

The London School of Economics and Political Science

*Transforming Life in China:
Gendered Experiences of Restaurant Workers
in Shanghai*

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A thesis submitted to the Gender Institute of the
London School of Economics for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy, London

June 2015

Declaration

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Abstract

Internal migration has played a major role in the transformation of post-reform China. To explore how migrants have experienced change I consider three aspects of the lives of a particular group of migrants working in a restaurant in Shanghai: work experiences, intimate relationships with partners and families, and leisure time. I aim to highlight both men and women's experiences in order to analyse the significance of gender alongside social class and *hukou* status as markers of social division in China. Based on more than seven months of participant observation and interviews, mainly with migrant workers, between 2011 and 2014, my thesis aims to illuminate how this shift in location has affected their lives: how gender operated in their daily lives; how their experiences were gendered; and how agency was exercised, how subjectivity was expressed. In examining these different dimensions I consider how these migrants dealt with a range of tensions and hierarchies, such as the denigration they encountered from customers; the inconsistency between job hierarchy and gender hierarchy; how they reinterpreted filial piety; and how their income and time-constrained leisure formed part of their coping strategies in gender-differentiated ways.

Primary findings are that these migrant workers experienced change in complex and contradictory ways. Some male workers in the lowest-level jobs, whose work primarily depended on physical labour, were disadvantaged in this gendered, feminised and hierarchical workplace. Their financial disadvantage made it difficult for them to find wives and to conform to the image of primary breadwinner post-marriage. However, men despite their disadvantaged position in the work place and in partner finding still exercised their male privilege in everyday gender relations and likewise the women still experienced sexual harassment.

In comparison, the female migrant workers benefited in some ways by moving away from the tedium of rural lives and by becoming financially independent wage labour, but at the same time they still performed their filial obligation of financially supporting their natal families. These workers negotiated their changed circumstances in gendered ways. I argue that their subjectivities were influenced by a range of factors, including consumer culture and the patriarchal system, which was mediated through filial piety.

Acknowledgements

The process of doing a PhD for me is one of constant self-exploration. It is an interactive process that has reshaped my intellectual orientation and made me adapt my lifestyle choices. It is a project that transcends the thesis-writing itself and may foster some life-long transformations.

Acknowledgements are usually the first words the reader sees but the last words the author writes. I would like to end this beginning by expressing my gratitude. My gratitude for my parents Jinfu Shen and Jinying Li is beyond words. My adventure began when I was 21, when I backpacked to Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. At that time, this was extraordinary behaviour among people my age from mainland China. My parents showed great respect by concealing their concerns about my expedition. Gradually, my voyage became cross-continental, and each trip took longer than the last. 'Being extraordinary' can mean 'taking risks, coping with anxiety and uncertainties'. The unfailing emotional and financial support from my parents helped me deal with hardship and uncertainty. It may be disappointing to my father that I have not inherited his interest in finance. Instead, I chose a road less financially abundant. But I believe that their primary expectation for me is to see me living an intellectually fulfilling life by pursuing the career I am drawn to. I have been trying hard to walk this rocky but rewarding road towards an academic career.

I am greatly indebted to my supervisor, Professor Diane Perrons. I cannot imagine how she could have unceasing support and patience to me as a demanding student. She provided invaluable critical feedback at every stage of the thesis writing. Her comments, while sometimes challenging, always helped me improve my work.

I am grateful to my previous advisor, Associate Professor Bingqin Li. She was always willing to share her expertise with me. I would not have been able to explore social policy studies without her encouragement. Her sense of humour and attitude to life offered me an outstanding role model, enabling me to see how energetic and entertaining a female Chinese academic can be.

I am much indebted to Dr Ania Polemia, Professor Charles Stafford, Dr Hans Steinmüller, Dr Bo Hu and Dr Yingqin Zheng for reading my thesis draft at various stages. In addition, my gratitude goes to Dr Kalpana Wilson, Dr Marsha Henry and Dr Paul Bouanchaud for reading chapters of the thesis. Also, I owe debts to my PhD

cohorts Dr Amanda Conroy, Dr Alessandro Ribu, Dr Nicole Shephard and others for reading my chapters in the PhD workshops. All of them provided invaluable comments. And thanks to Hilary Wright for proofreading the thesis.

I feel blessed to have some great friends in London who walk with me through the intellectual journey, especially Dr Bo Hu, Dr Yingqin Zheng, Tatiana Olarte, Dr Wei Yang, Hang Zhang and doctors-to-be Lin Jiao, Xi Ji, Linda Peterson, Miha Fugina, Lu Jiang, Ke Lin, Jin Jin and Albert Pai. I truly appreciate your support and encouragement.

My PhD research was primarily funded by the China Scholarship Council, the Great Britain-China Educational Trust and the London School of Economics. I really appreciate their generosity.

Lastly, special thanks to all the fieldwork informants who shared their bittersweet stories with me. Our encounters have enriched my life. I hope that I have presented a responsible and faithful account of their lives and it is my humble hope that this work will help provide an impetus for social change, to create a better society for all.

It should be noted that part (less than 10%) of my thesis was published in the peer-reviewed journal *Asia & the Pacific Policy Studies* under the title ‘Why does the government fail to improve the living conditions of migrant workers in Shanghai? Reflections on the policies and the implementations of public rental housing under neoliberalism.’

Table of Contents

Preface	11
Introduction	14
The elaboration of research questions	18
Aims of the thesis	19
Outline of the thesis	20
Chapter 1: Contextualising migrant workers in the catering sector in Shanghai ..	25
1.0 Introduction	25
1.1 Social transformation and its relation to migration	26
1.1.1 Economic transformation and its consequences	26
1.1.2 The reform of <i>hukou</i> and social welfare system	29
1.1.3 The drivers of migration	30
1.2 The making of the new class and the problematisation of rural workers	32
1.2.1 Migrant workers as the new working class	32
1.2.2 The problematisation of migrant workers	35
1.3 Gender relations and gendered migration	36
1.3.1 Changing gender relations over time	37
1.3.2 Perplexing situation of women and men with rural <i>hukou</i>	42
1.3.3 A critique of the literature on gendered migration	44
1.4 Marketisation of the catering industry	45
1.4.1 The catering sector in China and in Shanghai	46
1.4.2 Transformation of the catering industry and its working conditions	46
1.5 Fieldwork setting	50
1.5.1 A brief introduction to the Meteor Restaurant	51
1.5.2 Work Schedules	52
1.5.3 Living conditions of restaurant workers	55
1.6 Conclusion	57
Chapter 2: Reconceptualising agency, subjectivity, coercion and patriarchy in	
China	59
2.0 Introduction	59
2.1 Understanding agency	60
2.1.1 Agency, coercion and subjectivity	61
2.1.2 Agency and resistance	62

2.1.3 Different modes of agency and the distinction between coping and resistance	65
2.2 Patriarchy, filial piety, masculinity and femininity	67
2.2.1 Conceptualising patriarchy in China.....	68
2.2.2 Gendered practices of filial piety.....	71
2.3 Conclusion.....	76
Chapter 3: Methodology: doing ethnographic research from a feminist perspective	78
3.0 Introduction	78
3.1: Feminist epistemology	79
3.1.1 Intersectionality	79
3.1.2 Standpoint theory and situated knowledge	80
3.2 Research design.....	82
3.2.1 Formulating the research questions	82
3.2.2 Methods of data collection.....	83
3.2.3 Fieldwork: from pilot interviewing to follow-up study	87
3.2.4 Data analysis	93
3.3 Reflexivity and positionality	95
3.3.1 Presenting myself.....	96
3.3.2 Interactions between my informants and me	98
3.3.3 Conflicting roles: researcher or potential activist?	101
3.4 Evaluating qualitative research.....	104
3.5 Conclusion.....	106
Chapter 4: Gendered subjectivities in a gendered, feminised, hierarchical and discriminative workplace.....	108
4.0 Introduction	108
4.1 The gendered, hierarchical and feminised workplace	108
4.1.1 Gender division of labour	109
4.1.2 The hierarchical workplace.....	115
4.1.3 Feminised workplace	116
4.1.4 Job hierarchy and prestige	117
4.2 Gendered subjectivity	119
4.2.1 Feminine morality at work.....	119
4.2.2 Negative subjectivity of the male workers	121

4.3 Double discrimination	125
4.3.1 Contempt of table servers from customers	126
4.3.2 Peer contempt of male workers	129
4.4 Conclusion	133
Chapter 5: Intimate relations with parents and partners: obedience, compromise and resistance	136
5.0 Introduction	136
5.1 Responses to filial piety: Hushao, Ma, Yong and Ru Nan	138
5.2 Brideprice and bachelorhood: <i>ziji tan</i> versus <i>xiangqin</i>	144
5.3 Resistance and consent among unmarried women	150
5.4 The perpetuation of filial piety and women's rising power in conjugal relations	154
5.4.1 Transitioning from an unmarried daughter to a married mother	155
5.4.2 Rising power of married women in the temporal non-patrilocal environment	160
5.5 Changing role of migrant men in conjugal relations and the constitution of subordinated masculinity	162
5.6 Conclusion	165
Chapter 6: Exerting agency at work and at leisure	167
Extract from field notes	167
6.0 Introduction	169
6.1 Motivations for migration	170
6.2 Exerting agency at work	172
6.2.1 Motivations for physical escape	173
6.2.2 Envisioning the alternatives as mental escape	176
6.2.3 Physical and verbal coping and resistance at work	179
6.3 Gendered leisure activities	185
6.3.1 Gendered and class-specific shopping	186
6.3.2 Embroidery (<i>shizi xiu</i>) as women's activity	191
6.3.3 Gambling, poverty and masculinity	194
6.4 Back to the Karaoke Bar: concluding remarks	200
Chapter 7: Contribution, implications, limitations, and potential for further research	204
Extract from field notes	204

7.1 Main findings of the thesis	205
7.2 Contribution of the thesis	210
7.3 Implications for policymakers and NGOs	211
7.4 Limitations and the potential for future research	212
Appendices	215
Appendix 1: List of informants	215
Appendix 2: Topic guide for my fieldwork interviewees	218
Appendix 3: Sample of a coded transcript	222
Bibliography	227

List of Tables

Table 1 Welfare and salaries in the catering sector (in 100 million yuan)	49
Table 2 Work schedule for morning-shift table servers and pantry helpers	54
Table 3 Timeline of the fieldwork	89
Table 4 Configuration of the public area of the restaurant	111

List of Figures

Figure 1 Ratios of urban to rural disposable income (2000-2013)	28
Figure 2 Average annual income of employees in Shanghai: catering average/Shanghai average (2000-2013) (Currency: yuan).....	48
Figure 3 Interior decoration of the Meteor Restauarant.....	52
Figure 4 Face-scanning	55
Figure 5 Machine for face-scanning	55
Figure 6 Employer-provided dormitory (a).....	56
Figure 7 Employer-provided dormitory (b)	56
Figure 8 Hierarchy in the public area of the Meteor Restaurant.....	110
Figure 9 Flow chart of the dining procedure.....	126

Figure 10 Magazine pages stuck on the wall	189
Figure 11 A <i>shizi xiu</i> piece depicting 'a harmonious family is the origin of the prosperity of everything'	193
Figure 12 'Lucky Six Crocodile'	195
Figure 13 'Forest Ball'	195
Figure 14 'Fishing' (a)	195
Figure 15 'Fishing' (b)	195
Figure 16 A slot machine decorated with different car brands	199

Abbreviations

AAA	American Anthropological Association
ACFTU	All-China Federation of Trade Unions
ACWF	All-China Women's Federation
NPC	National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China
GDP	Gross domestic product
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NBS	National Bureau of Statistics of China
SBS	Shanghai Bureau of Statistics
SRB	Sex ratio at birth
SCIO	The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China
SOE	State-owned enterprise
NGM	New-generation rural migrant workers

Preface

I was born seven years after the establishment of the reform and opening-up policy in China. In the year I was born, the country still operated as a planned economy in which food was rationed and purchased by food stamps. In the early 1990s, my parents started a small business. My father resigned from his job at a state-owned enterprise (SOE), which was an extraordinarily risky and unusual thing to do at that time because SOE jobs were regarded as an ‘iron rice bowl’ (*tie fanwan*): a permanent job with sufficient social benefits (Whyte, 2012). The reform of SOEs commenced in the mid-1990s and as a result, 28.18 million workers were laid off from 1998 to 2003; by 2003, only 68.76 million workers remained employed in SOEs (SCIO, 2004). Several years after my father’s resignation, the factory where he had worked was closed down and all the workers were laid off; by that time, my father had invested in the Chinese stock market and become one of the most financially successful people from that factory.

Although my family is relatively well off, I do not take this wealth for granted, especially because not everyone has benefited equally from the booming economy. Like my father’s former colleagues who lost their jobs in SOEs, many city-dwellers are now poor and live difficult lives.

I became aware of the rural-urban disparity thanks to a television documentary and through people I encountered in China. In 2010 I watched ‘The rich and the poor’, a documentary made by the Japanese media group NHK. It displayed the drastic differences between the newly rich and migrant workers in China. I was sentimental to see a middle-aged rich man decorate his house like a palace, whereas a middle-aged male migrant worker in Guangdong province searched for the cheapest toy for his child, who still lived in a rural area, in hope of taking the toy back to his village during the Spring Festival.¹ It reminded me of a case I came across around 11pm on a midsummer night in 2010. Some women were waiting by the roadside in an attempt to make a living by carrying passengers by scooter. Planning to take the ‘scooter taxi’ home, I agreed a price with one of these women. Before leaving, she spoke to a little girl, three or four years old, who was sleeping on the cold concrete floor: ‘Mum has to leave for a while. Please stay here and don’t move around.’ Her child was half awake and remained lying on the floor. On the way to my home, the woman told me that local Shanghainese

¹ Spring Festival is the biggest celebration in China. It begins on 1st January each year according to the lunar calendar, which is different from the Gregorian calendar. The Chinese New Year holiday usually lasts for one week. It is a festival in which families gather together, so millions of migrant workers are on the move during this period.

children went to bed earlier, whereas her child had to be there until late at night. She worked during the day in a supermarket and as a scooter driver during the night, and her husband worked as a scooter driver full-time. She had to bring the child with her because there was no-one at home. I felt great compassion for them.

The interaction with my roommate Xiuxiu during my M.A. studies from 2007 to 2010 reinforced my resolution to help deprived people. She came from rural Shanxi province, where coalmine explosions occur frequently. During late night chats, she told me a lot about her hometown. Although coal mining is risky work, it is more profitable than farming. As a result, many men choose to be miners. My roommate was the first person in her village to complete a master's programme. She wanted to do something to help her fellow villagers, but as a migrant who was new to Shanghai, her schedule was dominated by career development, such as doing internships and searching for a job in order to find footing in this metropolis. This did not leave much time and energy for focusing on the development of her village. She was the first person from rural areas I have come to know, and meeting her made me realise how different life trajectories could be. The encounter with Xiuxiu reinforced my belief that those who do not need to worry about their own financial wellbeing are more likely to have the ability to help others, so they should take more social responsibility.

In the summer of 2008, motivated by Xiuxiu's story, my friends and I organised a volunteering group to help children in rural Guizhou province. It was the first time I had visited rural China. Through teaching and home interviewing, I gained a glimpse of life there. I was frustrated to see the underdeveloped situation there and be unable to think of solutions. During the global economic recession in 2008, many rural workers went back to their villages, so this gave me my first opportunity to talk to people who had experienced migration. As a result, I observed that *hukou* can help explain the deprived situation of rural migrants before pursuing my PhD studies.

Furthermore, in summer 2010, a friend and I made a documentary about an 82-year-old Shanghainese woman who collected used newspapers in order to sell them to recyclers. She narrated her life experience of leaving Shanghai to support the construction of inner China in the Mao era. Her *hukou* was transferred from Shanghai to Sichuan province, and she was not able to transfer it back to Shanghai even after she came back. At that time, living in Shanghai without Shanghai *hukou* made it impossible for her to apply for permission to use gas, a property ownership certificate and even a TV licence. Seeing

how obsessed she was with her *hukou* status, I came to realise what it meant to more marginalised people.

After this, the suicides committed by migrant workers in Foxconn made me decide to focus on migrants. I felt sad about the tragedy, but it also made me feel I had a duty to do something to change their situation. I felt compassion for pupils who lack sufficient educational resources and for people who are destitute because they were born in rural areas and live a hard life. The compassion for the less fortunate was one of the motivations for me to carry out this research.

When I was writing about reflexivity, I recalled George Orwell, one of my favourite writers, who worked as a casual worker in restaurants in Paris and wrote a book called 'Down and out in Paris and London'. His vivid account of working in restaurants and experiencing poverty was a great inspiration to me.

'In the face of difficulties, people should maintain their own integrity. In times of success, they should do favours to the world,' is a famous saying by Mencius (BC 372 – 289). It is one of my favourite mottos, guiding and reflecting my principles. I was awarded a national scholarship to fund my study at London School of Economics. Identifying myself as an intellectual, I feel that I have a responsibility to my country. Corruption, persisting gender inequality, the growing gap between rich and poor: China has many problems waiting to be solved. It is my hope to devote myself to making China a better country.

Introduction

*Please slap me in the face
As a son I am incompetent
I was not able to become a public servant and glorify the ancestors
I feel guilty towards my parents
Please slap me in the face*

*Please slap me in the face
As a father I am cowardly
I do not dare to sell my kidney for an iPhone 5S as a gift for my son
I feel guilty towards my son
Please slap me in the face*

*Please slap me in the face
As a husband I have no money
I cannot afford a car or a house
My wife suffers with me
I feel guilty towards my wife
Please slap me in the face*

...

Above is the extract of a poem written by male rural migrant worker Lizhi Xu, who committed suicide in October 2014. He worked at Foxconn, a giant manufacturer that produces electronic products for Apple, Dell and other prominent international technology companies. A wave of suicides occurred in Foxconn factory plants across China in 2010, during which 14 workers aged 18 – 25 died (Lau, 2010). The Foxconn incidents drew my attention to rural migrant workers and motivated me to carry out this research. Rural migrants are disadvantaged in cities due to the binary household registration system (*hukou*), scarce social welfare, low wages, unpleasant living conditions and stigmatisation. The poem echoes the subjectivity of my male informants from rural areas and their disadvantaged situation in various ways. First, the male migrant worker positions himself in relation to his parents, son and wife. The relational self is discussed throughout the empirical chapters. Second, the poem connotes the feeling of shame and helplessness of being incompetent and unable to satisfy the financial demands and career expectations of his family, which reflects the deprived situation of the migrant men and represents their subordinated masculinity, discussed throughout this thesis. Third, it reflects the workers' desires in this consumer society: an iPhone, a house and a car. These desires are discussed in Chapter 6 in relation to the workers' coping strategies and subjectivity in the context of a consumer society. In the Introduction, I will first consider what the thesis is about and why this research matters. Next, I elaborate the research questions, followed by the aims of the thesis. An outline of the thesis is provided at the end.

Over the last 30 years, China has experienced a profound economic transformation. At the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, the central government put in place a series of reforms and policies to ‘open up’ the Chinese economy in order to promote economic growth. Since then, China has been in the spotlight on the global world stage.

According to the World Bank (2014), China’s gross domestic product (GDP) grew at an average rate of 9.83% per year from 1978 to 2013. This economic growth is unusual in contemporary world history.

This rapid economic growth would be impossible without rural-urban migration on a remarkable scale. By the end of 2014, China had 168.21 million migrant workers holding rural *hukou* but doing non-farm work outside their registered hometowns or home villages, accounting for 12.3% of the whole population (NBS, 2015). *Hukou* refers to the household registration system in China that categorises citizens as either urban or rural. It requires every Chinese citizen to be recorded with the registration authority at birth. It is further explained in Chapter 1. In this thesis, rural migrant workers (sometimes abbreviated to migrant workers) refers to those who hold rural *hukou*, do non-agricultural entry-level work in places other than where their *hukou* is registered. The migrant workers who are rural *hukou* holders but do professional jobs are beyond the scope of this thesis.

China’s rapid economic growth has brought many changes and improvements in living standards, but has been accompanied by growing disparities in wealth. Although migrants are better off after migration, especially financially, they are still lower paid, enjoy fewer social benefits, and have poorer living conditions than the local population. Migrant workers in restaurants share all these characteristics. They also have to endure long working hours and denigration from ‘urbanites’, the term I use to refer to those who reside in urban areas and who have urban *hukou*.

The population of migrant workers in the service sector has been increasing in China. 42.9% of the migrant workers were engaged in the service sector in 2014, compared to 33.3% in 2009.² By contrast, the number of migrant workers in manufacturing followed a downward trend, from 39.1% in 2009 to 31.3% in 2014 (NBS, 2010, 2015). The

² Service sector is equivalent to tertiary industry or tertiary sector. According to NBS (2013b), the tertiary industry mainly consists of transport, storage and postal service, wholesale and retail trades; hospitality and catering services, financial industry, real estate; and others.

number of migrant workers in the service sector is too significant to be ignored, and their life experiences are extraordinary.

Although an increasing number of studies have focused on rural migrant workers, current studies have not captured the diversity and complexity of their lives. There has been a significant amount of Chinese-language quantitative literature addressing the issue of rural migrants.³ Although quantitative research paints a general picture of migrant workers, it is less able to address the complexity and the heterogeneity of migrant workers' experiences in urban China. Despite the fact that there is a small and growing body of qualitative research in Chinese and in English that focuses on migrant women's experience, the literature is still scarce (Fan, 2004; C. K. Lee, 1998), and most studies have focused on women in manufacturing (A. Chan, 2002; J. Chan & Pun, 2010; Chang, 2008; C. K. Lee, 1998; Pun, 1999, 2005, 2012). Only a few have focused on women in the service sector (Gaetano, 2004; He, 2007, 2008; Jacka, 2006; H. Yan, 2008). To the best of my knowledge, only Lin (2010, 2013) and Kim (2015) looked at men's experiences.

In this thesis, I intend to examine the life experiences of migrants working in the public area of a five-floor restaurant with around 300 staff, one of a chain of restaurants in Shanghai. Public area of the restaurant refers to the area except the kitchen, including reception, dining area, pantry area, bars and cashier desk. I pay particular attention to the most important parts of the migrant workers' lives: the workplace and their experience at work; their intimate relationships with families and partners; and their leisure time. By focusing on the intersection of gender, social class, *hukou* status and age, I aim to illuminate the operation of gender in their daily lives, their gendered experiences, the expression of their subjectivity and their exercise of agency in negotiating a range of tensions and hierarchies in pursuit of a better life. This thesis intends to enrich the understanding of internal migration, employment and the service sector in contemporary China.

In order to collect first-hand data of their lived experiences, I completed a total of seven months of fieldwork between 2011 and 2014, which included participant observation and interviews with 58 restaurant workers. The participant observation was conducted

³ For quantitative research, to mention just a few, please see Cao (2010), Lv et al. (2010), NBS (2015).

through working in the restaurant, primarily as a waitress and occasionally as a pantry helper.⁴

I chose Shanghai as my fieldwork location because Shanghai has a prosperous service sector; in 2014 the service sector produced the highest share (64.8%) of GDP in Shanghai. In addition, 56.7% (that was 6.45 out of 11.37 million) of the employed population in Shanghai worked in the service sector, making the city a suitable place to examine service workers (SBS, 2015). I also chose Shanghai because a significant number of the restaurant workers are rural migrant workers from other provinces. In 2014, 8.9% of migrant workers in Shanghai worked in hotel and catering sector (SBS, 2014d). According to the NBS, the catering sector is the business of providing cooked food and serving it on the premises to consumers (NBS, 2013a). Types of enterprises in this sector include restaurants, coffee shops, bars and so on. It is a major service sector industry and the proportion of migrant workers in the catering and hospitality sector ranks the fourth of all the sectors that migrants would choose in Shanghai (SBS, 2014d).⁵ In addition, Shanghai is a place of great social inequality. The conspicuous inequality between rural migrants and citizens with urban *hukou* makes it one of the most unequal cities in China. Rural migrants are disadvantaged in Shanghai due to their *hukou* status, low wage, few social benefits, and discrimination. It is noticeable that wage in the catering sector was only slightly more than half the local average from 2009 to 2013 (SBS, 2014a). Rural migrants' socioeconomic status is in sharp contrast to urban Shanghainese.⁶ Urbanites' stigmatisation of and discrimination against rural migrants can be more obvious and more severe in this metropolis compared to smaller cities, and this discrimination will be elaborated in Chapter 1. By studying restaurant workers in Shanghai, my thesis aims to show how a group of people who have played a major role in the transformation of China have experienced this transformation in their own ways.

⁴ Pantry helpers are those who connect back of house (kitchen) with front of house (dining area). They deliver dishes from the kitchen to the dining area. Job descriptions will be explained further in Chapter 4.

⁵ The first three sectors in which migrant workers are most likely to work are manufacturing (42.5%), resident service and repair (11.1%), wholesale and retail trades (9.7%) (SBS, 2014d). I have not found the statistics regarding the proportion of rural migrants among restaurant workers in Shanghai. But according to the Restaurant Yearbook in 2014, 80% restaurant workers in China were rural migrants (L. Jin, 2011).

⁶ I am aware that residents with urban Shanghai *hukou* is not a homogeneous group, and that the inequality within Shanghai can be high as well. However, I cannot find any literature addresses the income disparity within Shanghai. But it is clear that the income of an average Shanghainese is significant higher than that of an average person from rural areas.

The elaboration of research questions

The research questions have been frequently revised during the research process. These revisions were influenced by the literature, materials collected in the field, and my evolving understanding of the research. The first overarching question of the thesis is: how did gender operate in the daily lives of these migrant workers? I address this question by focusing on how gender operated at work, in intimate relationships and in leisure activities. Gender sometimes operates in subtle ways and usually intersects with other categories of social difference including social class, *hukou* status, and age.

The second overarching question is: how were these migrant workers' experiences gendered? To date, qualitative studies have emphasised migrant women's experiences whereas male migrants' experiences are given less attention. While a few scholars aimed to discuss gendered experiences of migration, they focused on either women or men (Jacka, 2006; Lin, 2013). My aim in this thesis is to examine the gendered experiences without ignoring either gender. By focusing on gender differences of the restaurant workers with first-hand empirical materials, I aim to analyse the significance of gender alongside social class and *hukou* status as markers of social division in China and to point out that the experiences of migrant women and men differ in various ways.

The third question is: how did these migrant workers exercise their agency and express their subjectivity? Agency and subjectivity are implicated in each other's formation. The ability to assert some control over one's life (agency) is affected by how subjects perceive themselves and the situation in which they are positioned (subjectivity); in turn, their perceptions of their environment impact on their willingness and ability to act. The workers' ideas and practices were constrained and enabled by certain factors, and in this thesis, the conceptualisation of agency and subjectivity is coupled with coercion in order to analyse these factors. The purpose of focusing on the agency and subjectivity of both female and male workers is to understand disadvantaged people from their own points of view, to identify the coercion/constraints they encountered, and to ascertain whether migrant workers were able to actively change their situation rather than passively accept coercion. By focusing on the workers' agency and subjectivity, it has been possible to obtain insight into their daily lives and how they perceived the opportunities available to them. At the same time, by conceptualising agency and coercion in this specific context, I aim to make a contribution to feminist scholarship, discussed in Chapter 2.

Existing literature on the agency and subjectivity of migrant workers in China is scarce. Some qualitative literature has focused on women's agency in marriage negotiation but without considering their occupations (Beynon, 2004; Fan, 2003; L. Tan & Short, 2004). Other studies have focused on the agency of factory women in the export processing zones (A. Chan, 2002; J. Chan & Pun, 2010; Chang, 2008; C. K. Lee, 1998; Pun, 2005) and there have been a small number of studies which focused on women in the service sector, for example domestic workers (Gaetano, 2004; Jacka, 2006; H. Yan, 2008). With respect to restaurant workers, I have only found one qualitative study addressing restaurant worker's agency and subjectivity in China, which was an ethnographic study focusing on female workers (He, 2007, 2008). There is even less qualitative research focusing on migrant men's agency and subjectivity. Lin's work (2010, 2013) on male migrants in Guangdong province and Kim's study (2015) on male workers in manufacturing in Shandong province are original in this respect.

These three research questions overlap. The first question focuses on the everyday operation of gender. It points not only to the workers' gendered life experiences but to the construction of a gendered, feminised and hierarchical workplace (Chapter 4). The second question of gendered experiences has a narrower focus than the first, but it is the focus of enquiry through the three empirical chapters, so I highlight it as an overarching question. The third question is about the exercise of agency and the expression of subjectivity. This question is related to the first two questions. The discussion on agency and subjectivity can be situated in the discussion of gendered experiences because agency and subjectivity can be reflected in gendered ways. Gendered agency and subjectivity also speak to the question of how gender operated in daily life. But female and male workers' agency and subjectivity exhibited non-gendered similarities. For example, both female and male workers' subjectivities were relational and filial (Chapter 5), and both women and men exercised agency in the form of coping and resistance (Chapter 6).

Aims of the thesis

One of the research aims is to explore how the lives of both the female and male migrant workers have been affected by the shift in location. I have not found any ethnography highlighting the experiences of both female and male migrant workers in China. My research therefore intends to fill this gap both empirically and methodologically.

Second, by constructing a conceptualised framework of agency, subjectivity and coercion in relation to patriarchy, masculinity and femininity, the thesis aims to contribute to the knowledge base of feminist studies and contemporary China studies.

Third, China is experiencing rapid economic and social transformation. My research, which engages with the topics of rural-urban migration, employment in the service sector, and gender relations, aims to show how one group of people who live with social disadvantage and who have contributed to the growth of China have experienced this change in their own ways.

Fourthly, having researched some aspects of one group of rural migrants' lived experiences, I make a few suggestions in the conclusion as to how non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the government could design policies more suited to the migrants' needs. From a social justice perspective, it seems only fair that those who have contributed to the rapid growth of the China's economy should share more fully in the gains.

Outline of the thesis

Chapter 1 outlines the economic and social changes in contemporary China as well as the changes in gender relations, providing the context within which the rural migrants who form the subject of the thesis live their daily lives. This chapter also depicts the restaurant where my informants and I worked. The first section of this chapter considers China's economic and political transformation from the 1970s onwards and points to several stimuli for rural-urban migration. Political, economic and cultural factors have great impact on rural *hukou* holders' behaviour and self-perception. The second section considers rural migrant workers as an emerging social class. It examines the discrimination they faced and the ways in which the mass media portrays them in a negative light. Some elements of this discrimination are echoed by customers in the restaurant, which will be discussed in Chapters 4 and 6. The third section investigates gender relations and gender inequality in China, foreshadowing the discussion of the conceptualisation of patriarchy in Chapter 2. This section also interrogates how migration changes women's and men's status. It also reviews the literature on gendered migration and argues that greater attention should be given to male migrants' experience. The fourth section considers the catering industry in Shanghai and in China as a whole, including the marketisation of the catering sector and the changing working conditions of restaurant workers. The restaurant setting, including the restrictive work schedule and

workers' living conditions, is dealt with in the fifth section. This provides the foundation for Chapter 4, where the workplace is discussed in more detail. These five sections provide contextual information to explain why migrant workers are positioned at the bottom of society, in gendered ways, in contemporary China.

Chapter 2 constructs a theoretical framework with two clusters of concepts. The framework is drawn from the findings of the fieldwork. The first cluster of concepts consists of agency, subjectivity, coercion, coping and resistance. The first cluster elaborates the research questions by conceptualising agency, coercion and subjectivity. The discussion of agency in the forms of resistance and coping functions as an analytical tool for the empirical materials discussed in Chapter 6 on life at work and in leisure. The second cluster of concepts includes patriarchy, filial piety, masculinity and femininity. This cluster also serves as a theoretical pillar for the empirical analysis, especially of intimate relationships, which is discussed in Chapter 5.

These two clusters of concepts are interrelated. Gender norms and filial obligations embedded in the patriarchal system can be seen as coercion, prescribing subjectivity and practices. By exercising agency, my informants conformed to and/or challenged social norms and redefined what was meant by filial piety. Through the practice of filial obligations, subjectivity was shaped and reshaped. Both clusters pave the way for the discussion of how patriarchy is mediated through filial piety and serves to construct masculinised and feminised subjectivities in China. Both clusters of concepts helped to explain how gender operated at work, in intimate relationships, and in leisure activities. Apart from laying a foundation for the empirical chapters, this conceptualised framework attempts to contribute to feminist scholarship.

Chapter 3 considers the research methodology, which broadly follows a feminist ethnography. I situate the thesis within feminist discourse; that is, feminist epistemologies and theories lay the foundation of the research. I use ethnography as my primary research approach because it is best suited to explore the gendered experiences, subjectivity and agency of this specific group. By using the data collection methods of participant observation and interviewing, I spent more than seven months doing fieldwork. Working alongside the restaurant workers for an extended period allowed me to observe more nuanced operation of gender, more subtle ways of exerting agency and expressing subjectivity. By living in the dormitory affiliated to the restaurant, I was able to obtain a richer picture of the workers' lives.

This chapter sets out to discuss the feminist epistemological underpinning of this thesis. Then it considers research design, methods adopted to collect and analyse the data, and how I carried out the fieldwork. This is followed by a discussion of ethics, which considers the interpersonal relationships between the informants and me, how our positionality influenced the whole research process, and my conflicting roles as researcher and potential activist in the field. In the remainder of the chapter, I address the criteria used to validate and analyse the material collected in the field. The chapter is not intended to be simply an account of how the research was carried out, but also considers the dilemmas I encountered and the emotional overload I experienced, both of which were behind the scenes but nevertheless have significance to the thesis.

Chapter 4, the first of the three empirical chapters, focuses on how gender operated at work. To be more specific, it examines how and why the workplace was gendered, feminised and hierarchical, how the workers' gendered subjectivities were represented, and how and why the male workers in the different positions encountered denigration. I begin this chapter by introducing different job positions in the public area of the restaurant, showing that it was a gender-segregated place. Then I consider why the workplace was hierarchical and feminised and why the female workers were often in an advantaged position in the public area. In section two, I address the subjectivities of both female and male workers. Their subjectivities were influenced by a range of factors, including rural status, work status and gender hierarchy. In section three, I first outline the dining procedure in order to illustrate how the workers interacted with each other and with the customers. Then I show how gender hierarchy, job hierarchy, *hukou* status and class intersected in complex ways to produce tensions between the workers themselves and between workers and customers. These three sections address the questions of how gender operated at work and how agency was exercised and subjectivity expressed through the lens of their working lives, echoing the overarching research questions of the everyday operation of gender, the exercise of agency and the expression of subjectivity.

Migration not only brought about changes to the migrants' working lives but also had a profound influence on their intimate relationships with their partners and natal families. Chapter 5 addresses the process of partner choosing and their relationships with their natal families and partners. To be more specific, I consider how they practised filial piety after migration, how their experiences of intimate relationships were gendered, and how the constant negotiation with families and partners was reflected in the

migrants' agency and subjectivity. Using individual examples, I examine these questions by focusing on both female and male migrants at different life stages: seeking a partner, engaging in a relationship and life after marriage. The chapter helps to answer the overarching questions of how gender operated in their everyday lives, how the workers' experiences were gendered, and how agency and subjectivity were represented and understood.

Chapter 6, the last empirical chapter, shows how the migrant workers acted, how their agency was exercised and subjectivity was negotiated at work and in leisure activities. The discussion on exerting agency in the forms of coping and resistance was based on the theoretical framework constructed in Chapter 2, in which I identified multiple forms of agency. The workers' leisure activities were influenced by their intimate relationships and by the unfair treatment they encountered at work. Exploring how the workers acted within the constraining environment also helps to answer the overarching questions regarding the operation of gender in daily life and the representation of agency and subjectivity.

I found that the workers' motivations for migration and for resigning their jobs were gendered. Workers in the public area exercised agency in various forms including coping and resistance, sometimes but not always in gendered ways, depending on different job positions. Leisure activities were also gendered: male workers usually went gambling whereas female workers either did embroidery in the restaurant or went shopping. These workers' gendered ways of spending their leisure time was associated with their feminised and masculinised subjectivities. Consumption conflicts with filial obligations, and the workers had to deal with this dilemma between crafting a modern identity through consumption and saving money to send home to their families.

Many of the issues addressed converge in the analysis of the karaoke scene at the end of Chapter 6. The workers had minimal interaction with members of the dominant society, other than servicing them as restaurant customers, and the constraints of restaurant work prevented the workers from fully integrating into city life. Their behaviour in the karaoke bar was related to filial obedience, their ambivalent subjectivity and their collective ways of coping with their difficult lives. Attending a karaoke bar can be considered a collective activity that enables them to cope with undesirable aspects of life at work and in intimate relationships, and to cope with their marginalised life in Shanghai as a whole.

In the final chapter (Chapter 7), I conclude by briefly reviewing the main findings followed by a discussion of the contribution made by the thesis. I also look at the policy implications of my findings. Finally, I consider the limitations of the thesis and point to directions for future research.

Chapter 1: Contextualising migrant workers in the catering sector in Shanghai

1.0 Introduction

China has experienced very strong economic growth over the last three decades. This growth has led to rising prosperity and declining poverty, but also to rising social and spatial inequality. China's massive economic transformation would not have been possible without high levels of internal migration from the relatively low-income rural regions to the booming cities and industrial regions. Migrant workers from rural areas make a vital contribution to China's economic growth. In this thesis, I focus on a specific subset of migrant workers, both women and men, who worked alongside each other, though mainly doing different jobs, in a restaurant in Shanghai.⁷ My overarching research questions ask: how did gender operate in the daily lives of the migrant workers? How were the experiences of female and male migrant workers differentiated? How was their agency exercised and subjectivity expressed?

The aim of this chapter is to set the broad political, economic and cultural context in which migration takes place and also to situate these specific service sector migrants in the restaurant where they worked. The chapter also provides background information for the research questions of gendered experiences and the constitution of subjectivity. I divide this chapter into five sections. The first section discusses the broad social milieu, including the transitional political and economic context and the *hukou* system, and considers the stimuli for migration. The political, economic and cultural specificities have great impact on rural *hukou* holders' behaviour and self-perception. The second section considers rural migrant workers as an emerging social class. It examines the discrimination they face and how they are problematised by mass media (X. Dong & Hu, 2010; Yanhong Li, 2006; P. Zhang, 2007) and scholars (Yu Chen, 2008; Hu & Luo, 2001; X. Tao, 2000; D. Zhou & Qin, 2004).

The third section investigates gender relations and gender inequality in China, foreshadowing the discussion of the conceptualised framework of patriarchy in Chapter 2. I have adopted the concept of gender relations from a recent World Bank Report in which gender relations is defined as 'how these aspects (social, behavioural, and

⁷ As mentioned in the Introduction of the thesis, this thesis narrows down 'migrant workers' to working-class people who hold rural *hukou* and make a living in entry-level jobs, excluding the small portion of college graduates from rural areas who engage in white-collar occupations. Some migrant workers from rural areas may have a college degree and get employment in companies willing to provide better social benefits. As the thesis focuses on migrants working in low-end service sector, these migrant workers are beyond its scope.

cultural attributes, expectations, and norms) determine how women and men relate to each other and to the resulting differences in power between them' (The World Bank, 2011, p. 4). The third section also interrogates how migration changes women's and men's status but at the same time, how migrant women and men are disadvantaged in different ways. It should be noted that the thesis only considers heterosexual relationships because I did not find any homosexual relationships during the fieldwork.⁸ The remainder of this section critically engages with the existing literature on gendered migration in China. I argue that male migrants' experiences should be given more scholarly attention.

The fourth section considers catering industry in Shanghai and in China as a whole, including the marketisation of the catering sector and the transformation of the working conditions of restaurant workers. The restaurant setting, including the restrictive work schedules and workers' living conditions, is discussed in the fifth section. All five sections provide contextual information to explain why migrant workers are positioned at the bottom of society, in gendered ways, in contemporary China.

1.1 Social transformation and its relation to migration

Life experiences of migrant workers have to be understood in a broad context: the nexus of uneven regional development, inequality in disposable income and the binary *hukou* system linked with the social security system. The first section of this thesis examines the economic transformation in the post-Mao era, which witnessed increasing inequality as a consequence of economic reforms and economic growth. This section also discusses how the state responded to this growing inequality followed by a discussion of the *hukou* system and the various motivations for migration.

1.1.1 Economic transformation and its consequences

During the last 30 years, China has experienced profound economic transformation. However, not everyone has had an equal share in this rapid economic growth. The pursuit of equality and justice in the Mao era was replaced by Deng Xiaoping's principle (1993, p. 166): 'Some people and some regions get rich first. The principle is to achieve common prosperity' (*rang yibufen ren, yibufen diqu xian fuqilai, dayuanze shi gongtong fuyu*). More than two decades have passed since Deng made this statement

⁸ It is noteworthy that all my informants consider themselves as heterosexual and many of them regarded homosexuality as abnormal. The heterosexual assumption continues to define the 'normal' characteristics of sexual difference (Hearn, 2004).

and, in accordance with Deng's principle, some people have been growing rich, but 'common prosperity' remains a mirage. China has witnessed a rise in overall prosperity and everyone can be better off than previously but still have a large inequality. China's GDP is soaring, but not everyone receives an equal share of this wealth; this has created a growing gap between rich and poor. The growing wealth benefits urbanites more than their rural counterparts and coastal areas more than the hinterlands.⁹

As regards to the urban/rural disparity in wealth, the annual disposable income of urban households in China was 26,955.1 yuan per capita in 2013 (NBS, 2014c), whereas the net income of rural households was 8,895.9 yuan per capita (NBS, 2014d).¹⁰ Figure 1 shows that the gap in disposable/net income between urban and rural areas has risen between 2000 to 2013. This gap increased dramatically from 2000 to 2003, became flatter from 2003 onwards and shrank from 2009. Nevertheless, the absolute gap in income has grown.¹¹

⁹ I recognise the existence of the inequality within urban areas in China. Some scholars found that income inequality within urban areas and between urban areas have both been through an upward trend, based on the gauge from the Gini Coefficient (S. Li, 2003). However, the inequality between rural and urban is more prominent. Elaboration on this issue can be seen in Wei and Wu (2001) and Kanbur and Zhang (2005).

¹⁰ 26,955.1 yuan is roughly equivalent to 2,695 British pounds. CHY to GBP is roughly 1:10 at the time of writing.

¹¹ There is no unified name of income between urban and rural areas. National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) juxtaposes and compares 'disposable income of urban households' with 'net income of rural households' in the same report, which denotes that these two concepts have the same meaning. When making comparisons, NBS puts urban and rural into different root directories. I asked NBS through the official online forum whether these two forms of income were comparable and was told that although the data were collected by different methods, they are comparable because both of them represent the annual income. NBS explained to me that they were trying to use unified indicators to gauge income in both urban and rural areas, which will be reflected in future yearbooks of statistics. My question and their answer can be seen online at http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjfw/tjzx/tjzxbd/201502/t20150210_681889.html.

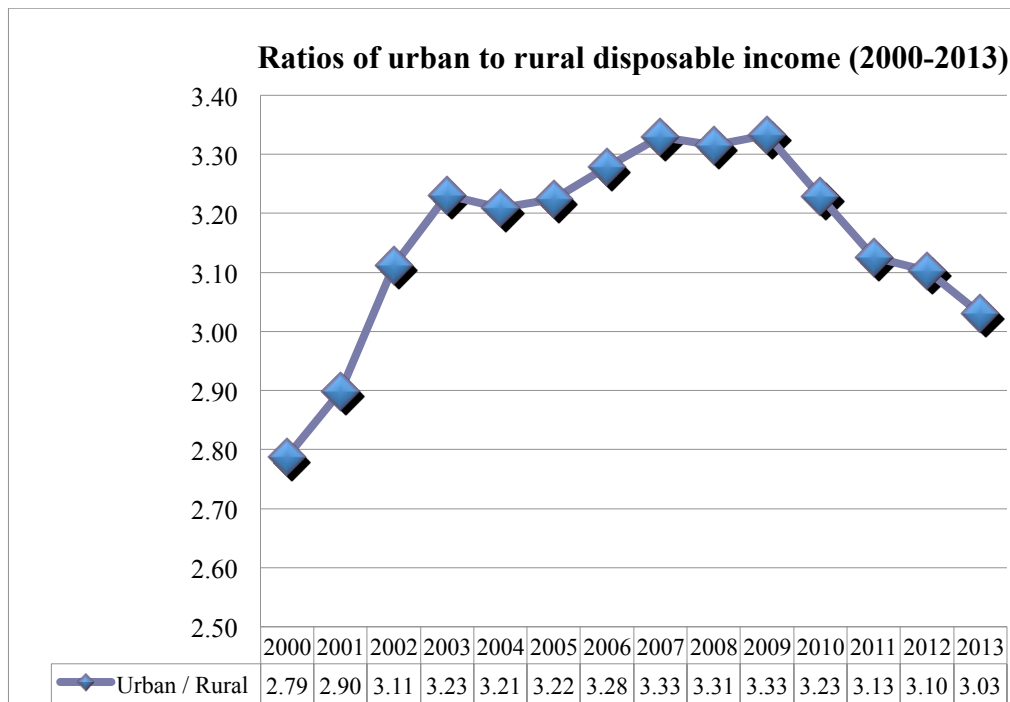


Figure 1 Ratios of urban to rural disposable income (2000-2013)

Source: Calculated based on the data from the National Bureau of Statistics (2014c)¹²

When former president Hu Jintao came to power in 2002 he attempted to deal with this uneven development and social inequality. He advocated the construction of a ‘harmonious society’, which meant ‘people-oriented, good, fast and steady growth in the economy, greater attention to social inequality, and an expansion of government aid for education, medical care and social security’ according to official news source Beijing Daily (Qing, 2005). Consequently, as shown in Figure 1, ratios of urban to rural disposable income experienced a downward trend from 2003 to 2012. This trend reflects a shift from purely pursuing GDP growth to more balanced development. In 2006, agricultural tax was abolished in rural China for ‘the first time in 2600 years’ according to the official press (Xinhua News Agency, 2010). Furthermore, new rural health insurance, nine years of free education for children and a new pension system were established in rural areas.¹³ Apart from these measures, the *hukou* system is at the centre of the reform.

¹² All the wages calculated by NBS and SBS and used in this thesis are nominal wage rather than real wage. For more information, please see the online forum:

http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjfw/tjzx/tjzxbd/201502/t20150210_681889.html.

¹³ However, children and the elderly are unable to benefit much from the implementation of these new policies. Children cannot obtain a good education in the countryside; schools in rural areas lack qualified teachers and advanced equipment. In 2013, 61.03 million were accounted as leftover children who hold rural *hukou* and whose parents, or one of the parents migrates to other areas (ACWF, 2013). For the elderly, the new rural pension system was launched in August 2009. People above 60 can get 55 yuan (5.5

1.1.2 The reform of *hukou* and social welfare system

Hukou refers to the household registration system that requires every Chinese person to be registered at birth and categorises residents as either urban or rural. A child's *hukou* is inherited from its parents regardless of the child's birthplace. The earliest *hukou* system was adopted in 1958 (B. Li, 2004, p. 17). 'The system is designed to prevent unplanned urbanization and overcrowding' (Pun, 2007, p. 256). The policy of tightening and relaxing the *hukou* system reflects the state control of labour in order to meet its political and economic pursuits, which gave rise to the fluctuation of migration. The *hukou* system has profound and persisting impacts on people in China. Social benefits, including health insurance, pensions, education, and unemployment compensation were tied to one's *hukou*, and for a long time these benefits were exclusively given to urban citizens; migrant workers with rural *hukou* did not have the right to them (Solinger, 1999; Y. Zhang, 2002). Some scholars stated that migrant workers' informal work contracts, longer working hours, meagre wage and lack of social welfare are all related to the *hukou* system, which forms the basis of inequality (Fan, 2004; Y. Zhang, 2002). Zhang (2002) even considered that the system determines a person's life chances. This argument might have been true at the time, but it is important to recognise the changing nature of this system.

Hukou reform is one crucial aspect of ongoing social reforms in China. It 'had been modified significantly since 1984 when rural labourers were officially permitted to seek non-agricultural jobs and to run businesses in cities' (Huang & Zhan, 2005, pp. 8–9). According to the Social Insurance Law issued in 2010, social benefits, including pensions, medical insurance, injury insurance, maternity insurance and unemployment insurance, which were once attached to *hukou*, could be transferred from one place to another (NPC, 2010). In February 2014, the central government revealed plans to deal with inequality between urban and rural areas before 2020 by creating a unified pension system for both the urban and rural population.

The State Council (2014) released further guidelines on *hukou* reform on July 30 2014, noting that China will gradually phase out the binary rural/urban system and unify them as residence *hukou* (*jumin hukou*) (Article 9). The guideline shows that social welfare in education, healthcare, social insurance, employment, elderly care and housing will be

pounds) per month (Yao Li, 2011). However, this is such a small amount of money that they can only just manage.

reformed in response to the unified *hukou* system (Article 9). However, the policy only applies to small and medium-size cities where the population is less than three million (ibid., Article 6). The central government plans to strictly control population size in megacities like Shanghai and Beijing (ibid., Article 7). The policy was intended to eradicate the rural/urban disparity and therefore reduce discrimination against peasants and rural migrants. However, Li (2014) showed that the unified system faces obstacles: people with rural *hukou* might not willing to join the pension scheme or choose to withdraw from it once enrolled. Their high mobility means that they prefer income in the form of cash, especially when the unified social protection requires them to give up land. Li argued that the unification of social benefits may not be necessary and that workers should be given the right to choose which social benefits programme to enrol in. Above all, although the *hukou* system is less rigid than in the past, it still forms a basis for discrimination, and the consequences of the most recent *hukou* reform are yet to be known.

The relaxation of *hukou* restrictions is one of the factors that stimulates migration. It motivates a huge number of migrant workers to seek opportunities in urban areas and it allows industries to access an abundant labour force. Apart from the relaxed *hukou* system, there are several other factors that make the massive scale of migration possible and these factors are discussed further below.

1.1.3 The drivers of migration

As discussed earlier in this section, the disparity in disposable income between rural and urban workers is huge. The annual disposable income of urban households in Shanghai (43,851.4 yuan) was the highest among all the regions in 2013 (NBS, 2014e), 5.4 times of the net income of rural households (8,097.9 yuan) in Anhui province (NBS, 2014f). Therefore, it is not difficult to understand that the primary impetus for migration is the income gap. Around 60% of the migrant workers in the public area of the restaurant that I did fieldwork in came from rural areas in Anhui province at the time of my fieldwork in 2012. The income gap is closely related to the disparity in economic development between urban and rural areas.

The government continues to place an emphasis on exporting, and an export-oriented economy encourages migration. After the 1978 reforms, China sought foreign direct

investment. As a consequence, labour-intensive manufacturing zones were built.¹⁴ China became known as the ‘global factory’. The development of this ‘global factory’ was not possible without huge numbers of rural migrant workers. However, these factories are at the bottom of the value chain, achieving meagre profits. Migrant workers in these factories could also be said to be at the bottom of the global value chain, negatively affecting their earnings and opportunities.

The expanding service sector is another hub to attract migrant workers. The service sector has undergone continuous growth since 1978 and in 2013 it accounted for 46.1% of China's GDP (NBS, 2014b). Accordingly, the number of employees in the service sector in China has enlarged rapidly over recent decades, a significant proportion of whom are migrant labour from rural China.

A further cause of migration is land reclassification. As a result of urbanisation, peasants’ land was confiscated by the government. Approximately 50-60 million people lost their land in 2009 (Song, 2009, p. 43) and the figure is expected to rise to 100 million in 2016 (T. Yang & Shi, 2006, p. 103). Many of the peasants who lost land become migrant workers in urban areas (Su, 2007; X. Yang, 2006).

Migration is also a response to the rural reform, which forms a part of the state development strategy. Rural reforms started in the late 1970s, and involved the decollectivisation of agriculture from collective production to household production (Gittings, 2006; Oi, 1999). A consequence of this decollectivisation process was a labour surplus, a surplus which drives peasants into non-agricultural industries (Fang Cai, 2008; Oi, 1999).

Furthermore, the *hukou* system has reinforced the rural/urban division. Both urbanites and rural people perceive rural areas to be poor, backward, and rustic, while urban areas are considered rich, modern and stylish (Gaetano, 2004; H. Yan, 2008). Peasants considered ‘digging food from the soil’ outmoded and found urban lifestyles more acceptable (B. Li, 2004, pp. 16–17). The perception motivates peasants to work in cities.

¹⁴ In 1980, the Fifth National People's Congress approved the setting up of special economic zones in coastal areas such as Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Shantou and Xiamen (Leonard, 2008, p. 26). As a result, these cities have become hubs for export-led and labour-intensive factories. Privately-owned and foreign-invested factories surged.

Migration thus results from many intertwined factors: *hukou* reform, income disparity between urban and rural areas, increased demand for an expanded labour force in cities, land reclassification, rural reform, and the changing aspirations of peasants.

1.2 The making of the new class and the problematisation of rural workers

This section investigates migrant workers as the new working class. It also explores the xenophobia they face and the problematisation of them by mass media and scholars. It touches upon the ideological division of the superiority of urbanites and inferiority of migrants. The underprivileged status of my informants is mirrored by the status of rural migrants in general.

1.2.1 Migrant workers as the new working class

Class serves as an important analytical lens in this thesis. It helps to explain these workers' position in society and is suggestive of difference and inequality. The concept of class has gone through profound change from the Mao era to the post-Mao era. In the Mao era, class (*jieji*) was clearly defined by the state. Each person was assigned to a specific class category such as peasants, workers or intellectuals. The class label largely determined a person's life chances and the label was passed on to the next generation (Goodman, 2014). In the post-Mao era, political consciousness has become divorced from socioeconomic status in the constitution of class, and this is reflected in the changing nomenclature (Goodman, 2014). *Jieji*, a word with strong political connotations, was replaced by *jieceng*, which is used to signify socioeconomic status and can be translated as strata, a relatively politically neutral word (Goodman, 2014; Yingjie Guo, 2009). The concept of *Jieceng* was adopted by the leading sociologist Xueyi Lu in China (2002) and has quickly become the most common word to describe class.

The definition of class in contemporary China is still debatable and the criteria for class categorisation are poorly designed (Yingjie Guo, 2009). It can be defined by some relatively fixed indicators such as occupation, income (C. Li, 2005; X. Lu, 2002) and some qualitative indicators such as people's perception on social class (Chunguang Wang & Li, 2002). Use of the word 'class' is not widespread in daily life with the exception of the frequent reference to the middle class (Yingjie Guo, 2009). This term has been frequently seen in the media, academic articles and government reports. It would therefore be remiss to discuss social class without considering the emergence of

the concept of the middle class. The definition of middle class is usually based on income, occupation, consumption, and status (Y. Guo, 2009).¹⁵ Consumption, or the purchasing power of the middle class, is placed at the centre when referring to the concept of middle class, as shown in advertisements (Y. Guo, 2009) and the McKinsey report (2012). The conspicuous consumption of the middle classes is reflected in their consumption in restaurants, which gives rise to the prosperous catering industry discussed in Section 1.4.¹⁶

A central reason why I discuss the middle class here is that according to my observation, a significant amount of diners in the Meteor Restaurant can be categorised as urban middle class, a socioeconomic class in sharp contrast to that of the migrant workers.¹⁷ The discussion on class disparity provides background information for the class and *hukou* differences that the restaurant workers encountered through daily contact with customers and how they dealt with discrimination, which is discussed in Chapter 6.

Migrant workers can be viewed as a social class. Lu classified social class in China into ten strata (2002).¹⁸ Nevertheless, migrant workers are not given an independent category in Lu's report. Wang (2005) argued that rural migrant workers should be treated as a new working class because they have similar socioeconomic status and a shared identity. Goodman (2014) categorised rural migrant workers as a 'new urban underclass' (p. 3). I agree with the view that migrant workers should be categorised as a new social class because they do not belong to the traditional working class, with urban *hukou* and comprehensive social benefits, nor are they farmers in rural areas.

¹⁵ The definition of the middle class is still controversial. For example, according to Li (2013: 70-71), if the definition of middle class is merely based on median annual income (30,000 yuan) in the first-tier cities in China, then the middle class would account for 16.8% of the whole population aged from 17 to 70; if education (junior high school or above) and occupation (professionals, managers and entrepreneurs) are also taken into consideration, the figure decreases to 7.7% (The statistics were from a nationwide survey conducted by China Academy of Social Science. Students were not included when calculating the percentage of middle class). According to the McKinsey Report (Barton, Yougang, & Amy, 2013), 68% of urban Chinese households can be considered middle class. Middle class in the McKinsey Report refers to households with incomes ranging from 60,000 to 229,000 RMB. Above all, it is clear from these statistics that the proportion of population allocated to the middle class entirely depends on what indicators are adopted to gauge it.

¹⁶ According to a survey of the middle class in Shanghai and Beijing conducted in 2010, the middle class accounts for 25% of its employed population. Regarding self-identification, 60% of the respondents in Shanghai recognise themselves as middle class, a proportion significantly higher than in Beijing, which signifies that middle class culture is more prominent in Shanghai (C. Li, 2011, p. 26).

¹⁷ Meteor is the pseudonym of the restaurant where I did fieldwork.

¹⁸ These ten strata include 1) party-state cadre and leaders in state-owned organisations and the public sector; 2) middle and high-ranking managers; 3) entrepreneurs; 4) professionals; 5) office workers; 6) self-employed; 7) service workers; 8) manual workers; 9) agricultural workers; 10) unemployed or laid-off workers.

Nongmingong is a term that especially refers to rural migrant workers. *Nongmin* literally means peasants, and *gong* refers to workers. *Nongmingong* has been used by the state to describe this particular group. The term appears in various government reports such as the annual National Monitoring and Investigating Report on Rural Migrant Workers published by NBS (2014j) and the Report on the Problems of New-Generation Rural Migrant Workers released by the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) (Lv et al., 2010). The term has become a political identity promoted by the government. *Nongmingong* endows rural migrants with a new identity, which serves to shape the workers' self-identity. According to my observations from 2010 to 2014, an increasing number of my informants began to use *nongmingong* to describe themselves, which demonstrates that they gradually came to recognise themselves as such. This categorisation has had a profound impact on the workers' subjectivity. *Nongmingong* has become a new group, a class, and a shared identity.

The naming of *nongmingong* can also be considered a process of othering, which consolidates their low social position. According to a survey evaluating social status in China, rural migrant workers were ranked 77 out of all the 81 occupations listed (C. Li, 2005, p. 81), indicating extremely low social status. The naming also marks the segregation between urbanites and migrants. Overt discrimination of migrant workers is now rarely seen in the official media, but this does not mean that the barriers between local residents and migrants are disappearing. Instead, these barriers manifest in a different way. Hostility towards migrants has been expressed in online forums and social media. Xenophobic comments are commonly seen on some local online forums such as KDS, which claims to be one of the most influential Shanghai-based forums. Some posts complain that local residents' career opportunities have been reduced by the presence of outsiders, and they narrow local people's available living space, making Shanghai a less attractive place to live. Comments such as 'life in Shanghai will be better without outsiders' are frequently made (CosdoNet, 2009; Sorg, 2014; Yewutai, 2009). On the most popular social media platform, Sina Weibo, which is similar to Twitter, some accounts such as 'Shanghai Hotspot Today' (*Jinri Shanghai Redian*), 'Mutual Help and Protection of Rights and Benefits of Shanghainese across the World' (*Quanqiu Shanghairen Quanyi Huzhu Baohu Zuzhi*) have 150,000 and 136,000 followers respectively in July 2014. These accounts differentiate Shanghainese from outsiders (*waidi ren*) by posting selective news regarding how uncivilised the outsiders are.

1.2.2 The problematisation of migrant workers

Migrant workers have begun to be associated with ‘problematic’ discourse. The problematisation here has two kinds of meanings. First, it refers to the particular difficulties that migrants encounter in urban China. Most of the migrants in cities engage in low-skilled and low-paying jobs (Ha, Yi, & Zhang, 2009) in manufacturing and the service sector, jobs that urbanites are not willing to do. Although migrants are better off after migration, especially financially, they are still lower paid, enjoy fewer social benefits, and have poorer living conditions than the local average, and have to endure long work hours and discrimination from urbanites.

Second, the problematisation refers to the ways in which media and scholars portray rural migrants, which reflects the hegemonic power of the social elites and their sense of superiority. In the media, rural migrants are most frequently represented as victims who deserve compassion and should be protected; but they are also frequently accused of causing problems and threats to society (X. Dong & Hu, 2010; Yanhong Li, 2006; P. Zhang, 2007). Their image has been transformed from a floating population in search of money in the 1980s to a disadvantaged group, often facing social conflicts, in the 2000s (Dong & Hu, 2010). Scholarly discussion focusing on rural migrants often treats them as a group to be controlled; they are seen as challenges to the state, challenges that should be dealt with properly and carefully (Yu Chen, 2008; Hu & Luo, 2001; X. Tao, 2000; D. Zhou & Qin, 2004). For instance, some scholars noted that rural migrant workers are to blame for the increasing crime rate in urban China (Yili Chen, 2008; Hu & Luo, 2001). It was reported that in 2000 more than 50% of criminal suspects in big cities like Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou were migrant workers (Yili Chen, 2008), whereas the ratio of the population without local *hukou* to the whole registered population in these cities was 23.1% (NBS, 2001c), 21.9% (Gong Chen et al., 2006) and 37.9% (Guangzhou Bureau of Statistics, 2003a, 2003b) respectively.¹⁹ Some scholars advise that the state should increase social control in order to deal with migrants’ transgressive behaviour (Hu & Luo, 2001). In addition, migrants are considered a group to be transformed and their personal quality (*suzhi*) should be improved (X. Tao, 2000;

¹⁹ I calculated the proportion of migrant households in Shanghai ($3,871,100/16,737,700=23.1\%$), in Beijing ($3,840,000/\{3,840,000+11,000,000\}=21.9\%$) and in Guangzhou ($4,281,782/\{4,281,782+7,029,293\}=37.9\%$) by myself. Regarding Beijing’s statistics, I cannot find the original source online and it is not possible for me to find the paper version when I am in the UK. So I used the second-hand sources and at the same time consulted Beijing Bureau of Statistics via email. The second-hand source was confirmed by Beijing Bureau of Statistics via their official online forum. I have to log in to access their answer so it is not possible for me to provide the link here.

D. Zhou & Qin, 2004). For example, Tao (2000) argued that rural migrants have the behaviour of 'abnormal consumption' because they 'prioritise material consumption over spiritual consumption' (pp. 41-42). He contended that migrants' *suzhi* should be improved to have a more correct attitude towards consumption. The discussion of *suzhi* discourse will be elaborated in Chapter 6.

The problems that peasants and rural migrants encountered and the solutions to them have been constructed by the elites and rarely by rural people themselves (Jacka, 2006), constructed in a way that reflects the taste and concerns of the dominant groups. I argue that the representation should be shifted from portraying them as a group to be transformed and controlled to focusing on how to enable them to create better lives in urban China.

The first two sections of this chapter situate migrant workers in a broad context in China, where the continuing economic boom does not benefit everyone equally. Urbanites in the coastal areas tend to be the biggest beneficiaries, whereas rural people in the hinterlands benefit less. The *hukou* system, together with other state development strategies, serve to constrain but also to enable migration. One of the by-products of *hukou* in the context of migration is the continuing insider/outsider dichotomy in the cities, where migrants are denigrated and problematised as a disadvantaged class.

1.3 Gender relations and gendered migration

The importance of the conceptualised framework of patriarchy emerged from the fieldwork. Patriarchy can be considered as a two-axis hierarchical system (S. Harrell & Santos, in press). One axis is intergenerational hierarchy, referring to the power of seniors over juniors; the other axis is gender hierarchy, which refers to men's power over women. The conceptualisation of patriarchy and how it relates to intergenerational and gender relationships and gendered subjectivities will be discussed in Chapter 2. Section 1.3 primarily discusses hierarchical gender relations. It serves as contextual information for the thesis as a whole.

In this section, I first outline a brief history of gender relations. Then I consider the achievements made in gender equality in certain areas, as well as the persisting gender inequalities in other areas in contemporary China. In the second part of this section, I focus on women and men with rural *hukou* and investigate to what extent rural women are empowered and how female and male migrants are disadvantaged in different ways

because of the imbalanced sex ratio at birth (SRB) caused by the son preference. Son preference is still prevalent in China, especially in rural areas. It gives rise to sex-selective abortion, which directly contributes to sex ratio imbalance at birth. I also critically engage with the current literature on gendered migration in China because it is directly associated with the research question ‘how were these migrant workers’ experiences gendered’.

Although I focus on both women and men, the reason why I highlight migrant women in this section is due to the fact that I can find little literature on how migration has impacted rural men’s status in China. For example, in the third report on Chinese women’s status in China conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and the All-China Women Federation (ACWF) (2011), men were not given the same weight. Although 48.4% of the survey respondents were men, the report had a strong focus on women and men’s experiences remain largely unexplored. In addition, the disparities between men and women, rich and poor, and urban and rural enabled me to consider multilevel inequality; that is, not only between genders but also within gender. Attention needs to be paid to how the variations of gender, class and *hukou* affect different people in different ways. Not every man enjoys superior status, and arguably, migrant men are disadvantaged in different ways compared to migrant women. I suggest that men’s experiences should be given equal weight when discussing gender relations.

1.3.1 Changing gender relations over time

The history of gender relations in China is complex and is not possible to be exhaustive in the discussion that follows. As the thesis focuses on migrant workers in contemporary China, I will focus on the post-Mao era. Before this, I will briefly review the history of gender relations in the pre-Mao and Mao eras, as this history continues to influence thought and practice in contemporary China.

Discussing the concept of gender relations in ancient China as a whole runs the risk of viewing ancient China as static over such a long time span. But it is safe to say that men’s unchallengeable superiority is a dominant ideology in ancient China. The idea that ‘a wife should be dominated by a husband’ (*fu wei qi gang*) was proposed by the Chinese philosopher Zhongshu Dong in the East Han dynasty (AD 25-220). This belief has been absorbed into Chinese traditional culture and has been widely considered as a fundamental value embedded in a patriarchal society guided by Confucianism. This

belief is still prevalent even today (Stacey, 1983; Ma, 2003).²⁰ In addition, traditional Chinese society was organised around the gender division of labour that valorises woman's role in the domestic arena and man's role in the public arena (Jacka, 1997; Ma, 2003). Through the study of clan rules in the Republican era (1912-1948), Liu (1959: 93) found that clan rules were explicit about the obedience of the wife, and 'sex segregation restrains the activities of women in three major areas: domestic life, the use of services from outside the home, and social activities'.

In the Mao era, conscious attempts were made to create an asexual title, *tong zhi* (comrade), which is a socialist term disassociated from gender, class and age (Pun, 2005). 'Whatever a male comrade can do, a female comrade can do as well' was a popular slogan in the Mao era (Wichterich, 2007, p. 85). The hidden script behind this 'desexualisation' is that masculinity is the standard which can be applied to all, and women should endeavour to catch up and compete with men. Some scholars considered that during the Mao era, the liberation of women, especially in the countryside, was unfinished or postponed (Croll, 1983; Y. Jin, 2006; Parish & Whyte, 1978; Stacey, 1983).

Women's employment rate was high in the Mao era, and women were considered to be valuable to the state and the family (Parish & Whyte, 1978; Croll, 1983; Stacey, 1983). Although both urban and rural women's participation levels in the labour market were high, their situations were different. In urban areas, women gained a sense of economic independence, because many were able to take control of their own income (Croll, 1983). Scholars who conducted research in rural Zhejiang (L. Zhang, 2005) and Guangdong provinces (Parish & Whyte, 1978), discovered that during the Mao era, although women were significant contributors to the family income, the allocation of that income was controlled by the head of the household, who was usually a man. Therefore, women in these areas did not have control over their own income. In both urban and rural areas, women's economic contribution to the family did not seem to make their housework burden any less. They still undertook the majority of housework and childcare, regardless of the Communist Party's commitment to the idea of an equal sharing of housework (X. Gao, 1994; Parish & Whyte, 1978; Stacey, 1983; Wolf, 1985). That the slogan was 'women can do men's work' and not the other way around

²⁰ I will explain more about the concepts of filial piety and patriarchy in Chapter 2. I am wary of using the concept of Confucianism as the explanation of patriarchy and filial piety because filial piety as a moral principle can be seen in Buddhism and Taoism as well.

indicates the subordinated status of women and the undervaluing of domestic work. Women's double burden was embedded in the state patriarchy, while men were still in dominant positions (Stacey, 1983). However, other scholars argued that women benefited from the desexualising movement in the Cultural Revolution in that it extended women's life choices, recognised their contribution to the state and raised their social status (Y. Jin, 2006; C. X. Lu, 2010). The idea that women should engage in the public arena through work was widely disseminated and well received, which is a legacy passed to the post-Mao era.

The primary legacy of the Mao era is the recognition of women as suppliers of valuable labour. However, the desexualising revolution in the Mao era was incomplete. Aspects of inequality dating back to Han dynasty continue to influence working patterns, intimate relationships and leisure time activities, as will be discussed in Chapters 4 to 6. This influence is evidenced by the fact that conventional patriarchal perceptions of the public/private division of gender roles still persist in contemporary China (NBS & ACWF, 2011), which will be discussed later in this section. In addition, the core constitutions of patriarchy—a strong preference for sons and the male line of succession, especially male inheritance of property—have remained across vast rural areas (Y. Jin, 2011; Ma, 2003; C. Tang, Ma, & Jin, 2009). This had significant impact on intimate relationships for both of my female and male informants and will be discussed in Chapter 5.

In the post-Mao era, there are positive as well as negative aspects to women's status and gender equality. The improvements made in reproductive health over the previous few decades are significant (Attané, 2012, p. 11), and women's employment rate increased from the Mao era to the post-Mao era. As a result, Chinese women are more economically independent than at any time since the 1950s. There had been a sharp rise in women in senior management positions from 2008 to 2013 (Grant Thornton, 2013), and women had engaged more in the decision-making process in domestic issues, based on the joint nationwide reports on Chinese Women's Social Status published decennially from 1990 by NBS and ACWF (2001, 2011).

However, the findings of these joint reports were perplexing (NBS & ACWF, 2001, 2011).²¹ In regard to education, the gender gap had narrowed to 0.3 years. But wage

²¹ The Third Survey was released on October 21, 2011. It followed the first and second surveys conducted respectively in 1990 and 2000. They are the only consecutive surveys to investigate women's status and gender relations in China on this scale. See Shen (2011) for a fuller report on the surveys. It is notable

continued to be highly gender-differentiated, and the wage gap between men and women had increased. In 2010, women in urban households earned 67.3% of men's wage. The figure was 70.1% in 2000 and 74.5% in 1990. However, women worked almost 40 minutes longer and rested one hour less per day than men.²² What made the situation worse was that 10% of women claimed that they encountered gender discrimination in the workplace.

The gender gap also remained evident with respect to property ownership. In 2010, only 37.9% of women owned property, including co-ownership with their husbands, whereas the figure was 67.1% for men (NBS & ACWF, 2011). It is notable that according to the Third Survey on Chinese Women's Social Status, conducted in 2010 (hereafter the Third Survey), 24.7% of women had encountered domestic violence.²³ In terms of gender awareness, it is also notable that 61.6% of men and 54.8% of women agreed with the traditional saying that 'men should be public-based; women should be family-oriented.' The figures had increased by 7.7% and 4.4% respectively compared to the Second Survey in 2000. This suggests that the conventional ideas on gendered roles have not declined or disappeared with the economic development and general improvements in people's wellbeing in China.

Women's political participation rate is another important indicator to evaluate gender equality. This refers to the proportion of women who are members of the National People's Congress (NPC). China has adopted a gender quota for women's political participation. From 1978 onwards, the proportion of women in the NPC had averaged around 21% (China News, 2012 April 20). Although the figure increased slightly to 23.6% in 2015, China still ranked 54 out of 189 countries with respect to women's political participation, according to the statistics provided by Inter-Parliamentary Union

that the indicators of the surveys have changed significantly over the last twenty years, making some aspects difficult to compare.

²² In terms of time use, this survey indicated that gender differences remained in terms of overall work time, leisure time and time spent on the household. Combining the indicators of economy and lifestyle, women worked on average 574 minutes per day compared to 537 minutes for men. Women had on average 240 minutes of leisure time per day, compared to 297 minutes for men. At the launch conference of the Third Survey, when asked why women worked almost 40 minutes longer but rested one hour less per day compared to men and what the results implied, the vice president of ACWF suggested that it was because of a) job segregation by gender: more women worked in the service sector, and because the nature of the sector demands longer working hours, women tended to have longer working days than men; and b) traditional gender roles in the sense that women are presumed to take up more time on domestic work (NBS & ACWF, 2011). However, her answer merely justified the reasons why women worked more and rested less, not why women got paid less. Furthermore, as a high official who was responsible for promoting gender equality, she did not indicate the inequality embedded in this situation, nor suggested ways to solve the problems.

²³ Domestic violence includes verbal abuse, assaults, restriction of personal freedom, economic control, forced sex and other forms of domestic violence during their marriages.

(2015). Wang (2013) argued that the gender quota system is merely ‘a symbol of good will’, indicating a sense of political correctness, without actually implementing it (p. 23).

In addition to the changing gender relations reflected in statistics, the discourse of gender equality disseminated by the state suggests that its recognition of gender equality has scarcely changed since the Mao era. Equality between men and women (‘男女平等’ in Chinese), according to the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China (NPC, 2004), means that ‘women in the People’s Republic of China enjoy equal rights with men in all spheres of life, in political, economic, cultural, social and family life’ (Article 48). ACWF, which is a semi-official organisation affiliated to the State Council, adopted the concept of equality between women and men instead of gender equality and argued that ‘equality between men and women’ is a ‘basic national policy’ (ACWF, 2008). The concept of gender equality appears more and more frequently in recent official reports (NBS & ACWF, 2001, 2011; Xinhua News Agency, 2005). It reflects the Chinese government’s effort to mainstream the concept of ‘gender equality’. However, it does not have an obvious distinction from the concept of ‘the equality between women and men’ that the government promoted for decades. For example, the Report on Conditions of Gender Equality and the Development of Women in China (Xinhua News Agency, 2005) stated that ‘recently, the Chinese government has adopted justice and equality such as gender equality to the construction of a harmonious socialist society, using economics, law, administration and propaganda, to make sure that women can receive the equal rights in politics, economics, culture, social and family life as men in order to promote the comprehensive development of women.’

Although the report adopts the buzzwords of gender equality, it remains mired in the idea that ‘women are entitled the same rights as men’. ‘To safeguard women, entitle the equal rights’, as stated in the official report, has two connotations. First, ‘to safeguard women’ suggests that it is through the male-dominated state that women secure their status. Second, ‘the same rights as men’ connotes that men are the standard for women. Both of these imply men’s status as role models and women’s as subordinates. Thus, ‘gender equality’ in the context of contemporary China is merely a repackaging of ‘equality between men and women’ in the Mao era, and, arguably, women’s subaltern status remains essentially unchanged. Furthermore, ‘gender equality’ discourse in China is overly concerned with women’s rights, taking for granted that men already have these rights. This may reflect the superior status of male policymakers, whereas

disadvantaged men, especially male rural migrants, are marginalised and ignored in the ‘gender equality’ discourse.

Above all, despite the quest for greater gender equality in both the Mao and post-Mao eras, many dimensions of gender inequality remain, such as the gender pay gap, traditional views on women and men’s roles, and women’s low rate of political participation. This complicated and dynamic situation makes it difficult to reach a simple conclusion on gender relations and women’s status. What is clear is that there is still a long way to go in order to achieve gender equality.

1.3.2 Perplexing situation of women and men with rural *hukou*

Having discussed the general situation of gender inequality in China, this section focuses on women and men with rural *hukou*. It first discusses how migration empowers migrant women in some ways but also introduces new problems. Migrant women remain disadvantaged, both compared to urban women and to men in general. The section then discusses the persistence of the son preference, giving rise to an astonishing sex ratio imbalance at birth, which harms both women and men.

It is undeniable that migrant women have been empowered in various ways. Both the Second and the Third Survey confirmed that migration positively impacts women’s ability to make decisions on personal issues such as partner finding and family issues (NBS & ACWF, 2001, 2011). In addition, the decreasing suicide rate of rural women offers a further indicator of their empowerment. Some authors highlighted the disproportionately high suicide rate among women with rural *hukou* in the 1980s and 1990s (Jacka, 2006; S. Lee & Kleinman, 2003; Murphy, 2004), but the most recent findings showed that the situation is changing. The latest figures showed that women’s suicide rate was significantly higher than that of men from 1987 to 1997, but underwent a decrease in the 2000s (Y. Liu, He, Wu, & Webster, 2010; C. W. Wang, Chan, & Yip, 2014; Zhong & Gui, 2011). In a recent piece of research, Wang, Chan and Yip found that ‘the male/female ratios of suicide rates increased further during the period 2002–2011, with higher rates in males than females in both urban and rural areas since 2006’ (2014, p. 938). This research revealed a rapid decrease in women’s suicide rate in rural areas. Some scholars argued that the lower female suicide rate can be explained by migration. Through migration, women’s subordinate status and family disputes are no longer found in the new locale, and pesticides (previously the dominant suicide method) are less available to them after migration (Jing, Wu, & Zhang, 2010). It should be noted

that the reasons for women's empowerment are complex. How migration serves as a source of empowerment is an important issue that will be explored in Chapter 5.

Apart from these promising findings of migrant women's empowerment, migration also has undesirable impacts on women. The Third Survey (NBS & ACWF, 2011) showed that the main problems female migrant workers encountered included 'being looked down upon' (14.7%) and 'salary default or deduction' (14.2%). These figures suggest that some basic demands such as being respected and the timely payment of wage remained unmet. In addition, rural women were still disadvantaged not only relative to urban women but also to both rural and urban men. In terms of gender differences, the urban and rural division was still substantial. A total of 54.3% of urban women had received a high school education, compared to 19.2% of rural women; additionally, rural women devoted much more time to housework than urban women did. Comparing rural women to men, women earned the equivalent of only 56% of men's wage in 2010.²⁴

So far, I have discussed the changing status of rural women and its relation to migration. I now focus on the imbalanced SRB and how it has disadvantaged both women and men. I discuss SRB here because it lays the foundation for my male informants' anxiety of not being able to afford a wife (Chapter 5) and is related to son preference (Chapters 2 and 5). In general, SRB is more imbalanced in rural areas than in urban areas (Hesketh & Xing, 2006; L. Xu & Cui, 2008). It is directly related to the preference for a son in many parts of China, especially rural areas (Attané, 2012; L. Gao, 1993; X. Qiao, 2004; Yuan & Shi, 2005). The son preference persists despite massive migration.

The phenomenon of imbalanced SRB should be positioned within the context of the enforcement of family planning policies since 1979. The policy implementations are differentiated geographically and ethnically. In general, each couple of Han ethnicity in the urban areas was only allowed to have one child; the maximum was usually two for Han couples in rural areas if their first birth was not a son (Yuan & Shi, 2005). Couples violating the family planning policy had to pay fines, and violators might also run the risk of losing their jobs. In order to have a son without being punished, sex-selective abortions were frequently performed. Xu and Cui (2008, pp. 81–82) found that two factors served to explain the imbalanced SRB: sex-selected abortion counts for 76.03%, while 23.97% was due to the non-reporting of female births. Households who violated

²⁴ The report did not suggest that rural women were compared to rural men or men in general.

the family planning policies tended not to report the birth of girls to the government, which partly explains the imbalanced gender ratio in the statistics.²⁵

After the implementation of family planning policies, the male to female SRB rose steadily from 108.5:100 in 1982 to 118.6:100 in 2005, and continued to fluctuate around 118 until 2010 (NBS, 2011b; L. Xu & Cui, 2008). The imbalanced SRB harms both women and men, although at different life stages. Infanticide and abortion based on sex selection seriously damage the rights of female infants and young women. Meanwhile, adult men in some rural areas are negatively affected because there are not enough women for them to marry. Women are on the demand side of the marriage market. Consequently, the brideprice has been soaring. As a result, a significant number of adult men cannot afford to get married (Fei Cai, 2007; Hesketh & Xing, 2006). For instance, my informants who came from rural Anhui, the province with the highest sex ratio imbalance in China (Zhu, Lu, & Hesketh, 2009), demonstrated that the search for a wife was a motivation for migration among unmarried males. This will be discussed further in Chapter 5, which examines intimate relationships.

The imbalanced SRB in China is unprecedented in documented human history in terms of scale and continuing impact (Attané, 2012, p. 13). Former president Hu Jintao proclaimed that more effort should be put in to dealing with the unbalanced gender ratio and gender inequality after the 6th Census in 2010 revealed the hugely imbalanced sex ratio (People's Daily Online, 2011). In November 2013, the central government relaxed the one child policy, allowing couples to have two children if either parent is an only child (Xinhua News Agency, 2013). By 31 May 2014, 271,600 couples had applied to have a second birth, but this only accounted for 2.5% of couples qualified to apply (China News, 2014). Rebalancing the SRB will take time and the current gender ratio imbalance is expected to persist for many years.

1.3.3 A critique of the literature on gendered migration

Gendered experience of migration is a primary focus of this thesis. My critique of the current literature on gendered migration refers back to the critique of gendered experience discussed in the Introduction of the thesis. The current literature is problematic in two ways when considering China. First, women's migration experience is more likely to be emphasised when referring to gendered migration. Second, some

²⁵ Apart from the imbalanced SRB, female infanticide and female babies' deaths from malnutrition are reported more frequently than male babies' deaths (Xu & Cui, 2008, p. 81-82).

scholars claimed to find differences by gender when in fact they merely focus on either men or women (Jacka, 2006; Lin, 2013).

According to some qualitative literature on migration in China, migration is gendered not only by motivations of migrants and by the social networks they create in the arrival city, but also by the occupations they take up (Gaetano & Jacka, 2004; Jacka, 2006; S. Lee & Kleinman, 2003; Pun, 2005). In this literature, migrant women are considered to have special obligations in the household such as their roles as filial daughters and responsible wives. Interestingly, if the research on female and male migrants is compared, these gendered experiences are sometimes not gendered with regard to the responsibilities both male and female migrants intend to escape or the filial obligations they have to adopt. For instance, Lin (2013) claimed that sending remittances home (p. 62) and family pressure to give birth to a son (p. 68) amounted to the ‘gendered familial responsibility’ (p. 67) of his male informants. Jacka (2006) noted a filial obligation to send remittances home among her female informants as well (p. 179). Furthermore, Jacka argued that the motivations for migrating were highly gendered. She pointed out that patriarchal relations and women’s experiences in rural areas were unique motivations for women to migrate and to choose to prolong their stay in cities (Jacka, 2006, pp. 7, 221). But again, Lin (2013) found that ‘for some men it was a path that enabled them to escape traditional gender obligations and responsibilities’ (p. 48). This resembles Jacka’s findings on women. Therefore, gendered differences in the motivation of migration are not clearly established. I do not deny the existence of gendered motivations for migration, but my critique focuses on the insufficient evidence of, and therefore the unconvincing argument in favour of, gendered migration.

From the discussion in Section 1.3, the status of women and men has shifted and presents today in complex and contradictory ways, which are echoed in the subsequent empirical Chapters 4 to 6.

1.4 Marketisation of the catering industry

My research focuses on restaurant workers. It is therefore necessary to contextualise these workers by providing a brief introduction of the catering industry in China and in Shanghai and the changing working conditions in restaurants. This section first discusses the development of the catering industry in China and in Shanghai against the background of the burgeoning consumer society. Then it deals with transformation of labour force in the restaurants in the move from communism to capitalism and the

current underprivileged situation of restaurant workers, foreshadowing the discussion of their work experiences addressed in Chapter 4 and 6.

1.4.1 The catering sector in China and in Shanghai

In 2009, China became the world's second largest luxury market and is expected one day to become the first (People's Daily Online, 2009). A burgeoning consumer society is one of the consequences of the political and economic reform in China. The emergence of a thriving catering industry is concurrent with the booming consumer society and the growth of the economy in China as a whole.²⁶ Dining out has become an important part of daily life.

Catering industry revenue has maintained double-digit growth from 1991 onwards (L. Jin, 2009, pp. 31, 284). Now the catering sector is one of the five major aspects of China's service sector. According to NBS (2001a, 2001b, 2014g), the number of enterprises in the catering sector was 7.6 times greater in 2013 (26,743) than in 2000 (3,508); business revenue in 2013 (453.3 billion yuan) was 11 times of that in 2000 (40.5 billion yuan); the labour force engaged in the catering sector was 2.47 million in 2013, compared to 664,700 in 2000.²⁷ It is clear that food consumption in restaurants continues to be a crucial driver of economic growth. However, only restaurants above a designated size are taken into consideration by NBS, and most restaurants are too small to be considered, which means it is likely that the figures underestimate the full impact of the catering industry.

In Shanghai, the booming catering sector mirrors China's burgeoning consumption levels. In 2013, business revenue in the catering sector in Shanghai ranked in the top three among all the municipalities and provinces in China (NBS, 2014h). The catering sector's share of GDP in Shanghai rose from 1999 to 2013.

1.4.2 Transformation of the catering industry and its working conditions

During the Mao era, the restaurant industry was not as prosperous and diversified as it is now, both in regard to the types of restaurant ownership and to the cuisine provided. At

²⁶ However, consumption differs by class and *hukou*. Rural *hukou* holders accounted for 70% of the population but less than 30% of consumption expenditure (Yang, 2010, p. 20). Urbanites are more likely to be consumers whereas rural migrants are more likely to be service providers, which refers back to the job segregation by *hukou*, discussed in Section 1.2.

²⁷ According to National Bureau of Statistics (2014a), 'The statistical unit of the enterprises of hospitality and catering services above the designated size is the annual income of main business at and over two million yuan'.

that time, almost all restaurants were state-owned (J. Tang, Ling, & Zhang, 2006, p. 50). Service quality was not an emphasis in the daily work of service personnel. On the contrary, it was depreciated. Being served was considered improper because ‘good service leads to revisionist ideology’ (*fuwu de hao hui chu xiuzheng zhuyi*) (Z. Qiao, Kanagaratnam, & Tessier, 2003, p. 3; J. Tang et al., 2006, p. 62).

At the time, catering jobs were called ‘iron rice bowl’ (*tie fanwan*) as they were occupations with guaranteed security and abundant social benefits. In the Mao era, the wage system was guided by an egalitarian approach. From 1956 to 1978, wage was highly centralised and controlled by the state (Meisner, 1999; Ye & Wang, 2001), and the gap in income distribution was not as large as in the post-Mao era (F. Liu, 2006).²⁸ And because the strict control of mobility, these jobs were mostly taken up by local residents with urban *hukou*.

This situation has changed significantly since China’s marketisation. Under marketisation, the proportion of state-owned enterprises in the catering sector has fallen from 27.9% in 2000 (NBS, 2001a) to 1.9% in 2013 (NBS, 2014g).²⁹ Under the transformation, catering work is no longer undertaken by local people. Instead, most restaurants and coffee shops in large cities prefer to recruit migrant workers who are willing to accept cheaper wage, longer working hours and fewer social benefits compared to their urban counterparts.

Figure 2 shows how average wage in the catering sector compared to the local average declined between 2000 and 2013 in Shanghai. It is noticeable that restaurant wage fluctuated around 50% of the local average from 2008 onwards, which is mirrored by Yao’s finding that income in restaurants was the second lowest of all the sectors; only agricultural work pays less (2009). In the Meteor Restaurant, my fieldwork site, monthly wages for entry-level workers ranged from 1940 to 2240 yuan (excluding commission) in January 2012, similar to other restaurants in Shanghai.³⁰

²⁸ However, I am not able to find the wage of a table server in contrast to the average wage in the Mao era.

²⁹ The data prior to 2000 is not available on the official website of National Bureau of Statistics. And it is not possible for me to go back to China to check the data at the writing up stage.

³⁰ The wage for an entry-level worker in the Meteor would not be significantly different from the average wage of the restaurant because only slightly above 10% of the workers were beyond the entry level. Most of this 10% were shift leaders, whose wages were roughly 200 yuan (20 pounds) higher than the entry-level workers. The wages of the line manager, deputy manager and the manager were around 4500, 6000 and 8000 yuan per month respectively. The wages of these three persons did not affect the average wage of the restaurant.

Wages in the Meteor Restaurant are raised in every May in accordance with the rise in the minimum wage in Shanghai. Meteor wages in January 2012 were compared to the average wage in the catering

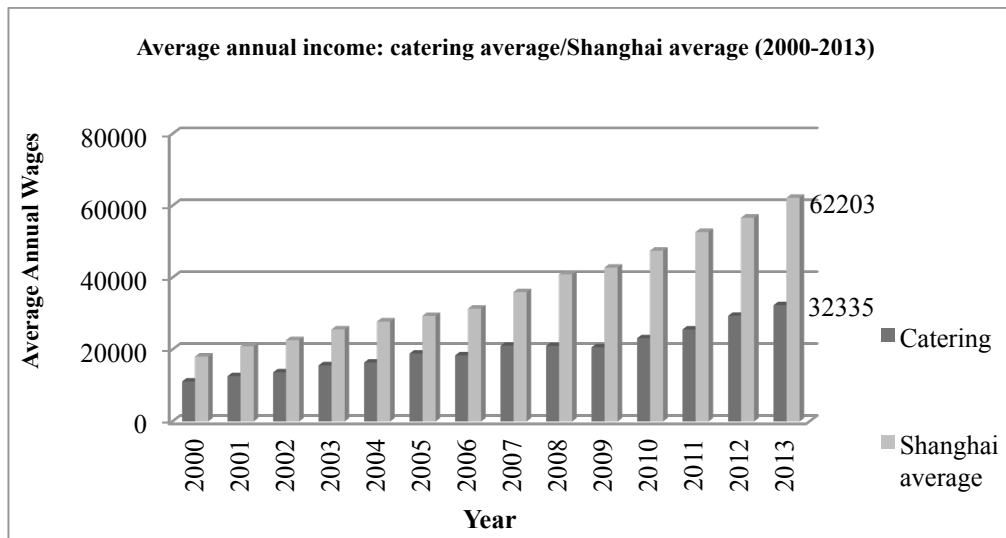


Figure 2 Average annual income of employees in Shanghai: catering average/Shanghai average (2000-2013) (Currency: yuan)

Sources: Shanghai Bureau of Statistics (SBS, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010a, 2011, 2012, 2013a, 2014b)

In addition, social benefits attached to restaurant jobs were reduced after the reforms of 1978. The ratio of welfare to salary is an indicator to suggest the proportion of social benefits to total salaries paid by restaurants for employees.³¹ Table 1 shows that welfare/salaries had been through a downward trend from 2000 to 2010 in the catering sector in Shanghai, which means benefits constituted a smaller proportion of salaries each year.³² However, in 2010, welfare versus salaries saw a 55% increase compared to the year 2009, which is probably related to the enforcement of the Social Insurance Law. The Meteor Restaurant, influenced by the Social Insurance Law that came into force in July 2011 (NPC, 2010), has been providing social benefits for workers since 2011. Restaurant workers began to receive pensions, medical insurance and injury insurance but were still without maternity insurance and unemployment insurance, benefits that local workers usually enjoy.

sector in Shanghai in 2011 (25585/12=2132.1) because the wages in January 2012 remained the same as the wages in May 2011. During my most recent visit, in April 2014, Meteor wages varied from 2700-3000 yuan, slightly above the half the average wage in Shanghai.

³¹ I asked Shanghai Bureau of Statistics about the social benefits per person; they replied that they didn't have these figures.

³² It is noteworthy that the statistics only cover the salaries and welfare in relatively large restaurants. The welfare and income conditions of small restaurants may be even worse.

Table 1 Welfare and salaries in the catering sector (in 100 million yuan)

Welfare and salaries in the catering sector in Shanghai								
Year Item	2000	2005	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Total payable salaries (in 100 million yuan)	4.17	17.54	31.45	34.78	41.08	50.77	59.04	75.52
Total payable social benefits (in 100 million yuan)	0.61	2.26	1.77	1.37	2.51			
Welfare/salaries % ³³	14.63	12.88	5.63	3.94	6.11			

Sources: Calculated based on the data from Shanghai Bureau of Statistics (2003, 2010b, 2014c)³⁴

On the one hand, restaurant wage had decreased compared to the average wage in Shanghai. On the other hand, labour shortages have been one of the principal factors affecting the catering industry over the last few years (NBS, 2014i; L. Yang, 2010). Restaurants have found it more difficult to recruit full-time labour in recent years. Although the labour shortage in the catering sector has been conspicuous, it does not necessarily give rise to wage increases. It is interesting to explore why wage is kept low in this context of labour shortage. One important reason that prevents wage from increasing could be the lack of effective labour unions. Many labour unions exist in name only. Few labour unions in the catering sector are organised by employees themselves and speak for employees. Workers have not yet cultivated a collective voice that is strong enough to be considered a threat to employers or to the state.³⁵ Another reason is that, in response to labour scarcity, many restaurants have lowered the criteria for recruitment. For instance, Manager Lv told me that the Meteor used to set an age range of 18-25 when recruiting a table server, but it no longer applies this age range rule due to labour scarcity.³⁶ The restaurant has recruited more employees above the age of

³³ The indicator of welfare/salaries was calculated manually by me based on the total payable salaries/total payable social benefits in order to see the proportion of welfare benefits in the salaries.

³⁴ Shanghai Bureau of Statistics notes that the total payable salaries and social benefits were merged together from 2011 onwards.

³⁵ News reports and scholarly discussions focused on factory workers' strikes in demand of wage in China. Very little literature considered collective behaviour in the service sector. See Gallagher (2006; 2011, 2014) on politics of workers and labour unions in China for detailed discussions.

³⁶ Table servers refer to waitresses and waiters. It will be elaborated in Chapter 4.

25.³⁷ The relaxed requirement has alleviated the labour shortage to some extent, so that the need to raise the wage becomes less urgent.

Additionally, many restaurants have started to recruit part-time workers. With the emergence of labour service agencies, restaurants have outsourced the recruitment of part-time workers to these agencies, which are very responsive to restaurants' labour demands. I observed the leaders of the labour agency working in the Meteor Restaurant; the restaurant manager usually told the leaders how many part-time workers would be needed the next day, and the leaders contacted potential workers and collected the number of workers needed in a short time, usually within one hour. The cost to the restaurant to hire a part-time worker is similar to that of a full-time worker. The combination of part-time and full-time workers meets the labour demands of the restaurant. In that case, it is unlikely for the restaurant to initiate a wage raise.

Above all, the catering sector in Shanghai is prosperous, reflecting the booming economy in China as a whole. The labour system has been changing with the political and economic transformation of China. State-owned restaurants offering job security and sufficient social benefits and mostly employing local residents, have gradually been replaced by privately-owned restaurants offering jobs with meagre wage and scarce benefits and mostly employing migrants. Low wage, minimum social benefits and the perception of restaurant work as a job for rural migrants make the work unattractive to urbanites. However, the persisting labour shortage does not necessarily lead to wage increases. The menial wage and scarce social benefits increase staff turnover in restaurants and also impact on workers' agency and subjectivity, which is discussed in Chapters 4 and 6.³⁸ Despite their underprivileged situation, however, it should be noted that migrants' financial wellbeing has been improved through migration. And the catering sector continues to be an option, sometimes even the best option, for migrant workers when they first arrive in Shanghai.

1.5 Fieldwork setting

This section portrays the fieldwork setting in which workers' daily lives and worker-customer interactions take place. A brief introduction to the restaurant is followed with

³⁷ In March 2012, I collected 27 restaurant recruitment advertisements across Shanghai and found that half of the restaurants did not specify the age limit for table servers. Where an age requirement was stated, the upper limit ranged from 28-45, which was much more relaxed than five years before.

³⁸ Turnover refers to the ratio of the number of workers that had to be replaced in a given time period to the average number of workers.

a description of the workers' daily schedule. Finally, workers' living conditions are discussed in order to highlight their disadvantaged status in Shanghai.

1.5.1 A brief introduction to the Meteor Restaurant

Consumers prefer to choose restaurant chains with a comfortable environment, good service and high reputation for events such as family get-togethers, weddings and birthday ceremonies. As a result, brand consumption becomes a trend (L. Jin, 2009, p. 34). I undertook fieldwork in the Meteor Restaurant, which is one of the biggest restaurant brands in China. It opened its first restaurant in 1998 and became one of the top 100 restaurant chains in China within five years.

The Meteor Restaurant had 13 restaurants in Shanghai in 2011-2014, the period of my fieldwork.³⁹ The branch I researched most is located in suburban Shanghai, 1.2 kilometres from the nearest subway station and 12 kilometres from the city centre Xujiahui. It consists of five floors. During my fieldwork in 2011, the first two floors were mainly hall area, which had a large number of tables suitable for 2 to 6 people; the third to fifth floors, as well as some parts of the first floor, have 39 compartments altogether, each compartment seating 6-15 persons. The restaurant was approximately 6000 square metres including a car park and was able to cater for 1100 customers. In 2013, the restaurant reduced the number of tables in response to declining customer numbers, a result of the austerity measures taken by president Xi Jinping in December 2012 to deal with outlandish spending and corruption among officials (Reuters, 2014), and also because newly-opened restaurants nearby attracted some of its customers.

As demonstrated in Figure 3, the Meteor Restaurant is decorated in beige. According to its official website, 'the decoration style of each restaurant is uniquely designed from the exterior to the interior. Mixed with Chinese and Western style, which is fresh, bright and chic...'⁴⁰ I did a search in April 2012 via the website 'Dianping', of all the comments and feedback on the particular restaurant branch I used; one-tenth of the comments mentioned the decoration. Most comments were positive: 'delicate',

³⁹ Meteor Restaurant here refers to all 13 branches of the restaurants. But hereafter it refers to the particular branch where I did the fieldwork, unless stated otherwise.

⁴⁰ For the purpose of anonymity, I do not provide the link to the official website of the restaurant.

‘beautiful’, ‘warm’, ‘luxurious’, ‘magnificent’, ‘comfortable’, ‘the crystal lamps are so beautiful’.⁴¹

Meteor Restaurant targets a wide range of customers, from working class to the well-off and from budget dining to luxurious catering, but most customers are, according to my observation, urban middle class. Meteor Restaurant offers a wide range of food choices at average prices for Shanghai. The average expenditure in the restaurant branch was about 82 yuan (8 pounds) per person in April 2012 and 89 yuan in April 2014, according to searches via Dianping in April 2012 and 2014 respectively. The expenditure in a compartment (*baofang*) is usually higher, especially for business catering.



Figure 3 Interior decoration of the Meteor Restaurant

1.5.2 Work Schedules

As shown in Table 2, Meteor employees work nine hours a day excluding rest time. They work six days a week, but the rest day cannot be guaranteed during holidays, the busiest times for the restaurant. According to the Labour Law (NPC, 1995), a worker should not exceed 44 hours per week (Article 36); in exceptional cases, workers are allowed to work an additional 36 hours per month with additional compensation higher than their hourly rate if they do not work overtime (Article 41). The exceptional cases apply to the restaurant industry. But, according to my observation, the workers do not

⁴¹ Dianping is a restaurant ranking website in China, similar to ‘OpenTable’ in the UK. Customers can rank the restaurants they visited and leave comments about their dining experiences.

get extra compensation in this restaurant. The culture of overtime work is prevalent in China. According to the Report on the Labour Market in China in 2014 (Zhuge, 2014), 90% of sectors required employees to work overtime. Employees in the restaurant and hotel sector worked 51.4 hours per week on average, ranking highest of all the sectors.⁴² As discussed in Section 1.4, restaurant wage was the second lowest of all the sectors in China. The longest work hours and the second lowest wage result in restaurant jobs being on the lowest rung of all the occupations in China.

The penalty system and the long rest hours serve as constraints to workers in the Meteor Restaurant. According to Table 2, morning-shift workers usually stayed in the restaurant from 9:30 in the morning to 9:30 at night. They had to register through a face-scanning machine four times a day.⁴³ Five yuan would be deducted from the monthly wages if a worker was five minutes late. A worker would be fined half a day's wages for being half an hour late. A worker had three hours' rest time from 1:30 to 4:30, whereas office workers in Shanghai usually have 1-2 hours of rest time. The relatively long time had both financial and psychological drawbacks. The restaurant did not pay workers for the rest time, but it was not a long enough time span for them to find a part-time job to fill it. The work schedules functioned as a form of coercion for workers because the workers could not derive financial benefits from the relatively long rest time. Their limited budget also constrained their ways of dealing with the long rest time. They usually stayed in the restaurant, watching TV and doing embroidery. Some of them read novels or chatted online via mobile phones. Some workers went shopping or gambling outside the restaurant. And others went home to take a nap if they lived close to the restaurant. Few of them were able to make use of the time to do something beneficial to their career development or financial wellbeing. Even worse, the male workers' gambling behaviour during the rest time trapped them in a difficult financial situation. How the work schedules served to marginalise the workers' life will be further elaborated in Chapter 6.

⁴² Being not able to find the original report, I cite the news report written by the journalist Zhuge who attended the press release for this report.

⁴³ I was told by a waitress that 2-3 years ago, the clock-in system changed from papercard-reader, in which clock-in and out time was displayed on the card, to face-scanning with no card to display the time. It was said that the reason for the transformation was that a worker collected photocopies of these papercards to successfully sue the restaurant for overtime payment.

Table 2 Work schedules for morning-shift table servers and pantry helpers⁴⁴

Time	Item	Content
9:30-10:00	Breakfast	Free breakfast was provided by the restaurant.
10:00	Face-scanning (See Figures 4 and 5)	Workers stayed for five seconds at the face-scanning machine in order to register their attendance.
10:00-1:30	Work	Workers usually did the cleaning from 10 to 11 am.
1:30	Face-scanning	
1:30-3:30	Lunch break	Some workers watched TV, used mobile phones or did embroidery in the assigned area on the second floor; others went shopping and gambling outside the restaurant.
3:30-4:00	Lunch	Free lunch was provided, usually with one dish of vegetables and another of meat.
4:00	Face-scanning	
4:10-4:30	Meeting 1	Supervisory/managerial level meeting, chaired by the managers. All shift leaders were required to attend.
4:30-5:00	Meeting 2	Parallel meetings for entry-level workers were chaired by shift leaders in each job position. All entry-level workers were required to attend.
5:00-9:30	Work	
9:30	Face-scanning	Morning-shift workers got off work.

Source: Fieldwork observation

⁴⁴ This schedule is subject to change due to the nature of restaurant work. Workers cannot leave until customers are gone. Working hour for table servers, pantry helpers, hostesses and cashiers in the public area was basically the same, whereas working hour for cleaners was slightly shorter. There were morning shifts and noon shifts with similar working hours. The schedule displayed above is for morning shifts.

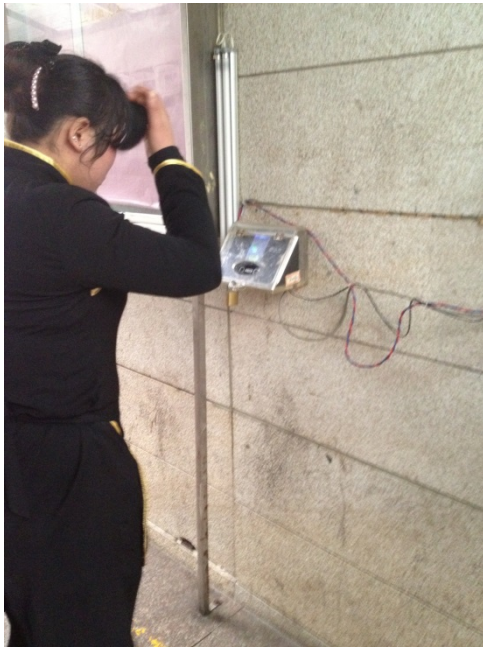


Figure 4 Face-scanning



Figure 5 Machine for face-scanning

1.5.3 Living conditions of restaurant workers

The restaurant workers either live in employer-provided housing or privately rented accommodation. The rented accommodation primarily consists of urban village and shared accommodation (dormitory). An urban village (*chengzhongcun*) literally means ‘a village encircled by the city’ (Y. Liu et al., 2010, p. 135). The residents in those old neighbourhoods with poor living conditions, who were once indigenous people, have been gradually replaced by peasant migrants. Almost half the migrant workers live in dormitories. This section focuses only on the employer housing that I lived in and visited. Living conditions in the dormitories are representative of all types of migrant housing.⁴⁵ I argue that the migrant workers’ rudimentary living conditions add a further dimension to their disadvantaged situation in Shanghai, and women can be more disadvantaged in this particular living environment.

Here I provide my experience of living in a dormitory, illustrated by photographs I took (see Figure 6 and 7). The Meteor Restaurant employer accommodates the employees within two types of dormitory. The infrastructure of the old dormitory is rudimentary but it is only one minute’s walk from the workplace; the new dormitory is better

⁴⁵ A fuller explanation can be seen in Shen (2015). Some part of this section was published in this journal article.

decorated but is 15 minutes' walk from the restaurant. Employer accommodation is free to the employees. It only requires them to pay bills equivalent to five pounds sterling per month, which accounts for 2% of their wages. I lived in the old dormitory. It is a two-floor building. Usually six people reside in a room with three to four bunk beds. Each floor is equipped with a female toilet and a male toilet, shared by all the residents. The toilet was always smelly and the light in my dormitory was kept on all the time. It woke me up in the night if I did not wear an eye mask, but my roommates seemed to be used to the light.⁴⁶ The upper berths of some beds were not suitable for sleeping in because they were in a very unstable condition. The hot water supply was erratic. Sometimes the water stopped unexpectedly when residents were brushing their teeth or taking a shower. A cold storage and a logistics distribution centre were nearby. Sometimes I was woken by the noise of loading and unloading goods in the early morning. A security guard told me that vans came shortly after 4am to the distribution centre, and another batch of vans for cold storage came shortly after 5am. These living conditions were far from desirable.



Figure 6 Employer-provided dormitory (a)



Figure 7 Employer-provided dormitory (b)

⁴⁶ According to my colleagues, there were two reasons for keeping the light on. First, the light was easily broken, so it was better to keep it on rather than switching it on and off frequently. Second, it helped those who slept on upper berths to find their way to the toilet at night.

The old dormitory was mixed-gender. Female workers can be more disadvantaged in such a living environment than their male counterparts. The fact that our room was next to a male room caused inconvenience for my young female roommates. My roommate Zaozao did not take off her bra when sleeping. She said that once, in the summer, she went to the toilet wearing a T-shirt but without a bra. A man stared her breasts and said: ‘eh, airport!’ ‘Airport’ is a metaphor used to describe a woman who has relatively small breasts. Zaozao said that she had never taken off her bra since then. Waitress Nana echoed Zaozao’s sentiment. She told me that she had never taken off her bra when sleeping either. I suggested that sleeping with a bra on might be harmful. Zaozao said she would rather die than be made fun of, which signified that she took the risk of humiliation very seriously. The living conditions served as constraints for both men and women, but women were further disadvantaged due to the sexual objectification, which made them uncomfortable and compelled them to adjust their behaviour.

Although workers living in the dormitories were able to save time and travel cost by living close to the restaurant, this geographical closeness also constrained their living space in Shanghai and isolated them from other communities, which is elaborated on in Chapter 6. Most of the workers who migrated with their families chose to live in privately rented housing because no double rooms were provided by the employer. From the employer’s perspective, providing dormitories that pack six people into a room is much more cost-effective than providing double rooms. The cost to the restaurant will increase if it must provide double rooms, which is against the goal of profit maximisation (B. Li & Duda, 2010, p. 20). Some scholars argued that the employers’ purpose in providing housing is not just to make employees’ lives more convenient, but to reduce labour costs and to control employees more effectively (B. Li & Duda, 2010; Pun, 2007).

1.6 Conclusion

This chapter contextualised migrant workers in the catering sector. The first section dealt with some broad aspects such as the transitional economic and *hukou* systems, which give rise to urban/rural disparities and impact on migration. It also discussed the *hukou* reform and the reasons for migration. The second section considered migrant workers as an emerging new class, the denigration these workers encounter and the problematisation of them as a group by mass media and scholars. The third section illustrated the shifts in gender relations, the situation of both women and men with rural

hukou and the critiques of the literature on gendered migration. I argued that migrant men are too important to be ignored when discussing gender issues. The fourth section considered the catering sector in China and in Shanghai, in particular the marketisation of the catering sector, the changing conditions of restaurant labour, and the current situation of restaurant workers in Shanghai. The chapter then introduced the fieldwork setting. The discussion of the workers' daily schedule and living conditions emphasised their lowly status.

Having discussed both broad and specific issues, the chapter finally focused on workers in this particular restaurant. I have considered how migrant workers are channelled to cities under the influence of state policies and how these workers are disadvantaged in gendered ways. This chapter takes a wide perspective by demonstrating how the political and economic factors serve as constraints for rural people but also as an impetus for their migration. I argue that these factors serve as forms of coercion but also as enablers that stimulate the workers' exercise of agency, because on the one hand, they are constrained by the binary *hukou* system and regional development imbalances; on the other hand, these restraints motivate them to migrate. The concepts of individual agency and subjectivity are highlighted in Chapter 2, which explores the theoretical framework, and in the empirical chapters.

This chapter has highlighted restaurant workers' menial wage, Spartan living conditions and discriminative environment. The unfavourable conditions are not only experienced by the workers in the Meteor but also workers in the catering sector as a whole. These conditions are not merely an issue for migrant workers in Shanghai but across China. The experiences of restaurant workers have significance not only in understanding how migration, gender relations and social change are intertwined, but also in reflecting imbalanced development and social inequality in China.

Chapter 2: Reconceptualising agency, subjectivity, coercion and patriarchy in China

2.0 Introduction

The previous chapter contextualised migrant workers in China. In this chapter, I aim to discuss two clusters of concepts. The first cluster consists of agency, subjectivity, coercion, coping and resistance; the second focuses on patriarchy, filial piety, masculinity and femininity. The aim is to provide a theoretical framework based on these concepts, which will help to explain the overarching research questions. The conceptualised framework of agency, subjectivity and coercion is fundamental to the thesis as a whole. The discussion of patriarchy, femininity and masculinity also serves as a theoretical pillar for the empirical chapters, especially for intimate relations, discussed in Chapter 5.

I am aware that to give clear definitions of agency and subjectivity may limit their meanings and implications. Rather than giving clear-cut definitions, I intend to leave the meanings open. I will seek to explore the different embodiments of agency and discuss the relationship between agency, coercion and subjectivity and how they relate to resistance and coping. These concepts originated in the West, so they may not necessarily map across to China, a country with different political, cultural and religious genealogies.⁴⁷ Rather than borrowing agency and its accompanying concepts uncritically, I pay particular attention to the concepts' transferability. In Section 2.1, I draw a conceptualisation of agency, subjectivity, and coercion and distinguish between resistance and coping. I also consider different modes of agency in various contexts. In Section 2.2, I consider how patriarchy is mediated through filial piety and serves to construct masculinity and femininity in China. The concepts in these two sections are interrelated, laying the foundation for the analysis of the empirical chapters. I found that by exercising agency, my informants conformed to and/or challenged social norms and redefined what is meant by filial piety. Gender norms and filial obligations embedded in the patriarchal system can be seen as coercion, prescribing subjectivity and practices. Likewise, practices themselves shape and reshape subjectivity. Gender is a primary focus when considering subjectivity throughout the thesis, but I recognise that

⁴⁷ I understand that the distinctions I make between West and East and Global North and South are far too general to reflect the realities and complexities of contemporary inequalities and differences. I continue to use these terms for convenience in my discussions, but I am fully aware of the limitations of these distinctions.

subjectivity is also shaped in relation to class and *hukou* status, the intersectionality of which is discussed in Chapter 3.

2.1 Understanding agency

In this section, I begin by highlighting the relationship between agency and coercion, including the ways in which coercion functions to both constrain and enable agency.⁴⁸ Then, influenced by the theories of Foucault (Foucault, 2000), I deal with concepts of subjectivity and subjectivation in relation to agency. Later, enlightened by Mahmood (Mahmood, 2011 [2005]), I provide a critique of the overemphasis on resistance when interpreting women's behaviour in some liberatory feminist projects. At the end of this section, I consider various forms of agency and flesh out the idea of coping in order to enrich the understanding of subjects' agency under coercion with particular reference to China.

Several disciplines, such as philosophy and sociology, deal with the concept of agency from their specific discipline-based perspectives. Agency is theory-laden and has a lengthy genealogy. The genealogy of agency and discussions of agency in other disciplines are beyond the scope of this thesis. Rather, I conceptualise agency within the realm of feminist studies. Wilson (2007) argued that agency had long been used to describe men, but the discourse of women's agency was not developed until the rise of feminist movement. The concept was harnessed by feminist activists in order to promote women's self-esteem and to organise women to rediscover resistance and act for change against male dominance (Ahearn, 2001; Gardiner & Kegan, 1995; McNay, 2000).

Regarding the definition of agency, Ortner (2001) has argued that “agency” is virtually synonymous with the forms of power people have at their disposal, their ability to act on their own behalf, influence other people and events, and maintain some kind of control in their own lives’ (p. 78). Ahearn (2001) paid attention to how agency is socially and culturally mediated and how it functions as the capacity to act (p. 112). It is rarely controversial to interpret agency as the capacity to act and bring about effects. Nevertheless, agency should not only be construed as the ability to act. Other embodiments of agency need to be addressed, including speech practices and silence,

⁴⁸ In most cases in this thesis, coercion is interchangeable with ‘constraints’. I use coercion here because it is originated from feminist theories and is often juxtaposed with agency in feminist discourse.

which are examined in the last part of this section. It should be noted that I recognise that various forms of agency is innately rooted in every human being.

2.1.1 Agency, coercion and subjectivity

Agency cannot be considered without recognising multiple forms of coercion, which encompass components of socio-cultural background and individual location (Madhok, Phillips, & Wilson, 2013b, p. 7). Coercion can be characterised as the ‘coercive power of money, the coercive power of belief, and coercive epistemologies’ (ibid, p. 260). Coercion has negative impact on the exercise of agency. But coercion can sometimes stimulate subjects to respond actively and effectively. Giddens argued that structure is not only about constraining, but enabling (1984, p. 25).⁴⁹ In a similar vein, Foucault expressed the view that the processes which valorise a subject’s subordination are also the means through which agency emerges (Foucault, 1980). Agency and coercion are by no means mutually exclusive concepts. Rather, they are implicated in each other’s formation.

Subjectivity, as some scholars have contended, ‘is a reality based in practices’ (Kelly, 2008, p. 103). It is constructed through a person’s location in a social field or set of social relationships (McDowell, 2009, pp. 66–67). It ‘is the way in which individuals interpret and understand their circumstances and is bound up with the sense they have of themselves (Knights & McCabe, 2000, p. 423). Also, it implies a ‘subject as a productive and singular agent of change’ (Evans, 2007, p. 23).

I find Foucault’s conceptualisation of subjectivation helpful to explain the ways in which subjectivity is formed under the influence of aesthetics and norms prevailing at a specific time. Foucault (2000) argues that people explore the relationship with the self through subjectivation, ‘the way in which people are invited or incited to recognize their moral obligations’ (264). This recognition is achieved through ‘self-forming activity’ (265). Inspired by Foucault, I recognise that subjectivity is fluid and relates to social norms in specific contexts. I adopt subjectivation to analyse my informants’ ideas and practices and how practices shape and reshape subjectivity. For example, filial piety is a traditional ethical code in China that is still widely observed today thanks to heavy promotion by the state, which will be examined in Section 2.2 of this chapter. I consider

⁴⁹ The pattern of agency/coercion is similar to the structuration theory developed by Giddens. However, I continue to use agency/coercion because it is derived from feminist discourse pinpointing power relations and the deconstruction of oppression/resistance in the politics of representing the other.

that the restaurant workers' subjectivity is not only subjectivated through moral codes of familial obligations but also through specific gender roles that prescribed women and men's thoughts and practices. Filial or gendered practices can be viewed as self-forming activities, through the process of which a filial self or feminine/masculine self is crafted.

Scholars often discuss agency and subjectivity together without considering the relationship between them.⁵⁰ Agency and subjectivity impact each other. The ability to act, to take some control over one's life (agency) affect how the subject perceives her/himself and the situation in which she/he is positioned (subjectivity); in turn, her/his perceptions of the environment and her/himself impact on the willingness and ability to act. I argue that both agency and subjectivity make sense of the interrelation of the external world and the internal self, and therefore both are considered meaningful ways of addressing social inequality. But agency and subjectivity stress different aspects of making an action.⁵¹ Agency is more the exercise of power through practices, whereas subjectivity is considered the perception of the self in relation to the world outside. In this thesis, the conceptualisation of agency and subjectivity are coupled with coercion in order to analyse the constraining and enabling factors behind ideas and practices. The concept of coercion 'is rarely used in the context of the production of subjectivities' (Madhok, Phillips, & Wilson, 2013a, p. 260). My research suggests that by linking these concepts it is possible to gain a greater understanding of the way people act.

2.1.2 Agency and resistance

I now discuss the conceptualisation of resistance. While it is important to recognise women's resistant action, which invariably involves agency, it is necessary to recognise that resistance is not the only form of agency. Inspired by Mahmood (2001, 2005), I provide a critique of the emphasis on resistance in some liberatory feminist projects. Then the concept of subjectivation addressed by Foucault (2000) is elaborated, as I found this helpful for understanding the complex behaviour of my informants.

Kandiyoti (1988) and MacLeod (1992) with respect to the Middle East, and Parker (2005b) with respect to East and South, drew on the concept of agency to unsettle the victimised discourse that women were simply oppressed in patriarchal societies and instead recognised the importance of resistance. In what follows, I address the

⁵⁰ To mention just a couple, Lin (2013) and McNay (2000).

⁵¹ Action here refers to various forms of agency, including resistance as well as 'inaction' such as keeping silent.

conceptualisation of resistance as it has been developed and critiqued by various scholars.

Parker (2005) and Seymour (2006) shared a similar view on the definition of resistance. As Parker suggested, 'the term "resistance" should be limited to actions the actors themselves describe as aiming to defy, subvert, undermine, or oppose the power and repression of dominant forces' (2005c, p. 87). She further stressed that 'feminist resistance' should be 'directed against the forces of patriarchy - whether they be individual senior males or an oppressive state' (p. 87). In a similar vein, Seymour (2006) defined resistance as '...intentional, and hence conscious, acts of defiance or opposition by a subordinate individual or group of individuals against a superior individual or set of individuals' (305). Parker's and Seymour's definitions were clear-cut, setting high standards for what could be considered resistance. But little of my informants' behaviour can be categorised as resistance if resistance is defined that way.

Scholars have not reached an agreement on what constitutes resistance. The definition of resistance can be ambivalent and romanticised. Scott (1985) intended to broaden the connotation of resistance by noting that resistance does not necessarily challenge the hegemony. He shifted the focus from explicit resistance to implicit everyday resistance. As he argued:

Most subordinate classes throughout most of history have rarely been afforded the luxury of open, organized, political activity...Most subordinate classes are, after all, far less interested in changing the larger structures of the state and the law than in what Hobsbawm has appropriately called 'working the system'... to their minimum disadvantage'. (p. xv)

'Working the system' refers to taking advantage of a system or minimising the disadvantage in a system (Hobsbawm, 1973, p. 13). Scott provided an insightful argument that the subordinated are more likely to adopt 'ordinary weapons' to gain benefits rather than challenging the structural constraints. However, White (1986, pp. 50–51) argued that Scott's approach did not clearly point out what exactly is being resisted and that Scott grouped dissimilar phenomena under the heading of resistance. White's critique enabled me to recognise that what is being resisted may not be crystal clear, and if the behaviour can be interpreted as 'working the system' rather than challenging the system, then why should the behaviour be categorised as resistance?

The coupling of human behaviour with resistance can also be seen in Abu-Lughod's work. She critiqued (1990, p. 42) the 'tendency to romanticize resistance, to read all

forms of resistance as signs of the ineffectiveness of systems of power and of the resilience and creativity of the human spirit in its refusal to be dominated by analysing power and resistance at multiple levels.’ She situated resistance in power relations and identified multiple forms of resistance. In light of her work, I have attempted to analyse how my informants adopt multiple methods and actions to challenge different levels of power.

However, Abu-Lughod’s discussions were still confined to the framework of resistance. The uneasy conflation of human acts with resistance guides me to reference to the work of Mahmood. Based on ethnographic research of pious women in the Islamic religious movement, Mahmood (2001, 2011 [2005]) established that rather than exercising agency to challenge the system, those female informants who exerted agency reinforce religious control. She (2011 [2005]) questioned the tendency of conceptualising agency coupled with resistance in a ‘liberatory’ discourse:

I will argue that the normative political subject of poststructural feminist theory often remains a liberatory one, whose agency is conceptualised on the binary model of subordination and subversion. In doing so, this scholarship elides dimensions of human action whose ethical and political status does not map onto the logic of repression and resistance. (p. 14)

Mahmood (2011[2005]) departed from the dichotomy of either resistance or obedience to social norms and explained the religious practices and subject formation of her informants beyond the liberatory feminist political agenda. Mahmood’s critique enabled me to recognise that many of the migrant workers engaged in complex forms of behaviour involving acts that were simultaneously forms of coping/resistance and forms of compliance. The example of Yue, elaborated in Chapter 5, clearly illustrates this. By eloping with her boyfriend but giving all her savings to her parents, and then by using pregnancy to bargain parental consent to her marriage, Yue conformed to filial piety but at the same time challenged the norms in the case of partner choosing. I argue that challenging/resistant and obedient behaviour are not mutually exclusive. Rather, these different behaviours can be taking place simultaneously. Ideas and practices are usually internalised unreflexively by a subject. They function to reinforce social norms, but also leave space for subjects to redefine concepts through practices.

Another example, explicated in Chapter 6, was when waitress Zaozao persuaded a customer to order an expensive dish. By suggesting an expensive dish she was both challenging her role as subservient to the customer while furthering the restaurant’s

interests by encouraging the sale of expensive items and securing commission for herself. The behaviour of these migrant workers may be less likely to challenge the management of the restaurant or social inequality than to develop coping strategies to make daily life more endurable. According to my findings, as well as those of other scholars (Bain, 2005; Madhok, 2013; Mahmood, 2001, 2011 [2005]; Wilson, 2007), the exercise of agency frequently reinforces the dominant discourse rather than challenging the existing hegemony.

2.1.3 Different modes of agency and the distinction between coping and resistance

Section 2.1.2 discussed the importance of extending the conceptualisation of agency. This section introduces different modes of agency such as performance, ‘speech practices’ and silence in specific contexts and also addresses the concept of coping, which was the non-resistant method of exerting agency that I observed most frequently during my fieldwork.

Many scholars suggest that women’s agency should be examined in specific political, social and cultural settings. For example, Parker (2005a) contended that it is important to discern ‘how cultures construct meaning and interpret agency in sometimes unintended ways’ (p. 224). Wilson (2007) shared the similar view that agency includes ‘the complex interaction between changes in “ways of thinking” and perceived changes in the balance of social, economic and political power’ (p. 134). All these authors succinctly stated the importance of social context for the formation of agency.

Some authors maintained that agency is not necessarily related to ‘resistance’ but to various forms of performance (Bain, 2005; Dales, 2005; Madhok, 2013; Mahmood, 2001, 2011; Parker, 2005a). For example, Parker (2005a) indicated that ‘women’s agency can take many forms - accept, openly confront, accommodate, protest, ignore, passively collaborate, resist, actively engage, and disengage’ (p. 225). By investigating theatres in Indonesia and Indonesian politics, Bain (2005) used the term ‘non-resistant agency’ to create possibilities for other forms of agency (p. 128). Furthermore, Madhok (2013) examined how governmentality has impacted on the subjectivity of social workers in India (p. 107). She argued that emphasising agency as action might lead to an ‘action bias’ and that ‘speech practices’ should be recognised as a way of exercising agency under certain oppressive circumstances. Her convincing arguments enriched my understanding of the meaning of agency in that she contextualised the subjects’ inaction

based on their perception of the negative consequences their potential action might lead to. As a result, the subjects chose not to take action in order to avoid perceivable loss.

Some researchers have regarded silence as a form of agency in some contexts; this provides another way to consider the agency of women (Demetriou, 2001; Kandiyoti, 1988; Parpart, 2011). Speaking out may not be appropriate in certain cultures, especially Muslim culture, and in East Asian countries. Silence has different functions and meanings in different contexts. Some scholars explored the possibility that silence might be an essential strategy for negotiating gender relations and exercising agency (Kandiyoti, 1988; Parpart, 2011). For instance, Parpart (2011) explored the possibility that silence and secrecy might be essential strategies for negotiating gender relations, especially when speaking out, dissent and opposition are dangerous and even suicidal. Parpart also noted that silence connotes respect for authority in many Asian cultures. I found it enlightening to consider silence as a way to exercise agency because in China people are not used to speaking out publicly, especially when holding dissenting opinions, owing to the tradition of giving somebody *mianzi* (face, dignity), a tradition embedded in Chinese social norms. Chinese people frequently appear to be docile, not overtly expressing different points of view; but they may express divergent views more explicitly in private spaces.

In order to enrich the understanding of non-resistant actions, I define resistance in a restrictive and clear-cut way and introduce the concept of coping. The reason I address coping here is that I frequently observed it during my fieldwork. ‘Coping’ is used to label human actions that do not meet definitions of resistance which foreground, challenge or subvert the hegemony. Enlightened by Parker (2005c), Seymour (2006) and Abu-Lughod’s (1990) conceptualisation on resistance, I consider that the characteristics of resistance include not only intentions and various practices to challenge multilevel forms of power but also a clear idea of what is being resisted, regardless of the end result. I therefore utilise the concept of coping in order to deepen the discussions on agency. By contrast, coping does not necessarily involve intentions and practices to challenge the hegemony or to change power relations, neither does it necessarily involve a clear object to challenge. Coping, in this thesis, refers to efforts made in an attempt to endure life or change life for the better. The concepts of resistance and coping do nevertheless share some similarities: both concepts may involve the process of subject formation, and both are forms of agency that closely relates to coercion.

Some of my fieldwork findings show a clear distinction between resistance and coping. For example, Yue's elopement (Chapter 5) is construed as resistance because she had direct and concrete objects to resist (her parents), although this did not necessarily signify a challenge to the patriarchal system. By contrast, Nana's action (Chapter 6) of saving money to buy cosmetics and her preference to walk two hours instead of taking a bus which would cost her two yuan (20 pence) is interpreted as coping because she exercised agency to cope with a limited budget and her desire to be beautiful. Nana did not envision a clear object to resist, and her purchase of relatively cheap cosmetics might reinforce her disadvantaged status rather than challenge the existing power relations. I recognise that some forms of agency fit neither the category of resistance nor of coping. For instance, Ru Nan exercised agency by refusing to become engaged with a man via an arranged match (Chapter 5), but it did not necessarily mean that she resisted parental power, nor coped with life. Nevertheless, coping and resistance were two of the most frequently occurring modes of agency found in my fieldwork.

In this section, I addressed the complexities of the conceptualised framework of agency. From what has been discussed above, the recognition of different forms of agency expands the understanding of agency, and a concrete distinction between resistance and coping was addressed, paving the way for the empirical chapters to follow. Having recognising that migrant workers have agency, I will analyse the dynamic subject formation and agency exertion in their daily lives and avoid describing them as an oppressed group who exercise agency only in the form of resistance. It is clear that they find creative ways of coping with and resisting many different forms of coercion in their daily lives, especially at work, from their families and in leisure time.

2. 2 Patriarchy, filial piety, masculinity and femininity

The need to incorporate the concept of patriarchy only arose after I finished my first fieldwork. Based on empirical data, I found that the ideas and practices of filial obligation embedded in patriarchal society shape the subjectivity and the practices of migrant workers and have implications for their masculinised and feminised subjectivity. The patriarchal system can be seen as coercion which my informants conformed to and/or challenged by exerting agency. It is therefore important to interrogate the concepts of patriarchy, filial piety, masculinity and femininity and examine how they are interrelated. The purpose of linking them together is to develop an explanatory

theoretical framework that will help to understand the specific experiences of these migrant workers in their daily interactions, discussed in Chapters 4-6.

As I briefly mentioned in Chapter 1, patriarchy has two axes. The first is gender hierarchy; the second is intergenerational hierarchy. In Chapter 1, I fleshed out the first axis by discussing gender relations in China and how experiences of migrant women and men are gendered. I argued that gender inequality is embedded in patriarchy in China, and I addressed the fact that rural migrants began to seek job opportunities in urban areas after the economic reforms of 1978 has brought changes to gender relations, to women's status and to the constitution of patriarchy.

In this section, I conceptualise patriarchy in China by exploring the discussion on intergenerational hierarchy and gender hierarchy together. Part one conceptualises patriarchy in China. In part two, I discuss the resilience of the concept, the practices of filial piety and its embodiment in contemporary China. Then I consider how different forms of masculinity and femininity are mediated through filial piety. It is worth noting that feminist discussions on patriarchy in China tended to centre on women's experiences under male dominance (S. Harrell & Santos, in press; Lin, 2013).⁵² To the best of my knowledge, only Lin (2010, 2013) and Kim (2015) situated male migrant workers within feminist literature on patriarchy in China. Although it is crucial to examine women's experiences under the two-axis system of patriarchy, men's experiences are equally important. And it is important to recognise that not all men are superior to all women. Although I find the concept of patriarchy useful to explain women's situation in China, the scope of patriarchy should be extended. In addition, the emphasis on male dominance over women when discussing patriarchy may imply that patriarchy is equivalent to gender inequality, while I argue that senior power over junior is another axis of the patriarchal system, which is elaborated in the following pages.

2.2.1 Conceptualising patriarchy in China

Feminist scholars theorised the idea of patriarchy in an attempt to reveal and challenge male dominance over women and the imbalanced power relations between men and women. Walby (1990) defined patriarchy as 'a system of social structures and practices

⁵² This literature includes but is not limited to Parish and Whyte (1978), Stacey (1983), Ma (2003), Fan (2004), Pun (2005) and Jacka (2006). As I discussed in the Introduction, few scholars have paid attention to male rural migrants' experiences. There have been some studies that particularly focus on male migrant workers' disadvantages in the marriage market (Attané, Qunlin, Shuzhuo, Xueyan, & Guilmoto, 2013) and sexually transmitted disease (Ebenstein & Jennings, 2009; J. D. Tucker et al., 2005).

in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women’ and she developed six components of patriarchy (p. 20).⁵³ Her work on patriarchy (1986, 1990) incurred some criticism such as being biologically essentialist (Acker, 1989) and being too abstract (Pollert, 1996). Instead, Pollert (1996) contended that ‘lived practice’ and ‘human agency’ need to be highlighted, so it is necessary to examine how patriarchy operates in particular contexts (p. 655).

In her classical work ‘Bargaining with Patriarchy’, Kandiyoti (1988) found two categories of patriarchy: the Sub-Saharan African pattern, ‘in which the insecurities of polygyny are matched with areas of relative autonomy for women’, and classic patriarchy (p. 274). She argued that the ‘patrilineal-patrilocal complex’ is essential to the constitution of classic patriarchy (ibid, p. 278). Patrilocal refers to a pattern of post-marriage residence which requires a bride to live with her husband’s natal family, and patrilineal refers to the mode of succession through the paternal line. She considered that China belonged to the category of classic patriarchy.

According to Liu (1989), systematic patriarchy in China was established in the Han Dynasty (BC 202 to AD 220). Later it evolved to become a system in which gender, age and rank in the family hierarchy work together to define one’s position and relational role in the family (Ma, 2003). The idea that a wife should be absolutely obedient to her husband, just as a son to his father, and a government official to the emperor was prescribed by the philosopher Dong Zhongshu in the Han Dynasty and had profound influence thereafter (G. Liu, 1993, pp. 47–76).

Stacey (1983) carried out her research on patriarchy under the socialist revolution in China. She defined patriarchy in China as ‘a family and social system in which male power over women and children derives from the social role of fatherhood, and is supported by a political economy in which the family unit retains a significant productive role’ (p. 12). While Stacey pointed out male power over children by expanding the scope of patriarchy, the definition of patriarchy would be insufficient if elderly women’s power over children were not considered. In China it is necessary to recognise how patriarchy is combined with filial piety (*xiao*): the obligations that children, both sons and daughters, have to their parents. Hamilton (1990), for example, has argued that *xiao*, which generally refers to filial piety or filial obedience, is the core

⁵³ The six structures of patriarchy were: ‘the patriarchal mode of production, patriarchal relations in paid work, patriarchal relations in the state, male violence, patriarchal relations in sexuality, and patriarchal relations in cultural institutions’ (Walby, 1990, p. 20).

value of the construction of the patriarchal system in China. *Xiao*, in the broad sense, means obedience to state power. Filial piety to the father and loyalty to the emperor were interrelated and transferable (S. Harrell & Santos, in press; G. Liu, 1993). By stressing filial piety, the state endeavoured to maintain social stability (Fei, 1992; Freedman, 1979; Ong, 1999). In a narrow sense, with respect to the family, patriarchy means obedience not only to the father but also to the mother. As Liu (1959) argued, ‘ . . . (the mother’s) status was next only to the father, shared his authority to a certain extent or by his delegation’ (p. 48).

Santos and Harrell’s conceptualisation on patriarchy is helpful to this thesis. They (in press) have argued that patriarchy is a system that prioritises senior over junior and men over women. It is a system in which ‘there is a kind of logic and order that is pervasively embedded in language, institutions, technologies, and practices of social life’. This system is organised not only around power but also prestige. Ortner (1990) found that male dominance is prevalent in most societies, but in some societies men have prestige rather than de facto power. Therefore, power and prestige are not necessarily consistent and both of them should be taken into consideration.

I conceptualise patriarchy in both broad and narrow senses. In the broad sense, patriarchy is both a family and social system in which men’s prestige/power is exercised over women and seniors’ prestige/power is exercised over juniors. In the narrow sense, it means the structure of a household which encapsulates the patrilineal-patrilocal complex and prioritises men’s prestige/power over women and parental prestige/power over children. However, it should be noted that men are not necessarily always in an advantaged position in a family or social system, as demonstrated by men’s disadvantaged position in the feminised workplace (Chapter 4) and in intimate relationships (Chapter 5).

Many parts of the world have witnessed a decline of classic patriarchy and the emergence of transforming patriarchy with the impact of capitalism, the change of material conditions, and the rise of citizenship and the nation-state (Kandiyoti, 1988; Mann, 1986; Moghadam, 1992). Similar changes can be found in China. The rapid social and economic transformation in the post-Mao era has complicated gender and intergenerational relations and weakened classic patriarchy (S. Harrell & Santos, in press). Patriarchy exists in complex and contradictory forms. For example, as addressed in Chapter 1, a conspicuous sign of women’s empowerment is that rural women’s

suicide rate has undergone a rapid decline in the 2000s (Jing et al., 2010; C. W. Wang et al., 2014; Zhong & Gui, 2011). But the rising power of young women may be realised at the cost of the declining power of the older generation. As Wang, Chan and Yip (2014) revealed, 'in recent years, suicide rates among older Chinese have increased significantly in both urban and rural areas', which could imply the waning of parental power (p. 937). Some scholars have argued that the rise of adult children's power and the decline of parental power have been a growing trend (Ma, 2003; Y. Yan, 2003). However, the weakening of classic patriarchy does not necessarily eradicate the root of patriarchy. Respect for parental prestige is still prevalent (S. Harrell & Santos, in press); the core constituent elements of patriarchy - a strong preference for sons and the male line of succession, especially male inheritance of property - have remained strong, especially in the vast rural areas (Y. Jin, 2011; Ma, 2003; C. Tang et al., 2009). This has had great impact on the intimate relations of both of my female and male informants, which will be discussed in Chapter 5. Above all, patriarchy has been under multi-layered and multi-directional transformations, and has been shaped by gender, class and regional variations.

2.2.2 Gendered practices of filial piety

Filial piety, or filial obligation, forms the foundation of intergenerational hierarchy, which is one of the two axes of patriarchy. The concept and practices of filial piety have undergone ups and downs in contemporary China. However, the idea of filial piety, treated as an obstacle to the pursuit of free marriage between young couples in the Mao era (Croll, 1981, p. 151), has been resurgent in contemporary China and promoted by the central government (Feuchtwang, 2010; Whyte, 2004; X. Xu & Ji, 1999). The central government has been trying to construct a moral system that incorporates the rhetoric of filial piety in an attempt to encourage adult children to take care of their elderly relatives, because the current social welfare system is unable to provide sufficient social care for them (S. Chen, 1996; S. Harrell & Santos, in press; D. Wang, 2004). Under these circumstances, through the process of subjectivation, the moral code of filial piety is considered crucial to migrant workers' subject formation. But by no means do the migrant workers passively accept this moral code. They are redefining what is meant by filial obligation during the practices of filial obligations; Yue's case demonstrates that a filial daughter can be redefined as providing financial support to the parents regardless of the fact that she resisted her parents' intervention on her choice of partner (Chapter 5).

The practices of filial piety include, but are not limited to, supporting parents materially and mentally, and remaining obedient toward parents even when they are wrong (Fei, 1992; H. W. Liu, 1959; Whyte, 2004; Zhan & Montgomery, 2003). Chinese families have gendered expectations with regard to the practices of filial piety, which shape distinctly different representations of femininity and masculinity. In traditional Chinese society, filial piety is more the responsibility of a son than a daughter. In a traditional patriarchal family characterised by patrilineality and patrilocality, it was assumed that a daughter would marry out, becoming a daughter-in-law in her husband's family (Ma, 2003, p. 94). Therefore, a typical family consisted of parents, sons and daughters-in-law, and clan rules usually regulated the filial duties of sons and daughters-in-law rather than daughters (H. W. Liu, 1959). The traditional idea that a son has to take care of his parents when they grow old still remains, especially in rural areas when the pension system is not sufficient to meet the needs of elderly. But now, in some areas, it is considered a married daughter's responsibility to take care of her parents when they are old (S. Harrell & Santos, in press; Ma, 2003), and this will be discussed later in this chapter. In the first part of this section, I will interrogate the ways in which practices of filial piety are gendered and how they give rise to different forms of masculinity and femininity. I first discuss the concept of masculinity and how it relates to filial piety in China.

2.2.2.1 Masculinity and filial piety

According to Connell (2010), masculinities can be defined as the patterns of practice that both men and women use in gender relations. In addition, 'masculinities are configurations of practice that are accomplished in social action and, therefore, can differ according to the gender relations in a particular social setting' (Connell, 2005, p. 836). Both masculinity and femininity are context-specific and therefore require close examination in the context of China.

The concept of hegemonic/normative masculinity is of great importance in understanding patriarchy in China. 'Hegemonic masculinity is constructed in relation to women and to subordinated masculinity' (Connell, 1987, p. 186). The concept implies a hierarchy of gendered behaviour, reflecting a tendency for some men to seek to dominate other men and women, and posits a society that encourages men to subjectivate a dominant version of masculinity.

Some scholars argued that in ancient China, hegemonic masculinity was conceived as two ideal types. One is male literati (*wen*) masculinity, the other is warrior (*wu*) masculinity, signifying that both scholarly knowledge and physical strength were highly appreciated (Jankowiak, 2002; Louie, 2002). Chen (2002) argued that in the Mao era, normative masculinity connoted a revolutionary and selfless man. While in contemporary China, normative masculinity primarily consists of two components. First, elements such as wealth and power are valued, which fits with the burgeoning market economy and consumer culture. Under these circumstances, entrepreneurial masculinity, connoting men's ability to make money and be well-connected with officials, is more appreciated (Farrer, 2002; Osburg, 2013; E. Zhang, 2001; Zheng, 2006). Second, the conventional social expectation for a man to get married and pass on the patrilineal line (*chuanzong jiedai*) still persists. A man who cannot meet this expectation is considered unfilial and unmasculine. Mencius, one of the primary Confucian philosophers in ancient China, identified three types of unfilial behaviour, and pointed out that 'wu hou' is the most serious offence (*bu xiao you san, wu hou wei da*).⁵⁴ As Feng Youlan (1953), a key philosopher in mainland China, put it: 'for if a man has no posterity, the family line (or at least his branch of it), which has been handed down from the earliest ancestors, will be cut off, and this would show the greatest lack of filial piety' (p. 359). The ability to marry and perpetuate the family line can be viewed as an important component of Chinese men's hegemonic masculinity. A man remaining single may be considered not an adult, even not truly a man (Watson, 1986). It may therefore jeopardise his masculinity.

Normative or hegemonic masculinity is an ideal that is desired by men, but few men are able to meet all its requirements. Farrer (2002) argued that 'given the identification of masculinity with earnings and career success, men experience tremendous dislocations through the segmentation of the labour market into high-paying and low-paying sectors' (p. 16). Born in rural areas and poorly educated, many male migrant workers are unable to fit this ideal masculinity. Based on my findings, the desire to be rich so that they can afford wives, give birth to sons and meet parental expectations is very prevalent. Similar to my discussion, Lin (2013) found that the motivation to make money is related to the filial obligations the male migrant workers believe they must take on.

⁵⁴ Scholars have different understandings of the original meaning of this quote. Cai (2013) argued that Qi Zhao in the Han Dynasty interpreted it as: 'there are three things that are unfilial, and to have no posterity is the greatest of them' (p. 54); this has become the most prevalent version. Although it may be a misinterpretation, it has nevertheless become the most influential translation.

Rural people's anxiety about finding a partner, and the pressure they felt to do so, was not uncommon even in the Mao era. Parish and Whyte (1978) found that in the Mao era, '... poor families have a hard time marrying off their sons, and may go deeply into debt doing so.' (p. 186).⁵⁵ The inability to provide betrothal gifts and therefore find a wife remains a key source of anxiety for male peasants in the post-Mao era (Hesketh & Xing, 2006; Q. Jiang & Sánchez-Barricarte, 2012; F. Wang & Mason, 2006).⁵⁶ The obligation for men to get married and pass on the family name is still a man's primary responsibility to his family, and it is constructed as the core practice of a son's filial piety. My male informants have subjectivated this filial obligation. However, some of them cannot afford wives because of the high-value betrothal gifts required by women's families, so they felt anxious and frustrated (see Chapter 5).

2.2.2.2 *Femininity and filial piety*

In the previous section, I discussed the embodiment of masculinity and filial piety of men. Here I consider women's filial obligations, and the femininity embedded in these obligations, and show how this affects my female informants. Femininity is usually considered to consist of a range of attributes, ideas and practices mostly relating to women. According to the Chinese classics, women were advised to fulfill specific roles. The female writer Zhao Ban in the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220 AD) wrote an article called 'Precepts for women' (*Nujie*), which advised a woman to show subordination and weakness to her husband and parents-in-law. These principles were widely read by women, especially from the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) to the end of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912) and were internalised as moral codes that regulated women's daily behaviour (L. X. H. Lee, 1994, p. 23). Through research on clan rules, Liu (1959) found that a daughter was expected to learn housework and good manners from her parents, things that were not expected from a son. Rules for a daughter-in-law were far more detailed, requiring her to be subservient to the husband and his family, which echoes Zhao Ban's advice in the 'Precepts for women' (pp. 84-86).

⁵⁵ Croll (1981, p. 105) argued that in the Mao era, peasants' political status and social status are discrepant. Their high political status did not necessarily make them desirable marriage partners.

⁵⁶ 'Betrothal gifts', or 'brideprice' (*cai li* or *pin li*), as defined by Yan (1996), 'commonly refers to the property transferred from the groom's family to the bride's family' (p. 179) and it usually consists of money and goods. It will be elaborated in Chapter 5.

Although the values of being filial and obedient to parents were challenged during the Cultural Revolution and replaced with absolute loyalty to Chairman Mao, traditional gender roles persisted in that era. The expectation that women would do housework did not change significantly (Croll, 1981, p. 198; Parish & Whyte, 1978; Stacey, 1983). For example, Parish and Whyte (1978, p. 210) found that in rural Guangdong province in the Mao era, the bride's obligations included doing household chores under the direction of her mother-in-law, showing deference to her father-in-law, and providing the family with male heirs, all of which are consistent with the traditional roles of women with the family.

In the post-Mao era, some feminised obligations have changed but some remain. Women in both urban and rural areas spend more time on housework than their male counterparts (NBS & ACWF, 2011). The pressure on women to give birth to a boy is still significant in some rural areas, which results in the distorted gender ratio at birth considered in Chapters 1 and 5. However, it is noteworthy that in some ways the ideas and practices of filial piety continue but in other ways they are changing. Massive migration, rural women's increasing participation in the labour market in urban areas, and the concomitant non-patrilocal mode of residence have all brought changes to the practices of filial piety. The obligation to provide financial support to the natal family, which was once considered a son's responsibility, is now likely to be expected from a married daughter too, as can be seen in the case of Yue (Chapter 5), who continued to send remittances to her parents after she married. A complicated and paradoxical picture is displayed here. Having the ability to support their natal families signifies that married women have control over what they earn, which can be considered as a sign of empowerment compared to the pre-Mao and Mao eras. However, some scholars have established that a daughter is likely to provide material support to her natal family even if she is married, which brings a new form of burden to migrant women. An married woman has no right of inheritance in her natal family but nevertheless has to bear the burden of elder care (S. Harrell & Santos, in press; Y. Jin, 2011; Ma, 2003; C. Tang et al., 2009).

In addition, the requirement for women to be chaste in the form of widow chastity and pre-marriage chastity was more prevalent from the Han Dynasty (BC 202-AD 220) to the Qing Dynasty (1636-1911) (Brownell & Wasserstrom, 2002; Yufeng Guo, 2002). The requirement of pre-marriage chastity for women still persists in contemporary China, and young men share this view in relation to their own potential wives while not

adhering to it themselves (Farrer, Suo, Tsuchiya & Sun, 2012; X. Wang & Ho, 2011; X. Zhou, 1989). To be chaste can be seen as an obligation that a young woman should fulfil to her family and her behaviour can be monitored by family members, as seen in the case of Zhenxiu (Chapter 5).

The discussion above points up the complexity and contradiction of gender relations, and it is still too early to make a hasty and definite conclusion as to whether women are empowered or disempowered through migration. It is clear, however, that the need to be subservient to the natal family is encapsulated in femininity, which is associated with their subjectivity as filial daughters, especially for unmarried women. How some of my female informants negotiated the conflicts of their subjectivities, both as filial daughters and as individuals who exerted agency in pursuit of romantic love, will be discussed in Chapter 5.

The moral codes of filial piety are encapsulated in both men and women's subjectivity in China, but in gendered ways. Both female and male adults are expected to get married and give birth in due time (S. Harrell & Santos, in press), but even so the meaning of filial piety is constructed differently for men and women. For a man, a key responsibility is to perpetuate the family line, and this is built in to the understanding of masculinity. For a woman, the obligation to give birth is embedded in femininity, seen as a duty to help the husband pass on the family line. In rural China, an unmarried man is usually expected to be financially competent, to provide a house and betrothal gifts in order to marry a woman, and a woman's family sometimes needs to prepare a dowry, but it is not a mandatory, in contrast with the betrothal gifts a man generally has to offer (Parish & Whyte, 1978; Y. Yan, 1996). This is further explained in Chapter 5.

The concepts and practices of patriarchy, filial piety, masculinity and femininity undergo constant change. It is important to reveal these changes and to interrogate how these concepts and practices interplay with agency and subjectivity for both male and female rural migrant workers. I argue that migrant workers are influenced by patriarchal norms mediated through filial piety, giving rise to masculinised and feminised behaviours that will be discussed at length in Chapter 5.

2.3 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined some of the main concepts I draw upon in my research. It is noteworthy that in the literature, the concepts of agency and patriarchy are so closely

associated with women; the literature rarely addresses men's agency, not to mention migrant men. Based on my fieldwork observation, rural migrant men who do entry-level service jobs in Shanghai are disadvantaged in a different way from rural migrant women. This is why I have brought men into my analytical framework. I find that agency and patriarchy are also useful to theorise how the male restaurant workers managed their daily lives. The scarcity of literature dealing with the agency of men is in part compensated by empirical and theoretical elaborations of migrant men in this thesis. In the next chapter I will explain the methodology that I utilised to explore the lives and experiences of a small group of rural migrants working in a Shanghai restaurant.

Chapter 3: Methodology: doing ethnographic research from a feminist perspective

3.0 Introduction

In Chapters 1 and 2, I discussed China's economic and social transformation, rural-urban migration, changing gender relations, the catering sector and the restaurant where I did my fieldwork, as well as theoretical framework of agency, coercion and subjectivity and patriarchy. I now discuss my research methodology, which broadly follows a feminist ethnography.

Ethnography is the detailed descriptions of the events of human beings, communities and culture (Geertz, 1973). It aims to represent human experience and emphasises 'the individual and how the individual's psychology and subjective experiences both shapes, and is shaped by, social and cultural processes' (Hollan, 2001, p. 48), and it seeks meaning and understanding from local residents' point of view (Creswell, 2013). I use ethnography as my primary research approach because it is best suited to understand the gendered experiences, agency and subjectivity of this specific group of migrant workers. In order to examine these issues, it was necessary to spend a lot of time with the rural migrants. Using the data collection methods of participant observation and interviewing, I spent more than seven months doing fieldwork. My ethnographic research, i.e. working alongside the restaurant workers over a significant amount of time and living in the dormitory, allowed me to observe more nuanced operations of gender, more subtle forms of agency and expression of subjectivity.

It would be more accurate to describe my research as feminist ethnography because I situate the discussions in feminist discourse; feminist epistemologies and theories form the foundation of my research. This chapter sets out to discuss the feminist epistemological underpinning of this thesis. It then considers the research design, the methods adopted to collect and analyse the data, and the ways in which I carried out the fieldwork. This is followed by a discussion of ethics, focusing on my relationships with the informants, how our positionality influenced the whole research process, and my conflicting roles as a researcher and a potential activist in the field. In the remainder of the chapter, I address the criteria used to validate the materials collected in the field and the analysis. The chapter is not intended to be simply an account of how the research was carried out; it also considers the dilemmas I encountered and the emotional overload I experienced, both of which occurred behind the scenes but nevertheless are important to the thesis.

3.1: Feminist epistemology

This section considers feminist standpoint theory and intersectionality and the interrelationship between the two. The epistemology I use is situated in social constructivist/interpretivist philosophy. Researchers who take this orientation do not presume a single reality; rather, they consider ‘reality’ to be constructed through the interaction between the researcher and the informant, and the researcher’s purpose is to ‘explore subjective meanings of their experience’ (Creswell, 2013, p. 24).

3.1.1 Intersectionality

Intersectionality emerged in the late 1980s in an attempt to address the complexity of multiple forms of discrimination and social inequality (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013). Since then it has been adopted across disciplines and has also inspired social movements outside academia. Intersectionality can refer to ‘the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power’ (K. Davis, 2008, p. 68). The question of whether intersectionality is an epistemology, a theory or a methodology is still controversial (ibid., p. 69). It may be more fruitful to address ‘what intersectionality does rather than what intersectionality is’ (Cho et al., 2013, p. 795). It provides a unique way to think about ‘the problem of sameness and difference and its relation to power’ (ibid., p. 795). In this thesis, it serves as an epistemology and a methodology as well as a theory.

The intersectional approach assists me in three ways. First, intersectionality serves to justify the shift from a focus on women to research on disadvantaged people, including disadvantaged men. Davis (2008) considered that intersectionality is about the ‘the acknowledgement of differences among women’ (p. 71). Although it is important to address the diversity of women, it would be remiss not to extend this analysis to men. Coupled with standpoint theory, this argument is further discussed in the next part.

Second, intersectionality helps me understand how multiple characteristics such as gender, class, *hukou*, age etc. affect the production of knowledge, which especially refers to the conversations between me and my informants. The intersectionality of these specific characteristics is juxtaposed with reflexivity and positionality, discussed later in Section 3.3.

Third, intersectionality functions as a theoretical tool to analyse social inequality based on gender, class and *hukou*. *Hukou* is a crucial component of intersectionality in this thesis because it implicates the urban/rural binary which functions as a social system and is deeply embedded in people's mentality, impacting on social status and wellbeing together with social class. Gender, class and *hukou* intersect to explain social inequality in Chinese society.

According to McCall (2005), the categorisation of identities such as gender, race and class is an inadequate but necessary approach to address social inequality. It is inadequate in that categorisations simplify social phenomena, and social inequality may be reinforced through the iteration of identities/symbols in categories; but it is necessary because categories are useful to identify social inequality and can be strategically used for political purposes.

The thesis primarily uses gender, class, *hukou* and age as analytical categories. It compares and contrasts the lived experiences of female and male migrant workers. But in order to gain a better understanding of the workers' social position in Shanghai, I position them in relation to other groups. For example, in Chapters 4 and 6, I discuss their daily contact with customers, most of whom are urban middle class. Through these daily interactions, the migrant workers' disadvantaged position is more explicitly revealed.

3.1.2 Standpoint theory and situated knowledge

The feminist epistemological standpoint refers to 'women's unique standpoint in society' (Hekman, 1997, p. 341). Feminist standpoint theories have challenged the conventional ways in which knowledge is constructed and perceived. They have developed over four decades, reflecting the work of a range of authors who presented their theoretical input from different perspectives. But there are shared core understandings. Feminist theorists maintained that knowledge is not neutral and innocent; rather, it is situated and embedded (Haraway, 1991; Hartsock, 1983, 1983). They argued that the construction of 'reality' is embedded in power relations, and they critically evaluated the idea of the neutrality of 'science', constructed largely by white middle-class men, and highlighted the experience of subjugated people, especially women.

Feminist epistemologies shed light on my thesis in fundamental ways. The justification of and emphasis on the value of women's experiences inspired me to extend the concept

of intersectionality to another vulnerable group, rural migrant workers in China. Haraway (1991) contended that 'subjugated' standpoints are preferred because they seem to promise more adequate, sustained, objective, transforming accounts of the world (p. 191). She conceptualised 'situated knowledge' as 'partial, locatable, critical knowledge', which allows space for difference and multiplicity (p. 191). Collins (1986) considered the standpoint of black feminists, implicating race as a category of inquiry. Race, gender and class have become the most frequently used categories in intersectionality.

The claim that knowledge is partial and situational, and the awareness of race and gender as categories of inquiry allow space for examining women's issues intersectionally. Harding (1997, p. 385) was aware of the development of the intersectionality and the importance of considering women's particular geographical location, race and culture when analysing women's standpoints. But it seems to me that she did not realise that men are positioned in different social classes and she continued to use the problematic term 'male supremacy' (2009, p. 193).

Both the standpoint theories and intersectionality are invaluable in raising the issue of the lack of attention to women's experience. They can also be powerful tools when used to extend the critique to men. The intersectional approach allows me to think that patriarchy does not mean that all men are in a dominant position; rather, some men are underprivileged because of their gender, class and *hukou*. For example, Lin (2010, 2013) used intersectionality to observe the underprivileged status of male migrant workers through the lens of class and gender. The combination of standpoint theories and the intersectional approach provides a unique and powerful way to understand the experience of disadvantaged groups as well as privileged ones.

Feminist standpoint theories have been controversial since their creation. One of the primary critiques targets the claim that women's perceptions of reality are more privileged and truer than those of the ruling class (Hekman, 1997). In this thesis, I do not claim that about the knowledge on subjugated people is more valuable than about the knowledge on those in power. One of the primary reasons why the thesis focuses on this very underprivileged class in China is that I recognise that knowledge on the subjugated is invaluable and it is necessary to bring this knowledge to the general public. My research intends to portray the constructed 'reality' based on my interpretation of the rural worker's experience, which is inevitably influenced by previous literature, by

my own positionality, and by the interpersonal relations between my informants and me, demonstrated in Section 3 on reflexivity.

3.2 Research design

Research design here refers to the ways in which the research project has been carried out, including the formation of the research questions, the process of data collection, and analysis of the collected data. As I have learned during the development of this thesis, research design is by no means a linear process. In this section, I focus on the complexity and uncertainty of doing qualitative research. The section first considers the formation of the research questions, which refers back to the framing of the research questions discussed in the Introduction. This is followed by an overview of the methods used in the fieldwork, including interviewing, participant observation and questionnaires. The remainder of the section portrays the actual fieldwork practices, from the initial pilot interviewing to the follow-up study.

3.2.1 Formulating the research questions

Before I went to China for the fieldwork, my initial research questions were designed to examine the life experiences of new-generation migrant workers (NGMs) and their wellbeing.⁵⁷ I designed a five-dimension framework of wellbeing based on a Gallup Survey (Rath & Harter, 2010) to investigate their life quality.⁵⁸ After being in the field, I found that the semi-quantitative scale was not sufficient to explore their complicated life experience, so I reframed the research questions during and after the fieldwork.

Prior to the fieldwork, I predominantly paid attention to NGMs and assumed that this generation differed significantly from the previous generation. This assumption was based on the news report (Xinyan Chen, 2011) and the national survey results (Lv et al., 2010).⁵⁹ The characteristics of NGMs were portrayed quite different from their parents' generation, the first generation of migrant workers. The survey showed that the motivations for migrant workers' mobility differed by age: migrants born in the 1960s

⁵⁷ In a national report published by the official trade union ACFTU, NGMs are defined as second-generation migrant workers born after the Reform in 1978, and refer to those whose ages are above 16 and who are born after 1980 (Lv et al., 2010). Furthermore, they hold rural *hukou* and do non-farm work in places other than their hometown.

⁵⁸ These five factors are career wellbeing, social wellbeing, financial wellbeing, physical wellbeing and community wellbeing (Rath & Harter, 2010).

⁵⁹ The national report conducted by ACFTU covered 25 cities, 1000 enterprises and 4453 valid respondents. According to this report, 42.3% of new-generation migrants migrated to 'search for development opportunities', whereas the figure for the previous generation of migrants was 20.4%. The report suggested that there was a vast difference between these two generations.

and 1970s are more money-conscious, while migrants born after 1980 tend to migrate in order to seek fulfilment and to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the world (Lv et al., 2010), which resonates with the article written by Southern Weekly that the NGMs migrate in search of new experiences, whereas first-generation migrants left for reasons of survival (Xinyan Chen, 2011).

However, during the first month of the fieldwork, I realised that the term ‘new-generation migrant workers’ is one created and promoted by the state. Although NGMs are in general better-educated compared to the previous generation, and are more likely to find a partner on their own than the previous generation, I perceived a continuity between these two generations, especially with regard to their motivations for migration, their subjectivity, and their long-term plans. A significant number of my informants born after 1980 still stated that they migrated primarily to improve their financial wellbeing, which echoes Lin’s (2013) findings about the NGMs that ‘the economic rationale remains a dominant factor for their mobility’ (p. 120). Furthermore, most of the NGMs I came across saw themselves as peasants, or *nongmin gong* (rural migrant workers), and planned to go back to their home villages or the towns close to their villages in the future. According to my observations, the differences between these two generations were not as dramatic as media and government reports suggested. Therefore, rather than concentrating on NGMs alone, I explored the experiences of both generations. But 48 out of the 49 interviewees are NGMs, which is in line with the fact that workers in the public area of the restaurant are predominantly (77 out of 119) NGMs. It should be noted that the findings I am critiquing come from a large-scale survey while my knowledge comes from a small qualitative study, so I do not claim that my findings are representative.

3.2.2 Methods of data collection

For this thesis, I immersed myself in the field through working as a waitress in the restaurant where I did my research in order to gain deep understanding of the daily experiences of the rural migrant workers. I used mixed methods, which included semi-structured interviews, participant observation and two questionnaires, through which I identified that the most important loci of inquiry were the workplace, intimate relations and leisure activities. Interviews and participant observation are crucial to my project. I spent a significant amount of time collecting data using both methods. Interviewing and participant observation have different emphases. I used interviews to explore the

migrant workers' wellbeing, previous migration experience and intimate relations. Participant observation is a suitable method for observing how they acted at work and in their leisure time and how these practices reflected their agency and subjectivity. The empirical data about work and leisure (Chapters 4 and 6) was largely drawn from participant observation, whereas data on intimate relationships (Chapter 5) mostly originated from interviewing, because intimate relationships can hardly be observed in the field. Why and how I use each method is explained below.

3.2.2.1 Interviews

I used semi-structured interviews in the fieldwork. Three issues concerning interviewing emerged in the field that need to be pointed out here. First, the type of interview conducted depended on the research questions and also on the personality of informants. During the pilot research in 2011, I attempted to use narrative interviews based on life histories. However, some informants were more comfortable with a question and answer format, which made it impossible to conduct a narrative interview. So I decided to use semi-structured interviews based around their life histories for the rest of the interviews. Second, sometimes interview and participant observation overlap, because conversation is considered an important component for both methods. In order to distinguish interviews from conversations, an interview in this thesis refers to a continuous conversation that lasts more than 30 minutes with a clear awareness of the purpose of the conversation for both the informant and me. Third, regarding the selection of informants, Hammersly and Atkinson (2007, p. 104) argued that although 'informants sometimes emerge in the field' automatically, 'the ethnographer must try to retain the leeway to choose people for interview'. Informants 'emerge in the field' in the sense that some people are more willing to volunteer, respond positively when approached, or simply more talkative, something a researcher cannot control. In the field, I tried to interview as many workers as I could. The aim of doing a large number of interviews is to collect different experiences and to provide a relatively reliable representation of those different experiences through aggregation. Meanwhile, I paid attention to their gender, age, birthplace, educational level and job positions in an attempt to obtain a diversified sample of interviewees. For example, working as a waitress, I had more chance to talk to other waitresses. In order to get to know the life experience of young men, I approached them directly and asked them for interviews.

Given that the interviewees were uncomfortable with narrative interviews in the pilot interviews, I used semi-structured interviews after the pilot research. These interviews consist of standard questions and open-ended questions. It allows space to explore interviewees' perceptions about complicated questions and encourage them to provide clarification of their answers (Barriball & While, 1994, p. 330). It should be noted that interviewing and analysis is a dynamic and interactive process in that issues emerging as salient during previous interviews were incorporated into subsequent interviews. As shown in Appendix 2, my original topic guide for semi-structured interview was mainly designed to explore five dimensions of wellbeing.⁶⁰ Through asking these questions, I got a detailed picture of their lives and how far their aspirations and well-being were satisfied through migration. I also obtained data on their exercise of agency. Later, I shifted the focus of questions to intimate relations, because I identified this area as being very important to their lives.

As illustrated in Appendix 1, I conducted 50 interviews with 49 informants in the restaurant with an average of 76.6 minutes per interview.⁶¹ I interviewed one informant twice. Their ages ranged from 17 to 41, with an average age of 24. Twenty-eight of the interviewees were male. All of them held non-Shanghai *hukou*; only two of them had non-Shanghai urban *hukou*. Regarding marital status, 13 were married, two were engaged and one was divorced. The informants included 44 full-time workers and five part-time workers, covering a wide range of jobs in the restaurant, including four who worked in the kitchen. It is notable that the number of workers who had conversations with me is much higher than the number of interviewees. In Appendix 1, I also provide a list of all the informants mentioned in the thesis. I cited part of the conversations between them and me and all of these conversations lasted less than 30 minutes. Almost all the 300 staff in the restaurant knew me. Some of those who had frequent dialogues with me are not shown as informants in Appendix 1 because I did not cite our conversations in this thesis, and because it is not feasible to give a full account of all 300 staff. Interviews constituted a vital part of my fieldwork but were by no means the only source.

⁶⁰ The topic guide is attached in the Appendix.

⁶¹ The pilot interviews and the interviews with social workers and government officials are not included in the Appendix 1.

3.2.2.2 Participant observation

Interviewing alone is not sufficient to fully explore participants' life experiences. Some authors (Giddens, 1984; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007) argued that interviews are extracted out of daily life and therefore lack context. Words sometimes do not match what they actually do. Observation and participation provide more contextual information, which helps understand and explain their behaviour. Schensul, Schensul and LeCompte (1999) defined participant observation as 'the process of learning through exposure to or involvement in the day-to-day or routine activities of participants in the researcher setting' (p. 91), usually through doing fieldwork. Fieldwork involves 'active looking, improving memory, informal interviewing, writing detailed field notes, and perhaps most importantly, patience' (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002, p. vii). I have used participant observation to observe the behaviour of service workers and our interactions in the workplace, the dormitories and leisure-activity venues such as supermarkets, karaoke bars, shopping malls and gambling halls.⁶²

During the fieldwork, I wrote 262,316 words of field notes, interview summaries and monthly reports, not including the interviews that were transcribed after the fieldwork. I wrote 9000 words of field notes after the first day of work. But the amount of field notes generated each day followed a downward trend because I started to get more familiar with the setting toward the end of the fieldwork, so there was less need for detailed notes.

3.2.2.3 Questionnaire

I registered some basic information including age, gender, birthplace and *hukou* type of both full-time and part-time staff in the public area of the restaurant in order to get a general demographic understanding of the group. Based on my survey conducted in April 2012, 96.6% (115/119) of the full-time workers in the Meteor Restaurant were migrant workers from rural areas outside Shanghai. Four of them had urban *hukou*, two were managers who had Shanghai urban *hukou*, and the other two held non-Shanghai urban *hukou*.⁶³ It became more difficult for the restaurant to recruit full-time workers from the summer of 2012, so the role of part-time workers became more important,

⁶² I did not gamble myself in my several visits to the gambling shops. Instead, I observed the gambling behaviour of my informants and took notes on my mobile phone.

⁶³ Cleaners are not included here because the data concerning the cleaners' place of origins is missing due to the reason explained in the previous footnote.

which motivated me to register the part-time workers in January 2013 and April 2014 respectively. However, due to the fact that most of the empirical data was collected from January 2012 to August 2012, during the time which part-time workers were not a regular labour force, the thesis has a strong focus on full-time workers.

In addition to the questions listed above, I designed two open-ended questions. The first was about their perception of desirable life and happiness, and the second examined why they did not return home for Chinese New Year. The questions are elaborated in the next part.

3.2.3 Fieldwork: from pilot interviewing to follow-up study

For the purpose of clarity, I divided the process into stages: pilot interviewing, fieldwork and follow-up observation. It should be noted that follow-up observation has taken place throughout the entire research process and does not share a clear boundary with the stages of pilot interviewing and fieldwork.

3.2.3.1 Pilot interviewing

In order to identify the most suitable fieldwork site and get a general idea of the life experiences of restaurant workers, I carried out nine pilot interviews in five restaurants in April 2011. These restaurants covered the spectrum from low to high-end, fast food to fine dining, cuisines as diverse as Shanghainese, Sichuan and Italian. Through my connections, I recruited two interviewees each from the Italian restaurant, the fast food restaurant and the fine dining restaurant.⁶⁴ The other three workers in fine dining restaurants agreed to be interviewed without any previous connection. These informants included waitresses, a waiter and a chef and were aged from 19 to 35. I gave the informants hand cream and chocolate during the pilot interviews as a gesture of thanks.

Based on my findings, the high-end restaurants are more likely to recruit people with Shanghai *hukou*, whereas fast food and mid-range fine dining restaurants tend to recruit migrant workers. As my research focuses on migrant workers, I chose between fast food restaurants and mid-range fine dining restaurants. Many fast food restaurants are small in scale; the total number of staff varied from three to 20. In order to observe as many migrant workers as possible, I chose to work as a waitress in a large restaurant

⁶⁴ The interviewees in the Italian restaurant were introduced through one of my previous colleagues who knew the manager of the restaurant; my uncle is the owner of the fast food restaurant so I can easily get access to the restaurant; and the fine dining restaurant is the Meteor Restaurant, where I later did the fieldwork.

employing around 300 staff. Two of the informants from the pilot interviews worked in this restaurant. The pilot interviews helped me to select the fieldwork site and gain a general sense of their lives, but I did not incorporate data collected through these interviews into my thesis.

3.2.3.2 Fieldwork from January 2012 to April 2014

I gained permission to conduct fieldwork in the Meteor Restaurant through my father's connection with the manager in charge of the public area of the restaurant. I asked the manager not to disclose my personal information to the workers in advance, and he kindly agreed. I told the workers that I got my job through an introduction from one of my relatives—the commonest way to find this sort of work is through kinship networks.

The timeline of the fieldwork is illustrated in Table 3. From January to March 2012, I worked on a one-day-on and one-day-off basis. During March and April, I usually worked from 10am to 5pm every day and wrote up my field notes at night. Most of the time, I worked as a waitress in the compartment area or the hall area. Occasionally, I worked as a pantry helper in order to observe their work and to find opportunities to interview the pantry helpers. My area of work was assigned by the shift leaders and the managers based on the daily labour requirements. Waitressing involves writing down what customers order. This enabled me to always carry a mini-notebook and a ballpoint pen in the apron, making it easy to take field notes. Sometimes I took photographs with my iPhone 4S, which helped me remember events. At the time an iPhone cost almost two month's wages for an entry-level worker, so it was a luxury to them. Many of them were curious about the phone and borrowed it from me, using the camera function to take pictures of each other. I put a recording machine in the apron during working hours and was prepared to record conversations when I felt it necessary. I was open about this and all my informants were aware of it. I elaborated and analysed the field notes every day or every other day.

Table 3 Timeline of the fieldwork⁶⁵

Time Fieldwork	2011					2012					2013					2014			
	Mar-Apr	May-Jun	Jul-Aug	Sep-Oct	Nov-Dec	Jan-Feb	Mar-Apr	May-Jun	Jul-Aug	Sep-Oct	Nov-Dec	Jan-Feb	Mar-Apr	May-Jun	Jul-Aug	Sep-Oct	Nov-Dec	Jan-Feb	Mar-Apr
Pilot interview																			
1st fieldwork																			
2nd fieldwork																			
3rd fieldwork																			
4th fieldwork																			
5th fieldwork																			

⁶⁵ For most of the time during the fieldwork, I did not stay the full month, which is not reflected by the table. Although it looks as though I stayed 12 months altogether from the first to the fifth fieldwork, I actually only stayed for seven months.

I guaranteed anonymity to my informants at the very beginning of the fieldwork and reiterated this guarantee at the beginning of each interview. The topic guide and the consent form were prepared in advance of the interviews. Interviewees were aware that I was recording our conversations or interviews and taking photos. Sometimes they even asked me to make a record of what they said and take pictures of them. But others felt that recording the interview was annoying. After we got to know each other better, consent forms seemed too formal. They preferred to talk casually in a natural setting instead of signing a consent form and using the topic guide. In response to that, sometimes I clarified the research purpose, asked for their permission and recorded the whole process instead of inviting them to sign a form.

At first my fieldwork was subsidised by my parents in Shanghai. Having no need to worry about financial resources, I told the manager I would work for free in exchange for a flexible work schedule and permission to take notes whenever possible. The manager agreed. In the first week I worked for free. Later on, the restaurant started to recruit part-time workers to deal with the increasing number of customers when the Spring Festival approached. Then the manager offered to pay me part-time rates, equivalent to one pound sterling per hour.⁶⁶ Most of the interviews were conducted in the dining hall during the lunch break. Sometimes I also went shopping with the female workers, visited their dormitories or their rented housing in migrant communities, and observed the male workers' gambling behaviour during the lunch break.

In January 2012, when the Spring Festival was approaching, I noticed that most of them decided to continue working in the restaurant rather than going home to celebrate the Spring Festival with their family as is customary in China. In order to examine their wellbeing and the reasons why they did not go home during the Spring Festival, I sent out two questions, inviting them to write the answers down. The first was 'what is your view of happiness?' and the second was 'why don't you go back to the home village for the Spring Festival?' Thirty workers answered these questions. The answers showed that 20 out of 30 wished to earn additional wages, 1,300 yuan, for overtime work during the Spring Festival, a sum which accounted for half of their wages. Some of them stated that they remained in the restaurant in order to provide a good life to their family. As a result, I started to realise that intimate relationships is a very important theme that

⁶⁶ At the beginning of the fieldwork, the workers in the restaurant were appalled to find that I worked for free, which distinguished me from them and drew unnecessary attention to me. Therefore, I was happy to be paid so that I could be treated more normally and also had some money to fund myself during the fieldwork.

should be included in the thesis. Through the combination of surveys, interviews and observations, I realised that work, intimate relationships and leisure activities, which took up most of their time, were considered very important by them and it was therefore important to examine all of these areas in order to get a full picture of their life experiences. This is why work, intimate relationships and leisure time activities became the foci of the three empirical chapters.

In July 2012, I revisited the restaurant for three weeks. I worked as a waitress again in order to observe any changes in the restaurant and with the employees. In order to collect more materials and keep myself updated, I revisited the restaurant from December 2012 to January 2013, June to July 2013 and March to April 2014, during which periods I conducted some follow-up interviews and observations. I re-interviewed a previously interviewed informant in order to discern their changes over time. Each time I revisited the field, I spent a few days working there as a way to observe what had changed. I felt no need to work for an extended period in the follow-up visits because the knowledge I gained about the restaurant work per se was complete after the first three months in the field.

I completed a draft of all the empirical chapters before I did the last fieldwork in March to April 2014. At the time, 27 months had passed since my first visit. I organised two meetings in order to present my findings to the workers and collect their feedback. In March 2014, only around 20 workers out of the 130 that I knew were still there. It made my plan to present the findings to the informants very difficult because most of my previous informants had left the restaurant. I was concerned that there were too few informants still there to collect enough feedback on my findings. Due to their different shift patterns, I had to organise the meetings during a weekend—all workers are expected to work weekends, so most of the informants would be present—but they are busier at weekends than on weekdays. The shift leaders were interrupted by work demands because some of them were still on duty during the meetings. Fortunately, most of the informants remained during the whole process of the meetings. The first meeting took longer than their rest time, so I was not able to present my findings in a single meeting. Thus, I organised two sessions, and each of them had eight or nine attendees. Some informants attended both feedback sessions. The informants primarily consisted of the workers who were once my informants in 2012 and 2013. I briefly presented most of the findings incorporated in the thesis. All my findings were confirmed by them except for two of my observations on the empowerment of married

women.⁶⁷ I was aware that academic interpretation can differ greatly from an informant's perception.

3.2.3.3 Follow-up study

I kept in touch with some of my informants via QQ and WeChat, two of the most popular mobile phone instant messaging applications in China. My desire to keep in touch with them arose out of my role as a researcher, but also because during my time in the restaurant I had worked with them closely and so became concerned about their wellbeing. Sometimes they appeared online and started to chat with me at odd times of the day because of the time-zone difference. Talking with them online could be considered a way of doing fieldwork, evoking the ambiguity of what is considered a 'field'. The fieldwork has continued even though we are not physically in the same place.

I incorporated some of these follow-up online conversations into the thesis. For instance, I updated Zhenxiu's case via QQ (see Chapter 5). I knew about Zhenxiu's pregnancy and childbirth through her posts on QQ. I sought and received confirmation of this via QQ from her husband's brother, who had also worked in the Meteor Restaurant. I found that communicating via these applications was less effective than talking face-to-face, but even so, the most prominent factor preventing the follow-up interviews, either

⁶⁷ I told the informants that one of the findings was that married women have more decision-making power than when they were single or than their mothers-in-law had. Examples of where they had decision-making power include house purchase, job selection, and control of their own earnings.

The female informants did not consider that they were empowered, nor did they believe they had any power over their mothers-in-law. I realised that the question on 'empowerment' was very difficult to ask in a direct way and very difficult to investigate. For example, some of the women gained control over their own money after marriage, but does it count as 'empowerment' if they continuously sent remittances back to their natal family and husband's family rather than use the money for their own needs? I considered that 'empowerment' did exist in Yue's case. She eloped with her partner and made the house-buying decision after she got married. But in some other cases, migration did not necessarily bring 'empowerment' to these women. Instead, conventional gender norms were reproduced through migration and the status quo was maintained.

Regarding another finding that 'one of the main reasons why the husbands' natal families treated the married women well was that the wives became breadwinners', Pingzhen responded: 'It is not the case. After getting married, it is a wife's responsibility to do the washing and cooking, to take care of the children and the husband.'

It seems that Pingzhen did not address this finding. She thought doing housework was a wife's responsibility and did not see the relationship between her role as a breadwinner and the treatment she received.

I mention this finding because Yue was well received by her parents-in-law. At first I intended to link the good treatment with Yue's role as a breadwinner. But Yue left the restaurant in 2014, making it impossible for me to get further input from her. And Pingzhen's feedback did not support my tentative argument. As a result, I did not link Yue's role as a breadwinner and the way in which she was well treated when analysing Yue's case.

online or in person, was the extraordinarily high staff turnover at the restaurant. Most of the workers quit the job, moved on and disappeared from my life.

3.2.4 Data analysis

The research process is by no means linear, a step-by-step process of research design, data collection and analysis. Rather, it involves constantly revising research questions in the light of data collected, revising the theoretical framework and re-analysing the empirical data. This is not uncommon when doing qualitative research (Agar, 2004; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Constant changes during the process of analysis are inevitable, which explains why Agar (2004) called ethnography ‘a nonlinear dynamic system’ (p. 16). I did not finalise the research questions until I started writing the empirical chapters. Although not all the questions in the topic guide I designed for the semi-structured interviews were directly related to the finalised research questions, they were vital to my question formulation process.

The process of analysis began as soon as I wrote up the interview notes and field notes. I summarised the main findings in monthly reports organising the findings by theme. Initially I drafted the monthly reports in order to update my supervisor in London about my fieldwork process. In retrospect, I found it extremely useful to think and write in a way that was organised by themes. Most of the themes in the empirical chapters are based on those selected for the monthly reports. I wrote a monthly report during each stage of my fieldwork. Altogether I wrote seven monthly reports between January 2012 and April 2014, a total of 20,000 words. From the second report onwards, I started to elaborate the themes of preceding reports and also added some new themes. My supervisor gave me feedback on every monthly report, and we discussed the focus of the next stage of fieldwork on a monthly basis. In addition, drawing on the two feedback meetings, I wrote a feedback report of 3000 words, which helped me to analyse the data. The field notes and interview summaries were written in Chinese, but the themes, the monthly reports and the feedback report were written in English.

Regarding analysis methods, Hammersly and Atkinson (2007) pointed out that ‘it is important to recognise that there is no formula or recipe for the analysis of ethnographic data’ (p. 158). Some scholars note the importance of repeated reading of the original text. Pierre (2011) suggested reading without coding, whereas Agar (1980) advised repeated reading of the piece as a whole (p. 103). From the very beginning of the fieldwork I repeatedly read the field notes, the interview summaries I wrote right after

each interview regarding the interview contents and my thoughts, and also the full transcripts of certain interviews. I used thematic analysis; its techniques of repetition, similarities and differences are core to this method (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 102). The process of identifying themes was based on the following principles: themes that I consider are important to the migrants; recurring themes; themes of similarities and differences within the group, for example gender differences; themes that differ from the literature that I read, and themes that are linked to the research questions, as they are important. I did not do open, axial and selective coding as used in grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Instead, I identified themes based on intensive and repeated reading of the interview summaries and field notes. I tried to use the software Nvivo to assist the process of data analysis. However, I found it more productive for me to print out the interview summaries, transcripts and field notes and then do the coding with a pen. A sample of a coded transcript can be found in Appendix 3.

I did not transcribe all the interviews due to the significant amount of work involved. Instead, I listened to these recordings repeatedly and selected the recordings which would be used in the thesis based on the themes generated from interview summaries and field notes. I recruited people to transcribe these recordings, which amounted to one-third of all the interviews, after which I double-checked all the transcripts. The selection criteria regarding which interview to transcribe included how well the interview fitted the themes, the articulacy of the interviewees and the completeness of the stories in relation to the themes.

All the interviews and conversations were conducted in Mandarin. I translated all the original materials used in the thesis from Mandarin to English. I combined the methods of literal and free translation, both of which are referred to by Sturge (2014, p. 28) when discussing translation in ethnographic research (2000). I used both techniques in an attempt to make sure that the translation is understandable to English readers but at the same time is close to its original meaning. For some frequently occurring words such as *dagong* (working as wage labour), I directly use the Chinese *pinyin* in the text because it is a word usually used by rural migrants, a word which connotes their low social economic status.⁶⁸ The translation of ethnographic material involves interpretation of the context by ethnographers (Sturge, 1997), which goes beyond the aforementioned translation techniques. I found that my interpretation of the context was sometimes

⁶⁸ *Pinyin* is the phonetic system used in mainland China for transcribing the Mandarin pronunciations of Chinese characters into the Latin alphabet.

unavoidable. For instance, when explaining the word ‘*dangci*’ used by my informants in Chapter 6, I consider that *dangci* refers to level or class, and further position it in the context that when my informant said ‘not our *dangci*, it reflected that they were conscious of the class disparity largely based on income that distinguishes their class from the class which can afford to shop in the shopping mall ‘Dragon Dream’. In addition, the researcher’s ‘socio-cultural positioning’ also affects translation (Temple & Young, 2004, p. 168), which requires researchers to reflexively examine their own positionality, discussed in the next section.

3.3 Reflexivity and positionality

Doing fieldwork in China shares similarities with doing fieldwork elsewhere, but nevertheless has certain peculiarities. Fieldwork experiences are largely dependent on the geographical location and the time that a researcher enters the field, as well as the positionality of researcher and informants. This is especially the case in an immense country like China. Arguably, the experience of a white male middle-class researcher who did fieldwork in urban China in the 1990s and the experience of a female middle-class Shanghainese researcher will be different in fundamental ways.⁶⁹

Why do I want to speak for the rural migrants? To what extent are my interpretations credible? Are there ways in which my account of their lives merely reinforces my position of mastery and privilege? These questions are vital to ethnographic research. I address the first question in the preface of the thesis and I will answer the rest of the questions in this section. First, I will consider the concepts of reflexivity, positionality and their relationship with the feminist epistemologies, after which I will examine the ethics of presenting myself. In what follows, I explore how the class, *hukou* and gender of both my informants and me impact on our interpersonal relations, on the data collection process and on my perception and their perceptions of the purpose of the thesis. In the remaining part, I examine my conflicted roles of being a researcher and a potential activist.

‘Reflexivity is self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious analytical scrutiny of the self as researcher. Indeed reflexivity is critical to the conduct of

⁶⁹ For example, Farrer (2002) did his fieldwork in Shanghai from 1993 to 1996. He wrote that ‘I have about a dozen very close Shanghainese friends who helped me and continue to help me with my research’, and another dozen local friends who invited him to dance clubs and even TV shows (2002: 328). He married a local Shanghainese woman. As a middle-class white man who did fieldwork in the 1990s, his fieldwork experiences were very different from mine.

fieldwork; it induces self-discovery and can lead to insights and new hypotheses about the research questions' (England, 1994, p. 82). Reflexivity is being advocated 'as a strategy for situating knowledges' (Rose, 1997, p. 306). The pursuit for situated knowledge and the need for self-scrutiny requires the intersectional approach to investigate how the researcher's positionality affects the process of knowledge production. Chiseri-Strater (1996) considers that 'the concept of positionality includes the ethnographer's given attributes such as race, nationality, and gender which are fixed or culturally ascribed' (p. 116), and how gender, race and class influence a researcher's position (Killick, 1995; McCorkel & Myers, 2003; Moreno, 1995; Nast, 1994).

As a result, the positionality and biography of researchers can play a central role in the questions they ask, in the ways in which they conduct fieldwork, and in the final text they produce (Chiseri-Strater, 1996; England, 1994; Hastrup, 1992). The field notes I write, the selection of materials, the translation from Chinese to English and the way I analyse are all in relation to my positionality, which is why I should reflect on my personal experiences.

However, being in the field is an interactive and dynamic process. It is not only the position of the researcher that is worth exploring. The world is 'an intersubjective creation' which is constructed by both the researcher and the informants (England, 1994, p. 81). The intersectionality of gender, race, class and *hukou* of both the researcher and the informants needs to be reflected upon, and this is fleshed out in the remaining of the section.

It should be noted that reflexivity alone cannot dissolve the power relation imbalance (England, 1994). However, through reflexivity, '...the researcher might produce more inclusive, more flexible, yet philosophically informed methodologies sensitive to the power relations inherent in fieldwork' (ibid., p. 87). The purpose of reflexivity is not to eliminate the imbalance in power relations but to reveal it, reflect it and help both researcher and reader gain a more thorough understanding of how the research is produced.

3.3.1 Presenting myself

To what extent the researcher should present her/his personal experience is an ethical issue of concern (Creswell, 2013, p. 175). As suggested by Mack et al. (2005), the ethics code of my home institution and the American Anthropological Association

(AAA), a researcher should give a truthful response to informants' questions about the researcher's role and what the researcher is doing in the field. I presented myself to the informants as who I am: a Shanghainese, an unmarried heterosexual woman, the single child in my family, a research student who is studying abroad and who is now working in the restaurant in order to collect materials for her thesis. My informants had different interpretations of my role in the restaurant. Many of them considered that I was writing articles that were difficult to understand. Some thought I was a journalist, and others understood that I was there to 'experience life' (*tiyan shenghuo*). Although they had various interpretations of my purpose for doing the fieldwork, they were aware that I was in a more privileged position than them.

I presented my family as an average family (*putong jiating*) in Shanghai. Many of my informants had no idea what 'middle class' meant, so it was proper to present my family as *putong jiating*. Their perceptions of an average Shanghainese family were shaped by the customers who dined at the restaurant, who owned cars, held stable jobs, had savings, pensions, and apartments in Shanghai. Their perceptions of the Shanghainese reflect what they lacked. Few of them owned a car, their jobs were precarious, their savings were scarce, pensions were few, and having a flat in Shanghai was beyond their wildest dreams. Although not every Shanghainese family possesses a car, and not all local residents have stable jobs, the overall situation of an average Shanghai family is much better than the restaurant workers with rural *hukou*.

Some of my colleagues, both female and male, were surprised and then jealous of me because I am the only child in my family. They interpreted it as 'all Shanghai local families have only one child.' They were envious because my parents were able to pour all their resources onto me, while they had to share scarce family resources with brothers and sisters. They were shocked because I am an unmarried woman in my late 20s, which is very unusual in their community. Almost all the women they were familiar with married in their early 20s. They attributed my unmarried status to the belief that Shanghainese women prioritise career over marriage, so they prefer getting married late. They usually justified the differences between us by saying three words, '*shang hai ren*', connoting that 'you are different from us because you are a Shanghainese.' I usually responded with a smile without making further comment. How the differences in social status and gender affect the research process is discussed in the next part.

3.3.2 Interactions between my informants and me

As discussed at the beginning of this section, the relationships between the researcher and the informants are crucial to this research, and the researcher's class, *hukou* status and gender are crucial to making sense of the interpersonal relationships. A reciprocal relationship can be more productive and more equal than a unilateral relationship. Many of my informants would not have revealed as much as they did if they perceived my role merely as a researcher rather than a colleague or a friend. A more reflexive research 'must require careful consideration of the consequences of the interactions with those being investigated' (England, 1994, pp. 84). In the following pages, I consider how my and my informants' class, *hukou*, education and gender affected our interpersonal relationships and therefore affected the data collection process and my motivation for doing this research.

3.3.2.1 Intersectionality of class, education and hukou

Class, education and *hukou* all affect a person's social status. My colleagues and I had clear awareness of the difference in our social status. After I had been in the field for a few weeks, the relationship between my informants and me became closer. One day, I was asked three times by different colleagues what kind of jobs my parents did. Some colleagues who became familiar with me asked how much my parents earned and how many properties my family had. Apart from questions about my family, my informants had various questions for me. I was asked, 'How much is your scholarship? What kind of house are you living in? Is London in Japan? Do you take the boat or the bus from Shanghai to London? What kind of language do British people speak? How much is your watch?' They paid attention to the accessories I carried every day - lip care, ballpoint pens, notepads, bags and the watch - and asked the price of each item. These questions can be divided to two types. The first type is about my personal information. As far as I could see, they asked me personal details because they were curious about me and wanted to know more about me. The relationship between us was reciprocal and bilateral, unlike the unilateral and sometimes exploitative relationship that more frequently occurs between interviewer and interviewee. Some scholars argued that a reciprocal relationship between an interviewee and an interviewer is preferable and more productive for feminist research (England, 1994; Nast, 1994; Oakley, 1981). In response to these questions, I usually told the truth, except that I responded 'no idea' to questions regarding family wealth because I was concerned that the answers might reinforce the social status difference between us and unsettle our friendly relations. I realised the intrinsic unfairness by refusing to give an exact answer because I knew how

much their family earned, but I concealed the information about my family. But I did not consider that simply answering 'I have no idea' to the questions of family wealth would impair our relationships, because among the many questions they asked, this was the only set of questions to which I did not provide answers and also because our friendly relations were built on daily interaction as colleagues rather than on conversations in the form of question and answer. The second type of questions, such as 'Is London in Japan?' can be categorised as knowledge-based questions. At first, questions like that shocked me. After a while, I came to realise that because most of my informants are middle-school dropouts, they were constrained by the limited educational levels they attained. The knowledge-based questions they asked shed light on the issue of rural/urban inequality in China, which motivated me to contemplate how to solve the issue. I was aware that both types of questions reflected our disparities in education, class, and *hukou*.

Another reflection on social and gender inequality occurred in my interaction with waitress Ru Nan. I cultivated friendly relations with some of the colleagues. Ru Nan was one of them. As my colleague, she often helped me with my work. Sometimes we made fun of each other and laughed together. Her narration of her personal experiences made me feel quite emotional. She told me that her parents preferred her brother to her, which is quite common in rural areas. Born in 1993, she had kept sponsoring her younger brother for his college fees. I was crying in the library when writing down her story. Later, she told me that her brother wanted a laptop and she was about to buy one for him. I felt compassion for her, so I gave her my spare laptop and taught her how to use it. I asked her not to tell other colleagues in the restaurant. In retrospect, I still consider that my behaviour was proper because a reciprocal relationship is preferable, and it felt reasonable to give something I did not need to people in need of it. It seems that no one in the restaurant knew about this except Ru Nan and me, which meant confidentiality was guaranteed. As a researcher, I tried to analyse her story unsentimentally. The more information my informants disclosed, the more I realised how their personal experiences arose from the disparity in economic development between rural and urban areas, which motivated me to seek ways to change social and gender inequality.

3.3.2.2 Gender and data collection

Gender is a parameter that cannot be neglected when considering the relationship between researcher and informants. My fieldwork experience echoes the contention that a researcher's gender may have a crucial impact on fieldwork (Killick, 1995; Moreno, 1995), especially studies involving female researchers and male interviewees (Arendell, 1997; Kilkey, Perrons, & Plomien, 2013; D. Lee, 1997). It is notable that protecting oneself as a researcher may not be of concern for many male fieldworkers. However, female scholars are more aware of this before and during the fieldwork (Gurney, 1985). Hereafter I intend to analyse the extent to which my gender identity influenced the fieldwork.

I interviewed the male pantry helper Yao twice, both times in a quiet small dining hall without anyone else present. The small dining hall is adjacent to a larger dining hall. The larger hall was the designated place for employees to rest at noon. I considered it an ideal place for an interview because it was quiet and not far from the other colleagues. Unexpectedly, at the end of the first interview, he put his hand on my shoulder, pulling me to him in an attempt to stop me leaving. I pushed his hand away and left. At the beginning of the second interview, he refused to answer my questions unless I sat by his side. I refused to do so, realising that he was trying to take advantage of me by exerting masculinised physical and sexual power. We sat there in stalemate for around 10 minutes until he began to cooperate. Unexpectedly, he tried to hug me at the end of the second interview. I struggled to get free and cursed him, calling him 'psycho' and feeling disgusted. Based on what he told me in the interviews, I speculated that his inappropriate behaviour might be associated with his unfortunate childhood experiences, which he claimed he had revealed to no one in the restaurant except me. When we came across each other in the workplace a couple of days later, he said that he wanted to marry me. I responded: 'I don't want to marry you,' with an emotionless face. Recalling the article written by Moreno (1995) on her fieldwork experience of being raped by her assistant, I lived in fear following the interviews with Yao. In an attempt to deal with it, I told my colleagues what had happened. They responded that he had done something similar to a female pantry helper not long ago. Scolding him and calling him a psycho, they advised me to keep my distance from him. Soon after, he quit the job in order to find more profitable work and we lost contact.

When filling in the pre-fieldwork risk assessment form required by my institution, I took the potential sexual harassment of waitresses by male customers into consideration because I imagined that the power imbalance between customers and waitresses might have this effect. However, contrary to my presumption that female workers would encounter sexual harassment from male customers, I did not hear of any such cases in the field. Rather, sexual harassment was usually initiated by male colleagues in the workplace. As a female fieldworker, gender serves as a constraint as well as an enabler to me. As Yao told me, he would never disclose his detailed personal tragedy to any of the workers in the restaurant. This echoes McDowell's (1988) reflection that women may be considered by men as 'unthreatening' so that female researchers doing research with men can often elicit confidential data or make it easier for men to discuss difficult issues (p. 167). My role as a researcher as well as a female sexual being motivated him to reveal himself to me. Kilkey, Perrons and Plomien (2013) considered that risks sometimes also bring opportunities which allow the research to succeed. Gender is a factor that affects the kind of data I can collect in the field.

Above all, the interactions between my informants and me were influenced by our gender, which can have a subtle and complex impact on data collection. Female researchers need to consider sexual harassment in the pre-fieldwork risk assessment if adult male informants will be involved in the research. It is important to point out that in general I am in a more privileged position than my informants because of my social economic class and *hukou* status, but quite clearly the dynamics of gender and power are not always consistent with the socioeconomic status.

3.3.3 Conflicting roles: researcher or potential activist?

Prior to the fieldwork, I agreed with the view that it is necessary to study phenomena in a natural setting, as suggested by some scholars (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). As discussed already, through reflecting the differences in class, *hukou* and education between my informants and me, I rethought the meaning of doing fieldwork and the purpose of the thesis. After being in the field for a while, it was inevitable that I began to feel compassion for them and sought ways to help them. My roles of researcher, friend and activist became blurred, and this had the potential to unsettle the fieldwork setting. Here I illustrate my role conflict with three cases. The first case involves a letter that I wrote to the mayor of the local district with respect to the housing problems of migrant workers; the second is about the advice on

contraception I gave to Zhenxiu; and the third is about a customer losing a mobile phone in the restaurant.

During my fieldwork from 2011 to 2014, most of the migrant housing in the local district was demolished. The workers were worried about how to get new, affordable accommodation. Many of them told me that housing was the most urgent problem to be solved. In response to this, I wrote a letter to the mayor of the local district in April 2014. A local government employee telephoned me one week later, explaining that demolition was an inevitable part of the process of urbanisation, and there was no land available to build housing for migrants at that time. Nevertheless, he suggested that my letter was important and had been archived, and that the government would take it into consideration once the ‘leaders’ (*lingdao*) decided to build more migrant housing. In this case, it was clear to me that if I wished to improve the migrants’ wellbeing, writing a letter to draw the government’s attention to this problem was the action I could take for them. Before doing that, I carefully considered the possible consequences of my behaviour. Predicting that it would be unlikely to affect my own research, I wrote the letter. And the outcome proved my prediction to be accurate.

Regarding the second case, after staying in the field for a while, I realised that the use of contraception among my unmarried informants was very low, which led to unwanted pregnancy. In an interview, waitress Qinya told me that she had had three abortions and was a victim of constant domestic abuse from her partner. I came to realise that contraception advice needed to be provided to them in order to avoid further harm. Therefore, during the second fieldwork, when I heard that Zhenxiu stayed at her boyfriend’s place from time to time, I felt the need to provide her with advice on contraception. One day, when just the two of us were in the dormitory, I told her how abortion could harm a woman’s body and advised her to use contraception. Her attitude was reticent, suggesting that she was unwilling to talk about it. At the time I held the view that a fieldworker should study the natural setting and not try to intervene, and I was conscious that my behaviour might have violated this principle, but I considered it was the right thing to do at the time.

During my fieldwork in 2012, a customer claimed that he had lost a mobile phone in the restaurant. According to shift leader of the table servers Yulong, the customer told the restaurant workers provocatively: ‘tell your boss to be ready not to stay in the catering sector (*hun bu xia qu*) if my phone cannot be found’. Yulong said, very seriously,

during the daily meeting: ‘it is a very expensive phone, even more expensive than an iPhone. It is called ‘Heimei’ (Blackberry). Whoever found it please turn it in, otherwise all of you will have to pay for it’. My colleagues told me that a similar incident had occurred in another branch of the restaurant chain, and the workers had shared the customer’s loss. They grumbled about the potential loss of money. I considered it to be unfair that the service workers had to share the customer’s loss. I expressed my opinion explicitly after the meeting, and also searched the price of a Blackberry online as proof that a Blackberry was no more expensive than an iPhone. Luckily, the customer did not ask the restaurant again to compensate his loss, otherwise I would have been embroiled in further conflict.

I was acutely aware that I ran the risk of changing the setting by writing the letter, by giving advice and by challenging the punishment mechanism in the restaurant (as well as undermining the power of the shift leader), but it was unacceptable for me to keep silent in these situations. I behaved differently from the other workers because I am better educated, have more knowledge about sex, know the prices of electronic equipment, have better Internet searching skills and more awareness of social inequality. As discussed earlier, the conventional mode of participant observation requires a researcher to minimise his/her impact on the natural settings. Later, I realised that the field is not possible to remain neutral after researchers enter it because the field is unavoidably affected by the interactions between researchers and informants.

It was difficult for me to do nothing when I saw the informants in trouble or potential trouble. The question of to what extent and how a researcher should seek social justice by engaging in activism is controversial and unsettled (Low & Merry, 2010). In order to seek legitimacy for my actions, I resorted to the ethics guidance from my home institute (London School of Economics, 2014) and the AAA (2009). According to the research ethics code of my home institution, researchers should protect their informants, but the guideline is too broad to make much sense with respect to the particular case. According to Section 3 of the AAA ethics codes (2009, p. 2), the first guideline is ‘to avoid harm or wrong, understanding that the development of knowledge can lead to change which may be positive or negative for the people or animals worked with or studied. The elaboration of avoiding harm and wrong mainly concerns a) make sure the published results will not do harm to the informants; b) respect their wishes to be recognised or be anonymised; and c) cultivate a reciprocal relationship. ‘To avoid harm’ and to cultivate a reciprocal relationship are helpful to justify my behaviour under these particular

circumstances. I consider that what I did was proper because my behaviour was compatible with these codes. In the case of the letter to the mayor, my informants were helpless in the face of the forced displacement and anxious about where to live, which obviously affected their work. Having seen the undesirable consequences of unprotected sex, it was reasonable for me to believe that Zhenxiu and her boyfriend, both of whom were 17 years old at the time and came from rural China, had high possibility of having unprotected sex and consequently getting pregnant.⁷⁰ Regarding the mobile phone dispute, the workers were at risk of exploitation because they lacked knowledge and did not intend to challenge the unfair treatment. I perceived that in all the cases I had a responsibility to provide information rather than doing nothing, because my inaction might have brought harm to my colleagues. In retrospect, I still consider that I did what I should have done in these situations and have complied with the ethics codes.

Based on the discussion above, I challenge the view that researchers should minimise their impact on the field and argue that reasonable interventions may be necessary. I propose that another approach is to react, intervene and then reflect in the aftermath, and at the same time contextualise the actions, asking why the intervention is considered necessary and to what extent it may change the setting. Through the discussion above, I hope to contribute to the scholarship on doing participant observation regarding how, to what extent and when ethnographic researchers should be engaged in actions that may change the natural setting.

3.4 Evaluating qualitative research

Drawing from Creswell (2013) and Lincoln (1995)'s criteria for evaluating qualitative research, I constructed a framework for evaluating my research. First, the assessment of qualitative study should meet the standard set by the academic community (Lincoln, 1995). My research meets the ethical guidelines set by my home institute. I submitted a risk assessment form prior to the fieldwork, noting the potential danger of waitressing, including being hurt by hot or heavy dishes and being sexually harassed by male customers. The form was approved by the school. I carefully read the ethics guidelines provided by the school and avoided violating them during the fieldwork.

⁷⁰ The consequence of this incident has vital implications to one of the arguments in Chapter 5. As discussed in Chapter 5, Zhenxiu later became pregnant, which meant that although she was aware of the harm that unprotected sex could bring, she was still pregnant, which is related to her exercise of agency analysed in Chapter 5.

Second, ‘prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field’ is required in order to minimise misunderstanding and misrepresenting the informants (Creswell, 2013, p. 250). As demonstrated in the preceding sections, I spent a significant amount of time in the field in order to build trust and learn about my informants’ life experiences in hopes of achieving faithful representation.

Third, triangulation. Triangulation here refers to multiple approaches researchers use in order to provide trustworthy evidence (ibid., p. 251). Regarding data collection, I adopted multiple methods: questionnaire, interviewing and participant observation. In addition, I asked different informants about the same event in order to verify the basic facts such as the date and location of the event and collected different perspectives of the same event. Moreover, I compared and contrasted my empirical materials with the relevant literature to see to what extent my findings and analysis reflected the literature. When my findings were not in accordance with the literature, I prioritised the observations and perceptions of my informants and me. For instance, scholars and the media tended to suggest that women were less likely to be promoted at work (ifeng, 2013; Pun, 2005; Tong, 2011). But based on my observation on the workplace, women were not in a disadvantaged position regarding job hierarchy and job prestige, which encouraged me to wonder why my findings were different from theirs and to provide thick descriptions of my research context.

Fourth, peer review. This functions as an external check on the research (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). Some researchers have reviewed my work during different stages of the thesis writing. My supervisor has been to the restaurant in Shanghai and got a sense of the field. I submitted monthly reports to her during the fieldwork in order to keep her informed of the progress of the fieldwork and get timely responses. More than ten colleagues have reviewed my empirical chapters during the PhD workshops, through which I collected valuable comments.

Fifth, clarifying researcher bias (ibid., p. 251). Researcher bias is articulated by the reflexive approach I used, including the discussion of positionality and the use of autobiography, the latter of which is set out in the preface. Reflexivity is important for understanding how my personal history is related to the research. Through this clarification, readers will get a better understanding of my research purpose, my interpersonal relations with the informants, and how I interpret the data with reference to my autobiography.

Sixth, member checking (ibid, p. 252). Informants' views about data and its analysis can be an invaluable asset to the research. Their views were collected in two meetings. Most of my empirical findings were confirmed by them during the feedback meetings. Another form of member checking I used was to send interview summaries to the informants to obtain their verification. I sent the electronic version of interview summaries to two of my informants to double check and got confirmation from them. But on most occasions, inviting the informants to comment on the interview notes I wrote was not possible. It was not convenient to print the notes out and give them to the informants because I was concerned that confidentiality could not be guaranteed; many of the informants lived in the dormitory and worked together. As a result, printed materials could be easily seen by others. An incident that occurred in the field reinforced my decision not to print out the interview transcripts. One day, I bought my printed field notes to the restaurant and put them on a table before the daily meeting. To my surprise, I could not find them anywhere after the meeting. Two days later, shift leader Lulu gave me the notes and said she had found them somewhere. As a result, I was more careful about the confidentiality of printed materials and decided not to bring them to the restaurant any more. In addition, none of the informants had email accounts and few of them had computers, making it impossible for me to send an electronic version. And due to their limited education, some of them are illiterate. Therefore, I consider that the method of inviting the informants to comment on the interview notes is not suitable in my fieldwork.

3.5 Conclusion

In Section 3.1, I discussed that feminist epistemological critiques of the construction of reality paved the way for this research on disadvantaged people. The intersectional approach allows me to question the essentialisation of 'men' and be conscious that men can be disadvantaged in patriarchal society as well. The combination of feminist standpoint theories and intersectionality serve as powerful tools to investigate the gendered experience, subjectivity and agency of disadvantaged migrant workers and interrogate social inequality in China. In Section 3.2, I considered the mixed methods adopted to collect data and argued that data collection and analysis is a dynamic process requiring adjustment and readjustment. In Section 3.3, I conceptualised reflexivity and positionality, which are important approaches to feminist ethnographic research. I have foregrounded and critically examined how the intersectionality of gender, class, *hukou* and education of my informants and me impacts the research. My conflicted roles as a

researcher and a potential activist in the field impelled me to question the possibility and the necessity of maintaining neutrality in the field. In the final section, I provided a framework of six criteria to evaluate my research.

Chapter 4: Gendered subjectivities in a gendered, feminised, hierarchical and discriminative workplace

4.0 Introduction

In Chapter 1, I discussed the restaurant setting, including the employees' work schedules and living conditions. In this chapter, I intend to explore how gender operated at work. Especially I will investigate how and why the workplace was gendered, hierarchical and feminised, how the workers' gendered subjectivities were expressed, and how and why the workers encountered denigration differently.

The public area of the restaurant was a workplace which was gendered, feminised and hierarchical but in a way that did not always put women at the lowest level. Some men were disadvantaged in the public area of the restaurant, which upset the gender norms that expect men to occupy superior positions. In this chapter, I also intend to show the complex intersections of gender hierarchy, workplace hierarchy, social class and *hukou* status.

I begin by introducing different job positions in the public area of the restaurant, showing that it was a gender-segregated place. Then I consider why the workplace was hierarchical and feminised and why the female workers were often in an advantaged position in the public area. In section 4.2, I address the subjectivities of both female and male workers. Their subjectivities were influenced by a range of factors, including *hukou* status, work status and gender hierarchy. In Section 4.3, I first outline the dining procedure in order to illustrate how the workers interacted with each other and with the customers. I will then show how the dimensions of gender hierarchy, job hierarchy, *hukou* status and class intersected in complex ways to produce tensions between workers, and between workers and customers. These three sections address the questions of how gender operated at work and how agency was exercised and subjectivity expressed through the lens of work lives, echoing the overarching research questions of the everyday operation of gender, the exercise of agency and the expression of subjectivity.

4.1 The gendered, hierarchical and feminised workplace

The public space of the Meteor Restaurant was characterised by four traits. First, there was horizontal gender segregation. The female and male workers were overrepresented in different jobs. I will introduce different jobs in the public sphere of the restaurant

then discuss gender segregation and job hierarchy at work. Second, the workplace was hierarchical. The better jobs had higher pay and greater prospects for promotion, for example becoming a shift leader or manager. And it was often the female staff who had the better jobs. In this part, I consider job hierarchy and its intersection with gender. Third, I intend to explore why the workplace was feminised in the public area—why the female employees outnumbered the male employees. Finally, the female workers often held positions with higher prestige, so I will examine why the women were often in an advantaged position.

4.1.1 Gender division of labour

In April 2012, the Meteor Restaurant had 14 workers above entry level in the public area, including 11 shift leaders and three staff at managerial level: the manager, the deputy manager and the line manager. 10.7% (eight out of 75) female workers in the public sphere were above the entry level and the figure was 13.6% (six out of 44) for male workers. This difference was too insignificant to suggest vertical gender segregation. But horizontal gender segregation clearly existed, including both inter-job and intra-job gender segregation. The former refers to gender segregation across jobs whereas the latter means that tasks assigned to different workers are gendered in the same job category.

I begin by introducing different job positions to illustrate horizontal gender differences. According to the staff handbook, the restaurant manager is responsible for the overall daily operation, assessment of the performance of shift leaders, coordination with other branches, sanitation checks, purchasing and work attendance checks; the deputy manager is responsible for sales monitoring, staff grooming, work attendance, staff training and assessment and sanitation checks; and the line manager supervises sales calculations, dormitory administration, allocation of goods and materials, and also sanitation checks.

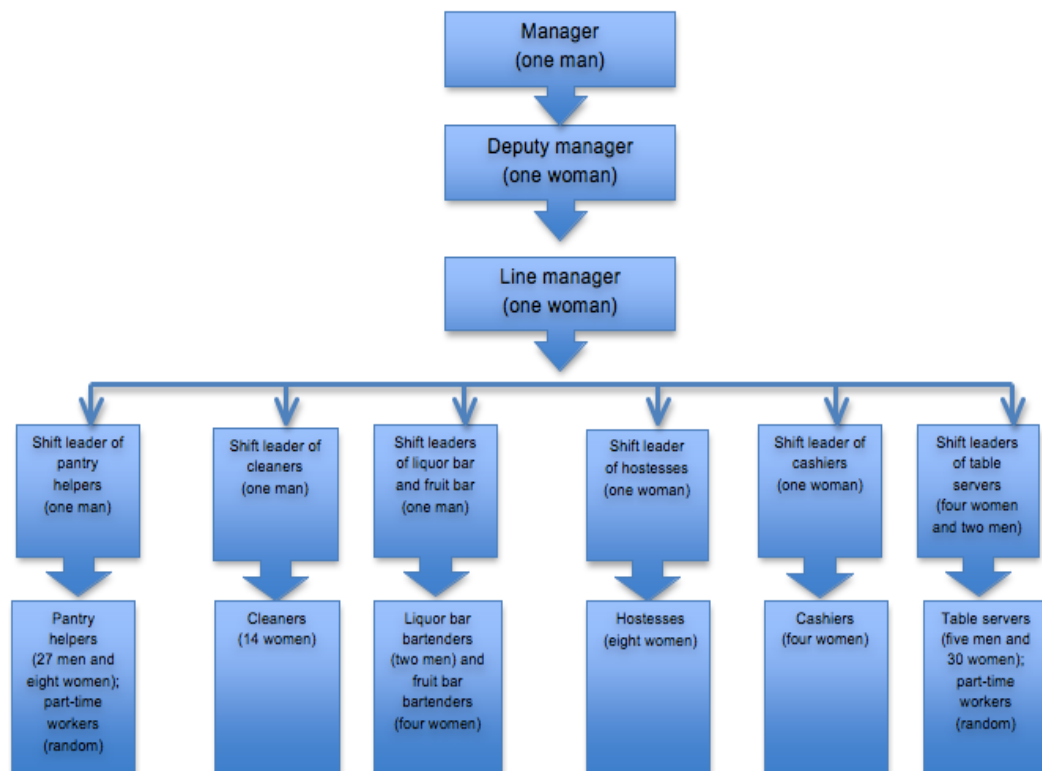


Figure 8 Hierarchy in the public area of the Meteor Restaurant

Source: Based on the survey that I conducted in the field in January 2012

When I first came to the field in January 2012, the restaurant manager was a Shanghainese man in his late 30s; the sales manager was a Shanghainese woman in her 30s; and the line manager was a 28-year-old woman from Anhui province. In April 2012, the manager and line manager were relocated to other branches and were replaced with leaders from other branches. Meanwhile, the previous deputy manager was promoted to be the restaurant manager in this branch; the new deputy manager was a Shanghainese woman in her 40s and the new line manager was a 30-year-old man with rural *hukou* from outside Shanghai. Based on my observations, headquarters tried to maintain a gender balance in the three top positions in this restaurant.

Table server (*fuwuyuan*) refers to both waitresses and waiters who take customers' orders, serve dishes at the table, and clean tables after customers leave. *Fuwuyuan* is a gender-neutral word, but in this restaurant it usually stands for waitresses. I use 'table server' rather than 'waitress' in the thesis in order to include both waitresses and waiters. Table server was the 'core' position in the public area in that table servers constituted the most numerous group and had more direct and more frequent interactions with customers than other positions. Table servers had a greater chance of being promoted to

line manager, deputy manager or manager because all the managerial positions were held by former table servers. But given that there were only three staff at the managerial level, the probability of promotion for any individual table server was low. Women were over-represented in the position of table server. As shown in Table 4, in April 2012, 79% of the table servers were women, of whom 55.9% were married. The average age of and marriage ratio for both female and male table servers were similar.

Table 4 Configuration of the public area of the restaurant⁷¹

	Number				Average age			Marriage rate		Monthly wage
	Women	Men	Total	W/ Total	Women	Men	Avg	Women	Men	
Table servers	34	9	43	79%	23	24	23	55.90%	56%	2100+commission
Pantry helpers	5	29	34	14.7%	31	24	25	80%	27.6%	1900
Hostesses	7	/	7	100%	25	/	25	71.4%	/	2300+commission
Cashiers	5	/	5	100%	26	/	26	100%	/	2100
Bartenders	5	4	9	55.6%	33.5	21	26	100%	25%	2000
Cleaners	17	1	18	100%	43	42	43	100%	100%	1800
Line manager	1		1	/	28	/	/	Single	/	4000-5000
Deputy manager	1	/	1	/	30-40	/	/	Married	/	5000-6000
Manager	/	1	1	/	/	30-40	/	/	Married	6000-7000

Source: Based on the survey that I conducted in the field in 2012

The management of table servers was more sophisticated than the management of other job positions. During my visit in January 2012, there were two types of full-time table servers. One was ‘dish orderers’ and the other was ‘non-dish orderers’. By successfully promoting certain expensive dishes such as abalone and shark fin to customers, dish orderers earned commission per dish ordered. Basic wages for dish orderers were £10 higher per month than for non-dish orderers. For non-dish orderers, the expensive dishes they encouraged customers to order contributed to the ‘general bonus’ that every worker in the restaurant shared.

⁷¹ Notes: First, the wages shown above were before the deduction of 140.3 yuan for social benefits. Second, the information for Table 4 was collected in April 2012, whereas the information for Figure 8 was collected in January 2012. It was easier to collect data for Figure 8 because the only thing I needed to do was to ask the manager about the numbers of the workers in each position, whereas for Table 4, I had to ask each of the employees for detailed information. I considered that it would be better to collect their detailed information after I got their trust. So I did the questionnaire in April 2012, three months after I entered the field. Third, the total number of staff fluctuates daily, making it difficult to calculate the exact number of workers. Fourth, in 2012 there were 200-300 employees in this restaurant, of whom around 105 worked in the public area of the house and the rest in the kitchen. Fourth, ‘W’ stands for women and ‘M’ stands for men, and ‘Avg’ stands for average.

But by my last visit in 2014, the categorisation of dish orderers and non-dish orderers had disappeared. My research suggests that the transformation had happened in three stages. In the first stage, before April 2012, a table server had to work in the restaurant for three months and then take a written exam. On passing the exam, she/he could be upgraded from a non-dish orderer to a dish orderer. In the second stage, from April to June 2012, the three-month period was removed. Any table server could take the exam at any time. And in the third stage, from June 2012 to April 2014, the exam was withdrawn, and any table server who stayed in the restaurant for more than three months would be automatically upgraded to a dish orderer. This transformation reflected the restaurant's attempts to reduce staff turnover.

As mentioned earlier in this section, inter-job and intra-job segregation by gender existed at the horizontal level in the public area. Intra-job gender segregation can be seen in the position of table servers. Women and men were assigned different responsibilities and to different geographical locations. The logic of these assignments can be understood and justified through the understanding of gender. For example, two men were appointed to be shift leaders of table servers in the hall area, whereas four women were appointed as shift leaders of table servers in the private room/compartment area. As manager Tang explained, the reason for this gendered arrangement was that more physically demanding work was required in the hall area than in the compartment areas and male table servers were considered to be physically stronger than female table servers.

The decision regarding whether to allocate a table server to the hall area or to the compartment area was made by shift leaders and managers. In general, customers dining in the compartment area had more purchasing power and were more likely to order expensive dishes. Table servers working in the compartments were required to be more docile, diligent and attractive so that they could provide VIP customers with better service. By contrast, table servers in the hall area were deemed lazier and less attractive by shift leaders, although they earned the same wage. Women were considered more docile and so were more likely to be assigned to the compartment area.

Intra-job gender segregation also existed for the position of bartender. The arrangement of bartenders varied not only by gender but also by age and marital status. As shown in Table 4, there were nine bartenders. All four staff at the alcohol bar were men with an average age of 21, and three of them were single, whereas all five workers at the fruit

and fresh juice bar were married women aged 33.5 on average. The daily work at the alcohol bar involves preparing drinks for customers. These bartenders do not have direct contact with customers. When drinks are ready, table servers fetch them. The position of bartender also requires workers to carry heavy bottles from the storeroom to the bar. Men are considered more capable of doing this. Similar to bartenders at the alcohol bar, workers at the fruit and fresh juice bar do not have direct interaction with customers. The daily work in the fruit and fresh juice bar involves preparing fresh fruit and freshly squeezed juice for customers, so workers need to pay extra attention to hygiene. The fruit bar has to be sterilised every few months and this will be done more frequently in the summer. Women are considered more careful and therefore more suitable for this work. As Dajie, bartender on the fruit and fresh juice bar, put it: 'women are more attentive, they are better at dealing with hygiene.' The fruit and fresh juice bar and the alcohol bar are on different floors. This division of labour suggests spatial segregation and variations in responsibilities by gender, age and marital status.

Similar to bartenders, the job of pantry helper was also marked by differences in gender, age and marital status. Pantry helpers (*chuancai yuan*) connect the rear of house (kitchen) with the front of house (dining area). They deliver dishes from two kitchens (located on the second and third floors) to the dining area, hand over dishes to table servers, and collect used dishes after customers leave.⁷² They are categorised as staff in the public area in the thesis because they are supervised by public area managers rather than kitchen managers. Male pantry helpers significantly outnumbered female ones. 85% of the pantry helpers were men. As a result, *chuancai yuan*, although literally a gender-neutral word, strongly connotes a male pantry helper. The average age of male pantry helpers was 24, and 72.4% of them were single. By contrast, the average age for female pantry helpers was 31 and 80% of them were married and illiterate and thus unable to do waitressing work because table servers must be able to read and write.

Regarding inter-job gender segregation, as Table 4 indicates, all the hostesses, cashiers and cleaners were women. Hostesses are based at the reception desk and are responsible for showing customers to tables, answering the telephone, selecting dishes for customers with reservations based on their budget, giving out receipts for customers, and dealing with administrative tasks. The average age of hostesses was 25, and five out of seven were married. Cashiers are those who process bills. With an average age of 26,

⁷² The kitchen on the third floor cooks cold dishes and dim-sum. The second floor kitchen cooks hot dishes.

two out of five cashiers were married. Cleaners (*a yi*) clean the dining areas, kitchens and toilets. Their average age was 43. 'A yi', which means 'aunt' in Chinese, connotes female gender and advanced age. It is a name extended to cleaners and domestic workers. In this restaurant, cleaners were called 'a yi' because all the cleaners were married women born in the 1960s and 1970s.

Job assignment reflects the preferences of the managers and the personal choices of the workers themselves, in both of which gender norms and gendered subjectivity play important roles. Certain jobs were labelled only suitable for a specific gender by the managers and by the workers themselves. Usually women tended to be allocated to positions considered women's work, such as table server, cleaner and hostess, whereas men tended to be allocated to pantry helper because it was considered a man's job. Regarding the employees' own choices, the workers chose the jobs that matched their gendered subjectivity. For example, Hushao said that he chose to be a pantry helper when he first came to the restaurant as he took it for granted that 'men are born to do physical labour.' By the same token, female table server Yadong said: 'table server is not a man's job. Women are more suitable because women were born to be more attentive.'

The majority of workers in the restaurant had gendered explanations for the allocation of roles. This phenomenon is in accordance with the literature, which suggests that both women and men tend to choose jobs congruent with their gender identities (Perrons, 2009). There have been many parallels between gendered patterns in China and elsewhere, illustrating that gender norms seem in some ways to be cross-cultured (Acker, 1990; Hanser, 2007; P. C. Lan, 2003; Perrons, 2009; Tilly, 1998). The discussion on gender segregation in job arrangement foreshadows the formation of the feminised workplace, which is discussed later in this section.

Another group of workers in the public area is part-time workers. The restaurant recruits part-time workers for the jobs of table server and pantry helper because of labour scarcity. Although the jobs are described as part-time, these workers usually have to work a whole day. Before 2012, the restaurant mostly recruited part-time workers during the summer and the Spring Festival. Due to the continuing labour scarcity, the recruitment of part-time workers has been routinised. As far as I know, all the part-time workers were from rural areas outside Shanghai; they got their jobs either through connections or via job-search websites. Part-time workers were a very heterogeneous

group in terms of their educational level, age and birthplace. Turnover among this group was extremely high. Some worked for a week or even a day and then disappeared. I decided not to include this group in my study because it was so transient and varied that it would have been difficult to provide a representative account of this group.

It is notable that the restaurant chain was co-owned by three male Shanghainese entrepreneurs who occasionally visited the restaurant where I worked. I was unable to include them in my research, however, as they were unwilling to be interviewed.⁷³

4.1.2 The hierarchical workplace

My analysis of job hierarchy is based on promotion opportunity and wage of restaurant jobs. The public area was a hierarchical place because some jobs were better than others due to better prospects for promotion and higher pay. Regarding the prospects for promotion, table servers had more chance to move up than other positions in the public area because table servers had the highest share of shift leaders, in other words, they had more chance of gaining junior management experience; and also because the three positions at the managerial level were chosen from the pool of table servers, as noted earlier in this section. By contrast, staff in other positions had few chances to be promoted to either shift leader or the managerial positions; even with many years of service, upward mobility was very constrained. Of all the positions in the public area, pantry helpers had the lowest share of shift leaders. In January 2012, only 2.8% (one out of 36) of pantry helpers was a shift leader, and the figure was 6.7% (one out of 15) for cleaners, the second lowest figure, suggesting the insignificance of these jobs.

Wage is also suggestive of job hierarchy. Wage varies by job position and related to job prestige, as discussed in Section 4.14 in this chapter. As demonstrated in Table 4, the basic monthly wages of a pantry helper were 200 yuan (£20) lower than table servers, second lowest to a cleaner, who earned £10 per month less than a pantry helper.

The marginal status of pantry helpers and cleaners is reflected in the discussion above. Their roles were not considered as important as that of table server. According to Table 4, 65.9% (29 out of 44) of all the male workers in the public area were pantry helpers,

⁷³ Manager Tang had been working in the restaurant for 10 years. She said the owners trusted her very much. She had meetings with the owners every two weeks. The owners were very responsive to the market and made strategic transformations to the restaurant chain very often. I heard that the bosses had made huge profits from this restaurant. For instance, they own a Porsche SUV, a Mercedes Benz, and other luxurious cars. Despite this, they didn't give their managers much of a share of the benefits; as shown in Table 4, the wages of the chief manager were 6000-7000 yuan (£600-700) per month in January 2012.

whereas 45.3% (34 out of 75) were female table servers. The fact that women were overrepresented among table servers and men were overrepresented among pantry helpers helps to explain why women earned on average more than men in the public area of the restaurant. It may be their position, rather than their gender, that held these pantry helpers back. Interestingly, my analysis of job hierarchy and their perception of job hierarchy were different, accounting for why a cleaner had higher prestige than a pantry helper. This will be discussed in Section 4.14.

4.1.3 Feminised workplace

In this part, I demonstrate why the workplace was feminised. Feminisation in this thesis refers to the trend towards greater employment of women in the workplace. Based on Table 4, women outnumbered men in the public area of the restaurant, where 63% (75/119) of the staff were women. There are two possible reasons for this. The first relates to job assignment, which occurred according to the preferences of the managers and the personal choices of the workers themselves, in which gender norms and gendered subjectivity play a significant part. Job assignment was considered in the previous section. The other crucial reason is that migrant workers were not entitled to paid maternity leave, so employers had no reason to discriminate against them.

The state council launched ‘Regulations on Special Labour Protection for Female Employees’ in 2012, aiming to safeguard all female workers regardless of their *hukou* status (The State Council, 2012). When female employees become pregnant, they are in theory granted 98 days of maternity leave on full salary. However, China often has had a high standard of law at the level of central government but low enforcement at local government level (B. Dong, 2007; M. E. Gallagher, 2004). The special regulations had not reached this restaurant during my last stay in the field in April 2014. My observations suggest that once migrant women found themselves pregnant, the most common pattern was to quit work, give birth in the home village then return to Shanghai to resume the same job or find another job. Although pregnancy was one of the most common reasons for female worker turnover, it seemed that it was not a concern for the employers and they did not try to persuade the women to remain.

In informal sectors in China, the lack of basic social benefits has been widespread (Bärnighausen, Liu, Zhang, & Sauerborn, 2007; Nielsen, Nyland, Smyth, Zhang, & Zhu,

2005; L. Sun, 2003; Chaoming Wang, 2005).⁷⁴ Employees in the informal sector are not usually entitled to social benefits. The scarcity of social welfare is also supported by the nationwide survey conducted in 2006 by the All-China Women and Children Protection Coordinating Group (2006). All the informants were migrant workers. More than half of the informants worked in the informal sector without receiving sufficient benefits. It is less likely for informal sector employers to pay maternity leave to female migrant workers than formal sector employers. Paradoxically, this unfair treatment of migrant workers is not altogether a disadvantage; it reduces their on-costs relative to non-migrants, thus increasing their chances of being hired, a finding which is corroborated by Zhang and Shi (2006).

4.1.4 Job hierarchy and prestige

Having shown how the workplace was feminised by focusing on why women were more numerous than men, I now turn to the reasons why women were predominant in positions with higher job hierarchy status and with higher prestige. Job hierarchy refers to the ranking of jobs based on pay and prospects for promotion, whereas job prestige refers to the ranking of jobs according to workers' perception. Job prestige can be inconsistent with job hierarchy, but they do overlap. In Section 4.1.2, I discussed job hierarchy and found that women were more likely to occupy higher-level positions. Regarding job prestige, my interviews and observations suggested that the workers perceived a hierarchy, though one without clear boundaries; it was difficult to accurately measure workers' perceptions of the job hierarchy. But it is safe to say that the position of hostess was perceived as superior to other positions, whereas a pantry helper was perceived as being of significantly lower status than other positions. Interestingly, my analysis of job hierarchy and how the workers perceived the job hierarchy were different. Although pantry helpers and cleaners were both at the bottom of the job hierarchy, the prestige of cleaners was not perceived by the workers to be as low as that of pantry helpers. This can be explained by feminine morality, which will be discussed in the next section. For the jobs of cleaner, bartender, cashier and table server, I observed no obvious difference in prestige.

⁷⁴ Regarding the definition of informal labour, according to the International Labour Organisation (2003), 'Employees are considered to have informal jobs if their employment relationship is, in law or in practice, not subject to national labour legislation, income taxation, social protection or entitlement to certain employment benefits (advance notice of dismissal, severance pay, paid annual or sick leave, etc.)'. According to this definition, workers in the Meteor can be considered informal labour because their employment was not subject to the Labour Law and they were not entitled to benefits such as sick leave and annual leave.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, all the hostesses (*Yingbin*) were female; they work at the reception and are responsible for guiding customers to tables, selecting dishes for customers with reservations, and doing some administrative work. Female table server Yue pointed out that one has to be smart to be a hostess, because a hostess has to remember the price of each dish. When customers with a reservation come to the restaurant prior to the dinner and pre-order dishes for group dining, sometimes they merely give a budget without indicating specific preferences. In these circumstances, it is up to a hostess to put together an appropriate selection of dishes for customers in a very short time, so a hostess has to be familiar with all the prices. Furthermore, some staff stated that a hostess has to be beautiful because she also acts as a receptionist, the first employee customers encounter when entering the restaurant. The comments of smart and beautiful were compliments, suggesting hostesses' high prestige.

By contrast, pantry helpers were not only at the bottom of the job hierarchy, but also on the lowest rung regarding job prestige. Pantry helpers Lu and Huangmao considered their status to be at the bottom and 'even lower than table servers', reflecting the view that table server was a low-status job, but pantry helper was even lower. Pantry helper Hushao managed to move to the position of table server. When asked why he changed positions, he answered:

As human beings, we should have the sense of uplift (*shangjin xin*)' . . . I was silly (*sha li sha qi*) at that time, (I thought) men are born to do physical labour (*tili huo*). But I didn't get along well with the shift leader, and being a table server is better than being a pantry helper, so I asked the manager several times to (help me) change job . . . finally manager Lv agreed.

The claim that being a table server was better than being a pantry helper was also made by pantry helper Yong. As he put it:

Table servers are unenterprising, pantry helpers are even more unenterprising. Some pantry helpers have worked here for 11 years, the monthly wages are merely two thousand . . . table servers have the opportunity to interact with customers.

As shown in Table 4, the wages of a table server were 2100 yuan in 2012, 200 yuan higher than the wages of pantry helpers. In Hushao's view, being enterprising or not was measured by wage and the chance to communicate with the customers. The view that wage was a primary means of assessing one's degree of enterprise was shared by many workers.

As I have noted in this section, more often than not, pantry helpers were assumed to be men. Although in general pantry helpers were considered lower in both prestige and hierarchy, a more complicated picture emerges if gender is considered. Once, when I told cashier Peng that I would dine out with the pantry helpers, without mentioning their gender, she said, ‘I don’t mean to be aloof and arrogant, but hanging out with pantry helpers is like mixing (yourself) in the mud.’ She just took for granted that the pantry helpers I referred to were men because of the fact that 85% of them were men. Mud is constructed as dark, cheap and disgusting, and the metaphor vividly illustrates the view of male pantry helpers held by many female workers: incapable of making money and unpleasant to associate with. The stigmatisation reflects that the female workers’ expectation of their male peers was inconsistent with the male pantry helpers’ job status in the restaurant. Gender hierarchy intersected with job hierarchy, accounting for the low prestige of male pantry helpers. However, some pantry helpers would not want to become table servers, even though pantry helpers were on the lowest rung in hierarchy and prestige in the public area of the restaurant. Equally interesting, although pantry helpers and cleaners were both at the bottom of the job hierarchy, the prestige of cleaners were not perceived being as low as pantry helpers. The reasons for these findings will be explained in the next two sections.

4.2 Gendered subjectivity

Having looked at the feminised workplace, I now explore gendered subjectivities of the workers in the public area. The female and male workers had conspicuously different subjectivities, influenced by gender hierarchy, job status, *hukou* status, and so on. Apart from the previous discussion that the characteristics such as attentive, caring and considerate were internalised by the female workers themselves, feminine morality was another visible trait of their subjectivity. By contrast, the male workers demonstrated low self-esteem and were aware of their disadvantaged status in society.

4.2.1 Feminine morality at work

In this part, I deal with how the women’s subjectivity was expressed at work. The female workers were less likely to feel inferior when doing restaurant work, because their primary subjectivity was linked to their status as mothers, making their work identity less significant. This is exemplified by cleaner Xia’s case.

Xia was born in south Shanxi province in the 1960s. The land there was sandy and infertile; they could only grow peanuts. Each peasant was allocated one acre of land. The summer of 2012 was not a productive season in that area. Her family invested 11 thousand yuan (£1100) but only harvested produce worth 9000 yuan (£900), on top of which their pigs got swine fever. To make matters worse, Xia's 18-year-old daughter caught a serious disease. Ten thousand yuan was spent on medical treatment. In need of money, Xia decided to *dagong*. She was guided to Shanghai by her neighbour from the same village. It was her first time migrating out. She said:

I cannot migrate until my children grow up. Now my mother-in-law is too old to farm, so she can take care of my children instead. . . . As long as my parents-in-law are able to take care of the children, I will *dagong* (work as wage labour). I won't stop working until I have to go back. . . . My biggest wish is that my children's lives will be easier than mine. . . . I will try to fund them as long as they want to study.

The reason she stayed in the home village until this point was the same as her motivation for migrating: her children. Female pantry helper Xiaoxiao felt the same, stating: 'all parents earn money for their children . . . we couldn't afford two children's tuition fees if we did not migrate. We *dagong* for a better life for our children.'

Many working mothers worried about the increasingly estranged relationship between themselves and their children. As Xiaoxiao said: 'When I went back to the *laojia* (home village), my son said: "You are a foreigner. . . this house only has me and my grandma!"' Female bartender Jieyang added that when she came back, her son was no longer accustomed to her accompany: 'I slept with my child in the night. He woke up in the night and hit me, telling me to get out. When I was about to leave for Shanghai, my son was utterly emotionless.'

In casual conversation, these working mothers were more willing to talk about their expectations and worries regarding their children and husband than their work. What they expressed demonstrates their concerns: the tension with their children and their sense of helplessness when trying to deal with their generational relationships. Their concerns expressed a sense of feminine morality, which was also found by Lee (1995) based on her research with female migrant workers in factories in south China. She argued that 'they have invested a strong sense of feminine morality in this identity as matron workers whose hard lives they accept for the cause of their families' and children's welfare' (p. 162). The focus on family life instead of work life in casual

conversation characterises the female restaurant workers' subjectivity with this sense of feminine morality and suggests their perception of their primary role as mothers.

As illustrated in Table 4, most of the female staff in the public area were working mothers.⁷⁵ All the cleaners and female pantry helpers were less well-educated and less well-paid than hostesses and table servers, but few of them expressed low self-esteem as male workers usually did. Although the female workers understood that the job was positioned as one of the lowest in society in terms of reputation and wage, the primary reason why these working mothers did not express low self-esteem was that their work gave them a sense of feminine morality. Their subjectivity was relational, prescribed by their role as mothers. Their role as workers was understood as a supplementary aspect of their subjectivity. This role enabled them to make economic contributions to their households, a bonus addition to their primary subjectivity as mothers.

Overall, the working mothers treated their jobs as a means of providing regular remittances to send to their families. Though worried about their relationships with their children, the mothers spoke of the work they performed in a language of morality and relatively high self-esteem. Nonetheless, their most conspicuous sense of subjectivity remained 'mother' rather than 'worker', which indicates their internalisation and expression of gender norms: women being more concerned with the private and men with the public. Presumably working fathers worked for their children as well, but the working mothers made it more explicit.

4.2.2 Negative subjectivity of the male workers

As discussed in Chapter 1, the workers had to work long hours; their wage was only slightly above half the average wage in Shanghai; and their living conditions were rudimentary. They were on the lowest rung regarding social and economic status. I found that the low social position had a more obvious impact on the male pantry helpers and table servers than the females. They held negative views on the jobs they were performing, on their own abilities, and on their future. In addition, the desire to be wealthy was widespread.

Some male pantry helpers despised their jobs explicitly. Xiao Wang, a team leader of pantry helpers, claimed: 'pantry helper is a *laji gong* (trash job) and I cannot understand

⁷⁵ This was in sharp contrast with busboys in the US context regarding gender, race and age, because busboys were usually young immigrant male workers of Latino origin (Jayaraman, 2011).

why “90 *hou*” (young people born after 1990) would take it’.⁷⁶ As he spoke he glanced at the young pantry helper standing next to us, but the young pantry helper stayed silent, listening to the music with an expression of indifference. ‘Trash job’ (*laji gong*) was frequently used by workers to devalue their job. Xiao Wang made his negative attitude towards manual work explicit on several occasions. Even in a daily meeting, he spoke about it openly: ‘Although pantry helper is not a job that’s worth treasuring, if one is doing it, it is important to take some pride in what one is doing and do it well.’

Some pantry helpers portrayed their work as ‘easy’ and said that it ‘does not use the brain’. Pantry helper Hu said in a similar way that it was ‘not a good job, no skill involved (*jishu hanliang*) at all’. By deprecating their jobs as non-skilled, the pantry helpers ignored the effort the job required. Some pantry helpers recalled the first couple of weeks of work as tiring, but noted that they soon got used to it. Through repetition, they became more capable of doing the job and developed more skill at it. Nevertheless, the adaptation to demanding physical work was not counted as a ‘skill’ by the workers themselves. Instead, they thought manual labour was natural for men. Hushao said that he chose to be a pantry helper when he first came to the restaurant because he took it for granted that ‘men are born to do physical labour.’ ‘Men are born to do physical labour’ reflects the social norm internalised by male workers. By labelling manual labour as natural and masculine, they devalued their job.

‘Muddle along’ (*hun rizi*) and ‘unenterprising’ are some other words often used by pantry helpers to depict this job and their state of being, suggesting that they perceived their job as meaningless and valueless. In addition, many of the pantry helpers had a sense of bewilderment and loss, which was reflected during a casual conversation when I asked some male pantry helpers what their dreams were.

Xiao Min: I have too many thoughts, I have no idea how to dream (*xiangfa tai duo, xiangxiang bulai*). . . . I don’t have the ability to change.

Ming Ge: Our dreams are just dreams, just bubbles, like making bubbles when we are dreaming.

Jia Chun: Ours is like one foot lifted without knowing where to put. (He lifted one foot, holding it dangling in the mid-air.) The road leads us to nowhere (*wulu kezou*).

⁷⁶ The position of team leader was an intermediate position between entry-level workers and shift leaders. The wages were in between as well. Of all the jobs in the public area, only pantry helpers have team leaders.

Bai Lian: Our roads lead to nowhere, but you have a bright future. Our future is thoroughly dark (*yipian heian*).

Xiao Min: Your dream will come true.

Bai Lian: I dream of winning the lottery, winning 12 million yuan, and then I will withdraw all the money and throw it on the bed, and I'm going to lie on the bed with money covering my body like duvet.

What Xiao Min said indicated that he did not have the ability to dream. Many of them did not have future plans, because in their perception, making plans without the ability to realise them only led to disappointment. They had a clear awareness that I was different from them because the likelihood of my dreams being realised was greater than theirs.

Sometimes they even felt ashamed of doing this job. Once I asked two experienced male pantry helpers how long they had worked here. Bai Lian replied: 'Please don't mention it. The more I think about it, the more unhappy I am.' They were not willing to mention how long they had been there, indicating their disdain for the job. Unable to find a better job, a sense of bewilderment and helplessness haunted them.

Some male pantry helpers revealed that they dreamed of being rich. Bai Lian vividly described how he wished he could win the lottery, how he would throw the money on bed and cover himself with it. The dream reflects his poor financial status, which was in sharp contrast with the wealthy customers dining at the restaurant. Pantry helper Yong was appalled by a rich male customer bragging about his wealth:

Yong: Many customers have conversations about how to make money from, say, real estate. They always talk about how to make money and what is the most profitable business, not like us discussing service jobs all the time, they talk about how to make money. Like that day in the VIP room on the fourth floor. There were seven men and two women. The host was very *diao* (*capable*), you know? He said he was running two companies and had bought four houses. He divorced his wife (*da laopo*), gave her 10 million yuan (£1 million) and gave each of his children a house, and then married a second time (*xiao laopo*). Both Qinqin and I overheard their conversation, Qinqin exclaimed to me: 'the man is so *you benshi* (capable of making money)!' And I exclaimed: 'OMG the man is soooo rich! He divorced his ex-wife but he still has two companies, two houses, and a BMW!'

Researcher: So you are very impressed?

Yong: Yes it's the most impressive story I have ever heard...He is a Shanghainese, guessing by his accent. He has two houses in Xujiahui, he should be Shanghainese. You see, both of his properties are houses (*bieshu*), he must be Shanghainese, otherwise he couldn't be that rich.

The topics that my informants were passionate about reflects their interests and desires. Yong narrated this story of the successful businessman with great excitement. Through daily contact with customers, Yong glimpsed the world of rich urbanites, a world he had never imagined. The host bragged about his wealth: houses, BMW, and two companies. Due to soaring housing prices in Shanghai, rural migrant workers would not even be able to buy a flat. Houses in the city centre such as *Xujiahui* made the host even more privileged. The speculation that ‘he must be Shanghainese, otherwise he couldn’t be that rich’ reflected Yong’s view that wealth was tied to *hukou* status, implying that wealth and *hukou* are interrelated, separating rich Shanghainese from poor rural migrant workers.

The desire to be rich haunted many male pantry helpers. When asked ‘What is meant by success?’ Pantry helper Ming Ge said: ‘Being rich is successful; winning five million on the lottery is successful.’ I replied: ‘Anything other than money?’ Pantry helper Bai Lian answered, ‘It’s all about money (*chu le qian haishi qian*).’ Some workers stressed harmonious family life and good health as measures of success, but male workers tended to associate success with economic rewards. Ming Ge and Bai Lian measured success solely by money, which connoted their desire to be rich, regardless of the approaches adopted to achieve this. Nevertheless, being at the bottom of the society, they had very limited opportunities to get rich. Bai Lian felt his future was dark and led nowhere, and being rich was beyond his wildest dreams. Under these circumstances, gambling was one of the few methods available to them of making a fortune; gambling will be discussed in Chapter 6.

A sense of inferiority was shared by both the male pantry helpers and the male table servers. *Di* (inferior) and *diceng* (bottom) were themes recurrent in their narratives, indicating a clear awareness of their existence as a bottom-level class in Shanghai. For instance, pantry helper Hu said:

Workers are scolded (*diao*) by shift leaders and managers . . . (I) feel like I am at the bottom level, without dignity . . . like an ant being trampled.

One day I even heard ‘bottom level of society’ (*shehui diceng*) used by three different male workers to describe their situation, suggesting the ubiquitous use of the phrase. A shift leader of the table servers, Xiaoping, said:

My parents think I live a good life in Shanghai, the villagers (*xiangqin*) think I am high-flying in Shanghai. Only I know that I am not doing well. Being a table server always feels like I am *diren yideng* (inferior to the others).

This low self-esteem was directly related to occupation. The sense of being at the bottom level of society was reflected in a large-scale quantitative study of mainly male workers which found that workers predominantly shared this view in 2013 (Gongzhong Research Centre & Remin University of China, 2013).

From what has been discussed in this section, the role of mother was represented by the female workers as their primary subjectivity and the role of worker as a supplementary subjectivity, whereas the subjectivity of the male workers was expressed as breadwinner who desired to achieve financial and career success. The gendered subjectivities echo the Chinese idiom that ‘men should be socially/publicly based, women should be family-oriented (*nan zhuwai nv zhunei*)’. According to the Third Survey on Women’s Status in China (2011), 61.6% of men and 54.8% of women agreed with this traditional saying. The figure had increased, by 7.7% and 4.4% respectively, since the Second Survey in 2000 (2001), which suggests that traditional gender roles prevail in contemporary China. *Nan zhuwai nv zhunei* indicates that men should take the role of breadwinner to feed the family, whereas women should serve the family. Nevertheless, the male workers’ desire to be successful was not accomplished, giving rise to their subordinated masculinity, which will be considered in the next section. The reason why most of the examples in this part are based on the experience of the male pantry helpers is that pantry helpers were more likely to express the desire to be rich and the feeling of being inferior.

4.3 Double discrimination

In this section, I begin with the dining procedure in the restaurant. The reasons why I put the dining procedure here are: first, to briefly explain how customers and workers interact and at what stage each category of workers becomes involved in the dining procedure. This information paves the way for a discussion of the conflict between female table servers and male pantry helpers and also customer-worker relationships. Second, both the job responsibilities and the dining procedure are somewhat different from the UK, making it necessary to contextualise the procedure for the reader who is not familiar with dining culture in China. In subsequent parts of this section, I consider two forms of discrimination in the public area of the Meteor Restaurant. The first form was the discriminatory attitudes of customers towards workers based on socioeconomic class and *hukou* status. The second form was the derogatory attitude of the female workers towards the male table servers and pantry helpers. The male workers

encountered discrimination both from customers and female workers, which I consider to be double discrimination.

Having introduced the responsibilities of each job in the public area in Section 4.1, I now focus on how workers cooperate with each other and how they interact with customers. As shown in Figure 9, the employee customers first encounter after entering the restaurant is a hostess at the reception desk close to the entrance. A hostess guides the customers to the dining area, after which the hostess reminds a table server that customers have arrived. The table server takes the customers' orders. A pantry helper collects the customers' food from the kitchens located on the second and third floors and brings the dishes to the table server; the table server then serves the dishes. Drinks are prepared by the bartenders in the alcohol bar or juice bar. When the drinks are ready, a table server fetches the drinks and serves them. Once the customers have finished their meal, the table server guides them to the checkout counter, where they pay a cashier. Finally, the hostess says goodbye to the customers as they leave.

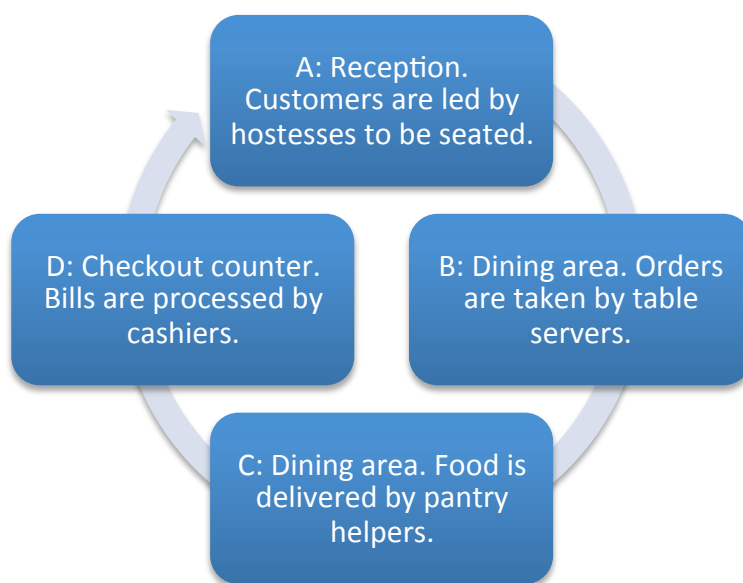


Figure 9 Flow chart of the dining procedure

Source: Fieldwork observation

4.3.1 Contempt of table servers from customers

The table servers were more likely to encounter denigration from customers, simply because of their frequent interaction. It should be noted that the fact that I focus on the

discriminative experience of the table servers does not necessarily mean that workers in other positions were not denigrated, but they had less chance to interact with customers.

Table server is the position involving the most frequent interaction with customers, and table servers frequently referred to the sense of being looked down upon. When I revisited the restaurant in December 2012, male table server Hushao told me that he was extremely angry with a female Shanghainese customer because she had treated him as though he were not a human being. When I asked for more detail, he was too angry to talk about it further. He said:

Shanghainese feels their status is different from others, like the emperor's relatives in the ancient time. Sometimes I feel they have that sort of mindset, that is, they treat us *dagong de* (migrant workers) not as human beings. They simply don't care about us.

Similarly, female table server Jie said: 'I'm not sure if it's just my own feeling or reality, but I feel like customers coming here look down upon table servers . . . they shout and scream when encountering anything they are not satisfied with.' Both female and male table servers complained about the impolite customers they came across, the male table servers were in general less tolerant of the work environment. I never heard the word 'tolerance' used by female table servers but heard it several times from male table servers. This may be because the women were more likely to focus on family issues, as discussed in the previous section on feminine morality, so would be relatively insensitive to the unsatisfactory situation at work.

By contrast, the male table servers stated that being tolerant ('*ren*' in Chinese) of the customers is part of their daily work. As male table server Ah Kui put it: 'Actually, I do not want to do catering, (I) cannot talk back and complain (to customers).' Similarly, male shift leader of the table servers Yulong said: 'However you "*diao*" by customers, you have to smile.' The verb '*diao*' was frequently spoken out by employees. '*Diao*', originally referring to penis, can be used both as verb and as adjective. For example, 'I *diao* by the manager' means I was scolded by the manager. 'He is very *diao*' means that he is intimidating and aggressive. This word was frequently used when they talked about daily life, suggesting the frequent occurrence of unpleasant situations. Male table servers such as Ah Kui understood that the conflicts arising from customer-client interactions were something they had to put up with. In addition, Yulong mentioned smiling, suggesting that the characteristics of emotional labour were embedded in table serving work. Emotional labour will be analysed as a form of coping strategy in Chapter

6. Similar to Yulong's account, Xiaoping, the other male shift leader of the table servers, mentioned in a daily meeting that even when exposed to public humiliation by customers, table servers had to tolerate it:

Customers who come here, to tell you the truth, most of them lack *suzhi* (quality). The customers who came the day before scolded me unreasonably. I was puzzled (*yunli wuli*). This customer came over and scolded me, and I stood there without saying anything. If he'd happened to encounter a cranky table server, they would have fought each other. That's not necessary. Bear it if you can. This is the nature of our job. No need to fight to the bitter end. If you irritate me, and I am right, that doesn't mean that I should fight back, really no need, is there? If the customers provoke you, that's fine, tolerate them. If the customers beat you, the restaurant will back you up. Don't fight with them, otherwise you are wrong even if you can justify yourself. So bear with it. If it doesn't work, and the customers make your life difficult, tell me and I will shift you to another position, all right?

Xiaoping considered that it was customers' low *suzhi* to blame for the conflicts. But delving deeper into the conflicts reveals that class and *hukou* disparities between customers and workers played an important role. This case shows that social class differences transcended gender similarities. The male customer used his class superiority to denigrate the male table server Xiaoping because of his 'inferior' class position and rural background.

The male workers' subordinated position did not conform to the ideal men. The situation paralleled the service sector in the UK and the US. The literature discussed how working class men were disadvantaged at entry-level service jobs that required obedience (Bourgois, 2002; Leidner, 1993; McDowell, 2009; Nixon, 2009). The workers' subordination is related to the multiple forms of masculinity discussed in Chapter 2. Dominant/hegemonic masculinities require a man to be assertive and confident (Leidner, 1993), whereas the subordinated masculinity of male service workers is constituted with 'humiliating interpersonal subordination', a concept coined by Bourgois (2002, p. 141) in which working-class men's masculinity is undermined in interpersonal communication.⁷⁷ The male table servers' masculinity was undermined by this low-end service job. The need to be subservient to customers partly explains why turnover among male table servers was significantly higher than among their female peers, and the discrimination they experienced gave rise to their behaviour of coping and resistance, which will be discussed in Chapter 6.

⁷⁷ Bourgois did fieldwork on drug dealers in the US. Some dealers who tried office jobs found themselves unable to accommodate the dominant office culture. These men felt humiliated and subordinated by interacting with white-collar workers, which reflects their differences of gender, class and ethnicity.

Interestingly, although table server positions were relatively more prestigious and higher-paid than pantry helper jobs, few of the male pantry helpers applied to become table servers. Some male pantry helpers stated that they did not want to serve others and be subservient in tone and manner (*di sheng xia qi*), so they chose to remain pantry helpers. These pantry helpers knew they earned less than male table servers, but accepting a lower socioeconomic status allowed them to feel that they preserved some aspects of their masculinity.

4.3.2 Peer contempt of male workers

The second form is reverse gender discrimination. The male table servers and pantry helpers were denigrated by the female workers because both jobs were considered unenterprising. The fact that the restaurant was a workplace in which both female and male staff in these different hierarchical and gendered positions worked in close proximity to each other and often depended on each other rendered the denigration more visible.

The male pantry helpers and table servers did not meet the social expectation of what the female workers considered an ideal man, therefore they were discriminated against by female workers. The view that men should be enterprising and be breadwinner was not only shared by the male workers themselves but by their female peers. For instance, cashier Peng thought that men over 22 years old who were still stuck in the restaurant were unenterprising. Female table server Zhuang pointed out: ‘men are more suited to management’. However, management was not a choice available to the male workers due to their low educational attainment and migrant status.

Mei chuxi (unenterprising, no future) was a recurrent phrase used by both male and female workers to describe these male pantry helpers and table servers, both of whom tended to be the focus of complaints made by female workers. For example, female table server Yue exclaimed: ‘How could *da nanren* (masculine men) be table servers?!’ And female table server Yadong thought ‘Men lose face by serving others.’ Female shift leader of the table servers Tang said: ‘It’s *mei chuxi* for a man to be a table server.’ Tang’s perception was prescribed by the social expectation for men. The female workers expected the male colleagues to match up to the ideal. Those men who subverted the gender norm incurring the risk of losing face and were stigmatised as *mei chuxi*.

Male bartender Kuo added: 'It's *mei chuxi* for a man to be a table server, but it's fine for a woman.' The belief that being a table server was fine for a woman shared by female workers. Male table server Ah Kui criticised his female colleague Zhuang for being *mei chuxi*. Zhuang replied: 'I am not a man, why do I need *chuxi* (a promising future)?' Her statement reflected her own low ambition while expecting men to be ambitious and enterprising. Female workers were free from the *mei chuxi* discourse imposed on male workers. Emphasising the man's role as breadwinner reinforced women's traditional role as mother. By upholding the dominant position of certain men, these female workers devalued the male table servers who did not conform to the hegemonic image while at the same time reinforcing their femininity by indicating that serving is a woman's job and women would not lose dignity when doing it. The emphasis on femininity also underlined the view that women are docile and therefore comfortable with subordinate status.

The male pantry helpers were considered as unenterprising as the male table servers, if not more so. Female pantry helper Xiaoxiao got her job first and was then followed by her husband. According to Xiaoxiao, her husband, who was also a pantry helper, was not ambitious (*mei shangjinxin*). *Mei shangjinxin* is a similar expression to *mei chuxi*, which literally means a lack of uplift motivation. Xiaoxiao was eager to move out and urged her husband to go with her. The fact that she took the initiative to migrate and then complained her husband was *mei chuxi* is in accordance with Reichert's (1982) findings that those men who do not attempt to migrate are sometimes considered unenterprising and lazy.

I interviewed Xiaoxiao twice. I carried out the first interview in April 2012, during which she complained about her husband being *mei shangjinxin* (unenterprising) and announced that she was thinking of divorcing him. Fifteen months later, at the second interview, she was no longer considering divorce because she did not want her children living in a separate family, but she still complained about her husband:

All parents earn money for their children. . . . I expect him to find another job. As a man he should do something and take responsibility for the family. Otherwise what would the children think of their father? (I) don't want our children to be mocked for having an unpromising (*mei chuxi*) father. But he cannot understand what his wife is thinking.

'He should do something' implies that she thought he was doing nothing meaningful. She stressed that other people would blame their children for having a useless father.

She told me that she expected her husband to set up a small business. I asked why she didn't run a business herself. She did not answer the question directly but said: 'He's an only child and is very introverted, he cannot adapt to a new environment properly, like, he won't ask questions but works silently. Wherever I go, he follows.' Xiaoxiao gave examples to illustrate the uselessness of her husband:

I am in charge of money, but sometimes he buys stuff without consulting me. One day last year he bought a mobile phone but wasn't happy with it the next day. I advised him to change to a new one. He asked me to accompany him, but I refused. He then smashed the phone and bought a new one. Sometimes he drinks alone. I have to buy food and cook and do housework. He does nothing!⁷⁸

She maintained that her husband was petulant, introverted, capricious and occasionally violent, not even willing to change a mobile phone by himself. The reason he was not happy to go alone was not clear to me. It might have been his timid personality or his perception that it was his wife's responsibility to accompany her. Smashing the phone suggests his anger, helplessness and fierce emotion. Although doing the same job, Xiaoxiao complained that her husband was 'unenterprising'. This underlined the perception that women doing pantry help work was acceptable, whereas men doing the same work was considered unenterprising. Her husband-blaming narrative resembles 32 year-old woman's account of her husband's migrant experience during an interview conducted by Fan (2004):

He is unskilled and can only do manual work. He is impatient and has a bad temper, and he cannot tolerate the tough life of migrants...The past several years the money he made from migrant work wasn't enough to pay for his food, cigarettes, and drinks. Even he himself admits that he is useless. (p. 202)

The woman considered her husband to be unskilled, bad-tempered, useless and lacking the ability to save money, which echoed Xiaoxiao's view of her own husband. The male workers' masculinity would be undermined if they could not meet the expectations of the female workers in the restaurant.

The female workers' contempt for male pantry helpers was intensified by frequent work encounters. Pantry helpers deliver dishes from the kitchen to table servers in the public area, so cooperation between table servers and pantry helpers is vital to both sides. Most pantry helpers pointed out that the difficulty at work was female table servers'

⁷⁸ I tried to interview Xiaoxiao's husband Gao in 2014. He appeared very introverted. He answered the questions in a succinct way. The information I got from him was insufficient to compare and contrast with what Xiaoxiao told me.

uncooperative attitude, not the physically demanding nature of their work. Pantry helper Hua explained the situation in the hall area:

Female table servers should take dishes from us and deliver them to customers as soon as possible. But it occurs very often that when I come over, the female table servers just pretend not to see me. I shout several times but they just ignore.

Regarding cooperation between pantry helpers and female table servers in compartments, he said:

Sometimes the door of a compartment is closed (in order to ensure the privacy of customers inside), and I can only hold so many dishes at a time. It is impossible to open the door. I shout at the door, trying to call the table server, but no one answered. Finally I manage to open the door and once I open it, I find the female table server's just inside! You can imagine how angry I was!

Pantry helper Yong echoed Hua's sentiment, indicating that sometimes the pantry helpers were forced to stand holding dishes while the female table servers chatted, pretending to ignore the male pantry helpers and shirking their responsibilities. Yong complained about it several times to shift leaders. Later on, the situation improved but the improvement only lasted for a couple of days. The way in which Yong and Hua were treated indicates the female table servers' slack attitude toward their own jobs as well as an indifferent attitude toward the pantry helpers. Female table servers' negative perceptions of the pantry helpers led to uncooperative behaviour at work.

As demonstrated in the dining procedure, staff in different hierarchical and gendered positions work in close proximity and often depend on each other. Pantry helpers have to wait for table servers to collect the dishes, which give rise to conflict. Not being respected enough, because of their subordinated position, male pantry helpers were at the bottom of the restaurant hierarchy and were more likely to be denigrated by their female colleagues.

The male table servers and pantry helpers were more likely to be looked down upon in different ways. The male table servers were denigrated by customers and the servers considered it unbearable. Their rural identity and lower socioeconomic status render them subjects of discrimination by urban residents. In other words, the intersection of gender, class, and *hukou* contributes to their discrimination. By contrast, pantry helpers were more likely to be denigrated by female workers because of the inconsistency between gender hierarchy in society and job hierarchy at work.

The fact that the male pantry helpers were more likely to be denigrated by female workers did not mean that the male table servers were not denigrated. Female workers, especially female table servers, held derogatory attitudes towards male table servers and pantry helpers. But female table servers themselves were discriminated against by customers because of their rural *hukou* and relatively low job status. These different forms of discrimination added to the complexity of the workplace.

Chinese society emphasises men's ability to make money and have power, which are conceptualised as important aspects of hegemonic masculinity in Chapter 2. For migrant men in entry-level positions in this feminised restaurant, masculinity was subordinated. For the male workers, hegemonic masculinity was an ideal that could be pursued but hardly ever achieved. I argue that the discrepancies between the subordinated masculinity of the men on the lower restaurant rungs and normative/hegemonic masculinity reflects male migrant workers' difficult lives in Shanghai.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter explored how gender operates at work. In Section 4.1, I examined a gendered, hierarchical and feminised workplace. In Section 4.2, I explored the expression of gendered subjectivities. In Section 4.3, I discussed the denigration of table servers by customers and of male table servers and pantry helpers by female workers. I noted that the workplace had intra- and inter-gender segregation; it was also feminised and hierarchical, women often occupying higher positions with higher prestige. Some men were disadvantaged in the public area of the restaurant, upending gender norms that expect men to be in superior position.

The chapter identified various tensions and discontinuities. The inconsistency of the job hierarchy, with its gendered hierarchy, social class and *hukou*, made the migrants' working lives complex. I conclude my analysis of the discontinuities and tensions with three points.

First, I noted a discontinuity between job hierarchy, given that male pantry workers were in a disadvantaged position, and gender hierarchy in society as a whole, given that men are usually superior. A primary difference between the restaurant and many other working environments is that, in the restaurant, workers in these different hierarchal and gendered positions work in close proximity and often depend on each other. The table servers were superior to the pantry helpers. The majority of the table servers were

women and they could be unpleasant to the male pantry helpers. This was exemplified by the conflicts in the dish-delivering process.

Second, the intersection between social class and *hukou* means that the workers have lower status than the customers. Table servers, who had the most frequent interactions with customers, were mistreated by customers. The female table servers who denigrated the male workers were themselves being disrespected by customers.

Regarding worker-customer relations: on the one hand, the table servers were placed in the inferior position to the customers in the sense that the customers felt that they could mistreat both the female and male table servers. But on the other hand, some of the table servers thought the customers did not have *suzhi* because of their derogatory attitude towards the table servers. The *suzhi* discourse will be further elaborated upon in Chapter 6.

Third, I pointed to the discontinuity of social class/*hukou* and gender hierarchy. Although male table servers were not in an inferior position in terms of job hierarchy and prestige in the restaurant, their social and economic status was nevertheless extremely low. As a result, they were denigrated by female workers, because the female workers expected the men to conform to the masculine ideal of being enterprising and capable of making a fortune.

The discontinuity between social class/*hukou* hierarchy and gender hierarchy also contributed to the male pantry helpers' low self-esteem. They felt inferior because they were incapable of meeting the social norm of being financially successful, the breadwinner, whereas the female workers did not appear to have a sense of inferiority, mainly because they foregrounded their feminine subjectivity of motherhood rather than financial success.

Interestingly, although pantry helpers were on the lowest rung in the public area regarding job hierarchy and prestige, some pantry helpers did not want to be table servers. These men associated masculinity with being non-deferential, but the table server role involved being deferential, which contradicted their understanding of masculinity. These pantry helpers did not want to become table servers because they thought table service would infringe upon their understanding of themselves as men.

This chapter sought to demonstrate the complex ways in which the workplace was formed, the workers' experiences were differentiated, and the migrants' subjectivities

were shaped. In the next chapter, this complexity will be deepened further by investigating the migrants' intimate relationships with partners and parents.

Chapter 5: Intimate relations with parents and partners: obedience, compromise and resistance

5.0 Introduction

Migration not only brings about changes to the migrants' working lives but also has a profound influence on their intimate relations with their partners and natal families. This chapter addresses the process of partner choosing and its relationship with their natal families and partners. The primary reason to examine intimate relations is that family members, including partners, are considered the most treasured aspects of life by my informants, according to the survey I conducted in 2012. Migrant workers are enmeshed in a web of different social roles. According to my findings, the workers tended to consider themselves in relation to other members in their families rather than as individuals; these findings are similar to those of Lin (2013) in his study of male migrant workers in Guangdong province. The idea that they are working for the wellbeing of the family encourage them to accept the tedium of daily work in Shanghai. For many of them, work is a means to an end, and the end is the family. It is therefore crucial to examine the migrants' interaction with partners and parents.

Migration brings not only a shift in geographical location but also changes in intergenerational and gender relations. In what follows, I discuss these changes separately. Regarding the shift in location, the post-migration pattern of residence can be viewed as temporal non-patrilocal, which refers to a mode of post-marital residence when a couple lives close to neither the husband's or the wife's natal family as well as to the mode taken up by adult children who separate from their parents before marrying. Traditionally, unmarried children would live with their parents until they married (although some parents continue to live with one of their sons after his marriage). Migration disrupts the conventional patriarchal way of living for both married and unmarried migrants.

Here I use the word non-patrilocal rather than neolocal because the latter is not capable of capturing the specific form of migrants' post-marriage residence. After marrying, my informants tried to establish nuclear families in new houses that were geographically close to the husband's natal family. However, the newlyweds rarely used the house, because they usually return soon after marriage to resume their work in Shanghai.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ In a lecture in January 2015 at the SOAS, Dr Liu Jieyu mentioned that she also observed this phenomenon when doing fieldwork in rural Hunan and Shandong Province in 2014.

Neolocal residence refers to a mode of post-marital residence where a couple lives separately from either the husband's or the wife's natal family. It can include the conventional patrilineal residence mode that the newlyweds live geographically close to the husband's natal family. By combining the terms temporal and non-patrilocal, I intend to highlight the fact that the married couple migrate to a place that is close to neither natal family, although this migration may only be a temporary period of their lives.

Because of the nature of the restaurant work, only limited vacations are provided. Employees are not allowed to visit their home villages during national holidays such as the Spring Festival, National Day or Labour Day. Work permits them to visit their home villages only very occasionally, which reinforces the pattern of non-patrilocality.

Migration also affects intergenerational and gender relations. The patrilocal mode of residence, an essential component of classic patriarchy, disappears, at least temporarily, which brings profound changes to the patriarchal practices of migrants. As argued in Chapter 2, both gender relations - in particular, men's overall power over women - and intergenerational relations - specifically, parental power over children - are the two axes of patriarchy. Migration brings transformation to both aspects, and migration affects different people in different ways.

In this chapter, I explore how both female and male migrants experienced intimate relationships after migration. To be more specific, how did they practise filial piety after migration? How were intimate relations gendered? How did constant negotiations with their families and partners reflect migrants' agency and subjectivity? Using individual examples, I examine these questions by focusing on both female and male migrants at different stages in life: looking for a partner, engaging in a relationship, and post-marriage life. Partner choosing and marriage negotiations are complicated and interactive processes. The variations of gender, age and marital status contribute to the different experiences and self-understandings of migrant workers. These issues all help to answer the overarching questions of how gender operated in everyday life, their gendered experiences, and how agency and subjectivity were represented and understood.

This chapter is divided into five sections. Through the case studies of Hushao, Ma, Yong and Ru Nan, the first section explores how both female and male migrants subjectivised the idea of filial piety as a moral principle to regulate their behaviour.

Section 5.2 focuses on the issues faced by male migrant Yong in finding a partner - how the soaring brideprice served as a burden to rural men such as Yong and how it affected their subjectivity as filial sons. Section 5.3 considers the conflicted experiences of unmarried female migrants in intimate relations and their resistance and obedience to parental power. The contradiction and conflict between being filial and pursuing romantic love are exemplified by the case of Zhenxiu. The coexistence of filial piety and resistance in her relationship with her parents reflects her complicated and confrontational subjectivity. Section 5.4 deals with the life of married women, with a strong focus on Yue's story. Yue's case shows how she negotiated conflict with both her parents and her partner in the marriage decision and highlights the contradictory status of married women. In Section 5.5, I consider the weakening of a husband's power and the constitution of his subordinated masculinity in intimate relations. These five sections discuss patriarchal practices after migration and how migrants' practices reflect their agency and subjectivity in line with gender, age and marital status. Through the lens of intimate relationships, the complexity and contradictions of their life experiences are exposed.

The reasons that I focus on these people in this chapter are as follows. First, their experiences were shared among my informants. The experiences, such as elopement, premarital pregnancy, negotiations with family and anxiety about partner finding, were themes recounted by the other workers. Second, these are clearly very important and even life-changing events. Third, I use the cases of these specific informants because they were articulate and willing to share their stories of happiness, struggle, bewilderment and trauma with me. Fourth, they illustrate how the different influences shaping people's subjectivity come together in different ways for people with different genders and marital status, yet all were shaped by the changing socioeconomic environment and all of them endured or challenged gendered social norms.

5.1 Responses to filial piety: Hushao, Ma, Yong and Ru Nan

Through the case studies of waiter Hushao and waiter Ma, pantry helper Yong, and waitress Ru Nan, this section demonstrates that both female and male workers subjectivised the filial obligations that prescribed their behaviours. Although all of them encountered confrontation and compromise from their parents on marriage decisions, their experiences were gendered.

Hushao was born in 1986. He discontinued his studies at 16 because his mother stopped sponsoring him despite his wish to continue. When asked, ‘Did you quarrel with her on this issue?’, he replied:

Living in rural areas, living in that environment, there was nothing worth quarrelling about, because you should *definitely respect* your parents (his emphasis), what they say is authoritative. How can I go against what my mother says?

He regarded his parents’ words as irrefutable and to be obeyed wholeheartedly, reflecting his beliefs about how to be a filial son. He was asked to meet women chosen by his parents and then married a woman he barely knew. He soon found that his wife was not willing to do housework. What frustrated Hushao even more was that she sent his money back to her natal family and sometimes cursed his mother. As a result, he told me, ‘I asked her to get out of the family, and we have been struggling for a divorce for two years.’ He regretted this marriage: ‘At that time my family pushed (*cui*) me. I didn’t want to get married so early. I wish I could get married *now* (his emphasis).’ Hushao appeared to be entirely obedient to his mother. His wife’s quarrel with his mother was one of the main factors that led to the end of the marriage, which shows his expectation for his wife to be filial as well.

Ma experienced family pressure as well. He was born in 1986 in rural Gansu province. Like Shaoshu, he married via an arranged match. One night in August 2012, when I was in London using QQ, one of the most popular online messaging applications in China, I noticed that Ma’s QQ signature status had changed to ‘sleepless, being a human being is tough, being a man is even tougher, but being a good man is more than tough’. At that time, he was still working at the Meteor, whereas his wife was seven months pregnant. She had quit her waitressing job at the Meteor and was in his home village waiting to give birth. I asked him if everything was all right. He told me that he was annoyed. During a phone call to him, she had vented her anger and asked him to come back home. He complained to me:

How can I make money to feed her if I go back? . . . She is so pig-headed she cannot get the point. . . . What can I do? I am tired to death. My heart is tired.

Clearly, Ma was extremely unsatisfied with his wife’s behaviour. According to the signature status, he wanted to be a ‘good man’, which reflected his masculinised subjectivity. Being a good man required him not only to be a breadwinner but also to be a considerate husband who could take care of his wife when needed. Nevertheless, the

complaints from his wife and the conflict between being a breadwinner and an attentive husband put him in a moral dilemma that exhausted him. This echoes the findings of Jankowiak and Li (in press), whose informants in the city of Hohhot in Inner Mongolia province agreed that it is ‘not easy to be a man’ because men are expected to provide both financial and emotional support to the family.

Romantic love is not an essential component of an arranged match. Like Hushao, Ma and his wife did not know each other well enough before they married. When I asked Ma if he loved his wife, he answered straightforwardly:

No! I didn’t think of myself but my parents when making the decision (on marriage). I want to die. . . . I’m forced (*bei qiangpo de*) . . . one should be cautious when making a marriage decision!

The claim ‘I’m forced’ and the warning ‘one should be cautious’ seem contradictory. ‘Forced’ implies he had no other choices, whereas ‘be cautious’ suggests the existence of agency and implies the potential to challenge parental authority. Nonetheless, Ma and Hushao were both obedient to their families, in practice and in their hearts. Although Hushao said he was ‘pushed’ (*cui*) by his family, whereas Ma adopted the word ‘forced’ (*qiangpo*), and both of them regretted marrying, neither of them explicitly blamed their parents for the unhappy marriages. Instead, they felt obliged to be obedient to their parents.

Ma’s comment indicates that he married only for the sake of his parents. The standard of ‘being a good man’ adds a new dimension of meaning here: marrying to be a filial son. As mentioned in Chapter 2, in China, marrying and having a child are analogous to ‘fulfilling the duty’ (Beynon, 2004; N. Zhang, 2013), which indicates that there are clear responsibilities a son has to fulfil. Sometimes natal families make every effort to assist their sons in finding a suitable wife. For instance, Yong’s family had been making every effort to help him to fulfil his duty. As he noted:

My family is anxious to death, you know what, all the women at my mum’s age have grandsons. Now all of my three older brothers have children so that she can embrace grandsons (*bao sunzi*), and I am the only one left. How can she not be anxious?

Bao sunzi implies a clear expectation for the gender of descendants. It connotes son preferences and the expectations for a son to have offspring to pass on the patrilineal line. Although the expectation is to embrace grandsons, marriage is an inevitable process to go through because children born outside wedlock in China have great

difficulty in obtaining *hukou* in either urban or rural China. Marriage is the only legal institution in which a couple can create and raise children.

Migration enabled Yong to postpone attending arranged matches. Although his parents had nagged him for years, he paid no attention. This process resulted in constant negotiation with his natal family. In 2012, when the Spring Festival was approaching, Yong's parents attempted to make him return home. When they were unable to reach him, they called his brothers instead. At that time, two of Yong's older brothers were also in Shanghai. They came to him every day, saying that their parents were 'worried to death' and urged him to return for marriage matches. Yong recalled, 'I was bothered to death and had no mood for work.' So he asked for leave from the restaurant to pay a visit back home. Despite migrating, Yong was still enmeshed in the power of parental control. He felt coerced by the family's expectation for him to marry. His relatives served as monitors and helped to enforce his parents' will when the parents themselves were far away. Finally, he yielded to his parents and went back to meet women. The arranged matches he experienced will be discussed in the next section.

All three of these male informants succumbed to parental authority with respect to their marriage decision, adhering to the principle of filial piety that functions to regulate people's thoughts and behaviour. These male workers' interactions with their natal families reflect the filial virtues of showing respect, being obedient and ignoring parents' faults (Cheung & Kwan, 2009). Filial piety or filial obedience encompasses not only the idea that one should give mental and financial support to parents, but also that one should marry and have a baby by a certain age. Yong told me that he was really anxious about being single at the age of 27, as it was very rare in his home village for a man still to be single by this age.⁸⁰ Most of my informants were married and had a baby soon after they turned 20. It seems that being single is conspicuous for both female and male migrant workers after the age of 25.

The timing of marriage varies by gender, class and *hukou* status. Although age may not be a constraint for a man of wealth and power seeking a partner, it may be an obstacle for men from rural areas. An online survey co-conducted by the dating website Jiayuan and the National Health and Family Planning Commission (2013) and consisting of 77,045 valid responses found that 70% of the 36,981 female respondents aged 18–25 preferred a man who was 10 years older than them as a partner—a phenomenon

⁸⁰ He was 27 during my visit in 2012.

described as *dashu kong* in China, which literally means uncle-mania (p.32). According to the survey, the reasons why these women were attracted to uncle figures included that a mature man ‘is more likely to take care of others’, ‘has a solid financial foundation’, ‘provides a sense of security’ and ‘tastes like real men (*you nanren wei*)’ (p.32).⁸¹

Dashu kong assumes that a *dashu* (uncle) is rich and mature and has a promising career path. The discourse of *dashu kong* has clear inclusions and exclusions with respect to class and *hukou*. Migrant men, even though physically mature, are excluded from the category of mature men because most of them do not ‘have a solid financial foundation’. *Chengjia liye* generally means marrying, and having a career is symbolic of men’s maturity. For unmarried migrant men who have neither abundant financial resources nor promising careers, growing old may function as a barrier to finding a partner (Q. Jiang & Sánchez-Barricarte, 2012). On the basis of a questionnaire survey in rural Anhui province, Attané et al. (2013) found that 71.6% of the unmarried rural male informants believed that a man’s chances of marrying became very slim after the age of 30 (p. 711). This resonated with the findings that male rural *hukou* holders with relatively low education levels were less likely to find partners (Hesketh & Xing, 2006; Q. Jiang & Sánchez-Barricarte, 2012; F. Wang & Mason, 2006); this is discussed in the next section.

As for female rural migrants, several of my informants recounted that they had experienced unfair treatment because of their parents’ son preferences, which corresponds with other research. Son preferences have been prevalent in many parts of China, especially in rural areas (L. Gao, 1993; X. Qiao, 2004; Yuan & Shi, 2005). Although they are being treated unfairly, some women still feel obliged to fulfil their filial obligations by sending back remittances and attending arranged matches as required. Ru Nan was one such woman. She was born in 1993. When I met her, I quickly noticed her first name, 茹楠 (*ru nan*), which has the same pronunciation as 如男, literally meaning ‘like a man’ in Chinese. It is very typical for a family to give this name to a first-born baby who happens to be female in the hope of having a boy for the second birth. I asked her whether her parents favoured her brother. She answered, ‘Of course.’ She said that her parents tended to give better food to her brother. However, she was reticent about disclosing more details about the son preferences of her parents.

⁸¹ The *hukou* status of the respondents were not specified

When I first met her in 2012, Ru Nan had been working as a waitress for three years and had been turning over all her savings to her mother. Her mother used the savings as tuition fees for her younger brother to attend high school and college. When asked why she did not continue to study, she simply said that it was because she was dumb (*ben*). She told me that she wanted to have her own savings, but her brother was a freshman at college and required a large amount of money. She reiterated on several occasions that she wished to save some money for herself. Nevertheless, considering her brother's situation, she understood that it was not possible to do so. Both her wages and those of her mother were saved for her brother's tuition fees and living expenses in Shanghai. I have come across quite a few cases in which a woman migrates and earns money for her brother's medical fees, tuition fees or betrothal gifts, but have never found a case that is the other way around.⁸² This echoes other findings (Fan, 2004; S. Tan, 2009): in the patriarchal family in China, a woman's money is more likely to be used to pay for her brother's tuition fees, housing and betrothal gifts in preparation for his marriage. By contrast, boys tend to use their money to build a house and save for their own betrothal gifts. A woman's patriarchal practices and filial obligations might persist after migration (Y. Jin, 2011; S. Tan, 2009). As a result, a migrant woman's ability to control her own life may be jeopardised.

I tried to console Ru Nan by saying, 'You can save money for your own once your brother graduates.' She responded, 'I will be getting married at that time!' The push by the family to marry was imposed on female migrants as well. Ru Nan's parents had been arranging matches for her. She went back to her home village for an arranged match at the end of 2012. The man's family is well off in his local village. Because she is short and dark-skinned, Ru Nan's father asked her to put insoles into her shoes so she would look taller and advised her to whiten herself with make-up for this match. He thought Ru Nan would 'lose face' if she were disliked by the man. In response to her father's advice, she piled up insoles in her shoes but did not whiten herself. It turned out that the man had a satisfactory level of interest in her but she had no feelings for him. Knowing that, her father felt pity. Ru Nan exercised agency by refusing this man, so she could postpone the timing of her marriage, and it would still be possible for her to save money for herself once her brother graduated.

⁸² When I presented this finding to the feedback meetings of the migrant workers in the restaurant in April 2014, they confirmed what I had found.

Ru Nan said that she had no plans for the future and that she did not know what the most important things in life were. It seemed that she was not living for herself. Her comments reflect how by fulfilling the duty of a responsible sister and a filial daughter, her personal ambitions and desires were subordinated to those of her family. Her relational role was defined as an older sister and a daughter in the family rather than as an individual. In regard to how migration affects rural girls and the patriarchal family, some Chinese scholars have found that through migration, although patrilocal residence is reducing, at least temporarily, patriarchy is still being perpetuated, albeit in transformed ways. Male preference and the male line of succession are still pervasive, and the denial of girls' rights is not uncommon (Y. Jin, 2011; Ma, 2003).

Although Ru Nan, Ma, Hushao and Yong were all affected by their families with respect to partner choice, Ru Nan's behaviour was in sharp contrast to the others. In one sense, refusal is a privilege reserved for unmarried women but not for unmarried men. The pressure on migrant men to maintain the patrilineal line renders them less likely to take the initiative in refusing a marriage proposal. This is related to these men's difficulties in finding a marriage partner, which is discussed in the next section.

5.2 Brideprice and bachelorhood: *ziji tan* versus *xiangqin*

This section examines how migrant men such as Yong were disadvantaged with respect to partner finding, which was in relation to the discussions on brideprice negotiation and subordinated masculinity. However, before I explicate Yong's case, it is important to explain the partner finding patterns of migrant workers. In what follows, I first discuss the patterns of homogamy and hypergamy, and then discuss the patterns of finding a partner on one's own and via arranged matches.⁸³

Some scholars have found that in contemporary China, women tend to marry husbands with higher social status, whereas a man tend to find a wife with lower or equal social status (Davin, 2005; Hesketh & Xing, 2006; Q. Jiang & Sánchez-Barricarte, 2012; A.

⁸³ Discussions on homogamy and hypergamy in China can be found in Yang (1959) and Parish and Whyte (1978). Hypergamy usually refers to a girl's marrying up with respect to family wealth, educational levels and income. Yang argued that the idea of homogamy was prevalent in the upper-class family, whereas lower-class women tended to marry up. Parish and Whyte (1978, p. 179) found that in rural Guangdong, men tended to marry women of the same class origin and ethnicity. In addition, men tended to marry women of similar or younger age and similar or lower educational attainment. The authors considered this homogamy.

Xu, 2000).⁸⁴ I consider most of my informants' marriage patterns homogamous because educational levels, *hukou* status and income between the two people in an arranged match or among married couples are very similar. I did not ask questions about family wealth because it seemed evident that the gap in family wealth between them would not be significant given the fact that both the informants and their partners are doing low-level jobs in Shanghai. The only conspicuous, and gendered, difference is that a boy's family has to pay for the betrothal gifts. In Yong's case, the women introduced to him were rural *hukou* holders with middle-school education, which was similar to Yong's situation.

Some studies have also shown that migrant women tend to marry men with urban *hukou* (S. Liu, 2008; C. Xu, 2006). However, in 2013, a survey conducted by the Shanghai Bureau of Statistics (SBS, 2013b) demonstrated that of the married migrant workers in Shanghai, 90.5% had partners from the same county. For unmarried migrant workers in Shanghai, 30.7% wished to marry a partner from the same county. Only 1.9% had a preference for marrying a Shanghainese resident. This echoes my finding that few of the migrant women I encountered had the motivation or the opportunity to marry Shanghainese men; indeed, none of them had married a Shanghainese man.

People in China are more likely to marry than people in the UK and the US.⁸⁵ The idea of marrying and having a baby at the appropriate time regulates people's behaviour in China.⁸⁶ The road to marriage is led by *ziji tan* and *xiangqin*, which are the predominant methods of partner finding. *Xiangqin* refers to finding a partner via arranged matches. It is predicated on traditional culture, in which romantic love is not constructed as an indispensable component of marriage. *Ziji tan* means finding a partner on one's own. *Ziji* literally means 'on one's own'; *tan* refers to 'talk (about love)'. *Ziji tan* reflects the migrants' agency and the decline of parental power over their children (Y. Yan, 2003). The increase in *ziji tan* results from burgeoning capitalism, the market economy and individualism (Y. Yan, 2003, 2010). It has gained popularity among rural migrants, who have endorsed and emphasised the idea of romantic love (I. C. Fang, 2012; Pun, 2005; H. Yan, 2008; Y. Yan, 2003). In addition, migration expands the possibilities and ways

⁸⁴ Marry (*Jia ren* or *qu*) as a verb in Chinese is different from that in English. *Jia ren* refers to a woman marrying a man, whereas *qu* refers to a man marrying a woman. The Chinese for 'to marry' has patrilineal and patriarchal connotations.

⁸⁵ According to the UN Demographic Yearbook 2011 (2012, pp. 716–720), the marriage rate in China was relatively high (9.3%) in 2010, compared with the rate in western societies such as the UK (4.3%) and the US (6.8%).

⁸⁶ Arguably, this can be seen in other countries as well. However, here I focus on the situation in China.

of finding a partner because the geographical location of partner searching is no longer circumscribed by a rural home base.

All of my informants preferred *ziji tan*, even female migrants of the previous generation who married via arranged matches. Bartender Dajie, who was born in the 1970s, said she did not even know what her fiancé looked like before they became engaged. She said, ‘Definitely *ziji tan* is better . . . nowadays more and more people choose *ziji tan*.’ Dajie’s claim was echoed by many of the informants, who considered *ziji tan* better because it is based on love and a deeper mutual understanding. Some male workers preferred *ziji tan* because it is less costly than *xiangqin*. As shown in Chapter 6, for some unmarried male workers, the primary motivation for migration was to find a marriage partner. Some of them considered it from an economic perspective, claiming that marrying via *ziji tan* is cheaper than marrying via arranged matches. Betrothal gifts or brideprice is usually involved in both *ziji tan* and *xiangqin* modes of partner searching. Usually, negotiation on the betrothal gift is a vital process in both *ziji tan* and *xiangqin*, regardless of the ways in which the couples become acquainted. The difference is that the bride’s family is more likely to charge a higher brideprice if the couple meet through *xiangqin*. For example, male pantry helper Xiao Yanjing told me, ‘*Ziji tan* can save money . . . *ziji tan* is better, it only costs 50,000 yuan, some women’s families even don’t ask for money. Marriage through match-making costs 200,000 or more.’⁸⁷

The account of married waitress Yue, who was married through *ziji tan*, echoes Xiao Yanjin’s sentiments, although they had differing opinions on how much to spend on a wedding:

We (my husband and I) just simply held a wedding banquet with a few tables in his home village (*bai le liang zhuo*) to treat my relatives in Shanghai, and took pre-wedding photos. As for *xiangqin*, first you have to give money to buy *san jin* (three golden accessories) - a ring, a necklace and a pair of earrings - which cost more than ten thousand . . . the bridegroom has to give five or six thousand when the bride goes to the bridegroom’s house for the first time . . . altogether at least five or six *wan* (£ 5,000 to 6,000), that’s a lot. We didn’t spend that much, we didn’t buy *san jin*.

The expectation with respect to high-cost betrothal gifts in arranged matches makes it difficult for some rural migrant men to afford a marriage. However, arranged matches

⁸⁷ It is possible that Xiao Yanjing’s quote includes the expense of building a house.

were a very popular path to marriage among my informants.⁸⁸ For a person who cannot find a partner via *ziji tan*, the family usually play a lead role in helping to find a marriage partner.

Being unable to find a wife and to father a son relates to the financial demands of providing betrothal gifts, arising from the patrilineal and patrilocal way of living and the imbalanced sex ratio imbalance at birth (SRB). The inability to find a wife and father a son gave rise to feelings of anxiety among the male migrants, as it undermined their masculinity and their subjectivity as filial sons. These arguments are substantiated by pantry helper Yong's frustrating experiences of partner choosing.

After starting romantic relations and then splitting up, Yong was pushed by his family to come home after the Spring Festival in both 2009 and 2012 to meet women introduced by his family. With the remittances Yong had sent back over the years, his parents had built a two-storey house, which was prepared especially for him and his future wife. He said that his parents would not live in his house after the marriage.

It is very common for migrant workers to go back to the natal family once a year during or after Spring Festival, making it a good opportunity for single migrants to meet each other. In 2009, it was arranged for Yong to meet a woman from a relatively rich family in a nearby village. Unexpectedly, she asked him to buy a flat in Shanghai, which was estimated to cost at least 600,000 yuan (£60,000) at that time. His parents told him that they did not have even half the amount needed:

When we had dinner that night, my dad told my brothers that their youngest brother (Yong) was the only one who had not fulfilled the duty (to marry). As his older brothers, you'd better help him. After that, each of my brothers helped me. My oldest brother lent me 15,000 yuan (£1,500), my second brother lent me 10,000 yuan, and my third brother lent me 10,000 yuan.

Yong went back again in 2012 and met a very beautiful woman. However, the woman wanted a boyfriend who could buy a retail shop for her as a betrothal gift; after that, she would do anything for him.⁸⁹ Yong said:

The woman wanted to sell clothes. That is why she asked my family to buy a retail shop. . . . Do you know how expensive a retail shop can be? How can I

⁸⁸ For detailed discussions on *xiangqin* from a historical perspective starting from the Mao era, please see Yan (1996, 2003) and Parish and Whyte (1978).

⁸⁹ It would be interesting to examine the rationale of the girls' families in demanding high betrothal gifts. It may be the parents' expectation for their daughters to achieve upward mobility, or to lead a better material life. Although I did not have direct contact with the daughters' parents, their perspective is indicated in Yue's case discussed in the next section.

afford it? . . . I was thinking to get usurious loans, but the interest rates were so high. . . . My parents were in their 50s and 60s, the retail shop costs several hundred thousand yuan. How can I get so much money? Steal? My parents were worried about it. I told them just let it be if we cannot afford it. If I can't find a good woman, I can find a bad one instead.

Yong's case clearly demonstrates the frustration arising from unaffordable brideprice. This is similar to Xiao Ming's comment in one of the feedback meetings I held in March and April 2014: 'For a marriage in rural areas, economic status is the first priority of the components considered by a woman and her family. The second component is the man's quality.' It echoes Yan's finding (2003):

In the recent past . . . when a *laoshi* (obedient and honest) person was the ideal mate for young women in the village, under the influence of the market economy and an urban culture, an individual's ability to make money is now considered most important. (p. 185)

In Yong's arranged matches, economic status was gauged largely by how many betrothal gifts he was able to provide for the potential bride. The theme of betrothal gifts can be observed at the centre of the arranged matches that he experienced. 'Betrothal gifts', or 'brideprice' (*cai li* or *pin li*), as defined by Yan (1996), 'commonly refers to the property transferred from the groom's family to the bride's family' (p. 179) and it usually consists of money and goods. The prevalence of brideprice has been closely associated with the patrilineal pattern of marriage (Goody, 1973; Q. Jiang & Sánchez-Barricarte, 2012) and has been a traditional practice in China. In a patriarchal society characterised by the patrilocal-patrilineal complex, a bride is expected to be married to both the bridegroom and the bridegroom's family. The brideprice is given either to the bride's family or to the newly wedded couple. Betrothal gifts have a long history in China and existed even in the Mao era (when they were discouraged). The value of brideprice has increased from the Mao era to the post-Mao era across China (Parish & Whyte, 1978; Siu, 1993; Y. Yan, 2003).

Brideprice was, and has continued to be, a heavy burden for men in rural areas (Siu, 1993; Wu & Jin, 2007, p. 200). Because they are required to provide expensive betrothal gifts, it is not uncommon for rural men such as Yong to borrow money from all possible relatives in order to marry. The difficulty rural men have with affording betrothal gifts is well recorded across China. Yan (2003) did his ethnographic research in a village in northern China and found that 50% of bridegrooms' families borrowed money to pay for betrothal gifts. This is mirrored by Sun's finding in northwest China that many bachelors took out loans to pay for brideprice (S. Sun, 2005). These findings

resonate with my research. 'Affordable' in this context does not mean a price that the unmarried man and his parents can manage in their current financial situation. Instead, it refers to the price achieved after having tried every possible way to borrow money to meet the demands of the bride's family. In the case of Yong, the money his family could provide was no match for the bride's family's demands, so he gave up.

It is necessary to examine the reasons for the soaring brideprice. Possible explanations include that the provision of betrothal gifts is a way for the groom's family to 'acquire prestige in the local community' (Siu, 1993, p. 182) and maintain 'intergenerational dependence' (p. 184). In addition, apart from the reproductive role a woman plays in passing on her husband's family name, women have become a source of valuable labour, which pushes up the brideprice (Y. Yan, 1996). Valuable labour is based on the assumption that in a patrilineal and patrilocal pattern of residence, a women's labour directly benefits the husband's natal family. However, it does not explain why the value of betrothal gifts keeps soaring in the context of growing non-patrilocal residence.

The sex ratio imbalance plays a major part in explaining the rising value of betrothal gifts. Some scholars have argued that male competition for women, through brideprice, is a consequence of the surplus number of men in China (Becker, 1991; Youhua Chen, 2004). The problem of surplus men has become serious and therefore has pushed up the brideprice. Bachelors who provide the most generous betrothal gifts are more likely to find a wife (Q. Jiang & Sánchez-Barricarte, 2012). Some male migrants sensed this issue, as they had experienced a lack of women in rural areas. Pantry helper Xiaohei from Anhui province pointed out that in his home village even a very ordinary woman can find a very handsome boy. As he said:

In my home village, the number of unmarried men versus unmarried women was 3:1. A mediocre woman was able to marry a handsome boy. And a woman's family usually asks for many betrothal gifts.

This comment reflects the fact that Anhui has one of the highest SRB differences in China. The SRB was over 130 in 2005 (Zhu et al., 2009). As expounded in Chapter 1, the ideas and practices of son preference are to blame for the high SRB. Sex-selective abortion and omitted reports of girls are two primary factors contributing to the high SRB (L. Xu & Cui, 2008).

In the case of Yong, his claim that 'if I can't find a good girl, I can find a bad girl instead' suggests that he was desperate to have a wife. Chen (2004) also found that

bachelors were so frustrated by the unattainable requirements of betrothal gifts that they did not dare to have any preferences in future partners. As a result, some men chose women with mental and physical disabilities. Male rural *hukou* holders with relatively low education levels are less likely to find partners (Hesketh & Xing, 2006; Q. Jiang & Sánchez-Barricarte, 2012; F. Wang & Mason, 2006). It has been estimated that 20.79 million boys who were born between 1980 and 2000 would experience difficulties in finding a female partner (Pan, 2007). Not only does this create social problems, it also means that these men are unable to fulfil their filial duties - because being unmarried also means being prevented from having children. In addition, those men who are on the lowest rung of society, unable to afford the brideprice, are discriminated against (Q. Jiang & Sánchez-Barricarte, 2012), encountering physical and mental pressure (Attané et al., 2013). The case of Yong illustrates the failure of the male pantry helpers to reach the hegemonic masculinity characterised by money, power and a heterosexual nuclear family, as discussed in Chapter 2. The failure to meet the requirement for betrothal gifts undermined Yong's sense of masculinity.

5.3 Resistance and consent among unmarried women

In Section 5.2, I discussed the high value of betrothal gifts that unmarried male workers such as Yong are expected to provide in order to find a wife. Brideprice demands give rise to anxiety about not being able to afford a marriage, and thus pass on the patrilineal line, which inevitably undermines their masculinity and their subjectivity as filial sons. Through the case of Zhenxiu, Section 5.3 discusses the situation unmarried women faced when seeking a partner. The pursuit of romantic love could contradict filial obligations. By exerting agency, the women were involved in constant negotiation with their parents. The term filial daughter was defined and redefined through the negotiations of partner finding. This section illustrates how filial piety was practised and how agency and subjectivity were represented. The experience of unmarried women is in sharp contrast to that of unmarried men, and an analysis of this issue addresses the question of how female and male workers' experiences were gendered.

In the discussion of women's changing situation in contemporary China, Yan (2003, 2010) has emphasised the rising power of women and young couples over parental authority, which he described as 'the triumph of conjugality over patriarchy' (2003, p. 14). However, some scholars considered it still too premature to make this claim, because although in some ways transformation has taken place, in others, patriarchal

norms and practices have prevailed (Brandtstädter & Santos, 2009). My observation supports this latter view. I found that my female informants experienced changes in complex and contradictory ways, which makes it impossible for me to reach a simple conclusion. As discussed in Chapter 2, the conventional social norms of filial piety and chastity embedded in patriarchy are not outdated, yet at the same time the search for romantic love is attractive to migrant women. If these two values stand in contradiction, the women make efforts to reconcile them, which involves challenging parental authority. In many cases, the parents finally approved the daughter's choice of partner. However, the process was not experienced in an easy or burden-free fashion. These women had mixed feelings; they felt guilty and were concerned about the disgrace being brought to their families. The disgrace arose from women's transgressive behaviours in the forms of cheating, pregnancy or elopement. Zhenxiu's case is a good illustration of the above argument, so in the remaining part of this section, I provide an account of Zhenxiu's story in chronological order, coupled with my analysis.

Zhenxiu was born in 1995 in Gansu province, Northwest China. She came to Shanghai with her cousins and uncle, all of whom were recruited as table servers at the Meteor in March 2012. Her sister and uncle had previously worked in this restaurant. Not long after she started work, gossip spread that she was having relationships with a security guard and two male pantry helpers. My roommate Zaozao saw Zhenxiu dining out with the security guard. Zaozao commented, 'She is hanging out with two pantry helpers and a security guy. If I had a daughter like that, I would rather kill her.' After a while, it turned out that her boyfriend was one of the pantry helpers. Nevertheless, some staff considered that she had behaved badly.

Spending time with more than one man may give a woman a bad reputation in rural areas in contemporary China (N. Zhang, 2013), and this idea may persist after migration. Zaozao's account signifies that she perceived Zhenxiu's behaviour as immoral and improper and that she would be extremely unsatisfied with Zhenxiu if she were in the position of Zhenxiu's parents. Zaozao internalised the moral code of what is considered proper behaviour by a daughter and imposed moral judgement on Zhenxiu, which shows how the social norms that regulate how a woman should behave were also enforced by co-workers. In this case, the migrant community reproduced conventional ideas in their urban space.

Another convention is that rural people are expected to find a partner whose home village is close to their own. However, migration enlarges the pool of potential partners, making the choice no longer constrained by birthplace, and adult children gain more power over decision-making on partner choice (Y. Yan, 2003). Nevertheless, parents still prefer their children to find partners close to their home villages. Both my fieldwork findings and Gaetano's (2008) research have revealed that geographical distance between a couple's *laojia* is one of the primary causes of parental opposition.⁹⁰ This is mirrored by Zhenxiu's case as well as Yue's case, explicated in Section 5.4.

Zhenxiu's boyfriend's cousin Chongtian also worked as a pantry helper in the Meteor Restaurant. Chongtian said his cousin's parents would not approve of their marriage:

This girl's *laojia* (home village) is in Gansu, which is too far from our *laojia* in Anhui. If she marries my cousin and then runs away one day, we won't know where to find her. His parents won't approve of them being together.

Zhenxiu was probably aware of the potential opposition from both families, but she still stayed together with her boyfriend. Soon after, she moved into her boyfriend's room opposite to her uncle's room in the migrant community Xinbei Village. Her uncle Ma was very angry about her 'looseness' and cursed her with contempt during our conversation:

She is such a cheap cunt (*jian bi*), a piece of dirt (*zang huo*), this man who is sleeping with her is wearing other's rotten shoes (*Chuan guo de po xie*). She's not my niece. I refuse to recognise her. She texted me, saying that she was really sorry about the whole thing. Pish! Sorry? She asked for it!

Zhenxiu's apologies indicates that she was ashamed of her behaviour. The discord between Zhenxiu's behaviour and feelings reflected the struggle in her mind. She was in pursuit of romantic love. Zhenxiu wrote a blog, most of which was about love and hurt, signalling that romantic love was vital to the constitution of her subjectivity. However, the way she pursued romantic love through cohabitation was considered morally wrong by the people around her. Chastity is prescribed as a feminised trait that a woman is expected to maintain, and therefore Zhenxiu's behaviour incurred contempt and gossip.

The idiom *chuan guo de po xie* draws an analogy between rotten shoes with women who lose their virginity and a well-known metaphor that objectifies and devalues women. By saying the man was wearing others' rotten shoes, Ma implied that Zhenxiu was not a virgin even before she cohabited with her boyfriend, which further maligned

⁹⁰ This was confirmed by my informants in the feedback meetings in April 2014.

her reputation. Chastity is a feminine trait that is embedded in patriarchal society. It can also be considered as an aspect of filial obligation that a girl owes to her family. It is noteworthy that Ma did not seem to take the slightest notice of whether the man was a virgin or not, exposing how the requirement of chastity is imposed on women but not on men. Zhenxiu was at the centre of the gossip, whereas both of the pantry helpers and the security guard associated with her were free from blame. The way Ma and Zaozao reacted to Zhenxiu's behaviour shows how they internalised and reinforced the gendered norms with regard to how a woman should behave.

Soon after my conversation with Ma, Zhenxiu quit her job and did as her father had asked her to do. Her father, who was working in Xinjiang, took a three-day train ride from Xinjiang province to Shanghai to bring her home. Gossip spread that she had quit the job because of pregnancy. However, according to one of her close friends, Zhenxiu did not have sex with her boyfriend even though they lived together.

However, things later turned in a direction that I had not expected. In July 2013, I was chatting online with Chongtian, the cousin of Zhenxiu's boyfriend. When I asked how his cousin was, he said that his cousin was taking care of the child back in the home village.

Chongtian: They got married last year, and gave birth to a child.

Researcher: So the gossip that Zhenxiu was pregnant and went back is true?

Chongtian: How can you know so much! Yes, she was pregnant, otherwise how can they be together? How could her dad agree this marriage if she was not pregnant?

Researcher: So they had the wedding ceremony but did not *ling zheng* (register for marriage), because your cousin was born in 1995 as well?

Chongtian: Yep.

The legal age for a man to marry in China is 22, and it is 20 for a woman. In 2012, both Zhenxiu and her partner were 17 years old, so they could have a wedding ceremony but could not obtain a marriage certificate.

Based on what Chongtian told me on various occasions, it is possible that both families would have opposed this marriage had she not been pregnant. At first, I was surprised that Zhenxiu became pregnant but then felt it understandable. As mentioned in Chapter 3, conscious that migrants are very likely to have unprotected sex, I told Zhenxiu before she moved to her boyfriend's place that using a condom is a very important way to

avoid pregnancy. I stressed to her that abortion can be damaging to a girl's health. However, despite being conscious of the risky consequences, she did not seem to use contraception. A possible way to explain the incident is that she and her boyfriend deliberately used pregnancy as a strategy to impose pressure on their families, because a marriage between a couple whose natal families are geographically distant is considered undesirable for both the bride's and the bridegroom's families in rural areas, as discussed earlier in this section. It is possible that Zhenxiu was aware of the consequences of her action and became pregnant deliberately.

The pattern of 'get pregnant and then get married' is a recurring theme narrated by quite a few of my female informants. It may serve as a form of resistance under the guise of an unintended consequence because it makes it more difficult for the girl's family to intervene in a daughter's love relationship and to separate the couple. The girl's family do not wish it to occur but there is little they can do about it. Forcing a pregnant daughter to have an abortion is detrimental to her health; more often than not, the parents have to accept what has happened and allow her to marry and give birth.

Above all, the process of negotiation with the family is complicated, and it is naive to dichotomise a girl's conduct as either rebellious or filial. Although Zhenxiu's case seems to be a daughter-conquering-parents story, the pressure on these young women is still remarkable. The strong patriarchal values of filial piety and women's chastity, together with the preference for romantic love, are issues that migrant women have to resolve; how they do so is influenced by and in turn influences their subjectivity.

According to my observations, migrant women had several ways of resisting parental pressures, including becoming pregnant, eloping and lying. The pursuit of love and the conformity to filial obligations encapsulated fierce personal struggles as well as constant conflict with the natal family and even with their partner. All these traits are well evidenced in Yue's case, discussed in the next section.

5.4 The perpetuation of filial piety and women's rising power in conjugal relations

In this section, I first provide a picture of rural migrant woman Yue. Her case demonstrates her rising power in conjugal relations and her consistent subjectivity as a filial daughter, even when undergoing the role transition from an unmarried girl to a married mother. Exerting agency, she actively engaged in redefining the term filial daughter. Her detailed accounts reveal the complexity of her subjectivity mediated

through filial piety in the patriarchal family. In the second half of the section, I consider women's empowerment evidenced by other informants. The empowerment of the young migrant women could be witnessed after they migrated. However, I also point out the complexity of the empowerment process because of the perpetuation of the conventional idea that valorises the gender division of labour.

5.4.1 Transitioning from an unmarried daughter to a married mother

Although Yue and her boyfriend's home villages were located in the same province, it took four to five hours to travel by bus from Yue's home village to her boyfriend's, which was the main reason her parents opposed their relationship. In addition, his family's financial situation was poor. Being the second son in the family, his parents could not afford to provide a house for his marriage. Yue's parents firmly opposed their relationship. As she recounted:

We (Yue and her boyfriend) were caught by my father on the street. My dad beat me and scolded me on the way back home . . . after going back, my dad said that he firmly disagreed with us being together, asked me to break up with him, and told me not to go to work tomorrow. I lied to him. I said I would quit on the 10th, the day I got paid. He said that was fine. Actually I didn't wait until the 10th; I eloped with my boyfriend on the 8th.

Although his parents strongly opposed the relationship, she resisted them by lying and then eloping with her partner. The process was by no means easy; it was full of struggle and conflict, not only with her natal family, but also with her partner:

We moved to Jing'an District. For the first two days we stayed in his friend's flat, then we rented a flat on our own. He found a new job, and I found a job as well, so we started work. . . . The first day I switched off my mobile phone, but I was worried about my parents so I gave them a call. I said: 'I won't be back until you agree.' My dad was angry and started to scold me. So I ended the call. I was frightened and began to cry. Later on, I called back from time to time. Each time my dad asked me where I was living. He said he agreed to us being together and wanted to come and visit us. But I didn't dare tell him where I was. My boyfriend quarrelled with me every day. He tried to stop me calling home for fear that my parents would find us. I always cried and said that I missed my family, so I kept calling them.

Elopement can be viewed as resistance but also as a strategy to obtain parental consent. Yue faced pressure from both her family and her boyfriend during the period of elopement. She was scared but resolved to stay with her boyfriend and made persistent efforts to obtain consent from her parents, which reflects her subjectivity as a filial

daughter. Her filial piety can be seen in her consistent financial support of her parents and her elder brother. As she recounted:

At that time I earned 1,200 (yuan). I gave my parents 1000 and kept 200 to spend . . . if it was not enough, my boyfriend paid the rest. Before elopement, I left behind all my wages and savings to my parents, I didn't keep a penny. Rent and everything else was paid for by my boyfriend. My family is not well off, and I have a younger brother. My elder brother had just got married, and my parents were still in debt. I have known how difficult it was for my parents to save money since I was a child. So I gave all my money to them.

Yue behaved with filial piety in economic issues but not in terms of personal relationships. She performed filial obedience and supported the whole family. As pointed out in Section 5.1, daughters are more likely to share the family burden, including brothers' tuition fees and brideprice. Similar to the situation of waitress Ru Nan, migration did not improve Yue's financial status because she did not have savings of her own.

Pregnancy can be used not only to obtain permission from parents, as in Zhenxiu's case, but also as a tool in negotiating betrothal gifts between the two families. Yue treated pregnancy as a trigger to inform her parents in order to obtain their consent:

After four months, I became pregnant, and I told my parents. My parents agreed to our marriage because I was pregnant, and asked his (her boyfriend's) parents to come to Shanghai to have a meeting. My brother said that he wanted to visit me, and I told him my address. After my brother's visit, my dad came the next day. We were still sleeping when my dad knocked on the door. I was scared. Oh my God! I didn't dare say much, although my dad had agreed over the phone to us being together. Later my boyfriend's dad came to Shanghai. At first we required some money from his dad to have the wedding ceremony in his home village, but he said their family didn't have that much, and disapproved. My dad asked me to get an abortion if they didn't agree to the amount of money. I thought for a while. My dad's insistence was right, you see, I eloped with him, but his parents didn't agree to this amount of money. I was angry and called my boyfriend: 'If your dad cannot give that much, I will get an abortion tomorrow.' That night, he called me and asked me not to go to the hospital and said his dad would be coming to Shanghai soon.

Yue pursued romantic love against her parents' wishes. However, when it came to the stage of brideprice negotiation, she conformed to her father's idea, using her sexualised body as a bargaining chip and threatening to put her unborn baby at risk.⁹¹ Elopement

⁹¹ Yue did not indicate the value of the dowry in the interview. However, based on her comment (see Section 5.2) 'altogether at least five or six wan (50 to 60 thousand yuan), that's a lot. We didn't spend that much...', it is reasonable to speculate that Yue and her husband spent less than five wan on the wedding. This amount is relatively small. In addition, they did not receive a new house on marriage, which is not very common for marriage practices in rural Anhui province.

and pregnancy are gestures and statements in the pursuit of romantic love, yet she still felt the need to be a filial daughter; she tried hard to obtain her father's consent to her marriage and even assisted her parents in negotiating the betrothal gifts with her boyfriend's family. As discussed in Chapter 2, being a filial child conventionally includes full obedience to one's parents. Yue reframed the embodiment of filial piety during the course of negotiation with her parents and her boyfriend. She shifted the boundary of filial piety, obeying her parents by supporting them financially but resisting them with regard to personal relationships. Her practices suggest that, by her definition, obeying parents on partner choice is no longer a necessary component of filial obligations, but providing parents with financial support is still obligatory.

Yue said that her boyfriend's family met her family's requirements by borrowing money from the outside. When asked why Yue's family required a certain amount of money, she responded:

It's a tradition in our *laojia*. If a girl elopes with a man and does not ask for any money, she will have no status in his family and will be bullied. If he gives her some money to buy a dowry and some other stuff (*mai dongxi*), at least it's worth it, at least (she will) have some status, that's the custom in our *laojia*.⁹²

It seems that her parents' intention was to ensure she would be well-received in the post-marriage patrilocal residence. It turned out that Yue's parents-in-law treated her very well every time she visited them, although she never had the chance to stay long with her husband's natal family:

My parents-in-law treat me very well, you see, their financial situation is not good. A year later, after I gave birth, when Xiao Bao (the baby) was one year old, they said to us that since we just married, and we are basically penniless, they would like to raise Xiao Bao so that we can go out and *dagong*. . . . Each time I visit them, they wash my clothes and cook for me. I neither cook nor wash the dishes. They do everything. After dinner I go to sleep with Xiao Bao upstairs, and they begin to wash the dishes. If I soak my clothes in the basin, my parents-in-law sense that I am going to wash the clothes and they wash for me. If I finished the washing by myself, they would hang it up to dry. They treat me quite well.

Her parents-in-law encouraged the couple to migrate and took the initiative to raise the child for them. Moreover, they did all the housework and were very considerate, which

⁹² According to Yue, her partner was expected to give her money as a dowry so that she could secure her future status. The dowry here refers to indirect dowry, which means the wealth is transferred from her husband and his kin to her family, as defined by Goody (1973). Indirect dowries can be observed in rural areas in some parts of China (S. Sun, 2005; Y. Yan, 1996). The construction of the value of brideprice as a symbol of women's post-marriage status resembles Sun's finding in Zhao Village in Northwest China (2005). The custom of Yue's home village made it possible for her family not to spend much, or indeed anything, on the dowry.

was contrary to traditional post-marriage intergenerational behaviour. As discussed in Chapter 2, in the past, a daughter-in-law was expected to do all such work, but this feminised responsibility as a daughter-in-law was not imposed on Yue. The reversed intergenerational responsibility can be viewed as the decline of parental power and the rising status of daughters-in-law, also reflected in the diminishing power of mothers-in-law that has been seen both in the Mao era (Parish & Whyte, 1978, pp. 244, 246) and in the post-Mao era (Y. Yan, 1996, 2003). The young couple's stay in Shanghai would not have been possible without the support of the parents in the husband's natal family.

Married women such as Yue are able to be free from childcare and household chores in the husband's natal family, and in that way, they are empowered. Interestingly, Yue fulfilled her role as a filial daughter by continuously supporting her natal family financially:

I am in charge of money. Sometimes I gave pocket money to my mum, 500, 1000. Sometimes I use our mutual savings and I will let him (her husband) know, sometimes I use my secret stash (*sifang qian*) so he doesn't know.

Yue had pocket money and saved it for her natal family, which is a phenomenon not usually seen in previous generations, when women did not have control over what they earned, or when they did not take part in activities with direct monetary returns.

Yue's control over money can also be seen in the fact that she had the final say in the distribution of income. She had confrontations with her husband with respect to income redistribution, but still did it her own way and was supported by her parents-in-law:

I insisted on buying a house. He didn't want to. I just insisted. I badgered him about buying it. I said we had to buy. We had five *wan* (£5,000) of savings. He had planned to save it for his future business. . . . He is a chef. He just wanted to save some money and run a restaurant. I'm thinking, what if his business fails? We have been married for three years, and our child is four years old, I'm thinking the child is growing up, but (we have) no money and no house. So I want to buy a house. But he wants to save the money so as to run a restaurant. I sent all the money back to his parents, along with tens of thousands of borrowed money, and asked his parents to buy a house in the town. He could do nothing about it. This was what I wanted to buy.

Yue's preference for owning a house conflicted with her husband's preference for saving money to start up a business. She was in control of the money and carried on with her own idea. Nevertheless, she reinforced the patriarchal pattern of residence by buying a house in a town that was close to her husband's family.

Although she bought a house that was close to her husband's family, Yue intended to prolong the non-patrilocal way of life. Nonetheless, this somewhat contradicted what her husband expected her to do:

Yue: My husband prefers to run a restaurant in Shanghai rather than in the home village. We plan to work (*dagong*) for two more years until the housing debts are paid off, he can run his own restaurant. But he suggested me to go back to taking care of the child when he attends school.

Researcher: What do you think?

Yue: I don't think so. I am thinking, I am still 24, I want to work outside the village for three or four years. I don't want (to go back) in a year or two. I want to (stay) longer. I don't want to take care of the child at home. . . . We can pay off the housing debts in two years, save money for another two years, and open a restaurant in Shanghai so that I can be here, running the restaurant with him.

Yue portrayed her hopes for future, hopes which involve negotiation with her husband. Two points suggest Yue's rising power in her post-marriage life. First, she kept her own savings and sent remittances to her parents. Her husband did not oppose her financial support to her natal family. Second, in the conflicts regarding the redistribution of the money (house versus restaurant), Yue took control of the financial resources and made the final decision. Even her parents-in-law supported her decision by using the remittance to buy a house for Yue and her husband.⁹³ This reflected her agency and power of decision-making in conjugal relations, although she adhered to the social norms of residing patrilocally.

Yue's continuous economic support for her natal family reflects her practice of filial piety, which is echoed by Whyte's (2004) findings in urban Hebei province. A daughter's support for the natal family both prior to and after marriage without any return signifies not only the perpetuation of filial obedience, but also the transforming power of conjugal relations. A conjugal family seems to be more equal in that married women such as Yue have more power in decision-making and more control over economic redistribution. Therefore, they tend to give their natal family more support, both financially and emotionally. However, some scholars (C. Tang et al., 2009) have discovered that migrant women do not have the right to inheritance, but continuously support parents because they subjectivate the ethics of filial piety and practice according to the norms. Their constant financial and emotional support for their natal families

⁹³ In rural Anhui, it is assumed that the groom will buy or build a house before marriage. Yue's husband did not prepare a new house before marriage because his family could not afford it. Presumably, his parents felt guilty about this so they were happy to see Yue remitting enough money to buy a house.

means they have less time and money for themselves. Married women need to support not only their own natal families but also their husbands' families. The married female informants in this study were more likely to send remittances back to their husbands' families than to their natal families. One of the primary reasons is that their children were usually raised by the parents-in-law. The double burden of the married women was not something experienced by their male counterparts. Migration may empower married women in some ways but disempower them in others. Moreover, it may empower young married couples but disempower the older generation. It is a complicated dynamic process without a single conclusion.

5.4.2 Rising power of married women in the temporal non-patrilocal environment

As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, I have adopted the term temporal non-patrilocal to suggest the change of household structure during the time the migrant workers are living in Shanghai, far from the patrilocal residence. According to the SBS (2013b), in 2012, 79.3% of female migrants and 80.2% of male migrants in Shanghai were married, and 82.2% of migrant couples came to Shanghai together.⁹⁴ In comparison, in the public area of the Meteor Restaurant, 71.62% of female workers were married at the time the information was collected in April 2012, whereas only 34.88% of male workers were married. Migration makes the temporal mode of residence possible and brings changes to patriarchal practices. It is important to investigate how the post-marital pattern of residence of the migrant workers affected gender relations.

Yue's case, discussed in Section 5.4.1, elaborates the process of role transition from unmarried daughter to married mother. The empowerment of married women in relation to migration is evidenced not only by Yue's case, but by those of other female informants as well. After migration, the conventional gender division of labour in the domestic area persists, but new patterns also emerge. The rising power of married women is a conspicuous theme in my findings. I will unfold the theme of the empowerment of women by examining their escape from entangled patriarchal relationships in rural areas, the decreasing amount of housework, the de facto weakening gender division of labour in households and women's high decision-making power in the households.

⁹⁴ The statistics did not indicate the average duration of their stay in Shanghai/outmigration. It is difficult to calculate the duration, as migration may be a back and forth process.

Many workers, such as cleaner Xia and waitress Yue, stated that they were better off compared with their own mothers or with their former selves when living in rural areas. Through migration, a married woman can avoid not only complex relationships with her husband's family in the patrilocal residence but also farm work and child raising, both of which are otherwise assumed to be her responsibility. For example, Jie, shift leader of the table servers, explained:

My husband is doing business. He can earn five to six thousand per month. Our child is in Shanghai, taken care of by his aunt. My husband asked me not to do this job a long time ago. But staying at home is boring, the relationships with his relatives in the village are annoying, so I just keep working.

Migrant women such as Jie can empower themselves by escaping from patriarchal relationships in their home villages, as Beynon found (2004). In rural areas, housework is generally performed by women. When asked who did more housework at home in Shanghai, however, the most frequent answer given by my informants was, 'It depends, whoever has time will do the housework.' Migrant men's greater involvement in housework is a significant change. In addition, the overall burden of housework is reduced in Shanghai, because most married migrant couples' living space is too tiny to generate a significant amount of housework. As waitress Qin Zhang said: 'My husband is a driver for Carrefour. He is provided with staff accommodation. He has to work every day and I just rest four days a month, so we don't usually do housework.'

Qin Zhang's remarks are similar to those of pantry helper Bai Lian. He said, 'I feel that there is no housework in my home. The studio is tiny.' When asked who would do housework if they were in the *laojia*, he responded, 'Definitely she (his wife) would do the housework.' These women's domestic work was significantly reduced compared with that of women in rural areas for the following reasons: their living space was very limited, which meant they did not have much housework to do; having to work long hours constrained the time available to devote to housework; most of them did not have children living with them in Shanghai, so that they could avoid the responsibility of child raising; and two meals were included at the restaurant, which meant they did not need to cook at home. The time devoted to housework is an important indicator for evaluating gender equality based on the survey on women's status conducted by ACWF and NBS (2001, 2011). In this respect, more gender-egalitarian conjugal relations can be witnessed in the non-patrilocal residence.

Empowerment can also be observed in decision-making processes. Yue made the final decision on house-buying regardless of her husband's initial objection, which suggests the important role she played in household decisions. Yue was not alone in exhibiting this empowerment. When asked who made the decisions in her family, Qin Zhang answered:

Men are the masters of the house in most of the families in China. In my family, important decisions are made by my husband whereas trivial decisions are made by me. However, *what is considered important or trivial is defined by me* (her emphasis).

The above comment refers back to the discussion on men's prestige/power in patriarchal society in Chapter 2. The last sentence in this comment suggests that Qin Zhang actually had significant power in decision-making in her household. Nevertheless, I found that the traditional gender division of labour persisted among some of my informants. Cashier Hubei justified women's role as the main contributor to domestic work by saying, 'Why do women live longer? Statistics show that it is because women do more housework.' When asked, 'Who does more housework in your family, your partner or you?', some female migrants, such as cleaner Xia, waitress Yadong and Yue, expressed their opinion that men should not do women's work. As Yue claimed:

I do all the housework and he doesn't do any. I feel like men should not wash clothes and cook. I think men should prioritise their career. After he comes home, I wash his socks and shoes, he doesn't wash them. I don't allow him to do the washing. And he's not in the habit of cooking or washing the dishes.

Yue's husband was a chef, but he did not cook at home. Although Yue had bargaining power in conjugal relations, she still felt the urge to do all the housework, which suggests her feminised subjectivity. Some women were willing to take on more housework. They subjectivated the feminised norms and reproduced them, which served to reinforce the conventional gender division of labour in the household. Rural women were unprecedentedly empowered in some ways after the shift of geographical location, but they still held conventional ideas regarding what is considered women's work, all of which contributed to shaping and reshaping their gendered subjectivity.

5.5 Changing role of migrant men in conjugal relations and the constitution of subordinated masculinity

Women's increasing economic contribution to the household and men's waning power on decision-making are interrelated. As discussed in Section 5.4, empowerment of

married women could be observed after the shift in location. The rising power of women in conjugal relations may lead to the declining power of married men, which may make them uneasy and cause them to be teased by their peers. As regards married male migrants who migrate together with their wives, the wage they earn may no longer endow them with the status of the primary breadwinner, reducing their power within the household. That migrant men are taking on more housework is an emerging phenomenon that can be observed in non-patrilocal residence. The subversive gender division of labour is one of the important components in constructing these men's sense of masculinity.

Xiao Min's case reverses and challenges the conventional gender division of labour in the household and in employment. Both Xiao Min and his wife, Pingzhen, worked in the restaurant. Xiao Min was a team leader of pantry helpers, and his wife was an experienced waitress who earned more than he did. Both had part-time jobs they performed in their 'leisure time'. During my stay in 2012, Xiao Min worked at the Meteor from 11:30 am to 10 pm, and then worked at KFC from 11 pm to 6 am. After finishing his shift at KFC, he went home to rest until 11 am, when he went back to work at the restaurant. During my most recent visit in April 2014, he bought a car to start a cab business. His car was a black cab because he was working illegally, carrying passengers for profit almost every day after finishing work, from 10 pm until 2 am.⁹⁵ Pingzhen worked part-time as a domestic worker in 2012 and continued to do so during my last visit. By taking two full-time and two part-time jobs, they were able to earn approximately 8000 yuan (£800) per month altogether. Xiao Min said: 'We have already saved the money for the house for our elder son; at this stage, we are working for the college fees for the older son and the house for the younger son.'

I discussed filial piety in the preceding sections. Xiao Min's words reflect a reversed responsibility between the parents and sons as opposed to filial piety that is fulfilled by the sons to the parents. Ensuring sufficient resources to provide for a son's tuition fees and a house for marrying was considered a responsibility to be shared by Xiao Min and his wife.

The interaction between Xiao Min and his wife suggests reversed gender roles in the family. He told me that he did the cooking, washing of clothes and cleaning at home.

⁹⁵ Using a private car for profit is illegal in Shanghai, but it is frequently seen in suburban areas after midnight in places where the fare for a legal cab ride is beyond reach.

However, when asked who did more housework, he responded, 'About the same.' Xiao Min was not willing to talk much about his family life to me. This reticence can be explained by Ma (2003), who commented that rural men are more sensitive about gender division of labour within the household. Those who did more housework considered that they had less say in the household decision-making process.

Interestingly, Xiao Min's wife and colleagues told me that Xiao Min actually did more housework. When asked why Xiao Min did more housework, pantry helper Xiao Wang said, '(Because) his wife earns more.' Bailian said, 'Women's roles are in the public, men's roles are in the family (*nv zhu wai nan zhu nei*)'—reversing the popular saying 'Men's roles are in the public, women's roles are in the family (*nan zhu wai nv zhu nei*)'. Another worker sarcastically shouted, 'Xiao Min is a woman!'

Nan zhu wai nv zhu nei is a Chinese proverb that indicates the conventional gender division of labour. By doing more housework and earning less, Xiao Min was reversing the conventional gender role, which is in line with Lin and Mac an Ghaill's (2013) findings that the conventional labour division by gender has been challenged by the increasing number of women from rural areas migrating to urban areas. Xiao Min did not fit the image of a primary breadwinner, which undermined his masculinity and caused him to experience peer pressure. Masculinity is associated with the ability to feed the family. The subordinate position may have castrated his self-image as a proper man.

Interestingly, during the feedback meeting in April 2014, Xiao Min claimed to be the master of the house (*yi jia zhi zhu*) when his wife, Pingzhen, was not present. On another occasion, however, when I asked Pingzhen who the master of the house was, she responded that the household decisions were made together and both of them were the masters of the house. The discrepancy between the couple's perception reflects Xiao Min's effort to retain his masculinity by claiming his authority in public. However, this may not be the case in actual interactions between him and his wife.

Some traits of subordinated masculinity in migrant men can be observed in the case of Xiao Min. He was no longer the primary breadwinner. This is associated with the fact that he had to perform a significant amount of household chores, a fact which he did not like to reveal. His masculinity was judged by his counterparts. He encountered peer pressure. I heard that Xiao Min frequently played slot machines and bought lottery tickets. Once he lost more than 10,000 yuan within half an hour. I asked his wife, 'Do

you give him money to play the slot machine?’ She said, ‘No, he stole the money to play.’ Although they owned the money mutually, ‘stole’ connotes that Xiao Min was supposed to obtain the consent of his wife before spending the money, which implies that his wife was in control of the money. His gambling shows his wish to be rich instantly as well as his anxiety about being deprived of the role of breadwinner. Subordinated masculinity and its relationship with gambling will be elaborated in Chapter 6.

5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined how gender operated in intimate relationships, including the consistency and inconsistency of gender relations after migration. In addition, I have demonstrated the migrant workers’ exercise of agency, albeit constrained by the subjectivation of social norms. Their obedience, resistance and confrontation were enmeshed in the power of patriarchy that was mediated through filial piety.

The marriage pressure imposed on the migrant workers gave rise to their mixed feelings of anxiety and ambivalence, and to the actions of consent and resistance. The female and male migrants experienced migration in gendered ways. Migration provided the women with unprecedented choices compared with both the Mao era and the pre-Mao era in terms of employment and partner choice. However, the unmarried women encountered the moral bewilderment of having to choose between obedience or resistance to parents in the pursuit of romantic love. Sending remittances while contravening social norms with respect to cohabitation reflects the ambivalent subjectivity of the female migrants. In the context of temporal non-patrilocal modes of residence, some married migrant women were empowered, in the sense that that they had control over what they earned and had less housework to do, but they were constrained by their filial obligations and therefore felt obliged to contribute to their natal families, even though they are not entitled to inherit family property.

The migrant men positioned themselves in relation to the different roles in the family and they tried to maintain the masculine images of breadwinner, tender husband, filial son and responsible father. However, both unmarried and married men faced the risk of emasculation. The construction of their subordinated masculinity in intimate relations encompassed their inability to find a marriageable partner, to fulfil the duty to father a son, the physical and mental anxiety embedded in bachelorhood, and the failure to be a

caring husband and primary breadwinner. All of these aspects jeopardised their subjectivities as filial son and capable man. The imbalanced SRB allows families of girls such as Ru Nan on the demand side of the marriage market to ask for a high level of brideprice.

Men are not usually treated as gendered beings in discussions on patriarchy (Lin, 2013). Some scholars have contended that patriarchal culture harms men as well, especially those marginalised men who are unable to enjoy the privilege that elite men have in patriarchal society (G. Fang & He, 2011; Y. Wei & Zhang, 2011). This chapter has described migrant men's experiences of family relations and marriage decisions to enrich these scholarly discussions.

Patrilocality, once the dominant family pattern for married couples in rural areas, is increasingly being disrupted because of migration. Patrilineality remains persistent, in that a son is still considered essential to pass on the family line, and sons are deemed to be the inheritors of parents' property in rural areas, regardless of the law that states that 'men and women are equal in their right to inheritance' (NPC, 1985). Migration makes possible the non-patrilocal pattern of post-marriage residence. Whether patrilocality is a temporary state or a prolonged reality, how it affects intergenerational relationships and how power relations in the conjugal relationship will change if migrant couples stop *dagong* and return to their home villages, although not the focus of this thesis, will require further examination in future research.

Chapter 6: Exerting agency at work and at leisure

*Step by step
I'm going in the wrong direction
Making a living out of being a dancing girl
A dancing girl is also a human
To whom shall I tell my sorrow
In order to earn a living
I swallow the tears
Is it really my destiny to live my whole life in the dancing club
Accompanying the customers, hugging and cuddling
My dignity has been soaked in wine
tango, cha cha, rumba and rock & roll every night
Do I deserve it as a dancing girl?*

...

Tears of a Dancing Girl by Junmin Lin

Extract from field notes

February 8, 2012

At 10:30p.m., after all the table servers finished work, we set off and walked all the way to Free Port Karaoke Bar to celebrate waiter Ah Kui's birthday. Ah Kui suggested that we could go to Holiday (a pricier karaoke bar with better equipment) after payday on the 10th with everyone contributing 50 yuan. Everyone agreed.

Free Port used to be the only choice when they fancied a night out together until Holiday opened in mid-2011. Holiday is situated in the Dragon Dream, a shopping mall targeting the urban middle class. Holiday is slightly more expensive than Free Port.

All the table servers in the hall area attended Ah Kui's birthday party except Auntie Niu. There were 13 of us altogether. Some girls were very well-dressed. Xiao Nan wore a pink coat, a silver necklace and pink lip gloss. She had recently dyed her hair blonde and today she tied her hair up in a ponytail. Waitress Yuebao wore a long coat in leopard print.

It is against the karaoke bar's regulations to bring in food from the outside. Nevertheless, we smuggled in bottles of Greatwall dry Red Wine, Sprite, Master Kong Ice Tea, Reeb Beer, lollipops and some packs of Septwolves cigarettes, all hidden in the bags and clothes. I hid a 1.25 litre bottle of Sprite inside my coat, as advised by my colleagues, and packed as much food as I could into my handbag. Once inside Free

Port, we only ordered two bags of popcorn from the in-house shop. Around 11:15pm, after everyone had settled down, Ah Kui and his sister Zhuqing went out for a second round of shopping and came back with bottles of Fanta and Sprite. Ah Kui said it cost him more than 300 yuan (£30) for all the snacks. Both the karaoke expenses and the food were his treat.

We started singing. Xiao Nan chose 'Moonlight over the Lotus Pond' by Phoenix Legend, a Chinese pop band that appealed to local audiences. Chief Executive Zhuguan selected some love songs by the female Singapore singer Fish Leong. Xiao Nan's boyfriend sang songs by Little Shenyang, a local singer who initially gained popularity as a comedy actor. Ah Gui and I sang 'The Old Boys' together, the theme song of a prominent local microfilm with the same title. Lulu sang 'Tears of a Dancing Girl', the lyrics of which form the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter.

I was not familiar with most of the songs they chose. I chose a song by the Taiwanese rock&roll band Mayday but got shifted to another song by Xiao Nan's boyfriend. Apparently he did not have the slightest interest in what I was singing. He shifted songs randomly when other people were in the middle of singing a song.

I looked around. Some of my colleagues were playing rock-paper-scissors, some were listening to the music and some were chatting. Xiao Nan, Nana and Ah Gui were smoking. Two hours later, the situation turned in a direction that I had never imagined.

Qing shifted the background music to disco, dragging some nearby people to the front of the stage. They started dancing to the excessively loud music, which was called 'the Most Up-To-Date High Music: Ice Age'. Zhuang and Xiao Nan loosened their hair and danced. Qinya tried to loosen Yuebao's hair but Yuebao resisted this. They sparred for a while. Soon after, seven or eight people were on the stage. The women began to shake their heads and bodies. Ah Kui began to twist his waist constantly. They looked as if they had taken drugs, especially the women. Four or five of us were still sitting on the sofa. Qing tried to drag me to the stage twice but I refused.

It was not until 1:30am that they stopped dancing. We shared the birthday cake after Ah Kui made a wish, and I gave him the Vaseline lip care as a gift. He said to me, half-drunk: 'I don't care about gifts as long as we are happy. The most important people to me are my sister and my mum.' I could hardly hear what he said as the deafening disco resumed.

At 2am, feeling sleepy, I decided to leave. I said goodbye to them and left the room to find Qinya vomiting and crying in the hallway. I asked her if everything was all right, and she assured me she was fine.

When I came across Qinya the next day, I told her: 'I never expected a gentle girl like you would dance like crazy!' She responded: 'I haven't been drunk like that for four years'. Later, Yuebao told me that Qinya and her partner had a two-year old baby but had not got married. Something unpleasant was happening between this couple. Two days later, Qinya told me she suffered constant domestic violence at the hands of her partner and had had three abortions.

6.0 Introduction

The prologue extracted from my field notes describes Ah Kui's birthday party in the Free Port Karaoke Bar. Attending a karaoke bar is one of the limited options workers have for collective entertainment. The analysis of attending the karaoke bar is fleshed out in the concluding remarks in this chapter. In Chapter 4, I discussed the formation of the feminised workplace and gendered experiences at work. In Chapter 5, I looked at these workers' intimate relations and how their masculinised and feminised subjectivities are mediated through filial piety. Chapter 6, the last empirical chapter, shows how migrant workers exercised agency and expressed subjectivity at work and in leisure time. These discussions are based on the theoretical framework constructed in Chapter 2, in which I explored multiple forms of agency. In Chapter 2, I also introduce resistance and coping and distinguish between these two concepts. The purpose of introducing coping is that, based on my observation, migrant workers were less likely to challenge the management of the restaurant or social inequality. They frequently developed coping strategies to make daily life more bearable. However, I do not deny that under some circumstances, the exercising of agency may signify neither resistance nor coping. Here I depart from the dichotomous interpretation of workers' behaviour as either resisting or consenting to the system; I will instead attempt to contextualise how these behaviours occur without overstating either coping or resistance.

In this chapter, I intend to examine how the workers acted within this constraining environment and how their actions reflect their agency and subjectivity. I will also explore how their leisure activities were associated with their intimate relations and with the unfair treatment they encountered at work. Exploring how they really acted creates

an important perspective to help answer the overarching questions regarding the operation of gender in daily life and the representation of agency and subjectivity.

I have divided this chapter into three sections. Sections 6.1 and 6.2 function as an extended discussion of Chapter 4. Section 6.1 centres on the workers' motivations for migration. Section 6.2 considers how the workers' motivations for resigning their jobs were gendered, what alternative job opportunities they envisioned and how they exerted agency in the form of coping and resistance and also how they used non-coping and non-resistant acts at work. In this section, I also readdress the exercise of agency in the discriminative environment arising from class and *hukou* disparities. In Section 6.3, I discuss gendered activities in forms of embroidery, shopping and gambling, which can also be seen as coping strategies. The male workers usually went gambling whereas the female workers either did embroidery in the restaurant or went shopping. In this section, I explore how these workers' gendered ways of spending their leisure time is associated with feminised and masculinised subjectivity. Consumption conflicted with filial obligations in the form of sending financial support (remittances) to their parents. How the workers dealt with this dilemma is a question explored in this section. Finally, I focus on after-work activities. I provide an analysis of the karaoke bar event described in the prologue. I investigate how the table servers' behaviour in the karaoke bar is related to filial obedience, their ambivalent subjectivity and their collective ways of coping with their difficult lives. Attending a karaoke bar can be considered a collective activity that facilitates coping with the undesirable aspects of life at work as well as with intimate relations and with marginalised social life in Shanghai as a whole. All three empirical chapters converge and conclude with the analysis of the karaoke scene at the end of this chapter.

6.1 Motivations for migration

This section considers the workers' reasons for taking up restaurant work despite the fact that they perceived it as a job on the lowest rung. Chapter 4 discussed the discrimination the workers encountered at work and their lowly perception of restaurant work. The reader may wonder why the workers were willing to work in the restaurant since discrimination was prevalent and they thought the job was undesirable. To answer this, it is necessary to interrogate why they decided to come to the restaurant in the first place. Many migrant workers see *dagong* (working as wage labour) in Shanghai as a temporary life stage. They were conscious that they might be subordinated at work in

Shanghai, but *dagong* enabled them to maintain status as breadwinners and secured better lives for their children than would have been the case had they remained in their rural regions.

Their motivations varied by marital status and gender; these motivations included seeking financial return, escaping complex relationships in rural areas and finding marriage partners. The latter two motivations were gendered. Regarding the first one, most of my informants migrated in order to make money and to become economically independent. They noted that they were better off in an economic sense through the process of migration. This confirms the significance of the economic motivation for migration which can be seen across nations (Morokvasic, 1984; Sjaastad, 1962; Stark, Taylor, & S. Yitzhaki, 1988).

For unmarried workers, attaining a sense of economic independence was important. Pantry helper Hua noted: 'life after migration is better in the sense that I am economically independent. I can indulge myself in buying whatever I like.' For working parents, sending remittances to feed the children back in the home village was an important motivation and was mentioned by many of my informants. For instance, both Xiaoxiao and her husband Gao worked as pantry helpers in the Meteor Restaurant. She explained: 'all parents earn money for their children... we could not afford two children's tuition fees if we did not migrate out. We *dagong* for a better life for the children.'

Some scholars argued that motivations vary by age (Lv et al., 2010). They considered that compared to the previous generation of migrants, income was no longer the primary concern for NGMs in China. They were driven more by self-fulfillment than by income. My findings contradicted this argument in that for many NGMs, the primary motivation for migration was still income. In addition, whether 'self-fulfillment' contained a latent element of financial incentive remains unknown.

An important motivation for some married women to migrate was to escape complicated and uncomfortable relationships and/or heavy farm work and housework. As cleaner Xia put it,

After coming out to *dagong*, there is no such big burden; I just need to take care of myself, no quarrels as I had at home. While in my home village, (I have to) take care of children when working in the farm, putting the baby carriage nearby the farmland, (I'm) too busy.

According to Xia, life after migration was easier and simpler. She did not need to be involved in family disputes or be overloaded with farm work, and she shunned responsibility for childcare. Based on my observations, married women were more likely to identify migration as an escape than both married and single men were. Married women's motivations reflect their agency in that they had managed to choose a life that they perceived as better in many ways. This mirrors the discussion of women's empowerment in Chapter 5.

One of the important motivations for unmarried male pantry helpers to work in Shanghai was to find a marriage partner, because they did not appreciate arranged matches. Liuxing, a pantry helper born in 1988, made it explicit:

I have met more than a dozen women via arranged matches (*xiangqin*) . . . but (these matches are) not like being in love (*tan lian ai*). I came to Shanghai to find a girlfriend. Now I make decisions on my own.

The claim that he could make decisions on his own reflects his agency. However, the chance for these male migrant workers to find a partner in the restaurant was slim because they were devalued and stigmatised by the female workers, as discussed in Chapter 4.

Nevertheless, some of my informants migrated to cities without considering the 'why' question. Lee (1966) and Lewis (1954) indicated that migration can sometimes be presented as a collective unconsciousness. According to shift leader Xiao Min, 'only the elderly remain in *laojia* (home village), young people are all gone'. Shift leader Lan felt that '80 percent to 90 percent of young people are migrating out, the rest are running small shops in *laojia*.' According to a report published by China's National Bureau of Statistics in 2011 (NBS, 2011a), only 26.4% of rural *hukou* holders born after 1980 worked on farms; the number of those migrating to work in non-farm areas were twice (58.4%) as much as those who worked on farms.

Many migrant workers, whether fully realising it or not, have to migrate out so that their economic conditions will not deteriorate further, and they will not be disadvantaged compared to their rural counterparts. In this sense, their choices are very limited because only way to stop being in an economically disadvantaged situation is to migrate.

6.2 Exerting agency at work

In his classic book, *Exit, Voice and Loyalty*, Hirschman (1970) explored under what

circumstances the customers or members of an organisation would adopt exit (resigning jobs), or voice (complaining to the management), or a combination of these two to express their dissatisfaction with an organisation.⁹⁶ In this section, I incorporate Hirschman's ideas to facilitate my discussion on the exercise of agency at work. Agency was exerted through escaping behaviours, but not necessarily in the forms of coping and resistance. First, I focus on physical escaping, a concept that is interchangeable with 'exit', refers to resigning jobs. In the restaurant, the male workers were more likely to resign their jobs than their female peers.⁹⁷

Second, I look at mental escaping, which refers to escapism, a mental diversion to get away from unpleasant daily life. I focus on the gendered opportunities available to find an alternative job in addition to the possibility of self-employment. I contend that envisaging alternative career opportunities, even if unrealistic, can be conceptualised as escapism to cope with the tedium of work. In the workplace, apart from coping with the onerous work per se, workers had to deal with discrimination arising from customer interactions, to which I alluded in Chapter 4.

Third, I focus on workers who exercised agency in the forms of verbal or physical coping and resistance. This reflects the importance of interrogating the social inequality resulting from class and *hukou* disparities. Adopting physical and verbal resistance against customers, who do not exist in factories, is very commonly seen in the service sector because it involves interaction among customers, workers and managers. In the restaurant setting, table servers were more likely to exercise agency to deal with customers than to challenge the management of the restaurant. This triangular relationship is different from Hirschman's relationship of customer - organisation or employee - organisation (1970).

6.2.1 Motivations for physical escape

The turnover of migrant workers is high in both the service sector and in manufacturing. According to a recent report, '*duangong hua*' (more frequent turnover) has become a trend among migrant workers, especially among new-generation migrant workers

⁹⁶ 'Customers' here refers to those who purchase products or services from a certain company. Hirschman also drew an analogy between customers and 'members' of an organisation such as a party.

⁹⁷ I recognise the prevalence of other strategies such as joking and sabotaging as discussed by Noon and Blyton (2007). However, this section is not meant to be exhaustive.

(NGMs) across China.⁹⁸ The report found that 50% of migrant workers have changed jobs in the past 1.8 years and an average female migrant worker stayed at a job 0.7 years shorter than her male counterpart (Gongzhong Research Centre & Tsinghua University, 2012). But my findings are not in accordance with this, because I found that male workers were more likely to quit their jobs than their female counterparts at the Meteor.

Turnover was overwhelming in the public area of the Meteor Restaurant. In March 2014, 27 months after my first visit, only approximately 20 workers out of 130 that I knew were still there. Male table server and pantry helper positions had higher turnover, which might relate to double discrimination they encountered at work, discussed in Chapter 4.

Motivations for resignation were gendered. One of the most significant reasons for male workers' physical escaping was low pay, whereas one of the most frequent reasons for female workers' resignation was pregnancy. Other recurring reasons, such as the inflexibility of work schedules, showed no apparent gender difference.

The gendered motivations were suggestive of the gendered turnover. Low pay as a reason for resignation was more frequently mentioned by the waiters and male pantry helpers in contrast to their female peers. During my fieldwork in 2012, some workers considered the ideal monthly wage to be 3000 yuan (£300) or above. Hushao explained his low wage by noting the structural factor that the catering labour force was situated in the low-end service sector. However, he pointed out:

But the wage is too low. We should get at least 3000 yuan per month. With such low wage, we have to pay social benefits, and the money we pay for social benefits will be rising soon, what shitty money is left for us then? I have to spend more than 200 yuan to buy cigarettes, let alone food, and (have to) pay for the rental fees.⁹⁹

Hushao complained that the wage merely guaranteed him a basic living and discouraged him from trying to secure a decent life in Shanghai. In a casual talk, waiter Ah Kui said he would head out to Jiangsu province the day he got his wage. He planned to work in a factory (*jinchang*) in order to make big money (*ku daqian*), and was confident of becoming a qualified shift leader there. *Ku* literally means bitterness and functions as a

⁹⁸ According to this report, the average turnover for middle school diploma holders was 2.1 years; the figure was 2.2 years for high school diploma holders.

⁹⁹ Based on my observation, many NGMs were unwilling to pay for social benefits (which consist of pension, medical insurance, injury compensation and so on); they preferred to have more wages and do not see the necessity for paying these compulsory charges every month.

verb here to indicate his resolution to try his hardest to make a fortune. As discussed in Chapter 4, the male pantry workers were perceived as ‘unenterprising/not promising’ (*mei chuxi*) not only by themselves but also by the female workers. In Chapter 2, I discussed how the ability to earn a good income is regarded as one of the most important ways to evaluate a man’s value and status in contemporary China. The desire to make a fortune was the primary reason why male migrants left the restaurant. Female workers were much less likely to express it as a reason for resignation, and their turnover was lower than the male workers.

Pregnancy was a reason for resignation that is exclusive to women. As discussed in Chapter 4, although it contravened the Labour Law, the restaurant did not provide maternity leave. Pregnancy has been naturalised as a sensible reason for leaving. Based on my observation, and confirmed by manager Tang, pregnancy has become one of the most frequent reasons for women to quit their jobs. As Tang said, ‘the most common reasons for resignation are job-switching and going back to home villages in order to get married or give birth.’ It should be noted that it may not be accurate to interpret the physical escaping as either coping or resisting, because the reasons for physical escaping, such as pregnancy and marriage, can be considered neither in relation to coping nor resistance.

Hirschman’s framework of exit and voice is useful to explain the workers’ physical escaping. He contended that if customers who complain about a certain product are confident that their complaints will be responded to efficiently by the firm concerned, they may maintain their loyalty to this firm; otherwise they are likely to change to other brands. Hirschman’s framework partly explains workers’ resignation in the restaurant. In the restaurant which lacked an organised labour union, workers’ bargaining power was weak and their discontent with low wage and inflexible work schedules was unlikely to get any response from the employer. This lack of response may stimulate them to quit. In addition, it is easy for them to find alternative jobs, and this discourages them from acting to change the situation or to be loyal to an organisation. As Hirschman argued, ‘the presence of the exit alternative can therefore tend to atrophy the development of the art of voice’ (1970, p. 43). Under these circumstances, loyalty is rarely cultivated and turnover is inevitably high.

6.2.2 Envisioning the alternatives as mental escape

Many workers moved between factories, the catering sector and construction sites, all of which are low-end jobs that are most often occupied by migrant workers. Whether to stay in the restaurant or to quit was a recurrent theme during their daily conversations, especially when someone was about to leave. Talking and fantasising about alternative job opportunities can be treated as a form of coping as well as mental escaping.

One day, in an idle chat, waitress Yan declared she was going to quit and work in a factory. Waiter Ma, waiter Di and Yan compared the pros and cons of working in a factory, in a restaurant and in a clothing shop:

Ma: *Jinchang* (working in a factory) and working in the restaurant makes little difference. Wage earned in a factory relies on *ku gan* (tiring and hard labour); but most of the clothing stores only recruit women. And meals and accommodation are not included.

Di: *Jinchang* means having to work 12 hours a day. And a person gets a little above two thousand yuan. Sometimes a worker has to work 15 to 16 hours but the overtime wages are only a couple of yuan per hour.

Yan: One cannot enjoy any public holidays here in the Meteor and it's so difficult to ask for leave. Working long hours in a factory is fine for me. I will work as hard as I can in the coming years and then I will get married.

The inflexibility of the work schedules was a major concern for Yan and many other workers in the Meteor. Public holidays are the busiest time for the restaurant. The workers are not allowed to ask for leave during these times. Working in a restaurant means giving up almost all the national holidays, whereas working in a factory can guarantee public holidays, at least the Spring Festival, which is considered the most important festival in China.

Di's claim that the monthly wages in a factory were 'a little above two thousand yuan' if a worker worked 12 hours a day actually underestimated the average wage in a factory in Shanghai. Based on information provided by previous restaurant workers who were working in a factory, entry-level factory wages were usually hundreds of yuan higher than in the Meteor. Data published by the Shanghai Bureau of Statistics (SBS) confirms this. As indicated by SBS (2014b), the average annual income in the catering sector was 32,335 yuan, second to lowest of all sectors, whereas the income in manufacturing was 42,975 yuan in 2013. However, the higher wage in manufacturing included overtime work. Waitress Fengyu only stayed in a factory a couple of days before quitting. She said:

Although a worker can sit when working (in the factory), the work hours are too long. It's intolerable. And they set a very high productivity goal, which is too demanding.

It is not difficult to see the characteristics of factory work compared to restaurant work on the basis of these workers' accounts: they are paid higher wage and receive time off on public holidays, but the work is more intense if overtime is involved. Although choices are limited, each worker chooses a job based on his/her specific preferences. Ma and Di had stayed in the Meteor for over a year. From their discussion, the alternative job opportunities were not so attractive given their intrinsic drawbacks. Discussing the alternatives may have reinforced their decision to stay at the restaurant. I argue that discussing and envisioning possible job alternatives was a form of coping to deal with the tedium at work.

Gender difference is not only reflected in the motivations for resignation but also by the job opportunities available. As discussed above, Ma sensed that a woman might have more chance to become a shop assistant, which indicates the gender division of labour for shop work. The annual wage for retail workers was 41,290 yuan in 2013 (SBS, 2014b), a figure that lies between catering and manufacturing. As for the jobs that preoccupied the migrant workers in Shanghai, shop work and domestic work are considered women's areas, whereas construction site work is seen as for men.

Working on a construction site is a popular option for male rural workers. Some of the waiters and pantry helpers had previously worked in construction, where they were paid more but had to endure an extremely dirty and risky environment. Hushao used to work in a construction site. As he put it:

Working as a construction worker can be better paid, but it's 10 times more difficult than working as a pantry helper. A person has to work in the open air in a temperature of 37 degrees, and the skin gets very sunburned.

'Ten times harder' may be an exaggeration, but it demonstrates that working on a construction site guarantees higher pay but requires tremendous physical labour. By comparison, domestic work, a better-paid job available to migrant women compared to restaurant jobs, requires them to deal with demanding customers. Some female workers who once worked as domestics recounted experiences of being humiliated by censorious employers. As female shift leader Lan put it:

Even in the coldest winter, the old bag (*lao tai po*) didn't allow me to use hot water when washing clothes. All I could use was cold water. She would scold me

if I used hot water. (She was) extremely stingy. Her granddaughter was lovely, and her daughter was nice, that's why I worked there for a year, otherwise I would have left within the first two months. When their old washing machine was broken, I was required to pay 12 yuan in repair fees. I stopped doing domestic work after that. They gave me the impression that they looked down upon us *xiangxia ren* (rural people), so I don't wanna do this job. I chose the restaurant job instead. I would have earned a lot more if I had carried on doing the domestic work, but, alas, I just don't like this sort of job.

Lan thought that she would probably be able to get better wage had she carried on doing domestic work.¹⁰⁰ Instead, she chose to do restaurant work because she was not comfortable with the humiliating work environment. Job choice is a trade-off.

Regarding the cases of Hushao and Lan, the fact that workers are motivated by economic incentive to migrate does not necessarily mean that they will choose the most profitable work. In many cases, they take a range of factors into consideration including the work environment and employee-employer relationships.

Starting a small business is an alternative envisaged by many. The mass media encourages entrepreneurship in post-socialist China. Legendary rags-to-riches stories of entrepreneurs are widespread in the media. Many workers in the restaurant expressed the desire to become entrepreneurs. Lacking upward mobility through institutional advancement, they dreamed of escaping employment and running their own business instead. For example, pantry helper Chongtian said that he was thinking of *kai dian* (running a shop), though without any specific type of shop in mind:

My uncle is a street vendor selling vegetables. I wanna run a shop, whatever can make money . . . definitely it's better than *dagong*, just think that way, how much can a person earn from *dagong*?!

In Chongtian's view, whatever business a person ran was better than *dagong* with respect to the economic return. Having seen successful entrepreneurs among relatives and colleagues, both male and female workers intended to establish their own business. Some workers considered that the suitable time to start a business was related to marital status. As waitress Lulu indicated:

For sure I will go back to run a shop . . . my auntie, uncle and brother are all going back to the home village to run their own business after getting married. Like my

¹⁰⁰ Domestic work usually includes part-time or full-time in-house workers who do cleaning and/or child or elder care. In 2014 the hourly pay for part-time domestic work in Shanghai was around 20 yuan (£2), which was double the rate for part-time restaurant work. In order to verify what shift leader Lan said, I searched the website 'Shanghai Domestic Work Information Exchange' (<http://www.shjzxx.net/>) on June 24th 2014. This search revealed that the pay for a full-time in-house domestic worker, which is the same type of job that she previously did, varied from 4500 to 5000 yuan, which is significantly higher than the current wages of a waitress (2800 yuan).

auntie, she is running a clothing shop, my brother's running a food court . . . me and my husband are saving money in order to run a small business.

Lulu viewed post-marriage as a suitable time to start a business. Although Lulu's relatives went back to open small businesses after getting married, she remained *dagong*, still hoping to find the best time to run her own business. It indicates her ambivalence regarding the timing of going back. Many migrants estimated the likely duration of their stay by their financial status. Waitress Lulu suggested that she and her husband would go back only if they earned enough money, although they had no idea how much counted as 'enough'. The ambivalence of this timing reflects their sense of uncertainty and the possibility of prolonging their non-patrilocal location.

Starting a business was not necessarily related to the return to the village. For instance, Xiao Min, the shift leader of the pantry helpers, had a different view on going back and running a small business:

I've never thought about going back to run a shop. For the time being only the elderly and the children are in the home village. That's boring. What kind of business can I do?

As discussed in Chapter 4, apart from this full-time job, Xiao Min bought a car to start an illegal cab business. Xiao Min's comments demonstrate that he did not find the idea of running a business in the home village appealing and that he would rather make money in Shanghai.

The workers were very critical of the conditions of employment in the restaurant, but the alternatives available to them were limited and had their own drawbacks. Most migrant workers in Shanghai have to choose between the least acceptable jobs and less acceptable ones, indicating their disadvantaged situation.

6.2.3 Physical and verbal coping and resistance at work

Having discussed physical and mental escaping behaviour, I will now examine the workers' physical and verbal methods of coping and resistance. I argue that some forms of coping and resistance were gendered but some were not, and these differences were related to job positions.

6.2.3.1 Resistance and coping among table servers

More often than not, table servers expressed their discontent through their relations with the customers rather than with the restaurant management. They expressed their

displeasure towards the customers either implicitly or explicitly, and their behaviour had no apparent gender difference. Once waitress Fang was displeased with the treatment she had received from a customer. Fang went over to the cupboard and asked me to guard her back so that she could put some vinegar into the green tea the customer had ordered. I said, 'Are you not happy with the customer?' She answered, 'No, I'm not'. Fang told me of another example: once, when a customer vented his/her anger on a waitress, the waitress spat in the rice she was preparing for the customer.¹⁰¹ This indirect way of expressing dissatisfaction with customers can be viewed as resistance, because the worker has a clear object to challenge.

In other cases, table servers responded to impolite customers in an explicit way. As waitress Fengyu recounted:

Several years ago, a table of guests said to me: 'If we hadn't come to this restaurant, you would have been planting crops and pasturing cattle.' I hit back: 'If we hadn't come, you would have been eating shit!'

'Planting crops and pasturing cattle' is a derogatory remark and suggests that urban customers perceive restaurant workers to be inferior owing to their rural background. It alludes to the idea that rural workers are dependent on urbanites for jobs in the city, which reinforces the urbanites' sense of superiority. Nevertheless, Fengyu refuted this perception by pointing out that urbanites are dependent on peasants and rural migrants to preserve the urbanites' privilege and serve them food in restaurants. The low-paid work of rural migrants allows urbanites to enjoy a higher living standard than might otherwise have been possible. Both peasants and rural migrants play crucial roles in food production not only with respect to agriculture and the livestock industry, on which everyone depends, but also because of the services they provide as migrants. By fighting back verbally, Fengyu decisively resisted the derogatory remark that cast the rural migrants as the dependent 'other' and the urbanites as the host being depended on.

In order to explore worker-customer relations, I asked a group of waitresses about the customers who left a lasting impression on them, all the waitresses except one came up with negative experiences of being denigrated, which resonates with Fengyu's experience.

¹⁰¹ I have no idea regarding the gender of the customer as 'she' and 'he' pronounces the same in Mandarin and I did not ask Fang about the gender of the customer.

When considering the relationship between Chinese migrant workers and urbanites, merely focusing on social class is to oversimplify the situation. Discrimination is inextricably associated with *hukou* status, because the urban/rural binarism is deeply rooted in many people's perception.

6.2.3.1.1 Using *suzhi* discourse as verbal resistance

A more nuanced and recurrent way of verbal resistance is identified by means of reversing the prevalent discourse that migrants' *suzhi* is lower than urbanites. *Suzhi* generally refers to personal quality. It is promoted by the government and by intellectuals and is related to improving the population as a whole (Jacka, 2006; H. Yan, 2008). As Yan argues, 'The promotion and deployment of the notion of *suzhi* as such a value-predication of the subject is central to a neoliberal governmentality that has rearticulated the relationship between the state, the market, and subjectivity in development' (p. 137). As touched upon in Chapter 1, according to a significant amount of Chinese literature, migrant workers should transform themselves and improve their *suzhi* in order to better adapt themselves to the city (F. Chen, 2007; Guilan Chen, 2004; G. Guo & Liu, 2007; C. Liu & Chen, 2008). The view that society should work together to improve the *suzhi* of migrant workers is also prevalent in the state media. As the media has claimed, improving *suzhi* is beneficial to migrant workers themselves, to their employers, and to the overall economic transformation in China (Xiaoyan Chen & Shen, 2015; G. Tao, 2015). The dominant rhetoric of low *suzhi* migrants reinforces their status as marginalised group and reproduces their social exclusion (P. Lan, 2014).

Interestingly, migrant workers in the Meteor created a counter-argument to the discourse that rural people have low *suzhi* or no *suzhi* at all, regardless of the government's effort to disseminate and promote the *suzhi* rhetoric in order to regulate the behaviour of people with rural *hukou*. Complaining about the customers' lack of *suzhi* was a recurrent theme among the table servers as a way to resist impolite customers and challenge the dominant discourse, whether or not they were fully aware of the dominant *suzhi* discourse.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, Xiaoping said in a daily meeting: 'The customers who come here, to tell the truth, most of them lack *suzhi*...' Xiaoping explicitly complained about the lack of *suzhi* among the customers. This was mirrored by bartender Lu's comment when he explained ways to deal with tough customers:

Working in the restaurant for a while makes a person's *suzhi* become worse. The workers' good characteristics are ruined in dealing with the customers.

In contrast to the prevailing rhetoric, Lu implied that it was the low-*suzhi* urbanites who were to blame for the contaminated *suzhi* of the workers. Furthermore, I found that the workers made an implicit association between customers' low *suzhi* and their low purchasing power. As Zaozao noted:

Those working in the hall area said that serving in the hall has two disadvantages: the first is *chi de bu hao* (the customers eat cheap food); the second is *suzhi bu hao* (the customers' quality is not good).

Zaozao's comment demonstrates the view, shared by many workers, that the customers in the hall area were less affluent and sophisticated than those in the VIP rooms/compartments. The customers' poor *suzhi* was perceived as being related to their thrifty consumption. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Meteor is a restaurant serving a wide range of customers from different social classes. Certain customers were stigmatised by the workers because of their consumption behaviour, which the workers associated with having 'poor *suzhi*'. How the workers judged customers resemble the way in which migrant workers are judged by urbanites that link their socioeconomic status to having poor *suzhi* (H. Yan, 2008).

These restaurant workers both conformed to and challenged the dominant discourse. They conformed to this discourse by uncritically accepting the word '*suzhi*' as a primary criterion to define a person's quality. They challenged the dominant discourse by using *suzhi* as a weapon with which to attack the customers, whether consciously or unconsciously. By complaining about the customers' low *suzhi*, the workers situated themselves in a morally superior position. Resisting the impolite customers by demoralising them justified the view that the workers' poor treatment resulted not from their low socioeconomic class and rural *hukou* status but from the customers' uncivilised manners. I argue that the ways in which migrant workers used the enemy's weapons to attack the enemy reflect their agency and complicates the naive claim that migrant workers are a group that should be monitored, addressed in Chapter 1 (Jiang, 2003; NBS, 2014).¹⁰² By focusing on the restaurant workers, I have discovered a picture

¹⁰² As discussed in Chapter 1, the central government tends to problematise, objectify and monitor migrant workers, as reflected by the title of the report that the National Bureau of Statistics issues annually: National Monitoring and Investigating Report on Rural Migrant Workers. The tone of some academic articles resembles that of the national report. For example, Jiang (2003) argued: 'Migrant workers are a special group in the cities. They constantly adjust their behaviour based on urbanites. They choose to change themselves and integrate into the cities...the whole society should take measures to help

that diverges from and challenges the dominant discourse. It is noteworthy that the workers complained about the customers' low *suzhi* to their colleagues rather than directly to the customers, whereas customers were more likely to complain and curse the workers to their face. The unbalanced power relationship between workers and customers, and the workers' rhetorical challenge of the *suzhi* discourse, do not necessarily lead to a direct challenge to the power relationship. But these actions still can be viewed as resistance because the informants have concrete object to resist regardless of the result of their resistance, as defined in Chapter 2.

6.2.3.1.2 Verbal coping of table servers in a commission system

Having discussed the resistant behaviour of table servers, I now consider their coping strategies. Rather than having conflicts with customers, some table servers strategically used verbal skills to persuade customers to order certain dishes that could generate commission. Coping strategies here refers to the use of emotional skills, including hiding feelings of disgust and being obedient to the customers, in order to obtain commission. Table servers were more likely to use verbal skills than facial ones, and in this they differ from what Hochschild (2003 [1983]) in her classic book on air hostesses. The utilisation of verbal skills as a coping strategy is exemplified by Fengyu and Zaozao.

‘What kind of tea would you prefer, sir? This one is ordinary, the other is more expensive’, Fengyu said to a middle-aged male Shanghainese customer. I was surprised to hear Fengyu asking in such a humble tone and using the word ‘*xiansheng*’ (sir), which I never thought about using myself when serving. Fengyu told me that she particularly looked down upon Shanghainese, and stated that they were stingy and arrogant, but she had to hide her disgust and performed with a docile attitude instead. In this respect, she was in accordance with the emotional labour described by Hochschild (2003 [1983]). Although the smiling face that Hochschild emphasised was not a focus for table servers in the Meteor Restaurant, they did use strategic communication skills, because the effective use of these skills was directly associated with their commission. Every day, they calculated how much commission they had earned. The amount of commission they could earn was a daily topic among table servers. They offer verbal docility and a humble attitude, encouraging customers to order certain food so that they could get more commission.

migrant workers to accommodate themselves in the cities and to transform themselves into citizens’ (p. 92).

In the restaurant, although smiling was emphasised in codes of practice, it was not a focus in everyday management. Hochschild (ibid., p. 7) created the term 'emotional labour' ' . . . to mean the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labor is sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value.' I observed that rather than use facial expression, workers more often displayed verbal obedience to customers. The regulations applied to workers in low-end catering in contemporary China may not as strict as those imposed on airline staff in the US, according to Hochschild's studies more than 30 years ago. Having 'good manners' and pleasant appearance - attributes that are difficult to codify in formal rules - have been discussed in different bodies of literature (Gill & Pratt, 2008; Hardt, 1999; Hochschild, 2003 [1983]; Leidner, 1993). Emotional labour, aesthetic labour, affective labour and immaterial labour, concepts derived from western contexts, may not fully apply to restaurant workers in China. It may be possible that workers in high-end restaurants and in airlines are better trained, higher paid, and therefore more likely to perform emotions according to certain scripts and be strictly controlled and manipulated, as this literature has described. Nevertheless, the performance of workers in large middle- and low-level restaurants like the Meteor were less likely to conform to the strict guidelines of emotional labour.

Zaozao's case also shows how verbal coping related to the commission system. One day, when my tutor waitress Zaozao served compartment 101, I stood by her side to learn how to serve the customers. She successfully persuaded the customers to order dishes of shark fin soup, each of which could generate 1-3 yuan (10-30 pence) in commission. After leaving the room, she asked me to hand in an ordering sheet at the bar area, where the dish-ordering terminal was located. I double-checked the sheet by asking: 'Are these dishes on the sheet what the customers in 101 want?' She said in a loud and proud tone: 'they are what *I want*' (her emphasis). Zaozao kept a record of the commission on a notebook that she carried with her all the time. She calculated the commission on a daily basis with great enthusiasm. By encouraging customers to order the food she wanted, Zaozao subverted the idea of docility associated with a service worker in contrast to a dominant customer. Claiming that it was her choice, she was getting the best out of her job by manipulating customers' desires. Therefore this can be viewed as coping. Her self-awareness suggests she was exercising her agency even in the uneven power relationship between waitress and customer.

It is notable that this strategic verbal persuasion reflects Zaozao's agency, but simultaneously reflects the interests of the restaurant; the commission mechanism required the workers to ally themselves with the restaurant rather than the customer. Physical and verbal resistance and coping constituted the most common strategies these workers adopted in their daily work, challenging the servile image of service workers. It should be noted that I found no obvious gender difference with respect to the coping strategies the workers used to deal with customers.

6.2.3.2 Procrastination by male pantry helpers

Discussed above is the coping and resistance of table servers. For male pantry helpers, who formed the second most numerous group, procrastination was the most common way of coping strategy and resistance, for example escaping to the back door of the restaurant to smoke and play mobile phone games or escaping to the toilet to take a rest. I have not seen these strategies used by female pantry helpers. Male pantry helpers staying at the back door after delivering a round of dishes was a daily sight. After relaxing for a few minutes, they went back to the kitchens to collect dishes. Their procrastination was frequently criticised by the shift leader in the daily meeting, because it led to delay in dishes being served, but criticism made little difference. Various kinds of procrastination remained commonplace. Both the pantry helpers and the shift leader understood that having suffered from labour scarcity, the restaurant was unlikely to fire the pantry helpers, therefore their procrastination was tolerated. I consider that by taking a rest from time to time, they were able to endure the mechanical job of dish-carrying and to resist the uncooperative behaviour and discriminatory attitude of the female table servers towards them.

6.3 Gendered leisure activities

In the preceding section, I explored how the workers dealt with difficulties, improved life quality or made life more endurable, and how these acts reflected their ability to exercise agency. I now focus on the leisure activities of shopping, embroidery and gambling during work breaks and attending karaoke bars after work. In this thesis, leisure is conceptualised by time, 'time which is not occupied by paid work, unpaid work or personal chores and obligations' (Haworth & Veal, 2004, p. 1). Here, I focus on leisure activities during the lunch break and after work. I examine how leisure in the form of consumption also functioned as a coping strategy that enabled workers to recreate themselves when their budgets were low. The acts of shopping, embroidery or

gambling can be seen as consumption. Consumption is a process that embodies both liberation and constraint. Through consumption, the workers glimpsed a sense of freedom, exerted agency and reclaimed their autonomy. However, as Baudrillard has stated, consumption is not a democratising place. It is a 'system of recognition' through which social distinction and hierarchy are reinforced (Baudrillard, 2001, p. 22). Being conscious of their disadvantaged position in Shanghai, the workers' sense of subordination was reconfirmed by consumption. However, I do not deny that these activities can be seen as forms of entertainment or socialisation as well. Leisure and coping are not mutually exclusive.

As illustrated in Chapter 1, the workers usually had a daily lunch break from 1:30pm to 4pm, although the exact duration was subject to change depending on how busy the restaurant was. The workers' leisure activities were gendered. The female workers usually stayed in the rest area on the first floor and made use of the two and a half hours by doing needlework, which refers to embroidery samplers (*shizi xiu*) that can be used to decorate walls or as tablemats and typically involve embroidering shapes or letters in various stitches. Alternatively, they went shopping in the National Drawer, an indoor market targeted at migrant workers and selling almost everything from gadgets to food, clothes and bedding to cosmetics. By contrast, the male workers usually went gambling near the restaurant, or played card games inside the restaurant.¹⁰³ In what follows, I explained how the gendered ways of recreation helped the workers cope with their menial daily lives and how the choice of recreation reflects their gendered subjectivity and reinforced their disadvantaged position in Shanghai.

6.3.1 Gendered and class-specific shopping

As explained in Chapter 1, from 1978 onwards the central government reoriented China from socialism to capitalism, with a strong focus on consumer culture. Stimulating domestic demand is frequently referred to by the state as a way to encourage people to consume so as to fuel economic growth. Meanwhile, the pursuit of material wellbeing is internalised as a desire to embrace consumer culture. Being a capable consumer is constructed as a crucial component of being a capable citizen. However, consumption is not a democratising place (Baudrillard, 2001). Rather, it reproduces and reinforces social inequality. Rural migrant women in China who are financially disadvantaged

¹⁰³ The boundary based on time slots to divide these activities was not clear-cut. The workers might also go shopping and did embroidery after work or during days off. But these activities were most frequently seen during their work intervals.

have to constrain their desire to consume, so they are not able to match the strong purchasing power of the ideal consumer (Evans, 2000; Pun, 2005, 2008; Rofel, 2007; H. Yan, 2008).

Consumption also serves to construct subjectivity. Here I examine how the female table servers made sense of themselves through consumption and how they dealt with the contradiction between the desire to recreate a new feminine self with the limited financial resources available.¹⁰⁴

The National Drawer and the Dragon Dream were the shopping places most frequently mentioned by the workers. The former was the first choice for most of the workers, whereas the latter targeted the urban middle class. I experienced a strong sense of class anxiety when shopping in the National Drawer for the first time. In January 2012, I was required by the manager to buy a pair of shoes made of cloth in the National Drawer before I could start work. I bought a pair of shoes for 15 yuan (£1.50). The low price was beyond my imagination. I was surprised by this price but simultaneously felt a sense of degradation that I was ashamed to recognise. It was as if, simply by purchasing these cheap shoes, my status had fallen from middle class to the class on the lowest rung of society. But later, when I went to the National Drawer with my colleagues, the sense of degradation disappeared, perhaps because I had become more immersed in my role as a waitress.

Dragon Dream is a chain shopping mall a five-minute walk from the National Drawer. There are dozens of restaurants located inside the mall. I dine out with my friends in Dragon Dream quite often when I am in Shanghai. However, I seldom go to the National Drawer, despite its closeness to my home. My informants made constant comparisons between the National Drawer and the Dragon Dream during daily conversations. One day we had a casual conversation during the afternoon break.

Zhuang: I haven't been to the Dragon Dream yet.

Researcher: Why?

Zhuang: Because it was only opened half a year ago. (After a pause) I do not dare to go inside because it is not my level (*dangci*).

Researcher: Have you been to the Dragon Dream, Yong?

¹⁰⁴ The male workers went shopping in the National Drawer as well. And I twice discovered that the male workers were sewing *shizi xiu*. Again, the boundary was not clear-cut. The female workers were more likely to go shopping and sew *shizi xiu*. But none of the female workers went gambling.

Yong: Yes.

Jie (with cynical tone): He just passed by it on his way to the National Drawer (all laughed).

Nana: Where is the Dragon Dream? The customers mention it quite often.

Yadong: It's close to the National Drawer. It's not our level (*dangci*). Once I tried a pair of boots there. The assistant had a nice attitude, but the boots cost more than one thousand (yuan)!

Xiao Nan: If you try on without buying, (they) look nice, but they will curse you behind your back. So I won't go to places like the Dragon Dream.

The class distinction between the workers and customers became clear during the discussion. The workers sensed the class distinction, although in a way that was contrary to my shopping experience in the National Drawer. 'Not our *dangci*' was a recurring comment when they described their impression of the Dragon Dream, although some workers like Zhuang were not willing to recognise it at first. *Dangci* refers to level or class, so 'not our *dangci*' reflects the fact that they were conscious of a class disparity largely based on income and purchasing power that distinguished their class from the class that was able to consume in the Dragon Dream. 'The customers mention it quite often' indicates that the people who dine in the Meteor were more likely to be urban middle class, signifying the class disparity between the workers and the customers.

6.3.1.1 Haggling for 'low class trash'

When shopping in the National Drawer, haggling is a very common coping strategy to deal with the desire for consumption while saving as much money as possible. Once I expressed my wish to go shopping with the female workers in the National Drawer, Zaozao said: 'the products in the National Drawer are low *dangci*. But we can teach you how to haggle on the prices.' During a work break, I accompanied Nana and Zaozao to the National Drawer to buy a shirt. The price tag showed 90 yuan. Nana said to the shop assistant determinedly: '40!' The assistant responded: '60'. Nana insisted: '40. No more, no less.' The owner hesitated for a second then agreed. I expressed my surprise: 'How did you manage to cut the price to 40 yuan?'¹⁰⁵ She replied with contempt: 'The National Drawer only sells trash.' I was stunned. I thought she took a

¹⁰⁵ I usually shop in places like the Dragon Dream, where prices are fixed and therefore leave no room for haggling. I was surprised because I was not used to haggling.

long time to beat down the price because she really liked the shirt, so I was surprised that she dismissed what she bought as ‘trash’.

‘Low quality’ and ‘low *dangci* (class)’ were repeated themes when workers discussed the products in the National Drawer. One day, Zaozao cut out five pictures from fashion magazines that she bought in a local supermarket and stuck them on the wall next to the bed (see Figure 10). The pictures showed models wearing MaxMara fur coats, Gucci handbags, and other mix and match clothes. Without knowing any of these brands, she said that she was fond of the design of these clothes. Both of us appreciated a particular pink suit. I asked her: ‘is it possible to buy a similar one in the National Drawer?’ She exclaimed: ‘The National Drawer? What’s the *dangci* of it? So vulgar!’ However, Zaozao said she bought clothes every month in the National Drawer, which seems to contradict her negative perception of the quality of the clothes there.



Figure 10 Magazine pages stuck on the wall

Zaozao adorned the damp dormitory room with images of urban middle class taste. The room had a broken light fitting and draughty windows that constantly let in cold wind in the winter. The strident alarm vibrated at 5am every morning. These unpleasant living conditions were in stark contrast with the images she chose of urban, beautiful and materially successful women wearing designer brands.

Based on the interviews and daily conversations, almost all the informants had a clear awareness that the quality of products in the National Drawer was low; nevertheless, it was their favourite shopping destination because of their weak purchasing power. The contradiction in behaviour and attitude indicates that although they longed for products of better quality and design, they understood that it was the best they could get in the circumstances. They saved money for their families and for their own futures, including possibly setting up a business. Consumption in a higher *dangci* shopping mall, such as the Dragon Dream, was therefore beyond their dreams.

6.3.1.2 Calculation and trade-off as coping

In addition to haggling, making the best use of their limited resources sometimes required prudent calculation and trade-offs. Even when purchasing relatively cheap products, they often paused to consider before making a decision. On my flatmate Nana's day off, I accompanied her to the National Drawer. She spent dozens of yuan on eye shadow and mascara without any hesitation. Noticing my surprise, she said she had been here a couple of times and had craved the cosmetics for a long time. After shopping, we planned to visit one of our previous colleagues. I suggested taking a bus as it would take an hour to walk there. After finding out that a single journey cost two yuan (20 pence), Nana insisted we walk. Altogether I walked with her for three hours that day. Faced with the contradiction between saving money and pursuing a beautiful appearance, Nana used her limited resources on what she desired most and avoided spending on what she deemed unnecessary. This cautiousness in consumption, and the trade-off behaviour, can both be seen as coping.

Some authors viewed migrant women's consumption behaviour as an effort to conjure up a new self (Pun, 2005, 2008; H. Yan, 2008). Yan (2008) mentioned that her migrant informants preferred talking about their consumption experience rather than their work. One reason for this might be that they did not want themselves to be identified as cheap labour. They highlighted their consumption experience to preserve their sense of self-worth. However, both the literature (Pun, 2000, 2008; Yan, 2008) and my observations showed that rural migrants' attempts to transform themselves through consumption are not recognised by urbanites. Their consumption reinforced their disadvantaged status in urban China.

In a similar vein, Evans (2006), who studied fashion and femininity in contemporary China, argued:

Contemporary femininity is fashioned through images of the urban-located female who has access to the clothes and accoutrements that urban consumption offers. The consuming urbanite thus functions to affirm hierarchical lines of distinction defined by consumer capacity and success. Those who cannot or do not participate in this project are relegated, silenced, and absented to the outer borders of the reform project. (p. 179)

Class and *hukou* hierarchy, embedded into the process of consumption, serve to explain migrant women's consumption behaviour. Zaozao and Nana caught glimpses of fashion and modernity through daily interaction with urbanites. Table servers overheard customers' conversations about up-to-date fashion. Through overhearing the conversations some workers got a sense of modernity and recast themselves accordingly. Their active engagement in purchasing clothes, cosmetics and fashion magazines demonstrates their pursuit of being feminine, beautiful and urban, a pursuit through which their feminised subjectivity is crafted and recrafted after migration. Paradoxically, even they themselves doubted their consumption could ever make them seem to have good taste, considering way they denigrated their purchases as 'vulgar' and 'trash'. On the one hand, they realised themselves in consumption, as Baudrillard argued (2001, p. 15). But on the other hand, their purchasing behaviour actually positions them at a disadvantage.

Serving customers sometimes require female workers to be docile and disciplined and follow certain scripts. Consumption creates an autonomous space for them to liberate themselves but, paradoxically, it constrains them at the same time in that consumption reproduces and reinforces the inequality. By subscribing to the values of the consumer society, they subjugate themselves to another source of coercion.

The negotiation between limited financial resources and modelling themselves in an urban and feminine ideal means that these women had to spend their money carefully. Their exercise of agency was very limited as it did not change the hierarchy and inequality between rural workers and the urban middle class but rather reproduced them. The interweaving of consumerism, middle-class taste and contemporary femininity adds to the absurdity of the situation and marks the class distinction between the rural workers and the urban middle-class.

6.3.2 Embroidery (*shizi xiu*) as women's activity

Another leisure activity the female workers frequently engaged in is sewing *shizi xiu* (embroidery samplers). Sewing *shizi xiu* is time-consuming work. It usually takes a

couple of months to complete a piece even if it is worked on every day. It is considered a gendered activity. Almost all the sewers were women.¹⁰⁶ They sewed different patterns with different colours of thread. The patterns include Chinese characters, flowers, animals and popular Chinese cartoon figures. Both married and unmarried women did embroidery. The primary motivation was to decorate their homes. All the informants suggested that they would adorn their homes with the finished pieces. Floral images and Chinese characters were the most popular patterns among these workers. The floral patterns included small yellow daisies, large chrysanthemums, pink plum blossom and peonies. Sewing *shizi xiu* signifies the women's pursuit of beauty and the creation of a well-decorated home. It reflects a greater commitment among women to prepare for their homes compared to the male workers.

As for the motivations for sewing *shizi xiu*, none of the women stated that they did it for financial reasons, although they told me that a completed piece was worth at least a hundred yuan, depending on the size. All the women said it was an activity to pass the time and to decorate their homes. Interestingly, Zaozao's comment suggests that the motivation for sewing *shizi xiu* is class-based. Lan, the shift leader of the table servers, asked me: 'Do you sew *shizi xiu* as well?' I said: 'no'. Zaozao responded: 'We make *shizi xiu* out of emptiness. She won't do this sort of thing'. Zaozao's response has multiple meanings. First, it suggests that sewing *shizi xiu* is a form of dealing with 'emptiness,' because they had limited ways of passing the time, and making *shizi xiu* happened to fill the vacuum. Second, the comparison Zaozao drew between them and me reveals her belief that as a well-educated urbanite, I do not have 'emptiness' to deal with, which suggests that in her view recreation was classed.¹⁰⁷

I believe there is more to the desire to sew *shizi xiu* than simply decorating houses or passing time. These women workers sewed their expectations into the patterns, in which feminised subjectivity was embedded. '家和万事兴' (*jia he wanshi xing*, see Figure 11) was a popular pattern among the sewers; it means 'a harmonious family is the origin of the prosperity of everything.' '守望幸福' (*shouwang xingfu*), literally meaning to 'hold the happiness', was another popular pattern. Apart from the pursuit of happiness and harmonious family relations, these workers also inscribed their hopes for wealth and

¹⁰⁶ In the fieldwork, I only saw two male workers do cross-stitch. Both of them took over the unfinished pieces left by their female relatives.

¹⁰⁷ However, I am not able to find any literature discussing the relationship between social class and the activity of sewing *shizi xiu*.

fame in the embroidery. Waitress Jie completed sewing the pattern ‘守望幸福’ (hold the happiness) and then began to sew another series of Chinese calligraphy, ‘人世间条条路坎坷，勇往莫退缩，谋富贵’，which means ‘every road in this world is rocky; go ahead, do not back down; and strategise for wealth and fame.’ It was accompanied by two characters, 奋斗 (*fendou*), which mean ‘to strive’. As pointed out in Chapter 5, Jie was shift leader of the table servers. Her husband advised her to quit the job and become a full-time housewife. She refused. These Chinese characters imply that she agreed with the idea that a person has to make great efforts in order to create a better life in a world that is full of obstacles, reflecting her self-motivated and pragmatic personality.



Figure 11 A *shizi xiu* piece depicting 'a harmonious family is the origin of the prosperity of everything'

Of course, sewing *shizi xiu* can be understood simply as a way of dealing with the split shift system in the restaurant. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the workers have two and a half hours of rest time. What they could do in this time was extremely limited; it might be too far to travel home and back again, and they could not really get a second job. Considering the abundance of time coupled with the limited budget, sewing *shizi xiu* could be one of the most practical choices for them.

Sewing *shizi xiu* can also be understood as an extension of the needlework conventionally understood as women's work. Through sewing, they not only projected their desires and yearnings onto the patterns but also created a female space in which to exchange views on work and family while sewing. The whole process of sewing, hanging the work in a conspicuous position so they could see it every day, functioned as

a way of coping with the drudgery of daily life as well as improving their lives through decorating their living space. The sewing behaviour itself, the patterns they chose, and the casual conversations all crystallised their feminised subjectivity, which was clearly distinguished from the male workers' subjectivity represented through gambling, discussed in the following part.

6.3.3 Gambling, poverty and masculinity

China has a huge underground gambling industry. Male workers in all jobs, including waiters, pantry helpers and kitchen workers in the Meteor Restaurant, engaged in gambling. Their primary gambling activities involved gambling machines, buying lottery tickets and playing card games. In what follows, I examine the male workers' gambling behaviour in the Meteor Restaurant and how it is associated with their masculinised subjectivity. I primarily deal with their engagement with gambling machines because this was the leisure activity the male workers mostly engaged in and because it demonstrates the workers' masculinised subjectivity.

Gambling was a common pastime, in part because of the hope of winning the jackpot. Because it is an illegal activity there is no data available, but almost certainly—in China, as elsewhere - most people will lose most of the time.¹⁰⁸ As illustrated by Addictions Foundation of Manitoba in Canada (2015), the hit frequency of the machines varies from as low as 3% to as high as 45%. But, as it points out, 'in almost half of those "hits," the player just wins back his original bet.'¹⁰⁹ Some countries, such as the US and the UK, set minimum payout percentages for the slot machines. By contrast, because gambling is an underground industry in China, the unregulated situation may make the gamblers more easily exploited than in the regulated markets.

I went to the gambling shops with the male workers several times. One such visit took place on 9th March 2012, a payday. About a dozen male workers went to play the slot machines as soon as they got their wage in a small-scale betting shop. There were two rows of fixed-odds betting terminals, 'Lucky Six Crocodile' (*xingyun liu'e*, see Figure

¹⁰⁸ Gambling machines are illegal in China, but they are seen everywhere. When asked why not to report the slot machine providers to the police, Hushao said: 'It is useless. Once you report the providers, they will be informed. They are well connected with the police (*Shangtou you ren*).' All the other male workers confirmed what Hushao said.

¹⁰⁹ According to Addictions Foundation of Manitoba in Canada (2015), hit frequency refers to 'how often a machine will stop on a winning combination.'

12) and ‘Forest Ball’ (*senlin wuhui*, see Figure 13).¹¹⁰ In addition, a large machine for a game called ‘Fishing’ (*dayu*) was situated in the middle (see Figures 14 and 15).



Figure 12 ‘Lucky Six Crocodile’



Figure 13 ‘Forest Ball’

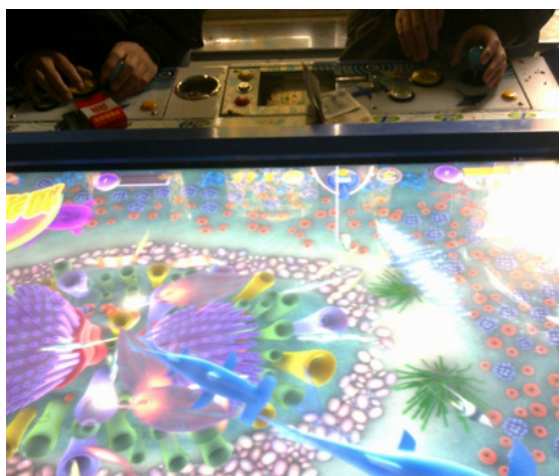


Figure 14 ‘Fishing’ (a)



Figure 15 ‘Fishing’ (b)

All the game players present were male. I observed the *dayu* game during most of my stay. As seen in Figures 14 and 15, four men from the Meteor were playing *dayu*. *Dayu*, colloquially called by the workers, literally means beating the fishes. It is a video game similar to ‘Fishing Joy’ developed by Punchbox. The game allows the players to use virtual cannons to ‘kill’ virtual fish. Players gain points if they are able to kill the fish; they lose if they do not kill the fish. At 3:06 pm, pantry helper Huangmao traded 20 yuan for 200 points. Three minutes later, he had scored 400 by killing the virtual fish.

¹¹⁰ Fixed odds betting terminals refer to electronic machines that allow gamblers to bet on the outcome of various games with fixed odds. Based on my observations, the reward for correctly choosing is from 2 times to 18 times the stake.

Had he stopped at that time, he could have reclaimed 40 yuan; but he continued to play. Suddenly his cannon was attacked by sharks and he lost all his points. Without hesitation, Huangmao said to the shopkeeper: ‘10 yuan please’, which meant he asked for 100 more points in order to resume the game. That was at 3:12pm. Huangmao had lost 20 yuan in six minutes. I turned to observe the other players. All of them were concentrating hard and none of them dropped out when the balance was still positive. They played until they lost every last point. Later, I asked why nobody cashed out and left while they were ahead. Xiao Wang responded: ‘the gambling spirit is inherent in human nature’. Yao added: ‘the game will not be that attractive if gambling is not involved’, which reinforced my perception that they looked for a big win by being engaged in risky games, which will be discussed later in this part.

Many male workers found themselves trapped in profound poverty because of their use of gambling machines. After breaking up with his most recent girlfriend, waiter Hushao, who complained about the low wage discussed in Section 6.1, frequently played the slot machines. The first time I mentioned the word ‘slot machine’ to him seemed to arouse uncomfortable feelings. He put his head down and placed his hands over it. With an expression of pain and regret, he refused to speak. After a while, he said:

Eight or nine out of 10 pantry helpers are playing the slot machines. But most of them lose money. (We) get addicted, and more often lose money than win. I haven’t played it for two months because I’m still indebted. But I will pay off all the debts soon.

Hushao was not alone in being indebted. His remorse was shared by pantry helper Huangmao:

(I) lost thousands of yuan within two months, almost one month’s wages. I’ve stopped playing it now. Each time (I) lose, I want to recoup the losses. I am entirely trapped in it.

Most of their earnings had been spent on gambling. They got so enthusiastic about it that they had no idea how to stop. During my stay in 2012, Xiao Wang, team leader of the pantry helpers, who had a longer history of addiction, cynically noted that he had been working for the gambling machines:

I have been working in the Meteor for almost eight years and have lost 100,000 yuan (£10,000). Basically I’ve been working (*dagong*) for the gambling machine (*laohuji*) . . . I hate myself . . . I lost 1,200 yuan and won back 300, (I was) obsessed with how to save the situation, but was trapped deeper and deeper . . . it is like smoking opium, (I) quit for some time, but people around me went gambling

again. I was tempted when I had money, so I went with them. It is like electronic opium.

Xiao Wang borrowed more than 10,000 yuan from his elderly brother to build a house in 2013 in his home village and as a result he got indebted. He was worried about how to pay off the debt. Later, he decided that gambling could be a way to pay off the debts quickly. Being continuously in full-time work for years and entitled to social benefits, Xiao Wang passed the credit check and successfully applied for four credit cards; the limit of each ranged from 10,000 to 30,000 yuan. Initially he was encouraged by the salesperson and applied for the first one for fun. Later, finding it the fastest way to get cash to gamble or to pay off his gambling debts, he applied for three more. However, with his meagre wage, it was not possible to pay off the credit cards in full, so interest accumulated, forming a vicious circle he had no idea how to get out of.¹¹¹

Using credit cards is a manifestation of middle-class lifestyle in China. Their use requires a person to pay off debts in a timely fashion. As a disadvantaged migrant worker who possessed four credit cards but could not manage the accounts properly, Xiao Wang's financial situation deteriorated as a consequence of his gambling. During my most recent visit, in April 2014, he said he had been worried about how to pay off the debts, so he engaged in gambling in an attempt to make a fortune but was becoming more deeply entrapped. In March 2015, manager Tang told me via instant messaging application WeChat that the mountain of debt distracted Xiao Wang from work so he was fired.

Another prevalent form of gambling among the workers was playing the lottery. Chapter 4 contains a vivid narrative by Bailian, expressing his dream of winning a lottery of five million yuan. His fantasy was echoed by Xiao Min. Below is a casual chat between female bartender Yangjie, Xiao Min and me.

Xiao Min: for us wage labourers (*dagong de*), house buying in places like Shanghai is beyond our wildest dreams. We are not able to buy even in two lifetimes, let alone one lifetime.

...

¹¹¹ According to the regulations of the Central Bank of China (1996), the interest rate on credit cards in China has a minimum of 0.05% per day and it is compounded monthly, which means the balance of an account is multiplied by the daily periodic rate and the interest calculated is added to the balance. If someone like Xiao Wang is not able to pay off the loan, she/he will have to pay penalty and overrun charges apart from the interest rate. For example, according to a news report (Gucheng, 2014), a customer ran up an overdraft of 1000 yuan on his credit card and forgot to pay it off. A year later, he had to pay a total of 123,000.3 yuan.

Researcher: Why do you go to play gambling machines (*da laohuji*)?

Xiao Min: Gambling machine, how to say, just a pastime.

Yangjie: He didn't tell the truth from the bottom of his heart (*xinli hua*). (He) wants to make a fortune so that he can buy houses for his two sons. He buys lottery tickets every day and went on all the time in the pantry, saying things like 'if I could win five million yuan, I will treat all the staff in the Meteor for three days!'

Xiao Min: That was a joke.

Researcher: Do you enter the lottery every day?

Xiao Min: Every draw. Three draws a week. I buy a ticket every draw. It costs dozens of yuan – about one hundred every month.

Yangjie and Xiao Min had been working together in the Meteor for more than four years. As a result, they knew each other quite well. As Yangjie said, Xiao Min's motive for gambling was to be rich in order to support his sons, a reason which was not denied by Xiao Min. To be rich is a primary motivation for gambling, an attitude mirrored by other male migrant workers.

In light of the hegemonic masculinity discussed in Chapter 2, wealth is highly valued in contemporary China, and this is reflected in Figure 16. These gambling machines are decorated with images of car logos and sexy girls, suggesting what success should mean to a man.¹¹² Cars and sexy girls are signifiers of men's financial power, which is a crucial component of hegemonic masculinity in China. These images are in sharp contrast to the undesirable socioeconomic status of the migrants and may serve to arouse the gamblers' desire to win so as to be rich. Their gambling behaviour is related to the undermining of masculinity at work and the intimate relations that were discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. Being disdained by both customers and female workers undermines their sense of masculinity. Both unmarried male workers seeking to find a wife and their married male peers who were no longer primary breadwinners desired the capability to make money in order to realise masculine ideals.

¹¹² I took a photograph of the image of sexy girls on the machine but I have not included it here because I consider that inclusion would reinforce the objectification of women.



Figure 16 A slot machine decorated with different car brands

The gambling behaviour of these marginalised people marks their desire to be rich while lacking opportunities to realise this desire. The male migrants devoted themselves to gambling, making use of credit cards to withdraw money when they ran out of cash and ensuring they did not miss each lottery draw. However, using gambling as a coping strategy was ineffective. Gambling isolated these men not only spatially but also socially and financially. Their marginalised status was reinforced through gambling.

Their hope to earn a great fortune also reflects their attitude towards life: one can become rich if one is lucky enough. Gambling is characterised by contingencies, uncertainties, ambivalence and serendipities, words which could also be used to describe the migrant workers' future prospects. It is important to recognise that gambling is attractive to all classes, irrespective of income and status. But the motivation for the subordinate group to gamble is especially related to their lack of alternatives in life and their opportunistic attitude.

I recognise that the acts of shopping, embroidery and gambling can be treated as forms of leisure activity, behaviours of consumption as well as coping. Nevertheless, I focus on the coping strategy because I intend to highlight the exercise of agency involved in coping with the difficulties of life and with social inequality. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the workers adopted tactical approaches to cope with limited budgets, drudgery

at work and their constrained work schedules. The outcomes that coping brought about were complicated: coping behaviour made their lives more endurable but reinforced class distinctions, fixing the workers in a disadvantaged position in Shanghai.

It is noteworthy that their gendered leisure activities are indicative of their gendered subjectivity and desire. The women's prudent calculations while shopping, balancing the desire for beautiful appearance with the need to save money, is in sharp contrast to the men's reckless gambling, reflecting the gendered expectations imposed on women and men. This is evidenced by the themes discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

6.4 Back to the Karaoke Bar: concluding remarks

In the prologue, I provided a detailed account of the experience of going to the karaoke bar. Going to a karaoke bar was one of the few collective recreations available to the workers. Singing and dancing in the karaoke bar can be viewed as collective ecstasy as it gave them a short respite from onerous routine work, unpleasant customers and the complexities of intimate relations. Although I have spent a lot of time with friends in karaoke bars both in Shanghai and in London, I have never experienced a situation like the one I described: the smuggled-in food, the deafening disco music, the dancing, shouting, crying and vomiting. I consider it a form of coping strategy that enables them to deal with their daily lives.

Social, spatial and financial constraints circumscribed the workers' choice of leisure activities. They experienced social and spatial segregation. The different daily rhythm of their working lives suggests that they had minimal interaction with members of the dominant societal groups except through routine interactions with customers. The workers could not leave work until all the customers have gone. This means that attending a karaoke bar was one of the few choices for collective leisure, because the bar was open when they were free; they were only allowed to have free time from 10pm to 10am. The time constraints marginalised their activities in urban space and prevented them from fully integrating, which further increased their marginality.

The leisure activity of attending a karaoke bar connotes a class distinction in China. Rolandsen (2011, p. 128) studied leisure time among the middle class in Quanzhou, a medium-sized city in South China. He found that attending a karaoke parlour functions 'as a form of social exchange' in order to 'pay one's respects to a host or show off one's talents to colleagues and superiors' so as to cultivate good relations which may

potentially benefit future business. Similarly, Osburg (2013, p. 56) found that among the wealthy class in Chengdu, 'KTV entertaining is one of the key sites for cultivating relationships'. In comparison, for the restaurant workers in Shanghai, attending a karaoke bar functioned more as a way of releasing themselves from the daily drudgery than a social exchange to strengthen the bonds between them. The primary reason was that employee turnover was strikingly high and the workers might quit at any time, which made the bond-strengthening somewhat unnecessary. Different social classes have different reasons for attending a karaoke bar. In what follows, I analyse the workers' behaviour in the karaoke bar in relation to filial obedience, their ambivalent subjectivity and the collective coping behaviour.

As demonstrated in the prologue, the workers brought food to the karaoke bar. The purpose for doing so was to save money, because snacks and drinks from the in-house shop attached to a karaoke bar are usually more expensive than elsewhere. The strategy of smuggling food suggests Ah Kui's weak purchasing power. The adoption of this strategy can be partly explained by his commitments within intergenerational relations. He said that his mother and sister are the most treasured people to him, which resonates with what he said to me when he was about to quit his job in order to make a lot of money through hard work (*ku da qian*) as a way to fulfil his filial duties to his mother. When his father died of cancer, his family owed thousands of yuan in medical fees. His goal to save money for the family would be impeded by any conspicuous consumption in Shanghai. The contradiction between saving money and having fun serves to explain the behaviour of smuggling food in. Those who attended the birthday party maximised their entertainment experience with minimal financial resources. I use 'they' instead of 'Ah Kui' because, I consider the collective food-hiding behaviour demonstrates that all the party attendees understood the contradiction between saving money and having fun and therefore collectively helped him to achieve this goal.

The workers' subjectivity was indicated by the songs they chose to sing. Regarding the song 'Tears of a Dancing Girl' chosen by waitress Lulu (see the epigraph for the lyrics), a dancing girl can be viewed as a metaphor for a waitress, who also experiences inhuman treatment but has to 'swallow the tears' and perform emotional labour. The line 'Is it really my destiny to live my whole life in a dancing club?' connoted waitress Lulu's uncertain feelings about the future. As discussed in Section 6.2, Lulu revealed the desire to go back to her home village to open a restaurant with her husband, but she was ambivalent about the timing of going back. The lyrics of the song 'The Old Boys'

that I sang with Ah Gui that night resemble those of ‘Tears of a Dancing Girl’, in that they both indicate uncertainty about what the future holds.¹¹³ Apart from this, the lyrics of ‘The Old Boys’ connote a sense of sorrow for the friends people lost contact with against the background of the rapidly changing world around them, as well as a sense of loss originating from the unrealised dreams. I feel sentimental each time I listen to it because all the colleagues who attended the birthday party left the restaurant a year later, reflecting the high turnover in the Meteor discussed in Section 6.2.

Collective ecstasy as a coping strategy is suggestive of multiple themes with respect to the workers’ situations at work, in intimate relations and in social life. In the workplace (Chapters 4 and 6), they had to endure low wage, inflexible work schedules and contentious relations with the customers and colleagues; in intimate interactions (Chapter 5), they came across constant conflicts and negotiations with their parents and partners. In social life (Chapter 6), they could barely achieve the identity of capable consumers and were constrained by social, spatial and financial segregation.

¹¹³ Extract from the lyrics of ‘The Old Boy’

For I am destined to wander
Alone and homeless
How could I still be on tenterhooks
Dreams are but dreams
Maybe I should give up
Flowers bloom and fade again and again
But where is the spring for me
Youth like a swift current
Rushing by without saying goodbye

Leaving me behind
Numb and cold
Beautiful flowers
Faded at prime time in spring
Who cares if they ever lived in this world

...
People go in different directions
Away and gone
But where is my future
Oh who can give me the answer
Where have you gone
The friends who used to sit by my side

...
Have my dreams been realised
Or I should let bygones be bygones
However hard I try
I cannot find my true self

...
Life like a cold and ruthless sculptor’s graver
Has changed our shape
The flower withers before it has a chance to blossom

Lyrics: ‘The Old Boys’ by Taili Wang

Attending the karaoke bar and releasing emotion through singing and dancing created a temporary shelter for them to escape their daunting lives. The brief period of relaxation allowed them to recharge their energies, the better to deal with the tedium of tomorrow. Collective ecstasy can be seen as a symbol of collective coping in response to difficulties in life. It is worth noting that there was no discernible gender difference in collective ecstasy.

Collective ecstasy is situated in the broad context of rapid development in China. The Chinese saying *jinzhao youjiu jinzhao zui*, which literally means ‘if there is wine today, then today is the day to get drunk’, faithfully reflects their collective ecstasy.

Uncertainty about the future encouraged them to seize the day. They released their complex, unarticulated emotions by drinking alcohol, dancing, singing, vomiting and crying. The ambivalence and uncertainties imbedded in their subjectivity can be considered as a shared mentality in response to the rapid transformation of China. These workers expressed this mentality in a somewhat exaggerated way, revealing their anxiety, insecurity and ambivalence in a society where dazzling transformation is characterised by uncertainty and inequality.

Chapter 7: Contribution, implications, limitations, and potential for further research

Extract from field notes

April 13 2014

More than two years have passed since my first visit to the restaurant; only around twenty of my informants are still there. For some, life seems to have changed for the better. Waiter Di was promoted from entry level waiter to table server shift leader. Recently he applied for a passport and a Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Travel Pass in hopes of travelling outside mainland China. He vividly described the process of applying for these documents: 'The application forms have to be filled in with regular script. I filled in the first two application forms incorrectly and tried a third time. I was sweating.' Xiao Min, the pantry helpers' shift leader, responded: 'It must be very different to have a passport!' and stated that he wished he could have a passport as well. After my last visit, Xiao Min left the part-time night-shift job at KFC and bought a car in order to become an illegal minicab driver, as discussed in Chapter 5. The car cost him 54,000 yuan (£5400), 1.5 times of his annual income in 2014. He finishes at the restaurant around 10pm and picks up passengers until 2 or 3 am, almost every day. His wife, waitress Pingzhen, still works as a part-time domestic worker when she is not working at the restaurant. They are planning a self-drive vacation to Hangzhou, the capital city of Zhejiang province, 165 kilometres from Shanghai. During our conversation, they half-jokingly asked me to help them go to the UK and work in London's Chinatown, as they had asked me previously during my fieldwork.

Waitress Ru Nan, the girl who was advised to whiten herself by her father in advance of an arranged match (Chapter 5), has become engaged to a boy from Anhui province. She told me that she agreed to this match because the boy's hairstyle is cool, and he looks OK in general. She told me that her father thought she was too young to marry as she is only 21 and thought it better to be engaged first. She still has no plans for the future. I recalled that she once told me she was fond of painting but did not dare to go to a stationery shop because she was too timid. I bought her a box of oil painting sticks before I left Shanghai.

Xiao Wang seems to be in a dilemma. He borrowed money from his family in 2013 in order to build a house in his home village. Being anxious about how to repay it, he resorted to gambling, hoping to win the jackpot. Unfortunately he lost money. After

working in Shanghai for more than eight years, he still does not have any savings. Most of his wages have contributed to the underground gambling industry (Chapter 6). His financial situation has deteriorated as a consequence.

The purpose of updating the workers' lives is to show how continuity and change have informed their personal lives, reflecting the broader picture of a constantly changing China. The changes my informants have experienced are not necessarily for the better. In a society with high social inequality, most of the rural migrants are stuck on the bottom rung with few chances to move up. In this final chapter, I review the main findings of the thesis and address the contribution to knowledge, theories and methodologies then examine the implications of my findings for policy makers and NGOs. In the final part, I deal with the limitations of the thesis and point out the potential for future research.

7.1 Main findings of the thesis

In the introduction to the thesis, I nominated three overarching research questions for the thesis to explore: how did gender operate in the migrant workers' daily lives? How were their experiences gendered? How was agency exercised, how were subjectivities expressed? I addressed these questions in three empirical chapters, focusing on the migrants' work, their intimate relationships, and their leisure time. I now outline the main findings with respect to the complex and contradictory ways in which gender operated in the migrants' daily lives before focusing in more detail on how gender operated in their working relationships, their intimate relationships and their leisure time.

My research shows that gender operated in complex ways. I have illustrated the complexities of gender relations in a society which has deeply embedded social norms regarding gender and filial piety. I have done this by focusing on people who moved from a traditional rural lifestyle to a major city, a city that has been strongly affected by rapid economic transformation. Being away from home created new possibilities and new challenges for these workers.

I found that migration did not overturn gender hierarchy, but male migrants could be disadvantaged in some ways. The female workers, although in relatively low-skilled and low-paid jobs, had higher prestige and higher positions in job hierarchy in the workplace. The inconsistency between gender hierarchy in society and job hierarchy at

work made gender relationships at work complex. The male workers' earning ability was incongruent with social expectations for men and their expectations for themselves. They were denigrated by female workers and customers. Some of the male workers felt inferior because of their inability to be primary breadwinners. The female workers did not appear to share this sense of inferiority, mainly because they foregrounded their feminine subjectivity of a mother rather than a breadwinner, discussed in Chapter 4.

In Chapter 5, I found that in intimate relationships, these migrant men positioned themselves in relation to different roles in the family and tried to preserve masculine images of breadwinner, tender husband, filial son and responsible father. They sometimes failed to meet these standards, however, due to their disadvantaged status in Shanghai. The unmarried migrant men were disadvantaged with respect to partner finding in a society which demanded high brideprice. Their inability to get married jeopardised their masculine self-image as a filial son, which resulted in feelings of anxiety and desperation. Married men like Xiao Min were no longer the primary breadwinners and were teased about this by their peers. In their leisure time, their involvement in gambling reflected this desperation, but gambling only served to further jeopardise their financial situation. Their experiences at work, in intimate relationships and in their leisure time served to construct their subordinated masculinity. This resonates with Lizhi Xu's poem, discussed at the beginning of the thesis, about the male rural worker who felt so guilty about being a useless son, father and husband that he committed suicide.

The male workers took advantage of their masculine power to disadvantage the female workers, as seen in the case of waitresses Zaozao and Nana, who wore their bras when sleeping because they feared being harassed by male colleagues who lived on the same floor (Chapter 1). Furthermore, the migrant men may be in an advantaged position irrespective of social class, as the harassment I experienced when interviewing Yao demonstrates (Chapter 3). These findings all show the nuanced way in which gender operates in practice. Men may be disadvantaged in various ways, but they retain a superiority derived from patriarchy and masculinity. These complex and contradictory gender relationships allow me to reconceptualise agency, subjectivity, masculinity and femininity in the context of China.

In Chapters 4 and 6 I explored how the workplace was gendered, feminised and hierarchical and how the workers' experiences at work were gendered. The workplace

was gendered based on the existing intra- and inter-gender segregation. It was also feminised in that female workers outnumbered their male peers, and women often occupied higher positions with higher prestige in the job hierarchy. Job assignment was influenced by the social construction of what were considered gender-appropriate jobs. On the one hand, gender norms were embedded in the workers' subjectivity, forming the basis of their job preferences and assignments. On the other hand, gendered job assignment reproduced and reinforced gender stereotypes, laying the foundation for producing and reproducing the gendered and feminised workplace.

The staff's work experiences were gendered in various ways. As shown in Chapter 6, their motivations for migration varied by marital status and gender. Both women and men migrated for financial gain, but the female workers also sought to escape restrictive relationships, while male migrants hoped to find marriage partners. I also found that the reasons for quitting the restaurant were gendered. Male migrants were more likely to quit, and their main reason was low pay, whereas female migrants were more likely to leave because they were pregnant.

I found that the workers exercised agency through coping and resistance in the workplace. Some forms of the coping and resistance were gendered but some were not. As Chapter 6 shows, this was dependent on job position. The table servers expressed their displeasure and showed resistance towards customers either implicitly or explicitly, and their behaviour had no apparent gender difference. Regarding coping strategies, some table servers used verbal skill to persuade customers to order dishes that would generate commission. Procrastination was the most common coping strategy among male pantry helpers, because it helped them endure the tedium of work. Procrastination also gave them a means of resisting the uncooperative behaviour and denigratory attitudes of the female table servers.

As shown in Chapter 4. The public area of the restaurant was a workplace which was hierarchical and gendered but in ways that did not always place women on the lowest rung. Some men were disadvantaged in the public area, which upset the gender norms that expect men to be in superior position.

Interestingly, although pantry helpers were on the lowest rung in the public area in respect of job hierarchy and prestige, some pantry helpers did not want to become table servers. They had a view of masculinity which was associated with being non-deferential, but table servers had to serve people and be deferential, which was in direct

conflict with these pantry helpers' understanding of masculinity. These pantry helpers did not want to switch to table serving because they thought it would interfere with their understanding of themselves as men. This intersection of job hierarchy, gender hierarchy, social class and *hukou* made the migrants' work lives complex.

In Chapter 5, I discussed the intimate relationships of both female and male workers. The traditional household structure and the roles of both women and men are changing as a consequence of migration. The patrilocal mode of residence, which was an essential component of classic patriarchy, has disappeared, at least temporarily, which accordingly brings profound changes to patriarchal practices. As argued in Chapter 2, gender relations, especially men's overall power over women, and intergenerational relations—specifically, parental power over children—are the two axes of patriarchy. Migration brings change to both aspects, and it affects people in different ways, reflecting their gender and marital status.

The migrants experienced migration in gendered ways. The imbalanced sex ratio in China allowed girls' families, such as Ru Nan's, to ask for a higher brideprice. Migration provided the women with unprecedented, though still limited, opportunities in terms of employment and partner choice. However, some unmarried women experienced a moral struggle between being obedient or resistant to parents in the pursuit of romantic love. Sending remittances home while contravening social norms regarding cohabitation reflects the ambivalent subjectivity of female migrants, as seen in the case of Yue. In the context of temporal non-patrilocal modes of residence, some married migrant women were empowered in the sense that they had control over what they earned and had less housework to do, but they were constrained by filial obligations and still felt obliged to contribute to their natal families. Yue's case also indicates that traditional values were still influential, but the workers were also able to redefine what could be included or excluded in the practices of filial obligation. And it is notable that redefining the boundary of filial piety through practice suggests the simultaneous operation of agency and coercion.

In Chapter 5, I also demonstrated that migrant men perceived themselves in relation to different familial roles and tried to maintain masculine images. However, both unmarried and married men faced the risk of emasculation. The construction of their subordinated masculinity in intimate relationships encompassed their inability to find a marriage partner in order to fulfil the duty to father a son; the mental anxiety embedded

in bachelorhood; and the failure to be a caring husband and primary breadwinner. All of these aspects jeopardised their masculinised subjectivities as capable men.

As illustrated in Chapter 6, these social, spatial and financial constraints circumscribed the workers' choice of leisure activities. The daily rhythm of their work lives suggests that they had minimal interaction with people of the dominant societal groups except through routine interactions with customers.

I argued that the choice of leisure activity functioned as a coping strategy that provided some recreation when money was tight. The acts of shopping, embroidery or gambling can be seen as consumption as well as coping. Consumption served to construct subjectivity. I examined how the female table servers made sense of themselves through consumption and how they dealt with the contradiction between the desire to recreate a new feminine self through consumption and the limited financial resources available. Consumption is a process embodying both liberation and constraint. The workers glimpsed a sense of freedom through consumption, during which they exerted agency and reclaimed their autonomy. But at the same time their disadvantaged position in Shanghai was reconfirmed because of their relatively low purchasing power, which confined them to low-cost shopping malls and karaoke bars.

By contrast, the men's gambling suggested their desire to be rich so as to realise masculine ideals. Gambling isolated these men not only spatially but also socially and financially, reinforcing their marginalised status.

Singing and dancing in the karaoke bar can be viewed as collective ecstasy as well as a form of coping. Visiting the karaoke bar was suggestive of multiple themes with respect to the workers' subordinated situation at work, in intimate relationships and socially. In the workplace (Chapters 4 and 6), the workers had to endure low wage, inflexible work schedules and contentious relationships with each other and with the customers; in intimate interactions (Chapter 5), they faced constant conflict and negotiation with parents and partners. In their social lives (Chapter 6), social, spatial and financial segregation constrained their attempts to become capable consumers. Singing in the karaoke bar provided a temporary means of escape from day-to-day anxieties.

To conclude, the lived experiences of the migrant workers were configured and reconfigured by an unstable constellation of components including the state-stimulated market economy, changing *hukou* policy and traditional patriarchal values that

prescribed gender-specific ways of behaviour. This thesis has explored how these components influenced the migrants' lives and subjectivity and how they lived this turbulent time in their own ways by making constant adaptations.

Although it is important to highlight the differences between the female and male workers, it should be noted that both genders shared much in common in relation to socioeconomic status, relational subjectivity, willingness to meet filial obligations, and discrimination and stigmatisation in urban China.

7.2 Contribution of the thesis

The thesis contributes to knowledge, theories and methodologies in feminist studies, ethnographic research and contemporary China studies. Some of the knowledge contribution has been considered in Section 7.1. Juxtaposing women and men's life experiences and analysing complex and contradictory gender relationships allowed me to evaluate theories of agency, subjectivity, patriarchy, femininity and masculinity in new and interesting ways.

Apart from the contribution to knowledge discussed in the main findings, my thesis extends the dimensions of intersectionality beyond the triad of gender, race and class by situating the discussion in the context of China and by including the category of *hukou*. The urban-rural binary has been fixed by the *hukou* system since 1958, reinforcing the superiority of urban *hukou* holders and the inferiority of rural *hukou* holders. *Hukou* is a crucial component of intersectionality in China because it impacts the workers' subjectivity, wellbeing and social inequality. Class and *hukou* status intertwine, positioning migrant workers as the underprivileged group in urban China, target of widespread discrimination by customers. The nexus of gender, class, age and *hukou* influences these workers' exercise of agency and expression of subjectivity.

Regarding the theoretical contribution, the theoretical framework discussed in Chapter 2 is innovative. It creatively links complex concepts to construct a specific framework of analysis for examining changing gender relationships in China. Chapter 2 examines the complexity of resistance and the multiple ways in which it can be exercised. The purpose of introducing coping was to avoid romanticising resistance; based on my observations, the migrant workers are less likely to challenge the management of the restaurant or social inequality than to develop strategies to make daily life more

bearable. I argue that the behaviours of coping and resistance reflect their underprivileged status in society and have implications for action on social inequality.

In the fieldwork I interviewed both men and women in order to get a sense of how gender operated and how it was experienced. In China, interviewing both men and women has not always been done, so the thesis may therefore have methodological implications for both qualitative and quantitative research regarding the design of research questions and data analysis. For example, as mentioned in Chapter 1, the report on women's status conducted by the All-China Women's Federation and the National Bureau of Statistics had similar numbers of female and male respondents, but the report only highlighted women's issues, leaving the men's situation under-discussed. The thesis showed that women and men experienced life in different ways, making it essential to compare both genders.

7.3 Implications for policymakers and NGOs

Knight, Deng and Li (2011) predicted that the number of rural migrants in China would continue to grow rapidly. They estimate that migrants will account for two-thirds of the urban workforce by 2020. It is critical to recognise that large-scale migration is likely to persist and therefore more attention should be given to how to manage a city properly, how to deal with population growth and how to create a liveable city for all.

The disadvantaged status of rural migrants has been highlighted all the way through the thesis. In Chapter 1, I discussed their rudimentary living conditions. Chapter 3 considered the way in which lack of contraceptive knowledge made migrant women like Qinya vulnerable. As discussed in Chapter 4, unable to find places in schools in Shanghai, migrant workers' children usually had to study in the home villages. Hence, workers had to endure long-term separation from their children. Limited education and long working hours might prevent them from accessing knowledge and understanding government policy relating to housing and child education. The government could therefore consider providing advice to migrant workers. There is a Public Service Centre for the Employment of Migrants (*laihu ren yuan gong gong jiu ye fu wu ji gou*) located in each district in Shanghai, and these centres might begin to provide services apart from job information. Employment, child education and sexual health are interrelated aspects crucial to the well-being of migrants, especially as they are far from

their families. I suggest that these service centres could integrate the provision of relevant information.¹¹⁴

7.4 Limitations and the potential for future research

The situation of my informants was representative of migrant workers performing entry-level work in large cities in China in the sense that their wage, education, *hukou* status and living conditions were very similar, as substantiated in Chapter 1. But the dynamic and complex lives of migrant workers cannot be entirely captured in this thesis. The limitations are discussed in the following paragraphs.

First, it is not my intention to generalise restaurant workers' experience to all rural migrant workers in China. The experiences of migrant workers may vary by the type of work they do. For example, the experience of working in a factory will be different from working in a restaurant. Even in the same restaurant, the experiences of a part-time worker can differ from those of a full-time worker.

Second, I do not claim that the ethnography of a particular restaurant is representative of all the restaurants in Shanghai. Differences of restaurant grade, gender and *hukou* status contribute to the different experiences of restaurant workers. As I suggested in Chapter 3, some high-end restaurants tended to recruit workers with Shanghai *hukou*. Furthermore, as Tong (2011) established, in some small-scale restaurants, male workers were in a more advantaged position. Workers' experiences may largely depend on the type of restaurant they work in.

Perhaps the limitations can be overcome by conducting further research with different groups of informants. For instance, focusing on part-time workers in the same restaurant or full-time workers in other restaurants would make comparative studies possible. As discussed in Chapter 3, more part-time workers in the Meteor were recruited after my first fieldwork research in 2011. Turnover was even higher among this group and, in contrast to full-time workers, they had no entitlement to social benefits. I also noted in Chapter 3 that during the pilot interview, I discovered that high-end restaurants were more likely to hire employees with Shanghai *hukou*. In addition, the thesis leaves the door open for similar studies in other sectors. As mentioned in Chapter 1, only a few qualitative studies address rural workers in the service sector. By extending the focus to other sectors employing migrant workers, such as express delivery services, retail and

¹¹⁴ Please see Shen (2015) where I elaborate on how to improve migrant workers' wellbeing.

karaoke bars, a fuller picture of migrant workers' experiences will be revealed.

However the framework of analysis I developed by utilising two clusters of concepts and explaining how the intersectionality between gender, class and *hukou* status all influenced the lives of the migrant workers could perhaps be drawn upon in studies with different empirical foci.

It would also be worthwhile to do longitudinal studies focusing on the same restaurant. Changing policies and the changing situation of the restaurant may affect workers' personal lives. In December 2014, restaurant manager Tang told me via WeChat that the ground floor of the restaurant was closed because of declining business, the consequence of the measures of the central government to deal with corruption as well as the more competitive business environment discussed in Chapter 1. Both factors had a profound impact on the restaurant. How the closing of the ground floor impacted on both full-time and part-time workers needs further examination.

The longitudinal approach can also be used to observe how the patriarchal system is changing under the impact of migration. As mentioned in Chapter 5, patrilocality, which used to be the dominant family pattern for married couples in rural areas, has been disrupted. Whether this is a temporary situation or the new reality, how it affects inter-generational relationships and how the power relations in the conjugal relationship will change if migrant couples stop *dagong* (working as wage labour) and return home is not the focus of this thesis but worthy of further research. My thesis found that patrilineality persisted, in that it was still considered a son's responsibility to continue the family line. Whether patrilineal patterns and son preferences will change because of continuing migration and the sex ratio imbalance are questions still to be explored.

Finally, *hukou* reform and social benefits reform may, in the long run, bring significant changes both to the restaurant and to the workers. As stated in Chapter 1, the State Council released guidelines on *hukou* reform in July 2014, noting that China would gradually phase out the binary rural/urban system and will unify it under the name of residence *hukou* (*jumin hukou*) (State Council, 2014, Article 9). The guidelines showed that education, health insurance, elderly care and housing would be reformed in response to the unified *hukou* system (*ibid.*, Article 9). Although the *hukou* reform only applies to small and medium cities, it may have an influence on large cities like Shanghai and Beijing (*ibid.*, Article 7) in the future. The phasing out of the rural-urban division and its impact on rural workers will need further investigation.

Optimistically speaking, with the removal of the rural-urban disparity in *hukou*, and more balanced development between rural and urban areas, the connotation of superiority with urban and inferiority with rural may change. This may make the phrase ‘rural migrant workers’ a thing of the past. My research on rural migrant workers may thereby be made obsolete, becoming a speck of dust in Chinese history. I would be delighted to see this discussion of rural migrant workers consigned to history if it meant that these workers had been given the same rights as their urban counterparts and there was no discrimination based on *hukou* or birthplace. It is my hope that this thesis might serve as a catalyst to change the situation of rural migrant workers for the better.

Appendices

Appendix 1: List of informants

Filename	Pseudonym	Year of Birth	Place of Birth	Position	Gender	Marital status	Hukou status	Fieldwork stage
Interviewees								
IVHJ001	Gaozhi	1989	Hubei	part-time pantry helper	male	single	rural	the 1st fieldwork
IVHJ002	Huangmao	1992	Anhui	pantry helper	male	single	rural	
IVHJ003	Yao	1991	Anhui	pantry helper	male	single	rural	
IVHJ004	Cui	1995	Anhui	table server	female	single	rural	
IVHJ005	Luzhang	1989	Anhui	table server	female	married, 2 children	rural	
IVHJ006	Shendaniu	1984	Henan	table server	female	married, 1 child	rural	
IVHJ007	Qinya	1990	Hubei	table server	female	married, 1 child	rural	
IVHJ008	Wenyan	1992	Anhui	table server	female	single	rural	
IVHJ009	Chongtian	1994	Anhui	pantry helper	male	single	rural	
IVHJ010	Yong	1985	Anhui	pantry helper	male	engaged	rural	
IVHJ011	Xiaoxiao	1984	Henan	pantry helper	female	married, 2 children	rural	
IVHJ012	Lan	1981	Sichuan	shift leader of table servers	female	married, 2 children	rural	
IVHJ013	Linxiao	1994	Anhui	bartender	male	single	rural	
IVHJ014	Kuo	1994	Anhui	bartender	male	single	rural	
IVHJ015	Yuxinwang	1989	Chongqing	pastry cook	female	engaged	rural	
IVHJ016	Shaokao	1988	Anhui	marinated food cook	male	single	rural	
IVHJ017	Juanli	1989	Gansu	hostess	female	single	rural	
IVHJ018	Bingshao	1990	Anhui	shift leader of bartenders	male	single	rural	
IVHJ019	Hushao	1986	Anhui	table server	male	married, 1 child	rural	
IVHJ020	Sichuan	1990	Chongqing	chef	male	single	rural	
IVHJ021	Ru Nan	1993	Anhui	table server	female	single	rural	
IVHJ022	Jieyang	1979	Anhui	bartender	female	married, 3 children	rural	
IVHJ023	Zhuang	1995	Anhui	table server	female	single	rural	

Filename	Pseudonym	Year of Birth	Place of Birth	Position	Gender	Marital status	Hukou status	Fieldwork stage
IVHJ024	Liunian	1995	Anhui	pantry helper	male	single	rural	
IVHJ025	Jincai	1991	Gansu	table server	male	single	rural	
IVHJ026	Hua	1989	Anhui	pantry helper	male	single	rural	
IVHJ027	Paoche	1991	Anhui	pantry helper	male	single	rural	
IVHJ028	Shangyu	1993	Anhui	table server	female	single	rural	
IVHJ029	Chenyong	1991	Anhui	table server	female	single	rural	
IVHJ030	Fage	1985	Henan	table server	male	single	rural	
IVHJ031	Aichuancai	1992	Anhui	pantry helper	male	single	rural	
IVHJ032	Xiehui	1990	Anhui	shift leader of table servers	male	single	rural	
IVHJ033	Huaerjie	1991	Anhui	bartender	male	single	rural	
IVHJ034	Dongdong	1994	Jiangsu	table server	male	single	urban	
IVHJ035	Meilijia	1986	Hubei	cashier	female	single	rural	
IVHJ036	Jiachun	1982	Anhui	pantry helper	male	divorced	rural	
IVHJ037	Fang	1993	Hubei	table server	female	single	urban	
IVHJ038	Xiaoping	1983	Sichuan	shift leader of table servers	male	married, 1 child	rural	
IVHJ039	Yuebao	1994	Anhui	table server	female	single	rural	
IVHJ040	Siyan	1993	Jiangsu	pantry helper	male	single	rural	the 2nd fieldwork
IVHJ041	Lu	1989	Anhui	part-time pantry helper	male	single	rural	
IVHJ042	Hu	1988	Henan	pantry helper	male	married	rural	
IVHJ043	Yue	1988	Anhui	table server	female	married, 1 child	rural	
IVHJ044	Xia	1971	Shanxi	cleaner	female	married, 2 children	rural	
IVHJ045	Xiao Nan	1991	Henan	previous table server	female	single	rural	the 4th fieldwork ¹¹⁵
IVHJ046	Xiao Wang	1980	Anhui	team leader of pantry helpers	male	married, 1 child	rural	the 5th field work
IVHJ047	Fumin	1989	Fujian	leader of part time workers	male	single	rural	
IVHJ048	shibasui	1996	Guangxi	part-time table server	male	single	rural	

¹¹⁵ I did not conduct interviews in the third phase of the fieldwork.

Filename	Pseudonym	Year of Birth	Place of Birth	Position	Gender	Marital status	Hukou status	Fieldwork stage
IVHJ049	lixiao	1990	Anhui	part-time table server	female	married, 2 children	rural	
Other informants mentioned in the thesis								
INFM001	Jie	1986	Anhui	shift leader of table servers	female	married, 1 child	rural	
INFM002	Qin Zhang	1984	Jiangxi	table server	female	married, 2 children	rural	
INFM003	Zhenxiu	1995	Gansu	table server	female	single	rural	
INFM004	Nana	1993	Henan	table server	female	single	rural	
INFM005	Ma	1986	Gansu	table server	male	married, 1 child	rural	
INFM006	Yulong	1988	Anhui	shift leader of table server	male	married, 1 child	rural	
INFM007	Pingzhen	1982	Anhui	table server	female	married, 2 children	rural	
INFM008	Yadong	1986	Henan	table server	female	married, 1 child	rural	
INFM009	Lulu	1986	Henan	shift leader of table servers	female	married, 1 child	rural	
INFM010	Zaozao	1991	Anhui	table server	female	engaged	rural	
INFM011	Fengyu	1990	Anhui	table server	female	married, 1 child	rural	
INFM012	Xiaohei	1990	Anhui	pantry helper	male	single	rural	
INFM013	Bai Lian	1975	Anhui	pantry helper	male	married	rural	
INFM014	Gao	1980	Henan	pantry helper	male	married, 2 children	rural	
INFM015	Liuxing	1988	Anhui	pantry helper	male	single	rural	
INFM016	Xiao Yanjing	1991	Anhui	pantry helper	male	single	rural	
INFM017	Xiao Min	1979	Anhui	shift leader of pantry helper	male	married, 2 children	rural	
INFM018	Kuo	1995	Anhui	bartender	male	single	rural	
INFM019	Dajie	1975	Anhui	bartender	female	married, 2 children	rural	
INFM020	Hubei	1986	Hubei	cashier	female	single	rural	
INFM021	Peng	1987	Anhui	cashier	female	single	rural	
INFM022	Ah Kui	1988	Anhui	table server	male	single	rural	
INFM023	Di	1988	Anhui	table server	male	married, 1 child	rural	
INFM024	Ming Ge	1977	Anhui	pantry helper	male	married, 1 child	rural	
INFM025	Zhuqing	1988	Anhui	table server	female	married, 1 child	rural	
INFM026	Qinqin	1994	Anhui	table server	female	single	rural	
INFM027	Tang	1974	Shanghai	manager	female	married	urban	
INFM028	Lv	1976	Shanghai	manager	male	married, 1 child	urban	

Appendix 2: Topic guide for my fieldwork interviewees

I designed the interview questions in order to know migrants' work experiences, their understanding of well-being, their experiences of gender relations, and their exercise of agency in daily life. The topic guide is categorised into nine different themes.

1. Contextual information:

Date:

Place:

Duration:

Interviewer:

Indicator for identifying the interviewee:

Gender:

Age:

Profession:

Working in this profession since:

Accommodation (dormitory or rented flat):

Rental fee:

Location:

Raised (countryside/city):

Number of children:

Age of children:

Gender of children:

Hukou status:

Peculiarities of the interview:

2. Migration experiences

Why did you migrate? Who did you migrate with?

Why did you choose Shanghai? What are your first impressions of Shanghai?

How did you find a job? How many jobs you have taken? How long did you stay in each job and in each city? How frequently do you change jobs? Why do you quit a job?

How is your general mental health, both before and after migration? Stressed, angry and confused, or calm, happy and determined? Why?

How long do you need to adapt to an entirely new environment?

Compared to your life before migration, in what aspects do you think you have changed after migration? How do you like this change? What do others think about change? Who influenced you most, both before and after migration?

In what ways do you feel you are respected/disrespected in daily life? Do you think 'respect' is important?

3. Working conditions

What is the schedule for an ordinary workday?

How heavy is the work load?

To what extent do you think you fit in at this job? What part of the job do you think is the most difficult?

Are there any codes of conduct in the restaurant?

What kind of skills have you learnt through the job?

How do you like this job? If you are not satisfied, in what ways are you not satisfied?

Do you think the job of service worker has age limits?

What is the procedure for a worker to get sick leave? Is it easy or difficult?

What is the duration of the work contract? Does the contract include health insurance and accident insurance?

How does a person get promoted in the restaurant? Do you want to get promoted?

In what ways do opportunities for women and men to get promoted vary? Why? Example?

4. Triangle relations between service workers, customers and managers

How do you get accustomed to the management style?

How do you find the interactions with customers? What do you think about the *suzhi* (personal quality, '素质' in Chinese) of customers?

Do you listen to customers' conversation while serving? What are their conversations like?

If you encounter impolite customers, how do you deal with them?

What are managers' and customers' attitudes towards you?

In what ways does the manager's attitude to waitresses and waiters differ?

In what ways do you think the behaviour of male and female customers varies?

5. Income and consumption

What is the wage and overtime rate?

What was the salary for the previous jobs? What are the implications of job changing?

In what ways do salaries for women and men differ?

What was your most recent purchase?

How much do you spend every month? What is your daily spend?

How do you spend your income?

Do you have any brand preference in terms of cosmetics, skin care and toiletries?

Where do you buy clothes? What is the frequency of buying clothes and cosmetics?

What differences do you perceive between how women and men spend money?

6. Relations with family

What are your parents' opinions about migration?

How often do you contact your parents?

Do you send remittances back? How many times a year? How much each time?

What are your parents' expectations or requirements regarding remittances?

In what ways did your parents change their attitude to you after you migrated?

7. Marriage and partner-choosing

What are your requirements for an ideal husband/wife?

What age do you think is proper for getting married? What is your ideal age for giving birth?

What are the ages for your colleagues and friends to get married? Examples and stories?

What is your parents' attitude to your partner-choosing?

What is your attitude to pre-marital sex or cohabitation before marriage?

How do you feel when you think about the word 'marriage'?

8. Living conditions

How is dormitory life? How do you get accustomed to it?

Appendix 3: Sample of a coded transcript

Background information

This is extracted from one of the semi-structured interviews I did during my fieldwork in Shanghai in 2012. The interview was conducted in Mandarin. I transcribed and translated the interview myself. For some terms in Chinese connoting specific meaning, I have added the corresponding Chinese *pinyin* in brackets. I have used thematic analysis as the coding approach and have tracked changes of the transcripts to indicate the themes that I coded.

Excerpt from the transcripts

Date: 24th July 2012

Interviewer: Yang Shen

Venue: Meteor Restaurant (pseudonym), Shanghai

Duration: 60 minutes

Informant: Yue (pseudonym)

Year of birth: 1988

Birthplace: Anhui Province

Hukou status: Rural

Marital status: Married, one son

Q (Yang Shen): Are your parents in Shanghai?

A (Yue): Yes. Both of them are in Shanghai. One day my dad came and picked me up when I got off work at 8:30pm. I didn't know my dad was coming. I was on my husband's bicycle (note: boyfriend at the time). We were caught by my father on the street. My dad beat me and scolded me on the way back home . . . After going back, my dad said that he firmly disagreed us being together, asked me to break up with him, and told me not to go to work tomorrow. I lied to him. I said I would quit on the 10th, the day I got paid. He said that was fine. Actually I didn't wait until the 10th; I eloped with my boyfriend on the 8th.

Q: Where did you go?

A: We moved to Jing'an District. For the first two days we stayed in his friend's flat, then we rented a flat on our own. He found a new job, and I found a job as well. So we started work.

Q: Did your dad call you?

A: The first day I switched off my mobile phone, but I was worried about my parents, so I gave them a call. I said: 'I won't be back until you agree.' My dad

Author

Comment [1]:

Theme 4.1 parental power over children

Author

Comment [2]:

Theme 1.1 resistance;
Theme 2.2 rebellious daughter

was angry and started to scold me. So I ended the call. I was frightened and began to cry. Later on, I called back from time to time. Each time my dad asked me where I was living. He said he agreed to us being together and wanted to come and visit us. But I didn't dare tell him where I was. My boyfriend quarreled with me every day. He tried to stop me calling home for fear that my parents would find us. I always cried and said that I missed my family, so I kept calling them.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: After four months, I became pregnant, and I told my parents. My parents agreed to our marriage because I was pregnant, and asked his parents to come to Shanghai to have a meeting. My brother said that he wanted to visit me, and I told him my address. After my brother's visit, my dad came the next day. We were still asleep when my dad knocked on the door. I was scared. Oh my God! I didn't dare say much, although my dad had agreed to us being together over the phone. Later my boyfriend's dad came to Shanghai. We required some money from his dad to have the wedding ceremony in his home village, but he said their family didn't have that much, and disapproved. My dad asked me to get an abortion if they didn't agree to the amount of money. I thought for a while. My dad's insistence was right, you see, I eloped with him, but his parents didn't agree to this amount of money. I was angry and called my boyfriend: 'If your dad cannot give that much, I will get an abortion tomorrow.' That night, he called me and asked me not to go to the hospital and said his dad would be coming to Shanghai soon.

...

Q: Did your boyfriend's family have the amount of money that you and your family wanted?

A: Yes, they did. If they didn't have it they could borrow it.

Q: Why did your family demand that amount of money?

A: It's a tradition in our home village (*laojia*). If a girl elopes with a man and does not ask for any money, she will have no status in his family and will be bullied. If he gives her some money to buy a dowry and some other stuff (*mai dongxi*), at least it's worth it, at least (she will) have some status, that's the custom in our *laojia*.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: If a couple comes to know each other by themselves (*ziji tan*) and then get married, the boy's family pays this amount of money, just as my husband did. If a marriage is based on an arranged match (*xiangqin*), it is another story. We (my husband and I) just held a wedding banquet with a few tables in his home village (*bai le liang zhao*) to treat my relatives in Shanghai, and took pre-wedding photos. If a couple meet through an arranged match, first you have to give money to buy *san jin* (three golden accessories) - a ring, a necklace and a pair of earrings - which cost more than ten thousand . . . the bridegroom has to give five to six thousand (£500-600) when the bride goes to the bridegroom's house for the first time . . . altogether at least five to six *wan* (£5000 to 6000), that's a lot. We didn't spend that much, we didn't buy *san jin*.

Author

Comment [3]:

Theme 1.1 resistance;
Theme 2.1 filial daughter;
Theme 2.2 rebellious daughter

Author

Comment [4]: Theme 4.1 parental power over children

Author

Comment [5]:

Theme 4.1 parental power over children

Author

Comment [6]:

Theme 2.1 filial daughter
Theme 4.1 parental power over children

Author

Comment [7]:

Theme 1.2 negotiation

...

Q: Did you keep the wages or submit them to your parents?

A: I submitted to my parents.

Q: How about (the distribution of wages) after the elopement?

A: Well, you see, at that time I earned 1200 (yuan), I gave my parents 1000 and kept 200 to spend . . . if it was not enough, my boyfriend paid the rest. Before the elopement, I left behind all my wages and savings to my parents, I didn't keep a penny. Rent and everything else was paid for by my boyfriend. My family is not well off, and I have a younger brother. My older brother had just got married, and my parents were still in debt. I have known how difficult it was for my parents to save money since I was a child. So I gave all my money to them.

Q: How did you manage your wages after you got married? Did you keep them?

A: I kept the money. But I give money to my parents during the Spring Festival, or on some occasions when they don't have enough money. Sometimes I gave pocket money to my mom, five hundred, a thousand.

Q: Does your husband know?

A: Sometimes he knows, sometimes he doesn't. If I use our savings I will let him know, but sometimes I use my secret stash (*sifang qian*) so he doesn't know.

...

Q: Have you ever lived with your parents-in-law?

A: Yes, we have. I get along well with them. My child is raised by them.

Q: Are they in Shanghai or in the home village?

A: In the home village. They have been raising the child. The child is in the primary school in the home village.

Q: It's good that you get along well with your parents-in-law, because I know some people don't.

A: True. Some don't get along well. They quarrel. I am not like them because my parents-in-law treat me very well. You see, their financial situation is not good. A year later after I gave birth, when Xiao Bao (the baby) was one year old, they said to us that since we just married, and we are basically penniless, they would like to raise Xiao Bao so that we can go out and *dagong*. . . . Each time I visit them, they wash my clothes and cook for me. I neither cook nor wash the dishes. They do everything. After dinner I go to sleep with Xiao Bao upstairs and they begin to wash the dishes. If I soak my clothes in the basin, my parents-in-law sense that I am going to wash the clothes and they wash for me. If I finish the washing by myself, they would hang it up to dry. They treat me quite well.

...

Q: Who is in charge of money in your family, you or your husband?

Author

Comment [8]:
Theme 2.1 filial daughter

Author

Comment [9]:
Theme 2.1 filial daughter

Author

Comment [10]:
Theme 2.1 filial daughter

Author

Comment [11]:
Theme 3.1 empowerment of married women

Author

Comment [12]:
Theme 4.2 patrilocal way of residence

Author

Comment [13]: Theme 2.3 satisfied daughter-in-law

Author

Comment [14]:
Theme 3.1 empowerment of married women

Author

Comment [15]:
Theme 2.3 satisfied daughter-in-law

A: I am in charge of money. Who do you think should be in charge of money, men or women?

Q: Hmm, it seems that women are more likely to be in charge.

A: Yeah.

Q: So in that case, who makes decisions on consumption, you or your husband?

A: Decisions on what sort of consumption? Expensive things?

Q: Yes.

A: We don't usually buy expensive things. But I insisted on buying a house. He didn't want to. I just insisted. I badgered him about buying it. I said we had to buy. We had five *wan* (£50,000) of savings. He had planned to save it for his future business. . . . He is a chef. He just wanted to save some money and run a restaurant. I'm thinking, what if his business fails? We have been married for three years, and our child is four years old, I'm thinking the child is growing up, but (we have) no money and no house. So I want to buy a house. But he wants to run a restaurant. I sent all the money back to his parents, along with tens of thousands of borrowed money, and asked his parents to buy a house in the town. He could do nothing about it. He had no other ways. This was what I wanted to buy.

...

Q: So how much money do you want to save before going back to run a restaurant in the home village?

A: My husband prefers to run a restaurant in Shanghai rather than in the home village. We plan to work (*dagong*) for two more years until the debts are paid off, he can run his own restaurant. But he suggested me to go back to taking care of the child when he attends school.

Q: What do you think?

A: I don't think so. I am thinking, I am still only 24, I want to work outside the village for three or four years. I don't want (to go back) in a year or two. I want (to stay) longer. I don't want to take care of the child at home... We can pay off the housing debts in two years, save money for another two years, and open a restaurant in Shanghai so that I can be here, running the restaurant with him.

Coding framework

Themes	Subthemes	Data extracts (partial)
Agency	1.1 Resistance	'I lied to him. I said I would quit on the 10th, the day I got paid. He said that was fine. Actually I didn't wait until the 10th; I eloped with my boyfriend on the 8th.'
	1.2 Negotiation	'I was angry and called my boyfriend: "If your dad cannot give

Author

Comment [16]:

Theme 2.4 powerful wife

Theme 3.1 empowerment of married women

Author

Comment [17]:

Theme 2.4 powerful wife with her own opinions

Theme 3.1 empowerment of married women

Author

Comment [18]:

Theme 2.4 powerful wife with her own opinions

		that much, I will get an abortion tomorrow.” That night, he called me and asked me not to go to the hospital and said his dad would be coming to Shanghai soon.’
Subjectivity	2.1 Filial daughter	‘I said: “I won’t be back until you agree.” My dad was angry and started to scold me. So I ended the call.’
	2.2 Rebellious daughter	
	2.3 Satisfied daughter-in-law	‘I am not like them because my parents-in-law treat me very well.’
	2.4 Powerful wife with her own opinions	‘I sent all the money back to his parents, along with tens of thousands of borrowed money, and asked his parents to buy a house in the town. He could do nothing about it. He had no other ways. This was what I wanted to buy.’
Gender relations	3.1 Empowerment of married women	‘Each time I visit them, they wash my clothes and cook for me. I neither cook nor wash the dishes. They do everything. After dinner I go to sleep with Xiao Bao upstairs and they begin to wash the dishes. If I soak my clothes in the basin, my parents-in-law sense that I am going to wash the clothes and they wash for me. If I finish the washing by myself, they would hang it up to dry. They treat me quite well.’
Patriarchy	4.1 Parental power over children	‘My dad beat me and scolded me on the way back home . . . After going back, my dad said that he firmly disagreed us being together, asked me to break up with him, and told me not to go to work tomorrow.’
	4.2 Patrilocal way of residence	‘Q: Have you ever lived with your parents-in-law? A: Yes, we have. I get along well with them. My child is raised by them. Q: Are they in Shanghai or in the home village? A: In the home village. They have been raising the child. The child is in the primary school in the home village.’

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