

in China perform different rituals. Nevertheless, it is hoped that this chapter helps readers improve their understanding of Chinese people with some information of the main rituals in Chinese society.

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## 4 Family and marriage

*Xiaowei Zang*

Chapter 3 discusses some aspects of marriage (especially wedding ceremonies) in China. This chapter examines other aspects of marriage, such as partner selection and divorce. In addition it studies the family institutions in China. There have been profound changes in the family and marriage since the nineteenth century thanks to industrialization, urbanization, the influence of the West, and the political campaigns carried out by the Chinese Communist Party since 1949. Nevertheless, the family has remained a fundamental social unit in Chinese society. Chinese people have continued their reliance on the family to meet the basic human needs of mating, reproduction, the upbringing of children, and the care of the elderly and to respond to new trends in employment, education, housing, etc. The Chinese family institution has been a main research subject in Chinese studies. This chapter introduces readers to some major issues and recent developments in the study of the family and marriage in China.

### Family structure and fertility transition

It is widely believed that in traditional China many people lived in large, multi-generation families. A typical extended household is thought to have consisted of five generations living together under one roof, sharing one common purse and one common stove, under one family head. Some scholars have claimed that 'the so called large, extended, or joint form of the family was commonplace' in China (Cohen 1976: xiii). Wolf (1985) found that in nine districts in northern Taiwan between 1906 and 1946, more than 70 per cent of the population lived in stem families in which parents lived with a son, his spouse and his children. Wolf's findings are supported by research on mainland China by Lee and Gjerde (1986) and Lee and Campbell (1998).

Other scholars however have argued that in reality, extended families with five generations living together were rare. Eastman (1988: 16) estimated that the proportion of such extended households might have reached 6 or 7 per cent in the past. Lang (1946: 10) claimed that 'the joint family is not and never was the "normal" type of Chinese family'. Freedman (1979: 235) asserted that the large joint family 'could not have existed as a common form

of the family because of the statistical fact that the average size of the domestic family was between five and six souls'. Goode thus contended (1963: 296) that in China, the large multigenerational family appeared to have been 'the ideal exception' and 'a luxury'.

A major reason for the different assessments is data limitation and deficiencies in methodology (Zhao 2000: 266-7). Recent computer microsimulation using both cross-sectional and longitudinal approaches shows that in traditional China, at all specified ages, proportions of individuals who could live in a five-generation household were well below 5 per thousand. Ten per cent of them could live in a household with four or more generations at the time of their birth. Living in a four-generation household seemed rather difficult to achieve (Zhao 2000).

Despite the above-mentioned difficulty, large extended households have persisted into contemporary Chinese society. This is remarkable given the rapid social changes and the family revolution in China since the nineteenth century. Indeed, most urban Chinese have lived in nuclear families since the 1930s. Increasing urbanization and industrialization since 1949 contributed further to the movement towards conjugal family structure. By 1900, over half of urban Chinese families took the nuclear form; by the 1980s this had grown to two-thirds (Zang 1993). Yet extended families with three generations have still constituted a substantive proportion of the households in China: 18.3 per cent and 19.5 per cent in 1990 and 1995, respectively. In 2000, 20.1 per cent of all family households in China had at least one elderly member aged 65 or above (Zeng and Wang 2003). These households have existed because of their usefulness in the provision of care for the elderly by adult children and of childcare and family services by elderly parents.

Despite the persistence of extended households, there has been a reduction in family size since 1949. Households in traditional China are thought to have been fairly large partly because some of them were extended and partly because of high fertility rates. There was a gradual movement towards small family size after 1949 due to the increase in the number of nuclear families. Yet the major change in family size apparently took place after the 1970s. It is found that the average household shrunk in size from 4.5 in 1982 to 3.5 in the early 2000s. One of the main reasons is the rapid and sharp fertility decline – from total fertility rates of approximately six births to two – between 1970 and 1990. At the national level, family size declined to around 1.7 children in 2006; the number is even lower in major metropolitan areas where one child is now the dominant mode of ideal family size. Because of the post-1970 demographic transition, China's fertility has reached a level well below replacement (Cai 2010: 422, 434; also Liu and Zhang 2009; Zheng *et al.* 2009; Retherford *et al.* 2005).

The degree of fertility decline in the 1990s is a subject of controversy, however. According to China's 2000 census, the total fertility rate (TFR) in the year 2000 was 1.22 children per woman. Yet it is widely believed that this estimate is too low, and this underestimate is attributed to fertility

underreporting that has plagued China's censuses (Morgan, Guo, and Hayford 2009: 605). Some scholars have asserted that the TFR in 2000 was 1.8 children per woman (Retherford *et al.* 2005: 57). The estimate by the National Bureau of Statistics of China was 1.4 children per woman (Morgan, Guo, and Hayford 2009: 605). Retherford *et al.* (2005) have applied the own-children method of fertility estimation to China's 1990 and 2000 censuses and found that the true level of the TFR in 2000 should be between 1.5 and 1.6 children per woman. Morgan, Guo, and Hayford (2009) found that the TFR was most likely in the range of 1.4 to 1.6 per woman at the turn of the twenty-first century, using data from the 1997 National Population and Reproductive Health Survey and from the 2001 Reproductive Health and Family Planning Survey.

There have also been debates on the main causes of China's demographic transition. Some scholars have argued that China's fertility transition took a different course from that of other societies because of heavy-handed government intervention. In December 1973, the Chinese government introduced a *Wan, Xi, Shao* (晚, 稀, 少) policy that promoted late marriage and low fertility among Chinese people. In 1979-80, it officially launched the one-child policy that each Chinese couple is entitled to only one birth. The one-child programme has been supported by routine surveillance and vigorous enforcement by local governments in both urban neighbourhoods and rural villages (Scharping 2003). Retherford *et al.* (2005) argue that about two-fifths of the decline in the conventional TFR between 1990 and 2000 was accounted for by later marriage, and three-fifths by declining fertility within marriage. Their analysis also included estimates of trends in fertility by urban/rural residence, education, ethnicity, and migration status. Over time, fertility has declined sharply within all categories of these characteristics, indicating that the one-child policy has had large across-the-board effects. It is thus argued that government intervention has played an important role in fertility decline (also Liu and Zhang 2009). It is problematical to discuss the demographic transition without reference to the power and determination of the Chinese government to control China's population growth.

Other scholars, however, have argued that China's current low fertility is not simply a prescribed result of the one-child policy (Chen *et al.* 2009; Zheng *et al.* 2009). For example, China's fertility transition shows the rapid fertility decline under the *Wan, Xi, Shao* programme in the 1970s. Yet when the one-child policy was vigorously enforced in the 1980s, the observed fertility level in China hovered above the replacement level without visible ups and downs, a clear reflection of the difficulties in implementing such a draconian policy. Only in the 1990s did China's fertility drop below the replacement level, where it has remained (Cai 2010: 422; Coale 1989: 834, 839; Morgan, Guo, and Hayford 2009: 608-9).

As another example, Jiangsu province and Zhejiang province have had different fertility policies, yet the pronounced policy difference has not translated into a substantial difference in observed fertility levels between these



Figure 4.1 An urban Uyghur couple with their singleton daughter taken by Xiaowei Zang.

two provinces. Development factors explain a much larger proportion of fertility variation in Jiangsu and Zhejiang than policy factors. After controlling for other factors, the fertility difference between these two provinces is small. The two provinces also have similar variability in fertility at the county level. TFRs in Jiangsu range from 0.69 to 1.49, with a mean of 1.01; and TFRs in Zhejiang range from 0.68 to 1.87, with a mean of 1.15 (Cai 2010: 428, 433). Thus, it is argued that the one-child policy has had some effect on birth rates, but structural changes brought about by socioeconomic development and shifts in values and norms on family behaviour have played a key role in China's fertility reduction. Below-replacement fertility in China, as in other societies, is driven to a great extent by social and economic development (Cai 2010: 422, 435; Morgan, Guo, and Hayford 2009: 624).

China's below-replacement fertility has attracted attention from scholars given its social costs and the long-term demographic effects such as accelerated population aging, distorted sex ratios, and changes to the Chinese family and kinship system. For example, China has experienced an unprecedented rise in the sex ratio at birth (ratio of male to female births). There are simply far more male live births than female live births as compared to the numbers expected in most other human populations. The sex ratio at birth in China was 106.32 in 1975. It rose to 111.14 after 1990, and then climbed to 116.86 after 2000, and reached 120.49 in 2005. The rise of the sex ratio at birth is

attributed to fertility decline, the one-child policy, a strong parental desire to have at least one son, and the increasing availability of sex-selection technology (Bhattacharjya *et al.* 2008: 1,832–3; also Liu and Zhang 2009). In a study of two groups of pregnant women in rural Anhui in 1999, it is found that the sex ratio at birth was 152 males to 100 females as reported by the first group of women and 159 males to 100 females as reported by the second group of women. It also found that the risk of death for girls was almost three times that for boys during the first twenty-four hours of life. The study compares the estimated number of missing girls by parity and pregnancy approval status with the abortions and stillbirths. Selective abortions of female fetuses may contribute most to the extremely high sex ratio of males among newborns (Wu, Viisainen, and Hemminki 2006).

A large-scale study of 4,764,512 people in all of China's 2,861 counties showed that sex ratios were high across all age groups, but they were highest in the 1–4 years age group, peaking at 126 in rural areas. Six provinces in China had sex ratios of over 130 in the 1–4 age group. The sex ratio at birth was close to normal for first order births but rose steeply for second order births, especially in rural areas, where it reached 146 (143 to 149). Nine provinces in China had ratios of over 160 for second order births. The highest sex ratios were observed in the provinces that allow rural inhabitants a second child if the first is a girl. Sex-selective abortion accounts for almost all the excess males. One particular variant of the one-child policy, which allows a second child if the first is a girl, leads to high sex ratios. In 2005, males under the age of 20 exceeded females by more than 32 million, and more than 1.1 million excess births of boys occurred (Zhu, Li, and Hesketh 2009). It is estimated that there were 22 million more men than women in the birth cohorts born between 1980 and 2000. Model-based simulations show that 10.4 per cent of these additional men will fail to marry. There will be some 28 million men in 2055 without female partners during their sexually active stages (Ebenstein and Sharygin 2009; Pan and Wu 2009).

There are consequences of the high sex ratio and large numbers of unmarried men such as the well-being of the elderly unmarried men, China's ability to care for its elderly unmarried men, and the prevalence of prostitution and sexually transmitted infections. Research using demographic and behavioural data shows the combined effect of sexual practices, sex work, and a male surplus on HIV transmission across developed parts of China's urban areas. Surplus men could become a significant new HIV risk group in China (Li, Holroyd, and Lau 2010: 402; Zhang *et al.* 2007: 456–7; also Tucker *et al.* 2005). Recent population-based survey estimates suggest levels of untreated chlamydia infection in urban China are as high as or higher than in urban areas in Western developed countries, and levels in rural China are similar to those in rural Africa (Parish *et al.* 2003). Chlamydia is often asymptomatic and goes untreated, which can lead to pelvic inflammatory disease and secondary sterility in China (Morgan, Guo, and Hayford 2009: 620).

## Marriage

In most historical Chinese populations, virtually all women were married by age 30 (Coale 1989: 834). In contrast, not all men were married and their marriage age varied widely depending on their financial status. Marriage was not based on love and romance. It was instead conceived as the transfer of a woman from her family to that of her husband. There were widespread practices of buying and selling of women into marriage, forced marriage of widows, and purchasing young girls as future daughters-in-laws (Johnson 1983: 61–87; also Wolf 1980). Another major form of marital union was arranged marriages in which young people had very little say, either about timing or about partners. The bride and the groom did not meet each other until the wedding day. All this gave parents effective control over the marriages of their offspring (Parish and Whyte 1978).

There have been significant changes in the marriage institution in China since the early twentieth century. One study found that the mean age at first marriage increased from about 17.5 years around 1930 to 18.5 in the 1940s, about 20 in 1970, and about 23 in 1980 (Coale 1989: 834). Another study found that about 10 per cent of the Chinese brides during the 1930s were less than fifteen years of age; by 1950 early marriages were reduced significantly. In 1994, the average marriage age for women at first marriage was twenty-three years. Freedom of choice in choosing one's partner has also increased in China since 1900. Proceedings dominated by parents arranged more than half of all marriages between 1900 and 1938; by 1982, arranged marriages almost disappeared. By then, four in every five couples married of their own volition. Many young people found their mates themselves. For others, introduction by co-workers, supervisors, friends, and kin was an important way of getting to know the opposite sex before 1978. These changes have been brought about by the forces of industrialization, urbanization, mass education, and government policy (Zang 1993). Globalization, the Internet, etc. have strengthened the trend towards free love and romance among young people in China. Today, young Chinese men and women enjoy much more freedom in selecting mates than their parents.

However, it is important to point out that love and romance are a necessary but not a sufficient precondition for a lasting relationship in China. One study (Jackson, Chen, Guo, and Gao 2006) found that fairytale ideals were a major theme for young American adults but not for young Chinese adults. Another study (Buss *et al.* 1990) examined thirty-seven countries and found that the Chinese sample differed from other international samples in paying more attention to health, chastity, and domestic skills but giving less value to traits such as mutual attraction, dependability, and sociability. One plausible explanation is that in collectivistic cultures such as China, family-related or group-related characteristics of the potential partner were more important than romantic love (Dion 1993). Not surprisingly, family influence is still important in one's marriage decision in China (Pimentel 2000). A recent study

found that parents and friends still had a great influence on marriage decision-making for young Chinese in dating relationships. Young Chinese would place more weight on their family's and friends' opinions rather than on their own views. They agreed that approval by parents, friends, and other family members was important for them to decide if they wanted to marry their lovers (Zhang and Kline 2009).

Status similarity is also an important factor in the choice of a marriage partner. Matchmaking in traditional China was based on the principle of 'one door matches another door'. Today, many marriages are same-status matches. One study found that after the 1980s, individuals increasingly married others similar to them with respect to education. The percentage of couples with the same number of years of schooling increased monotonically from 50 per cent to 65 per cent between the 1985–9 marriage cohort and the 1995–2000 cohort. At the national level there was an overall 15-point increase in the percentage of educational homogamy from 1970 to 2000. The odds of crossing two or three educational barriers were cut in half between 1980 and 2000. For college graduates in urban areas, the odds of marrying junior high school graduates (i.e. crossing two educational barriers) shrank from 0.11 to 0.02, and the chances of marrying a person with less than six years of schooling (i.e. crossing three educational barriers) in the late 1990s were only one tenth of the odds in the late 1970s. There was a greater degree of social closure among college graduates than among other educational groups. Rising spousal resemblance has increased as China's economy has boomed. Increasing rates of resemblance between spouses occur a decade earlier and at a higher level in urban areas than in rural areas (Han 2010).

## Sexual norms and behaviour

Similarly, there have been significant changes in sexual norms in China. Sex is no longer a taboo topic as it was before the 1980s. For example, premarital sex was widely opposed and rare before 1978. A high premium was placed on premarital virginity. If an individual was caught in premarital sex, he or she would face serious punishments: mass criticisms and public humiliations, forced confessions, demotions, dismissal, or even a court sentence of imprisonment on a verdict of hooliganism or rape (Cui 1995: 15–18). The rigid control over premarital sex has been gradually undermined since the 1980s thanks to increased exposure to the sex norms of the West and employment in the private sector that does not police employees' private life as the state sector and public educational institutions did before 1978. Today, living together has been accepted as a way of life in urban China. In a large survey conducted on university students in Shanghai (N = 5,067), only 17.7 per cent of the sampled students opposed premarital sex (Chen *et al.* 2008). A study found that of the 4,769 female university students in Ningbo, 29.3 per cent of them admitted having sexual intercourse, and among them 5.3 per cent

reported having multiple sex partners (Yan *et al.* 2009). Another study investigated 1,304 out-of-school youths in Shanghai in 2000–2 and found that the majority of them (60 per cent) held favourable attitudes towards premarital sex. Young men were more likely to have favourable attitudes compared with young women. Young men generally did not communicate with either parent about sex, whereas one-third of female youths talked to their mothers about sexual matters. Both young men and women chose their friends as the person with whom they were most likely to talk about sexual matters. About 18 per cent of the sampled respondents reported having engaged in sexual intercourse. One quarter of them had been pregnant or had impregnated a partner (Wang *et al.* 2007).

One main reason why unexpected pregnancy occurs is the limited knowledge of contraception young Chinese women received from their parents, teachers, and society at large. A 2007 study conducted in Beijing found that the majority of the pregnant teenagers scored less than 10 on a 20-point scale on contraceptive knowledge. Only 24.5 per cent of them obtained contraceptive knowledge from school or parents; the most common source of contraceptive information came from their friends, the Internet, and the media. Some 11.3 per cent of the pregnant teenagers considered it unnecessary to obtain contraceptive knowledge. Less than 53 per cent of the pregnant teenagers reported using contraceptives at their first sexual encounter (Wu 2010).

Another example of the changes in sexual norms in China is the official attitude towards homosexuality in the post-1978 era. Sexual behaviour among members of the same sex (mostly among men) was suppressed after the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949. It was officially defined as a mental illness, and the individuals who had been caught engaging in homosexual acts were publicly prosecuted as criminals before 1978. Partly because of the influence from the West, Chinese society has become more tolerant towards homosexuality (Li, Holroyd, and Lau 2010: 406, 410). In 1997, the Chinese criminal code was revised to eliminate the vague crime of 'hooliganism'. The *Chinese Classification of Mental Disorders* formally removed homosexuality from its list of mental illnesses on April 20, 2001. One mass survey conducted in 2000 found that among the 10,792 respondents, less than 31 per cent were against homosexuality; the rest were either indifferent towards or in favour of it.<sup>1</sup>

An article published on China.org.cn in 2001 suggested that the total number of homosexuals in China was between 360,000 and 480,000, with the majority of them being men.<sup>2</sup> However, an article published in *The China Daily* in 2004 claimed that male homosexuals, seen in public places such as gay bars, parks, and public baths, accounted for 0.9 per cent of all grown men between 15 to 55. The number of male homosexuals in China was estimated to be between 5 million and 12.5 million (the number of female homosexuals is unknown, but it is likely to be fewer than that of males).<sup>3</sup> One possible explanation of the two different estimates is that more and more Chinese gays and lesbians have come to terms with and thus publicly

acknowledged their sexual identities. For example, a study conducted in Harbin between 2002 and 2006 reported an increased trend towards more people identifying as homosexual in the city during the period of the study (Zhang *et al.* 2007).

Drawing on her research over the past two decades among urban residents and rural migrants in Hangzhou and Beijing, Rofel (2007) argued that the emergence of homosexual identities and practices in China is tied to transnational networks of gay men and lesbians in certain critical respects. Chinese homosexual identities materialize in the articulation of transcultural practices with intense desires for cultural belonging or cultural citizenship in China. However, Rofel was critical of the Western developmental narrative which suggests that gay men in China will soon 'catch up' with the level of liberation and politicization of gay men in the West. Rofel argues that gay identities in China emerge in relation to specific desires for cultural citizenship within China. In other words, national and cultural context are inextricably tied to articulations of gay identity.

Li *et al.* (2010), heterosexual marriage is still regarded as a cultural imperative in China. There is still a lack of political sensitivity towards sexual minorities despite increasing tolerance towards homosexuality. Chinese gay men's understanding of their gender, sexual identity and sexual practices is not radically divorced from discourse on heterosexuality in China. Being a Chinese man is normatively culturally accorded to marriage and procreation to maintain the family bloodline. How do Chinese gay men construct their sexual identities to maintain sexual and emotional attraction to men in an overwhelmingly heterosexual environment? How do they cope with the cultural imperative of heterosexual marriage, normative family obligations, socially desired gender roles, emotional experiences and a need for social belonging? A study conducted in Guangzhou found that Chinese gay men had developed four types of sexual identities: establishing a non-homosexual identity, accumulating an individual homosexual identity, forming a collective homosexual identity, and adopting a flexible sexual identity. They practised different levels of involvement in same-sex activities and emotional attachment, social belonging to homosexual groups, and independent homosexual lifestyle. The more they got involved, the clearer homosexual identities appeared to be articulated. For these Chinese gays, sexual identity was both fluid and fragmented, derived from highly personalized negotiations between individualized needs and social and cultural constructs.

### Marital breakdown

In imperial China, a husband could expel his wife or terminate his marriage to her on several grounds: barrenness, wanton conduct, neglect of husband's parents, loquacity, theft, jealousy, and chronic illness. The wife's legal protection derived from first, the claims to full membership of her marital family after observing three years of mourning for her parents-in-law, second, the

fact that a wife had gone through adversity with her husband (e.g. from rags to riches), and third, the fact that a wife had no natal home to return to. The wife could apply to the courts for the dissolution of her marriage on a limited list of grounds: if her husband had deserted her for a prolonged period, seriously injured her, forced her into illicit sex, or tried to sell her to another man. But she could never terminate the marriage on her own in the manner her husband could. A traditional Chinese saying goes: 'If a woman marries a rooster, she follows the rooster for her lifetime; if she marries a dog, she follows the dog for her lifetime.' Although only men were entitled to initiate divorce proceedings, they were not always ready to do so due to strong cultural norms and associated social pressures, which were reinforced by the high costs associated with divorce and remarriage (Huang 2001).

After 1949, new marriage laws altered the legal context for divorce and empowered women, and social change redefined the social nature of married life. In 1953, China experienced a major surge in divorces, probably due to the promulgation of the Marriage Law in 1950. It was popularly maintained that many government officials, who had been penniless peasants before joining the communist revolution, divorced their rural wives to marry urban women. Yet more importantly, the 1950 Marriage Law allowed women to initiate divorce proceedings for the first time in Chinese history. Some married women, who were urban residents, had more education, and had their marriages arranged by parents, used divorce as a way out of their marriages. In southern China, for example, 49 per cent of the divorce applicants were between 18 and 25 years old. In 1950, three-quarters of the divorce cases in Shandong were brought by the wives. In 1951, women took the first step in 76 per cent of the divorce applications in thirty-two cities and thirty-four rural countries. There were '186,167 divorces in 1950, 409,500 in 1951, and 398,243 in the first half of 1952.' The courts handled 1.7 million petitions in 1953. The 1950 Marriage Law was thus called 'divorce law' (Platte 1988: 430–2, 441–2). After the mid-1950s, divorces became less frequent. For example, divorce suits handled by the courts in Beijing remained at around 7,000 per annum until the mid-1960s (Platte 1988: 433).

Another major surge of divorces occurred during the Cultural Revolution (1966–76). The impact of the Cultural Revolution on divorce is difficult to assess with accuracy because of the lack of data. The extraordinary social upheavals and fear of persecution often led one partner to ask for a divorce when the other got into political trouble. The implications for the whole family of one member's political wrongdoing were potentially disastrous. Divorce proceedings were initiated not because of a lofty sense of ideological outrage against the offending spouses but for the purpose of social survival and protection of the children's future (Conroy 1987: 55–6; Liang and Shapiro 1983).

Divorce has been on the upswing in China after economic reforms started in 1978 (Platte 1988). Nationwide, the divorce rate was 0.03 per cent in 1979, 0.07 per cent in 1990 and roughly 0.1 per cent in 2000, climbing to 0.21 per

cent in 2003.<sup>4</sup> The number of couples divorcing has been rising steadily after the revised Regulation on Marriage Registration took effect in 2003. Couples now can seek divorces at civil affairs offices instead of dealing with complicated court procedures. The Ministry of Civil Affairs in June 2010 reported an annual rise of 7.6 per cent in the number of divorces from 2005 to 2009, with 2.47 million couples divorcing in 2009.<sup>5</sup> Some 800,000 Chinese couples got divorced during the first half of 2010. During the same period, an average of 5,000 couples separated each day.<sup>6</sup>

There are three major forms of marriage dissolution in China today. The first one is divorce by mutual consent, or divorce by agreement, by registering at civil affairs bureaus. The second form is divorce by court mediation. The third is divorce by court verdict. The government in general and the court in particular seek to preserve the conjugal family against light-hearted decisions to separate. A court verdict is used as the last resort when all other efforts to mediate the couple are exhausted and fail (Platte 1988: 435–6). But it has become increasingly difficult for the court to mediate and persuade the couple to withdraw their divorce application.

The main causes of marital breakdown in China include the failure to deliver emotional support or a gratifying sexual relationship, family violence, the fading of romantic love after marriage, extramarital affairs, etc. All these are said to have contributed to the rising divorce rate. Some scholars have argued that social changes will lead to a further increase in divorce rates in China. Others however have claimed that Chinese cultural traditions and the laws concerning divorce would contribute to the low divorce level in China, relative to Western countries, at least for the foreseeable future.

## Conclusion

This chapter outlines family and marriage institutions in China. It examines the post-1949 changes in family structure, family size, marriage, partner choices, sexual norms and practices, and marital breakdowns. While industrialization, economic growth, the spread of mass education, and urbanization in the post-1949 era have been partly responsible for these drastic changes, political campaigns and legal reforms carried out by the CCP to transform Chinese society have also played a major role in the transformation of family and marriage institutions in the PRC. China's market reforms and integration into the global capitalist system have allowed an increasing impact of globalization on Chinese society. Future changes in the family system are anticipated.

## Notes

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- 2 Ibid.

- 3 Zhang Feng, 'Male homosexuals estimated up to 12.5m', 2004-12-02, available at [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2004-12/02/content\\_396559.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2004-12/02/content_396559.htm), accessed on November 22, 2010.
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## 5 Gender and sexuality

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Following the mainstream acknowledgement of the Feminist movement in the early 1970s, gender is now widely recognized as one of the key concepts in understanding society. Whilst difficult to define, gender in social science is generally acknowledged to be 'denoting a hierarchical division between women and men embedded in both social institutions and social practices' (Jackson and Scott 2002: 1). Gender significantly influenced the way in which Chinese society was organized in pre-modern China and continues to do so today. Gender shapes various aspects of life in China, such as family (see Zang Chapter 4), work, education and political participation.

Sexuality, whilst closely affected by the gender system in a society, focuses upon a more specific aspect of life, i.e. organization and experiences around sex. Rather than being a 'natural' construct, it is widely accepted that sexuality is socially organized through various institutions such as family and education, and maintained by various discourses (such as religion and science) that tell us what sex is, what it ought to be and what it could be (Weeks 1986).

Since gender and sexuality are experienced as social structural phenomena, as well embodied and lived in everyday interactions, the examination of these concepts sheds light onto various aspects of Chinese lives in both public and private domains. This chapter starts by examining the historical context of gender and sexuality in China; then focuses upon gender transformation in the twentieth century with a close examination of gender relations at work; finally the chapter explores sexuality in contemporary China including issues such as intimacy, sex and economy, and homosexuality.

### Historical context of gender and sexuality

Throughout much of pre-modern history Chinese rulers adopted Confucianism as the core principle for regulating society, that is, everybody should know and behave in accordance with their position in society to achieve a harmonious and hierarchical order. Unfortunately for women, they were located at the bottom of this hierarchy. The idea of *Nanzunnübei* (that 'women are inferior to men') served as the code for women's conduct in society, exemplified by prescriptions such as the *Sancong* (the 'Three Obediences'),