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5   Gender and sexuality

Jieyu Liu

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'),

which dictated that women were subject to the authority of their father when young, their husband when married and their son when widowed (see Min 1997). In essence, Confucianism prescribed a patriarchal, patrilineal, and patri-local family system where men officially dominated women (Ebrey 1993; Mann 2001).

For the male patriarch it was important to maintain familial lineage where the living respected ancestors and present elders, and familial continuity was maintained by producing male heirs. To continue a family line, if the first wife failed to produce a son, a concubine might be purchased in the hope she would bear a male heir (in many wealthy families concubinage was a common part of family life) (Mann 2001). The cornerstone of this system was that marriage and sexuality existed to build future generations, with love and pleasure secondary to this (Barlow 1991).

Whilst it was accepted that a man would have various sexual partners throughout his life, female fidelity was crucial because one of the best feminine virtues prescribed by Confucian writings was for a woman to have only one man in her life. Widows who refused to remarry, even when pressured by their parents or parents-in-law, were singled out for praise in contemporary accounts of exemplary women, published either as independent volumes or as chapters in dynastic histories (Mann 1987). Indeed, even if a woman was raped, suicide was an accepted approach for the maintenance of her virtue.

The subordination of women was considered essential for the preservation of social stability and civilization itself in pre-modern China (Watson and Ebrey 1991). One of the ways in which gendered norms of sexual control were structurally reinforced was through the segregation of boys and girls from the middle years of childhood. Whilst females were confined to the 'inside'/domestic sphere, excluded from public life, and denied access to education or eligibility for examinations, males were given free rein to explore and dominate the 'outside'/wider world. As a result of this distinction, *nei ren* ('inside person') came to be the common term for a wife (Watson and Ebrey 1991).

Some have argued that in reality the Confucian patriarchal arrangement was less negative than feminist historical interpretation might imply (Mann 2001; Wolf 1985; Watson and Ebrey 1991). The husband gained sexual access to his wife and his patriline gained claims to her labour and the children she would bear. The wife gained financial security via a claim to her husband's estate and also a place of honour in ancestral rites. A few women of the largest, wealthiest families were even able to have significant influence through management of household funds and control over female relatives and servants (Mann 2001). More commonly, when a wife successfully gave birth to a male heir, her status in her family would rise, or when her son got married she would earn the right to oversee her daughter-in-law. It is noted, however, that whatever powers women obtained in pre-modern China, these were not theirs by right but delegated to them by men and circumstance (Wolf 1985). For example, whilst imperial legal codes granted a mother the same authority

over her children as a father, the mother derived this right through her capacity as a wife; and if there was a conflict of views the father's will would always prevail (Mann 1987). Such power dynamics were also demonstrated in the film *Raise the Red Lantern* (Zhang 1993).[1] Although the background was set in the early twentieth century, the film offered a view of life in a closed patriarchal household of wealth in pre-modern China. The film described the shifting balance of power between various concubines in their struggle to improve their standing in the household. While the film showed how easily the master could be manipulated by his concubines, it was evident that the power a concubine could command was closely derived from her capacity to gain the master's favour. Further, bearing a male child played a more critical role than a woman's beauty and sexual appeal in her position in the household.

Gender transformation in the twentieth century

At the start of twentieth century, many contemporary intellectuals began to question Confucianism as they sought to explain China's constrained modernization and the inferiority which had allowed European powers to take effective control of key parts of the country. These intellectuals regarded the unequal status of women as one of the key obstacles to Chinese development and promoted ideas such as free marriage and women's education.[2]

At the same time, the engagement with Western scientific discourse persuaded many Chinese intellectuals to prioritize a biological determinist approach to the understanding of gender (Zheng 2009). As a result of the alleged superiority of modern science, the belief that gender roles were determined by biological differences and gender hierarchy was 'natural and progressive' was firmly legitimized (Dikotter 1995: 9). This biological determinist understanding persisted in the Mao and post-Mao eras (Evans 1997; Gilmartin *et al.* 1994; Jacka 1997; Ko and Wang 2006; Liu 2007; Zheng 2009).

The founders of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) tried to promote the liberation of women. Whilst the rural focus of Party campaigns from the 1930s onwards meant that liberation was often subordinated by other revolutionary goals (e.g. campaigns to end wife-beating and ban arranged marriages needed to be carefully weighed against the need to win the support of peasant men) the CCP firmly believed that women's emancipation would be realized through their full-time participation in paid work outside the home (Davin 1976). Indeed, when the CCP came to power in 1949, to introduce a new ideology of gender equality, it legislated on issues such as marriage, labour, and land. The All-China Women's Federation, a government department, was set up specifically to deal with women's issues (Croll 1983; Davin 1976). It is widely acknowledged that these actions genuinely improved women's status and quality of life.

In keeping with Marxist theory, which locates gender issues within class struggle (Landes 1989), the CCP's attempt to uphold women's interests was subordinated to an extent by other prioritized efforts in building the socialist

nation. For example, women were called upon to return home and be good housewives in the early 1960s when there was mass unemployment (Andors 1983). As a result of competing interests, the Women's Federation often struggled with its role of assistant to the CCP's central work and with the role of protector of women's interests (Jin 2001). During the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), class issues took precedence and, despite slogans such as 'women hold up half the sky' and 'what men can do, women can do', hardly any official attention was given to women's issues (Honig 2002).[3] After Chairman Mao's death in 1976 China adopted an approach to socialist construction that was centred on economic modernization and, with gender equality subsumed by this priority, discrimination against women proliferated (Honig and Hershatter 1988), as discussed below.

Gender and work

Gender has been shaping various aspects of life in China, such as family (see Chapter 4), work, education and political participation. Since the mobilization of women into paid work was among the top gender campaigns after 1949, this section will focus upon the changes in the workplace to critically evaluate the gender transformations in the latter half of the century. As a result of the state's mobilization, paid employment became a normative feature of urban women's lives in the Maoist era (Wang 2000).[4] Research has shown that women born under socialism (post-1949) established a full-time working identity and that for these women it was far less acceptable to be a housewife (Liu 2007; Wang 2001). Moreover, by earning a wage that was central to the family budget, urban women were able to more readily achieve parity with men in the family decision-making process (Jankowiak 2002). Similarly, in rural areas, women were expected to join in with collective labour and such work relationships equipped them with wider social networks that went beyond their own family (Hershatter 2002).

Despite redefining the boundary between household and social production, a focused examination of employment conditions found that gender segregation persisted in workplaces. For example, in urban areas the division between 'heavy' industry and 'light' industry was formulated along the gender line: according to the 1990 census, in light industries (e.g. leather-making and textiles) women comprised 70 per cent of workers, but less than 20 per cent in heavy industries (e.g. construction and metal processing) (Liu Dezhong and Niu Bianxiu 2000). Given the wages of light industries were much lower than those in heavy industries (Liu 2007) such segregation had gendered economic consequence. National representative data (from 1988 to 1994) also confirmed that overt wage discrimination between men and women performing similar work was limited, and that the main source of wage inequality was the concentration of women workers in low-paying sectors of China's economy (Maurer-Fazio *et al.* 1999). In rural regions, men received more work points[5] because they were considered to be undertaking 'heavy work'

despite the fact that the division between heavy labour and light labour could be flexible and arbitrary (Jacka 1997). This gendered division of labour was premised upon a 'natural' difference between men and women and that women's 'weak' physique was best suited to 'light' work and so links back to the biological determinist understanding that gained attention during the republican era and was noted above.

The mobilization of women into the workplace did not exempt them from their more traditional duties, such as being a good wife and mother. Although men were called upon to do a share of domestic work, research has shown that women continued to spend far more time undertaking domestic tasks (Research Institute of All China's Women's Federation *et al.* 1998: 473, Table 9.1). The stronger cultural association of women and family meant that women entered social production on unequal terms to male workers, and through a vicious circle of devoting more time to domestic duties, reinforced the workplace gender hierarchy. Contemporary narratives of urban industrial women workers show that, unlike their male counterparts, women suffered from time poverty, juggling work and family duties, and this made it difficult for them to invest time in cultivating social connections that would benefit their career (Liu 2007). Rural studies demonstrated the double burden upon women affected their ability to earn work points and be active in political campaigns (Andors 1983; Hershatter 2004).

The *danwei* was the work and residential unit fundamental to social organization in urban China prior to the 1990s and has continued to be an important organizer of work and life in the post-1990 era. The distinctive familial organization of the *danwei* played a special part in perpetuating gender ideology and practices (see Lui 2007). For example, the *danwei* maintained the traditional practice of men providing the house in marriage as only male workers were eligible for housing application. Such gendered housing allocation reinforced the traditional idea of female dependency in family life and made marriage materially necessary for women. It also made women more vulnerable if any marital problems arose. Although theoretically rendered obsolete by socialism, Confucian familial protocols were in fact 'redeployed in various forms in daily practice of *danwei*'s control' (Liu 2007: 141). The gender inequalities which women workers had experienced eventually exploded into overt discrimination during the reform period. Without the state's rhetorical protection, women were thrown into the market. Middle-aged and older women workers in particular were more prone to lose their jobs and bore the brunt of economic restructuring (Liu 2007; Wang 2000).

In the countryside, from the 1980s collective farming was displaced by a return to family farming, which meant that women's labour was once again controlled by the head of the household (Davin 1999; Jacka 1997). Because restrictions on rural-urban migration reduced, men and young women left the countryside for better paid jobs in cities. Older and married women continued to run low-profit agricultural businesses whilst having limited access to the micro-financial loans initiated by the government (see Jacka 1997; Judd 1994).

Among the rural-urban migration of today, gender continues to play an important role. As a result of the gendered expectation in marriage and family, marriage cut short women migrants' working life whilst enabling men to migrate since the wife was expected to look after the household in the countryside (Fan 2007). Further, male migrants are mainly found working on construction sites, whilst young migrant women mainly work as domestic workers, waitresses and assemblers in foreign-owned factories (Tan 2000). Overall, economic reforms have improved living standards immensely; however, the effects of these reforms have been felt differently according to age, location, social hierarchy and their intersections with gender.

Sexuality in contemporary China

The Confucian emphasis on family and lineage meant that in pre-modern China sexuality was prioritized to ensure procreation of the next generation. The communist revolution in 1949 brought many challenges to Confucian ideologies and rearranged many aspects of social life, including sexual relations. Whilst journalistic reports tend to view the Mao regime as puritanical and the following reform era encompassing a sexual revolution (Jeffreys 2006), research findings question a simple dichotomy between the repression of the Maoist era and the apparent liberalization of the post-Mao period (Hershatter 1996; Evans 1997, 2000). In order to capture the changes and continuities in organization and experiences around sex that have taken place in China, the following section discusses issues such as sexuality in intimate relations, sex and economy and homosexuality to unfold the complexity of the sexuality picture.

Sexuality in intimate relationships

The 1950 Marriage Law outlawed concubinage and arranged marriages; free-choice marriage became the expected norm for families in socialist China (Chapter 4). Pan (1994) highlighted that as a result of this law, the role of love became gradually important in marriage. With the introduction of the one-child policy in 1979, the traditional equation of sex with procreation was fundamentally undermined. Sigley (1998) showed that with the aim of promoting the one-child policy, there was abundant official literature to highlight the pleasurable aspects of marital sexual relations.

Free-choice marriage and family were promoted and established as the main site where sexual equality might be achieved. Whist the heterosexual marital unit became normalized in terms of sexual relations, this excluded and deviated other forms of relationship such as premarital sex and homosexuality (Jeffreys 2006). Evans (1997, 2000) discussed the significant gendered consequences of the official discourses on sexuality. Despite the rhetoric of equality, women were still defined in 'scientific' terms as essentially different from and less

sexual than men. In this monogamous picture, women were represented as the principal targets and agents of sexual morality and reasonability; and so the double standard implicit in the Confucian principle of female chastity was recast in gender-specific identification of female responsibility for the maintenance of social and sexual morality (Evans 1997, 2000). Despite the abundance of sexual representations since the 1980s, neither the popular nor official discourses have tackled sexuality as a gender issue and so the view that 'nature subjects women to lives dominated either by male or reproductive concerns continues to permeate' (Evans 1997: 219–20).

Although a wife is obligated to support her husband's interests and serve his needs, sexuality can also function as a site to enact resistance. During an ethnographic study of an urban setting in the 1980s, Jankowiak (1993) found that women had some say in the frequency of intercourse in marriage. If a wife felt satisfied with her marriage, she was more than cooperative to her husband's advances; if not, she rejected the advances either directly or with excuses (e.g. sleeping with a child in order to avoid her husband). Jankowiak (2002) also pointed out the variation of male sexual techniques by social class with the educated men putting more emphasis upon women's enjoyment in sexual acts. Finally, it is noteworthy that while Chinese women regarded sexual relations as a marital duty, male identity is equated with sexual performance (Jankowiak 2002). If a husband is impotent, a Chinese woman is within her rights to request and immediately receive a divorce.

Over the last two decades newspaper and media coverage of extramarital love has rocketed (Chapter 4). While extramarital affairs allow the expression of romance and exchange of sex unspoiled by economic factors, such affairs coexist with a continuance of fulfilling family responsibilities by the philandering spouses (Farrer and Sun 2003). Public discussion of divorce has also risen considerably. Many divorce cases are filed by women, often on grounds of incompatibility; however, at the same time, divorce was often portrayed as disadvantageous to women (Honig and Hershatter 1988). As a result of the implicit standard of female chastity, divorced women were often pitied or looked down upon, subject to stigma in natal family networks, and in public domains such as the workplace (Liu 2007).

The post-Mao period has also witnessed the emergence of new sexual discourses in the popular domain, exemplified in the proliferation of novels and online blogs about personal sexual experiences. When these accounts were written by a woman, controversy arose particularly. For example, when the woman writer Wei Hui published her novel *Shanghai Baby* in China in 1999, the graphic description of the heroine's sexual experiences attracted a lot of readers as well a public moral crisis.[6] It was officially banned as being decadent; nevertheless, the availability of the Internet enabled its wide non-official circulation. While some of these publications to some extent objectified women and satisfied the male's gaze, Wei and other young women writers who wrote about their sexual experiences were pioneering in the sense that

they talked about sex publicly as women, which challenged the male's authority and control over sexual discourse. However, in public, these women writers were generally condemned as morally disreputable women.

Some mainland Chinese scholars feel that China's sexual revolution is more associated with the younger generation, though with a significant gender twist. Survey data show that young Chinese men increasingly view sex in a manner that is unrelated to romance, but young women are still constrained by traditional assumptions about female sexual behaviour with a high value attached to female chastity (Jeffreys 2006). By analysing sexual culture among Chinese youth, Farrer (2002) found that official sex education, by condemning premarital sex and reinstalling sexual morality, reproduced the importance of female chastity and traditional gender roles. With such strong gendered implications, despite the abundance of sexual representations in the post-Mao era, it seems problematic to use the term 'sexual revolution' to describe the transformations in China (Liu 2008).

Sex and the economy

Since the 1980s, China has pursued a policy of 'opening up' to the outside world and moving to a market economy – which has, among other things, led to the emergence of new sexual cultures in large coastal cities: for some young women in Shanghai, being 'sexy' and sexually more adventurous has become a badge of 'modern' status (Farrer 2002). 'Opening up' has also brought with it a growing deployment of a sexualized femininity in the market domain. The beauty economy is booming: commercial companies employ models to advertise their products and many local governments have sponsored beauty contests to boost local tourism (Xu and Feiner 2007). The sex industry has also proliferated as a result of the emergent consumerism, catering to the demands of the increasing numbers of wealthy businessmen whereby sexualized leisure activities have become normative business practices to maintain good relationships with clients.

The wider social economic background embedded in sexual consumption of women's bodies created particular problems for white-collar professionals, an occupation many university women graduates aspire to. Case studies show that women's sexuality has become a commercial resource deliberately initiated and developed by their organization; they are expected to engage in sexual labour during interactions with clients in work and in leisure venues are vulnerable to sexual harassment and exploitation (see Lui 2008). Despite the desexualization of women in the market economy, past restrictions on sexual expression and discussion have given 'reputable' women little or no opportunity for sexual autonomy. While men happily consume women's sexuality, women who are actively engaged in sexual activities are considered decadent; women's sexuality is still strictly moralized. This has challenged white-collar professional women as they attempt to negotiate the sexualized work culture whilst maintaining their sexual reputation. In view of the close link between

morality and women's sexuality, it seems to be impossible to excel in a sexualized business world as well as to be a reputable woman. Either women ignore the sexual gossip when adapting to business-related leisure in venues designed for men's sexual pleasure or miss out on networking opportunities that might be vital to the effective performance of their jobs. These white-collar professional women seemed to walk a fine line between respectability and disreputability (Liu 2008).

At another end of the labour market are the sex workers involved in prostitution which re-emerged in the post-Mao era. Prostitution was rampant prior to 1949. When the CCP took over, eradicating prostitution was regarded as a sign of the moral superiority of socialism. As a result, prostitution became non-existent (Sigley 2006). In the post-Mao years, despite government efforts to ban commercial sex to ensure a healthy social environment, the sex industry has boomed, serving the increasing number of wealthy businessmen (Jefferys 2004). Government intervention is considered questionable by some scholars, since research shows that the policing of commercial sex is generating corruption and social injustice to sex workers (Pan 1994).

As a result of a strong association between morality and female sexuality, sex workers are widely regarded as decadent in public and viewed as causing a crisis to national morality. While subject to extensive institutional and social discrimination in the city, sex workers negotiate an urban identity through 'their consumption practices and through exploiting the superior social, cultural, and economic resources possessed by their clients' and act as 'brokers of modernity' in the countryside (Zheng 2009: 5). Unlike the white-collar women stuck in a dilemma between maintaining a morally high reputation and excelling in a sexualized business culture, sex workers assumed an entrepreneurial ownership of their own bodies, and 'reclaimed the commodification of their bodies as an empowering practice'. By disregarding their reproductive duties to the families and the state, these sex workers 'subverted the gender and social hierarchy' (Zheng 2009:12). Women working in the Pearl River Delta felt that the term 'sex work' placed too much emphasis on 'sex' at the expense of other aspects of their 'work' – the emotional and embodied labour (Ding and Ho 2008).

Homosexuality

While there was no mention of homosexuality in the official publications in Maoist years, homosexuality entered into both popular and official discourse in the reform era when it became closely associated with AIDS, crime, sickness and abnormality (Evans 1997). The aversion to homosexuality is dissimilar to homophobia in the West. Homosexuality and lesbianism are not merely objects of moral outrage – they challenge the foundations of the Asian patriarchal family. To live as a gay man is to 'renege on the paramount filial duty of continuing the family line and ensuring parents' future status as ancestors; to live as a lesbian refuses women's part in this project, brings

shame on the family, and flies in the face of all tenets of feminine virtue' (Jackson, Liu, and Woo 2008: 24). Historians found that in the late Qing legal code from the mid-eighteenth century on, homosexuality was thrown together with other kinds of extramarital sex and considered undesirable because it did not lead to legitimate procreation within marriage (Dikotter 1995). Aggravated by the assimilation of Western concepts of biological science in the earlier twentieth century, homosexuality became further condemned as a form of sexual pathology (Hinsch 1990).

In such a hostile environment, homosexuals' lives are not easy. Although Chinese law makes no specific mention of homosexuality, narratives of male homosexuals show that they are subject to brutal treatment including beatings by police in public (Evans 1997). Lesbians are also found to be subject to administrative detention and re-education as 'hooligans' (He and Jolly 2002). In recent years, some Chinese researchers played important roles in exposing the discrimination and pleading for greater tolerance for homosexual people. Gay clubs have been established in some of the larger cities (Li and Wang 1992). Although homosexuals 'are talked to, or talked about', they are effectively 'denied a voice in public discourses about sexuality' (Evans 1997: 208). Further, the pleading for public tolerance and recognition among Chinese scholars co-existed with a persistent understanding of homosexuality as a deviant or diseased behaviour, a result of a naturalized view of heterosexuality and sexual difference (Evans 1997: 208–9).

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the ways that gender and sexuality affected the organization of Chinese society in both public and private domains. In the past century, various national projects have challenged Confucian ideologies and practices and re-arranged the relations between men and women. Due to an inadequate understanding of gender in the socialist modernization project, inequalities between men and women persisted. For example, although the boundary between inner space and outer domain has been refined, the gender segregation based upon 'heavy' labour and 'light' labour still predominated at work. The gendered division between domestic sphere and social production was maintained despite the fact that women were mobilized into the workplace. Further, due to the intersection of gender with other social categories, attention needed to be paid to urban/rural location, social hierarchy, and generational differences to understand the complexity of gender transformations in China.

Sexuality, while traditionally serving the need to produce the next generation, has undergone great changes in the last five decades. Maoist years were not a puritanical era as people might have expected: sexuality was closely regulated rather than repressed (Evans 1997). In the post-Mao era, even when the government tried to limit access to knowledge about 'decadent' sexual practices, new communications technologies as well as the demands of a market

economy have begun to make it easier to evade censorship and to exchange sexual information. Although the abundance of the sexual discourses more often than not re-sexualized women, studies show that, in the case of sex workers, women could subvert the gender and social order by claiming the ownership of their own bodies (Zheng 2009). Despite hostile public attitudes, homosexuality is also becoming gradually more visible in some urban areas.

Further, it is important that we recognize that sexuality is 'embedded in wider social relations and in non-sexual aspects of social life; in particular, it is enmeshed with gender relations' (Jackson, Liu, and Woo 2008: 18). The gendered implications of current changes around sexuality are significant. For example, women's sexuality is still strictly moralized, which leaves women who are engaged in sexual pleasure or discourses morally decadent (Liu 2008). An entrenched biological determinist belief of gender not only normalizes heterosexuality thereby making other sexual alternatives deviant but also limits the liberating effects of such sexual transformations for women.

Notes

1   The film follows the sad life of a young woman who married into a wealthy household as the master's fourth concubine. The name of the film is reflective of the practice in the household, that is, a red lantern will be raised outside the concubine's room when the master spends the night at her place.
2   In reality, because of social and political disorder during the early part of the century, these practices were constrained to a privileged few (Barlow 2004).
3   Although embedded in inner-party politics, the 1973 campaign to criticize Confucianism offered a rare moment for gender inequality to be openly addressed in the context of a political campaign (Andors 1983; K. Johnson 1983; Croll 1980).
4   In pre-Communist China, women were already found to be working in cotton mills in industrial centres such as Shanghai and Tianjin (Hershatter 1986). However, large-scale women's employment began in Maoist years.
5   This practice was used during the collective agriculture period: the workers' labour input was first calculated in points and then remunerated in money.
6   It is supposed to be a semi-fictionalized account of the author's experiences of love and sex in Shanghai.

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6   Contested ground
Community and neighbourhood

Chunrong Liu

An extraordinary consequence of China's market reforms is the fundamental change within rural villages and urban neighbourhoods where signs of grassroots autonomy seem to alter the pre-existing pattern of social infrastructure and pose a challenge to the Chinese state. Indeed, revival of communal groups, emergence of property-based organizations as well as collective actions have tempted many observers to interpret villages and neighbourhoods as springboards of civil society, in sharp contrast to organized dependence during the pre-reform era (Derleth and Koldyk 2002; 2004; Lei 2001; Lin 2002; Xu 1997; Pekkanen and Read 2003).

This chapter discusses the complexity of Chinese grassroots society with reference to market reforms, social change, and state adaptation. Rapid market-oriented reforms have spawned rich social fabrics in local communities. Meanwhile, persistent demands for stability and governability have generated community-based welfare and governance programmes such as villager committee (VC) elections, the 'New Socialist Countryside Building' campaign (NSCB) and the push for 'Urban Community Building' (UCB). These drastic movements have restructured the grassroots society, resulting in a patterned cellular solidarity with limited mobilization capacity against the state.

Grassroots society in Mao's China

Traditional Chinese grassroots society was composed of semi-autonomous local units, each of which was structured around the kinship system as its core (Yang 1959). Rural community was governed by highly indigenous leadership based on the solidarity groups of kinship, and social control was based upon the collective principles of joint-responsibility and mutual surveillance. The imperial state limited its formal bureaucratic power at the magistrate level, engaging the local community from within through the agency of gentry as well as the *Baojia* system, which was a community-based system of law enforcement and civil control with one *jia* consisting of ten families and ten *jia* (or one hundred families) making a *bao* (Hsiao 1960).

The kinship-based community order was demolished by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) after 1949. Land reforms, agriculture collectivization