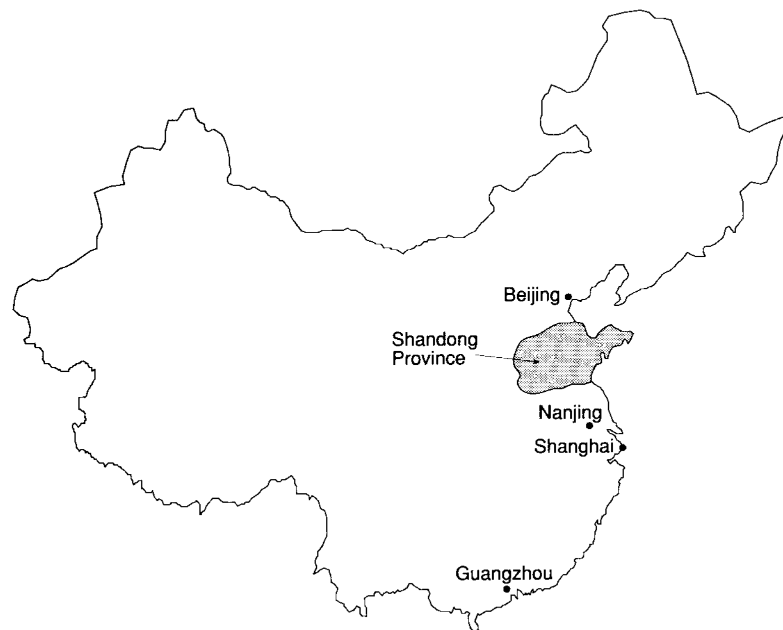
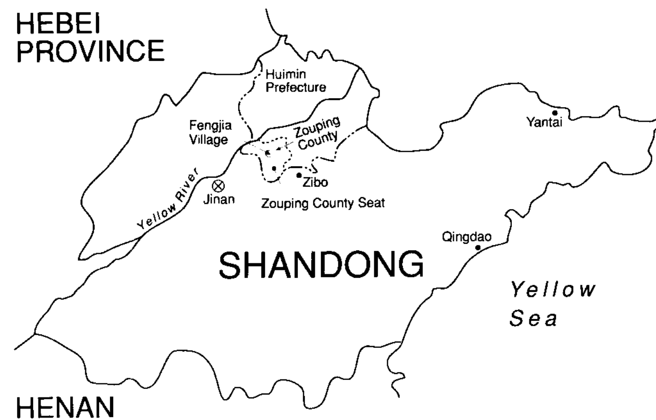
Introduction

During my fourth month of fieldwork in Fengjia, a rural village in the People's Republic of China (PRC), I learned of a Cultural Revolution (1966–68) prohibition on interclass[1] weeping at funerals. Though I knew that policy at that time had emphasized glorifying the "red" classes and struggling against the rich peasants and landlords, I could make little sense of this prohibition. If, for example, the deceased person were a "poor peasant," wouldn't it be most "revolutionary" if everyone, regardless of class, honored the deceased by weeping at the funeral? I later learned that I had a mistaken view of weeping at funerals. Weeping was not simply a matter of honoring the deceased; it also claimed a relationship to the deceased and his or her family. Thus, the ban on interclass weeping did not prevent bad classes from honoring "red" ones, but rather discouraged the formation of interclass relationships, a reasonable objective given the politics of that time.

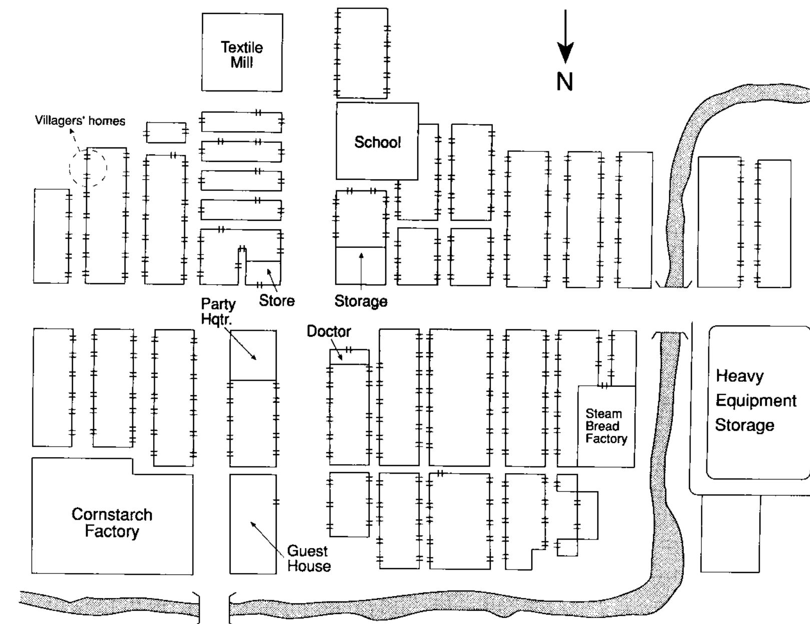
The above prohibition is just one example of the place of relationship (*guanxi*) formation in everyday village life, and the role of embodying human feelings (*ganqing*) in those relationships.[2] The first time I went to Fengjia village I was both frustrated and fascinated by the amount of time spent in introductions, banquets, drinking tea, lighting cigarettes, and otherwise participating in the small rituals that produce *ganqing* and *guanxi*. As I spent more time in the village I realized that these practices were not limited to the official entertainment of foreign researchers. Living at the Fengjia guest house, I could often observe village leaders entertaining officials from other villages and counties. More importantly, every household I visited was set up to receive guests in a similar manner. In addition, the villagers themselves recognized the centrality of these practices, describing the people of the area as particularly hospitable (*haoke*). After less than a month in Fengjia I concluded that the production and reproduction of human relationships—by means of "guesting" and "hosting," attending and giving banquets,



Map 1 People's Republic of China



Map 2 Shandong Province



Map 3 Fengjia in 1989
Source: Adapted from map originally drawn by Stewart Odend'hal.

giving and receiving gifts, and a variety of other methods—was a primary activity for most villagers. I decided to make it the focus of my study.

Fengjia sits on a plain of fertile farmland less than twenty miles south of the Yellow River, in Zouping County, Shandong Province, between the cities of Jinan and Zibo (see maps 1 and 2). In 1989 more than 60 percent of the village's population of approximately 1,150 belonged to the four branches of the Feng family. Zhangs, Lins, Jias, and a few other families comprised the rest of the population. Physically the village consisted of approximately four square blocks of one-story, brick, courtyard-style houses with a handful of larger structures, including the party headquarters, a cornstarch factory, a textile mill, an elementary school, and a guest house (see map 3). Surrounding the buildings were flat fields of either cotton, a rotation of winter wheat and summer corn, or, in a few places, vegetable gardens and orchards. Two paved and two dirt roads connected Fengjia to the towns and villages to the north, south, east, and west. Most Fengjia households had income both

Figure 1 Women working in wheat field.

from farming corn, wheat, and cotton and from working at one of the factories or some other sideline (figures 1 and 2).

Zouping County itself is familiar to historians as the site of Liang Shuming's Rural Reconstruction Institute (see Alitto 1979:chapter 11). During the early 1930s, with the backing of the provincial government, Liang and others founded the institute to train rural reconstruction cadres and to research and experiment with "plans, programs and policies" (Alitto 1979:242) for rural development. A hospital, library, social survey department, and normal school were affiliated with the institute. When I was in Fengjia, the legacy of the institute's efforts in the area of education were still apparent. Several older Fengjia men had studied at the institute and a few knew Liang as a teacher. Education levels in the village were high for rural China, with Fengjia children testing into college at a rate double the provincial average for rural *and* urban children (see chapter 9). The old normal school had been reincarnated as Zouping's excellent, no. 1 high school, and the brightest of Fengjia's teenagers went to school there.

As has been noted by so many others, family relationships both agnatic and affinal occupy a central place in the lives of Chinese rural people (Cohen 1976; Fei 1939, 1986; Freedman 1966; Gallin 1966; Pasternak 1972; R. Watson 1985; A. Wolf 1985; Wolf and Huang 1980; M. Wolf 1968, 1970, 1972; Martin Yang 1945). Fengjia residents were certainly no exception. The management of family relationships was a premier topic both in everyday conversation and in most of the popular media con-

Figure 2 Women working in textile mill.

sumed in the village. Local opera dealt almost exclusively with the managing of family relationships, while, at least in 1989, *Required Reading for Parents* (*Fumu Bi Du*) was the only widely read magazine. However, though villagers invested much effort in the production of family relationships, they also constructed extrafamily relationships with friends and fellow villagers. Moreover, the techniques used to manage these relationships were the same as those used in family relationships. Steven Sangren notes that

> Chinese establish corporate groups very similar in form and function to lineages on bases other than kinship. Consequently analysis of Chinese lineage corporations is best framed in the wider context of all formally constituted groups. (1984:391)

Though lineage relations per se did not occupy a central place in Fengjia, Sangren's insight still resonates. I will write of family and extrafamily relations together.

Guanxi and Culture, *Guanxi* as Practice

In his study of the relationship of moral discourse to social life in rural China, Richard Madsen divides the preexisting literature into two types:

> Important books had been written by Western intellectual historians like Stuart Schram and Frederic Wakeman on traditional and modern themes in Maoist ideology, and careful studies were being conducted by a host of political scientists and sociologists on contemporary Chinese social structure. But while the intellectual historians were carefully analyzing ideas, the social scientists were generally discounting the importance of those ideas and explaining actual Chinese political behavior in terms of the pursuit of economic and political interests. (1984:ix)

Though the works of Madsen, Mayfair Yang (1994), and a few others are exceptions, a similar statement could be made regarding the use of the concept of culture in sinological studies of *ganqing* and *guanxi.*

On one side are those philosophers and cultural historians who see *guanxi* and *ganqing* as a sort of Confucian cultural essence. Ambrose Yeo-chi King (1991), for example, recently contributed an analysis of *guanxi* as Confucian social theory to a volume entitled *The Living Tree: The Changing Meaning of Being Chinese Today.* He concluded: "As a socio-cultural concept *kuan-hsi* [*guanxi*] is deeply embedded in Confucian social theory and has its own logic in forming and in constituting the social structure of Chinese society" (1991:79). As the volume title indicates, King portrayed *guanxi* as a Confucian logic in order to locate a common cultural essence among people of Chinese origin in the People's Republic, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and throughout the diaspora.

On the other side are those economists, political scientists, and sociologists who concentrate on the contemporary political economy of communist China. Against those who would portray *guanxi* and *ganqing* as Confucian culture, they insist that such practices are practical adaptations to communist socioeconomic structures. Writers like Andrew Walder and Jean Oi describe *guanxi* and *ganqing* as types of "clientelist" relationships that have parallels in other communist and even noncommunist nations. Oi concludes:

> The existence of the clientelistic politics and evasion that I describe at the lowest tier of the rural bureaucracy may invoke similar accounts of official malfeasance and the importance of personal ties in imperial China. Parallels exist, but one should not conclude that the root of either corruption or patronage is cultural. This behavior is neither inherently Chinese nor traditional. (1989:228)

I am sympathetic to the gist of Oi's statement. In forming *guanxi* and *ganqing,* Chinese people are reacting to social pressures that have parallels elsewhere in the world. Certainly, it would be a mistake to view Confucian "culture" or "tradition" as a sort of unmoved mover in a Newtonian logic of social causality. Moreover, like Oi, I argue that practices of *guanxi* production in modern rural China must be understood in the context of more than forty years of Chinese Communist Party (CCP) policy. However, there is another sense in which I would insist that the practices of *guanxi* production are cultural. As communicative actions, practices like gift giving or weeping at funerals presume a shared nexus of comprehensibility—that is, common cultural assumptions.[3]

Though this study is indebted to the insights of both those who have interpreted Confucian texts and those who have analyzed communist social structures, its theoretical starting point differs from each. Like King, I am interested in the cultural significance of *guanxi* and *ganqing.* However, I view this significance as a modern phenomenon rather than a manifestation of an ancient textual tradition. Like Oi, I ground my analysis in the practical actions of modern rural people living in a socialist state. However, I insist that these practices have a cultural specificity that requires interpretation.

The phrase "the production and reproduction of human relationships" suggests my primary theoretical emphasis. By saying that relationships are *produced,* I wish to emphasize that their existence is dependent upon the continuing work of human actors. Human relationships are the by-products of neither biological generation, a Confucian worldview, nor any sort of abstract "social structure" that works outside of or above human subjects; they are the results of purposeful human efforts, of a type of practice. In practices, actors skillfully adopt strategies and draw on cultural resources in the pursuit of contemporary ends. They simultaneously utilize past cultural logics and generate new ones. Viewing social action as *practice* implies that villagers exercise their own judgment rather than blindly act out the dictates of tradition. Practices are not merely "remnants" of tradition, but rather are activated or vitalized in present village life.

As with all attempts to transcend the difficulties of "objectivism" and "subjectivism," or "structuralism" and "economism" with a theory of practice, I am greatly indebted to the works of Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1990). I take as my starting point Bourdieu's vision of practice as simultaneously acting in the present and relying on shared understandings from the past, as skillfully manipulating time rather than mechanically acting out atemporal rules. My emphases, however, are more processual and cultural, less structural and political than his. Instead of de-

lineating an internalized, unreflexive "habitus," I focus on the constant, reflexive manipulation of social options. I take inspiration from de Certeau (1984), who examines the continual modification of what is borrowed from the past and presented from above in the "making do" that constitutes a "practice of everyday life."[4]

In presenting social actions like gift giving and weeping at funerals as practices that produce *guanxi* and *ganqing*, I suggest a means/ends relationship between these practices and *guanxi*. Here I will caution that this relationship is not always simple, linear, final, or explicit. First, an instrumental logic that separates the actor from object worked upon is inappropriate for describing *ganqing*-producing practices. In a very real sense, when Fengjia villagers re-create their networks of relationships, they also re-create themselves. If one considers the self to be socially determined (a logic, I will argue below, that is implicit in certain practical conceptions of *ganqing* and *guanxi*), then one's relationships in fact constitute one's self.

Moreover, Fengjia residents see the formation of relationships simultaneously as means and ends. A wide range of friendly and family relationships in itself is seen as a desired state. The opposite, solitary state (that of a "loner") is seen as disastrous. This valuing of relationships for themselves is reflected in general evaluative comments on the state of an individual's or family's network of relationships and in claims about fellow villagers' skill at creating and maintaining relationships. Statements like "He is good at creating networks of relationships" (*Tade guanxi gaode henhao*) or "Their relationships are not so good" (*Tamen de guanxi buzenmayang*) are far from rare. Thus, excessive instrumentalism in the form of questions like "What does she want out of that relationship?" is both overly cynical and ethnocentric. Such a question both evokes an image of a completely separate actor (Fengjia woman) and object acted upon (relationship) and implies that relationships are never ends in themselves.

On the other hand, relationships have a decisive influence on much of social life. If a couple's friends and relatives are all poor, and they are expected to help friends and relatives, then they are also likely to remain or become poor. If one's friends and relatives are all intellectuals, and one continually discusses highbrow issues with them, then one becomes more intellectual oneself. As noted above, relationships are constitutive of one's self. In addition, they are constitutive of families, villages, and perhaps any other social group one could name. It would be naive to think that villagers are not conscious of these considerations when forming relationships and, thus, wrong to say that the formation of relationships in itself is always the sole and final end of the practices this book discusses.

That processes of self formation are immanent in practices of *guanxi* production makes practice theory an especially appropriate starting point for an examination of *guanxi*. As Bourdieu emphasizes, both objectivism, which lays out rules of human behavior independent of individual consciousness, and subjectivism, which presupposes an individual will that transcends social and historical inertia, omit processes of self formation from social analysis. To understand self formation in *guanxi* production, one must begin with the self that is made as it makes, that is conditioned by its history as it forges its future, that is neither the slave of structural rules nor the king of rational calculation—in brief, precisely the self that Bourdieu attempts to show us in *The Logic of Practice* (1990).

Subjectification

What is a person, an actor, a subject? Where does agency reside? Though scholars have debated these questions for centuries, many of the social sciences—especially economics, political science, and psychology—take the rational, unitary, and noncontradictory Cartesian subject as their starting point. In contrast, cultural anthropologists have long argued that this view is itself a cultural artifact (see Holland and Kipnis 1994 for a review), while Michel Foucault (1975, 1978, 1979) has described and historicized the microprocesses in which this sort of subjectivity developed. Since the publication of Foucault's genealogies, social theorists of many predilections have questioned mainstream social science's deployment of the rational unitary subject (e.g., Henriques et al. 1984). The shaping of subjectivities has received as much attention as the choices that subjects make; the inherent inconsistencies and politics of the processes of this shaping have been highlighted as much as their linearity and rationality. Dorinne Kondo's *Crafting Selves* (1990) exemplifies the power of such an approach in another East Asian context.

Since the creation of *guanxi* involved villagers in the social re-creation of themselves, discussions of *guanxi* production illuminate and are illuminated by this theorizing of the subject. Through the production of *ganqing*, Fengjia villagers constituted shifting, multiple actors whose agency was contradicted by the histories of their past construction; they dialectically re-created themselves as their subjectivities

emerged within processes of *guanxi* formation. However, though shifting and contradicted, these subjects should not be seen as so many images on an MTV screen, as ephemeral and infinitely malleable. The production of *guanxi* involved commitments, and villagers were keenly aware of how new or changing commitments might contradict already existing ones. Villagers and their commitments did change. However, this change occurred over periods of months and years and, thus, cannot be imagined outside of lived time.

In brief, I resist both the pregiven and unitary subject conceptualizations of mainstream social science and the decentered, agentless ones of much post-structuralist theory. By rejecting these two types of conceptualizations, I follow an already well articulated position in Western social theory (Holloway 1984; Smith 1988; Mahoney and Yngvesson 1992). However, paying attention to the cultural specificity of *guanxi* production allows the expansion and development of this position. Here, Sun Lung-kee's (1987) discussion of *ganqing*'s power to constitute the individual and the social both illuminates social process in Fengjia and illustrates the relevance of these processes to recent theorizations of the subject.[5]

For Sun, the *xin* or heart/mind and locus of individual motivation is always defined socially through *ganqing*. Through this theorization, Sun directly links practices of *ganqing* production to subject formation. In addition to constituting individual heart/minds, *ganqing* also define the boundaries (ever shifting) of the group of people whose "magnetic fields of human feeling" (*renqingde cilichang*) constitute individual heart/minds. In short, *ganqing* simultaneously define the individual and the social. Through the managing of *ganqing*, villagers create and are created as subjects.

Deceptively simple, the theoretical value of Sun's formulation lies in his firm grounding of subject formation processes in interpersonal relations. Feminist Lacanians have provided some of the most sophisticated theorization of the subject to date (Mitchell and Rose 1982; Henriques et al. 1984; Holloway 1984). Yet, as Maureen Mahoney and Barbara Yngvesson (1992) argue, these theorists rely too heavily on the positioning of subjects by and in language. Subjects exist not only in discourse, but also in all kinds of ongoing social interaction. Though language perhaps mediates all human action, it does not subsume all agency and subjectivity.[6] Mahoney and Yngvesson use this insight to argue, against Lacan's theorization of child development, that infants participate in social interaction, and hence exist as active subjects, long before they can talk. Extending their argument, by way of Sun, to subject construction in Fengjia, I argue that villagers not only occupy (interpellate?) subject positions through speech but also shape subjectivities in all processes of social exchange, including gift giving, ritual, and emotional interaction. By locating the social dimension of subject construction in *ganqing* rather than language, Sun provides a theoretical standpoint from which subjectivity is not reduced to simply a desire to occupy subject positions in language.

Margot Lyon argues that "social relationships are necessarily bodily" (1995:254). When we manipulate the desires and subjectivities of others or allow or resist others' manipulations of ourselves, we do more than rework words. Feelings—in all of their physical, bodily, and social richness—as much as language, are where subjectivity lies. To reduce the former to the latter is an ideational simplification of the highest order.

Methodology and Research Situation

The research for this study took place within the context of a large project funded and negotiated by the Committee on Scholarly Communication with the People's Republic of China (CSCPRC). In 1985 a CSCPRC team led by political scientist Michel Oksenberg began negotiations with the Chinese and Shandong Academies of Social Science to designate a rural research site for American scholars. Eventually the negotiators settled on Zouping County (map 2), in part reflecting the interests of one of the senior American researchers, historian Guy Alitto, in Liang Shuming's Rural Reconstruction Institute.[7] Because the county was not officially "open" to foreign visitors, researchers had to obtain special permits before entering the county and remain in close contact with representatives from the county's Foreign Affairs Office (FAO) while they were there. Within the county, researchers could live at one of two places: the guest house in the county seat or a guest house constructed partially with CSCPRC funds in the village of Fengjia. Though several other villages within the county were open to the researchers for day visits, researchers were not supposed to spend the night there. Since I was interested in conducting long-term ethnographic research in a rural village, I chose to live in the Fengjia guest house.[8]

Initially eleven scholars—an historian, two economists, two sociologists, two anthropologists, two political scientists, a veterinary scientist, and an environmental specialist—were selected to do research for a five-year period that began in the summer of 1987. I first went to the village

Figure 3 *Calligraphy reading "Prosper Collectively."*

in the summer of 1988 as a research assistant to one of the anthropologists, Judith Farquhar. Later I developed my own project.

Compared to neighboring villages, Fengjia in 1988–90 was slightly wealthier and considerably more collectivized. A large piece of calligraphy of which there were copies displayed prominently in both the office of the party committee and the home of the party secretary said "Prosper Collectively" (*jiti zhi fu;* see figure 3). Though land was allocated to individual families, in accordance with the responsibility system (*zerenzhi*) implemented in 1978,[9] plowing, seeding, and some irrigation and harvesting were still done collectively. The result was a relatively equal distribution of wealth. Moreover, village regulations standardized and subsidized house building, preventing the relatively well-off from ostentatiously displaying their wealth by building extraordinarily large homes. Consequently, in 1988 every family in the village owned a one-story brick house (figure 4). Politically, the village had been comparatively stable (considering the rampages most of the countryside had gone through), with Party Secretary Feng retaining power as village head for more than twenty years. In addition, the village had a reputation for obeying party mandates. Though not a subsidized "model" village,[10] Fengjia's lack of any extremely impoverished families, its political stability, and its willingness to follow party leadership were certainly factors in the selection of this village as a research site for foreign social

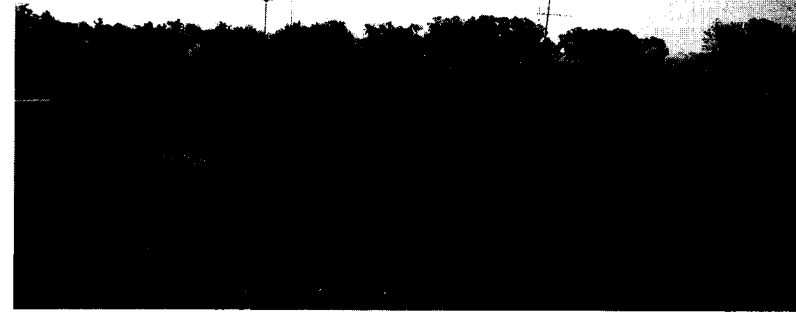


Figure 4 *Village housing.*

scientists. In addition to CSCPRC scholars, researchers from other foreign countries and from Chinese government research institutes in Beijing have visited Fengjia.

Compared to other villages in Zouping County and the Huimin prefecture, Fengjia occupied an economically and geographically intermediate but rather unique position. Many of the villages in the southeastern part of Zouping County were considerably more industrialized than Fengjia. They had better access to the urban center of Zibo and to the railway line that runs from Jinan to Qingdao. According to officials from the FAO, many of these villages both ran collectively organized factories and encouraged individual families to participate in the nonagricultural private sector. Such families either started their own businesses or sent members to Zibo and other neighboring urban areas to work in privately owned enterprises. Between 1988 and 1990 most Fengjia residents stayed in Fengjia to farm and work at the village factories. Few households started their own businesses and most continued to derive more than half their income from agriculture.[11] Most of the villages to the north of Fengjia, especially those outside of Zouping County, were, like Fengjia, primarily agricultural. However, these villages were generally poorer than Fengjia. Fengjia was fairly unique in being both primarily agricultural and relatively prosperous.

How has the particularity of Fengjia influenced my research? The CCP leadership certainly did not encourage the practices of relationship reproduction that I studied there. One can only assume that if such

practices are tolerated in a village that is open to foreign researchers then they are tolerated in most places. At least one other study, Yunxiang Yan's (1993) dissertation about a Heilongjiang village, describes gift-giving practices very similar to the ones I record here. One could speculate that the voice of official discourse speaks more softly in other villages. However, given that the CCP articulates its propaganda as much through mass media as through the mouths of village-level party leaders, one could hardly expect it to be mute. Certainly, personal relationships in a village less collectivized and less egalitarian than Fengjia would have a different tone. Where services such as irrigation are organized by individual families and friends instead of by the village and where vast differences in wealth develop among neighboring families, one can only expect that economic considerations would play more of a role in decisions about the production and reproduction of relationships.[12] Where villagers participate in an extravillage private economy or join the "labor tide" and seasonally migrate to wealthier areas in search of work, one might expect an expanded scope of extravillage ties.

Further discussion of how a change of site might have affected this research could only degenerate into pure speculation. More worthwhile is a closer consideration of the research situation in Fengjia. While in the village, I lived in the guest house[13] at the north end of the village (see map 3). The guest house had a staff of two Fengjia men, a cook in his fifties and a general attendant around twenty years old. Cook Feng lived alone with his wife in one of the only smaller sized houses in the village. His son had graduated from a school of Chinese medicine and was now a doctor in the county seat, where Cook Feng planned on retiring. He enjoyed calligraphy and covered the walls of his home with his work. He also loved socializing (cooking at the banquets of his friends and neighbors for the fun of it) and was a well-known matchmaker, responsible for some twenty-odd couples in the village, including the match of the general attendant, Feng Bo. Feng Bo underwent many changes during the course of my research, growing from a rather taciturn teenager to a confident husband and father. He lived with his parents and, until she married, his younger sister. When not working at the guest house, he helped farm his household's land and by 1995 was dreaming of starting a photography business. Upon observing some facet of village life that confused me, I would often return to the guest house and ask Cook Feng or Feng Bo for an explanation.

Also living at the guest house whenever foreigners were present was a representative from the county FAO, along with whatever other researchers or village guests happened to be in town. The FAO representative was himself a friend of many Fengjia villagers. He did not directly concern himself with the substance of my research. Since I was not supposed to leave the village unaccompanied (as mentioned above, except for designated villages, the county was closed to foreigners), he was responsible for making arrangements for my coming and going. Within the village, however, I usually visited people's houses unaccompanied. Occasionally the FAO representative would follow me on my rounds of the village. On these occasions I would try to avoid what I thought might be "sensitive" topics. However, sometimes the very topics I thought were sensitive came up in discussions initiated by the representative himself. Overall, the presence of the FAO representative had little effect on my particular topic of research. Given that all ethnographic research in China is officially approved and to some extent "surveilled," I was relatively pleased with my "freedom" within the village.

In all, I made eight trips to Fengjia: two months in the summer of 1988, a month and a half in the winter of 1989, two weeks in April of 1989, two weeks in June of 1989, a month and a half in November and December of 1989, two weeks in June of 1990, and two brief checks in the summers of 1992 and 1995. I undertook my most wide-ranging research during my first trip. Updating the census of the village, copied the previous year by anthropologist Huang Shu-min, I visited all of the households in the village and surveyed the variety of living arrangements. Assisting on a medical anthropology project, I visited the families of sick villagers and got a feel for the types of afflictions from which Fengjia residents suffered. I also began studying local dialect with Teacher Feng Rugong. Teacher Feng lived with his wife, son, daughter-in-law, and two grandchildren just down the street from the guest house. Having graduated from the high school during the 1930s, Feng Rugong had been a teacher in many Zouping County schools before retiring to the village of his birth. When I was in Fengjia, he drew a modest pension and spent his time raising his grandchildren, maintaining his health through long morning walks and tai chi exercises, and socializing with friends. Thoughtful, careful with his appearance, and well mannered, Teacher Feng perhaps embodied the attitudes Liang Shuming hoped to inculcate. He unselfishly contributed much time to my project.

That first summer many other researchers visited the village, and I benefited from their observations on the village's and county's ecology, health care, political economy, and history. On later trips I was usually the only foreigner in the village and concentrated on observing and ask-

ing about practices of relationship reproduction. From mid-November to mid-February was the village's agricultural slack season—a time when farmers had the most free time to speak with researchers and when most weddings took place. The research I undertook during this period was the most productive. I took the April trip to observe practices associated with the *Qingming* holiday.[14] The June trip of 1989 was taken to observe the practices of visitation that occur after the wheat harvest. However, the massacre in Tiananmen Square and subsequent rupture of research relations between the CSCPRC and the PRC prematurely ended my June 1989 trip. Furthermore, though I had originally planned to spend most of the fall of 1989 in the village, I was not able to return until November.[15]

Being in the village during the Tiananmen Massacre was interesting though stressful. Village leaders, though not necessarily supportive of the students, were definitely concerned about what a change in the leadership at the top of the party might mean for their village. On June 6, Party Secretary Feng declared a youth curfew in the village. He said that if young people got together at night, they might say things that they should not, and that in general people should unify their thought around the party line and concentrate on the upcoming harvest rather than political events. Both during my June 1989 visit and afterwards, Fengjia residents asked me about the student protests in the city of Nanjing (where I had been in May of 1989) and expressed their opinions about the movement and subsequent crackdown. Though perhaps lacking the vigor of discussions in large cities, their concern about and discussion of national events reminded me of the influence of state politics on village life. In my subsequent visits, I began to focus on the historical connections of village practices to state politics and especially on the evolution of relationship-producing practices after the end of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (GPCR) decade of 1966–76.

In the periods between my trips to the village, I returned to Nanjing, where I lived at the Johns Hopkins/Nanjing University Center for Chinese and American Studies. There I studied Chinese language, politics, and history and reviewed local newspapers and other sources not easily available outside of the PRC. In all, I spent nearly two years in Nanjing, and eventually married another university student there. Though the cultural and social distance between urban and rural China at times seemed to exceed that between the United States and China, my fieldwork benefited from my exposure to Mandarin dialect in Nanjing, my

conversations with urban Chinese friends and family, and the opportunity to reassess research strategies with other intellectuals.

Linguistic difficulties, though a central methodological concern for interpretive anthropology, are rarely directly addressed in ethnographies. The dialect of Mandarin spoken in Fengjia village was difficult to understand even for native speakers of Mandarin upon first entering the village. However, it did not differ from Mandarin as much as, for example, Shanghainese or Cantonese. I saw native speakers of Mandarin enter the village and adjust to the local dialect within a month. Fengjia residents, on the other hand, could understand standard Mandarin, and in many cases could speak it themselves, with varying degrees of accent. During all of my visits I studied local dialect with Teacher Feng three or four times a week. I asked him to translate into Mandarin words I did not understand, and I developed specific vocabularies and question/answer frames for topics in which I was particularly interested. I tested them by speaking to individuals whose Mandarin was particularly poor. If I could hold a coherent conversation on a given topic entirely in local dialect, I felt that I had begun to understand it. In writing, I have continued paying close attention to problems of translation. Because Fengjia residents speak of and use speech in practices that are different from our own, the "corresponding" English words that one finds in a dictionary are often inappropriate translations. Differences such as those between *guanxi* in Chinese and "personal relationship" in English, or *jingyi* in Chinese and "respect" in English are elaborated throughout this study.

Ability to speak standard Mandarin was also one of the factors that influenced my relationships with individual Fengjia residents. Initially my closest contacts were highly educated old men. Party Secretary Feng had arranged in advance for these men to talk to researchers. They had more free time, spoke clearer Mandarin, and were more academically oriented than most residents. Secretary Feng also required those who held leadership positions in the village to talk to us. As far as I could tell, in arranging these informants Secretary Feng was not trying to limit or control the researchers; rather, he was offering us the people whom he felt understood the most about the working and history of the village. However, though I certainly relied on these people, I did not want to limit myself to educated old men and village leaders.

Weddings provided me with another opportunity to cultivate contacts. If I hadn't already met them, Secretary Feng would arrange to

introduce me to families who were planning marriages while I was in the village. Some of these families were quite pleased to have me attend their sons' weddings and were more than happy to answer my questions. However, I still found it easier to build relationships with the more educated families, as they both tended to speak more standard Mandarin and appreciated my own educational aspirations.

It was through the first summer's visiting of sick villagers that I established my best relationship with a relatively uneducated family. An old man had suffered a stroke. He had a large family, and scores of his relatives came to visit. I went to their house several times, on one occasion bringing a gift of preserved fruit. The man's wife saw my visiting and bringing a gift as quite respectful. Furthermore, the man's fifth son had studied Mandarin during an eight-year army assignment in Beijing and loved to talk; he was also head of the village's militia. Proud of his martial abilities, he often told me of his run-ins with thieves and vandals in Fengjia's fields, gardens, and orchards. By contrasting the attitudes and dispositions of this family's members with those of more educated families, I learned how educational attitudes and aptitudes influenced the cultural politics of the village.

I also attempted to compensate for my relatively limited conversational contacts with women. Though I would often speak to several members of the same family at once, including women who were by no means mute, most of my central questions were responded to by men. However, in two of the extended families in which I attended weddings, there were women who were fairly comfortable talking to me. Mrs. Zhang had come to the village with her teenaged daughter when she remarried a local water bureau cadre who resided in Fengjia. Gentle and soft spoken, she filled her house with Buddhist statuettes and images. She often spent her time helping out with her husband's (now also her) numerous grandchildren. The other was a young mother married to an accountant in the cornstarch factory. Cheerful, hard working, and the pride of even her mother-in-law, she could farm, tailor clothes, and do housework at the same time that she responded to my questions. I diligently pursued both of these women and they were kind enough to spend a fair amount of time speaking with me. In both of their families I heard explicit articulations on the importance of sexual equality.

In addition to asking questions, I also indulged in "participant observation." My participation consisted of forming my own relationships with villagers: giving and receiving gifts, attending and hosting banquets, being received as a guest and acting as host, and otherwise participating in practices of relationship production. My observations consisted of attending weddings, funerals, and other assorted rituals; noting the arrangement of houses and utilization of space; and watching interaction between guests and hosts and among family members in a variety of contexts. Because my position as a researcher in an officially approved project allowed me entrance into virtually all the households of the village, the range of households in which I observed practices of relationship reproduction was wider than those upon which I relied for answers to questions.

Some may insist that because this study is based on government-arranged research, it is necessarily an idealization of village life. I would counter that the variety of voices that I heard in Fengjia convinced me that villagers were not merely regurgitating a predigested party line or putting on an act for my benefit. Certainly I avoided some topics. Moreover, given the official nature and size and scope of the project, it would be impossible for me to conceal the identity of individual villagers. I have also avoided detailed descriptions of the social backgrounds of some of the individuals I quote. However, I believe it possible to say much of interest without pursuing secrets or sources of shame.

The notion that valid ethnography demands that the ethnographer be "free" to pursue *the* truth about social life without supervision or oversight suffers from unreflected notions of "truth" and social life. Social life is something that is practiced, constructed, and reconstructed by fellow humans; it is not an unchanging specimen, to be discovered and dissected by the researcher. That my project was negotiated with village and county leaders, that limits were placed and fees were charged, was reasonable and workable if not always ideal. In the end, the angle on social life that I chose to investigate was both one that impressed me as central to what people were doing and one that I thought was politically and ethically feasible.

The strength of ethnography, of doing long-term research with a limited number of people in a single place, is that it offers the researcher the opportunity to develop a sense of locally significant *questions* and the strategies for answering them within the context of the field experience. Conceivably a researcher could develop significant questions from the secondary literature on a given place and design a wide-ranging survey that would result in data from a larger range of informants. However, in most research situations the secondary literature is partial at best and insufficient for a survey. This was certainly true for Fengjia. I did not go into Fengjia planning to study practices of relationship reproduction,

and I did not see the importance of placing the evolution of these practices within the context of changing national policy until after Tiananmen 1989. My development of research questions and strategies for answering them make sense only in the context of the research situation described above.

Organization of the Book

The division of this book into two parts reflects my attempt to write about cultural specificity without essentializing it. Part I examines specific practices of *guanxi* production in Fengjia. Though the subject matter is quite narrow—gift-giving practices in one village over a two-year period, for example (chapter 3)—the vantage is quite distant. I try to understand the cultural logics that villagers presume or assert in undertaking these practices and to contrast these logics with those of other places. Though necessary for the task of cultural translation, this exploration of cultural difference reifies. The search for intersubjectivity mutes polyvocality; the cultural contrasts suggest an essentialized Confucian Other.

Part II attempts to de-essentialize this portrait. It contextualizes Fengjia's practices of *guanxi* production within a history of the People's Republic of China and describes contrasting and conflicting versions of *ganqing* and *guanxi* in different Chinese contexts. In the end, it returns to Fengjia with an exploration of how differences generated in national policies intertwine with, and inject polyvocality into, local practices of *guanxi* production. The subject matter is broader, but the vantage is nearer. Rather than general cultural contrasts, which obscure local difference, part II explores the modernity and multiplicity of practices of *guanxi* production in the PRC.

I Practices of *Guanxi* Production