3 Gift Giving

Perhaps more directly than any other method, gift giving constituted *guanxi;* by giving gifts, villagers managed (created and re-created) relationships. Since *guanxi* were simultaneously matters of material exchange and human feelings, the material exchange of gifts directly generated *ganqing* and *guanxi.* The Chinese term *zuo ge renqing* illustrates this implication. Literally it means "to make human feeling," but in common use it refers to giving a gift or doing a favor or, more specifically, giving a gift or favor for the purpose of establishing or improving *guanxi.* In gift giving, the relation between *ganqing* and *guanxi* worked as a linking force between past, present, and future. *Ganqing,* the feeling of the present, elicited memories of relationships past and begat *guanxi,* the material obligation for future exchange.

To present a complete picture of gift giving in the Fengjia of 1988–90, and to contextualize the case studies and analysis that follow, I begin with an account of the types of gifts villagers gave and the occasions on which they gave them. In no sense, however, should this background be taken as a set of "rules." As both Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1990) and Annette Weiner (1976:220–222) argue, resorting to "rules" as an explanation detemporalizes practice, and time is central in gift giving. The time lapse between gift and countergift defines gift giving as a social form. It is the possibility that a gift might not be reciprocated that gives the gift its moral weight. Social custom, the relationship between giver and receiver, or even the lives of the parties involved could end or change abruptly during the time lapse between gift and countergift. Consequently, gift giving produces a contingent social field rather than reproduces a static social structure and is an art rather than a science.

Moreover, as many scholars have noted, "traditional" gift-giving practices have been anything but static under CCP rule in both rural and urban China (Walder 1986; Miao and Lu 1987:16; Mayfair Yang 1988). In Fengjia, as in the Heilongjiang village described by Yan (1993)

and the fictional Shaanxi village depicted by Jia (1992:321), increases in the standard of living during the 1970s and 1980s allowed villagers to invent new gift-giving opportunities, expand gift-giving capacities, and extend gift-giving networks. Yet, though change was continuous, it was only against the background of what was held to be usual in 1988–90 that individual gift-giving acts took their significance, and that actors' motives and strategic artistry become apparent.

Perhaps an example can further illustrate my approach. If, at a series of weddings, a certain category of gift givers all give the groom the same type of gift, one may conclude that at that time, under those historical circumstances, that type of gift was usual and that all of these gift givers, following their own aims and strategies, decided to give the usual rather than an exceptional gift. One may not conclude that there was a "rule" for a certain category of gift givers to give that type of gift at weddings. Indeed, in 1988–90 Fengjia, as in the fictionalized village portrayed by Jia (1992:471), the size of gifts and relationships of givers was public knowledge and a matter for much discussion. Thus, the "usual gift" was well-known and was treated in practice as a background for specific gifting decisions.

Gifts

In 1988–90 Fengjia, most gifts fell into five categories: cloth, clothes, food products, "congratulatory gifts" (*hexili*), and "gift-money" (*renshiqian*—literally, person-event-money). Foodstuffs (*shipin*) were the most common gifts. During the late 1970s and 1980s Fengjia residents began giving more expensive foods like bottled fruits, sweets, and cookies instead of grain or steamed bread, though in a few contexts it was still most appropriate to give steamed bread. On some occasions specific food gifts were fairly standard. For example, when celebrating the birth of a child, eggs were given to the new mother to help her recuperate. In general, giving foodstuffs showed concern for someone's health; when visiting the elderly or the ill and mothers who had recently given birth, food products were appropriate gifts. Likewise, food given in ancestral offerings embodied concern for the well-being of ancestors.

Cloth was almost always given by women to women. Money, equivalent to the value of the cloth that would have been given was sometimes substituted; however, on those occasions it was said that the meaning of this money was "cloth," differentiating it from the money that was given as "gift-money." Parents gave clothes to children or children-in-law.

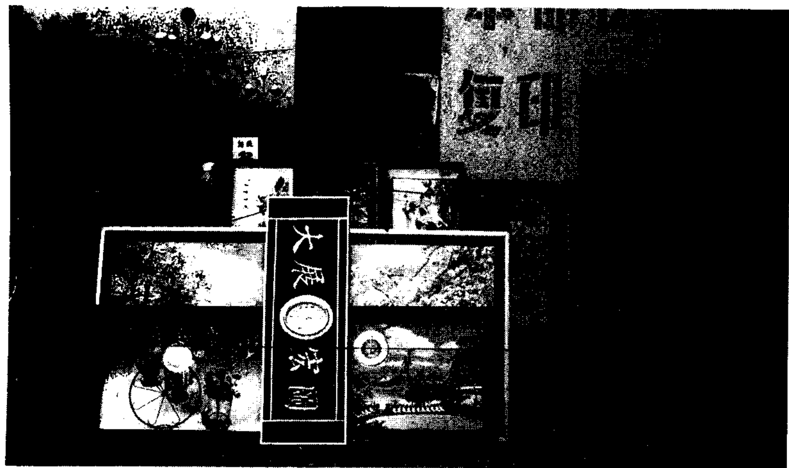

Figure 13 Jingzi *(glass-framed artwork) on display at a store in the county seat.*

Congratulatory gifts were given by friends to the groom and/or his family on the occasion of his wedding. They included practical items like thermoses and decorative wall hangings—either paintings, cloth with congratulatory messages attached, or a type of glass-framed artwork (*jingzi;* see figure 13). Like Chinese paintings given to a patron, the inscriptions on congratulatory gifts usually included the giver's name, the occasion, and the date. Glass-framed decorations were often displayed in villagers' homes years after the event for which they were given. Similarly, urban work units and village committees throughout Zouping County displayed glass-framed decorations that they had received from other units.

Gift-money was given to the head of a household on the occasions of weddings, engagement parties (*xiang qin*),[1] "dowry parties" (*song hezi*), and twelfth-day parties. The prominent use of cash as a gift contradicts Western sensibilities which, except between parents and children, deem money an inappropriate gift. As Bloch (1989) points out, the need for Western anthropologists to explain the significance of cash gifts in foreign locales says more about the symbolism of money in the West than elsewhere. We place gifts in the realm of kinship, sentimentality, and morality, and cash in the realm of commodity exchange. We deem it tactless to inquire of a gift's monetary value and idealize gifts as inalienable (cf. Weiner 1994). As the essence of alienability and countability, cash is the least appropriate gift.

In contrast, Fengjia residents had no compunctions about discussing the price of gifts. More than once I heard young men brag of the congratulatory present that they had bought for their newly married friend, saying something like "That glass-framed decoration cost 60 yuan and only one other friend chipped in on it with me." Likewise, parents preparing a dowry proudly pointed out which items had been newly bought and told me the price. When a dowry was delivered, people crowded around to check out the quality and quantity of furniture.[2] Moreover, dowries were not the only sort of gift whose value was publicly assessed. Gifts were never wrapped and were given in front of everyone who happened to be there at the time. Congratulatory gifts had the *giver's* name written on them in big letters, and were displayed for everyone to see. In brief, assessing, bragging about, and displaying the value of gifts was a popular, public activity. Because gifts were about *guanxi,* and *guanxi* involved both sentiment and material obligation, both giving monetary gifts and assessing the monetary value of noncash gifts were reasonable behaviors.

Gift-giving Occasions

Food products could be given any time one visited friends or relatives, but were almost always given when visiting during spring festival, visiting old relatives when they were sick, or visiting the families of friends or relatives who had recently passed away. Over spring festival, older friends and relatives gave money (about 2 to 8 yuan) to preteen children.[3]

Fengjia residents held birthday parties for old people and one-year-old babies. To an old person's birthday party friends usually brought food. To a child's first birthday party, relatives usually brought eggs (twenty to fifty in number or ¥4 to ¥10 worth) and some twisted sticks of fried dough called *mianhua.* Female relatives also brought cloth. Fellow villagers and friends could bring cloth, fried dough, or both.

At twelfth-day parties people from outside the village usually gave gifts on the day of the feast, while fellow villagers gave any time in the month after the baby was born.[4] Gifts were of two sorts. Close friends and relatives, who were allowed into the mother's room to see the baby, gave money to the mother *for* the baby. Other people gave presents of eggs and fried dough sticks to the head of the household (usually the mother's father-in-law) *for* the new mother. The mother's female, natal relatives attended these events in large numbers and gave generously of both money and food products. If the family was given more eggs than

they could use (as was usually the case), the surplus was sold at local markets.

Engagements and weddings included numerous gift-giving occasions. The first or second time that the prospective bride and groom met,[5] the man usually gave a "meeting gift" (*jianmian li*) which in 1989 amounted to ¥300 to ¥400, the value of a rather expensive watch. By accepting this gift, the bride-to-be accepted the match. The families then scheduled an engagement party. On such occasions the woman, her matchmaker, and several of her elder female relatives (including sisters, sisters-in-law, or aunts, but *not* her mother), went to the man's house and inspected his family's house, land, and property. After a banquet the matchmaker introduced the bride-to-be to all of the man's elder female relatives, each of whom gave her a gift of cloth. That evening or the following day, the fiancé, either in person or through the matchmaker, gave the woman's household part of the brideswealth, usually about ¥1,000. This occasion was also a public declaration of the engagement (*biao tai*). The fiancé's household notified their friends and fellow villagers, and many came over in the days preceding the event and gave the head of his household some gift-money.

The next day the fiancé and his matchmaker usually went to the woman's house for a *ren qin* (recognition of relatives). On such occasions the man met his fiancée's parents, ate a meal, and was given his own "meeting gift" of ¥300 to ¥400. At this point the couple was considered engaged and waited until they reached legal age (twenty-two for men and twenty for women) to marry. During the engagement period the woman was expected to make four formal visits a year to her fiancé's house.[6] During such visits the man first went to the woman's house, perhaps bringing some food gifts to give to her parents. The woman's parents might give him ¥30 or a set of clothes. Upon returning to the man's house, the woman and her future parents-in-law exchanged similar gifts. She then ate a meal at their house before he took her home.

After the couple became old enough to legally register for marriage (local officials allowed people to add a year to their age after each January 1, so most people registered in early January and held their weddings before spring festival), they went to the township marriage bureau and registered. If their registration was approved, the groom gave the bride the rest of the brideswealth (usually about ¥2,000 more) and the families went about arranging the wedding. The bride and her household generally used the brideswealth to buy furniture for the dowry, often adding to it themselves.[7] The groom's household also might buy additional furniture. Which household bought what furniture and exactly how much the brideswealth should be were topics subject to much negotiation. Thus these figures are only approximations. They are, however, comparable to those reported elsewhere in rural China during the 1980s (Fei 1986:5; Thireau 1988:308; Yan 1993:196). That everyone I spoke to reported figures in the same range perhaps indicates the lack of class differentiation during the 1980s in Fengjia. In general, friends and relatives of the bride's family delivered the dowry the day before the wedding. The groom's family feted the deliverers and gave them each gifts of ¥5 to ¥10.

The day before the wedding the bride's household sponsored a dowry party. At that time many of the bride's family's fellow villagers, friends, and relatives gave the head of the bride's household gift-money. In addition, the bride's aunts and her maternal grandmother's family usually gave her quilts or quilt covers to go with her dowry.

The wedding ceremony itself was sponsored by the groom's household. Fellow villagers gave gift-money to the head of the household. As on the day of the engagement, all of the groom's elder female relatives gave gifts of cloth to the new bride in addition to the gift-money that they gave to the head of the household. The personal friends of the groom, from both inside and outside the village gave the groom congratulatory gifts. These could be quite expensive (as much as ¥60), though often several friends would join to buy one present. In 1988–90 the village committee likewise gave one of these presents to each groom in the village. In the wedding of the son of an official who worked in the township seat but lived in the village, friends of the groom's father also gave congratulatory presents. The groom's family invited all who pitched in on congratulatory presents to "*hexijiu*" (drink the wine of happiness)—the final event of the wedding day. At most of the weddings I went to, three separate records were kept: one for the congratulatory presents, one for the fellow villagers' presents, and one for other gifts. Finally, a present of noodles was often given to the bride by women who had previously married out of (and into) the same village as the bride. One such woman told me this gift embodied sympathy for the new bride's awkward situation. The bride's family gave no gifts to the groom's family on the day of the wedding.

Talking about Gifts and *Guanxi*

The language used to talk about gifts and *guanxi* likewise points to the congruence between feelings of friendship and economic exchange in *guanxi*, and the elements of virtuosity and timing in the art of gift giving. The term *laiwang* (coming and going) when referring to *guanxi* could mean the exchange of gifts, the exchange of visits, or the exchange of *ganqing* (human feeling) between friends. When talking about how to deal with *guanxi* and gift giving, people often used the phrase "*zenme lai zenme wang*" meaning to treat people as they treat you. Sometimes I would be confused by this phrase and ask if it referred to reciprocal visiting, the exchange of gifts, or feelings and attitudes toward the other person. Almost always the reply was "It's all the same" (*yige yisi*). Descriptions of *guanxi* as being close (*jin*) and, therefore, having a high level of *ganqing* and being reliable (being able to count on it for material support and favors) also overlapped in several situations. For example, in response to the question "Who will you get to deliver the dowry?" the two most common replies were someone who had a close *guanxi* and someone who was reliable (*kekaode*). After a while I began to realize that people were using these terms interchangeably. As with *laiwang*, when I asked what was the difference between these two terms, I got the reply "It's all the same" (*yige yisi*). The language here is certainly not a local phenomenon. In his investigation of the political uses of *guanxi* and *ganqing* in a rural Taiwanese township during the early 1970s, Bruce Jacobs (1979) reports the use of practically identical phrases.

Finally, consider the following descriptions of people who gave or received unusually many or unusually few presents. Of a teacher who received about ¥1,200 in gift-money on the occasion of his youngest daughter's marriage, several men commented, "He handles his *guanxi* very well." Of a young man who received relatively few congratulatory presents on his wedding, one said, "He does not handle *guanxi* very well." In these statements not only is giving gifts directly related to handling *guanxi*, but the dimension of skill is also clearly indicated. A few days after the 1989 spring festival I went to see a local official, accompanied by a couple who were going to town on another errand. The official's wife gave the woman some foodstuffs as a present. The woman resisted accepting them, but the local official told his wife to "just put them in the car," thus forcing the gift. On the way back everyone seemed quite pleased and the woman's husband said of the official, "[He] is very polite and really knows how to make friends." Again, the skillful use of gifts to establish friendly feelings was praised as artistry.

Case Studies

This section discusses cases emblematic of the full range of gift-giving practices I saw in Fengjia. At most ritual events, the hosts set up an accounting table and kept lists of who gave what gifts. My knowledge of these cases comes from reviewing such lists. At first I was surprised that people would share these lists with me, but I later surmised that many villagers enjoyed discussing their gift networks; they viewed them as accomplishments. Moreover, as Yan (1993:45) comments, gift lists were sometimes used like photo albums; they commemorated family reunions and were meant to be reviewed.

The first case is the wedding of a young man whose education ended after junior high school and whose family did no work outside of farming. As a result the groom and his family had no connection with a large network of classmates or coworkers. Thus, most of the people who came to the wedding were relatives and fellow villagers. However, the groom's father had four brothers and the groom himself was popular in the village. Sixty people gave the head of the household a total of ¥350 in gift-money. Most people gave ¥5, but the groom's four paternal uncles each gave ¥10, while one of the groom's maternal aunts gave ¥20. When I asked why she gave more than everyone else, the groom said because she was especially close to his mother. All of the groom's elder female relatives also gave the bride ¥7 to ¥8 worth of cloth. In all, seventy-five people gave or pitched in on congratulatory gifts. The largest single giver was the groom's best friend (a fellow villager and classmate in junior high school) who gave a large glass-framed decoration by himself.

A second case involves the dowry party for the youngest daughter of a retired teacher. The daughter had graduated from college and had just been assigned a teaching job in the prefectural seat. Her father said she was the first woman in the village to marry a man of her own choosing (though she and her husband still relied on matchmakers to handle the wedding arrangements). The young woman had three older brothers who had already married and were living in separate households in the village. The bride's classmates and coworkers were going to throw a separate party for her when she returned to the prefectural seat, and

thus they were not present at this event. However, in addition to relatives, many of the father's former coworkers and students came. I did not get an exact total, but approximately ninety people gave over ¥1,200 in gift-money. Many of the bride's older female relatives also gave quilts for her dowry. Monetary gifts ranged from ¥5 to ¥20 for fellow villagers and from ¥20 to ¥30 for close relatives. Three exceptional gifts of ¥200 each were made by the bride's three older brothers. They said that they were beginning to carry out the duty of supporting their father in his old age (*shanyang*). On two other occasions I also saw sons who had already moved out of their parents' homes giving their elderly parents large amounts of gift-money.

When asked why so many gave more than the usual ¥5, people gave two sorts of answers. One was because this retired teacher handled his *guanxi* with others especially well (*ta guanxi gao de man hao*). The second was that people were just repaying him in the same amounts that he had given them on various earlier occasions (*zenme lai zenme wang*). When I asked for help in resolving the differences between these statements, Teacher Feng pointed out that there really was not any difference. To have good *guanxi* with people and to exchange a large quantity of money on various festival occasions were parts of the same process.

A third case is a twelfth-day party that celebrated the birth of a baby boy to the wife of a young teacher who still lived with his parents in one household. In general, gift giving at these events was on a smaller scale than at weddings or dowry parties. Guests gave eggs and fried dough sticks to the teacher's father (as a present to the young mother) and/or gave money to the young mother (for the baby) when they went in to see the newborn. In all, about fifty people gave gifts. Most gave twenty eggs, but the relatives from the young mother's natal home (*niangjia ren*) gave thirty eggs each. Most people gave ¥3 to ¥5 when they saw the baby, but one man gave ¥10. This man was the father of the fiancé of the teacher's younger sister. The teacher said that he gave more than others in order to help establish (*jianli*) the *guanxi* between his family and that of his son's fiancée.

The final case regards the decisions of a young man about whom to give to and how much to spend on congratulatory gifts. I give him the pseudonym Ming. In a two-day span, three men were to be married. One was from the same team as Ming;[8] moreover, this groom's bride was from the same town as Ming's own fiancée. The other two grooms were from different teams and had no particular *guanxi* with Ming. All were slightly older than he, so none of them had been Ming's classmate.

At first Ming was just going to chip in with two other friends to buy a painted glass decoration for the groom from the same team. However, after more careful consideration Ming decided to chip in on a present with three other friends for one of the grooms not on his team, and to buy an expensive painted glass decoration with just one other friend for the groom who was on his own team. Ming explained his decision: now people were buying more and more presents. Though he didn't feel obligated to buy one for the groom from the other team, some of his friends were buying him one, thus making this groom the friend of a friend from the same village. By chipping in on this present, Ming could confirm this *guanxi* and have one more friend. So "giving was better than not giving." In the case of the groom from the same team, Ming said that he had just discovered that his fiancée was friends with this groom's bride. Since in the future his own wife and his teammate's wife would bring their families closer together, he decided to buy an expensive present.

Discussion

Perhaps the first point that could be made is that the closer the *guanxi* the bigger the gift. Close relatives tended to give more than friends, and those who wished to claim a close friendship gave more than those who didn't. Whenever I asked why one person gave more than another, the answer almost invariably was "because so and so's *guanxi* is closer." However, this point is potentially misleading. On the one hand, the correspondence between closeness of *guanxi* and size of gift should be seen as constitutive and not simply representational; a large gift did not merely "stand for" the unchanging reality of a close *guanxi*, it constituted or reconstituted the *guanxi*. To not give the gift would have altered the *guanxi*. Gifts, in their embodiment of the desired closeness of a *guanxi*, helped construct that *guanxi*. On the other hand, there was more to the constitution of *guanxi* than gift size; a person could not create a *guanxi* ipso facto with anyone at any time just by giving a large gift. The circumstances and timing had to be right. When Ming gave the husband of his fiancée's friend a large congratulatory gift, he seized an opportunity to strengthen a *guanxi* that, because of other circumstances, had the potential to be deepened. Thus large gifts constituted close relations, but not in and of themselves.

In any case, this capacity of gifts to realize *guanxi* allowed several types of action to be taken through the giving of gifts. On the one hand,

by giving identical gifts, givers could claim an equality among themselves in their *guanxi* with the gift receiver. In each case where I saw sets of brothers giving gifts to their father or one of their other brothers, they always gave the same amount. For one to give more than the others would declare one of the relations to be closer than the others. On the other hand, by giving more than is typical, one could acknowledge or assert the closeness of a *guanxi*. Thus, when deciding how much to spend on congratulatory gifts or how much gift-money to give, Fengjia residents considered how close the *guanxi* was (which perhaps had been defined on previous giving occasions), how close the *guanxi* could be, and how close they wanted it to be. This calculation was then viewed in a comparative fashion vis-à-vis what others were giving. Likewise, when relatives from a woman's natal home gave more eggs than anyone else on the occasion that marked the birth of the woman's child, they asserted that their *guanxi* was close enough to be counted on, and should be counted on as a first resort, if the woman for some reason needed any help. As discussed above, to say their *guanxi* could be counted on was also to say that it was very close.

There were at least two general strategies that households adopted in gift giving. One was to use records to keep track of what others had given them in the past, and when the occasion arose, to give back the exact equivalent of what had been given. Several of the households I spoke with used their records in this way. Others took a more expansive strategy. They always tried to give more than had been given to them. One man, who was an official in the township seat, went so far as to say that one should strain one's economic capacities to give as much as one could to as many people as one could. When his youngest son got married, this man received so many congratulatory gifts that even after hanging them in all the rooms of his own house and each of his three son's houses, he still had piles left over. My general impression was that those whose work necessitated social networks outside of the village (such as local officials and the teacher whose youngest daughter's marriage is discussed above) were more likely to have this sort of expansive style than peasants whose work kept them involved mainly in village and family social networks.

In addition to managing the closeness of existing *guanxi*, gifts were also used in establishing new *guanxi*. The marriage process was the prime example of this use of gifts. Marriage was not just a relation between husband and wife, but rather between two families. To allow for the establishing of *guanxi* between various households of both families, the engagement process created many opportunities for different people to give different gifts. As discussed earlier, the groom gave gifts to the bride, the bride's parents gave gifts to the groom, the groom's parents gave gifts to the bride, and the groom's elder female relatives gave gifts to the bride. These gifts were both numerous and large. In addition, if one of the two families had an event in which people give gift-money, the other family would send a representative to give some. On three separate occasions (including the twelfth-day party discussed above), the person who gave the most gift-money at a given event was the father of the fiancée of a member of the host household.

Next consider the giving of cloth to the bride when she was introduced to her husband's older female relatives. Recall the importance of kinship terms in the defining and acknowledging of *guanxi*. In both the engagement ceremony and the marriage ceremony, the bride was likely to be formally introduced to her older female relatives. I saw this introduction done twice and was told that it was a part of every marriage ceremony and most engagement ceremonies. Thus many people went through it twice. Even in a wedding where the family had abandoned most of the ceremony on the grounds that it was "feudal," this formal introduction still took place. In it each of the groom's elder female relatives gave the new bride a piece of cloth. As each gave her a piece of cloth the groom's mother introduced them, saying, for example, "This is your *gugu* [father's sister]. You call her *gugu*." The bride then responded by addressing her new relatives with the appropriate term.

Though I cannot say how widespread this exact ceremony was, Isabelle Thireau describes a similar custom in rural Guangdong:

> Chinese custom requires the bride to worship her husband's ancestors and pour tea to her parents-in-law and other relatives as soon as she enters her new house. Raising a cup of tea with both hands, she offers it to her mother-in-law saying "Mother-in-law please drink . . . Everyone who is offered tea naturally gives the bride in return a red envelope with money or jewelry. This custom has persisted until today. (1988:309)

Rubie Watson (1986:626) similarly emphasizes the ritualized exchanges of kinship terms in rural Hong Kong wedding ceremonies, though in the ceremonies she describes only men gave red envelopes (R. Watson 1981:602). In a fictionalized account of a Shaanxi village during the 1980s, Jia Pingao (1992:289) depicts a ritual for creating adoptive "dry" (*gan*) kinship relations. In it the adoptive father-to-be prepares many gifts and carries them to his future adoptive child's house. Upon

arrival, the child's mother accepts the gifts and the child bows down, kowtows (see chapter 4), and utters the kinship term "adoptive father" (*gan die*). In all of these accounts, the construction of new kinship relations involves the exchange of a respectful use of a kinship term (by the younger) for a gift (from the older).

The role of the gift in the establishment of the kinship relation here is to create the obligation and thus the basis for respect that the younger generation owes to the older. As Bourdieu (1977:171–197; 1990:105) writes of gift giving everywhere, and as I was told in both Fengjia and elsewhere in China, the most insulting thing one can do upon receiving a gift is to return a gift of exactly equal value within a day or two. A gift given from one person to another creates an outstanding obligation and, thus, *guanxi*. To immediately return a gift in kind is to immediately erase the obligation and thus negate the *guanxi*.

In the case of kinship relations between older and younger, an ideal *guanxi* is that of the older caring for the younger until maturity, thereby establishing an obligation that is repaid through respect and care in old age. In establishing the new kinship relations of affinal ties, elders gave gifts in an attempt to create an obligation that would be the basis for the respect granted in the use of relational terms of address. The gifts of cash and clothes from the bride's parents to the groom and from the groom's parents to the bride, and the gifts of cloth from the groom's elder female relatives to the bride all served this purpose. Furthermore, the number and size of gifts was roughly congruent with the extent of the deference the older hope to elicit from the younger. Gifts from the groom's parents to the bride were the largest because the deference they desire from their daughter-in-law would be expected on a daily basis. Other *guanxi* in which either contact was less frequent or the difference in age was only one of years and not of generations, were marked by smaller gifts. The most distant affinal relationships marked by kinship terms, such as those between older and younger brothers-in-law, lacked gift giving altogether but did involve *guanxi*-constructing banquets.

Sinological anthropologists have long argued over whether monetary gifts to the bride's family before a marriage were best viewed as purchasing the bride's labor, and hence called "brideprice," or as endowing the new couple through the dowry, and hence called "brideswealth" or indirect dowry (M. Cohen 1976; Freedman 1966; Goody 1990; Han and Eades 1992; Yan 1993). Sociologists of rural China have tended to see these gifts as bride prices that purchase all, or part of, the bride's labor power. Parish and Whyte (1978:180–192), for example, argue that high

bride prices especially indicate the complete transferral of the bride from one family to another and consequently the end of all obligation on the part of the daughter to her natal family. Building on Whyte and Parish's work, Chan, Madsen, and Unger (1984:189–191) argue that in Chen Village, Guangdong Province, because brides who married in their natal village continued to provide labor and resources to their natal families, the rise of intravillage marriages led to a reduction of bride prices. I believe the language of *guanxi* and *ganqing* provides a more satisfying way of examining the problem. In 1988–90 Fengjia, there were high "bride prices" in both inter- and intravillage marriages. I would say that these gifts should be seen as a *guanxi* claim on one's future daughter-in-law, while spending a lot on the dowry should be seen as a counter claim. As mentioned earlier, Ellen Judd (1989) argues that a woman's natal home and mother-in-law's home (*pojia*) made competing claims on their daughter's (daughter-in-law's) time and services. The giving of more eggs than anyone else by people from the mother's natal home at twelfth-day parties likewise contributed to these competing claims. Describing marriage gifts as a form of payment misses the eventual transfer of wealth to the younger generation in addition to portraying kinship relations as little more than commodity transactions. Describing marriage gifts as a form of endowment accurately captures the transfer of wealth to the younger generation but misses the *ganqing* and *guanxi* debts the young couple owes to both sets of parents. Understanding marriage payments as part of the never-ending cycle of creating, manipulating, and relying upon *guanxi* and *ganqing* gives a more accurate picture.

The obligation-generating role of gifts was also related to the style involved in the different types of gifts. Cash and/or clothes, as given to the younger generation in the engagement process and as given by villagers to each other on various occasions as gift-money, created an unfulfilled obligation that could only be properly repaid at a future unspecified date. As such, Fengjia residents used these gifts to create and maintain *guanxi*. Food, given to the elderly, the ill, and women recuperating from childbirth acknowledged that an already existing obligation could be counted on in time of need. A notable exception to this scheme were the sizeable gifts in cash in the form of gift-money given by sons who had already moved out of their parents' house to their parents on the occasion of a younger sibling's marriage. This cash actually was part of the repayment of the debt owed to one's parents.

Cloth given by older women to younger women also acted to estab-

lish *guanxi.* However, as a gift given only by women, cloth had further overtones. Cloth required the labor of women to become useful. Cloth given to the bride on her wedding was often made into clothes for the bride by her mother-in-law. Hence, gifts of cloth utilized a medium crucial to labor exchange and labor obligations among women. In many respects cloth was a medium of *guanxi* production controlled almost exclusively by women. Weiner and Schneider (1989) argue that cloth cross-culturally constitutes significant gendered media of material and symbolic exchange. Chapter 5 returns to the implications of this control.

The value of gifts used in establishing new relationships illuminates another aspect of *mianzi* and its relation to *ganqing.* Michelle Rosaldo (1984) has defined emotions as embodied thoughts. In the case of *ganqing* in Fengjia gift giving, these thoughts were both memories of past *ganqing* flows and promises for the future. The prominent display of gifts in families' homes as well as in the village committee building, announced the extent of the hosts' *guanxi,* of their potential network for future material exchange, and visibly embodied the memory of *ganqing* past. When relationships were just being established, no memories of past *ganqing* flows existed. Without a preexisting relationship, nonrelated rural families lacked *mianzi* to face each other and allow *ganqing* to flow. Hence, intermediaries must be used. By establishing obligations that took time to fulfill, the extensive giving at the beginning of relationships created a period of indebtedness during which flows of *ganqing* could begin. In this sense such giving created *mianzi,* which in turn acted as a starting point for *guanxi.* After the establishment of affinal *guanxi,* the intermediaries could be bypassed.

In conclusion, I return to the most basic claim of part I: that *guanxi* unite material obligation and *ganqing.* This chapter describes many gift-giving practices. Some created *guanxi,* some altered *guanxi,* some maintained *guanxi,* and some acknowledged *guanxi.* Some of these *guanxi* were hierarchical family *guanxi,* while others were (more or less) egalitarian *guanxi* between friends. This diversity in *guanxi* corresponded to a wide range of gift-giving practices. However, despite this diversity, or rather at the basis of this diversity, was congruence between material exchange and *ganqing.* There was a congruence between the size of gifts, the burden of obligation, the strength of feeling that either existed or that the parties hoped to develop, the closeness of the *guanxi,* and the dependability of the *guanxi.* In pointing out this congruence, I do not want to assert that there were no instances of unfilial sons, of daughters-in-law who hated their mothers-in-law, or of people who manipulated

guanxi purely for material gain. In fact, avoiding such occurrences was a reason for maintaining good *guanxi* through wise and faithful gift giving. Rather the point is that the significance of giving and accepting gifts, and the resulting strategies for managing *guanxi* through the giving of gifts, invoked a world in which these assumptions, this congruence, held true. In this sense, gift giving in 1988–90 Fengjia was an example of the types of strategies and practices that exist when congruence between material exchange and *ganqing* are assumed.