

practices of *guanxi* production, these everyday actions involved a type of subject construction that was shifting and contested—a personhood subject to the claims of others, that in turn made its own claims. The next four chapters examine Fengjia *guanxi* production in more formal contexts.

2 Guest/Host Etiquette and Banquets



“No,” said Chao Gai. “Since ancient times ‘the strong guest must not exceed his host.’ Strong I may be, but I’ve only recently arrived from distant parts. I cannot assume high command.”

Lin Chong pushed him into the leader’s chair. “This is the time. Don’t refuse.” . . . [After two pages more of discussion and deferral, the first four leaders are seated in the first four seats.]

“Song and Du should now be seated,” said Chao Gai. But Du Qian and Song Wan absolutely refused. They begged Liu Tang, Ruan the Second, Ruan the Fifth, and Ruan the Seventh to take the fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth places respectively. Du Qian then accepted the ninth chair, Song Wan the tenth and Zhu Gui the eleventh.

From then on, the positions of the eleven heroes were fixed in Liangshan Marsh. . . . Oxen and horses were slaughtered as a sacrifice to the gods of Heaven and Earth, and in celebration of the reorganization. The leaders ate and drank far into the night. They feasted in this manner for several days.

(Outlaws of the Marsh, Shi and Luo 1986:135–138)

When asked about the importance of seating at banquets, a retired cadre said, “etiquette emphasizes respect for position” (*lijie jiangjiu zunjing dengji*), and suggested that I read *Outlaws of the Marsh*, a classic novel about Song dynasty rebels.¹ Several sections of the book, including the passage quoted above, devote considerable attention to practices of seating. Seating was also important in the guest/host etiquette and the banquets of 1988–90 Fengjia, though the hierarchies and *guanxi* involved differed considerably. This chapter examines how Fengjia residents constructed and manipulated *guanxi* and hierarchies through practices of banqueting and guest/host etiquette.

The etiquette of banqueting (*yanxi*), hosting (*zuozhu*) and guesting (*zuoke*) involved skills important to all types of *guanxi* production. Though most used these skills on occasion, some people, because of

their talent and position, banqueted, gusted, and hosted more than others. Those highly skilled in these areas were valued by their friends and families. When describing a sixty-year-old woman who was often asked to accompany guests at banquet tables (*peike*), another woman said, "She really knows how to talk, guests are comfortable with her." Emily Martin (Ahern 1981:32) has similarly noted the importance of "knowing how to talk" among Taiwanese religious practitioners who wish to construct *guanxi* with their gods. Though no one in Fengjia spoke to me about talking to the gods, the need to speak skillfully to guests clearly extended to village government. When asked for descriptions of Party Secretary Feng's responsibilities, most villagers included "receiving guests" (*jiedai keren*) on their list. Indeed, Secretary Feng spent much time banqueting and hosting other officials in the village guest house. In brief, the skillful practice of banqueting, gusting, and hosting was both admired and seen as necessary to village business.

Guest/Host Etiquette

In Fengjia, hosts managed the going and coming of guests through a large array of kinetic, positional, dispositional, and verbal practices, all of which worked to construct *guanxi* through the positioning of guest and host and the embodiment of respect and/or friendly feelings. If possible, hosts received guests upon arrival at the outside gate and saw them off to the gate when they left. If the host was not outside and the gate was open, guests often walked into the courtyard (see figure 7), calling out the name of their host. In such cases the guest was greeted in the courtyard. Visitors who were neither close friends nor family members were almost always seen off, as villagers lived by the saying "It is impolite not to see guests to the gate" (*Busong menkou, bulimao*). Between 1990 and 1992 several households built screen walls (*yingbi*) in their courtyards. These small walls allowed villagers to leave the outside gates to their houses open without worrying about people in the street looking into their courtyards. The screen walls I saw were all decorated with painted tiles showing pine trees in a mountain setting with the words "Guest-Welcoming Pine" (*Yingke Song*). The evergreen quality of the pine, one screen wall owner explained, "expressed that the guest is forever welcome, that the *ganqing* of welcoming the guest will never end."

The comings and goings of guests were further marked by various polite formulas. While being seen off, guests often insisted "It's not necessary to see me off" (*bubisong*). This humble gesture both indicated

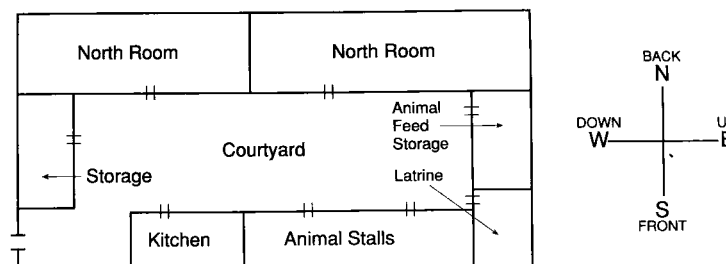


Figure 7 Common Fengjia house layout.

one was not worthy of respect and was a request to be treated informally, implying that one's *guanxi* was relatively close. As guests prepared to go, hosts often said "Sit and chat" (*zuowanwan*). This saying was sometimes taken as a literal invitation. However, it was also used in situations when everyone knew the guest must go. In these cases the saying indicated that one would like to devote more time to hosting one's guest, and that one considered hosting one's guest an important priority. Guests often countered by insisting that their host was busy, implying that there were more important activities for that host than receiving such a humble guest. These polite sayings and actions all served to create good *ganqing* and, hence, to improve *guanxi*. At the same time, however, being overly formal was a way of keeping guests at a distance. As the Chinese sociolinguist Bi Jifang has noted, in close family relationships even the use of everyday polite formulas like "Thank you" (*xiexie*) and "Excuse me" (*duibuqi*) would be taken as purposeful distancing or sarcasm (Bi 1990:18-19).

House orientation also informed etiquette. People slept, lived, and received guests in one of the "north rooms" (*beifang*) of houses. As they faced south, these rooms caught the sun's winter rays and avoided those of summer. Thus, they were comparatively comfortable. However, this orientation was not just a method of climate control. It also embodied the cardinality of the village and guest/host etiquette.² When verbally orienting a place or object in the village relative to oneself, one could use either the four cardinal directions or the directionality of seating guests. The wooden chairs used for receiving guests, called *kaoyi* (literally chair with a back to lean against), were almost always placed against the northernmost wall of the north room, facing south (see figure 8). The eastern chair was called "upper" (*shangyi*) while the western one was called "lower" (*xiayi*). Thus, one could refer to things to one's south as either "on the southern side" (*zainanbian*), or "to the front" (*zai-*

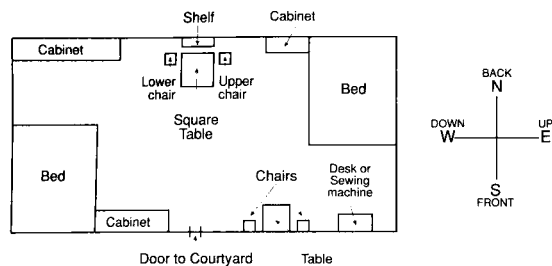


Figure 8 Furniture for receiving guests in north room.

qiantou), where front, regardless of the direction one was facing at the moment, referred to the direction faced when sitting in a wooden guest chair. Likewise, north could be referred to as “to the back” (*zaihoutou*), east as “toward the top” (*zaishangmian*), and west as “toward the bottom” (*zaixiamian*).

Slight variations of the furniture arrangement pictured above were used to receive guests in many of the houses in 1988–90 Fengjia. However, when collecting furniture for soon-to-be-married couples, some families bought sofas and easy chairs instead of wooden guest chairs and square tables (*fangzhuo*, which are placed between the guest chairs). The older style of furniture thus acquired the label “traditional” (*chuantongde*, a term whose significance is examined in chapter 9). Another exception occurred in houses where the “traditional” furniture was present but was so covered with sacks of grain etc., that one had to find other places to sit. The residents of such houses whom I saw were older couples whose children had all left town, and who did not often receive guests.

If there was functional “traditional” furniture, hosts led guests to the upper chair and then sat in the lower chair. If the guest was an honored one (as opposed to, say, a friend of a child) and several hosts were present, the senior adult (usually) male sat in the lower chair. When I made my rounds of the village, I would always be placed in the upper chair (figure 9). On several occasions, as various members of the host family came and went, there was a constant shuffling of occupants of the lower chair. If an older male relative of the current “host” entered the room, the current occupant of the lower chair would surrender his seat, reclaiming it if the older relative left. Some families were more strict about this format than others. In one case a brief argument broke out. I was conversing with a young man who spoke excellent Mandarin. His older brother entered the room and squatted near the lower chair.

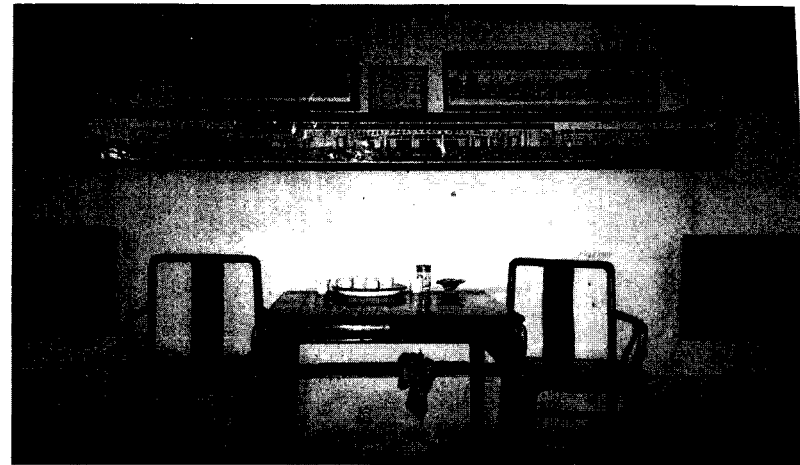


Figure 9 Guest and host furniture in party headquarters.

He too started to speak with me, but his Mandarin was worse and I constantly needed the interpretation of the younger brother. Seemingly irked by his younger brother’s ease of communication, the older brother indicated that the younger brother should give up his seat. After some protest the younger brother gave way.

This disagreement reflects the dynamic described in the sentence quoted earlier, “etiquette emphasizes respect for position.” Other villagers described this dynamic as a problem of *mianzi* (face).³ In pairing hosts and guests, *mianzi* worked in two directions. It both conferred respect upon the guest and constructed intrafamily (or intraunit) hierarchies. Having enough *mianzi* to “face” someone implied that one had the authority to represent one’s group in a manner similar to, or at least congruent with, the person one was facing. By having the oldest, most respected, and most authoritative member of one’s family act as host, Fengjia families could suggest that their guests were people of significant authority and were worthy of significant respect (figure 10). In so doing, they created good *ganqing*, and established *guanxi*. On the other hand, by occupying the host seat, a senior male could also claim to be the most authoritative person of his family.

As Zito points out in her discussion of banquet seating in the eighteenth-century novel *The Scholars*, “*mianzi* hardly implies equal status, but rather functions as a site from which hierarchical communication is possible” (1994:119). In *The Scholars*, to sit with someone at the same table indicates that one’s *mianzi* is good enough to “face” and



Figure 10 Couple with granddaughter seated on guest/host furniture.

hence communicate with one's fellow banqueter. In Fried's ethnography of Chu County (Anhui Province) in the late 1940s, banqueting together and *mianzi* conferral are likewise closely connected. The boss (*laoban*) described by Fried does not allow those whose status is too low to banquet with him (1953:78-79). In the case of the two brothers, the family's father's recent stroke had just caused the leadership of the family to become a relevant issue. Before, the father could have occupied the host chair; now, who occupied this chair had implications for family leadership and decision making. Claims to authority within the family manifested themselves in arguments over how best to confer *mianzi* upon and hence create *ganqing* and *guanxi* with the honored guest who had come all the way from America.

When men were not present, women in some families would act as host to my guest; in others they would not. In these latter families, even if there were no men in the room, women would not sit opposite me in the lower chair. One of these women said it was a matter of *mianzi*. She feared that I would perceive her occupation of the host chair as not giving me enough *mianzi* and hence as being disrespectful. However, most villagers described sexual segregation, especially in banquet seating, as a matter of "tradition" and convenience rather than *mianzi*.

Once I attempted an experiment. Upon arriving at a young teacher's house, I quickly sat in the lower seat. Without hesitating, my host sat down in the upper seat and we had an interesting conversation. After

about an hour his father (who lived in a separate household) came in to give a brief message and left. After his father left, the teacher related that his father had reprimanded him for seating me in the wrong seat. He said that old folks in the countryside felt that only men should sit in these seats, but that in the city it wasn't that way. He added that there should be "equality in seating between men and women" (*nannu tong-zuo*) and that the two chairs were the same anyway. But, he concluded, we might as well switch or the old folks would say that he didn't understand etiquette (*budong limao*).

At large ritual gatherings, scores of guests came from near and far. As guests were received, a representative of each group (usually the eldest male) was seated in the upper chair. If one group had two significant representatives, the host might lead them to the upper and lower chairs, while the representative of the host household sat wherever was convenient. As new guests came, there would be a constant deferring of seats. Distance, as well as age, played an important role. A guest who had come from far away received the most deference. By traveling a long distance, such guests go to considerable trouble to attend a given event. This sacrifice creates good *ganqing*; hosts participate in this *ganqing* by extending extra deference. In addition, "guest" fellow villagers often acted as host to guests from out of town. In such instances, fellow villagers made claims about their own *guanxi* with the host in relation to the *guanxi* of guests from out of town. Here "distance," or lack thereof, was seen as indicative of the closeness of one's *guanxi* as well as one's degree of physical proximity. At one wedding a nearby cousin debated a brother who lived far away over who should defer their seat and, thereby, act as host. In so doing, they made competing claims about whose *guanxi* was closer.

After everyone sat down, hosts almost always offered tea, cigarettes, and sometimes small snacks like melon seeds, watermelon (during the summer), and (especially at weddings) candy. Hosts did not ask guests if they wanted these tidbits, and guests were expected to gracefully accept them. The informality of asking if someone wanted something and refusing it if one didn't was reserved for everyday situations among friends and relatives. Informality implied a close *guanxi*. A demand for informality from a distant guest was both rude and prohibited the *guanxi*-producing practices through which distance could be overcome. Cook Feng explained that people don't smoke and drink alone and told me a popular local saying, "wine and tobacco aren't split among house-

holds" (*jiuyan bufenjia*), implying that one shouldn't be too possessive with wine and tobacco. As media of *ganqing*, tobacco and wine had to be shared to be effective.

During my first summer in the village this practice presented me with a problem. As long as I drank tea, I could use my foreignness to excuse my inability to smoke. However, during one period stomach problems convinced me to also avoid tea. In my next household visit, I insisted that I didn't smoke and didn't want tea. Though tolerant enough not to be mad, my host commented "How *can* you both not smoke and not drink tea? If you don't smoke and don't drink tea, what do you do?" I had made myself a social cripple. By not accepting cigarettes and tea, I was refusing to participate in the creation of good *ganqing* and hence in the establishment of *guanxi*. I quickly learned to always accept tea, but also found it was not necessary to drink much.

One day a cornstarch factory worker explained to me the proper way to receive tea and cigarettes. He said that when someone gives you a cup of tea or a cigarette or lights your cigarette, you should receive it in one hand and hold the other hand next to but not touching it. This gesture indicates cooperation in the creation of good *ganqing*. He said that only when the item "should" be given anyway, as in the case of a son pouring tea for his father, is the gesture not important.

Though central to the procedures of receiving guests, the sharing of cigarettes especially was not limited to this context. The etiquette of giving, receiving, and lighting cigarettes was important anywhere they could be carried. The giving of cigarettes was especially important in courting officials. Cigarettes were almost always offered in office settings (often by the person visiting the office). On occasion I saw visitors to various offices open a new pack of cigarettes, give one to an official, and leave the pack on the desk. On other occasions I witnessed "etiquette battles" in which several parties simultaneously offer to give and light cigarettes. Official and personal *guanxi* were negotiated and produced in part through the etiquette of cigarettes.

Banquets

In 1988-90 Fengjia, banquets were often the first step in the establishment of *guanxi*. Banquets marked the first meetings of affinal relatives in wedding and engagement parties as well as the arrival of official guests to the village. However, before banquets took place, intermediaries had

usually conducted negotiations to determine the propriety of the *guanxi* in question. In the case of marriages, matchmakers negotiated before the engagement party (*xiang qin*). In the case of new relationships with the village as a whole, or with village factories, introductions and negotiations mediated by middlemen determined the appropriateness of a relationship. In either case, a prior determination of the propriety of a *guanxi* occurs. If a *guanxi* were inappropriate, then the two parties would have trouble "facing" each other at a banquet table. The rejection of a relationship at a banquet table would destroy any *ganqing* that the banquet was supposed to create and would result in a loss of *mianzi* for the rejected party.

Banquets were usually preceded by the formal reception of the guest. In a personal banquet the guests' reception usually proceeded as described above. Hosts showed their guests into the house, sat them in the upper chair, and gave them tea, cigarettes, and snacks. In official receptions, guests were received in a room designated for that purpose and given tea and cigarettes. The village's most formal guest room, located in the party headquarters, contains an elegant framed couplet of calligraphy that reads: "The ocean contains close friends; the corners of the earth are like next-door neighbors" (*Hainei cun zhiji; Tianya ruo bilin*).

All banquets present the problem of determining who sits where. The local term for banquet, *yanxi* (used widely throughout China), itself illuminates this importance. The second character of this word, *xi*, means "seat" or "place" at a formal gathering like a banquet or in a political organ like the People's Congress.⁴ The convergence of banquets and politics here reflects the importance of banquet seating to negotiating hierarchy, social relations, and power. The eleven heroes of Liangshan Marsh permanently reorganized their leadership positions by arranging banquet seating. Though Fengjia banquet procedures did not constitute political hierarchies so directly, banquet seating was still negotiated and was still relevant to problems of reproducing and re-creating specific hierarchies.

At banquets given by families in their homes on ritual occasions, Fengjia residents used square banquet tables arranged for groups of eight. At one large wedding a dozen such tables were needed. The hosts set up the tables in the north rooms of their own and their neighbors' houses. A fellow villager took charge of arranging who sat at which table. Men and women were segregated, and people from the same family or place were seated together. For each table of guests the host

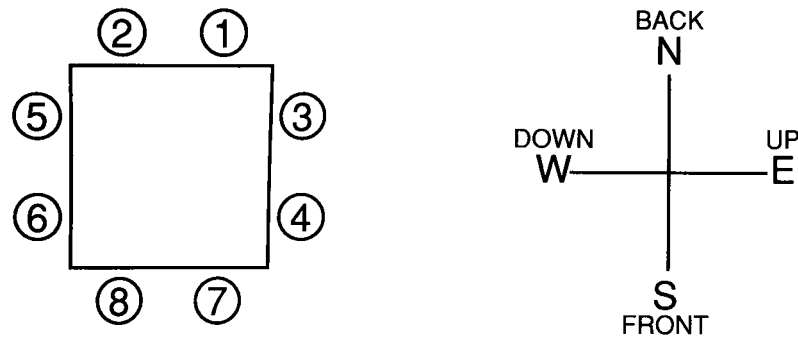


Figure 11 Banquet seating at a square table.

assigned a person or two to act as host representatives (*peike*, literally the person who accompanies guests). Usually fellow villagers served as host representatives, as relatives had other ritual duties. The host reps were chosen to match the most honored guest at each table in age and sex. The ranking of seats is pictured in figure 11. Depending on the circumstances, many seating arrangements were possible. The simplest arrangement occurred when there were six guests of one sex from one family and two host reps. In this case the guests most frequently sat in age order in chairs one to six while the host reps sat in age order in seven and eight. It did not matter if the youngest guests were younger than the host reps. However, occasionally even in this situation there were attempts to defer seats. At one wedding banquet I saw a host rep seated in one of the head two chairs with the oldest guest placed in the other. At this table the significance of the banquet had shifted. Instead of acting as a representative of the host (which constructs the other banqueters firmly as guests), the host rep used this banquet to establish his own relationship with the guest family.

Whenever I saw two guest families seated at the same table, serious negotiation took place. The guests milled about the table, discussed who should sit where, and tried to understand each other's intentions. Arguments about distance from host, age, and positions within family were all offered. Host reps sat in the seventh and eighth chairs and tried to mediate. On one such occasion one family had two representatives older than the eldest of the other family. The negotiations became particularly tricky. Should the eldest two men at the table occupy the first two chairs or should each family's eldest representative occupy the first two chairs? The families argued for more than five minutes and I had to

leave before the issue was resolved. Because the expressions of respect embodied in seating order could be interpreted in terms of age hierarchies, distance hierarchies, and *guanxi* between families, the issue was complex and ambiguous.

The seating of future daughters-in-law and sons-in-law was particularly interesting. When a future son-in-law attended a banquet at his parents-in-law's house, he was often given the first chair even when the other guests at the table were older than he. In contrast, when future daughters-in-law participated in banquets, they usually took their age-order seat among their fiancé's female relatives. Since future daughters-in-law are almost always young women, their seating position was generally quite "low." The difference reflects the logic of patrilocality. Sons-in-law are and will continue to be from different villages and patrilineal units and thus are likely to be constructed as guests in banquet seating arrangements. Daughters-in-law will switch to the host's village and patrilineal unit and thus may be constructed as members of the host hierarchical unit.

The placement of sons-in-law in the most honored guest position often had further significance. An older man with three married daughters told me that if one loved one's daughter, it was important to treat one's son-in-law especially well. That way the son-in-law would feel obligated to be good to her. A young father provided a complementary example. He said that if you get mad at your wife and want to yell at her or hit her, you would think about how good your parents-in-law were to you. If you were bad to her, you would not be able to face them. In this way, people say, the *ganqing* you have with your relatives can keep you from doing bad things. Thus, like most practices of *guanxi* production, the seating of a son-in-law may be seen as managing the specific (and potential) obligations of a relationship through the manipulation of *ganqing*. Giving him the most honored seat helps create appropriate *ganqing*.

The tables used in official village banquets held in either the village guest house or the village committee building were round rather than square. There was no fixed number of seats per table; large groups could be broken into separate tables or crowded together at one table. When village leaders held banquets for delegations to the village, seating arrangements did not construct a guest/host opposition by placing guests in the most honored positions and hosts in the least. Instead, representatives from each recognized unit shared the head seats. Thus

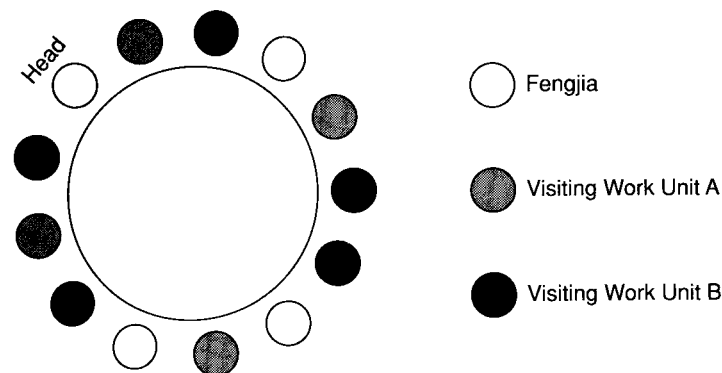


Figure 12 Banquet seating at a round table.

for example, a banquet of thirteen people including village leaders and members of two visiting work units might have been seated as pictured in figure 12.

Before sitting down, village officials and their guests usually discussed who would be the primary representative of each group. The primary representatives then sat next to each other; their seats became the head of the table. Others then negotiated their seats with much deferral. The farther a seat was from the head of the table the less important it was. Though the primary representatives were usually the leaders of their own units, intraunit hierarchies were not always strictly observed. Rather, who the primary representatives were depended on the nature of the *guanxi* being constructed. For example, if one unit wished to introduce a new member to work with the other unit, this new member would be constructed as the primary representative for that banquet. Or, if the purpose of a banquet was to patch up a relationship between arguing members of two units, the arguing members plus a mediator would be constructed as the primary representatives. In short, in inter-unit banquets, interunit *guanxi* were constructed by seating representatives of each group next to each other at the head of the table.

In matching primary representatives or matching host reps to guests, the problem of face (*mianzi*) was again relevant. As mentioned earlier, having enough *mianzi* to "face" someone implied that one had the authority to represent one's group in a manner similar to, or at least congruent with, the person one was facing. If a provincial-level official came to the village to negotiate village agricultural practices, it would make little sense for him to negotiate with someone who did not have the authority to change such practices. Since in Fengjia of the late 1980s

only Party Secretary Feng, and perhaps agricultural specialist Zhang Lin, had such authority, no one but these two would have the *mianzi* to face such an official as the primary representative at a banquet table. In banquet seating the possibility of and need for achieving a given *guanxi* was central. Villagers arranged seating to produce *guanxi* between individuals who had the authority and hence the *mianzi* to represent their unit or household at the appropriate level.

Once everyone was seated, the banquet proper could begin. All of the banquets I saw had servers. The village hired a cook and a waiter to work its official banquets. At personal banquets, fellow villagers handled the cooking and serving. The servers generally brought out the food as it was cooked and kept liquor glasses full. As soon as one drank from one's glass, it would be filled again. The food was brought out in plates that were placed in the middle of the table. In general, individuals had only a small empty bowl, or perhaps just their chopsticks and liquor glasses. Pieces of food were picked up from the plates in the middle and immediately eaten, or temporarily placed in one's small bowl. Banquets were generally divided into two parts. In the first, people toasted each other and ate food between toasts. After the primary representatives or most honored guest and host rep decided that everyone had drunk enough, a last toast was made, in which everyone emptied their glass. The host representative would then tell the servers to take away the glasses and bring out the "main food," usually steamed bread or dumplings. In contrast to the meat and vegetable dishes, each person received his or her own portion of this food. In the second part of the banquet, people continued to eat food from the plates on the table as well as their own steamed bread and/or dumplings.⁵

During the late 1980s, banquet foods were materially and symbolically rich. Recently built greenhouses allowed for year-round vegetables. Most personal banquets followed a twenty-plate format: eight large plates (usually hot dishes), eight small plates (mostly cold dishes), and four bowls (usually soups). The two sets of eight plates was sometimes called "double eight dishes" (*shuang ba cai*). Since the *ba cai* rhymes with *fa cai* (good fortune), this arrangement was doubly propitious. At the start of the banquet, most of the cold dishes were already on the table. The rest were brought in during the course of the banquet. The host rep would urge the banqueters to eat the choicest morsels from the most recently arrived plates while they were still hot. Not all of the dishes were solely for eating. At weddings a big chunk of pork fat was almost always served as one of the large plates, but was never eaten. The

fat embodied wealth and surplus.⁶ A whole fish with its head pointed to the east was also served at weddings. The words for fish and surplus (*yu* in the second tone) are homonyms. This dish, though also embodying wealth and happiness, was eaten.

Eating and drinking during banquets was collective and negotiated rather than a matter of individual hunger or taste. Especially at banquets in which *guanxi* were just being established and people did not know each other well, people drank only during toasts and ate only what someone else put on their plates or indicated they should take with their chopsticks. Likewise, cigarettes were smoked only when offered and lit by someone else. Host representatives were responsible for orchestrating, or at least initiating, eating, drinking, and smoking. At personal banquets the host reps usually started off with several toasts and encouraged the guests to eat from various dishes between toasts. If the banquet remained stiff and formal, all such initiatives were taken by the host rep. The guests' role was one of accepting or resisting the host reps' suggestions. At interunit banquets or at personal banquets where guests and hosts shared responsibility, countertoasts and offers were often made by the guest representatives. In the most cooperative instances, complete interdependence was ritually achieved. Guests and hosts were focused entirely on the eating, drinking, and smoking of others and depended entirely on others for their own satisfaction.

Cooper (1986:183) describes cooperation and deference in eating etiquette in Hong Kong in terms of Taoism and Confucianism:

At the macro level of China's great tradition, one finds such behavior characteristic of the *chun-tzu*, the individual skilled in the *li* (etiquette, rites and ceremonies). He is also skilled in the art of *jang*—of yielding, of accomplishing without activity, of boundless generosity, of cleaving to the *li*. There is even something of a Taoist resonance in all this, getting at things indirectly without obvious instrumental effort.

However, in some cases the hosts and guests had no personal *guanxi* before the banquet, and the event remained stiff and formal. The guests resisted most of the host reps' suggestions and thereby refused to depend upon the host reps for satisfying their wants. At the end of the banquet, the host reps could similarly refuse to involve their own desires in the banquet. By pretending to eat until the guests finished and then having the servers abruptly remove all the plates, the host reps could indicate that they had eaten only to accompany the guests and that their own needs were not involved. Though such stiff formality could

indicate an ambivalence toward the construction of a certain *guanxi*, we should remember that the attendance of the banquet in itself was a positive *guanxi*-constructing act.

Drinking was important to banqueting for many reasons. For the most part, men drank *baijiu*, a strong clear liquor, while women and youths drank *hongjiu*, a sweet, red fruit wine. Most saw these drinking habits as the only significant difference between men's and women's banqueting habits and as the reason for the "traditional" sexual segregation in banquet seating. Though predominantly male intervillage and county-level official banquets would include women if necessary, most village and county cadres felt that single-sex banquets were more convenient. Cadres paid close attention to who drank how much and felt uncomfortable if different types of liquor were mixed at the same table. Different types of liquor ended the equivalence of a toast in which both parties drank one cup. Thus, gender-marked drinking habits obstructed the smooth use of alcohol at sexually integrated banquets. Since the public political sphere was dominated by men, gendered drinking patterns contributed to the continued exclusion of women from important political posts. However, at least within the village, such segregation not only shut women out from male *guanxi*-making activities but also shut men out from female *guanxi*-producing activities. Women created their own networks within Fengjia and between Fengjia and their natal villages. Like village men, well-connected Fengjia women could rely on their networks to secure help in times of need, to locate and evaluate potential spouses, and to borrow money for small family enterprises. The *guanxi* of these spheres of activity were consolidated through all-female *guanxi*-producing activities, such as the giving of cloth and quilts (discussed in chapter 3) and all-female banquet tables. As Weiner (1976) has argued about the segregation of men's and women's gift-giving spheres among Trobriand Islanders, women's control over certain spheres of relationships gives them a source of power that is both envied and feared by men. In Fengjia, I twice heard men complain that their wives' many *guanxi* made them too independent.

Both men and women used drinking to break down excessively formal postures. Skillful host reps coaxed their guests to drink and relax. Toasting materialized respect, while drinking deconstructed the boundaries that distinguished guests from hosts, thus allowing *ganqing* to flow. The local saying "exchange feeling by toasting" (*jingjiu jiao qing*) sums up this use of drinking. At an official banquet a county-level cadre told me that close friends and acquaintances just establishing a relationship

drank more than others. He added that refusing a toast was the equivalent of refusing to give *mianzi*, the starting point for relationships. At personal banquets I observed similar patterns. Once I attended a banquet held for the older brothers of a bride and groom. The groom's older brother (the host) explained his aggressive toasting to me. He said that drinking a lot helped make the guest "happy" (*gaoxing*) and thus established the *guanxi* between them. After such a banquet established their *guanxi*, he said, the two brothers-in-law could become more informal (*suibian*) in their interaction.

However, though drinking was a practical method of creating *ganqing*, at some banquets it became a competitive game. In an attempt to get other banqueters drunker than themselves, hosts and guests could initiate drinking games, and try to make toasts that resulted in others drinking more than they did. For example, if there were two host reps and six guests, the first host rep could simultaneously toast all six of the guests while the second host rep just watched. The second host rep would toast all the guests later. After the two toasts, each of the guests would have drunk two glasses while each host rep would have drunk only one.

The drinking responsibilities of (the almost always male) officials whose job it was to foster *guanxi* between work units were considerable. In Zouping, cadres compared their drinking capacities by specifying the exact number of ounces (*liang*) of white liquor (*baijiu*) they could hold. Two men both confident of their superior capacity might try to drink each other under the table. Several times I saw officials drink themselves sick at banquets. In a fictional account of Shaanxi cadres during the 1980s, a newly appointed official earns the wrath of his family because his new job compels him to get drunk as often as two or three times a day (Jia 1992:415-416). At times, unit leaders delegated their drinking responsibilities to subordinates. When they made or accepted a toast, they would tell a subordinate sitting at the same table to drink it for them. Once, I saw an official play a drinking game during which his subordinate had to drink every round he lost. On another occasion, I saw an official of one county-level unit try to get a worker in a province-level unit to drink for him. Though supposedly cooperating on a mutual project, there was much tension between the units. The provincial worker refused the order to drink, thus also refusing the direct authority of the county unit's leader. When I left Fengjia, the two units were still having difficulty in their relationship.

An article in the newspaper most widely read in Fengjia, *Village*

Masses (1989a), gives a fascinating account of the role of drinking in cadre life. As it is consistent with my own observations, I present the article here without consideration of how its didactic purposes may have influenced its construction.⁷

Capacity for Liquor, Capacity for Courage, Capacity for Work

The charm of liquor is growing. In the China of a commodity economy that is developing daily, liquor, already more than a mere commodity, has become a lubricant for the people's political life. In one county where they were preparing to select a township party committee secretary, there were three suitable candidates. Qualifications, experience, ability, and spirit were all comparable, and those in charge of the selection could not decide. Then, one person suggested a drinking contest. The result was that the victor, who drank one *jin* (.5kg) of *Erguotou* liquor [a type of white liquor] without getting drunk, was appointed the next day.

Don't be surprised about this. The primary work of whoever occupies a head position in a township or county, a "parental official," is to revitalize the local economy. The consequence, since this task necessitates economic exchanges, economic exchanges entail banquets, and banquets require drinking, is none other than China's special characteristic: giving and taking, guesting and hosting, greeting them when they come and seeing them off when they go—how could this be done without getting drunk?

And it is not that all officials can drink a lot, in this matter there is also a factor of courage. A friend who works at the township level complained that the hardest work of village officials is to accompany guests at banquets. Even if a responsibility system for accompanying guests' drinking has not been set, as soon as you enter a dining hall, your body is not your own. Setting up the liquor glasses seems like killing one's way to the battlefield—all selfish ideas and ulterior motives are flung to the back of one's brain. The great poet of the Tang dynasty, Li Bai, could after drinking create with poetic inspiration. Nowadays "parental officials," though without poetic inspiration, can also create greatly when inebriated. With magician-like drinking ability, they often win the approving words of satisfied guests. Before leaving, these full-bellied guests sell 80 or 100 tons of product at production-target [i.e., state-regulated and therefore inexpensive] prices. No wonder people say that a cadre's official responsibility is eating and drinking, and that a leader's drinking capacity is his working capacity.

Courage and drinking capacity as a special measuring stick of those climbing the political ladder has a close relationship with the present sociopolitical climate. In the years of the Great Leap Forward, brave braggarts succeeded and

got rich. During the Cultural Revolution, brave looters came to the fore. Now brave drinkers get along well. As a result, drinking problems are the viruses of current cadres and policies, interfering with the implementation of the economic system reforms while eroding the body of the party in power. Morality and ability should be the basic standard for selecting cadres. We should not allow negative social inclinations to influence the party's cadre system. If we don't thoroughly liberate all levels of leaders and cadres from the shackles of liquor, the giant wheels of reform can veer off track.

The presentation of banquet drinking as a sometimes onerous task that officials undertake to engender *ganqing* and thereby secure privileges for their local units mirrors my own view of the importance of banqueting to local *guanxi* production. The role that drinking white liquor plays in cadre selection demonstrates how gender-specific practices of *guanxi* production exclude women from the official sphere. The success of (presumably male) cadres with "magician-like drinking ability" in eliciting favors from their guests further points to the socially coercive aspects of *guanxi* production. The "battlefield" of the banquet table exposes one to the *ganqing* manipulations of one's host.

The article's critique of cadre drinking as a "virus" of current policies that interferes with the implementation of economic system reforms raises another point. There has been considerable tension between the official policies and propaganda of the CCP and the banqueting behavior of local officials. Like gift giving, banqueting can be used to form *guanxi* whose material obligations take precedence over the policy preferences of the CCP-led state. If, for example, the central organs of the CCP want certain local units to provide land to public works projects or to pay extra grain taxes, local cadres could use their *guanxi* with higher level officials to try to protect the interests of their home villages. As Mayfair Yang (1989a, 1994) argues, *guanxi* are often constructed to bypass the policy directives of the party state. Consequently, official propaganda often attacks the banqueting (and gift giving) of local officials as either feudal or corrupt.

However, though the banqueting of local officials may be inimical to the interests of the state's center, they do not necessarily counter the interests of local people. Other newspaper accounts of cadre banqueting portrayed it as a corrupt pleasure of the privileged that aroused the fury of the masses—a presentation quite opposite to the opinions I heard expressed in Fengjia.⁸ As mentioned above, those I interviewed saw it as a necessary part of official work, as part of forming *guanxi* that

protected the interests of the village. Wilson (1994) and Xu (1992) likewise describe the practical benefits that rural people can derive from cadre banqueting. At least during the 1980s, Fengjia residents saw the banqueting of their officials as a necessary activity.

The attempts of the party to curb cadre banqueting during the 1980s and early 1990s have been numerous but seemingly ineffectual. After the Tiananmen Massacre in June of 1989, Fengjia received a directive suggesting that cadres limit their banqueting. Village leaders told me that they had received several such directives before and that they always reacted with caution, curbing their banquets for at least a month or so. In the spring of 1995, the party's Central Commission for Discipline Inspection announced regulations banning cadre participation in banquets with any "influence seekers" (*China News Digest* 1995). Less than a month earlier the *Canton Evening News* (*Yangcheng Wanbao*) wrote that cadres' yearly public expenditure for banqueting amounted to twelve billion American dollars (*World Journal* 1995). In the memories of Fengjia villagers, only during the height of the Cultural Revolution—when Red Guards attacked any practice that could be labeled feudal, capitalist, or corrupt—was cadre banqueting severely curbed.