Love, Marriage and Intimate Relationships of Later life in China

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Sociology

December 2020

Dedicated to memory

of

my grandmother Yang Xiuying(1941-2014)

Abstract

Although there has been much concern about China's ageing population in the context of rapid social transformation, existing research has seldom focused on older people's private lives, on their intimacy, love and values in the wider social context. The aim of this thesis is to explore older Chinese people's views on love, marriage, remarriage and cohabitation in later life. In particular the thesis focuses on how individuals' intimate relationships and marital choices are influenced by the process of modernisation and the changes from the Mao era to the post-Mao era: how their experiences of love and marriage embody social-historical and political changes during China's transformation and how older people deal with and negotiate their love relationships during later life. This study used qualitative research and was based on 45 in-depth semi-structured interviews with men and women aged between their late fifties and nineties who are single (divorced or widowed) or in a long-lasting marriage. The interviews were conducted in Mandarin and the data were generated from four urban cities in mainland China: Beijing, Qingdao, Jinan and Guiyang. Data were analysed thematically using a life course approach and drawing on theorisations of practices of intimacy. This research contributes to remedying a gap in existing research. It unveils older Chinese people's understanding of love and marriage practices and how their practices, ideology, identity have been shaped by the social context in Mao's era and the post-Mao era. In addition, older people's choices regarding remarriage and repartnering in later life are impacted by their gender, class status and cultural norms; at the same time, older people also face dilemmas associated with both the family and moral domains.

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Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to my two supervisors, Professor Sarah Nettleton and Professor Stevi Jackson, for their generosity in both their intellectual and personal support and their encouragement throughout my time as a research student. During my research they have recommended some valuable readings, given me some advice to develop my academic potentials and with their encouragement I have become more confident and was able to enjoy my PhD research journey. In addition, I would also like to thank my Tap members Dr. Laurie Hanquinet and Dr. Steph Lawyer as during the tap and progression meetings they would help me to improve my research by pointing out my writing's strength and weaknesses.

In addition I want to thank my families and relatives' and my many friends' help during my fieldwork and I particularly want to thank all the participants who took part in my research. Without them this thesis would not have been possible to complete.

Special thanks to my best friends Richard Swane and Woei Yng Tan, who are always there when I need them. Thanks to my colleagues in the Sociology department and my friends, especially to Pin-Yao Chiu, Wang Qian, Li Nai, Lian Chizi, Bianca Di Giacinto, Chen Zhishuan, Daniel Nelson who all generously shared their research experiences, including during the pandemic period and they have given me great support and encouragement.

I could not have undertaken this study without the help of my parents' support for my study in the UK. I would like to thank their investment in me and for being understanding about my absence from the family; to them I owe many thanks.

Author's Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References.

Chapter 1 Introduction

> 'I escaped from the wars in the 1930s when I was a kid. I met my late wife during the 1950s, and we experienced hard times in the Great Famine during the 1960s and we started to have a good life due to economic reform. I cherished her and she cherished me. However I think people like me are unfortunate, I had a good relationship with my late wife but she died before me and I felt lonely living alone, I am jealous of the couples who were able to grow old together, the couples lasting from their youth in relationships till marriage and living until now, they can experience their hair turning grey together *[bai tou xie lao]*'
>
> (Lao Mao, Widower, 85 years old)

Many older people in mainland China, like Lao Mao, have experienced this dramatic social upheaval process. The transformative historical period from the Mao era of communist China (1949-1976) to the post-Mao modernisation (after 1976) have influenced the perspectives of many Chinese individuals on their personal and intimate lives (Ho et al, 2018). In particular China has undergone dramatic social change due to the open door policy (Luo and Sun, 2014); rapid economic growth and different social values interweave to shape individual experiences of the private sphere and areas such as marriage, relationships and family practices. Over the past few decades there has been increasing debate concerning the traditional injunction against romance, sex and marriage in later life (Shea, 2005). However, the marriages of China's elderly cohorts are not just entangled with Chinese history, as the rapid increase in China's ageing population means that some older people must now carefully consider the pros and cons of a second partnership, especially after they have lost a loved spouse. Against this background of social transformation, it is worth exploring older people's views on love and marital relationships, as well as their attitudes toward remarriage or re-partnering in later life, as very little research exists on these issues, this research will fill the existing research gap.

In this introduction, I present the main motivations for setting about the research, which reflect not only my research experience but also my grandparents' love stories and their historical biography. I then identify gaps in previous research and research purpose before outlining the main chapters of the thesis.

Motivations for the research study

During the summer of 2014, while preparing for my undergraduate dissertation research into the matters of love and marriage in the lives of young Chinese women, I visited some matchmaking corners of public parks in China. Various news reports were suggesting that there were a few matchmaking corners for older people but this was the first time I noticed that intimacy, love and marriage concerning older generations were being addressed in the public arena. Compared with marriage and matchmaking for young Chinese people, these topics were not as widespread amongst older people and the relevant reports in the media were not that common or popular at the time. However, due to my grandfather's life story, I decided to change the focus of my PhD research to the love lives of the older generations.

From an early age, I was given fragments of the life stories of my two grandfathers by my parents and other relatives. My grandparents were born in the late 1930s and early 1940s before the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC). My paternal grandfather grew up in a village in Shandong province, which is located in North East China and whilst living there, he was subject to an arranged marriage. During the Mao era of the 1950s and 1960s many political movements were launched, including those focused on land reform and the early stages of the Cultural Revolution, and both of my grandfathers' lives and their intimate experiences were impacted by this period of great social change. Although my paternal grandfather only obtained a primary-school level of education, his 'poor peasant' family background was politically acceptable and he was able to find work with the rural local government. In contrast, my maternal grandfather was educated to university degree level in a city and fell in love with one of

his classmates, with whom he had a romantic relationship. After their graduation his girlfriend was assigned[1] to work in Beijing but my grandfather failed the political status test required to go to a bigger city due to his family's 'rich' political background, which caused them to be labelled as 'class enemies' in the Struggle Sessions of the Cultural Revolution. As a result, he was assigned a job in a smaller city far away from Beijing. They wrote love letters and kept each other's black and white photos, but their relationship finally ended due to the geographical distance between them and the difference in their political backgrounds. I heard that my maternal grandfather saved that woman's black and white photo in his diary for a long time until my uncles found it many years later.

Around 1950, a new marriage law came into force and the Chinese communist party (CCP) launched a three-year campaign that attacked the 'feudal marriage' (Ding and Zhong, 2014). Against this backdrop, my paternal grandfather responded to the call to allow citizens to have free choice in terms of who they married by the late 1950s, he had ended his arranged marriage and married my grandmother, a banker, before he turned 30 years old. He later moved to the city area and worked for a government institution. During this historical period, my maternal father met and married a schoolteacher introduced to him by a mutual friend. He worked as a mechanical engineer before they got married. Thanks to the 'economic opening up' policy of the 1980s they even able set up their own business for a while to cater to the 'business rush' (*Xia hai jing shang*). To date, their marriage has lasted for about sixty years.

At the end of 2014, my paternal grandmother died from lung cancer aged 73. Six months later in 2015, my grandfather broached the idea of finding another partner or potentially remarrying. This proposal caused a debate within the family with some of my relatives holding strong views against the idea. After careful consideration, and under pressure from these relatives, my grandfather finally gave up on the idea. During

[1] Before 1990, undergraduates who has successfully finished their study would be assigned a job by the government, but after 1990, the job market became more competitive and graduates had to find their own jobs (Mao, 2012)

one summer holiday, I went back to visit my grandfather, who was living alone in a flat and had hired a carer to look after him.

My grandfather's proposal for remarriage, and the decision making process of negotiating with family relatives, attracted my attention to older people's life situations and their love and intimate relationships issues. Besides this, it broke down the stereotypes of older generations instilled into me when I was growing up. As a child I was taught so many ancient Chinese poems in school, poems that portray faithful love even after one partner has died. For example, poems in *Su Wu to his wife*[2] such as: 'As man and wife we ever unite; We never doubt our love … Safe and sound; If I come back to you; Even killed, my love won't die with me' (Xu, 2012). Or in Su Shi's[3] poem to his late wife, who many years later he still loved and grieved for deeply (Tseng, 2011):

Ten years of separation by the immeasurable distance between life and death
Is not something I'd like to think about, yet unforgettable it is already.
A thousands miles away is your lonely grave,
I've nowhere to visit and my grief is manifest.
Even if we could meet, we probably wouldn't each other recognise,
For my face has aged and my sideburns greyed as I have life's hardship sustained.
Last night out of the blue I dreamt of homecoming,
And there you were, putting on make-up after combing your hair.
Our eyes meet yet reticent we remained,
Yet rolling down our cheeks are tears forming far too many trails.
Then I realise we are where I'd visit year after year when my heart aches,
On a night with a bright moon, on the hillock, among the pine saplings I'd stay.

[2] Su Wu (140 BC--60 BC) was a Chinese diplomat and statesman of the Han dynasty. The poem is translated by Xu Yuanchong (2012).

[3] Su Shi (1037-1101): was a Chinese poet, painter, politician and writer of the Song dynasty. The poem is called *Lyrics to the Melody of a River Town (a record of a dream on the night of the twentieth of January, in the Year of Yimao)* and was translated by Tseng (2011) from Chinese to English.

I learnt those poems as a youth in school and they informed my stereotypes of the elderly. In my imagination, love for older people should be like the images portrayed in the poems: tenacious, lifelong, and continuing for many years after a partner's death. However my paternal grandfather's story and his remarriage proposal in practice changed my imagination and brought my ideas back down to earth. I started to realise that I might have biases or misunderstandings of contemporary older people's views on love and marriage and their needs for new love relationships during their later life. Elderly Chinese people are the same as younger generations, they also want intimate relationships or desire a second partnerhood. Although in practice their decisions and choices on remarriage or second couplehood may face challenges, such as my grandfather having to cope with some pressures from the family or his surroundings. My grandparents' love experiences and choices in intimate relationships throughout their life histories attracted my attention and encouraged me to explore how the elderly Chinese population view love, marriage and relationships, and how they negotiate their choices within their social milieu during later life. These experiences and stories have each helped to shape my initial motivations to focus the project on views about love, intimacy and remarriage in later life in China.

Research background and using the life course approach

The older generations, particularly the oldest-old (over 80) and middle old (70-79) experienced the pre-communist era before 1949 as well as the founding of the People's Republic of China during the Mao era (1949 to 1979). They experienced a series of political campaigns, including the more famous ones like the Land Reforms (1950), Great Leap Forward (1958-1960) and the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). The young-old (60-69 years old) cohort, however, grew up in the late Mao era and spent most of their lives during the economic reform era. The transformation from Maoist socialist society to the reform period began in the early 1980s, and its influence on Chinese society can be seen in many areas (Luo and Sun, 2014). The emergence of a market economy in particular has begun to shape the way individuals live, with economic theories and concepts now used to understand and guide individuals through the process

of dating. From this perspective, 'intimacy or intimate relations can be treated, understood, or objectified: consumed or assigned values and prices; and linked in many cases to transnational mobility and migration, echoing a global capitalist flow of goods' (Constable, 2009). This consumerist social context and new norms could be challenging for the older cohort who grew up in the Maoist socialist society. In addition, mainland China is rapidly ageing at an unprecedented pace and also faces insufficient economic growth and an inadequate health care system. Plus the Chinese second baby boomers born in the 1960s are now entering old age, which also accelerates the pace of this ageing process (Han et al, 2020). The ageing population gives rise to some issues such as an increased number of older people with various new support needs, including a rising demand for intimate relationships during later life.

The vivid stories of my two sets of grandparents show that they have experienced dramatic social changes throughout their lives, changes which have possibly altered their initial expectations about their life paths. Their romantic love experiences and marriage relationships have been intimately bound up with Chinese history. Likewise, as one of my participants, Lao Dang said when recalling his life experiences, 'The changing society throughout history for us is similar to an unforeseen river; we are like just a drop of water in the river; we do not know the river's destination or where it flows to, all we could do was just follow it'. Chinese people's lives have been deeply impacted by the dramatic social changes that have taken place in China over the past few decades. According to Lieberthal (1995:311) 'The turbulence of twentieth-century Chinese history has afforded different generations with very different socialization experiences, producing a society that is now deeply marked by strong generational cleavages'. Therefore, the different age cohorts among the older generations, young-old, middle-old and oldest old, have life experiences influenced by different political and social environments but always against a backdrop of China's ongoing social transformation.

As a result of this, and in the light of older people's values and views about love, marriage and intimate relationships, a deliberate choice was made to employ the life course approach to address the research in the Chinese cultural setting. The life course

perspective is about analysing changes, including those that are biological, developmental, historical or geographic, and attempting to identify which factors have an effect on the arc of change and what transformations change can bring (Hendrick, 2012:226). As Mills (2000:143) suggests social science deals with problems of biography, of history and of their intersections within social structures. Additionally, understanding the relationships between biography and history help us learn about the 'larger historical sense in terms of its meaning of the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals' (Mills, 1956:5). The life course is also a social institution which varies by historical time and cultural context (Kohlin, 2007). Therefore, historical and cultural differences can shape an individual's life experiences.

The research gaps and research aims

In studies of the macro social background of Chinese social transition, influenced by modernization and Chinese traditional norms and family constraints, there is a lack of research about how older people are dealing with love and marriage matters and negotiating their choices and identity during later life, therefore it is a topic worth exploring in greater detail. Some existing research on intimacy in later life comes from Western scholars. Examples of this include Davidson and Fennell's (2004) research looking at the relevant attitudes, ideals and personal experiences of older people in relation to new intimate relationships; Bildtgård and Öberg's (2017) study of sexual norms in later life in late modernity drawing on the life course; and research on long lasting love issues in later life (Määttä, 2011). However, in terms of the Chinese literature, most recent research has explored young people's experiences of intimacy, while research about elderly Chinese people tends to focus on family relationships, care and health issues (such as Qi, 2014; Yeh et al, 2013; Li et al, 2011; Zhang, 2016). Research seldom focuses on older Chinese people's intimate lives or their views on love and marriage.

To remedy this research gap, this study focuses on older people who are single, in long-lasting marriages, have remarried, or are cohabiting as a way of negotiating their intimate relationship choices, identities and gender roles within the wider social context. My research questions address a few core themes: exploring the meaning of love and marriage throughout the life course; how people deal with and negotiate their intimate relationships alongside their family relationships during their later life; and how social and cultural values influence older people's attitudes to and choices on love and marriage.

Research process

To examine subjective meaning and gain an 'interpretive understanding of social action' (Weber, 1947:88), I employed qualitative research methods, using in-depth semi-structured interviews to interpret individuals' values, their attitudes towards love and marriage, how their life histories have shaped their perceptions and ideologies, and how these interplay with their practice of intimate relationships. The fieldwork was undertaken during both the spring and summer of 2017. I recruited 45 participants and the interviews were carried out in four different urban cities of mainland China: Beijing, Qingdao, Jinan and Guiyang.

The initial design of the research questions was informed by both my grandparents' experiences and Chinese public discourse on older people's intimate lives reported by the media. I purposefully set some interview questions to explore the intimate relationships of elderly Chinese. With the development of the research interviews and later the pilot studies, I shifted some aspects of the research focus such as the sample focus and recruitment locations, and used multiple methods to engage in the data collection and data analysis. This helped me to develop an analysis of the historical formation to gain insight into the elderly Chinese's values and attitudes, as well as to achieve the overall aims and objectives of the research.

Structure of the thesis

Chapter Two examines the current literature from three perspectives: historical background, Chinese ageing process and family relationships. Firstly it follows a chronological timeline to review the literature associated with love, marriage and intimate relationships, focusing particularly on the pre-communist era, the Maoist era (1949-1976), and the economic reform period (1979 and onwards). Because older Chinese people have lived through these historical changes, the chapter outlines how individuals' love and intimate lives have been shaped by their social environments in different historical periods. This is followed by a review of the literature about ageing and family relationships, as well as relevant research on elderly intimate relationships. Building on this existing literature I identified gaps within the current research, for example, there are few literatures that explore the views of older Chinese people's love, marriage and their romantic relationships during later life. Whilst there are many research that focus on the Chinese young age group it is rare to research on older people's marriage and family life. By linking of the existing literature, I will explore the older Chinese people's intimate relationships and marital practices; I will unveil how the older cohorts' private lives were shaped by the Mao era and post-Mao era and how their everyday practices, norms and ideology were embodied in the transformation social period. These also fill the existing research gap where current research seldom focuses on the older Chinese people's intimate lives and on how they negotiate their love relationships with family and kinships in later life.

Chapter Three addresses methodological issues and the research process. In this chapter I outline the main research questions, as well as presenting my research design and the procedure for data collection, participant recruitment methods and how the research was carried out. The in-depth structured interview method was employed during the fieldwork to help to achieve the goals of research. In particular, I show how the research focus shifted from the pilot study and how I adjusted my research along with the research process. In addition, drawing on my experience and reflections on the ethical

issues faced during the fieldwork, the chapter explains how I dealt with emotional work throughout the research. Lastly, there is a section on the data analysis methods used during and after the data collection.

Based on the empirical data, Chapter Four to Chapter Seven deal with key themes related to my research questions or which arose from the data. Chapter Four unveils how older people's political ideology is embodied in their love, marriage choices and intimate relationships of both the Mao era and post-Mao reform period. It focuses on the different older age cohorts' life histories and personal experiences to examine how their life experiences have been entangled with the social and political environments, and further reveal how the Maoist political campaigns and Maoist ideology permeated individuals' lives and shaped views on their intimate lives and marital choices. Following this, I consider how ideology shifted during China's economic reform period.

Chapter Five looks at the different meanings and definitions of love and marriage that were expressed by the older Chinese participants. The social divisions between rural and urban areas in China inform the different responses to questions about their understanding of love and marriage. Given that there was a group of people who insisted they 'do not know what love is', the chapter examines how the arranged marriage system affected their values; in addition, drawing on other older groups who portray their feelings on romantic love and marriage in practice, how love can be defined both in the individual domain and social domains is explored. The contradictory perceptions of romantic love and marriage also help to shed light on the underlying factors associated with older people's life histories, biography and class position, which interplay with the family system in the Chinese cultural setting.

Chapter Six shifts to remarriage and re-partnering during later life and the dilemmas participants face in practice. It draws on the empirical data to explore the gender specifics of how older Chinese people make choices about their intimate relationships; and how they negotiate remarriage or second partnerhood with their family relationships. Specifically, it looks at the family conflicts and arguments on inheritance,

and parent-child relationships and power dynamics given the trend towards increased power for adult children and the declining power of elderly parents.

Chapter Seven continues the discussion started in Chapter Six about the dilemmas faced by the older Chinese people, but moves into the moral domain. To explore the cultural meanings embedded in older Chinese people's norms, values and morality, I draw on the lens of the various relationship patterns of age-discrepant relationships, cohabitation and extra-marital affairs in later life to discuss an individuals' value system and moral dilemmas. I critically analyse participants' main arguments, values, and various judgments regarding moral standards. It starts with the phenomenon of age-dissimilar love relationships, by drawing on some concrete examples to help to unpack how these challenge the gender hierarchy, age hierarchy and family ethics order of the Chinese cultural hierarchy. Then, using some cases of cohabitation and extramarital affairs, there is an analysis of the moral domain and how its various moral standards have been practised in different social fields.

The concluding chapter summarises the main arguments and findings of the research related to the research questions, as well as its limitations, and offers recommendations for future researchers in the field.

Chapter 2 Elderly Intimacy and Its Historical and Social Background

Introduction

China has experienced dramatic social change over the past century, in which individuals' private lives and their experiences of love relationships and marriage have been deeply influenced by the historical and social milieux. Over this period there has been a series of political campaigns in the Mao era followed by Deng Xiaoping launching economic reform. Underlying the remarkable development of the economy, the social changes have created many challenges in both the public domain and the private sphere of individuals' lives. One of the key changes is the increase in China's ageing population over the past three decades, a population which is still growing fast as a result of the one child policy[4] and the low mortality rate (Yi, 2010). Against this backdrop, the support given to ageing Chinese and elderly private life have been explored by many scholars. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a historical background by drawing on the existing literature discussing issues relating to marriage and love relationships, with reference to older people's intimate relationships and their family life. Because older Chinese people have lived through these historical changes and social transformation periods I will evaluate the history relevant to older people and the current literature on the main discourses regarding elderly intimate relationships and remarriage, while setting out how these debates inform and shape my research, I will then use these to build up my research focus and identify the gap within the existing literature.

This chapter will review the current literature and present research on senior age love relationships and marriage from three perspectives: the historical background, the links between the Chinese ageing process and social transformation, and family relationships. I will begin by discussing the historical background to map the changes in the marriage

[4] Although a universal two-child policy replaced the previous one-child policy in October 2015 (Zeng and Hesketh, 2016) we do not yet know how it will affect ageing and other aspects of the society in the future.

process along with social transformation from the pre-Communist to the post-Mao era and economic reform period; I will address how marriage, intimate relationships and elderly people's remarriage have changed through Chinese history and the series of political campaigns, as well as briefly sketch how norms and values have changed and been shaped by the wider social milieux. Following on from this, I will focus on recent literature on Chinese ageing and identify current literature gaps regarding the older age group's intimate relationships and repatterning. Finally I focus on the Chinese family perspective to review the power relationship between the senior generation and the younger generation, to address some absences in the existing literature on the elderly Chinese and their marital relationships.

Historical background

Pre-communist era before 1949

During the Republic of China era (1912-1949) the country experienced social upheaval and a series of societal revolutions and reform of customs (Potter and Solk, 1980). Some political campaigns were also launched at this time, for example, the May Fourth Movement of 1919, which was 'a sweeping literary and intellectual renewal that has been called the 'Chinese renaissance' and is said to be the Chinese answer to the Enlightenment in Europe' (Pan, 2015:5).

The May Fourth Movement initially derived from the student protest at the terms of the Versailles settlement (in 1919) granting former German territorial concessions in China to Japan but eventually turned into an attack on the Confucian morality of traditional institutions, especially the family (Stockman, 2000). During the May Fourth era (from 1915 to 1925) some scholars and revolutionaries called for a modernised ideology of 'science' and 'democracy' to critique the Chinese monarchy and the basic social units constituting the feudal family system and extended family system (Zheng, 2007). As a

nation China is profoundly influenced by Confucianism and during the pre-Communist era, the basic characteristic of the society was that the political system and patriarchal system worked together (Zhou, 2003). Against this social background, the main theme of the May Fourth era was a new cultural movement attacking Confucianism and advocating Western liberal ideas (Mao, 2012:30). Most educated elite young men and women were challenging the power of the elderly and 'making their own decisions about education, careers, and sexual and marital relationships'(Stockman, 2000:80). This gave rise to calls for liberation from 'feudal' matchmaking, individualism and self-determination (Pan, 2015).

According to Zheng (2007) under the traditional social order, the pattern of the extended family system was shaped by the system of dynastic monarchy, patriarchy was the central ideology of the family and the male leader was the ruler of the family. In addition to this, there were 'three mountains' oppressing both men and women in the old regime - feudalism, bureaucratic capitalism and imperialism - but women that were located at the lowest level of society (Zhou, 2003:67). Zheng's (2007) account of family history in the Republic of China suggests that some intellectuals belonging to the May Fourth Movement were exploring a 'new ideal family pattern' consisting of the nuclear family, freedom of marriage and freedom of divorce. Zheng (2007) cites many quotations from newspapers and journals published in this historical period, for instance, an intellectual called Chen Wangdao published an article in the journal 'New Women' in November 1920 emphasising that: 'In the current society, freedom of marriage and freedom of divorce are equally important, if we only call for freedom of marriage but not freedom of divorce, the marriage would not be a real freedom'; other intellectuals brought up the idea that 'widows remarrying should be considered a matter of individual free will, rather than following the customs and rules in the name of female chastity, and being rewarded for staying single and punished for getting remarried ' (Zheng, 2007:375). During this new cultural movement of the May Fourth era, the marriage regulations underwent major reform and with the abandonment of the old feudal ways, a politically aware population of men and women was created (Potter and Solk, 1980:8).

A monogamy rule was put into practice in the year of 1921 based on the marriage law of the Republic of China, which challenged the feudal marriage system (Mao, 2012). In 1928, the marital codes were revised and the traditional marital rituals and ceremony altered (Potter and Solk, 1980), although the new laws were not enforced throughout most of China. In this period, the social ideology of marriage, divorce and sex mixed Western ideas with traditional Chinese Confucianism, customs and traditional norms. There was a tendency in some economically developed areas for both elite groups and ordinary people to challenge the practice of arranged marriage by elders and marriage by matchmaking (Zheng, 2007). This can be seen by looking at the intellectuals and reformers who were the strongest critics of traditional sexual morality but, in their bones, remained Confucian to the core (Pan and Huang, 2011). For example, during the May Fourth era, Hu Shi, Zhang Daqian and Chen Duxiu and other equally famous intellectuals had extramarital love and affairs.

One of these reformers, Hu Shi, was a famous Chinese philosopher and a key contributor to Chinese liberalism. His marriage was arranged by his mother, however he fell in love with a woman when he was temporarily living at a holiday resort; they had a romantic love relationship but this was ended by his wife's threat to commit suicide and take the lives of their two sons as well (Zheng, 2007:396). The reformers, the youth intellectuals and scholars yearned for this freedom in love and marriage but they also had to negotiate with the pressures created by old customs and traditional norms. In addition, although they called for gender equality, women's rights to divorce and remarry were still limited in the 1930s. Influenced by the traditional Confucian ethical codes, divorced women had no social status before 1910, while the remarriage of widows remained socially stressful due to the fact that the 'custom and social pressure discouraged remarriage and mandated a chaste life in the service of the ageing parents. Like the divorce, the widow, when remarried, left behind all her possessions and her children' (Potter and Solk,1980:8). On the one hand, the ideology of the new marriage code and sexual liberalism encouraged people to pursue freedom in love and marriage. On the other, as Zhou (2003) suggests, although by the 1930s the new government was campaigning for Chinese women's right to own property, marry freely and be educated,

it had no intention of changing the fundamentals of the patriarchal system and its 'institutional reforms were hardly put into practice in most rural areas … [the result being that] women's liberation in the Republic era actually achieved limited success and in some regions, none at all' (Zhou, 2003:69), partly because the government only had limited control over the country.

Communist China: the Mao era (1949-1976)

The People's Republic of China was established in 1949 when the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) came to power and enacted interventionist state policies during the Mao era (1949 to 1976) (Jin, 2006). Some party-initiated political campaigns took place during the early stages of the revolution between 1946 and 1956, and during the early 1950s the new regime 'designed policies to punish the elite households from the pre-revolutionary period -- to keep them out of the Communist party and out of positions of power and privilege' (Walder and Hu, 2009:1397). These political campaigns were not limited to the regime and bureaucratic classes, and affected ordinary citizens across the nation. There were campaigns launched by CCP such as land reform, agricultural collectivization and the nationalization of industry, and state-led political campaigns were targeted to eliminate the social structural inequality of pre-revolutionary society in both rural and urban areas (Selden and Lee, 2007). For instance, there was a massive transfer of property during the land reform social movement and it is estimated that 43% of lands were confiscated of which 60% was redistributed to the rural population (Fan, 1997; Mao, 2012). According to Selden and Lee (2007:2) the process of land confiscation from landowners, along with the redistribution of wealth and lands to landless people, subverted the rural elite and partly satisfied the landless poor, thus giving rise to the class struggle mode that would be repeatedly invoked throughout the revolutionary era.

In addition to this, the entire urban and rural population was defined by the official politics and a frozen set of categories or political class labels (or political class status: 成

分 *Chengfen*) based on 'family employment status, income sources and political loyalties' (Walder and Hu, 2009:1401) as well individuals' class origin (*出身 Chushen*) and purported position in the pre-land reform social landscape (Selden and Lee, 2007). The class labels were originally assigned to a whole household and inherited along patriarchal lines (Kraus, 1981). They incorporated political categories reflecting tendencies such as in rural areas, the exploiting class of 'landlords' and 'rich peasants'; the exploited class of 'poor peasants' and 'lower middle peasants'; and the classes in between, the 'middle peasants' and 'upper middle peasants' (Zhang, 2013:440). Based on the income they derived from property ownership, hired labour and usury, as well as their political background, these exploitative classes - landlords, rich peasants and the urban capitalists - were stigmatised as 'bad elements' or 'class enemies' whereas the poor, lower middle and middle class peasants, along with Communist Party members and soldiers were considered to have good class origins (Sargeson, 2016; Croll,1981).

Simultaneously, individuals' marriages and their private intimate lives were immersed in and reshaped by the political measures and social movements of the communist era. The communist government introduced the 1950 Marriage Act (1950 Act) which prohibited arranged marriage, abolished polygyny and outlawed prostitution and concubines (Zhou, 2003). Introducing this new ideology to private life gave the youth greater autonomy when making marriage choices and increased gender equality, meaning that free love was reinforced by the political atmosphere of the 1950s (Yan, 2003). At the same time the divorce culture also changed. After the marriage law was promulgated in 1950, the Chinese Communist Party launched a three year campaign to approve divorces as long as the couples had been created through an arranged marriage by parents or families (Ding and Zhong, 2014). Against this background, many peasants and workers sought to divorce their original wives who were illiterate or unattractive, taking advantage of the campaign against family arranged marriage and the revolt against so-called capitalist ideology (Ding and Zhong, 2014:425).

Chinese socialist politics influenced marriage and shaped the family culture in communist society. The state became the ethical community that had the highest

authority and the socialist ideological milieu that developed prioritised the core relationship of comradeship in service of the socialist state (Ding and Zhong, 2014:437). Anybody could be reimagined as an equal member of society, as long as they were willing to sacrifice themselves for the state. Ding and Zhong (2014) note that the 1950s laws required couples to register their marriage for it to be valid, while the meaning of the wedding went beyond mere validation in law and came to be seen as a relationship between two lovers in the service of a highly political goal. In other words, love and marriage took on a symbolic meaning that showed that the couple shared a similar political ideology and social identity. Regarding marriage and love, Ding and Zhong (2014) emphasise the political meaning of marriage as a form of feudalistic or capitalistic ideology, due to the fact that 'love without the proletarian ideology was seen as a remnant of feudalism, which treats women as mere objects incapable of labour' and 'only people willing to labour or people who had deep sympathy with the proletariat class could develop true love toward one another'(2014:438). The term 'feudalism' (*封建 Fengjian*) can be dated back to the communist movement of the 1920s and refers to negative aspects of traditional Chinese culture such as 'traditional feudal views and old worn-out traditional customs'(Shea, 2011:366). For example, under the influence of feudal culture, people's marriages were arranged by their parents according to the 'matching gates' (*门当户对 mendanghudui*) which were mainly based on similar family background, economic and social status (Li, 2011). Sexual norms were strict and sexuality was seen as a shameful and taboo subject (Zheng, et al, 2011:498). As a rejection of this, in the Mao era, marriage in the new political culture became a symbol of identity and a way of distinguishing the 'feudalistic person' from the 'progressive person' as well as a means to enhance or mediate the different class categories.

According to Zhang (2013) the state gave the poor and the loyal access to education, jobs and political power, while those children who came from the 'bad classes' or unfavourable family origins faced discriminatory treatment and their life chances were limited, including marriage and spouse choices. Against this backdrop, social groups with bad class labels faced different degrees of stigma and exclusion in mate selection. For instance, Croll (1981:88) indicates that in the 1950s the state initially imposed some

rules banning interclass marriage, to prevent landlords attempting to 'marry off their daughters to poor peasants in order to establish alliances that would blur class lines and thus the class conflict' (Croll, 1981:89). This revolutionary process gave rise to a class struggle both in urban areas and the countryside, while widening the gap between urban-rural and state-collective (Selden and Lee, 2007).

From the year 1955 and especially from 1960, the urban-rural and state-collective gaps widened steadily due to villagers being barred from getting jobs in the cities and the few that did manage to get temporary work in urban areas would be excluded from the urban welfare benefits system (Cheng and Selden, 1994; Walder,1986; Selden and Lee, 2007). During this period and between 1957 and 1958, the household registration system (*户口 hukou*) registered all the population as either agricultural (*农业 nongye*) for rural areas or non-agricultural (*非农业 fei nongye*) for urban, and the people with agricultural hukou were left to fend for themselves. Due to the restrictions on agricultural hukou, those from rural areas could only get food, housing and medicine in their villages whereas non-agricultural hukou residents were entitled to jobs in urban areas and could obtain public goods (Sargeson, 2016:3). Hukou continues to play a significant role in relationships and will be discussed in more detail below.

The Mao era: the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976)

As well as land reform, there was also a series of political campaigns during the 1950s and 1960s[5] such as the 'Great leap forward' which propelled the disastrous famine (from

[5] Other political campaigns included: 1950: land reform; 1951: "Suppression of Reactionaries"; 1952: The "Three Antis" and "Five Antis" campaigns; 1955: "Liquidation of Reactionaries"; 1957–1958: "The Anti-Rightist Movement"; 1959–1961: "Three Red Flags", "Highway to Socialist Construction", "Great Leap Forward", "Great Steel Production", foundation of communes; 1963: Campaign of socialist education; 1966–1976: "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution" (Haubl, 2014:84).

1958 to 1962) and led to thirty to forty million people dying (Plankers, 2014: xv). The Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) was another famous political movement launched by Mao Zedong, who on the 7th of May 1966 gave his 'Five Seven instruction' calling for critique of the elite classes of capitalists and intellectuals, in order to achieve a general 'communist society'. The official aim was to eliminate social class, while limiting and gradually removing all capital commercialisation by speeding up the population's ideological development (Wang, 2009). The idea was thrashed out during Communist Party meetings in May and August 1966 when the Cultural Revolution was finally launched and the movement has been described by scholars as a 'ten-year disaster' and political and economic catastrophe (Li, 2001: 139). According to Schram's (1989) comments on the Cultural Revolution, Mao's motivations for starting the movement were to take control of political power and stifle the opposition group within the Communist Party; it was also an attempt to prove that he had been right about making the 'great leap forward'. Initially the movement began as an intra-party purification campaign but it eventually spread to all segments of the population and the political leadership lost control (Plankers, 2014).

The Cultural Revolution also established the moral foundations of socialism and the ideology of collectivity - advocating public ownership and selflessness in a behavioural sense (Li, 2001). Political and institutional power were transferred to local official organs and groups such as military men, revolutionary committees and the 'Red Guard' (Plankers, 2014) of youth that students organised themselves with Mao's support from 1966 (Mao, 2012:35). The Red Guards and Red Guard movement (1966-1968) started out as active agents of the Revolution, encouraged and guided by the state, but later the state lost control of them as they became more violent and less predictable (Haubl, 2014). Officially they were battling with 'the four old evils': old thought, old cultures, old habits and old customs (Plankers, 2014). But the Red Guard youth soon began targeting those with bad class identities directly, such as teachers and other learned people considered as enemies during first wave of the violence (Haubl, 2014:88). These groups of 'intellectuals, technocrats and management elites in the process of socialist industrialisation were the subject of controversy' (Li, 2001:146). But as a result of the

Red Guard movement, the entire intellectual class was more or less eliminated (Planker, 2014). In addition to this, class labels took on new positive and negative connotations, with a red class (good class) being distinguished from the 'black class' and 'grey class' (or in some literature the 'black five categories' including rich farmers, landlord counterrevolutionaries, elements and rightists (Jian et al, 2006)) of class enemies or 'inherently guilty' classes (Haubl, 2014:88). Society reached an anomic condition by the end of 1968 (Plankers, 2014) and from 1968 to 1980, a Rustication Campaign (*上山下乡 shang shan xia xiang*) was launched whereby Mao called for the youth to go to rural areas and receive re-education. About 17 million students, named 'educated youth'(*知识青年/知青 zhiqing*) and former Red Guards were sent from urban areas to countryside, where they were supposed to transfer themselves into the peasantry for the rest of their lives (Bonnin, 2012). In the following years this also led to further waves of violence and persecution taking place and among the various forms of violence such as looting, arrest, torture, shaming and self-criticism, while thousands of men and women chose to commit suicide (Planker, 2014). The end result of the violence during the Cultural Revolution was according to Haubl (2014) an estimated forty-five to sixty-five million dead, including five to six million deaths in the first three years of the Cultural Revolution movement alone.

Throughout the collectivisation and Cultural Revolution periods, marriage strategies reflected and legitimised the values of the new system (Murphy, 2001). The class labelling system played an important role in individual spouse choices and there was a tendency for class labels to become an even more important criteria in mate selection (Zhang, 2013). Zhang's (2013) research on the rural marriage patterns of the Cultural Revolution period indicates that compared with men, class labels were more important to women who married between the 1950s and 1970s. As class labels were inherited along patriarchal lines, males in the 'bad class' categories faced more stigma and discrimination, meaning some men with negative class labels were unable to find wives. One solution to this was for two or three families to enter into 'marriage exchanges' whereby parents would exchange their daughters in return for wives for their sons and Croll (1981) found a range of parental involvement in children's marriage choices, such

as matching them with partners in rural areas and consenting to marriages with urban residents. However, marriage between urban and rural partners was rare because of the household registration system (hukou) that took shape in 1955. The hukou system established a wall between the cities and counties that prevented rural urban exchanges and migration from rural to urban areas (Selden and Lee, 2007; Ho et al, 2018). As a consequence, while there are a few rural-urban marriages, they are extremely rare because the hukou system is a barrier blocking social mobility; the peasants remain bound to the land, while the next generation of city dwellers is able to inherit their parents' non-agricultural hukou status and assume their job positions and retirement welfare (Murphy, 2001). Under the Mao regime, marriage customs were also reshaped and adjusted by the political milieu and socialist ideology. For example, from the 1960s to the 1970s the number of guests allowed at the wedding feast was limited and other aspects of the ritual were controlled based on the logic that such 'lavish displays wasted scarce resources'. Instead, couples would simply have some peanuts and sweets with a few friends and relatives until the late 1970s and 1980s when group marriages became popular, hosted by Party leaders of the local women's association (Murphy, 2001).

The post-Mao era and economic reform

After Mao's death in 1976, Deng Xiaoping's reforms led to a new market economy and from 1978 onward, the economic system shifted from central planning as market mechanisms were introduced to the planned economy (Zhao and Belk, 2008). Deng encouraged unequal regional economic development through the 'get rich first' policy and 'coastal development' strategies, the aim being to gradually bring prosperity to the interior regions (Zhao and Tong, 2000). He abolished the previous people's communes- a core political and economic unit during the Mao era, and more than eighty percent of farmland was subcontracted to individual families (Davis and Harrell, 1993:2). Chinese society also underwent radical changes and the rigid political class stratification and class system of the Mao era became more open during the post-Mao era (Bian, 2002).

In terms of the gaps between the city and the countryside, the hukou system continued to widen the deep inequalities between rural and urban areas, peasants with a rural hukou identity being at a particular disadvantage (Sargeson, 2016). Nevertheless, the rural social stratification structure was impacted during the reform period: during the Mao era the village cadres were at the top of the social stratification and the 'bad class' placed at the bottom; however, during the post-Mao reform era, the cadres' authority and power declined and attitudes towards the previous bad class labels changed (Yan, 2009). By the end of the 1980s previous class enemies like the 'landlord' had been replaced by new enemies such as the 'corrupt official'. Under the new Chinese leaders' drive to promote human capital and entrepreneurship, the social stratification structure was reshaped and inequalities in property ownership downplayed, which was contrary to official policy in the Mao era (Sargeson, 2016). In addition to this, Sargeson (2016) indicates that along with the process of rural de-collectivisation and the economic opening-up policy, in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s state controls over employment were relaxed. Rural people were able to engage in non-agricultural activities, self-employment, home based and small businesses were privatised and replaced the previous collective enterprises. The subsequent increase in urban enterprises also led to increased demand for cheap migrant labour from rural areas. As a result of this shift in policy, the number of people who were registered as rural hukou actually engaged in rural agriculture was rapidly reduced, as most were fully or partly employed in off-farm arrangements.

The economic transition started in the early 1980s continued into the 1990s, when the 'capital, labour, housing, community, and cultural markets moved closer to the liberal model of freer choices, rational markets and lower transaction costs' (Farrer, 2002:12). Sigley (2006:44) supports the view that social and economic development demands political liberalization and that sexual liberation is a visible sign of political liberalisation[6]. In 1980 the marriage law was revised and the new regulations

[6] Although there has been some political liberation in the post-Mao era, it is still limited and since Xi Jinping took control of the Communist Party and became President of the PRC in 2012, the regime has become more authoritarian (Ringen, 2016; Ho,et al, 2018).

emphasised that 'political status and upbringing should play no role in the marriage', meanwhile it became easier to file for divorce (Ding and Zhong, 2014:440). These changes to the marriage law demonstrate that romantic love was beginning to replace the 'traditional emphasis on love as relating to marital favour and gratitude' (Pan, 2006:31) and that mutual affection was now the grounds for marriage and divorce. This freedom of choice not only gave rise to greater individual freedom in the labour and consumer markets but was also embodied in the more liberal sexual culture that emerged during the 1990s. In the wake of massive social change, a new middle class was created with the economic growth and ideas about courtship, dating and marriage were also reshaped (Jankowiak and Moore, 2017:101).

Farrer (2002) notes that during this transition to a liberal market society, the mid-1990s surveys show the practice of seeking wealth being transformed from its previous deviant status to the main goal of personal life. Against this backdrop, Farrer found that sexual liberation and emphasis on individual motives brought about something of a moral crisis (2002:17-18). Sigley (2006) argues that moral righteousness and moral discourses during this 'opening up' period were shaped by history and politics, and in terms of the sexual realm of marriage, family and issues relevant to sexual behaviour, Western notions and sexual liberation challenged the social conservatism which remained from the Mao era. There was also party-state and political official anxiety about a sexual revolution happening if Western notions about sexual liberation and sexual freedom became widespread.

In 2001 the marriage law was further revised, and adjustments made due to some issues that had arisen during the reform period such as 'domestic divorce, extramarital affairs and marital breakdown' and perceived difficulties in regulating the relationship between law and morality (Sigley, 2006: 50). According to Sigley (2006:47) the Chinese government's attempt to impose moral order on society was also aimed at maintaining party-state authority. For instance, cohabitation in China is seen as an abnormal social phenomenon and has not been legally recognised. Instead, the government has tightened up control of media broadcasting and cultural products in an attempt to make social

political discourse more harmonious, and maintain social stability and conjugal harmony (Sigley, 2006).

In post-Mao society during this transition period, marriage patterns, family values, intimate relationships and gender dynamics are also 'parallel to the shifting state agenda, dismantling of the welfare system and hierarchical division of labour' (Xiao, 2010: 736). Due to the fact that divorce and marriage no longer require permission from the work unit (*单位 danwei*) individuals now have more freedom to register marriage or divorce. For example, in 2004 the number of Chinese couples divorcing was 1.61 million (Xiao, 2010) whereas in 2018 there were 4.46 million divorces (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2019). Material foundations now play an important role in the marriage market, and individuals' values and attitudes to marriage and sexuality mix tradition and liberation and change with the times. Thus according to Zheng et al (2011) premarital sex was mostly unacceptable in the early 1990s whereas by the 2000s the study shows that most people accepted it, particularly if the couple was 'in love'. In terms of extramarital relationships, however, there was a gendered difference as women held more strongly negative attitudes towards extramarital affairs than men. The political and social economic transformation from the Mao era to the post-Mao era is revealed through individuals' private lives. Moreover, when viewed through the lens of individuals' marital relationships, the changing of cultural norms and reshaping of marital norms and practices shed light on the 'ideology provided the framework for the designation of political and economic priorities as well as development objectives' (Li, 2001:158). Understanding these changes against the historical background builds on research of intimate relationships, martial choices and practices, value orientations and the changes taking place in Chinese later life. It is also instructive for exploring how older men and women's private lives were shaped by their specific lived social environments in the Mao or post-Mao eras (see Chapter 4).

Ageing in a Chinese context

The population of China is ageing and there has been considerable growth in the number of elderly people along with increasing urbanisation. According to the Sixth National Population Census of the people's republic of China, in 2010, the number of people who are above 60 is 177.6 million, which accounted for 13.26 of the total population (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2011). Furthermore from 2011 to 2015, the number of older people has increased from 178 million to 221 million which at the time accounted for 15.5% of the total population (Wang, 2016:2-3).The elderly population is predicted to be over 300 million by 2050 and among this number, the figure for the oldest old (aged 80 above) could reach 40 million by 2030 (Yi, 2010). In 2009, with the exception of three provinces where the percentage of people who were aged 60 or above was less than 10 percent (Tibet 9.68%, Qinghai 9.85%, Ningxia 9.47%) 30 out of the 33 provinces had percentages above 10%, with Shanghai reaching 22.5% (Peng and Hu, 2011). Based on the 6th national population census in 2010, the percentage of over-60s is 12.54% for Beijing which is similar to the number in Guizhou, and almost 15% in Shandong (Zhang, 2016). Because of China's 'one child policy' and low mortality rate, 'the ageing population will continue to increase rapidly and would give more pressures on the already troubled health care system' (Yi, 2010). In addition to this, the national pension system has been seriously questioned due to the rapid population ageing (Feng et al, 2019:31).

In the 'Western' world, ageing (unlike other similar sociological categories such as class, gender, race and sexuality) is an important dimension of social difference that is relatively overlooked (Twigg, 2013). Age is one of the significant categories of social division and most important ways of ranking people's identities within society (Twigg, 2013: 33). Bevan (2001) suggests that ageing is fundamentally social because it is defined by societal norms about how to categorise the old and senior citizens. It is interwoven with other social issues such as in health, economic conditions, financial support and cultural values. Similar issues apply to Chinese ageing. For instance Tong et al's (2011) study of Chinese elderly living alone in Shanghai shows the impact of health on depression amongst older singletons. Tong et al (2011) suggest that the risk of a health condition triggering depression depends on the elderly person's income, the financial support they receive from their children and their housing situation. Thus older

people's financial conditions, especially in terms of housing, are also an important part of living alone.

In the 'West' too there are some limitations and inequalities associated with ageing, which is generally considered as disadvantageous. Some scholars argue that modernisation has not reduced ageism (Palmore, 1990) According to Blaikie (1999), ageing was dominated by 'social problems' from the perspective of policy and welfare needs; whereas since from 1970s, the negative images of ageing have been challenged but ageism still remains. Ageism exists in various forms of social exclusion on the basis of age across the life course in western industrial societies (Hocky and James, 2003:168). According to Macnicol (2006) the concepts of ageism and age discrimination are sometimes interchangeable in practice: 'ageism' accounts for age-based discriminations in the context of social relations and social attitudes; it operates at different levels from the interpersonal to the institutional, similarly to sexism and racism, embodying prejudice towards older people. However, this 'age discrimination' places individuals of a senior age at a disadvantage in their area of employment (2006:6). For instance, along with the change in economic or social status after retirement during later life, elderly people not only lose power and are disengaged from their workplaces and social networks (Asquith, 2009) but also are excluded from mainstream society and discriminated against (Twigg, 2013). The consequences of this not only shape elderly people's self-imagination but also reinforce their identity in day-to-day life. Compared with some representations of other age stereotypes, elderly people's romantic lives are less visible socially, romance being more associated with youth (Twigg, 2013; Collins, 2003, Berscheid and Reis, 1998). Under the influence of these general prejudices towards older people, the identities of the ageing are not only socially defined, but further impact on older people's identities and choices in practice. In terms of older people in China, it is worth discussing this in relation to Confucian cultural values and norms.

China has been influenced by Confucianism for a long time and its influence persists today. As discussed earlier, love was absent from Chinese marital history for many years. Because of the shackles of Confucianism, men and women's marriages were based on unequal relations and love was not allowed by Chinese society (Pan, 2015). Traditional marriages were arranged by parents and in some cases the brides and grooms had not even met each other before their weddings (Johnson, 1983). Furthermore, for thousands of years China has narrowed down sexual activities to the purpose of producing heirs, thus implying that sex was only something that happened between

married people, while people of a senior age maintained their reputations and respectable images through 'infrequent sexual activity and avoiding the topic of sex in daily conversation' (Guan, 2004:105). Although many men were having sexual relations outside of these respectable boundaries in Chinese history.

As sexuality is largely culturally constructed (Tiefer, 2004) under the influence of the traditional marriage norms during the Chinese feudal era, both men and women's romantic, remarriage and sexual activities in older age were considered immoral, selfish and unacceptable by their communities or society at large (Shea, 2005). Some Chinese traditional ideas also shaped the limitations on and the discrimination towards love and marriage at a later age. For example, Daoist health practice considers it inappropriate to have sexual behaviour or romantic interaction during middle and old age, moreover it is also against people older than 40 or 60 remarrying, especially women who are not suitable for remarriage after 40 or after bearing a child (Shea, 2005). Against the background of Confucianism and Daoist thought and influenced by the related principles of Chinese traditional medicine, it is easy to see that later life romance is not merely a threat to familial and societal harmony but is also disapproved by traditional cultural, medicine, ideological and social norms and social politics, which have worked together to exclude romantic love from many parts of Chinese life for a very long time (Ding and Zhong, 2014).

Chinese traditional patriarchal culture shaped different gendered expectations as well. For example, according to family patriarchy and the principle of three-obediences, a woman must obey her father before marriage, her husband after marriage and her son once widowed (Croll, 1978). Therefore, the norms of 'chastity' and 'virtue' for women meant that it was difficult for them to remarry, even if their husband died; whereas, on the contrary, men were able to have several legally recognised wives in Chinese traditional marriage practice (Yan et al, 2011: 984). In spite of the context of remarriage changing and the ideal of 'chastity' being eroded as a result of social and economic reform and the open door policy (Hu and To, 2018), the traditional gendered double standard continues to be shaped by the assumption that chaste women do not have

sexual needs (Yan, et al, 2011). Therefore, gender and cultural values remain dominated by patriarchal values and this is shown in Yan et al's (2011) research on elderly Chinese people's ideas about sex. This found that older women had more rigid beliefs about sex, which should only happen in marriage and be performed as a duty to fulfil a husband's physical needs; whereas old men considered sex a 'normal physical drive that was both the pleasurable and a means to relieve negative emotions in or outside marriage' and as 'indicative of a men's strength and ability' (Yan et al, 2011:995). Indeed, in Chinese society marriage or partnership typically serves to reinforce and maintain the older man's masculinity (Arber et al, 2003).

Recently in the academy some controversy has arisen about the influence of Confucianism, as it is clear that the neoliberalisation of China during the post-Mao period has changed Chinese culture in various ways and that these changes are having an impact on personal and family life (Xiao, 2010). The emergence of a neoliberal marketplace in contemporary China has given rise to modernisation, which in turn erodes traditional social norms (Savelsberg, 2002). As discussed earlier in the chapter, with social change and the Westernization of Chinese culture and society, ideological liberation has already caused some changes in public attitudes, evidenced by the debate in the Chinese mass media about traditional 'feudal superstition' (Shea, 2005:115). Shea's (2005) research critiques mass media reports portraying rural, less-educated women as generally conservative with traditional attitudes towards love, romance and sexual activity during their later years. She points out that in reality the attitudes of the late-middle-aged and elderly groups of people are actually quite different from the image that the media presents to the public. Unlike urban stereotypes of the less developed rural areas, which assume that people unthinkingly obey feudal tradition (Liu et al, 1997; Shea, 2005), late-middle-age and elderly Chinese in rural areas who have received a moderate level of education have more open attitudes on love and sexual issues, which means that the media's view is inaccurate. Chao et al (2011) also point out that middle-aged and older adults have sexual desire that plays an important role in bringing them satisfaction during later life .

Shea's (2011) research on elderly Chinese women's sexuality suggests that 'it was primarily practical exigency and historically shaped personal priorities that led women to behave as they did, more than it was lack of knowledge ' (2011:375). She gives as an example the fact that most older women born before 1949 reported that even when they were young, they did not engage in romantic behaviours like 'saying I love you, hugging, sitting close together or holding hands'(Shea, 2011:372). This is mainly because such behaviours were not fostered in the 'feudal' pre-communist years nor encouraged during the Maoist period. Thus, the elderly cohort's perception of love and intimate practice is shaped by their early memories, social practice and has been historically structured, which confirms Turner's (1995) argument that the times we live through are a social and collective phenomenon, a social network of shared experiences shaped into a single memory of one's past (1995:256).

With the expansion of the elderly population in China, remarriage or cohabitation have become potential sources of support for the ageing. Based on the demographic census of 2000, among the 60 year olds and above age group 30.4% were widowed and among singleton older women the figure reached 41.7% but is just 18.5% for older men (National Bureau Statistics, 2000). By comparison, in the demographic census of 2010 the widowed proportion was slightly lower at 26.89%, a decrease from 2000 but because of the increasing ageing population, the total number of 60 years old and above who were widowed had increased to 8.6234 million people, among which there are still over twice as many single older women (36.96%) as single older men (16.3%); however the rate of older men who have a spouse (79.46%) is more than that in older women (62.08%) (Sun, 2015). According to Lin et al (2004), as well as remarriage among the senior age group, about half of second couplehoods in old age are not registered as marriage, with couples choosing cohabitation instead, and this so called 'companionship for supporting ageing' (*da ban yang lao* 搭伴养老) pattern has increased. Normally in this pattern women play the role of caregiver, looking after older men in exchange for the financial resources elderly men can offer, but this 'companionship for supporting ageing' can also be a way for men to avoid the division of property with their partner

and Lin et al (2004) note that older men tend to get more benefit overall from this cohabitation model.

'In widowhood, women grieve and men replace' (Davidson, 2002:43). Davidson (2002) argues that repatterning after widowhood is 'gender-specific' (Davidson, 2002:43) and he notes the gender difference in widowhood whereby older widowed men are more likely to remarry than older widowed women. From his study of the UK's new partnership choices among widows and widowers, older widowers are much more likely than older widows to start a new relationship, with men favouring cohabitation while women favour living apart together (Davidson, 2002). In spite of the cultural differences that may lead to different normative paths for older people (Koren, 2011; Koren and Eisikovits, 2011) certain Chinese research studies and literature echo Davidson's research. For instance, Shea's (2011) research on older Chinese women's marital relationships and sexuality found that it was not only widows' love for their deceased spouses that was stopping them from getting remarried but also that 'they would prefer to be free to do what they felt like on an everyday basis rather than take care of another old man' (Shea, 2011:374). This finding reveals some continuity in gender norms among the senior age groups, with older women preferring to remain single to achieve freedom during widowhood. Hu and To's (2018) study of family relations and remarriage found that 'remarriage is far from an 'individualized' affair, rather remarriage is closely associated with 'indisposable' ties with children, siblings, parents, and extended families' (2018:2306). In addition, they identify that the widow(er)s spend time and resources to provide care for their offspring, which also prevents widow(er)s from getting remarried (Hu and To, 2018).

Against this backdrop of ageing, representations of middle-age and older Chinese groups' love and romantic stories have started to appear in some forms of public mass media such as books, films and news, in order to encourage more liberal attitudes to love and remarriage (Shea, 2005). Shea's (2005) study also reveals that, to some extent, there are political factors underlying the surfacing of media coverage and publicity. On the one hand, the expansion of the older generation may put pressure on the younger

generation, increasing the amount of social labour necessary and reducing their work efficiency; on the other hand, seniors tend to be more dependent on the pension and welfare system of the nation (Shea, 2005). Older people and the widowed are therefore being encouraged to remarry, due to the mutual care and support older people can give to each other while ageing, which can reduce the burden on society (Shea, 2005). In addition, both the government and the economic marketing of matchmaking are promoting the elderly marriage market. For example, from the coverage by newspapers during September 2015, in the capital city of the province of Shandong in China, there were more than five hundred people engaged in matchmaking activities in Public Park and the media reports emphasised that some participants' children accompanied their parents to help them find an ideal partner or an ideal step mother or father (Southcn, 2015). Similar phenomena have happened in many different cities across the nation according to media reports, with many matchmaking activities being organized by dating agencies and even government institutions such as Beijing Chaoyang Civil Affairs Bureau, in the name of keeping loneliness away from the older group people by organising blind dating parties for the elderly in the local community (Chaoyang Civil Affairs Bureau, 2015). The phenomenon of elderly matchmaking in public, pushed by the political system, media and economic marketing, suggests that older people's love issues have been transferred from the traditional private realm to the public.
Encouraging elderly couples to support each other may help reduce the burden on the nation's welfare as well as its youth, enabling adult children to devote their minds and bodies to work and studies instead (Shea, 2005). From this perspective, senior remarriage seems like a political strategy to solve the ageing problem and based on the background of ageing, in the later chapters (see Chapter 6 and Chapter 7) I will critically explore individuals' marital choices, remarriage and second couplehood in practice and the gendered differences in Chinese people's later life.

Family relationships

For many centuries, the family system has been the essential part of the Chinese moral universe, its main features being the virtue of filial piety and the importance of family obligations (Jankowiak and Moore, 2017:17; Santos, 2006:275-333). In the long history of China the ideal family was the multigenerational joint family but this pattern has been undermined post-1949 (Jankowiak and Moore, 2017). Marriage is a social placement and the 'choosing of a spouse creates a relationship to that person's kin group and affiliates a person to the life changes of the kin group'(Stockman, 2000:99). Under the influence of Confucianism, family kinship ties and relationships play an enhanced role in individual lives and Fei (1992) suggests that kinship, the social relationship formed through marriage and reproduction, is the most important relationship in Chinese society. In the traditional kinship system, intergenerational relationships are more important than conjugal ties(Pimental, 1994) and this way of thinking also influences many elderly people's attitudes to love and marriage in contemporary society.

Individual love relationships and marriages are limited by the macro sphere of the national order and family order, which is reflected in the collective pattern of love passed from traditional times to nowadays. As Lawler (2008:36) points out, 'like other non-westerners' the Chinese 'have long been seen as having an identity based on and in kinship ties'. There has been a strong belief throughout Chinese history in the ideology of harmonious internal relationships, so that the Chinese marriage and family was not based on a contractual relationship but rather it worked on an ethical community basis (Ding and Zhong, 2014). Harmonious interpersonal relationships are the foundation of maintaining family order and state order, and as a result of this, marriage traditionally performs such functions as achieving the family's collective goals, continuing and maintaining its social status and family lines (Lee, Wang and Ruan, 2001). Furthermore, marriage goes beyond the couple's relationship and is the linkage between two families, as well as the continuation of the next generation (Wu and Yi, 2003; Kwok et al, 2013). From a functionalist perspective, family and kinship perform the role of reproduction, reproducing both population and patterns of culture and social structure, the family system maintaining society's structure as it transmits primary culture, value orientation and personal character (Stockman, 2000:95). In this cultural context, deviant forms of

love and marriage in Chinese traditional society such as senior female remarriage, or other types of deviant love like same-sex love, are not only an individual issue but also a family or the community matter (Sigley, 2006).

The dramatic social changes taking place in China have reshaped family structure and individual values from traditional patterns, and this also impacts on intergenerational relationships. In the traditional family, patrilineality was the key among the traditional Chinese family and gender values (Hu and Scott, 2014). Under the doctrine of Confucianism, during the pre-revolutionary epoch, marriage was considered a family matter and a means of continuing the patriline; in the extended family household, the eldest man was the head of the family household and had authority over the family, while women were subordinate to men in all family relationships (Stockman, 2000:95-96). However, this ideal was weakened during the May Fourth movement in 1919 and when the People's Republic of China was established (in 1949); during Deng Xiaoping's rule, market reform and especially from the late 1970s the one child policy further changed the traditional family structure, with Chinese society undergoing a cultural transformation that is still reshaping both family structure and people's ordinary lives, including their cognitive, emotional and ethical spheres (Jankowiak and Moore, 2017). The nuclear family has become the normative family structure and the current family dynamics is still impacted by the one child policy, as well as other government policies on birth control and housing market development plus the effects of economic growth (Xu et al, 2007).

Unlike previous generations of seniors, who were generally supported by multiple children, in contemporary China, older people cannot get the support they need from their only children. The post-socialist society being created arguably poses a threat to filial obligation (Zheng and Ho, 2016) and a 'crisis of filial piety' has emerged in both rural and urban areas (Yan, 2003; Zheng and Ho, 2016). Hu and Scott (2014) suggest that traditional family and gender values inform two sets of relations: vertically, intergenerational relations are regulated by filial piety; and horizontally, there are the gender roles that shape the relations between husband and wife. Filial piety means that

children should show respect and obedience to their parents in all circumstances (Yan, 2003). It is also 'a way to maintain social stability' and in practice it 'means there should be no disobedience and this concept recognizes that priority of paternalistic power' (Fei, 1992:130). However, Zhang and Goza (2006) argue that the Chinese family structure has been greatly impacted by the one child policy. Older kinship patterns have changed into a new dominant family structure form of 4-2-1, which consists of four grandparents, two parents and one child. Within this family structure an urban single child has nobody to share the burden of caring for two parents and four grandparents with (Zhang and Goza, 2006). Against this backdrop, and during the recent period of social transformation, there has been a decline in respect for elders and elders' power has been weakened (Jankowiak and Moore, 2017).

Parental power and authority have changed along with the transformations of the family pattern and traditional filial piety norms. The norms of filial piety have been redefined as an intergenerational exchange of thoughts and feelings, which again is different from the traditional norms around filial piety (Yan, 2016:250). Both parents and children are now mutually assisting each other (Whyte, 2005), a state of affairs which is different from the previous notion of filial piety, that of one way support from children to their elders. For example, Yan (2016:244) notes that among China's rural families, the most notable change is that youth power and autonomy have increased and parental authority declined. When Yan (2003) studied rural family private life during the 1990s he found that the generations between older and younger adults had different views on elderly support and filial piety; and in some cases, it had become an intergenerational reciprocity. Later Yan's (2016) studies from 2006 and into the 2010s also show that familism is decreasing in rural families, with rural family size in decline and family structure changed from traditional extended patterns to some new forms. Similar to Yan's view, Liu (2016) also indicates that supporting ageing parents in rural areas is shared by the family networks, which provide material as well as emotional support and personal care; and that filial piety has shifted from its traditional one way focus to mutual care, with older people performing grandparents' duties as well receiving help from their younger relatives. There is a slightly different perspective from Qi's (2016)

finding that while respect for parental authority is not high, parents' advice is still very important in the eyes of young people. Although there has been a rise in individualism and the family patterns have changed, Qi (2016) suggests that the family bond and family obligations remain strong and filial obligations continue to play an important role in the relations between parents and adult children. Nevertheless, 'the filial obligation is no longer a fixed norm but a guideline which parents and young people negotiate to operate it more flexibly and effectively' (Qi, 2016:44). In addition, in terms of family care for the ageing, there is a difference between rural and urban locations. Gu et al (2007) state that older people living in institutions are more likely to reside in urban areas. Older people in urban areas also receive more pension from their workplaces and medical care whereas in the rural areas, older people can only access limited welfare from the state (He and Ye, 2014; Ikels, 2008). Compared with the welfare available in urban areas, currently government relief services are generally only for the childless rural elderly (Ikels, 2008:19). Due to the large migrations from rural to urban areas, families have become the predominant way of supporting the ageing.

To cope with this limited welfare support for the ageing, the Chinese government has consistently reinforced the practice of filial piety by legislation. For example, a law was added to China's constitution in the 1990s to regulate family members who have primary responsibility for looking after the elderly parents (Li and Tracy, 1999; Zhang et al, 2014). In 2013, a new version of the safeguarding the rights and interests of the elderly law was implemented, with additional clauses about family support for the ageing such as 'it is children's duty to support parents, social security, social service and elders' social participation' (Zheng and Ho, 2016:450). Zheng and Ho (2016) emphasise one controversial element of the articles, which requires children who live apart from their parents to visit them 'often' to meet their parents' emotional needs. This has been interpreted by the public to mean that any failure to visit ones' parents often is a criminal act, an interpretation that has attracted much public debate.

Inheritance is another important family issue to be considered when exploring older people's views on remarriage and repatterning. During the late 1970s housing and

property in China were still rare resources due to the fact that they were primarily a welfare benefit channelled through employers by bureaucratic redistributors (Davis, 1993). With the market reforms, the concept of house ownership appeared from the 1990s and the government set about both privatising existing housing stock and building new houses, in order to expand the housing market and spur domestic demand (Croll, 2006:54). House prices and urban property tripled within the first decades of the 21st century, and home ownership has become a symbol of wealth and prestige (Zurndorfer, 2016:2). When the senior age groups think about remarriage, they must face some potential family conflicts regarding the division of property and inheritance to family members, due to the Chinese law that both the marital spouse and children are the successors first in line to inherit (Jiang, 2004). It is worth noting the current property rights under changes to the marriage laws: according to Davis (2014) the revised marriage law of 2001 has changed the property rights, weakening earlier communal claims to conjugal property and in particular threatening women's matrimonial property rights; traditionally, the expectation was that a house would be provided by the man and his family and the women and her family would furnish the new home; this put wives at a disadvantage and has a negative impact on women who are divorced or widowed.

As well as the changes to the filial piety in family relationships, people's marriages and love relationships are also embodied in everyday life and family practices. British sociologist Morgan (1996) notes that family is something individuals do in their daily lives through their everyday activities. He breaks with the format of structure and agency for studying family, instead adopting 'practice' as a way to study how people 'do family', with a particular focus on the cultural and historical influences (Jamieson, 2011). Developing on Morgan's ideas about family practice, Jamieson (2011) uses the concept of 'practices of intimacy' to research how individuals do intimacy and explore the different types of personal and intimate relationships with family relatives in various cultural settings. According to Jackson and Ho's (2020) study of women doing intimacy and practicing family in Britain and Hong Kong, 'family practice can involve anything and everything that sustains the family', including routine domestic activities, feelings, family displays and so forth (2020:116). In the Chinese cultural setting, this literature

will be useful for interpreting family relationships and norms in elderly people's everyday practice during the transformation of Chinese society. Questions to do with how older people manage their intimate lives, or their views on remarriage and repatterning, or how they negotiate their love and remarriage relationships with their extended families and kinship networks, is an issue that will be explored in later chapters.

Given the social transitions taking place in China, which are influenced by modernisation as well as traditional Chinese norms and family constraints, there is still a lack of research on how rural and urban people are dealing with love matters and negotiating their identities during later life and this is a topic worth exploring in greater detail. Although little research has been done on this area so far, recent research has explored elderly Chinese people's family relationships, caregiver and health issues (Qi, 2014; Yeh et al, 2013; Feng, 2019;Han et al, 2020). There has even been some research into intimacy and sexuality issues in later life (such as Pan and Huang, 2011;Yan et al, 2011; Shea, 2005; Wong, 2005; Chao et al, 2011) but such research seldom focuses on how elderly Chinese people view marriage and love relationships during later life. Against the backdrop of societal transformation, I will attempt to fill the gaps in our understanding of older people's intimate lives - how they make the decision to remarry, their entanglements with family and kin, and how their romantic relationships and second couplehood are negotiated with their loved ones. The aim of this study is therefore to explore elderly marriage, remarriage and cohabitation, and to locate their identities and choices within the wider social context. The relevant issues here include: the meaning of love during later life; how people deal with and negotiate their identities in relationships with family, their communities and romantic partners; whether the elderly create new meanings during the process of doing senior romance; and what the attitudes to marriage are in a rapidly changing China.

Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the relevant literature on love, marriage and intimate relationships against the background of Chinese history, China's ageing population and the Chinese family system. The older Chinese cohort's private lives, marriage and intimate relationships have been deeply influenced by their early experiences, which occurred either in the pre-Communist, Mao, or Post-Mao era. Some older people's early lives were shaped by successive political campaigns and the ideology of Maoist socialism; but even during the post-Mao era, changes to the social structure have also shaped and reshaped the relevant norms and practices in older people's everyday lives and intimate relationships. As Li (2001) notes, the transformation from Maoist socialism to Dengist capitalism is 'not only a change in a generation of leaders and government, but also more significantly a fundamental change of political ideology and developing thinking'(Li, 2001:158). In addition, the existing literature on ageing and the family in the Chinese context shows that older people's marriages and remarriages as well the relevant norms, values and ideologies have been impacted by the social and cultural and political environment. Chinese society mixes liberal and modernist ideas with traditional norms and this gives rise to tensions in how people practice their marital lives. The impact of the different historical periods on the different older cohorts' experiences and understanding of love and marriage, views on marriage in later life, and family relationships will be further revealed through my research findings. But before examining these older men and women's accounts, and the narratives of their life experiences, in the next chapter, I will first outline the methodology used in the research to conduct the fieldwork, collect and analyse the data.

Chapter 3 Methodology and Research Procedures

Introduction

I remember when Lao Mao started to talk about his late wife, he showed me a locket with her mini photo that he has worn since she died about ten years ago. He described tearfully how he had promised her 'we will never ever be apart from each other' and he used the photo as a way to stay close to his wife. This reminds me of a quote from the American film *Gone With the Wind* 'I will love you just as I do now until I die'(HistoryGypsy, 2011). However Lao Mao's behaviour showed that his late wife's love has lasted even after death parted them. At that moment I could not stop weeping in front of him as I was deeply moved. My emotional response lasted for a while before I calmed down and it continued even after the interview. I cannot count how many times I experienced this type of emotional moment throughout the fieldwork and these feelings came back again even when I was writing about participants' life experiences. The issues I faced in the process of research encouraged me to rethink the methodology and ethical issues, such as how to deal with the emotional work, how to design the interview schedules and adjust the interview questions in the process of interviews.

The aim of this project is to explore the views of elderly Chinese people on love, marriage and relationships in later life. The research questions focus on experiences of love and marriage, the older people's attitudes towards love, and the meanings they place on intimacy in old age; meanwhile, the intention is also to examine how their identities are embodied and how they negotiate their family relationships. In this chapter I will elaborate on the research design and research methods choices, my fieldwork routes through various locations in China, sample recruitment, data collection and data analysis. As a researcher I will also share some of my research experiences and the challenges faced when carrying out the interviews.

Research design and research method

The research design was decided before the data collection began and was founded on four main considerations: the goals of my research; how to achieve these goals and what types of research questions and groups of participants would be needed; what methods for data collection and data analysis would be most appropriate; and lastly, how to maintain validity and what limitations and ethical issues would be revealed through the process of doing the research.

Bearing in mind the study's aims and research questions, in-depth semi-structured interviews were employed to carry out the research. According to Gillham (2000: 11) one-to-one interviews are suitable for exploring deeper meanings; and furthermore, the semi-structured interview is able to help researchers explore interviewees' insights into the world (Bryman, 2012). From this perspective, the flexible open-ended questions asked in the semi structured interview are well suited to examining the views and opinions of the elderly on love and marriage, as well as how their identities are embodied. This in-depth interview method allows for much greater depth and detail to be revealed than would be possible with other data collection methods.

In this study, the research design and its relevant open-ended questions and interview schedules (see Appendix 2) have been designed based upon the research questions as follows:

1. What are the views regarding love and marriage over the lives of the senior age group who are in different relationships (such as cohabitation, being singleton, or in a long-lasting marriage)?
2. How is or was their love and marriage embodied throughout their life?
3. How do older people deal with and negotiate their identities between relationships with family, communities and romantic partners?
4. How do cultural values influence the older people's attitudes and choices towards love and marriage?
5. How do people negotiate their love relationships during their later life?

The participants and the locations

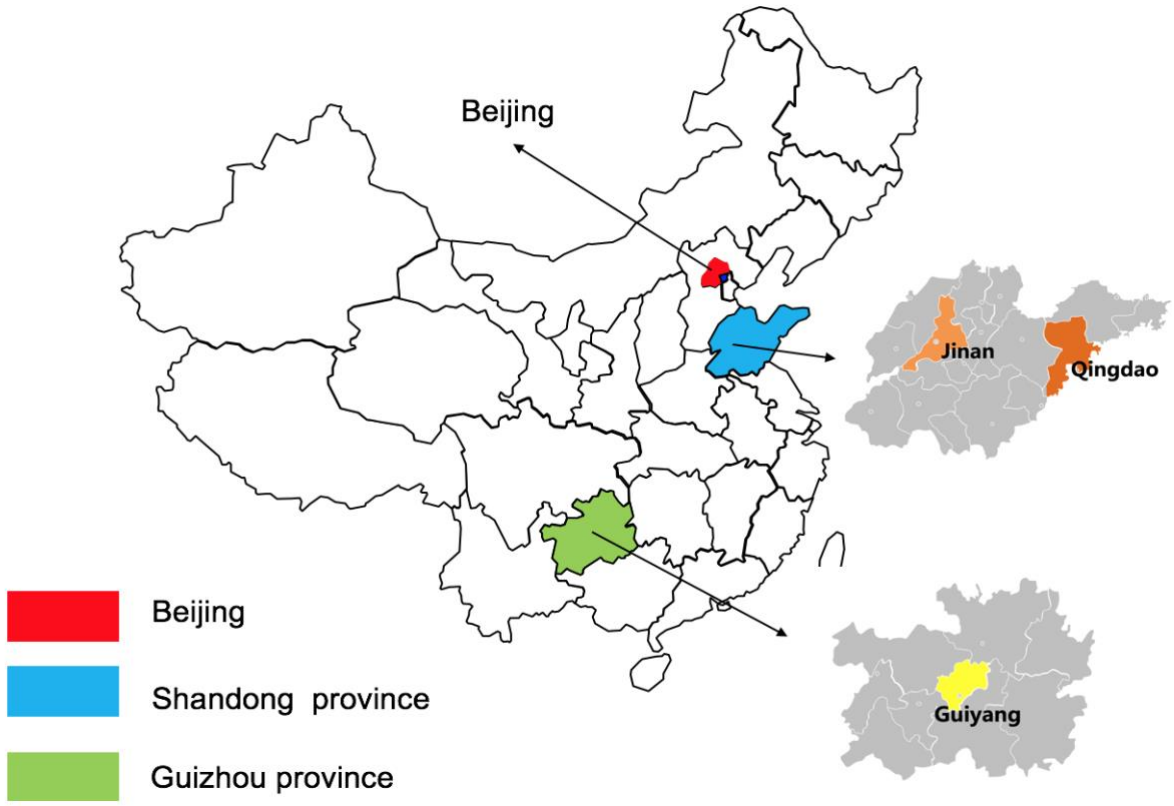


Figure 1. The four cities where my fieldwork took place

The 45 participants in the research come from four cities: Beijing, Jinan, Qingdao and Guiyang (see Figure 1). One of the reasons that I decided to carry out my fieldwork in these cities is that most of my friends and relatives are living in those places and through their social networks they could supply me some chances to access potential participants. Since East Asian societies are influenced by Confucianism, personal networks are fundamental to relationships (Park and Lunt, 2015:n.p.), therefore recruiting through personal networks works far better than any other method (Jackson et al, 2017:3). Furthermore, each city has a large population of older people, enabling me to locate a potential sample there. For example, Beijing is the capital of China and according to the '*Economic and social development report of Beijing in 2014*' the population of permanent residents who are above 60 years old had reached 3,216,000 by the end of 2014 (Beijing Municipal Bureau of Statistics, 2015). This population comprised about 15% out of the total Beijing populations (Zhang, 2016:3). On the one

hand, Beijing is an old city full of history with a rich cultural heritage, such as the Great Wall and imperial palace; on the other, it is also a very modern city with a fast developing economy and is full of high rise buildings and commercial properties. It is the economic, political and cultural centre of the country and is therefore defined as a first-tier city based on Chinese standards. Because of this political and economic advantage, the economic investment and social welfare are stronger and better than in the other cities of my fieldwork. The Beijing elderly can benefit from good medical care and basic pensions.

Figure 2-1 Beijing, street view of Haidian district (the photo was taken during fieldwork in 2017)

In addition to Beijing, I also picked two second-tier cities from Shandong province in the north: Qingdao and Jinan, because they are both mine and my grandparents' hometowns. It would be easier to obtain participants by both my friends circle and my relatives' social networks in both cities. Shandong is located in the northeast and it is one of the biggest provinces of China in terms of population, furthermore it is the birthplace of Confucius and Confucianism. Within this province there are 20 million people who are older than 60 years old (Tian, 2017). Jinan is the capital city of Shandong, has an elderly population of 1.28 million (Yu, 2017). It is also known as 'the city of springs' due to its nationally renowned hot springs. Unlike the inland cities, Qingdao (also spelt 'Tsingtao') is a famous coastal tourist city in China and it has an elderly population of approximately 1.89 million (Qingdao daily, 2017) and Qingdao is the place where I grew up. When you travel around Qingdao you will see many Western style buildings and churches (see Figure 2-2) which are a legacy of the colonial period

around the time of the World Wars, when the city was occupied first by the Germans and then the Japanese. As a consequence, some Western elements have been integrated into the city's culture such as seafood barbecue, Tsingtao Beer and the beer festival (an obvious example of the German influence). Furthermore, its advantageous geographical location has attracted business investment and trade, which have helped develop the city's economy and made Qingdao into one of the richest cities in northern China.

Figure 2-2 Qingdao: a view of the southern district.

In contrast to those cities, Guiyang is the capital city of Guizhou province in the southeast of China (see the map in Figure 1). Guiyang has a smaller population and thus the number of people above 60 is just about 0.63 million (China News, 2016). Initially, Guiyang was not one of my fieldwork locations but during my pilot study, one of my uncles who lives in Guiyang heard about my research and invited me to stay so that I could do some of my fieldwork in the city during my later data collection stage. Using his social network and personal relationships, he helped me to recruit more potential participants and access some care homes, and thanks to his kindness Guiyang became one of the cities where I undertook my summer fieldwork. I remember when I arrived in Guiyang my uncle introduced me to a rhyme about Guizhou popular since ancient times: '*the sun won't shine for more than three days, the land never can be seen plainly, the people have no money to spend'*[7]. This expression vividly depicts the character of the weather, geography and economy of the province, which is in the highlands of the

[7] In Chinese: '日无三日晴，地无三里平，人无三分银'

Yunnan-Guizhou plateau and very wet as well as mountainous (see Figure 2-3). The climate and terrain have been a barrier to economic development, which is one reason why Guiyang is not as rich as the cities of the plains like Beijing or the eastern seaboard like Qingdao. Also unlike the other cities or provinces dominated by ethnic Han (汉族), Guizhou is a multi-ethnic province and there are more than ten ethnic minority groups living in Guizhou. Unfortunately, due to the recruitment method limitation (which I will discuss later) I failed to recruit participants who come from minority ethnicity and all of my participants belong to Han ethnicity, but I can tell their food, fashions and local culture are very different from those of the north. For example when I travelled around and I was told about some interesting old customs of the local ethnic minorities such as the Miao ethnic group (in Chinese:苗族) which is one of the largest groups in Guizhou. Apparently, traditionally Miao women had to give birth to a child before they could marry the child's father, in order to prove their fertility, a custom which means that the Miao's attitudes towards cohabitation before marriage are very open by comparison with many parts of China. Another Guizhou minority, the Buyi (in Chinese:布依族) also had an unusual approach to marriage compared with mainstream China, which tends towards a female-centred family pattern. In this case, the difference is that when Buyi women get married they carry on living with their parents rather moving in with their husband or husband's parents. Although both of these customs are slowly vanishing, they do reflect how different Guizhou is from the north of China.

Figure 2-3. Two photos taken in Guizhou minority ethnic area during summer fieldwork 2017

Participants [8]

Six participants were recruited from three of the cities described above during the pilot study period from March to May in 2017 and 39 people were interviewed during my late summer fieldwork from July to September in 2017. Among the sample 25 participants are in long-lasting marriages; 14 are single (widower, widow or divorced); four participants are on their second marriage and two are cohabiting. There are 28 men and 17 women and their age range is between 51 to 96 years old. The average of all the participants' age is 70 years old and the median is 65 years old. My initial plan was mainly to interview participants who were over 60 years old or in some cases over 55 years old, the reason I decided to choose this age category is because the World Health Organisation and the Ministry of Health of China define 60 years plus as the elderly group (Tian, 2007). Furthermore, In China the retirement age is around 55 years old, which is lower than the world average (Zhao, 2015). Therefore, the people who are above 55 years old are the ideal age groups to explore in this social context. But I loosened the age limit in one particular case: Lao Ren is a 51-year-old man and has remarried with a partner who is 55 years old. He was included in the sample after I attempted to interview his wife, who unfortunately rejected me, but as her husband expressed an interest in joining the research and considering his remarriage I decided to loosen the age limit in his case. In advance of the fieldwork, I took some time to contact my family relatives and friends to ask whether they knew any older people might be willing to possibly participate in the project and I got some positive feedback, with the majority of participants being recruited through my personal connections.

The recruitment method

[8] For the list of interviewees with the personal information please refer to Appendix 1.

During the fieldwork, I accessed the participants in multiple ways (see Table 1), for example, opportunistic meetings in the public realm or parks (Ling, 84 years old; Lan, 61 years old; Lao Shi, 82 years old), three participants were obtained by asking some older people whether they would like to take part in my research. Nine participants were interviewed in care homes; apart from these, the interviewees belong to either my friends', families' or relatives' social networks and friendship circles. Snowball sampling therefore played an important part in gathering the participants in the research.

When obtaining participants from institutions, I interviewed nine participants through care homes and three participants through a local committee institution during the fieldwork. It was through my families' social network and relationship that I was able to gain access to some local care homes; for instance, my relatives introduced me to two owners of different care homes in Guiyang and a manager of a care home in Jinan. Therefore, I accessed these care homes by their permission. Different care homes are equipped with different facilities and services and they have different management rules (see Figure 3-1 in Guiyang and Figure 3-2 in Jinan).

Figure 3-1. A care home in Guiyang - on the left of the photo is the accommodation building, on the right is the sports field

Figure 3-2. The care home in Jinan where the fieldwork took place

These owners and the manager were the 'gatekeepers' in my recruitment process and were also involved in the selection of potential participants. Miller and Bell (2002:55) suggest that 'gatekeeper' is a notion commonly used in sociological and anthropological research, with much qualitative research relying on gatekeepers as an initial way to access participants. Accessing potential participants requires providing information about the research, from an ethical perspective it also puts individuals in a position whereby they can exercise choice regarding whether to give consent to participation (Mill and Bell, 2002:55). However, this choice was applicable to my research but there are some limitations of gatekeepers. On the one hand, the gatekeepers supplied me with chances to approach older people in care homes and the local committee institution, which enabled me to easily to get 'permission' to access the participants in this field; whereas, on the other hand, the gatekeepers also limited my choices of who I could access to interview and who I could not, because the participants selected or approved by the manager had to be in a good health. In addition to working with the gatekeepers, within the care homes a snowball method was also applied in order to recruit more participants. For instance, Lao Mao[9] (pseudonym, 85 years old, widower) was introduced by Lao Lee (pseudonym, 89 years old, male, widower) as both share the same hobby of photography and already knew each other from the same photographic

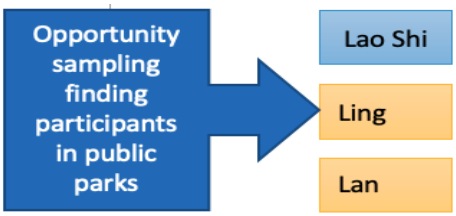
[9] In the thesis all participants' names have been changed to pseudonyms

society before they moved to the care home. When Lao Lee agreed to participate in my research, he recommended me to his friend Lao Mao and even accompanied me when I went to seek Lao Mao's permission.

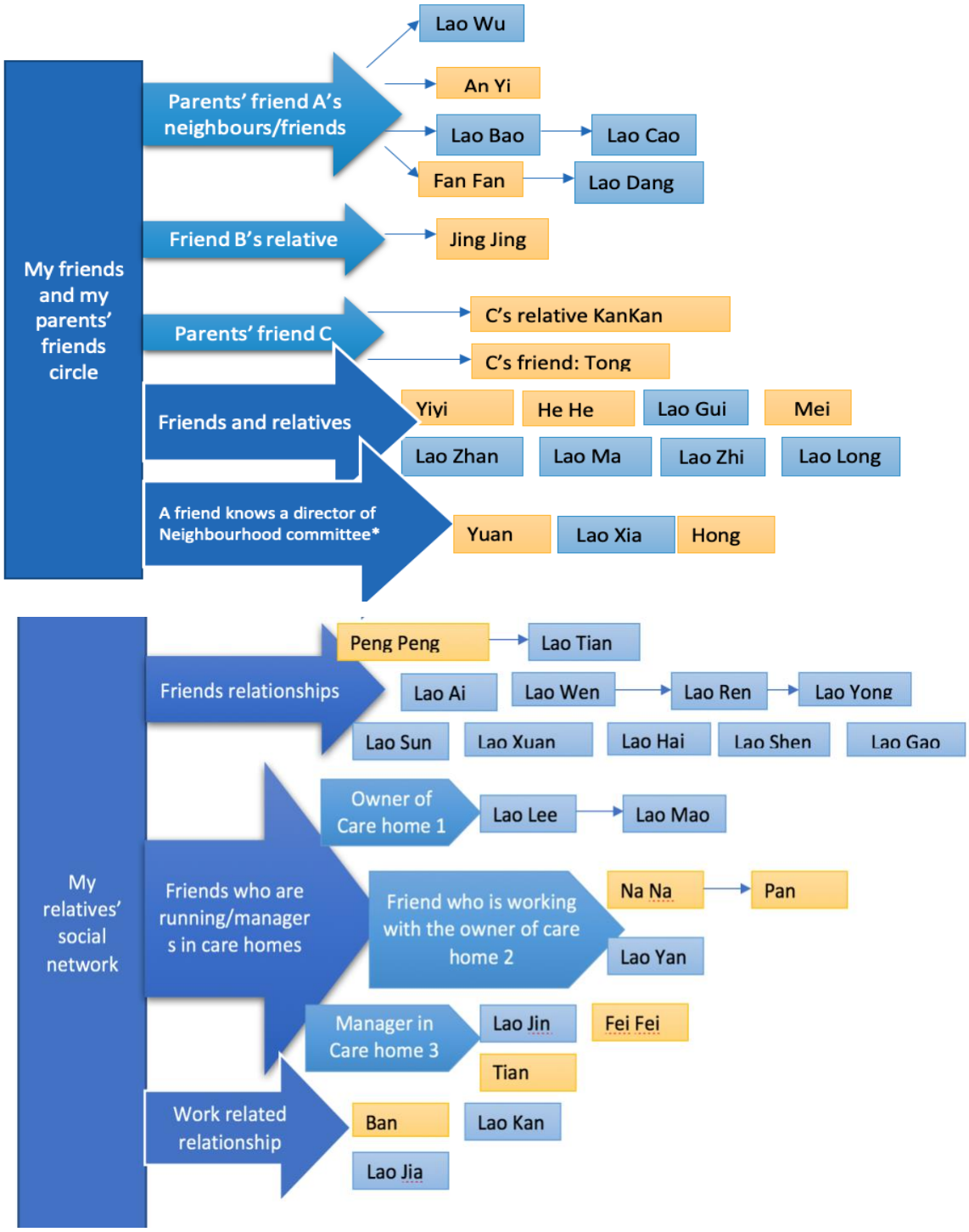
In the Confucian cultural setting, characterised by the traditional values associated with collectivist society, personal networks have become fundamental to relationships such as personal connections in blood relative networks, regional networks and school networks (Park and Lunt, 2015). During the recruitment process I relied on my blood networks more than my other connections, one reason being that older people were hard to reach through my own friendship circle who are younger, but could be found through my relatives who are of a similar age. Against this backdrop, some of the participants are my relatives or from my relatives' friendship circles; in most cases, my relatives or friends became a medium or played a bridging role between myself and the participants. Drawing on my friends' circle and relatives' social network to recruit participants enabled me to easily approach the interviewees, immediately gain their trust and thus obtain richer data from their narratives. This aspect of the recruitment process is discussed by Park and Lunt (2015) who note that in their research 'personal networks helped obtain richer data and numerous network respondents expressed the view that connections facilitated a smoother discussion'(2015:20). One case is YiYi (60 years old, female, long-lasting marriage) who is part of my parents' circle of friends and who has known me since I was a very young age. She was not merely willing to join my research project and give me very detailed views on my research topic, but also gave me a tour around her workplace and treated me to a meal afterwards. There is some mention in the literature about developing the rapport between interviewer and researched, but this 'prior relationship' as an 'acquaintance relationship' (Garton and Copland, 2010:535) has pushed the interview one step further, as it is a relationship that has evolved through everyday contexts rather than the research process (Garton and Copland, 2010:536). However, in the cultural context of Chinese Confucianism, it is worth elaborating the relationships between researcher and interviewees in more detail. Because unlike the Western emphasis on rules and the individual, the Chinese emphasise groups and relationships (Redding and Witt, 2007; Kriz et al, 2014). A relationship in Chinese is

called '*Guanxi*' and its relevant social network is the '*guanxi tree*'; *Guanxi* is considered the heart of Chinese interpersonal relationships and the key concepts within guanxi are '*renqing*'(favour) and *li-shang-wang-lai* (a favour deserves a return favour) (Kriz et al, 2014:32), which are important elements for maintaining guanxi. In addition to this, China is a low trust society and it is difficult to collect empirical data especially through face to face interviews in social research compared with the Western countries (Kriz et al, 2014). Thus *'guanxi'* becomes an important snowballing tool when recruiting the participants and gaining access to some institutions (Kriz et al, 2014:35). Therefore, I relied on my families and relatives' guanxi (tree) when accessing the potential participants and this method worked effectively in my research. However, every coin has two sides, there are also some limitations of using the *guanxi tree*, each group of samples I accessed by one guanxi shows certain levels of homogeneity. For example, as I mentioned earlier in this chapter, all my participants are *Han* ethnicity but there are no minority ethnicities. Although Guizhou province is a multi-ethnic area, due to my reliance on my uncles' social network and his guanxi tree, all of his friends belongs to the *Han* group and some of them I interviewed have even migrated from Shandong province to Guiyang city as did my uncle. This is another disadvantage to using my relative's *guanxi tree*, which meant that I could only access people from similar backgrounds as them.

Table 1. Recruitment methods and relationships between researcher and participants.[10]



[10] ***Neighbourhood committee** (in Chinese 社区居委会). The Chinese city neighbourhood committee organization law was introduced in 1990. The law defines city neighbourhood committees as self-controlled organisations. (Zhang and Goza, 2006). However the neighbourhood committees comprises the basic unit of local government and planning, including the Communist party's organisational links at the community level (Edgington, 2008:31). Their role is to deliver political welfare and organise campaigns in the local community and during my fieldwork, the director of the neighbourhood told me they often organised events such as learning cooking skills or psychological training for the area she is in charge of.


My friends and my parents' friends circle
Parents' friend A's neighbours/friends
Lao Wu
An Yi
Lao Bao
Lao Cao
Fan Fan
Lao Dang
Friend B's relative
Jing Jing
Parents' friend C
C's relative KanKan
C's friend: Tong
Friends and relatives
Yiyi
He He
Lao Gui
Mei
Lao Zhan
Lao Ma
Lao Zhi
Lao Long
A friend knows a director of Neighbourhood committee*
Yuan
Lao Xia
Hong
My relatives' social network
Friends relationships
Peng Peng
Lao Tian
Lao Ai
Lao Wen
Lao Ren
Lao Yong
Lao Sun
Lao Xuan
Lao Hai
Lao Shen
Lao Gao
Friends who are running/managers in care homes
Owner of Care home 1
Lao Lee
Lao Mao
Friend who is working with the owner of care home 2
Na Na
Pan
Lao Yan
Manager in Care home 3
Lao Jin
Fei Fei
Tian
Work related relationship
Ban
Lao Kan
Lao Jia

During the interviews: The relationship between the researcher and the participants

As a 27-year-old female PhD student, I did not concern myself too much with the details of relationships during the process of my fieldwork (in 2017) or in other words, try to unpack the power imbalance between the researcher and the researched. I took it for granted that I should show respect for them because all of my participants are older than me. Most of the participants are over 55 and therefore older than my parents, I would generally use my parents and grandparents as reference objects, calling elder men '*Bobo*' (an 'uncle' who is older than my father) or *'Shushu'* (an 'uncle' who is younger than my father) and elder women '*A-yi*' (an 'aunt' who is around my mother's age). For the most senior males, I would use '*Yeye*' ('grandpa') and for women '*Nainai*' ('grandma') if they were my grandparents' age (over 80). It is only now when I recall my experiences during the fieldwork that I notice these appellations which I took for granted and to some extent reveal the cultural hierarchy, which in Chinese Confucian cultural contexts can be attributed to the expectation of respect for elders. This also applied in my interviews, when I would use the proper appellations for each participant and they in turn would call me 'Xiao Li' ('Xiao': 'Little', in particular, younger people). When I finished my fieldwork, I used the pseudonym '*Lao*'(老*Lao*, means 'old' but in a respectful way when referring to an aged male of the same peer group or used in casual way in writing, 'Lao' here is also used with a respectful meaning) to address male interviewees. Both the appellations and the use of '*Xiao*' reveal certain degrees of hierarchy due to the age gaps between the researcher and the researched because in these circumstances I am in the same generation as my participants' children, for some the same age as their grandchildren. These appellations were also a culturally appropriate way for me to develop a rapport during the interview by practising respect for the participants.

Sometimes this respect was also embodied in behaviour, such as in some situations I took responsibility for catering for the participants' practical needs while they talked, refilling their glasses of water or cups of tea but my actions were not reciprocated by the

interviewees. Despite these appellations and practices being part of the overall cultural background, after finishing the interviewing and from the data results, I can now see what was going on below the surface, as there is also a symbolic boundary between different generations. For example, before one participant shared her experiences, she said to me: 'Xiao Li, you are still young and have not experienced marriage, you would not understand this …'. At times such as this I felt excluded as a researcher from a younger generation, not having been through similar experiences or life stages.

The pilot study and a shift in focus

If the research was a musical, I would say that the pilot study was similar to the dress rehearsal for the main performance. Once my application had been approved by the University of York ethics committee, I travelled back to China and conducted the pilot study between late March and the middle of May 2017. This journey not only gave me the chance to explore multiple approaches to recruiting potential participants, exercising my research routes plan and testing my guide questions for the in-depth semi-structured interview, but also helped me to shift the focus of the project away from my earlier research proposal. There were four main influences on this adjustment to my plans after the pilot study: 1. Research sample focus. 2. Research questions and recruitment approach and 3. Research areas.

For the sample focus, in the early stages of my research the sample was designed to focus on single older people. The reason for this stemmed from my initial motivation to engage in the project. My initial plan was to focus on the group of older singletons, and this idea was traced back to my motivation to start the research. This motivation began with the reports that some older people have joined public matchmaking events to seek a new partner, and this group attracted me to explore their attitudes towards love and marriage among the single elderly. When I started the pilot study, I mainly recruited seniors who were single; However meanwhile I wondered about the views on love and

marriage amongst other groups, and I also found one participant who was cohabitating and then two participants in long lasting marriages. These cohabiting or married participants impressed me with their vivid and touching love stories. For instance, they recalled how their feelings had changed over time and at the different stages of their lives. The reality behind their feelings was that they were still living a married life or equivalent and experiencing love. It also revealed their various attitudes towards second couple-hood and remarriage. Compared with the singleton participants, the narratives of married people can provide more abundant details about their current married lives; the fruitful definition of love based on the different individuals' life experiences attracted me to continue exploring. This opened my mind to expanding the sample categories to incorporate elderly singletons, single older people cohabiting and married couples in long-lasting partnerships. It also contributed to the 39 participants in my later fieldwork representing a diverse set of views about relationships, love and marriage.

In terms of the interview questions, some ideas and issues emerged from the pilot study and from what the participants had to say about the topic. These were factors that I had not considered during the initial stages of my research, but which were nevertheless worth exploring and so they were added into my questions outline and applied into my fieldwork that summer. For instance, when I was collecting data in Beijing, through both casual talk and interviews, the elderly cohabitation phenomenon was perceived as generally acceptable and considered the 'best choice for the older generation' (such as Lan, 61, divorced, female; Hong, 65, widow, female). In order to examine this opinion in more depth, I added questions relating to this in the interview schedule for the second stage of fieldwork. Another example is 'hukou' [11] which had been brought up as an issue for elderly people seeking potential partners in Beijing. When I interviewed Lan

[11] hukou: or household registration system, which for decades classified people as urban (non-agricultural) or rural (agricultural) and outsider/insider according to where they were born, not where they reside. Begun in the 1950s as a way for the government to distribute resources from the centrally planned economy and to limit population mobility to prevent overcrowding in cities (Wallis, 2016, available at: https://cpianalysis.org/2016/10/10/hukou-reform-and-chinas-migrant-workers/)

and Hong in Beijing, they both thought that the citizens of Beijing believe hukou is the most important factor to consider when thinking about finding a new partner; they would not consider a partner whose hukou was in another area outside of Beijing. This revelation encouraged me to think about geographical differences and regional discrimination and I set a question asking participants: 'How important is hukou when you are looking for a potential partner?' In addition to this, the pilot study tested all of my questions effectively. Some parts of the participants' narratives did not attract my attention but when I was coding the transcript for my first round data, I noticed how useful each question was. Such as when I asked, 'Can you introduce yourself?', some participants narrated their background, where and how they grew up in very fine detail, this was a very good and flexible way to learn about their basic information, such as family background and social status and even the social milieu in which they are living. These fruitful, detailed experiences have given me valuable materials for my analysis.

Ethical issues

Ethics and accessing care homes

Before I started the fieldwork, my research proposal was approved by the ethics committee of the university of York. At the beginning of each interview I would give the participant information sheet and consent form (See Appendix 3 and Appendix 4) to sign and ask the participant's permission to record the interview. A few of the participants are illiterate, therefore I read the consent form and got their oral permissions. To make sure the participants' information remains confidential, I also told them the recordings would only be listened to by me and all their names would be changed to pseudonyms. Throughout the research, in order to record my fieldwork and reflections in more detail, as well as tape recording the interviews I also employed some supplementary strategies. One of these was taking a few photos (such as those shown in previous sections) to remind me of the fieldwork locations, the places of interview or

certain people I have interviewed. Regarding the latter, I took photos with their permission but considering the ethics issue I will not be releasing their photos, either in my thesis or in public. After the fieldwork, in terms of the data security and confidentiality, I stored the recording data on my laptop with a password and after doing the fieldwork trips and my flight back from China to the UK, I locked the finished transcripts hard copies and backup recordings USB in my university office drawer to comply with data confidentiality.

In addition to recording the interviews, keeping a research diary is an important tool throughout my research life. Before I started the fieldwork, my supervisors advised me to keep a fieldwork diary, primarily I thought it was just one method to record fieldwork but I did not realise how useful it would be until I engaged in later data analysis and even when I was writing up my analysis chapters. I made some fieldwork diaries that roughly recorded some of the interviewees' key information and their stories, as well as my feelings and reflections. In Emerson et al (1995:14) it is suggested that 'fieldwork researchers seek to get close to others in order to understand their way of life. To preserve and convey that closeness, they must describe situations and events of interest in detail'. Such strategies have been very helpful in terms of dealing with my emotions or when writing up my fieldwork following an interview. Due to the many ethical issues involved I did not anticipate beforehand, particularly when I collected data inside the care homes, my fieldwork notes and diary helped me record my reflections on some ethical issues I faced throughout the fieldwork and here I will draw on some specific ethical issues to unpack this in more detail. As a particular place to recruit my potential participants in care homes, it is necessary to illustrate how I had to keep adjusting and negotiating the ethical standards depending on the rules of different care homes; and how the owner/manager of the care homes played the role of 'gatekeeper' helping me to select the categories of participants and exclude others in the field.

In the Chinese cultural setting, the care home is regarded as a special case due to the fact that family members are considered responsible for their elders, unlike in Western countries where the government and state support the elderly via welfare services

(Zhang, 2016: 9). As one of my relative's friends told me when they heard I was doing fieldwork in care homes, 'I absolutely won't send my parents to a care home unless I die'. In China, the practice of filial piety has a long history, thus sending the elderly to homes is not an 'honourable' thing to do for either the parents or their children, as it goes against the traditional norms and values of Chinese culture. However, among my participants, most of them have particular reasons for being in a care home, as these brief excerpts from the interviews illustrate: 'I asked my children to find a care home for me as they are all getting old and have to look after their grandchildren, they are very busy' (NaNa, 94 years old); 'I can't get used to living here, my children have sent me here twice in the past three months … but when I got back to the empty home I felt more lonely' (Lao Mao, 85 years old); 'I am too old and I really need a carer to look after me 24 hours a day' (Lao Yan, 96 years old).

Along with the recruitment process, some ethical issues were exposed that I did not expect to face prior to carrying out the research in these institutions and which encouraged me to adjust the ethical procedures at different stages of the research. Miller and Bell (2002) suggest that consent should be ongoing and renegotiated between researchers and the researched throughout the research process. Although the ethics and consent form had been approved by the university before the fieldwork, due to different care homes each having their specific rules and regulations, I needed to keep renegotiating and adjusting the ethical procedures throughout the fieldwork. For example, when I was conducting the study in the care home of Jinan, and before I got access to my potential participants, in order to ensure my interviews were at minimal risk and to reduce any potential emotional harm to the interviewees there, the manager checked whether my consent form and interview questions were 'safe' from an emotional perspective and suitable for their residents. Afterwards the manager talked me through the care home regulations and asked me to comply: I promised that I would not disturb the participants' timetables, as they have rigid rest and lunch breaks; I agreed to keep the duration of interview to less than one hour per participant and that if I failed to finish in one hour, I would separate the interview into two periods of the day. Such details were not part of my submission to the university ethics committee but when I

encountered them in the field, I needed to abide by them nevertheless and adjusted my original plan as an important part of the ethics process. As a result of these new and additional requirements, before conducting a care home interview I had to show the participant both the initial consent form and the care home's instructions. I tried my best to finish my interview in one hour and in some cases, divided my interview between different periods of the day or conducted the interview over two days.

I accessed the homes through their owners or through the managers working on the premises, these people playing the 'gatekeeper' role and supplying me with a limited number of potential participants. Most were concerned about their elderly residents' health situations and the need to negotiate with the elderly's own willingness to participate in the research. In some cases it was necessary to get the permission of family members as well. For example, Lao Jin (83 years old, male, long lasting marriage) and his wife are living in a care home together, and his daughter was visiting them when the manager negotiated to obtain Lao Jin's permission to be interviewed. Lao Jin showed his willingness to join the project, his wife and daughter also supported his decision and cooperated with the carer to supply us with a quiet space to complete the interview. According to Bell and Nutt (2002) the implications of the gaining access and obtaining informed consent should be placed during the early stage of the research in certain institutions, especially where those people are considered to belong to 'vulnerable' categories such as people who are older or those who have mental health problems (Bell and Nutt, 2002: 74). In the case of the care homes I approached, the participants I had chosen were generally filtered by the managers or the owners in advance of the interview based on the pool of information concerning the older people's health situation. After this process, they selected some 'suitable' potential participants for me and excluded those who were not in good enough health to be interviewed. For example, in the second care home in Guiyang, the manager selected a healthy senior lady who her carer described as follows: 'although she is 94 years old she is still keeping healthy and is glad to talk to people with an open-mind.' Likewise, in Jinan, the manager told me that some of the residents suffered from dementia and would not be able to communicate with me, so instead she selected some potential participants who

were comfortable talking and then they guided me to the participants' rooms and asked their willingness to take part in my research. This method of choosing from a pool of the 'healthy' enabled me to reduce the risk of causing harm to the participants. To ensure voluntary participation, I would double check their willingness and then give them consent form to make sure of their voluntary participation. It is very important to double check when access relies on a gate-keeper, to ensure participants do not feel obligated to participate. Except for two older people who immediately declined to participate in the study when the staff asked them, the rest of the participants were interested in my project and glad to share their life stories and opinions. Most of them are living in a single room of the care homes, possibly many miles away from their families and most of the time just stay in their rooms. Some of them feel lonely, therefore they welcomed having a listener to talk to. Some of them even invited me to visit them again after the interview was done, such as Lao Yan who suggested, 'Would you like to visit me again before you go back to the UK? Even after you go back we can still talk by overseas call '.

Dealing with emotions during or after the interviews

According to the research methods literature, it is almost inevitable that emotions will be involved when touching on sensitive issues for the participants and/or interviewers. Qualitative research, particularly with topics which are highly personal, threatening or confidential, can sometimes be a stressful experience for both interviewer and interviewee (Lee, 1993: 102; Brannen, 1988). As Dickson-Swift et al (2007: 328) note, when researchers and respondents enter into the interview situation they are also entering into each other's lives. Interviewees are allowing researchers into their lives, telling them details about their personal life, feelings and their experiences. In my research, we touched on topics that led to the participants recalling their memories, for example, the partner who has died or from whom they had divorced. In some cases some participants' responses about their personal experience would also arouse emotional distress. Twenty participants in the sample had experienced the loss of a

partner, divorce or remarriage. More than half showed evidence of emotional reflection, such as keeping silent for a while, weeping, sighing, repeating their thoughts and so forth, to some extent during the interview.

There were two things to think about connected with the emotional issues that emerged through the research: on the one hand, it was clear that the degree at which questions become 'sensitive' might be different for different individuals; on the other, I realised that I could not ignore the issue of how a researcher copes with the emotions generated by the interview process, both their own and the feelings experienced by the researched.

In advance of the interview, at the early stages of the research, I thought some of the questions I had devised would definitely not be harmful, but when carrying out the fieldwork they would be deemed as 'sensitive' for certain specific interviewees. For example, when one participant was interviewed in a care home, I asked him to introduce himself then he started to recall sad life experiences from his youth. The memory of his father's death and his mother's remarriage triggered deep emotions and he wept when recalling the sad events of his early life. Band-Winterstein et al (2014: 532) note that '[some sensitive] research might create feelings of vulnerability. It may raise and bring back to life traumatic events from the past. And memories that were forgotten or hidden resurface and bring with them emotional responses'. However, this emotional reflection caused me to refresh my definition of the 'sensitive questions' because even though this starting question was used with other interviewees without any emotional effect, it became an emotionally loaded question when this particular participant was recalling his sad memories. Sometimes strong emotions resulting from personal experiences were aroused, the other example being a participant who had divorced and then remarried; unfortunately, after her marriage she found out that the man was mentally ill and unable to play the role of husband. In this context, many of the questions referring to current marital relationships, past experiences and family relationships became 'sensitive' for her, which meant that I had to keep adjusting my way of asking these questions during the interview.

In terms of coping with emotional situations, as Lee (1993:105) suggests, it has to be managed during the course of interviewing as there are certain sensitive topics which might produce some degrees of distress. I found that dealing with the participants' emotional reflections was one of the biggest challenges during the fieldwork, as different participants would release various degrees of emotion. In the first example above, we stopped the interview for a while and I told the participant that those bad experiences were all in the past, then shifted the topic of conversation to a more casual subject, talking about his hobby. He likes photography and he showed me his photo album and described the stories behind the photos. At that moment, I felt the relationship between researcher and researched shifting into a friendship; we talked in a friendly way, sharing thoughts and experiences with each other to make the situation more comfortable. As Dickson-Swift (2007:336) notes that it is possible that the boundaries between researcher and research participant can be blurred when the researcher and interviewee engage on a personal level during 'emotion work'. Emotion work is 'generally used to refer to the work involved in dealing with other people's emotions' (James, 1989:16). In addition, researchers can show care, empathy, offer support and express their own emotions (Dickson-Swift, 2007) during the interview process. I found that I used different strategies for coping with emotion depending on the participant's situation: in the second case above, in order to protect the participant, the interview had to be paused multiple times to reduce her sadness; moreover, with her permission, a volunteer with a background in psychology was invited to help raise her mood back in the local community.

During the research process, stress and strong emotions can be felt by both interviewer and interviewed. I sometimes wept or became immersed in my emotions, influenced by my participants' experiences and their often intensely personal stories. With the example I mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, when I wept when Lao Mao showed me his dead wife's mini photo, later in my research diary I wrote: '*I felt so sad for the whole day after the interview, I cried out and thus released my sadness on my way back. I could not help myself out of that sad mood for a while, so I called my mom before I returned to my living place*'. Writing a diary and calling my family or friends for

comfort became common ways for me to relieve my sad mood or keep calm after an emotional interview. While I was expecting these kinds of emotional experiences to occur during the fieldwork, I did not anticipate that the emotional work would continue after the fieldwork had been completed. For instance, when I was told that one of my oldest participants had died after I returned to the UK, I cried for him. After our interview, he had asked me to keep in touch and to remember to call him after the fieldwork finished. About four months later, after the fieldwork that took place in August 2017, I called his phone and was planning to wish him a happy new year but was informed by his family that he had already died. I was shocked by this sad news and I wrote about my feelings in the research diary *'...recently I am immersed in this sad mood when I think of his death, and I am feeling very guilty that I did not call him earlier. He had given me a precious gift during his later period of life—his valuable interview and his love story, but I did not call him earlier before he left the world, such a pity and I feel so guilty...*' I was struggling to deal with my sadness due to this unforeseen circumstance. I talked to the people around me such as friends in the UK, had video chats with family in China and even talked to my academic supervisors during our meetings. Thanks to their comfort and encouragement, I was able to get through this difficult time.

Concealed 'truth' during the interview

The varying degrees of 'sensitivity' of the participants to the questions I asked helped me to realise, to some extent, the influence this had on the researched during the interview process. Lee and Renzetti (1990) claim that researchers cannot know what is sensitive or taboo until they carry out the interview. But I did not anticipate that 'sensitive' or 'taboo' questions would have other side effects such as the interview as a 'performance' when participants recounted their life stories, they would present only what they wanted the researcher to hear. In this section, I will draw on two cases from my research to illustrate this particular ethical issue.

Randall and Phoenix (2009:130) argue that participants are not telling us the truth rather interpretations of the facts they have chosen to recount. An example where this point of view could apply was during my second stage of the fieldwork in Guiyang, with a participant who had been introduced to me by a relative of mine. After the interview finished and the participant had left the interview location, one of my relative's friends who knows the interviewee well had a casual talk with me and asked 'did he mention he is having an affair in your interview?' He then proceeded to tell me that the participant is currently engaged in an extra-marital affair that his wife possibly does not know about. Moreover, the interviewee's lover is about 30 years younger than him and they have been conducting this secret relationship for a few years now. Despite the obvious significance of the relationship, the participant did not say a single word about the affair during his interview, instead he praised his marriage and criticised people with a second family or mistress, and even showed me some pictures and videos of him with his wife looking after their granddaughter to prove how happy and harmonious his marriage is. This image fits with a normative family and social expectations. A result of this interview, I realised that the other interviewees might possibly have withheld some information and kept some thoughts or feelings hidden from me, just as this man had kept his affair hidden, and the fact that he is having an affair is even more ironic when compared with some of the views he expressed in his interview.

The other obvious example of non-disclosure happened later in the research period in Beijing, when a participant (given the pseudonym 'Mrs D' in methodology chapter) was introduced to me by my parents' friend 'Ann' (also a pseudonym). Mrs D is Ann's uncle, D's second wife. Before the interview, Ann told me that Mrs D had once played the role of mistress in D's last marriage; then D divorced his wife and married her. Ann told me that all her family believe Mrs D acted 'immorally', that she 'destroyed' her uncle's first marriage and as result of this none of Ann's family members accept Mrs D and have had no contact with her or D for a long time. After the divorce, D's only son lived with D and Mrs D became his stepmother. However Mrs D did not do a good job and as a consequence D's son died from gas poisoning. Because of Mrs D's fertility problem she was unable to have a child and later on in her life she adopted one of her

sister's daughters. But according to Ann's account, Mrs D's adopted daughter had a bad relationship with Mrs D due to their constant arguments and they have not spoken to each other for several years. The daughter still calls Mrs D 'aunty' rather than mother and is still much closer to her biological parents.

When it came to the interview, I was surprised by Mrs D's version of events, which was totally different from the one Ann had given me before the interview. For instance, Mrs D concealed the adoptive relationships between her and her daughter, rather she said that she had given birth to her only daughter and that because she was a teacher she had to obey the 'one child policy' or she would have lost her job. Furthermore, according to her narrative they have a very good mother-daughter relationship; in addition, she concealed her husband's divorce history but emphasised how full of family responsibilities both her and her husband's lives are. I did not expect there to be such big contradictions between Mrs D's version of her life story and the account that Ann had given me to before the interview. Especially when I recalled that Ann mentioned the family ties excluded Mrs D because of her previous 'immoral mistress' role, I realized that judgements about individual behaviour can be established on a collective basis, in this case family ties influenced her narratives of the past and the present. Given that Mrs D's 'personal troubles' took place in this collective context alongside much broader changes in Chinese society and the historical process, she possibly used certain techniques to adjust her life stories to fit the social and collective mainstream values and norms.

One reason for this may be because the past per se is a moving target, along with time, where people's perception of the truth, both the experience of the past and the perceiving of further are continually changing (Randall and Phoenix, 2009:127). This moving target concept highlights how the narratives of one's life experiences are fluid, because one's precepts of history, present and future are entangled and the perceptions keep on changing. As Mishler (1999:5) said, 'as we access and make sense of events and experiences in our past and how they are related to our current selves, we change their meanings.' Similarly, in Riessman's (2002) study of a woman's account of her

multiple miscarriages, due to the woman using a chaotic account for her infertility rather than directly responding to his questions, she analyses her narrative as a performance. She points out that:

> 'personal narratives are, at core, meaning-making units of discourse. They are of interest precisely because narrators interpret the past in stories, rather than reproduce the past as it was' (Riessman, 2002:713).

Miller (2000:19) makes a related point about the interview process, that it is not their history we are hearing, but their story. This also applied to Mrs D's case, through Ann's description of Mrs D both the women's infertility and her previous 'mistress role' are stigmatised in the social cultural milieu. From a feminist perspective 'truths are socially constituted within male-dominated disciplines' (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002:63). In Chinese male dominated society, for Mrs D to avoid her gendered identities being shamed by the culture and its values, she was doing a type of performance in front of the researcher and weaved her ideal identity into her life stories about the past, giving an account based on how she wants to be displayed rather than narrating the past as it was.

It is also worth noting that, in these two cases, intermediaries played an important role in exposing the participants' 'secrets' to the researcher and revealing the ethical issues that arise from the discrepancies in the accounts given. The interviewees are in closer relationships with the intermediaries than the researcher is. In the first case, they are in a friendship, and in the second case they are relatives. In the social context they inhabit, having an affair in marriage or playing the role of mistress is still considered a 'dishonourable' thing to do, therefore the interviewees concealing the truth about their life experiences can be seen as a way of avoiding a loss of honour or preventing others from making moral judgements about them. Moreover, in the second case, Mrs D also hid the truth about her adopted daughter and never mentioned her stepmother experience. Rather, she depicted a very ordinary and happy family for me. Park and Lunt (2015) suggest that when they studied a similar Confucianism cultural setting in South Korea such 'respect for honour' was related to the 'traditional value placed on personal success and a good reputation, with personal success being judged by honour and reputation rather than income or wealth' (Park and Lunt, 2015: 9). This

interpretation could partly apply in this circumstance too, as living in a social network people have to think about and protect their 'honour' and reputation in their circle of friends, in order to maintain their bonds with others in a collectivist context.

From the researcher's perspective, our perceptions of the participants' narratives will also result in different understandings and various accounts, depending on the listeners' background, age, personal experience and culture. As an outsider's viewpoint, that of the objective researcher, when looking at what the pilot study reveals I have had to rethink the relationships between me and the researched. From the age hierarchy and generation gap perspective, the interviewees possibly withheld their experiences in an attempt to maintain the image expected of them, that of a 'respectable elder'. This has also helped to me realise the dilemma inherent in the in-depth semi-structured interview, that during the interview the interviewees hold the power regarding what to say and what to keep hidden, and that as a researcher I can only ever access part of their life stories. This includes my other interviewees, who also probably hid or embellished some truths, as they had the choice to express only what they wanted me to hear in the interview. Furthermore people might reconstruct their past life stories from the standpoint of the present to fit in with the current social norms and value system, however the necessity to reconstruct the past from the present standpoint may apply to our everyday lives too.

Data analysis

I used multiple data analysis methods when carrying out the research, as well as grounded theory and the life course method. Grounded theory is a systematic set of data collection and analysis procedures for developing and inductively deriving theory from data (Eaves, 2001; Strass and Corbin, 1990, 1994). Morse and Field (1995:157) explain that 'researchers must systematically categorize data and limit theorising until patterns in the data emerge from the categorising operation'. Grounded theory is suitable for my

research on Chinese intimate love and marriage in later life because, first of all, adopting this inductive approach gives me a framework to enable the findings to be derived from the data; second, this research method can help 'researchers concentrate on what people do and the meanings they make of their actions and on the situations in which they are involved '(Thornberg and Charmaz, 2014:3). It has helped me to explore the underlying meanings of the participants' attitudes, perceptions and decision making about marriage and love and how these individuals' intimate practice are set against the background of social transformation in China.

The research procedure mainly referenced the diagram of Strauss and Corbin (1990) and diagrammatic of Charmaz's (1983) multi-step analysis technique. I travelled to multiple locations in China multiple times and I split the interviews into three stages: the first stage was the pilot study stage where I travelled to three cities (Qingdao, Beijing and, Jinan) and interviewed six participants, three women and three men. After the first round of data collection I manually transcribed the data, coded and derived different themes from the data set. Drawing on grounded theory, the early stage of the data analysis mostly involved line by line coding and the codes that reflected the raw data, I followed some tips from Oktay (2012) when I was doing open coding such as, 'code words and phrases that describe or evoke strong emotions; reflects symbolic interaction concepts; or some red flags like phrases that reflect assumptions'(Oktay, 2012: 57). There are some methods to tease out themes, for instance, when a number of participants talked about their married lives referring to the historical period of Chinese Culture Revolution, I found that these stories suggest an important cultural theme. After categorising some common codes, key concepts and themes started to emerge from the data such as men and women's different attitudes to remarriage or cohabitation, or the different definitions of love and marriage given by the interviewees. These contribute to the assumptions that the elderly's values and attitudes towards love and marriage may differ depending on gender or class influences. Due to the limited numbers of the sample, these limited concepts became a guideline to help me to refine my initial interview questions and adjust my research focus to apply them into my later fieldwork. In the second stage, I went back to fieldwork again and interviewed another 20 people in

two cities (Qingdao and Guiyang). Data transcription and coding began along with the fieldwork and in this stage I found further coding and conceptual categories, for example, the importance of political ideology and its links to love and marriage, some more concrete definitions of love and marriage, intimate relationships and family relationships. These results tested the assumptions from the first stage and led to the third stage. In the third stage I travelled to two more cities (Jinan and Beijing) to interview 19 participants, primarily to fill out the dimensions and properties of the previous conceptual categories until they reached saturation point.

It is worth mentioning that memo writing took place throughout the research, during the fieldwork, each of the data analysis stages and even when I was writing up. According to Glaser (1978:83) a memo is 'the theorising write up of ideas about codes and their relationships as they strike the analyst while coding', while Gibbs (2007:30) sees memos are 'a way of theorizing and commenting as you go about thematic coding ideas and about the general development of the analytic framework'. As well as memo writing and coding manually, I also made use of NVivo software to help me code, make coding comparisons and for memo writing, all of which were useful during the later stages for identifying the core coding categories and tying the theory together.

The life course approach is another method I referenced while carrying out the interviews and data analysis. This approach was not initially in my proposal plan and did not appear until I was doing the second stage of data collection in the fieldwork, as more my data codes and coding categories derived from the data began to show that individual life experiences and biographies were entangled with dramatic social change and involved in different segments of history. In spite of the fact that grounded theory enabled me to construct a theoretical structure, it cannot provide more insight into how individual life experiences, perceptions, love and marriage practice changed with their chronology of ageing, their historical time or even their early years in the family environment. As Hockey and James (2003:89) suggest 'life course is a fluid and ever-changing experience, not susceptible to fixed or even sequential stages'. In addition to this, the life course method also gives information from both the macro level - by

uncovering changes in orientations and attitudes across cohorts in countries undergoing rapid social change; and the micro level through research on connections and personal lives (Giele and Elder, 2013), practices and contradictions in practice, drawing on how both personal experience and social interaction, collectivities and institutions (Connell, 1991:143) contribute to identify how people's life experiences, norms and practices are shaped by the fluid macro level social milieu. With awareness of these issues, I adjusted my interview questions, instead of asking direct questions about opinions towards love and marriage, the interview questions were carried out in more open-ended form, for example, 'How/when did you meet your (late/present) husband/wife? ', 'Have you and your husband/wife faced any challenges in marriage? …and how do you overcome it? ', 'Who do you live with?'. This type of open question encourages participants to provide rich narratives about their life experiences with ageing, different life patterns, interactions and norms practices between their ageing process and the changing of the social order. Therefore the data analysis was also an integrative process, which took place alongside generating the data.

Conclusion

This chapter has supplied the major parts and procedures of my research methodological approach, the reasons that I choose the methods and how I applied them into my fieldwork research, data collection and data analysis. Although the research process was a challenge because research per se is an unpredictable process and the issues that appear in fieldwork are rarely what one would expect, however this unpredictability can yield some interesting insights. For example, the ethical issues that I faced encouraged me to rethink my research design, the relationships between the interviewees and researcher, and the researcher's role as insider and outsider. And I also felt the fieldwork process was not purely doing research, rather it was a deeply emotional involvement and engagement throughout the research. With these experiences, the findings emerged from my data analysis, some of which I had not anticipated at the outset of my research, for

instance although I initial aimed was to explore the Chinese older people's love and marriage whereas my data displayed how the different historical political atmospheres shaped their love and marriage (Chapter 4); or they gave me various unexpected definitions of love and marriage (Chapter 5); beyond the choices of love and remarriage, the family relationship negotiation play an important role in later life (Chapter 6); and this also gave rise to some moral issues in love and remarriage against the Chinese cultural hierarchy context (Chapter 7).

Chapter 4 When Love and Marriage Emerge in a Political Atmosphere

Introduction

My maternal grandparents were born around 1937 and their marriage has lasted for more than 50 years. In their bedroom, their black and white 'wedding picture' has been hanging on the wall for as long as I can remember. It was taken over 50 years ago (in 1963) and they are dressed in what looks like worker's uniforms without any pattern, and as a wedding photo, their dress looks too simple without any decoration or makeup. On the other side of the photo frame are their colourful and Western style wedding anniversary pictures, which were taken in 2013 for their 'golden wedding' (50 years anniversary). Although they look old, they are dressed following the fashion style of younger marrying couples, my maternal grandmother in a Western wedding dress with long veil, beautiful hair with decoration, and my maternal grandfather in a wedding black suit with a proper hat. This memory invokes in me the thought that these dramatically different images depict the two completely different societies that have existed in China during their lifetimes. I recall that a couple years ago, when I asked my maternal grandfather why he decided to marry my grandmother, he said '*during that time your grandmother's family Chengfen (in English: political class status) was better than mine, as they belonged to the 'poor peasant' class and her father used to be in the Red Army*'. At the time, I did not realise the significance of his personal choice and how it was interwoven with a specific period in Chinese history. However, it was only when I was doing my thesis, that all the fragments of memory flowed through my mind and began to piece together. This gave me a clue, guiding me to explore further how their love and married life moved along with the times during the Mao and post-Mao eras in China.

In this chapter, I will unpack the political influences on my research participants' marriage and marital choices, both in the Mao era (before 1976) and post-Mao era which I discussed in Chapter Two. I will first explore some findings that reveal how the older participants' love and marriage experiences were shaped by the political

background during the Mao era; I will then examine how the ideological shifts manifest in the post-Mao era impacted on spousal choices, with particular emphasis on changing values associated with the economic reforms.

Marital choices and ideology in the Mao era

Marriage and love against the background of political campaigns

The political influences on individuals' lives explored in this section can be traced back to before the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. As I discussed in Chapter Two, major political campaigns took place during the early stages of the revolution between 1946 and 1956 such as the land reform, agricultural collectivization and the nationalization of industry. These political campaigns were state-led and targeted to eliminate the social structural inequality of pre-revolutionary society in both rural and urban areas (Selden and Lee, 2007). Of particular note was the land reform movement, which took place between 1946 and 1953 and was rooted in the intra-village system, whereby privately-owned lands were confiscated and assigned to the poor. This land confiscation knocked over the privilege of the rural elite and the redistribution satisfied the landless and land poor (Selden and Lee, 2007:2). This social-political context, according to Selden and Lee (2007) gave rise to the power of the local party leadership, as the local cadres directly controlled the village labour. The land reform broke down the existing class structure which eliminated the rural elites in the villages. Against this social background, people were categorised into different classes based on their purported positions pre-land reform and during the late 1940s and early 1950s; the Chinese government labelled all families by their 'Chengfen' (class of political background) meaning that family class definition had a profound influence on people's lives (Selden and Lee, 2007; Zhang, 1999).

However, the definition of one's 'class origins' is 'purported' in the sense that the labels were not really based on the ownership of lands or property, rather the labelling was determined by the local leaders. For example, Lao Shen (Long Lasting Marriage-Male-81 years old-Jinan) belonged to the 'middle peasant' class as he was adopted by his uncle, even though his father belonged to the 'rich peasant' class. Actually, he said his father's lands in the village were initially classified in the 'middle and lower peasant' category but because his father had a bad relationship with the village leadership team, as an act of revenge his father was eventually categorized as a 'rich peasant'.

Against the backdrop of this political context, the political campaigns to some extent shaped the private realm of individual life, particularly views on marriage and marital choices. As we saw in the methodology chapter, among the total 45 participants, about half of them married various during the Mao era (N=23): 14 participants married before the Cultural Revolution (pre-1966), while 9 interviewees married during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). These participants' ages ranged between 62 to 96 (when interviewed in 2017). According to the existing literature, there is some relevant research on the people who were born in the 1960s or later and the younger generations in contemporary China, but the elderly group's private, intimate life before the Cultural Revolution in the Mao era has rarely been explored (Ho, et al, 2018). Therefore, this groups' data gives me a unique opportunity to explore their intimate lives through the lens of love and marriage in this social context. When I was researching the participants' accounts of love and marriage, especially the marital preconditions in their youth, it became apparent that the political ideologies had a profound impact on their private lives.

The first time I met NaNa in one of the expensive care homes in Guiyang with good facilities, she was sitting in a chair and reading the news on an iPad. She looks younger than her age, even though her husband died about ten years ago. NaNa was born in 1923 in a rural area of Hunan Province but in order to escape from the second Sino-Japanese war and civil war (1937-1949) she moved with her schoolmates to the city of Guiyang where she obtained a university degree. She married her university lecturer after

graduating in 1948 and managed to secure a job teaching in a college, settling down in Guiyang. During the interview, she gave me an important reason for marrying her husband,

> Kun: Why did you decide to marry your husband?
> NaNa: Because his family was very poor, during that time, in about 1948, I considered his *Chushen* (family class origin *出身*) was better than mine, his family background belonged to the city poverty class as everyone's family background was categorized during the land reform period.
>
> (NaNa, Widow-Female-94 years old-Guiyang)

According to NaNa, the 'poverty' family class status was the better spouse choice than a partner from a better-off class. During that period the class status of one's family did not carry the same meaning as social class status does nowadays, rather it followed the political ideology of 'family class origin'. The 'city poverty' was considered a better family background in the eyes of NaNa and this political class label played an important role in her marital choices. This opinion was echoed by some of the other participants such as Lao Cao who said,

> There was a period around this time that one's class status was considered to be that the poorer you were the more honour you had. The poorer the better, because during the early age of the new leadership, all the cities' capitalists' property was confiscated by the nation and all the landlords' lands were confiscated in rural areas; those lands were distributed to the poor. From the other side, the capitalists and landlords' reputation were very bad, because during that time we thought these capitalists exploited the labour and landlords exploited the peasants, that is why the poorer someone was the better they were considered to be; the poor people never exploited others nor were they oppressors, they were always good people.
>
> (Lao Cao, Long-lasting marriage-Male-79 years old-Qingdao)

Before the communist regime, a woman's marriage was a method of upward social mobility via a wealthy or well-educated man, whereas during the Mao era 'landlords, rich peasants, capitalists, urban dandies, lawyers, and merchants were politically suspicious, while marriage to a poor peasant a mark of political virtue '(Diamant, 2001:451). This is supported by Lao Cao's account above, as during the period of the land reforms that took place in the late 1940s and early 1950s, both landlords and rich peasants were classified into the 'black five categories' (*di-fu-fan-huai-you* 地富反坏右). These categories covered those labelled 'rich peasant', 'landlord', 'counterrevolutionary', 'bad element' or 'rightist' (Jian et al, 2006:14) and once labelled in this way, a person would be considered an opponent of the political movement and become the target of criticism. The data shows how sexuality and marital choices were influenced by the politics of the time. During the early days of the establishment of modern China, the state led various political campaigns to categorise people by labelling them with different political identities, the labelling dividing the 'good' and the 'deviant' classes as well as shaping people's personal choices. As Mills (2000) points out, individuals' choices are historical and socially structured, furthermore, how large a role these factors play in their decisions depends on the means of power that was given by the society. When individuals' love and marriage took place against this political social context, it can be seen that the political ideologies strongly impacted their private intimate lives and marital spouse choices. Their choices depended on the tense political atmosphere and the political consciousness, therefore they took advantage of this by thinking about political identity over other marital conditions. People applied this political labelling practice to their intimate lives, which enhanced their political identities and political class classification in general.

In addition to 'family class' and 'family origin', there were some other clearer and more concrete political identities as the mainstream pre-conditions for marital choices. For example, Pan told me,

> I got along well with my partner because he belonged to the labouring class and people from the labouring class were seen to be very reliable and sure, even the

> nation's leaders were from this class. If you say one's families are all labourers or that they belong to the labour class, it means that they must be very good.
>
> (Pan, Widow-Female-87 years old-Guiyang)

As mentioned in Chapter Two, 'Labouring class' status was a political symbol that one belonged to a 'good' class category, the opposite to an 'exploiting class' like the capitalists or landlords. There was a clear boundary between the good and bad, and once a class label was assigned, it would be inherited along patriarchal lines (Kraus, 1981). Political identity was associated with personal qualities and characteristics such as being a 'good' or 'bad' person. This ideological dualism reflects to some extent the effect of the political imagination on the concept of moral quality. Against this backdrop, according to the marriage and marital choices made, it shows that individuals have to hold a deep sympathy with the proletariat class (Ding and Zhong, 2014). From Pan's narrative above, she felt some reflected glory on obtaining the same political identity as the nation's leaders' labouring class category by marriage. And marriage here becomes 'a relationship between two lovers in the service of a higher political goal' (Ding and Zhong, 2014: 437).

In other examples, Tian (Widow-Female-90 years old-Jinan) recalled her arranged marriage,

> 'I remember the matchmaker introduced him to me as being: 'a good man as he is a communist party member. He joined the communist party after he got a job [in his early 20s].'

And FeiFei's (Widow-Female-77 years old -Jinan) husband was 'introduced' (arranged) by her leadership in the village: 'because he is an old cadre, all the elderly people in the village knew him … in older people's eyes, it said that he is upright and honest, he is trustworthy enough to make friends with.'

Tian and FeiFei decided to marry their partners because of their political identities and these political identities - 'communist party member' and 'old cadre' - were all shaped in the prevailing political environment. Croll (1981) suggests that, on the basis of a survey from the mid-1950s, 'the cases of girls marrying cadres in order to gain Party membership for themselves and win support of the leadership were unfortunately many' (1981: 87). In male-dominated Chinese society, marrying up to achieve a good and better social status is important for women, particularly for Tian and FeiFei, who were doing farm work in villages. Marrying up with a cadre would help them to achieve a better status within the political hierarchy or even potentially have a chance to leave the village. In addition, because this desire to maximize political status was very high, marrying the members of the youth league and Party was 'almost a prerequisite to a 'good match'' (Croll, 1981:88). Marriage was a good way to obtain a good political identity and such political identities were also the labels used to construct barriers between different political 'classes' through marital partner choices.

As well as the personal effects of marital choices, political identity and its boundaries also permeated within the family. Social reform and the relevant social movements led to individuals being separated into different groups by the ideology of 'class' and in these circumstances, political class differentiation even challenged the relationships between parents and children and the traditional Chinese patriarchal order and norms. For example, Lao Shen who married in 1964, told me that his parents were unable to attend his wedding due to them belonging to the 'rich peasant' class,

> In that situation, my family background did not allow me to invite my parents to attend my wedding ceremony, you know, they belonged to the *'funon'* (rich peasant) class and I had to draw a clear line between me and the rich peasants and landlords. I had to make a break with them, as my uncle adopted me and my class origin followed him as a *'zhongnan'* (middle peasant), in these circumstances I had to keep a clear line between me and my parents.
>
> (Lao Shen, Long-lasting marriage-Male-81 years old-Jinan)

Although Lao Shen was adopted by his uncle's family, his parents and his uncle's family lived close by in the same village, yet he had to 'make a break with them' and 'keep a clear line' between himself and these 'rich peasants', even though they were his parents. This shows that before the Cultural Revolution, during the land reforms and similar political campaigns, political labels had a strong influence on individual private life. People held sensitive attitudes towards these political boundaries, which broke the traditional order of the family realm and overrode norms like filial piety and the seniority rules. This situation continued during the Cultural Revolution.

Political ideology not only shaped 'personal choices' but was also a power embodied through the intervention of workplaces and work institutions in the participants' marital partner choices. For example, Anyi recalls,

> We ran the relationship for half a year, then my husband said let's get married, then we reported this to the leader of the *danwei* (work unit). His leader asked him to investigate my political background, he told his leader that 'it is not necessary because both her father and her brothers are the members of communist party, in addition her two brothers are soldiers; and her family *Chengfen* was poor peasant', my family background is good and there is a common phrase to describe the background like me is called '*gen-zheng-miao-hong'*('born red and grow up properly').
>
> (Anyi, Long lasting marriage-Female-73-Qingdao)

Danwei investigation of family political background was one way to exercise control over the individual. According to Liu's (2007) study, before the economic reform in urban cities, *danwei* were state enterprises and more than economic entities in that they guaranteed lifetime employment and supply the workers welfare services such as housing, healthcare and pension after retirement. In her study of women born during the 1950s, she shows how the leadership would matchmake suitable political men for them. This only applies to part of my dataset, especially the 60 year olds. However, according to all my participants *danwei* regulation is considered important, especially for finding a

partner in the army or one who worked for governmental institutions. For the older group, such as Anyi, she needed to pass the political vetting of her husband's *danwei* before they got married. However, Lao Shi's love story of matchmaking by his work unit shows how a work unit matched a marriage for an individual based on their political status.

Lao Shi describes how he met his wife,

> She did not make a good impression on me, because she was born to a capitalist class family and at that age she was considered born from a bad family. Although she never suffered from the same criticism her parents got, I did not have any good feeling nor passion about her.
>
> (Lao Shi, Long-lasting marriage-Male-82 years old-Beijing)

This quotation reveals that Lao Shi was critical of his wife's family's political identity as a 'capitalist'. Ironically, he married her because of his work unit's matchmaking. Lao Shi was a senior architect working in a design institute in Beijing. He describes how his colleagues and the leadership of the work unit persuaded him to marry his wife,

> Lao Shi: all my surroundings and my leaders in the *danwei* persuaded me to marry her
> Kun: why?
> Lao Shi: Because there was an old revolutionary cadre after her during that time, but my colleagues and leadership in the *danwei* didn't think the old cadre suitable for her, he was considered not matched with her, therefore the *danwei* people wanted to help her to solve this problem. Because I used to be a schoolmate with her, the *danwei* made a big effort to persuade me to marry her. There was no way out for me and finally we got married.

In the end, thanks to the work unit's persuading and matchmaking, Lao Shi finally agreed to marry the woman who became his wife in 1957. The match was made to help

a woman with a bad political class background to marry someone of a better political status, so that she could escape the stigma of her family origins. The old cadre was considered not suitable for her, perhaps because the *danwei* thought he was too old for her, or possibly because he was too good for her - during the Mao era the state at times discouraged and even banned interclass marriages (Croll, 1981; Diamant, 2000). According to Croll's (1981:93) study of the political status gradient of mate choices (see Figure 4 below[12]), Lao Shi's political status was located in the 'technician' class, which was much worse than the revolutionary cadres who were 'politically rewarded' but at least better than his wife's 'exploiting class' origin.

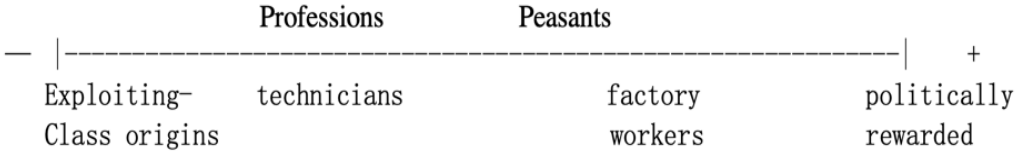


Figure 4. Choice of mate: social status gradient

However, their marriage was not always a happy one and Lao Shi blames this on his wife's 'unsuitable' family background,

> She is totally the type of woman born from the capitalist class, a capitalist class princess! She is not a Chinese traditional type of girl of noble birth but rather a woman who was spoilt by a capitalist family. She is very self-centered and she always thinks that she is right… Because of this we did not get along well after we got married. This made me rethink that marriage must be *'Men-dang-hu-dui'* (similar family background), it means each other's parents' classes should be similar.

[12] Figure 4. Source from Croll.J.(1981). The politics of marriage in contemporary China. London, Cambridge University Press. page 93

Lao Shi attributes his wife's shortcomings to her 'capitalist class' family background. This judgement fits with the dualist political ideology, a person's character depends on their political class category. Therefore, he concludes that having parents from similar political class backgrounds should be the precondition of marriage. Using the lens of marital choices demonstrates that during the Mao era, through the operation of the *danwei* system, the private family sphere was integrated with the state or public sphere (Ji et al, 2017); while marriage per se was an important social mechanism to maintain individual political status, reshape political identities or escape political stigma.

1966-1976: The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution

Before writing up this section about the Cultural Revolution, I was reminded of a book that I read many years ago called '*Home Letters by Fu Lei'* (Fu, 2004). Fu Lei is a famous translator and teacher working in the academy: one of his sons called Fu Cong is a pianist who studied and performed abroad during his youth; the book contains letters mainly written from Fu Lei to Fu Cong, which were sent from China during the time his son was studying and living abroad. The letters end in 1966, as during the Cultural Revolution in 1966, Fu Lei and his wife committed suicide together by hanging themselves at their home. In the book, the last entry is their suicide note and I have translated part of it from Chinese to English below,

> *'... Although the so-called evidence of crimes against the party (a mirror and an old poster) was discovered at our home, we can't give an explanation for them, but we insist that they do not belong to us. If we have very deeply sinned, we have never thought to go against the mainstream political idea, we failed to explain it but I believe under the wise communist leadership and the great chairman Mao, we won't receive heavy punishment because of this. However, this wronging has made us feel even worse than staying in jail. In addition, we educated a 'traitor' son - Fu Cong [because he was studying and living abroad]*

- *we deserve more than death! Moreover the rubbish like us who come from the old society should be got rid of from the historical stage!...* '(Fu, 2004: Appendix 1).

The first time I read this suicide note, I could feel their anger but did not understand the political situation that led such an outstanding intellectual couple to commit suicide. When my participants depicted their life experiences against this same social background, they touched me deeply. According to Wang (2009), throughout the country during the 'The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution', intellectual life was one of the earliest areas attacked by the political campaign, due to the party leadership releasing an instruction in a document named 'five one six information', which called for criticism of the 'bourgeois reactionary idea' and the 'representative figures in the cultural and intellectual areas' which were split into five: the academic area, education area, journalism area, cultural area and publishing area.

According to the participants in my study, which also surprised me, during the Cultural Revolution there were some other political labels reshaping the political identities of individuals. Under the influence of widespread chaos and an atmosphere of complicated political struggle, the political movement overturned certain people's lives. Even the previous 'good class' categories, like those from a 'poor peasant' background or the identity 'cadres' could now also be criticised by the ones with new political labels during the Cultural Revolution. For example, there are a few participants who suffered from criticism and struggle sessions as intellectuals such as Ling (Widow-Female-84 years old-Beijing) and her husband, who as architects were stigmatized as '*Chou lao jiu'*(The sinking old ninth)[13] or NaNa's (Widow-Female-94 years old-Guiyang)

[13] Chou lao jiu (The sinking old ninth: in Chinese is 臭老九) is a disdainful term for intellectuals. In addition to the 'five black categories', there are another four categories that were criticized: traitor, spy, capitalist roader and intellectual. During the Cultural Revolution, 'intellectual' ranked number nine in the criticized line, while the 'sinking' was to encourage disdainful attitudes towards intellectuals, hence 'the sinking old ninth'. (World Finance Report, 2012. Available at http://finance.icxo.com/htmlnews/2012/11/02/1448196.htm)

husband, who was grouped as a ‘reactionary academic authority’. I will set out NaNa’s narrative as an example.

As we discussed earlier in this chapter, NaNa married a university lecturer because of her poorer political family origins in the ‘poverty’ class, however during the Cultural Revolution this intellectual identity became a target for criticism. As a lecturer at a university, NaNa’s husband was labelled a ‘reactionary academic authority’ and in need of ‘re-education’. He was publicly criticised in a struggle session and then sent to a rural area to work on a collective farm. His salary was cancelled and his family was forced to rely on NaNa,

> NaNa: During the Cultural Revolution, my husband was affected, he was called a ‘reactionary academic authority’, because almost all the intellectuals were influenced during that time… all our love letters, pictures have been confiscated, they even confiscated our wedding picture, they said those all belongs to *‘Feng-zi-xiu’*(feudalism, capitalism, revisionism)… in the Cultural Revolution, his salary was frozen, he has nothing but I never thought of leaving him, I never. The children relied on me and I had to use my limited salary to support my mother, my mother in law and my five children.
>
> Kun: why did you do this for him?
> NaNa: Because I trusted him, I asked him ‘have you done anything wrong or committed a crime?’ he promised me that, ‘I never have done anything bad or reactionary’, I told him ‘I know you, please trust the party and the people’, because I worried about him. He was not allowed to live with us, rather he was forced to live alone in a very small room next to the toilet in the yard. I worried and was afraid he would kill himself there. I told him, do not do anything silly there, I believe the party and the public will give you an answer ...
>
> (NaNa,Widow-94 years old-Guiyang)

During the process of socialist industrialization, the role of intellectuals and management elites was the subject of controversy (Li, 2001:146). Throughout the Cultural Revolution, the Chairman Mao supported the Red Guards and gave them power to use the most extreme brutality against enemies of the revolution, with the first wave of Red Guard violence directed at teachers and other learned people (Haubl, 2014: 62). NaNa told me that all their private 'love letters' written before they were married, as well as their documents and wedding pictures, were confiscated by the Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution. Under the influence of these political forces and the power of the masses, their love was also embodied in the 'silent' support that NaNa showed, by never thinking about leaving her husband after he was labelled a 'reactionary', by continuing to support him, the children and his family. NaNa used the words 'trust' and 'worry' to reveal the solid ground on which their love was built, and even when her husband became a 'deviant' or 'criminal' and was criticized due to his political identity, she continued to trust him and encourage him to prevent him from committing suicide. The spiritual support provided by NaNa was very important for her husband in these circumstances, as NaNa explained the environment further,

> NaNa: They (students of Red Guards) launched the struggle session, they even required my sons, daughters and me to criticize him, he was ordered to ask for instructions every day and had to read the *little red book* (quotations from chairman Mao Zedong) every morning. I remember once at home, he was not standing straight against the wall, my son's face turned to anger, 'stand well!' he snapped at his father, then my husband stood straight, 'who do you think you are?' my son continued. I stepped forward to them and shouted at my son 'what are you doing! Is it not enough for you to criticize your father in public, do you have to keep this up at home?' Then they stopped.
> Kun: Does it mean even family members attacked each other?
> NaNa: You do not understand that?
> Kun: No
> NaNa: Because even in the household we were required to hold criticism meetings, they asked my children to criticize their father. Of course it sounds

> unbelievable now. In that circumstance, I stopped my children from doing that at home, then nothing happened, I was in charge of the family during that period.

The ideology of the Cultural Revolution blurred the line between 'public' and 'private', as well as challenging the family order and family relationships between father and children, husband and wife. NaNa's husband's stigmatised political identity even resulted in their children criticising and disciplining their father. Looking through the lens of family relationships also reveals how the Cultural Revolution effectively challenged traditional family values and Confucianism, subverting the ideology of filial piety whereby children of the family should obey their elders, who maintain their paternalistic power and permit no disobedience with the rules of tradition (Fei, 1992:130). Roetz (2003) highlights filial piety as one of the cardinal virtues in Confucianism (as cited in Haubl, 2014: 59) and notes that there was a strict seniority principle before and at the early stage of the Cultural Revolution in China (and to some extent still today): 'old people demand unlimited respect, which younger ones show by suppressing any impulse to criticise… lack of piety to their father is one of the worse crimes that a son can commit, a son is expected to protect his father under any circumstances' (Haubl, 2014:59). However, during the Cultural Revolution, NaNa's children disobeyed their father and contravened the value of filial piety, partly because Mao had given the Red Guards extensive power and encouraged them to use it 'against all the enemies of the revolution, even those found within their own families'(Haubl, 2014:60). Zang (2000:69) also notes that with encouragement from the Chinese Communist Party's(CCP) policy, there was a tendency for children of the victims to blame and denounce their parents in public, thereby showing their loyalty to the CCP over that to their family members. From the children's perspective, they made efforts to remove their family's political stigma and rebuild their good political identity by joining struggle sessions for their parents. This was one approach to adapt their political identities from previous 'good' class and social status after their parents had been labelled 'capitalist roaders' or 'bourgeois academic authority figures'(Zang, 2000); whereas from the CCP's perspective, they 'saw this tactic as an effective means to break

down the victim's resistance' (Zang, 2000:69) by encouraging such struggles with family members and causing family instability.

This political movement was ubiquitous in people's lives and they were disciplined by this political power. NaNa's husband's status changed from that of an 'honoured' family to a 'deviant' family. If the wrong kind of literature was found in victims' homes, some women would even divorce their husbands or join in with the persecution (see Zang, 2000). Unlike them, NaNa supported her husband and played the role of breadwinner in the family, in her own way conforming to the socialist gender ideology launched by the state proclaiming that women should be equal with men, in their participation in and 'sacrifice for socialist construction, through both their family and to the socialist state' (Ji et al, 2017). During the Cultural Revolution, NaNa shouldered all the heavy burdens of life both in the private and public domains.

In addition to the intellectual area, this political movement also had an influence on those in previously 'good' class categories such as FeiFei's husband, who was considered one of the reliable '*old cadre'* (*laoganbu 老干部*) and whose character played an important role when she chose him as her marital spouse. However, her husband's cadre identity was also criticised during the Cultural Revolution, when it became one of the targets to be knocked down, as it represented 'party officials' or 'those in power' (*dang-quan-pai 当权派*).

> FeiFei: During the ten years of the Cultural Revolution we were unable to look after each other, as he was under criticism, almost everyday he was criticized. I was worried about him as time went by, sometimes I went to visit him by bike.
> Kun: Did he go to jail?
> FeiFei: No, he did not, but he was shamed in parades on the street and in public, because people all denounced 'those in power' (*dang-quan-pai*) during that time, he used to be a cadre thus he belongs to 'those in power', in fact he did not commit a crime nor was he corrupt at all, afterwards I think this movement was

> because the 'Gang of Four'[14] wanted to attack the cadres in order to achieve their political aims. There were lots of old cadres committing suicide during that period... they had all worked for the country since they were young and they were from very poor family backgrounds.
>
> (FeiFei, Widow-Female-77 years old-Jinan)

The revolutionary cadres had political power and the cadre households received state-sanctioned favouritism until the Cultural Revolution. During the second stage of the political campaign in late 1966, many cadre households were attacked as part of Mao's assault on revisionism in the party (Walder and Hu, 2009:1408). Against this backdrop, FeiFei's husband's previous 'good' categories suddenly became targets to be criticized and denounced as 'bad' people, their status shifting from one extreme to another.

Similar to FeiFei, Tian's husband was part of the 'revolutionary cadre' elite before the Cultural Revolution but became a target to be struggled against,

> Tian: At that time, some of my children were already attending middle school, but the school did not allow them to continue to study, as they told my children their father was mistaken. During that time none of us knew what had happened and what was going on, then my children and I were sent back to my husband's parents' hometown in a rural area of Hebei province for four years.
>
> (Tian, Widow-Female-90 years old-Jinan)

Because of the downgrading of the 'cadre' and its political power, Tian's husband lost his job in the local leadership and had his identity changed from good 'cadre' to 'person who was mistaken'. Moreover, this 'mistaken' identity led to his children being banned from going to school and being sent to their father's hometown. After the family's deprivation, their children experienced severe social discrimination and socially

[14] Gang of four(in Chinese is 四人帮): the most powerful members of a radical political elite convicted for implementing the harsh policies directed by CCP chairman Mao Zedong. Source available at: https://www.britannica.com/topic/Gang-of-Four

isolation, and like many children in such situations they faced ‘lack of friendship, fear and hostile environments both in school and in their neighbourhoods’(Zang, 2000: 66). These examples indicate that the political campaigns during this era were unpredictable and the power relationships changeable. The judgement of some cadres shifted dramatically from one side to the opposite and someone with a ‘good’ political identity could become a victim overnight, which as FeiFei mentioned resulted in many well-meaning and hardworking old cadres committing suicide because they could not bear the shame of being paraded on the street or in public. The Cultural Revolution plunged China into an anomic state in which ‘social relationships were dominated by fear’ (Haubl, 2014: 66).

The Cultural Revolution was an extremely cruel movement when seen through the eyes of the participants and their life stories. Their emotions and feelings for their loved ones had to be hidden but supporting their families was one way to ensure that their marriages would survive. Similar to NaNa, FeiFei and Tian found ways to support their families, raise children and encourage their husbands. Their family relationships and family roles changed when their husbands’ were suffering from struggles against them, as they had to become the backbone of the family and take over their husband’s previous family role. However, from the husbands’ perspective all that could be done was to withstand the torture, stigma and criticism, and do their best to keep themselves alive. This was the only way they had to protect their families. Lao Yan will be a good example to depict this.

Lao Yan described his love in a particularly touching way. Lao Yan is 96 years old and he was an actor who performed in films produced by an underground communist party working on behalf of the national communist movement before the establishment of the People’s Republic of China. Because of his involvement in the film industry, during the Cultural Revolution he was treated as ‘reactionary’ and was sent to prison for three years.

I was arrested and stayed in jail for about three years during the Cultural Revolution, from 1974 to 1976, until 1978 when my reputation was rehabilitated ...
… during that time, I forfeited all of my salary and my family had to rely on my wife and her salary. She had to support the elders and children of the family; we had no money during that period. But my personality is optimistic, so I didn't feel afraid in prison because I thought I was a communist revolutionary, I believe I would still be able to make films in the future, without this confidence I would have committed suicide by hanging myself. When I was in prison, I remember one year during the middle autumn festival, I had to stand on tiptoe to be high enough to see just half of the moon in the sky through the window, because the wall of the prison was very high and I could not see the outside. When I was staring at the moon I was singing 'The song at midnight[15]':

Oh, girl!
Only your eyes can look through my life,
Only you can understand how deep my love,
You are the moon of the sky, I am the stars in the chill;
You are the tree of the mountain; I am the withered vines on the tree;
You are the water in the lake; I am the duckweed on the water;
Oh, my girl…'

Because during that period, I was missing my wife, as I was arrested and alone in prison, my wife was just permitted to visit me only once a month. I almost died in prison, almost half of my teeth dropped out and this caused me a great deal of pain. The main reason was the prison meals were so bad, I always felt

[15] Song at midnight: in Chinese 夜半歌声, was produced by Xian Xinghai and Tian Han in 1936, the lyrics were translated by myself.

> hungry, I was given a couple of tael[16] of rice, those meals were mouldy without any fat, I ate those for three years…
>
> (Lao Yan,Widower-Male-96 years old-Guiyang)

During the interview, Lao Yan was full of emotion and when recalling his love and marriage, he described it with great passion and sadness. Even the narrative of his time in prison was delivered in this way, the love song being used to symbolise how much he missed his wife on the night of the mid-autumn festival. The mid-autumn festival is traditionally a time for family reunion in China, and the song reveals the love between Lao Yan and his wife had not been diminished by the physical distance and barriers between them or the isolation created by his political identity. Lao Yan was struggling for his life in prison, in order to prevent his wife and children from suffering the same fate as him. These painful memories, Lawler (2014) suggests, have 'become a powerful way through which we establish shared social ties' (2014:37). Lao Yan and his generation share a painful collective memory, one which also reflects the cruel political social milieu of the Cultural Revolution.

Grateful to be alive, Lao Yan was finally released when the Cultural Revolution finished and his political identity reconstituted as 'old red cadre'. His family continue to benefit from his restored identity until this day.

> If I couldn't bear it and committed suicide, they would have seen my suicide as a way to escape the punishment, my behaviour would have implicated my family, as they would be treated as the relatives of the counter-revisionary, they would be criticised in the same way same as me. I experienced and finally went through it... I didn't commit suicide so now all my family and offspring belong to the 'red cadre', thus they all receive good welfare, good pay and conditions now. My pension is more than I was earning in my youth, because I was an actor and 'old red cadre' and this identity entitles me to receive this level of welfare.

[16] Tael: a unit of weight used in East Asia approximately equal to 1.3 ounces

The political environment had a profound impact on the lives of individuals, especially during the Cultural Revolution of the Mao era. After Mao's death in 1976 and during the post-Mao period, the character of individual life also began to change, as the reconstitution of Lao Yan's public identity so vividly illustrates. As an 'old red cadre' he was now entitled to a better standard of welfare and from his account it can be seen how individual experiences and intimate choices were shaped by the politics and history of the Mao era. Under these conditions, the expression of love become heroic: wives (such as NaNa, FeiFei, Ling, Lao Yan's wife) continued to support their husbands regardless of the consequences; and husbands continued to miss their wives and find ways to protect their children, as is the case with Lao Yan.

The older generations depicted a vivid historical picture for me, the history of an epoch as well as a generation (Bonnin, 2007). Looking through the lens of marital choice and family life shows that the political beliefs and norms during Mao era shaped people's behaviour, their obedience of authority and loyalty to the CCP, family roles and relationships, challenged the traditional family order and filial piety. By recalling their experiences, the older generations narrate the past that gives them a sense of individual identity but also embodies the collective memory, because individual experiences are located in the ways society as a whole remembers (Weedon and Jordan, 2012). Particularly in the Maoist socialism context, these elderly people's life stories unveiled the links between individual memories and the collective memory of the Cultural Revolution. Mills (2000) argues that 'The biographies of men and women, the kinds of individuals they have become, cannot be understood without reference to the historical structures in which the milieux of their everyday life are organized. Historical transformations carry meanings not only for individual ways of life, but for the very character - the limits and possibilities of the human being' (Mills, 2000:158). However, during the post-Mao era, Chinese society experienced dramatic change and such 'historical change also differentiates the life experience of social groups or categories within each cohort' (Clen and Elder, 1978:36). Therefore, in the next section I will unpack how during the post-Mao era, individual ideology shifts from political to

economic and how this social transformation period influenced the participants' marital choices and intimate lives.

Post-Mao era: Ideology shift from political to economic

As we discussed in Chapter Two, in the post-Mao era China has shifted its priority from class struggle to economic development and the economy has changed from central planning to market mechanisms (Zhao and Belk, 2008; Riskin, 1987). From the late 1970s, China began to move forward from the previous decade of Cultural Revolution into a period of economic reform and opening-up. According to Farrer (2002), this opening-up is not merely about sexuality, rather it is also an opening up of the economy and every other aspect of society. For instance, the functions of the educational institutions returned to normal and the change from planned economics increased individual freedom. Against this historical context, individuals' choices regarding ideal marital partners also gradually changed from politically oriented to ones based more on economic values.

Economic reform period: continuities and change in partner choices

> I think no matter men or women; everyone wants to be wealthier. If I was to find a partner I would seek one with a good salary, as without money you can't do anything, such as if I ask you, can you finish your research without financial support? I don't think so at all. I believe 99% of the population are materialistic, especially living in today's society.
>
> (Lao Dang, Long-lasting marriage-Male-60 years old-Qingdao)

I remember that during his interview Lao Dang - a successful businessman who has bought two big five storey houses in the community where our interview took place. He repeatedly emphasised the importance of having a solid economic base. I sometimes felt a bit irritated by his views on money and rhetorical questions such as those in the quotation but they do to some extent reveal the contrast with the views on political ideology expressed by the participants aged between 70 and 90. The importance of economics was often mentioned by the younger age group in their 50s and 60s who placed considerable stress on economic status or coming from a similar economic family background when evaluating relationship issues. The conditions attached to their marital partner choices have gradually changed from the older generation's focus on political background to incorporate new elements of economic ideology.

This also can be seen with Tong. Tong is a woman living in a new residential community in Beijing. She experienced marriage, divorce, remarriage and after her second husband died, she is cohabitating with a man. When I met her, she was living with three dogs in her flat. She told me that in her twenties she was in a relationship with an army officer's son but they finally broke up because the class differences between their families were too great,

> My mum would not allow me to marry into a commanding officer's family, because his family status was too high for us, she thought as our family status as labourer class I should get married to another labourer. If I had married him, their families would have probably treated me like a house servant … I felt that I couldn't communicate with family members in this type of rich family, because my family background was lower than theirs, they must have looked down on me.
>
> (Tong, Cohabitation-Female-58 years old-Beijing)

As a person of lower economic status, Tong thinks she would be looked down upon by her potential richer in-laws, a viewpoint which contrasts quite starkly with those of the previous era, during which the rich classes were considered a bad category to be

critiqued. Yet her concern is based on economic status and her judgement of her likely position in her new family. Furthermore, when Tong talked about the younger generation's marriage choices, Tong puts forward the view that money is very important,

> Nowadays, when considering marriage, money can cover everything, because all the costs of life are getting so expensive, without money one can't live. You can't live well just by relying on a salary, you must buy a car and pay the bills. The people's views of life have changed nowadays and I would also like to help my child to find a partner who has better economic status.

In the climate created by the post-Mao reforms since the 1980s, young men are valued for their ability to make money (Hershatter, 2007:9). Tong's opinion also reflects that when choosing a marital partner, instead of the previous political ideology, the economic situation now plays a more important role in her and the next generations' marriage marketing strategies. In addition, from man's perspective, Lao Wen makes similar claims.

> I feel the big shift in the view of love and marriage is, people are becoming more and more realistic and placing more emphasis on economics, people's economic requirements are greater than before. Previously we thought personality was important when choosing a partner, but nowadays one's economic status and even the two people's families having similar economic status are more important. In my day, it was already hard for couples to get together when there was a big gap in the families' economic backgrounds, now it is impossible for the younger generations to marry when there is a big distance between their economic backgrounds. I think about this for my son's marriage too.
>
> (Lao Wen, Remarriage-Male-60 years old-Jinan)

Lao Wen's daughter has already married, his son is studying a PhD in Beijing and is in a relationship, which prompted Lao Wen to compare the differences in love and marriage

choices between the two generations. As Lao Wen notes, material capital plays an important role in marital choices, there has been a shift in how people make their marital partner choices, with more consideration now given to personal finances. Economic status and the economic backgrounds of the two families joined by the marriage are important too. Here, Lao Wen's reflections show his awareness of the value changes over time and, as Mills (2000) notes, the personal experience of specific milieu will develop due to social structure changes.

Unlike in the Mao era, when the preferred marital choices were 'cadre' or 'poor peasant', during the post-Mao era marital preferences also changed. For example, Hong (Widow-Female- 65 years old-Beijing) was concerned about the need for a man to have a secure job when she thought about marrying her ex-husband, 'He is a train driver, which is a 'tie-fan-wan' (iron rice bowl) at that time; his father and little brothers all worked in train system and I thought it sounded good'.

Hong married her husband because both he and his family have an 'iron rice bowl', which is a metaphor to describe a person with a secure job such as a train driver. Hunting for an 'iron rice bowl' husband seems to be popular amongst Hong's generation. Similar to Hong, Jingjing explains further about the meaning of the 'iron rice bowl' in more detail:

> Jingjing: He was introduced by my sister, his circumstances were very good, he is a doctor and has a university degree, his job was good, during that time we all want to find a man with good jobs and with knowledge, we are hunting 'iron rice bowl'.
> Kun: What is the meaning of the 'iron rice bowl' ?
> Jingjing: 'iron rice bowl' is about seeking a man with good and secure job, such as my husband's job, as a doctor he was classed as high status, but the very common iron rice bowl jobs such as drivers, craftsman and skilled workers, they were very stable and secure vocations.
>
> (Jingjing, Divorced-Female-64 years old-Shanghai)

Jingjing married a doctor but they divorced 13 years later, although throughout the interview she continued to call her ex-spouse 'my husband'. The 'iron rice bowl' was created during the Maoist period and before 1978 it reflected the collective values and basic welfare system. Because Chairman Mao tried to established a socialist system influenced by the Soviet Union, employment was controlled by a personnel and labour department that assigned all employees to different work units, in addition the replacement system enabled the children of retiring employees to take up their parents' jobs in the work units (Leung, 1994: 341-344). However, while all urban employment was 'iron rice bowl' during the Mao era, after 1978 during the economic reform period, iron rice bowl jobs began to be eroded and now such jobs are increasingly rare and mostly confined to the state sector. Jingjing laid out the different levels of 'iron rice bowl' jobs: her doctor 'husband' belongs to a higher class of 'iron rice bowl' worker and hunting for a man with this type of secure professional job is based on the idea that a steady income is essential.

Compared with the older participants' preferences regarding marital choices, which were based on their partners' political family backgrounds, the younger age groups' choices were more materially oriented and economically rather than politically pragmatic. For the women, a man with a steady job and stable income is a source of economic security. Moreover, just as the older generations made judgements about the personalities of potential partners based on their political family background, the younger participants also hold the view that a person's character can be determined from their social status. Jingjing continues to explain more about her husband's social status and its links to individual qualities below:

> … I thought as he is a doctor and as a knowledgeable person he must be more self-restrained than the others, with good manners and good qualities, as when we were in a relationship all my colleagues were jealous and envied me, they said to me: 'good for you! You got a Shanghai doctor!' Because people already saw Shanghai as a good city during that time, in addition my husband has been

> to university and was a doctor in a hospital, especially the social status of a doctor was very high in people's eyes during that time. You know my mate choice criteria were very strict, but his conditions completely fitted with my image of a spouse.

Jingjing described her ex-husband's doctor identity and university degree as indicating he must be a person of 'self-restraint, good manners and good quality'. But unfortunately and ironically, although Jingjing got her ideal husband and benefitted from his secure job, their marriage eventually failed as a result of her ex-husband having an affair with another doctor at his hospital. After their affair was exposed in the workplace, the couple migrated to America and although both Jingjing and her ex-husband's *danwei* made efforts to maintain the marriage by trying to persuade him to come back home and to his workplace, they failed to save the marriage and finally Jingjing decided to divorce after her ex-husband had another child in America. She became a single mother afterwards and remains single today.

However, compared with women, men's economic status and their ability to earn money is an even more important part of their identity. Lao Ren is a businessman and has experienced divorce and remarriage. He used to work for the local government but after the opening up of the economy, he applied for early retirement and became a businessman. Lao Ren grew up in an economically stable family as his parents ran a business; he displayed pride in his economic status throughout the interview. Lao Ren's first marriage lasted for 25 years and they divorced because of his ex-wife's affair. when he talked about it, instead of focusing on love or romance he emphasised his role as an economic 'breadwinner':

> When I met her I was working in local government, my job role was executive secretary and most of the time I ate and lived in my danwei...
> …In the 25 years, I met my responsibility no matter if for family or work, probably I was too busy with my career so I ignored my family a bit. As I was

> always on business trips, but I made my family rich and satisfied their material needs. As a man, I think career is always in the first place.
>
> (Lao Ren, Remarriage-Male-51 years old-Guiyang)

Lao Ren's ex-wife became a housewife and looked after their daughter after they married. Lao Ren emphases his business success as well as his financial contribution. This shaped their family relationship as he was able to support the family. Lao Ren thinks that supporting the family materially means he has fulfilled his family 'responsibility'. Compared with the women's perspective in search of an 'iron rice bowl', Lao Ren's values also serve to maintain the gender double standard and encourage women hunting for economic security and dependence, whereby by the man plays the breadwinner role, an ideology which enhances the male's masculinity both in private and the male-dominated public sphere. This also parallels with Ho et al's (2018) finding that men must be a career success and perform well in business to meet the demands of being a good husband and good father, which are equal to being a good man (also see Uretsky, 2016). Thus, for a man, career and the ability to earn money are a priority.

Lao Wu is also a businessman but his views on money are even more pronounced than Lao Ren's. For Lao Wu providing for his family is not just a responsibility, as money for him is also type of 'power':

> In my generation we experienced the Cultural Revolution, universities closed, the policy required us to delay marriage and delay giving birth to children, after we married we met the one child policy, we experienced all those. However, it was a blessing in disguise for me, because of these experiences I started to do business and earn money, with money I am not afraid of anybody, money means I don't need to worry about even the head of the country or the governor and the people with power. Money is a thing that can conquer anything, there will be no problem as long as you give them money [hinting about bribing the local government officials for business projects], you know money talks…

(Lao Wu, Long-lasting marriage-Male-63 years old-Qingdao)

For Lao Wu having money has given him the power to 'conquer anything', to challenge political power as well as obtain the things that he wants from life. The reason he started to do business can be traced back to the challenges presented by the one-child policy. In the interview I learnt about Lao Wu's wife is a homemaker and they have five children; the four older children are daughters and the youngest is a son. Lao Wu was born in a rural area and under the influence of the local custom, held strong patriarchal values about the importance of having a son. He joined the army and the Communist Party, and after he came back from the army he became a teacher in a local school. Unfortunately, when his wife gave birth to two daughters the school fired him from his job and the local party removed his party identity, as a punishment for going against the 'one child policy'. To make ends meet, he started a small business, had two more daughters and finally a son.

The money Lao Wu made enabled him to achieve his dream of having a son, as one of the benefits of running a business was that he was able to pay the fines incurred by having additional children. In the interview, Lao Wu was very critical and resentful of the Communist Party, so he sent his five children to Japan to be educated. Now each of his five children has settled down in Japan and is running a business or working for a living. Money in Lao Wu's eyes is a form of power that can conquer political power and help him to achieve everything he wants.

By contrast, Lao Dang gave me an explanation from a consumption perspective that emphasised a different meaning behind the younger participants' focus on the economic aspects of family background. He attributes his wife's inferior values and taste to her family background and their lack of education.

> I think I should play the main role of the family, as my values and taste are better than hers…this different taste and values are very hard to be negotiated between us, because our original family's education is very important. I heard an old

> saying before the Liberation that 'One prefers to marry the slave of a rich family, he would not marry the poor's daughter', it actually means one's education in the family background is important… their living habits, manners and values should be influenced by the rich family environment and their lifestyles are edified by the rich families, in contrast the woman who comes from the poor would not receive this type of education.
>
> (Lao Dang, Long-lasting marriage-Male-60 years old-Qingdao)

Lao Dang thinks the differences in taste and values between him and his wife are due to their family backgrounds, economic and educational. Lao Dang's father used to be a governmental officer in the city of Jinan and Lao Dang's wife's parents were skilled workers in the industry of Qingdao. Draw on Bourdieu's (1984) idea that economic capital which is measured by individual income and wealth; and culture capital refers to intelligence, skills and ability. And those class habits domination depends on the stocks of capital available (Atkinson, 2015: 65). In addition the lifestyle can be considered as an impotent fashion trend expressed through the consumption of sets of goods and service (Cohen et al, 2015). However, when discussing this in the Chinese social context, it is also linked to the political discourse *suzhi* (quality) that emerged during the early 1980s when China started to modernise and open up economically (Murphy, 2004:3). This *suzhi* discourse relates directly to the authoritarian structure of language use in the PRC (Kipnis, 2006) and reflects types of hierarchical discourse that 'require moving from one of the many specific qualities of an individual, such as the way she is dressed, her accent, her table manners or her score on a particular test, to an overall judgement of her capital quality' (2006:304). During the interview, Lao Dang maintained his class superiority over his wife and criticized his wife's tastes and lifestyle for being inferior in origin.

Compared with the older generation in the early section of the chapter, who emphasised the political elements of family background, the 'Landlord and capitalist' in this reform era context are no longer a symbol to be critiqued but rather a signifier of wealth and good taste. Lao Dang emphasises the importance of wealth accumulation as well as a

solid economic foundation, as these shape one's values and taste, in this case, a sign revealing the gap between his privileged family origin class and his wife's inferior family class.

The changing of the Hukou policy and its influence on marital choices

The shift from planned economy to free market gradually changed the participants' lifestyles and ways of thinking about their marital choices. During this transition period, the different welfare and relevant economic benefits between urban and rural not only shaped their residential identities, but also their choices regarding love and marriage. During the fieldwork, some participants pointed out that many rural middle-aged and even elderly women were now working as carers in the cities. Ban is an example of this phenomenon: she comes from a rural area, is illiterate and seven years ago her husband passed away. At the time she participated in my interview, she was working as a carer in an urban area, looking after elderly people in their homes. However, her description of how she made her partner choices in her youth was a bit different from the others living in urban areas,

> Kun: How did you meet your husband?
> Ban: We were introduced by someone. I wanted to live in the city, because I thought living in a city or town would be more convenient than living in a village, I just wanted to find a person who lived in a city area, because if I married him I could find some casual jobs in city areas and earn more money, which is a lot better than working in the farms with dirty and muddy environment... but finding a rich family or a person in the city was very hard for me, because those types of families would look down at me, although my husband's family is poor but I believe we can work together and earn money in the future.
>
> (Ban, Widow-Female-64 years old-Jinan)

As a peasant from a village, Ban's dream was to marry a city dweller who could help her to escape her agricultural environment. However she ended up marrying a villager because she worried that the urban-rural gap would lead to her being looked down on by the city dweller's family. Her lack of both economic and cultural capital meant that she had no alternative but settle for second best, marrying a man from a rural area but whose village was better than hers and close enough to a town or city to enable her to take temporary jobs to earn casual money. She describes her reasoning,

> Kun: Why did you decide to marry your husband then?
> Ban: Because it would be easier to earn money in his area than in my village, for example, I can make chilli jams and sell them for money; I made some bags for the industries for money, it was very easy to find casual jobs to earn money there, that is it.

However, the differentiation between urban and rural not only applies to Ban, and when the other participants joined the research I found the reasons run deep. As described in Chapter Two, hukou is a residential system that divides people who live in rural areas into agricultural hukou and those who live in the suburbs and cities as non-agricultural hukou. It is the political and economic power divide between urban and rural areas, the rigid barrier between city and countryside. By 2014 the internal migration in China reached 273.95 million (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2019) as rural migrants want to have a better life in urban areas through work or by marrying with urbanites; whereas the inter-hukou marriage is only about 5% of total marriages in China (Lui, 2018; Nie and Xing, 2011). According to Lui (2018:1166), 'the unequal citizenship based on hukou status denotes one's family origin, socioeconomic status and social stigma or prestige'. Lui (2018) also points out some problems in cross-hukou marriage such as the problematic of social identity, as rural migrants are stigmatized and not accepted by the relatives or friends of urban spouses. The hukou policy is not merely a superficial means to define one's identity as a citizen or peasant, rather it has driven the distribution of economic benefits and this has therefore shaped people's choices in love and marriage.

Back to Lao Dang's case, although Lao Dang's father worked for local government and obtained hukou in the city of Jinan, due to the limitations of the different local policy during that period, if the mother's identity was agricultural the children would inherit their mother's rural identity. Therefore, Lao Dang and his siblings were defined by their mother's agricultural hukou identity in Qingdao and were unable to obtain the city's non-agricultural hukou during their youth. Not until his twenties, after he returned from army was Lao Dang was finally granted Qingdao city hukou by family relationship,

> During that time I thought that I would not find a spouse who comes from a village, because I made a big effort to transfer my hukou from rural to city, it is not possible to go back to find a person with a peasant hukou again. The first thing I considered was that her hukou must be a city's, because people with agricultural hukou and non-agricultural hukou belong to two different types of human beings. They belong to two types of people so that peasants and labourers are totally different. For example, the Qingdao beer industry supplied citizens four bottles per person at that time, but peasants were ignored and had nothing, they had to grow their own food to survive.
>
> (Lao Dang, Long-lasting Marriage-Male-60 years old-Qingdao)

In the central planning and state-owned industry period, hukou was an important factor when choosing a marital partner for people living in the city. Once a person obtained city hukou they would tend to choose a partner with the same hukou background to marry and in Lao Dang's case, he did not want his children to suffer the same fate he did as a result of him marrying a woman with rural hukou. This would have meant the next generation struggling to change their hukou identity in the same way that he had struggled. In effect, the outcome of his choice between the 'two types of human beings' contributed to the ongoing division between urban and rural areas, as did those of many other participants with city hukou:

> Previously, hukou was very important, as long as you got a city hukou you would be allocated the free amount of food, we used to get coupons and we could exchange these for free rice, flour and noodles.
>
> (An Yi, Long-lasting marriage-Female-73 years old-Qingdao)

> [with non-agricultural hukou] we were allocated jobs after we graduated, so I was assigned a job as a teacher in the city of Dezhou after I got the degree.
>
> (Lao Wen, Remarriage-Male-60 years old-Jinan)

> When I got married my danwei gave us a free house so we did not use the house my parents prepared for us, but bought good quality furniture instead.
>
> (Lao Ren, Remarriage-Male-51 years old-Guiyang)

During the participants' youth, the right to free food, allocated jobs and housing welfare only extended to those with 'non-agriculture hukou' identity in the towns and cities. Liu (2007) has shown the complicated process of housing by urban workplace through her research, that housing was a scarce resource only allocated to certain groups of workers. In contrast, those who worked as farmers in rural areas survived by planting food and building houses for themselves within the village. Furthermore, because of the barriers of the hukou policy they were not able to migrate to, or get a job in the city during the early post-Mao era. However, after several decades of economic reform there has been a shift in the policy and when I asked the participants how important hukou was nowadays, most of the participants who come from these second-tier cities hold the view that the influence of hukou has reduced, that as long as one has money it is possible to move to a city by buying a house. In contrast, most of the participants from Beijing or Shanghai argued that hukou still plays an important role in the elderly's marriage marketing,

> I think the out-of-towner must be aimed at Beijing citizen's money and in order to get Beijing hukou, if the out-of-towner marries a Beijing elderly they can

> settle down in Beijing and occupy the elderly's house… you know I heard some out-of-towners are frauds and use this strategy to get Beijing hukou.
>
> (Tong, Beijing)

> I still think hukou is important, getting a Shanghai hukou means you belong to the local community in Shanghai, I feel more security. You know the out-of-towners are too many now, such as some migrant workers who broke the order because they can move to Shanghai by marriage.
>
> (Jingjing, Shanghai)

According to the data, most participants from the first-tier cities such as Beijing or Shanghai emphasise that hukou is still essential and plays an important role in their lives. In first tier cities, social welfare provisions such as healthcare, education and pensions are much better than at others' levels of city. By comparison, most of the participants from lower level cities such as Qingdao, Jinan or Guiyang said that hukou is not as important as one's economic basis. Some of them even hold the view that people with rural hukou are better off because they can obtain more benefits from the government such as free land, tax breaks and a generous allowance.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has unveiled the different senior age groups' marital choices and life experiences during both the Mao era and post-Mao era. As a well-known writer Liu Binyan said 'in the days of Mao Zedong, politics permeated every aspect of life in China, and was considered to be more important than happiness, love and even life itself'(1996:1). This political permeating can be seen during the Mao era where the political class labels shaped the marital choices of individuals; love and marriage became a symbolic meaning of service to the political ideology. During the Cultural

Revolution, love and private life became more silent under the social movement, some people were affected and their family relationships and family roles were reshaped by Red Guard violence. However, following the death of Mao in 1976, Chinese has society experienced a dramatic shift since the 1980s when economic reforms shaped a new social milieu, which gave rise to an ideology shift from Maoist socialism to post-Mao economic opening up. Against this backdrop, marital choices, love and marriage changed. The people's attitudes and values to love and marriage were reshaped by the power of economic capital. In addition, the data reveals that how the participants' accounts and experiences have been shaped by their different age and geographical groups, the difference between rural and urban, and the difference in their family backgrounds. This therefore reveals that people's attitudes towards love and marriage have been influenced by and internalised different historical periods, geographical differences and life experience. In the next chapter I will draw on the lens of definitions of love to unpack senior age groups' perceptions and elaborate how their values and attitudes have been shaped throughout the course of their life.

Chapter 5: The Meaning of Love and Marriage: Through the Eyes of Older Chinese People

Introduction

My grandfather is 85 years old (born in 1935) and has been married twice, the first time to a woman chosen by his parents and grandparents, the second of his own choosing, to my grandmother. His arranged marriage happened when he was young, his second marriage much later, and one day he shared his stories about these two different parts of his life during a family meal. His first marriage was the result of living in a village and being forced to comply with his parents' wishes, and although he eventually divorced some years later, the experience had a significant impact on his younger life. He would tell us that 'I did not know about love until I met your grandmother' and we would all laugh and tease him. 'How did you fall in love with grandma?' we would ask. 'Haha', he would say, 'She was working in the community and I would always find excuses to go to see her, as she looked so beautiful and shy'. My grandmother was sitting beside him and laughing with us too. Unfortunately, I did not have a chance to ask my grandmother about her understanding of love but in my memory, this was the last time we talked about their love stories before my grandmother passed away. Probably, she did not expect that many years later I would bring back those memories to research their peers' experiences of love and marriage.

'What is love?' and 'what is marriage?' filled my mind during the fieldwork, as these are the central questions I want to explore with my research. However, after talking to the participants I began to feel more confused about the definition of love and the meanings of marriage. I realised how understandings of love and marriage vary and depend on the individual's experiences, such as in my grandfather's case; his definition of love reveals the different understandings that emerge from an arranged marriage and a freely chosen marriage. In these circumstances, the meanings ascribed to love and marriage become more fluid: they might change across one's life; or the differences may

depend on the individual's understanding of love and marriage. In this chapter, I will draw on some empirical data which has emerged from participants to illustrate their understandings of the meaning of love and marriage. In the first section, I will focus on the participants who said that they 'do not know what love is' to explain their views and attitudes towards love and marriage; in the second section, I will discuss some of the participants who give different views on and explanations of love and marriage.

Experiences of Arranged Marriage : 'I do not know what love is'

The data suggests that the participants' views on love are rather vague but in most cases they saw love as something very different from marriage. Some participants even claimed that they 'do not know what love is', despite having been in long-term marriages well into their old age. Most participants were able to talk a little more clearly about the meanings behind their marriages and in contrast with their nebulous idea of love, to some extent there were indications that class and family backgrounds have influenced their different viewpoints. However, a clear definition about love or marriage did not emerge from most of the interviews, especially the older group who are over 70 years old. I would argue that the older people's views on and definitions of love and marriage are strongly related to their family backgrounds, geographical areas (urban-rural difference) and generational differences. The people who experienced arranged marriage are more likely to say that they 'do not know what love is'.

To illustrate the confusion about love expressed in the interview, we might first use the cases of FeiFei and Ban as examples. I interviewed FeiFei in a care home in Jinan city but she is from a rural area and has been put into the care home by her children. She told me:

> During that time, we had no love or love stories [between us]. I do not know what love is, I did not know love when I was introduced to my husband, you

know, it was very different from nowadays when people talk about love and relationships.

(FeiFei, Widow-Female-77 years old-Jinan, married in 1960)

Another example is Ban who came from a village but ended up working as a carer in towns and cities. She stated that:

There are no love stories to tell as we have no love, we got married in the past as we were introduced by others and our parents agreed to the marriage.

(Ban, Widow-Female-64 years old-Jinan, married in 1973)

Both FeiFei and Ban claim never to have known love, not even with their husbands, although they recognise that understandings of love have changed along with the social transition of China. These types of representations were not isolated instances and many other participants expressed similar views. Like FeiFei and Ban, most of those who claimed to 'not know love' had experienced marriage arranged by their families, although Ban is only in her early sixties and very young among the participants who have been through an arranged marriage. She grew up in an underdeveloped village and did not receive an education due to her family's economic situation, as well as the widely held belief at the time that 'men are superior to women'. With no formal education and few prospects, Ban entered into a marriage arranged by a matchmaker when she was just 20 years old.

We had no love stories and I do not know about love. The matchmaker introduced us and the elders of the two families wanted us to get married. We were not like today's more astute youth. I did not think about his family background, personalities or his savings, I just knew there was a man for me but did not try to find out about him. My mind was empty at that time.

(Ban, Widow-Female-64 years old-Jinan, married in 1973)

According to Pan (2015:2) during the early 20th Century in China no one chose their own marital partners on a romantic love basis due to the fact that marriages were arranged by parents via appointed go-betweens; furthermore, people did not have a chance to find or develop true love, which can also be attributed to the fact that society did not allow this to happen. Ban's narrative shows that she did not experience love; rather her arranged marriage was her families' her idea, not her own, and this absence of herself in the marriage highlights the family-centred way of life at the time. By comparison, she uses the younger generation's marital preferences to show how little time she spent thinking about her future husband and his family background, and her ignorance also explains why she 'doesn't know what love is' and has 'no love stories' from her arranged marriage.

As was mentioned in Chapter Two, the marriage law adopted in 1950 denounced the arbitrary and compulsory feudal marriage and abolished arranged marriage and polygyny (Xu and Whyte, 1990; Zhou, 2003). However, what is perhaps more unexpected is that in contemporary Chinese society many of the younger elderly participants also experienced this type of traditional marital arranged marriage. The older participants like FeiFei and Ban who are from rural areas and married during the 1960s and early 1970s were still in arranged marriages. According to Parish's (1975) study of the Chinese peasant family, although parents can no longer legally interfere with their children's marriages, in practice the reality has lagged behind this new ideal, because the family structure in rural areas is still that of the large extended family. During the 1970s the family was still an important unit for economic production and social welfare was still based on the family (Parish, 1975: 613-615). Therefore in rural areas, the continuity of the old family structure made 'feudal customs' like arranged marriage difficult to eradicate.

It was more common for the older participants in their seventies and eighties who had experienced arranged marriage to state that they 'do not know love'. For example, Lao Jin and his wife are temporarily living in care while awaiting relocation due to the demolition of their home. Their marriage was arranged by their respective parents when

they were both still young and living in the village where they grew up but despite this, the marriage has lasted for 65 years. Lao Jin's narrative about the marriage is as follows:

> Lao Jin: In our previous cultural custom, marriage was always decided by the parents. I had already been engaged since I was very young, about five or six years old. Someone who got engaged at a similar age to me married at about 12 years old, but I got married later than him [married at 18 years old].
> Kun: Did you know you had been engaged by your parents at that young age?
> Lao Jin: I was too young and cared very little about this. After the engagement, the two families exchanged some gifts, I remember I just felt it was a new thing in my life as I got some delicious snacks from this engagement, but actually I didn't meet my wife at all and we had no chance to contact each other. But for our parents, they were thinking we have become family in law, we have become 'relatives' from then on.
>
> (Lao Jin, Long-lasting-marriage-Male-83 years old-Jinan, married in 1953)

Lao Jin's engagement ritual took place sometime in the 1940s before 'feudal marriage' and 'marriage by purchase' were abolished by the new laws introduced by the PRC (People's Republic of China) in 1950 (Heshatter, 2007). Lao Jin did not meet his bride at all, not even during their engagement, which the two families' adults were entirely in charge of organising and supervising. As in the traditional Chinese arranged marriage, 'the bride and groom had never seen each other before the wedding day, the arrangement for their wedding having been made entirely by their respective parents with the assistance of a matchmaker' (Jankowiak and Moore, 2017:77). Apparently, the only memory Lao Jin has about his childhood engagement to his wife is the taste of the food given to him to celebrate the arrangement. As a five or six years old child, he could not have known what love was and, moreover, he was too young to understand the full implications of the engagement or marriage. As a bridegroom, he did not play the main role in the engagement process, instead, he emphasises how the relationship between the two families changed after the engagement. Lao Jin gave some more details about the families' relationship later on during the interview, such as how becoming a 'relative'

meant that after their engagement the family members would mutually have responsibility to participate in family big events and were expected to attend family wedding ceremonies or funerals.

Against this arranged marriage background, in terms of his attitudes towards love, Lao Jin states,

> Lao Jin: I didn't know about love, I was only focused on books at school. I knew that the elders had arranged a marriage for me, but I never met her. I never learnt about love from school, we just learnt knowledge but not about love.
> Kun: So, you just obeyed the elders?
> Lao Jin: Those were elders' matters; I had no idea about that. We did not meet up at all [with the fiancee], you know I just studied mathematics and Chinese and did not study that other stuff at school. I think children should obey their parents' decision during that time in general. All our marriages were arranged at that time.

These quotations and Lao Jin's repeated views make it clear that he had no awareness of love because he had not 'learnt' about love in school. To some extent, he regarded love as a type of knowledge like 'mathematics' or 'Chinese', something to be taught at school. The facts for Lao Jin were that his parents had arranged his marriage but nobody taught him what love was or where to 'study' love, all he had done was to follow his parents and the tradition he was brought up in. Baker's (1979) view is that in an arranged marriage system, 'marriage was not something to be left to the individuals involved and was certainly not to be left to 'love' (as cited in Pimental, 1994:268). In Pimental's (1994) assessment of the arranged marriage system, the male descent line, kinship and gender hierarchy all reinforced the importance of the parent-child bond over the conjugal bond and therefore the 'family unit as a whole by keeping the conjugal bond weak and facilitated control over the young couple by older kin' (Pimental, 1994: 268). For this reason, the absence of 'love' in Lao Jin's perception and arranged marriage is shaped by the family system and the importance of patrilineal descent.

Participants' marriages were not only arranged by parents or grandparents but also by other elders such as older sisters, as in Tian's case. Tian is 90 years old, she was born in 1927 and lost her husband in the year of 2011. Her children eventually decided to place her in a good care home in Jinan, where she has been living for about a year. According to her narrative, her hometown is in Hebei province and she was born in a village. Tian is illiterate and never attended school. Influenced by the war and the starvation that ensued, she and her siblings left home and moved to Jinan, where she was forced into an arranged marriage by her older sister. Her sister introduced her to her late husband in the village where they worked as farm labourers for many years, Tian's older sister played the elder's role to arrange the marriage. Hershatter (2007:15) notes this type of matchmaking also contributes to the maintenance of women's social networks and she draws on Potter and Potter's (1990) point to illustrate how, in rural areas, some women who had married into a village would sometimes start up their own networks to arrange matches for the younger women from their natal villages. Although Tian later moved to a county town when her husband got a job there.

> Kun : Can you talk about love and relationships when you were young?
> Tian: Love relationship? We did not have love or relationships; we were arranged by my sister. He was one year older than me and we got married when I was 18.
> Kun: What is your understanding of love?
> Tian: I don't understand it, not at all. Because during that feudal age, we were shy about this, I didn't even want to meet him before marriage, if I had done that others would have gossiped about me, they might have called me 'dissolute' or laughed at me if we had met up [before marriage].
> Kun: So you just listened to your family's advice?
> Tian: Of course, we always did what they said, I couldn't make my own decision, I just had to do what the elders said. We had no freedom during that time. Don't laugh at me. I remember that even after we had been married for a couple of years, we were still too shy to talk or be playful with each other, we

> couldn't even laugh loudly in front of each other, you know, we were too shy. That was our world and the old time, we were all very shy.
>
> (Tian, Widow-Female-90 years old, Jinan, married in 1946)

Tian uses the word 'shy' to explain why she did not want to meet up with her late husband before they married. In addition to this, she notes that if there had been any intimacy between them during the engagement, they would have been laughed at by the other people in the village. Her account shows how arranged marriage was a local custom, one which shaped people's values regarding intimacy with labels like 'dissolute' used to shame individuals who violated the rules of the tradition. According to Fei Xiaotong's (1992) description of the traditional norms in Chinese rural society:

> 'Rural society does not allow the Faustian spirit… Rural society seeks stability, so it fears the destruction of social relationships. The relationship between men and women must be arranged so that their emotional states are not erratic. One need not seek an underlying commonality between men and women, between them, there should be some distance, this distancing is clearly present in the prescription "there should be no intimacy in the interaction between men and women." This distancing is not just physical but also psychological'(Fei, 1992:91).

Tian's experience of arranged marriage reflects this 'physical and psychological' distancing, whereby marital practices were disciplined by the morality and customs of the arranged marriage system and structured by rural society. Under the arranged marriage system, the bride and groom were not permitted to see each other until their wedding; moreover, in order to prevent any gossip spreading about unmarried or engaged young women, brides to be were kept out of the public realm as their families sought to boost their daughters' marriageability (Jankowiak and Moore, 2017:77). Before 1949, if an unmarried young woman was seen talking to a man in public, she would be considered immoral and regarded as wanton or shameless (Evans, 1997). From a man's or rather his family's point of view, when choosing a young woman for their son, both the woman's and her family's moral reputation were considerably more

important than they would be today (Yan, 2003). Although Tian did not mention too much about this custom before her marriage, her first meeting with her late husband did indeed not happen until the day of their wedding and her unwillingness to meet up with her fiance before their marriage indicates that she wanted to avoid gossip spreading or any potential damage to her reputation. As a result of this, they were bashful during their marriage and this comes across when Tian narrates these experiences.

It is worth noting that Tian is aware that her experience and behaviours are so different from nowadays, therefore she asked me 'not to laugh at' her before she told me about their (her and her late husband's) reaction to being married. Tian regards these experiences as collective memories of the irreversible past of society 'we were all very shy' and shaped by that era's world. Turner (1995) states that our embodiment is important because it is fundamental to understanding ourselves and is a process of memory and identity; furthermore, from a sociological perspective, the times we live through are a social and collective phenomenon, a social network of shared experiences shaped into a single memory of one's past (1995:256). This applies to Tian's case; her experiences of marriage are not only her own but also the collective's. As a result, meeting up with one's fiance was considered taboo for someone of her age in a rural area. Tian's view of arranged marriage was the common sense view of the time and as she told me, 'if a girl found a partner by herself then others would criticise her for being a slut'. This reveals that arranged marriage during Tian's youth was not just rigid adherence to form but also reflected a tight moral discipline shaping and guiding the individual's private life and behaviour.

However, when I asked Tian 'Were you getting along well in marriage*?',* she told me,

> 'We were good, we were in a good relationship after marriage. My husband was very handsome, I looked not bad as well, others who saw us would always comment that we looked like brother and sister or how a husband and wife looks. In addition, I treated him well and he treated me well too.'

Because I grew up in an age of freedom of choice regarding love and marriage, it surprised me that some of the participants like Tian who had experienced arranged marriage were able to have a satisfying marriage. Tian's marriage obtained approval and affirmation from her surroundings, her community and wider society, partly because they 'looked like' husband and wife and 'got along very well'. Interestingly, Xu and Whyte's (1990) study comparing satisfaction in arranged marriages and free choice marriages shows that the marriage quality of those who are free to select their mates is higher than it is amongst arranged marriages, but traditionalists argue that 'arranged marriages are generally more likely to produce compatibility than are love matches' (1990:710). Nevertheless, there is no evidence to show that arranged marriages necessarily lead to bad outcomes, rather in some cases they enable couples to have a good quality life as a result of matchmaking based on the same level of family background and socioeconomic status.

From a male perspective Lao Bao also gets along well with his wife and their arranged marriage has lasted more than 50 years so far:

> Kun: What did you think of love when you were young*?*
> Lao Bao: There was no love during that time, we just got along well.
> Kun: What is 'getting along well'?
> Lao Bao: For example, some people are very lazy and never do work in the village, they are lazy and gluttonous. [As] a family can't run if a man is like that, I believe the couple can't get along well; if one earns money but the other one is only spending without saving they can't get along with each other well too, so I think a couple should have some things in common. In addition, if a woman only looks beautiful but is useless or she can't do anything, her beauty means nothing, doesn't it?
> Kun: How do you understand marriage then?
> Lao Bao : I don't have that concept in my mind, neither love nor marriage, no ideas about these.
>
> (Lao Bao, Long-lasting marriage-Male-70 years old-Qingdao, married in 1947)

Lao Bao's answer is another viewpoint commonly expressed by the participants who 'do not know love is' but are satisfied with their marriages. When asked this question about love, they talked about other things instead such as their marital partner's personality characteristics or the practical circumstances in which they began their marriage. Unlike Tian's emphasis on the mutual satisfaction that comes from 'treating each other well' and 'looking like a couple', Lao Bao highlights how good his wife was at doing housework and farm work.

Not everybody in arranged marriages is this lucky, as Lao Lee's views on his wife demonstrate:

> Lao Lee: 'Haha, love? I have no idea about love. My wife comes from a village, she was good at farming work and diligent, she was very strong, with a strong body. But we had no sense of whether we were in love or not, we just lived together in order to live [in marriage] then.'
>
> (Lao Lee,Widower-Male-89 years old-Guiyang, married in 1949)

Lao Lee is 89 years old and his wife died in 2005. He lives in a care home in Guiyang and when I met him, he was doing exercises on the artificial mountain of the care home. He grew up in the rural Wuhan area but moved to the city of Guiyang with his parents to escape from the Second Sino-Japanese War. During the interview, he told me that his engagement was arranged by his grandparents when he was about ten years old. He did not meet his wife before the wedding, even though they lived in the same village. In fact, by the time they got married when he was about 20 years old, he had already moved to the city to take up a job in a press industry. Not surprisingly, Lao Lee failed to provide me with a definition of love but he did describe some of his late wife's strengths such as her 'strong body' and 'diligence'. This because during the collective period, the ideal spouse according to villagers was a decent person with a good temperament, hardworking and capable of listening to his or her elders as well as to the leaders of the community (Yan, 2003:77). Lao Lee highlights how his late wife's characteristics of diligence and hard work in farming were a good fit with the preferred mate during that epoch. Moreover, despite having lived in the city for many years, he still considers his

wife's strong body and personality characteristics as a good farmer to be important. However, his answers to further questioning reveal some different views.

> Kun: How do you understand marriage then?
> Lao Lee: I do not have any ideas about it. Although I just finished primary school, I was the smartest child among my siblings when we were young. I had not read many books but I was good looking enough. After I got married, when I walked with my wife outdoors, others often suspected that she was my mother, not just one or two but many people said she looked like my mother. This is my only feeling about her and our marriage, that is it.
> Kun: Why did you have that feeling?
> Lao Lee: Because she grew up in a village and did lots of farm work, her skin was coarse and her face had wrinkles, she looked like fifty years old already when she was in her twenties and thirties. I was not very handsome but at least I looked younger than her.

This contradictory view of his late wife means that it is difficult to say what his true feelings about love or marriage are. On the one hand, Lao Lee appreciated his wife's 'diligence' and 'strength'; on the other, he disliked her appearance because she looked older than her actual age, which caused others to comment that they looked like mother and son rather than a married couple. That his wife was 'mother-like' seems to have become his main feeling about the marriage. It is worth noting here that, after the collective period, there were changes about how to judge the ideal bride, whereby beauty became a top priority as did a good body shape and there was a fading of the ideal character of hard work and a strong body due to the declining demand for farm work in the villages (Yan, 2003:80). As Lao Lee moved from village to city at a young age and there was rarely a chance to do farm work in urban areas, these mixed appraisals served him very well through the different phases of life. His late wife's 'diligence' was an important positive personal characteristic in rural areas but when they moved to an urban area 'beauty' became the main positive standard to judge a woman. As a consequence, there were negative comments about his late wife and Lao Lee

mentions that his friends, neighbours or strangers suspected his late wife old enough to be his mother when they went out together. As he describes in the quotation, this was because of his late wife's 'coarse skin', 'wrinkles' and ageing appearance, which probably hurt his pride or caused him to lose face and therefore came to dominate his feelings about the marriage. This change in interpretation also reveals, to some extent, the gap between rural and urban areas during the collective period in Lao Lee's time and how his different life experiences shaped his ideas and values, which were embodied via his intimate life.

Some male participants did not know about love but most saw marriage as having a special meaning in a patriarchal society, where a man's 'ability' to find and marry a woman is of great importance and an essential task of his life, as is illustrated by Lao Bao and Lao Yong,

> Lao Bao: You asked me what love is, but we never thought about it in that way, the parent's ideas and the elder's suggestions were the majority decision of that, you know it was impossible to stay single when I reached marrying age. So I think love for me is whether a man is able to get a woman and get married to have the next generation.
>
> (Lao Bao, Long-lasting marriage, Male, 70 years old, married in 1965)

Lao Bao emphasises that in their era, the aim of marriage was to create and nurture the next generation rather than to initiate a relationship based on love or romance. Stockman (2000: 96) argues that traditional Chinese Confucian ideas about marriage see its primary purpose as carrying on the patrilineal family and as such it is something to be arranged by parents, a family rather than an individual matter. Thus the meaning behind Lao Bao 'being able to' find a woman and create the next generation is actually about whether the patrilineal family will continue into the future.

Similarly when I asked Lao Yong the question 'how do you understand love?', he said,

Lao Yong: Love…um…I just know it's about man and woman, it is about a man being able to find a woman and to live their lives, I don't know what else there is about love, whatever I thought at that time, my marriage was arranged by my parents.

Kun: What do you think about marriage?

Lao Yong: About marriage… I just know I have to find a woman, because a man can't live alone for his whole life, he has to find a woman to 'Guo-ri-zi'(*过日子 to live life*).

Kun: What is 'Guo-ri-zi' then ?

Lao Yong: It is about giving birth to children and bringing them up, this is Guo-ri-zi. This is a mission or a task of life, one must get married, no matter who, he must carry on the family line, it can't end with your generation, so you need to pass it from one generation to the next.'

(Lao Yong,Widower-Male-82 years old-Jinan, married in 1954)

Lao Yong's view on love and marriage is similar to Lao Bao's, neither of which gave me a clear explanation about the boundaries of love and marriage. Both have no idea about love but marriage has a very important meaning for them, as a man must be 'able' to find a woman to marry and carry on the family lines. According to Yang and Wang (2014:98) 'in China norms as to when and who to marry have long been outside the confines of individual decision making and preferences.' Therefore marriage is not based on romance but rather on the family's collective goals and the continuation and maintenance of economic, social and family lines (Lee, Wang and Ruan, 2001). In Lao Yong's account, marriage for a man is a type of mission to be completed over the course of a lifetime and this reflects the principles of Confucianism, in which the traditional family is patriarchal and the family lines traced through males, whose personal feelings are not important as marriages are arranged by the parents in order to ensure the continuation of the patrilineal family (Jankowiak and Moore, 2017).

It can be seen that during the collective historical period, the older participants who experienced arranged marriage in rural areas still view the 'purpose of taking a wife as

the begetting of children to continue the family line' (Croll, 1981:4). Their marriages did not involve love and their perceptions of marriage were shaped by the arranged marriage system and traditional cultural norms. However, unlike the group who lived in rural areas and gave views on marriage associated with norms and family obligations, some of the older participants from urban areas as well as those from the younger elderly generation were able to give me different definitions of love and marriage.

The Meaning of Love and the Difference Between Love and Marriage

In Shakespeare, 'there are a thousand Hamlets in a thousand people's eyes.' From the perspective of love, and according to my data, I would change this to be 'there are different meanings of love in different people's eyes'. Unlike those who 'do not know love', shifting to the group who grew up in urban areas or who moved from a village and spent most of their lives in cities, this group was more likely to give me a detailed explanation of the meanings of love and marriage. Among this group, except for a few participants who told me that love and marriage should be the same or closely related, many people gave me two different explanations for these phenomena. I will now draw on participants' accounts to unpack their understanding of love and its differences from marriage.

NaNa who is 94 years old, obtained a university degree during her twenties and spent the next 30 years teaching in a high school in the city Guiyang. Her hometown is a village in Wuhan but in order to escape the war, she fled her home to receive an education in Guiyang. All her siblings were forced into arranged marriages by their parents but she managed to avoid this by going to university, where she met her husband (who used to be a lecturer in the university). She told me,

NaNa: I do not know exactly what love is exactly, I just found that we had similar hobbies, our personalities fitted with each other, and that he was an honest and right guy … anyhow if our personalities are in sync, that is it.
Kun: Do you think marriage is similar to love?
NaNa: Marriage …um… I was ignorant about it at that age, I thought that if it was approved by the parents and we can get along with each other then getting married would be fine.
Kun: So you needed to get your parents' approval?
NaNa: Of course, I had to get their approval, we were free to choose our partners but we did not have unlimited freedom about marriage.

(NaNa, Widow-Female-94 years old-Guiyang, married in 1948)

NaNa was one of the oldest participants and her explanations of love and marriage are already much clearer than those given by the other participants who grew up in rural areas. In her view, love is about having similar hobbies and being a good match in terms of personality traits. NaNa married during the 1940s and according to Jankowiak and Moore (2017:86) in this period urban areas were undergoing some important changes in terms of how marriages were conducted: firstly, arranged marriage was no longer considered the norm but an exception; secondly, there was not much parental involvement in marriage and forced marriage was less common. Against this background of social change, unlike NaNa's siblings living in a rural area and forced into arranged marriages, NaNa's husband was an urban citizen and he was free to choose his ideal marital partner in Guiyang, although NaNa still needed to ask for her parents' permission and the marriage had to be approved by the families. Her experience indicates that the degree of freedom of choice regarding marriage during that age was dependent on geographical location (urban and rural) as well as class classification and education level. NaNa's experience of close relationships was more open than those in arranged marriages and for her love was about choosing a man with whom she shared hobby and matched personalities, therefore, love is an individual free choice for her but marriage is somewhat above that level, as family as an institution still played an important role and exercised its power to approve their marriage.

Compared with NaNa, Lao Zhan depicted his marriage in a more romantic way. Lao Zhan is in a long-lasting marriage and has a medical degree. He and his wife used to be classmates when they were studying at university and they married once they graduated, both of them becoming doctors and working in the same hospital in the city from then on.

> Lao Zhan: Love is the affection for each other, they share similar ideas and are able to live together… during our age, we were admiring the type of love in the opera and films called '*Marriage of the Fairy Princess*[17]', the film was played during the 1950s, in our mind their love was our role model.
> Kun: What is the type of love in '*Marriage of the Fairy Princess'* about?
> Lao Zhan: 'They helped each other and relied on each other, what is more they overcome hard times and their love becomes deeper and stronger… I think personality and affection are important, two people get along well and then love involves the feeling of a spark and crush on each other. Without this feeling of a crush on somebody, it's very hard for two people to stay together. Maybe they can only meet once and there would be no stories.
>
> (Lao Zhan, Long-lasting marriage-Male-74 years old-Jinan, married in 1969)

Lao Zhan's understanding of love is very similar to the romantic love that is shown in films and he uses the words 'spark' and 'crush' to describe his understanding of it. Furthermore, the love films of his time also played a role in shaping his sense of love, the story in the film encouraging his understanding of love in practice. As mentioned in Chapter Two, during the 1950s the marriage law established the main context (Ding and Zhong, 2014) while Evans (1997) notes that passion and romantic intimacy have been represented in the Chinese media as evidence of changes in the discourses of love and sexuality.

[17]Marriage of the Fairy Princess: Based on the Chinese legendary story of Dong Yong and the Seventh Fairy Princess, Marriage of the Fairy Princess is a (socialist) retelling of how a celestial maiden spies a dutiful young man and, taking pity on him, flies down from heaven and helps him pay back his debt to the local landlord. But their happy relationship is doomed when the Emperor of Heaven discovers his daughter's absence. They overcome many difficulties from the Emperor of Heaven and their love story touches the Emperor, finally they have a happy life.

During the interview, I asked a follow-up question,

> Kun: Did you and your wife experience this 'spark'?
>
> Lao Zhan: We absolutely had, haha… although she was not a very beautiful girl and I was not a very handsome boy, we were just classmates in the university. Before we were in a relationship we did not have this feeling of closeness or spark, but once we confirmed our relationship, we felt especially close, this feeling of passion is very strong. Last week we [he and his wife] had a casual chat and we recalled this and talked about how our youthful passion has faded and we cannot have that feeling now. But I still think love is really about this passion or spark, this is very important for marriage. I do not think it is a sign or fundamental factor of marriage, but it is a very important point when entering into a marriage.

From Lao Zhan's narrative, the feeling of 'passion or spark' emerges before marriage and plays an important role in both relationships and marriage. Lao Zhan thinks these passions encouraged him and his wife to become 'closer' but during the interview, he emphasises how they needed to follow the strict rules of the university, which created a clear line between 'love relationship' and 'classmates'. Before they could openly declare their love relationship after graduation, they had to behave as normal classmates and this is the result of their social environment. As the Cultural Revolution was taking place while they were studying at university, they were not allowed to be in love nor to marry according to the university's regulations, which is why Lao Zhan emphasises that the 'spark' happened after their graduation. Evans (1997) refers to this type of love as 'true socialist love', as there were procedures for moving from 'ordinary friendship' to marriage that had to be followed or the couple would be regarded as immoral and their love criticised as bourgeois in character. In this process they needed to be mutual acquaintances first and then they could move through the transition from friendship to love without overtly romantic or sexual contact; finally they were required to declare their love relationship (Evans, 1997:89).

Compared with the participants who had arranged marriages and claimed to 'not know love', Lao Zhan's views reflect the liberated ideology emerging during the same historical period. However, when he talks about marriage, he delivers the meaning with a strong traditional Chinese value included.

> Lao Zhan: Why have marriage? As a human being, marriage is the 'must do' thing, if one does not marry, the first ones to disagree with him would be his elders. Otherwise what do the elders feed him up for? Put myself as an example, my parents lived in a rural area and although they didn't speak out about it, their minds have already adapted to that habit and tradition. That is life, no matter who, they need to think about marriage, at least they need to think about it for the elders and offspring. If one jumps out of this range he would be considered a black sheep of the family.
> … Marriage should be a natural phenomenon. If one lacks a marriage, I use the word 'lack' which means he or she must have some problems, the problems might be physical or mental, I would feel this person must be in some way abnormal, without marriage one's life has not been completed yet. I think our Chinese problems are not that bad, the Western ones worse than ours ...
>
> (Lao Zhan, Long-lasting marriage-Male-74 years old-Jinan, married in 1969)

Lao Zhan's views on marriage embody traditional Chinese values shaped by Confucianism and his liberated ideology of love is complimented by an awareness of the functions of marriage. Whereas love is just an individual feeling, one's marriage is a mission undertaken on behalf of the elders and the family's offspring. Giddens (1992) points out that the family duty marriage and conjugal marriage models are useful for understanding family transition in Western societies, as a good marriage should ideally involve mutual emotional affinity. This also partly applies to Lao Zhan, whose ideas embody both types of ideology: on the one hand, he believes the 'spark' of emotional feeling is a vital factor leading to a good marriage; on the other hand, the success of a marriage is still evaluated on a family duty basis. In addition to this, marriage, according to Lao Zhan and other like-minded participants could even become a standard to judge

whether one is a 'normal' human being able to have a 'complete life'. Otherwise, a life without marriage is stigmatised. This normative way of thinking requires everybody to marry, to behave like everyone else, and reflects the fact that marriage and family are the central feature of Chinese society (Ho et al, 2018).

According to the data, this need to conform to social expectations was some other participants' main motivation or reason for marriage, as further examples from Lao Shen, An Yi and Yuan's interviews show.

> Lao Shen: I built a family and got married because all the others were doing this, I cannot live alone and also need to build my own family.
> Kun: Why?
> Lao Shen: Because I can't live on my own forever, without marriage how can I have offspring? Or what kind of person will I become? Because others all got married, I also need to enter marriage at the marital age, just to follow the social mainstream. It was not because I really loved her or she loved me. Love grew gradually after we married, it was not a thing that appeared suddenly.
>
> (Lao Shen, Long-lasting Marriage-Male-81 years old -Jinan, married in 1964)

Lao Shen has been in a long-lasting marriage for more than fifty years, he obtained a degree and used to be a good engineer. His understanding of love is in reverse order to that of Lao Zhan, that love should grow after marriage. As we mentioned early in Lao Yong's example, marriage is associated with having a family and offspring, and the obligation to have children is common, especially when most people are doing this, it becomes a mainstream and normalised behaviour that should be followed.

Similarly, An Yi,

> 'I considered love was influenced by most of my colleagues surrounding me, as most of them had a marital mate. I thought I achieved the marital age then I took it for granted to have a partner by my friends' matchmaking, that is it. But I did not have a strong desire for love or marriage. I just thought that others are all

getting married so I also need a marriage, just to follow the mainstream and never think about love and stuff like that.'

(An Yi, Long-lasting Marriage-Female-73 years old-Qingdao, married in 1976)

Love for An Yi is actually not about love itself but rather a life stage or time period when one is supposed to find mate. This value has been shaped by her environment, what she has to do is just follow the mainstream and without need to think about it. However, in terms of the meaning of marriage, it is also clear that there are many gender differences in how it is interpreted,

An Yi: Marriage was about finding a guy to marry that I can depend on for the rest of my life. I felt that marriage includes many pressures, it meant I would have to face bearing children, to live life, I have to do this family relationship stuff. Before that I had a leisurely life, so marriage meant that those family matters suddenly filled my life. I needed to look after my father in law and families in law, I felt a lot of pressure to be a good daughter-in-law.

An Yi's narrative is different from the male viewpoint provided by Lao Shen or Lao Zhan and suggests that marriage for a woman means finding a man to rely on, which reflects the ideology of patriarchy. An Yi was no longer herself after marriage, especially when compared with the 'leisurely life' she led before marriage, as her identity shifted to that of wife, mother and daughter in law. As a new bride, her responsibility involved servicing her in laws, performing duties within the respective households and giving birth to children to complete her primary function, which is to show filial piety and maintain harmonious family relationships (Stockman, 2000). This expectation, according to Stacey (1983:50) reflects the fact that Confucian patriarchy has succeeded in legitimating itself as a system among most Chinese women as well as men.

There were different explanations of the meaning of marriage and love. For example, one of the oldest old participants, Lao Shi (82 years old) who obtained a university

degree and was a senior architect in the city of Beijing, also thinks about love and marriage in binary terms but in a different way,

> Love, I think the general and the basic love is about caring for each other, respecting each other and showing consideration for each other … But marriage is actually a contract, an agreement by law. However, marriage does not necessarily mean experiencing love. Just as I told you, I fell in love but we failed to stay together; the woman I married is not because of love. So love does not have to result in a family. In the past feudal period, many people's marriages have been arranged by elders, without love they can still have marriage. But I remember Engels said, 'marriage without love is immorality.
>
> (Lao Shi, Long-lasting marriage-Male-82 years old-Beijing, married in 1957)

As mentioned in Chapter Four, Lao Shi's marriage was matchmade by his work place (*danwei*). His life was deeply influenced by the Mao era and although he experienced 'true socialist love' (Evans, 1997) during his youth, he was only able to marry his wife because their political class statuses were matched.

Compared with the oldest-old group, the young-old group was less affected by the transformation from the Mao to the post-Mao era and the economic reform period, but they also saw love as different from marriage. As Jingjing put it to me, 'the differences are man-made sometimes' and she used her experience to illustrate her understanding of love,

> Love is about people who would like to stay together, like to talk to each other and have fun together, as I was missing him and always wanted to talk to him. It is hard for me to use one sentence to explain love. Some would say love is full of passion, love till death; some think love is about looking after each other. In my view, my love with my …[ex-]... husband is a type of self-sacrifice, I always wanted to share his burdens and think about his situation. For example, he planned to do a three-year masters degree after we got married when I got pregnant, but as a result of that

> we needed to live apart at a distance for three years. I supported his idea and told him 'go for it, I completely support you and I can look after our child very well, do not worry about this'. In the marriage, I was always the one to be self-sacrificing, the reason I agreed to our divorce was also because I want him to live well with that woman and their child. I can say I still love him from the first time we met until now, I think love is self-sacrifice, as long as he lives well and he needs it, I will support him.
>
> (Jingjing, Divorced-Female-64 years old-Shanghai, married in 1976)

Jingjing and her ex-husband divorced because he had an extra-marital affair. She draws on her life experience to illustrate how 'self-sacrifice' is her way of showing love and uses a very touching way to explain how deeply she loved her ex-husband in marriage and continues to love him even after their divorce. At the same time, she also supplied with me another difference between love and marriage,

> Jingjing: When we were in a relationship, we went out for meals, watched films or went shopping, talked dearly, visited each other's family sometimes, dated, those were very romantic and happy experiences. However, after we got married, it was more about daily necessities, we had to come back to reality, make the bed, clean the rooms and do the housework, that became our *guo-ri-zi* (to live life). '
> Kun: What is *guo-ri-zi* ?
> Jingjing: Once we'd got married, unlike the so-called passionate love, it then became about having children, cooking meals and commuting to work every day.

Love is romantic but marriage is down to earth; this seems to be the main difference between love and marriage, as marriage is bound up with the social and economic obligations of family practice. But unlike Lao Zhan and other members of the older generation, who hold strong traditional views on marriage as a means for continuing the family lineage, as one of the younger-old group Jingjing's explanation of marriage places more emphasis on its everyday practice.

Tong has experienced marriage, remarriage and is currently cohabiting. Based on these three experiences, she gives me three accounts of her feelings about love,

> Tong: I think love is a type of 'feeling'
> Kun: What is that 'feeling' about?
> Tong: The feeling is, what's that called … He looks pleasing to my eyes when we meet and then I will think this man is nice.
> Kun: Pleasing to the eyes?
> Tong: I do not know how to describe that feeling, it's about even if he has nothing but I still feel he is nice, we can talk together and share a common language. Such as in my first marriage, my first husband always listened to me, I felt like I was in charge.
>
> (Tong, Cohabiting-Female-58 years old-Beijing)

Tong's hometown is the city of Beijing and her first husband was introduced to her by a mutual friend when she was in her early twenties. In her first marriage, her husband would follow her suggestions but she had to divorce him because of problems with the extended family. Tong's narrative fits with Potter and Potter's (1990) analysis of Chinese expressions of love and intimacy, that 'marriage choice is ideally based on what are called 'good feelings', although the phrase is never used in the sense of a romantic or passionate emotional response' (Potter and Potter,1990: 191). However, when she describes meeting her second husband at their workplace many years later, after her divorce at around the age of 30 years old, Tong's narrative shifts into more a romantic form:

> 'In my second marriage, to be honest, if wasn't for the mistress in our marriage, our life could be considered very romantic, he knew me, knew how to love me dearly, how to play with me and have fun, and he was good at sweet talking, plus he liked to write poems, a very attractive and romantic man, but it can be a problem when man is too romantic, he will be other women's favourite too. … I loved him with all my heart but he did not reciprocate, I treated him so well, but

> unexpectedly he had an affair during our marriage and from then on I lost faith in men. I do not want to remarry again …'

In terms of remarriage, Tong talked about her second husband more than her other partners and she uses the term 'romantic' to describe the feeling that her ex-husband gave her. This romantic love did not last too long due to her ex-husband's affair; Tong enjoyed the romantic love but meanwhile it broke Tong's heart as well. In James Farrer's (2002) study of sexuality during the market reform in Shanghai, in which women use 'romance' to describe their feelings about love experiences, 'romance is one trope of the emotional rhetoric used for expressing love relationships' (2002:193). Tong was attracted by this same romantic feeling, which led to her second marriage but romance is a double-edged sword and damaged the marriage. Romance was positively constructed in the kind of happy romantic stories used to confirm past experiences (Farrer, 2002) but when Tong's husband was 'too romantic' it would lead to an affair and this would leave a negative stamp on Tong's memory.

> With the current partner, I am happy when he comes or goes, sometimes I even feel very peaceful when he is absent. When he comes to stay he always helps me, such as with the cooking or fixing some home appliances. We live in a very relaxed way, never constraining each other's freedom …
>
> (Tong, Cohabiting-Female-58 years old-Beijing)

When Tong talked about her current partner, she described him in an understated way, without mentioning love but emphasising that having the freedom to come and go is the way they get along with each other. Tong's experiences and her way of expressing them vividly depict how her different feelings about love and marriage depend on the type of partners she has been with, in her case, unlike some participants mentioned earlier who talked about traditional values, she underplays marriage as a family duty and set of norms, placing more emphasis on individual feelings. Her account shows how social change has given rise to the ideology of individualism and liberal values, which are played out via her intimate life. In this period, which started around the middle of the

1980s, brought on by the forces of the globalisation reintroduced during the reform era, many liberal values that had been pushed aside during Mao's ascendance began to re-establish (Jankowiak and Moore, 2017:73).

Lao Yan who is currently living in a good care home in Guiyang, provides another perspective to illustrate how love can also be attributed to passion and biological 'sexual love'. Lao Yan was born in 1921, worked as a film actor and married his late wife, a senior university professor, when he was in his thirties. He was free to choose his wife because he came from a very good family background - his father used to be a warlord in the city of Guiyang and was wealthy enough to support Lao Yan and his five siblings, which meant he was also able to receive a good education. His understanding of love and marriage is that,

> It is a representation of a high passion between a man and a woman; it refers to biological, psychological and sexual needs. An individual's love should not be limited by age, gender or country, nowadays there are some more homosexuals, I think it is no problem because human beings should not confine their love to a rule.
>
> (Lao Yan,Widower-Male-96 years old-Guiyang, married in 1956)

In Lao Yan's view 'love should be the precondition of marriage' and he thinks the two should be integrated. In addition to this, his description of his love life was full of romance and he emphasised that he is a romantic person. He also told me that during the pre-communist era (before 1949) when he made many films and travelled to various cities such as Shanghai, the young people around him had a very open attitude to love due to the influence of the liberal Western ideas; he himself had romantic affairs and cohabited with different women. From Lao Yan's account, it is clear that his understanding of love and marriage is very different from that of his peers, while his liberal ideas and views show that in urban areas, the meaning and practice of love also depended on one's class classification. Lao Yan, at the top of the social class hierarchy, was able to display a very open attitude towards intimate relationships, an attitude

similar to or perhaps even more open than that of young people in contemporary Chinese society.

Hong gave a more detailed explanation of sexual love,

> 'Love is between man and woman, at a young age they have passion, they share a common language. Using vulgar language, one could say that when a woman and a man have sex they stimulate these types of passion, but men have a type of explosive power, whereas women experience a different kind of enjoyment'
>
> (Hong,Widow-Female-65 years old-Beijing, married in 1978)

Compared with Lao Yan's account, Hong's explanation reveals the gendered difference in sexuality and by emphasising men's 'explosive power' and women's passive enjoyment, she also shows the self-narratives of individualism. According to Jeffreys and Yu (2015) the flow shift from Maoism to market socialism gave rise to the 'desiring' individual, which represented a new kind of cosmopolitan Chinese person more concerned with individualism, consumerism and novel articulations of sexual identity.

Conclusion

This chapter has unpacked several different definitions of love and marriage from the participants' explanations. To some extent, their understandings of love and marriage have been shaped by their individual life experiences but their perceptions of love and marriage also reflect their lived experience of social structures and the historical periods. In the first section of the chapter, I explored the implications of a common complaint 'I do now know what love is' to elaborate on how one group of older participants understand love and marriage, focusing on how the arranged marriage system has affected their values and even dominated their individual intimate lives. In the second section, the focus shifted to analysing the other group of older people that were enabled

to present different definitions of love and marriage. Compared to the participants that experienced arranged marriage in rural areas, the views of older people who lived in urban settings and received higher education showed different levels of liberal ideas about love and marriage. In addition, how the meaning of love and marriage varied through the eyes of older people depended on their class stratification, age generation, gender and life experiences. Love can be defined as a romantic involvement in the individual domain, but marriage is a normative practice that needs to be completed in the family and social domains. However, this gives rise to a particular issue when considering love and remarriage in later life: the challenge of negotiating private desires with family relationships. In the next chapter, I will focus on this issue and analyse the dilemmas faced by older Chinese people attempting to balance love and family.

Chapter 6 Negotiating Love in Later Life in China: The Dilemmas Faced by Older People

Introduction

One of my motivations for researching love and marriage in later life dates back to my grandmother's death. My grandmother died of cancer at the end of 2014 and after her funeral my grandfather thought about finding another partner and remarrying. When he put forward this idea to the family it prompted a family debate: some of my kin, such as my aunt and uncle held strongly negative opinions whereas some of the younger generations were more supportive. Due to the pressure of the family arguments my grandfather finally gave up the idea of re-partnering or remarrying. 'Why did he give up on this idea?' This question haunted me for a few years and when I asked my grandfather, he just said 'after I thought about that, I do not want to bring troubles to this family'. Obviously, his answer did not satisfy my curiosity and left me wondering how he balanced his own wishes against the family's and what was the internal struggle throughout his decision-making process. I brought my unsolved mystery with me to my research and fieldwork, and to some extent, my participants answered my questions by giving me more concrete answers based on their life experiences.

In this chapter, I will focus on older Chinese people's dilemmas when considering remarriage and re-partnering. In the first section I will draw on some examples of participants who remarried to reveal their challenges and the effects on their family relationships; I will then unpack the role of children's power and the family conflicts relating to inheritance; after this I will explore gender differences when older people consider second partnerhood and end with some reflections on their motivations for re-partnering in later life.

The dilemma of dealing with family relationships

> Previously others had tried to introduce me to someone but I refused, if I did I would hurt both the woman and me. If someone married me, we would not think with each other's best interests in mind but rather we would think about our own families' interests due to each of us having children and grandchildren. If we failed to handle the family relationships such as the matter of looking after the offspring or the money expenditure for the families, we would have an argument or even get a divorce, it is not worth remarrying.
>
> (Lao Mao,Widower-Male-85 years old-Guiyang)

Most of my participants hold similar views to Lao Mao in that they would not choose remarriage and one of the most common reasons they raise is family relationships. As Lao Mao mentions, potential family conflicts would result from having to place their own children's interests over their potential partner's. In the following I will draw on the accounts of some participants who experienced remarriage to unpack the conflict in family relationships and the dilemma of remarriage during later life.

Lao Xuan remarried in 2011 when he was 67 years old, one year after his wife died. Lao Xuan is 73 years old and has two sons (43 and 46 years old) but one was against his remarriage. He is living with his current wife, his sons have established families and their homes are located in the same district of Jinan. Lao Xuan describes some aspects of his family relationships below:

> We have been married for 6 years since 2011. I am feeling it [remarriage] is not the same thing as my marriage with my late wife before. Because now we each have children, there is kinship involved in it, it is not purely about whether my children support my remarriage or not, rather it refers to other things.
>
> For example, I did not need to think about anything when I was living with my late wife, as she would have handled the family matters and run family relations

> before I thought about that; but my current wife, she probably never thinks about those issues. She is completely different from my late wife, as my late wife was always thinking about our family members and rarely thought about others. Compared to when I was with her, now once I want to do something or buy something I need to think about my wife's family and the relationship between her children and me, as well as this I also need to think about the relationship between my children and hers, this would be more complicated. You know, this has never been a problem before, such as when my children made a mistake, my late wife would chew them out directly, it didn't matter even if she kicked our children out of the house, but for my current wife, she cannot do that and she is not allowed to...
>
> (Lao Xuan, Remarried-Male-73 years old-Jinan)

Relationships among the Chinese elderly remarried are not merely limited to the couple, rather they are entangled in the connections with each other's children and two extended families. Lao Xuan makes a comparison between his previous marriage and current remarriage, noting that through the lens of the everyday family practice, his late wife 'would have handled family matters and run family relations before I thought about that; but my current wife, she probably never thinks about those issues', which made Lao Xuan realise that his remarried wife cannot replace his remarried wife. Delphy and Leonard (1992) note that domestic work includes practical work on people or things, as well as emotion work that creates bonds of solidarity and maintains bonds of affection among family members. In addition, the mother's role is to be the gatekeeper of family relationships (Doherty et al, 1998) and women's kinkeeping or kin work activities includes 'making visits and telephone calls, sending letters, cards and presents to kin, organising holiday gatherings, deciding either to neglect or develop specific kin connections' (Seery and Crowley, 2000:104). In a Chinese cultural context, cultivating guanxi networks is considered as domestic work and it is usually a wife's job to keep track and take care of gift exchange (Yan, 2003: 96). Therefore, replacing a 'mother' also means replacing 'kin keeper' and Lao Xuan's current wife is failing to play this role

and perform the emotion work needed to maintain his kinship bonds and guanxi networks, which is what Lao Xuan's misses from his relationship with his late wife.

In addition, although Lao Xuan tries to balance his relationship with his wife and their respective children, to some extent, his wife has been excluded from his kinship realm. On the one hand, his late wife had the right to discipline their children but his current wife is not 'allowed to'; and yet, on the other hand, Lao Xuan complains that his current wife is failing to run his household affairs and family relationships. She is unlike his late wife, who practiced familial loyalty and was 'always thinking about our family members'. Lao Xuan's current wife was pushed away from his family by being deprived of family rights, but pulled back to his family by the expectation that she would run his family affairs and relationships as well as his late wife. Lao Xuan's 'pushing and pulling' of his spouse in the remarriage has probably exacerbated and further complicated their family relationships.

In addition to concerns about the role of women in remarried families, participants also expressed concerns about the relations between stepchildren and stepparents. For instance, Lao Wen described his blended family relationships:

> Previously, the family relationship should be a triangular model, one father, one mother and their children, they consist of a triangular relation, within this relationship the parents would concentrating love on their children; however, in my remarriage family, our relationship is not a triangular relation but rather a quadrangle relation, in this model the parent treats only their own children well. Because I used to be a mathematics teacher, I know that the triangle is the most stable shape in mathematics therefore the triangular relationship should be the most stable model for the family.
>
> (Lao Wen, Remarried-Male-60 years old-Jinan)

Lao Wen uses this metaphorical way to explain his remarried family relationship model, which is different from his previous family relationships, which he likens to a quadrangle shape and gives some examples to support his opinion:

> The remarriage is very different from the marriage with my late wife. Now each of us have our own children; in my memories of my first wife, we never had arguments about our children, but now we are very easily and very often having arguments over the matters of each other's children. I analysed that the conflicts are due to personal interests. As we are two families combined, we would always think about our individual benefits first, mostly I cannot avoid thinking about my two children first, so does she, she shows bias to her son. We can't deny this is in human beings' nature to consider our own children's interest first. This is the essential difference between my first marriage and the remarriage, now it is very hard for us to completely devote oneself to this family, it is impossible.

Unlike Lao Xuan who lives separately from his adult children and stepchildren, Lao Wen's stepson is still living with them, therefore he directly experiences more family conflicts than Lao Xuan. Lao Wen also compared his current and first marriages, emphasising the bias each partner shows to their own children as 'human nature'. As Hu (2020: 984) notes, marital disruption can undermine the quality of the parent-children relationship and it is hard to achieve close intergenerational relations in stepfamilies. In Lao Wen's first marriage, the couple shared their children and hence their love for them also but this parental love focus changed when the family structure changed. The conflicts now go beyond the two individuals, as they become 'two families' in conflict, whose children's interests and benefits compete, and this can sometimes even extend to the matter of looking after grandchildren, as Lao Wen noted:

> You know she is the type of person who holds traditional values, she thinks that everything around her is family-centered, but sometimes I have to help her to save her from her problems, so my role in the family is very hard to say. For example, she felt pressured as her son failed to get a job, and she looks after him

> and helps him to prepare for job hunting and examinations. But once I suggested going to my daughter's home to look after my grandson, she would be very unhappy about that, and she has a bad temper so there are also some family conflicts like that. I have two children, the reason I ask them to settle down in other cities and come back to visit me sometimes is this, my family is a reconstituted family and it is very hard to deal with the complicated family relationships. …I feel no good for having a second marriage, not at all and if I had a chance to choose again I would not choose to remarry.
>
> (Lao Wen, Remarried-Male-60 years old-Jinan)

Lao Wen's explanation indicates the dilemma he faces in his second marriage and balancing the relationships between himself, his wife, her stepson and his children. He criticises his wife, who 'thinks that everything around her is family-centered', rather than thinking about his children and family. According to Morgan (1996) families are fluid and the practice of intimacy builds on the family practices, which means 'families are what people 'do' with relationships based on marriage, parenthood or kinship, such as the gendered practice in relationship between husband and wives and between parents and children as age-specific practice'(1996:193). In Lao Wen's blended family, as the family structure and family practices changed, the imbalance caused by the distribution of love between the couple's own children and their stepchildren in family practice has had an impact on the couple's relationship. Lao Wen as a father and a stepfather, has devised a compromise strategy to avoid family conflicts and has asked his own children to live away from him in other cities, so that the physical distance helps reduce the number of arguments in the remarried family. He has given up on the idea of looking after his grandson in order to avoid family conflict.

Another example is Lao Ren, who is remarried and holds a similar view of family relationships:

> Lao Ren: I think it is not often you see remarriage families able to find happiness, as the ones who get remarried generally bring their children from the

previous family, you know us Chinese are not very broad-minded, if I spent more on my child than the partner's, she would haggle over every penny, especially when it comes to money

Kun: Does your wife also have children?

Lao Ren: Yes, she has one son. The reason I said we can't fit well together is, such as when we moved together my daughter had not graduated from university yet, my wife was unhappy when I paid my daughter's living expenses; sometimes I buy some good stuff or delicious food, the first person she thinks about is her son, all of her heart and her attention is on her child.

(Lao Ren, Remarriage-Male-51 years old-Guiyang)

Lao Ren is a businessman and his daughter was studying in a university in South Korea when he remarried. The new family's relationship difficulties actually result from financial problems and it is hard for Lao Ren to balance how much the couple spend on each other's children. Hu (2020: 995) finds that Chinese children in stepfamilies enjoy fewer economic resources than children in intact families. Remarriage can put a strain on the distribution of resources across blended families, which gives rise to parents having to negotiate and renegotiate their relationships with children, stepchildren and their new spouse. In addition, family practice becomes an important tool to mediate their stepfamilies' conflicts and balance. Most participants are similar to Lao Mao in rejecting remarriage or couple-hood, especially when considering the children's interests in complicated family relationships. To determine the extent to which adult children impact on the elderly's choices or act as a barrier for seniors' considering remarriage, in the following I will draw on more examples to illustrate.

The precariousness of relationships and the consideration of inheritance

Remarriage for the old group is indeed difficult, especially as there will be some family conflicts. Generally, it is harder for a widower to find a partner, because

> his children would be against him, you know how, if I find my children a stepmother in the future and I died earlier before the woman, all my properties would be passed on to her, so the children will be concerned about the inheritance and that would probably trigger conflicts.
>
> (Lao Wu, Long-lasting marriage-Male-63 years old-Qingdao)

> Generally, children would disagree with this ... [remarriage] ... as they would think about the parents' house and the property, so the children would disagree with their parents getting remarried.
>
> (NaNa,Widow-Female-94 years old-Guiyang)

According to Lao Wu and NaNa, potential conflicts between children and a new female spouse would revolve around fighting over the inheritance; the children would become concerned about their parents' houses and property and this would become a reason to avoid remarriage during later life. Hong also said,

> My view on remarriage, I think it depends. As the reasons for the children to agree or disagree with a parent's remarriage would be various. The elderly probably put affection in first place but do not think too much about the property aspect. The children would consider the inheritance first but put their parent's feelings in last place … I have some friends who got remarried but the results are generally not very good, firstly they failed to deal with the relationship with children, as they think the parent can leave but the money cannot be taken away.
>
> (Hong,Widow-Female-65 years old-Beijing)

For adult children, elderly remarriage is a sign that their inheritance will be taken away by the stepparent. Although Hong mentions that the older people pay less attention to the inheritance issue than their children, the data shows that most of the participants would consider the potential family conflicts on inheritance when thinking about remarriage. Impacted by the Chinese economic reforms since the late 1970s, ordinary people's emphasis on house and property is much greater than it was before. In the late

1970s homeownership was rare in mainland China, housing and property were primarily welfare benefits allocated by the *danwei* or the bureaucratic redistributors, but 30 years later most couples were homeowners (Davis, 2010). Against this backdrop, individual accumulation of wealth through housing and property has become an important aspect of life in modern Chinese society. Writing in the context of the UK, Finch and Mason (2000) find that inheritance is the mechanism bonding families and society together through 'wealth trickling down the generations' (2000:2) as well as being a major cause of family acrimony. In other words, passing on their inheritance to the next generation is the main way older people transmit their wealth and, to some extent, one of their dilemmas regarding remarriage is not love and marriage per se, rather the issue of redistribution of the right of inheritance and their property. Drawing on Finch and Mason's (2000) idea, inheritance is not only about property and money, a matter of kinship within family, but also reflects their social status and has a symbolic meaning related to their social identity. Inheritance becomes one of the boundaries defining the domain of 'family' and others.

Lao Yan for example, is weighing property redistribution with the demands of his family relationships:

> From an economic perspective, my children did not let me remarry, now nobody will let me find a partner, of course my standard is very high too, you saw my late wife's photo, she was so beautiful, it is impossible for me to find an old woman …
>
> If I find a younger woman who likes me, my money must be given to this woman, I can imagine my children then having an argument with me because of this. This would be different from my marriage to my late wife. Although it would be a comfort for me if there was a woman to give me hugs and kisses, and I would give her money as a reward, if I do so my children would be fighting with her. You know I can't do it and make this happen, so I have given up thinking about it.
>
> (Lao Yan, Widower-Male-96 years old-Guiyang)

Lao Yan used to be an actor and his children are against him remarrying. The quotation shows that as a father Lao Yan's parental authority has declined, as the children will 'not let' him remarry. During the interview he was quite frank about his desire for an intimate relationship with a younger woman, somebody to give him 'hugs and kisses', and he is willing to use money as a means to reward any woman who could give him 'comfort'. But he would rather sacrifice his own needs than risk potential conflicts with his children over their inheritance. As Yan Yunxiang (2016:253) suggests regarding intergenerational intimacy, the decline of parental authority has given rise to a more powerful younger generation; once elderly parents stopped demanding the next generation's obedience and submission, a new consensus gradually emerged in which their children's personal happiness became the goal of a meaningful life for the elderly. This idea can be applied to Lao Yan's views and the way he has responded to the issue of remarriage. In addition, he is weighing up the options and later on he gave me a more detailed explanation, which was interwoven with his children's experiences growing up:

> If I find a spouse, an old one, she probably won't live long and I will need to meet her economic demands, which means my children won't accept her as a stepmother, as all my money should go to them in the end. I have already given my house and car to my only son, and my late wife's inheritance was given to my elderly daughter. Because of the impact of my 'counter-revolutionary' identity during the Cultural Revolution, none of my children went to university, my daughter had to give up dancing ballet in college because she failed to pass the family background censorship, however my children never hated me as they saw me as their family. I wasted their life because of that, so I will give everything to my children as compensation.

Inheritance for Lao Yan is a method for him to make up for his guilt over his children, to offset his children's failure to achieve their dreams due to the impact of his political identity during the Cultural Revolution. It is interesting that Lao Yan's present decisions are interwoven with the past. Inheritance 'is not tricky because of money per se [it is]

rather that kin relationships - past, present and future - are involved' (Finch and Moore, 2000:108). For Lao Yan, the beneficiary of his inheritance is either a potentially unaccepted 'stepmother' who must risk being excluded and triggering arguments with his and her families, or alternatively, the inheritance is a way to compensate his son and daughter for their past. He has made a rational choice based on thinking about his children's past and future.

Comparing Lao Yan with the older people living in urban areas, Lao Bao who comes from a rural area also points out that whether the elderly remarry largely depends on what the children want:

> Lao Bao: I think this [remarriage] depends on the children, depending on their agreement or not, if both families' children are all allowing them to get married or cohabitate then this would not bring any burden to the next generation and this would be fine. The important aspect is whether they can get their children's agreement and approval. They can't be making the decision on their own.
> Kun: Why do they let the children make the decision for them?
> Lao Bao: Because their remarriage or cohabitation would be a burden on their children, they can't do that if their children can't afford to look after them. Such as amongst the elderly, if one is independent enough and would not be any burden to others, in this circumstance probably they have the right to make the decision, but if one needs his children to support him already, two old persons would add to the children's burden.
>
> (Lao Bao, Long lasting marriage-Male-70 years old-Qingdao)

Lao Bao used to live in a rural area and compared with the other participants, his values are more traditional. In his opinion, children have the power to decide whether their parents have the right to remarry; this is because the children should support their elders and parental remarriage can add to the burden of supporting the ageing as adult children would then have to support the new spouse. Unlike the older people living in urban areas and receiving a pension from the workplace, Lao Bao does not have an adequate

pension and has to rely on his children who work in the city. The economic power in the family is controlled by the children and therefore his ability to choose remarriage is limited. When Yan (2003) studied private life in Xiajia village during the 1990s, he found that the patriarchal order no longer existed in Xiajia families, and that power and authority had shifted from the older to the younger generation in every aspect of life. This ongoing process is to some extent shown by Lao Bao's consideration of remarriage and re-partnering, that older people's remarriage would depend on their adult children's 'authority' and willingness to provide practical support.

However, I found that the patriarchal ideology still exists in older people's choices and that from a gendered perspective, there are different views on adult children's acceptance:

> To be honest I could find a younger attractive woman, but I found the remarried couples around me are rarely happy. Firstly, the children are generally against them, without children to support them how can the elderly be happy? Whatever happens, after all, the affection between parents and children is irreplaceable.
>
> (Lao Zhan, Long lasting marriage-Male-74 years old-Jinan)

> I feel I am a strong woman, I think I can bring up my child very well without finding a man. I like a simple life, the men who are my age must be experienced in marriage, I am afraid of conflicts in the family relationships, such as if the man's children would not accept me there would be many potential conflicts, I am afraid of these and I would be bothered by such matters.
>
> (JingJing, Divorced-Female-64 years old-Shanghai)

> No, I don't want to find a new partner. To be honest if I find a new one, ones my age mostly have children and offspring. You know, even my own children treat me badly, if I live in another person's family, can their children accept me? If they can't, we probably would have an argument and I would get mad or angry, that situation would be worse than my current situation.

(Ban, Widow-Female-64 years old-Jinan)

From a woman's perspective, in JingJing and Ban's accounts remarriage is not the wise choice because whether a marital husband's children 'accept' them is the main problem; whereas the male participants would be more concerned about the issues of inheritance and the 'irreplaceable' relationship between them and their children. On the one hand, this reflects the values of a patriarchal and male-dominated society, in which female participants think about marriage passively and in terms of being accepted by the male's family; on the other hand, most women participants refuse to remarry during later life, which challenges the patriarchal order and allows them to pursue their personal space and independence. Thus, there are gendered differences during marriage in later life and against this context, I will now explore these disparities in more detail.

Gender differences in remarriage choices

FeiFei is 77 years old and her husband died more than ten years ago. I interviewed her in a care home in Jinan, where she told me that she had married him during her twenties and she was 19 years younger than her late husband. He had been married before to a woman who died due to illness and left three children. After they married they had a daughter, which FeiFei raised along with her three stepchildren. When I asked her if she was considering remarriage, she told me:

> I am fed up with being a stepmother and I don't want a partner anymore. I brought up with my stepson and stepdaughters and they treated me well but now, if I took a step forward to remarry, you know, I did not raise their family's children therefore probably they would not even treat me like a person. I won't do this or I maybe would suffer from indignity. I am living a life of leisure now and I am very satisfied with my life for now.
>
> (FeiFei,Widow-Female-77 years old-Jinan)

FeiFei has devoted her whole life to her late husband's family, his three children and their offspring, as a stepmother, earning the title of 'hero' as a mark of honour and acceptance by the family. Throughout the interview, FeiFei was very negative about remarriage if children are involved. She thinks that the children of potential partners would not accept her and possibly cause her 'indignity'. In her first marriage, FeiFei raised four children during hard times, three of them stepchildren from her husband. She had to do the family's chores and take on a stepmother's responsibility to help four children marry and establish their own homes, and she also helped to raise grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Van Der Pas et al (2013:1066) notes that 'stepchildren, most of whom have not taken part in the lifelong exchanges with their stepparents, may feel less obligated than biological children to provide support', and Van Der Pas further suggests that 'the longer periods of relationships building and bonding offset some of the differentials in parental attachment to adult stepchildren and biological children' (2013:1066). Remarriage for FeiFei during her later life would not be the same as her first marriage due to the fact that she would not be able to cultivate this type of family affection or the bond between stepparent and adult stepchildren, therefore she would not be 'accepted' or perhaps even worse, her new relatives 'would not treat her like a person'. Marriage in a Chinese cultural setting goes beyond individuals and for FeiFei and the other participants (such as those mentioned above, Ban and Jingjing) remarriage means that a woman joins a man's family. In addition to this, the women have to take over the family chores and responsibility for looking after family members.

NaNa is 94 years old and she uses some younger women's opinions as examples to illustrate the typical widows' viewpoint:

> I asked some women whose husbands have passed away, I asked them why not find a partner, they told me: 'I won't find a man to wait on him'. You know women in old age generally do not want to find another man to wait on. The women I asked who are all younger than me, in their sixties, I tried to persuade them to find a new partner but none of them wanted to. You can tell they are very independent nowadays …

> … For me I think it is impossible, and no one has introduced me to a man, not at all, think about that, I was already in my eighties when he [her late husband] passed away at 90 years old. I was living happily alone, if I find an old man to look after, am I mad? My children are all very filial and treat me well, they bring me with them when they go to Sanya [a tourist destination in Southern China] during the winter and accompany me back to Changsha [a city in the Southeastern China] to visit my hometown if I want, I am enjoying my happy life.
>
> (NaNa, Widow-Female-94 years old-Guiyang)

When NaNa describes both her own and younger elderly women's opinions towards remarriage, the answers are negative as they are in pursuit of a happy later life. According to her and her widowed female friends, finding a man is equal to finding a person to 'wait on' and 'look after'. To them, gendered inequality is embodied in women's roles and is something which will last until the end of their lives, even into very old age.

NaNa's point also applies to other participants. Apart from the limitations associated with age, staying single generally leads to a more satisfying lifestyle, as Tian notes:

> Tian: At the time [her husband passed away] I was about 80 years old, who knows how many years I have left at that age, what do I need a man for? To buy me a coffin for my funeral? Become another person's burden? Nobody around me has remarried, there are many widows in my neighbourhood.
> Kun: Why don't you want to find a partner?
> Tian: None of us want to, it is better to live alone, it's comforting to live as a single person without any burdens, you know women do not want to do that … when I was younger I had to serve my parents in law, had to be in charge of the whole families' food and basic necessaries of life, my husband was just busy with working and could not help me, I didn't feel happiness at all until now, I am

enjoying my current life, this is my good fortune now.

(Tian,Widow-Female-90 years old-Jinan)

Hu and To's (2018: 2306) study of family and remarriage suggest that in China, remarriage is far from an individual affair rather it is tied up with children, siblings, parents and extended families. Tian, Nana and widows like her recognise the gender inequality of family structure and how it is embedded in everyday family practice, therefore they refuse to spend their time and resources on providing care for another old man and his family. Using Tian's words, remaining single during later life means 'without any burdens', 'happiness' and 'enjoying life', a release from the previous role of domestic labour and finally achieving freedom.

Hong uses a very interest-driven perspective to explain the gender differences in elderly people's remarriage issues:

> The children hold some ideas like that he wishes his mother could find a marital partner who is rich, then this would reduce his burden of supporting her, his mother's remarriage would be a way of earning money, such as they want her to find an old man who must be rich or at least has house property, without property who would marry an old man? If the woman is able to get some money back from the old man her children would benefit from that too … I have a couple of friends who remarried, her new family's children strongly rejected her as they thought she married their father to take a share of their property and houses, children from both sides of the family were fighting each other because of this kind of squabble, in the end they divorced again …
>
> (Hong,Widow-Female-65 years old-Beijing)

Hong's late husband died of cancer in 2008 and she has remained single for about 10 years, rejecting remarriage in order to avoid potential family conflicts. Apparently, her rational choices result from the experiences of friends whose remarriages have ended in divorce. In her view, remarriage can sometimes be a means for an old woman to

make some money from a rich old man but on the one hand, the widow's children would be likely to push her away or use her as a tool for seeking profit from the remarriage, whereas on the other, the widower's children would campaign against this invader in order to protect their 'family's property'. Huang (2012) suggests that remarriage is a method for a single parent to obtain a source of economic capital and in rural areas, some single mothers have to remarry for the survival of themselves and their children due to the economic imperative (2012: 328). However, the biological father's property is still supposed to pass onto their children, which gives rise to family conflicts over property ownership and distribution. According to Liu et al (2019:299) male home ownership is the dominant form of tenure amongst the younger generations and due to the soaring price of housing, it has become the social norm for the husband to provide (purchase or inherit) a marital home. Fincher's (2014) study, which shows that about 51.7% of married men are homeowners compared to just 13.2% of women, illustrates the enduring patriarchal traditions of Chinese society. In other words, ownership of the family's property and its potential to cause family conflict is one factor preventing older people from choosing to remarry.

Like the women, some male participants also emphasise the important role of family property in remarriage. For example, although Lao Wen has remarried, he has a negative view of remarriage amongst the elderly, as he states that:

> Lao Wen: I think people who have children generally do not want to remarry, especially in rural areas. I guess that about at least 80% do not want to remarry.
> Kun: Why?
> Lao Wen: Because their children do not want them to get remarried, especially the old man's children do not want it, and it is not limited to the rural area but is also common in cities. For example, I have an older male friend who retired and wanted to remarry his carer. When he told his three sons this, they were completely against it, his children told him that they can live together but they cannot make the marriage legal. Because his children were worried his property would be shared with the woman and her children, they couldn't accept her and

their marriage relationship.

(Lao Wen, Remarried-Male-60 years old-Jinan)

According to Lao Wen, if he remarried the family's property would potentially be at risk and would either have to be shared or lost altogether. To reduce the risk, Lao Wen's friend's children refused to accept their father's new relationship plans, although they did at least allow him to cohabit with his carer.

Another example is Lao Xuan, who remarried in his late sixties and also had to deal with rejection from his son. He faced a similar dilemma regarding the renegotiation of his relationship with his son, as he complained to me during our interview:

> There are too many complicated issues involved with remarriage, before I remarried my friends persuaded me: 'Ignore your little brat's words'. I told them after all I brought up my children for many years, after all they are my closest kin and loved ones eventually, I can't leave them, can't abandon them, although they cannot understand me now, not at all.
>
> (Lao Xuan, Remarried Male-73 years old-Jinan)

As a father, although Lao Xuan persisted with his decision to remarry, in his mind his children are still his 'closest loved ones' who he cannot 'leave' or 'abandon' and so he attempted to repair the father-son relationship. However, Lao Xuan's dilemma is not merely facing his son's rejection in the nuclear family, rather it refers to other kin and affinal relationships:

> Actually my daughter in law treats me well but her mother is a rural woman and did not know how to educate her daughter, so my daughter in law also disagreed with my remarriage. Because of her opposition I had a talk with her mother. She pointed out that my previous late wife and I once had a casual talk with her: her daughter has given birth to an only grandson for us, but my other son just has a granddaughter, if we follow the old traditional custom all our property should be

> left to my grandson. At the time, we did not take it seriously and I jokingly responded to her 'yeah, of course'. However, she became more serious about this from then on and since she knew I would be remarrying, she argued that my houses should be left to our grandson in the future. I told her, this is my property and in the future, I will share it equally between my two sons based on law or based on my will, it is none of your business … You know, they visited me and walked around my house three days after my late wife passed away. I guess they probably thought this house belongs to their daughter sooner or later, as it would be given to my grandson, which is equal to giving it to their daughter.
>
> (Lao Xuan, Remarried, Male-73 years old-Jinan)

Lao Xuan's daughter-in-law's mother and her late husband used to live in a rural area but many years later moved to a town nearby the city, where her husband eventually died of old age but did not remarry. Lao Xuan's attitudes towards the inheritance are apparently different from those of his family in law and he thinks the inheritance should be shared equally rather than based on the male priority. Chinese families were traditionally patrilineal, according to Jankowiak and Moore (2017) who note that before the People's Republic of China of 1949, families were male centred and the 'inheritance, both material and conceptual, was reckoned through males' (2017:3). This male-centred line of descent also underpinned the family's power, rights and obligations regarding family relations and relatives (Johnson, 1983). Against this traditional norm of patrilineality, Lao Xuan's remarriage has triggered more wide-ranging arguments amongst his relatives about the very nature of marriage. It is a debate about the value differences between rural and urban areas, rather than just a debate about Lao Xuan's inheritance rights and distribution. As discussed in Chapter Two, due to the Chinese law that both the marital spouse and children are the successors first in line to inherit, seniors remarrying face this kind of family conflict regarding the division of property and inheritance to family members (Wang, 2009). The daughter-in-law's mother was considering her daughter's interests and argued for upholding the traditional patrilineal ideology and its gender values, whereas apparently Lao Xuan holds completely different views. In the interview he told me that although his older son's daughter has a job and

lives in another city, he would still share the inheritance equally rather than give it to his little son, grandson and the priority males. The patrilineal beliefs of Lao Xuan are eroding compared with the 'rural woman' - his daughter-in-law's mother. Through the lens of Lao Xuan's case, the rural-urban divisions in China are reflected and there is a gap between traditional values and the relevant patrilineal beliefs among the older Chinese cohort. According to Hu and Scott's (2014:22) study of Chinese family and gender values, despite the fact that family values have undoubtedly been guided by familism rooted in Confucian teachings, this patrilineality has been questioned and along with it the education, female employment and individualism associated with city life further erodes the traditional beliefs.

Although Lao Xuan persisted and eventually succeeded in remarrying, he had to take into consideration the pressure emanating from his family members and relatives, hence the strategy he adopted, which was to enter into a premarital agreement with his new wife:

> 'I had a deal with my current wife that, in the future, after she passed away, she would be buried with her original family. In terms of the property, we would not hold or touch each other's inheritance. '

This agreement between Lao Xuan and his current wife is the result of the couple finding an independent solution to a potential family conflict and shows that their marriage is not based on money or property, as there will be no transfer of inheritance rights as a result of the marriage and their identities will revert to their original families after their deaths. Their resolution of these issues, returning or 'going back' to their original family and being buried with their previous husband or wife is not the custom in China, where the tradition is for husband and wife to be buried together. Bildtgård and Öberg (2017:18) note that Gidden's model of relationship might be better suited for describing repartnering in later life because older people are no longer working or expecting to have children, meaning that many older couples are freer from external demands. Repartnering relationships might fit the example of an ideal type of pure

relationship undermined by external norms but in Lao Xuan's case, he made a deal with his second wife as a result of negotiating with family and kinship networks, as well as heirdom and inheritance considerations. They are also a means for meeting individual needs and resolving the conflicts caused by complicated kinship relationships in a mutually beneficial way. The elderly people in marriage models like Lao Xuan's or in certain types of elderly cohabitations, are tactfully reducing the risk of this family conflict.

However, there is a question here regarding the pattern of remarriage: it is the result of negotiating family relationships and inheritance matters, but what are the main motivations for older people seeking a partnership or remarriage during their later years? Is it because of love or the desire for sexual and emotional support? Or is there another purpose? I will now briefly focus on older people's motivations for remarrying.

Gender differences in motivations for seeking partnership

One common motivation for finding a new partner or remarrying that emerged from the participants' accounts was to do with health concerns. Although a few women were concerned about lack of support during their later life, most female participants generally rejected the idea of finding a new partner as they wanted to avoid having to look after another person or other people. In contrast to the female participants' opinion, interestingly the opposite motivation was common amongst the male participants:

> I think health is the most important thing, to find a partner is to take care about the body and health. At our age wealth is not that important, it doesn't matter how much or how little money you have. I thought wealth was important when I was younger but now I think health is more important.
>
> (Lao Wu, Long lasting marriage-Male-63 years old-Qingdao)

Health during old age takes priority over wealth, a trend that increases with age. Lao Wu spent most of his life becoming a successful businessman and he was one of the beneficiaries of the opening up of the Chinese economy during the reform period. He has used his wealth to support his five children's studies abroad and has bought a retirement home for the elderly in Qingdao. Although he is still in a long-lasting marriage, he had an open mind about elderly singles finding a partner to help them with their health needs. This shift from seeing wealth as a priority to an increased concern for health is linked to the processes of ageing. Vicor (1994) notes that ageing has been considered a negative natural process, partly due to the range of limitations that come with the decline of the body, and ageing is a period of life characterised by not only decline but also weakness and obsolescence (Hareven,1982; Arber and Evandrou,1993). Although all these scholars challenge this portrayal of ageing in such negative, biomedical terms, nevertheless there is a dominant discourse of ageing as a time of decline and Lao Wu was aware of this process and saw the necessity of having a partner to support him in the later stages of his life.

However, the reasons behind the motivations for finding a partner during old age can be various. For instance, they might be rooted in personal experience, as is case with Lao Ren, who needed a partner when he suffered from a serious illness to help him get through these special circumstances:

> To remarry is to find a partner to look after each other, such as when I was at home alone and I suffered a serious illness, it was at the end of 2012 during winter, I got a very serious illness and I felt like I was going to die. If I had died immediately it would have been better, but the problem was that I did not die and I was suffering from a lot of pain, I could not even move, it was miserable and dreary existence. So I think after middle age, remarriage is not about finding love rather it is mainly about finding some company to look after each other until our very old age.
>
> (Lao Ren-Remarried-Male-51 years old -Guiyang)

Compared with the other participants, Lao Ren is quite young at just 51 years old. He told me about his miserable experiences during the period between his divorce from his first wife and his remarriage. His illness led him to lose physical function in the short term, which served as a fuse to light awareness in him that it was vital to have a partner who would look after him as he aged. As he says, his second marriage is not about love but for support and 'looking after' each other during old age, to avoid similar miserable experiences. Using the life course approach sheds light on how his individual decision actually reflects not only his reaction to the passage of individual time but also family time and historical time, because 'an elderly person's life experience will be created by that individual, within the context of actions by their family and changes they have experienced in society over time' (Arber and Evandrou, 1993:10). This applies to Lao Ren's experience after his divorce from his first wife following an affair within their marriage, as serious illness enhanced his feeling of loss and reminded him that he is cannot be an independent man when he loses his body function due to the process of ageing; plus his first wife's affair probably caused him psychological trauma, which made him disillusioned with 'love' and therefore he just turned to find a companion to look after each other. Drawing on this life course approach, in Lao Ren's case, it seems his individual decisions were influenced by the context of family as well as the social changes of China. The reform of communist tenets seems to have encouraged the sexual liberation of the middle aged and older population from the constraints of traditional morality (Shea, 2005:116). Moreover, policy changes to marriage law have made divorce much easier than before (Davis, 2010)[18]. In addition, the decline of the moral discourses in everyday life in contemporary society (Farrer and Sun, 2003) have seen extramarital love become more common than in the old times. In this uncertain, changing society, love is becoming more fluid and unpredictable, which means finding a companion for support in old age is a more practical option.

[18] Although the media has reported recently that the latest revised marriage law of 2020 sets a 'cooling off' period before divorce, as the Chinese government attempts to lower the divorce rate. The revised law requires couples filing for separation to wait 30 days before their request can be processed (Kuo, 2020).

For the participants older than Lao Wu or Lao Ren, health has become a central concern as along with a decline of function, they are now more emotionally aware:

> In my view I'm in favour of old people remarrying. I think no matter men or women, widows or widowers, the life of living alone is not easy without a helper. If two people live together, they are both each other's helper and companion. Just to give you a simple example, if I have to carry something heavy but fail to do so, I need a helper, my neighbour could help me but they can't help me whenever I want, it would be easier and more convenient to live with a partner, two people living together is easier than one …
>
> … But an old person living alone in my view is very hard, really hard, if he got a serious illness and he wants water, probably he cannot get it. As when I was ill my wife could immediately pass the water to me, old people can feel more alive with this support and live better lives, that is why I think getting a partner and looking after each other is better than being a singleton.
>
> (Lao Cao, Long-lasting marriage-Male-79 years old-Qingdao)

Lao Cao is 79 years old and in a long-lasting marriage. He lives with his wife in a large house in Qingdao and the house was bought by their daughter. They come from a rural area and moved to Qingdao city because both of their children are working and have settled down in Qingdao and sometimes their children will visit them from the city centre. Lao Cao's personal experiences are embodied in his everyday practices. The partners in an older people's relationship play the role of helper for each other. Although Lao Cao misses his old friends and social network in the village, his wife and two adult children are the only people who can support him at his age, and while in a Chinese context, family and community support for older people is strong, the rural areas are still quite poor and a farmer's annual income is less than one third that of urbanites, therefore it would be an issue for them to pay for health care (Flaherty et al, 2007).

Sometimes the emergence of a new family structure also gives rise to older people's

concerns about security and support during old age:

> The aim of old people's remarriage is to look after each other, as they have no sexual needs, they just aim to live together and look after each other, accompany each other … Such as at our age, now most of us have one child, if the child settled in another city, how can they support their retired parents? If one partner died first, how can the other one live alone, isn't it? If their children won't come back to their city, they just live on their own, I just think if one old person lives alone, what if he has an accident?
>
> (Lao Dang, Long-lasting marriage-Male-60 years old-Qingdao)

Lao Dang thinks remarriage is a way to reduce the potential risks of old age, such as lack of support from children or the risk of having an accident when living alone. Influenced by China's one child policy, more families like Lao Dang's have only one child and he highlights a new issue linked with changes to the family structure in modern society, where many of the younger generation have jobs in other cities and leave their parents sitting on an 'empty nest'. Lao Dang sent his daughter to Japan to read for a master's degree and when she got a job there, he realised that potentially he would face these types of issues in the future. Lao Dang is imagining that if his only child cannot be his old age assistance, if he lost his wife one day, remarriage would be a good option so that the new couple can look after each other.

Changes to the family structure have led to an increase in the number of elderly people living alone and An Yi also showed concern about the potential impact of this on her sister:

> I support the idea of our age group remarrying but it would be very hard. One thing is everyone has shaped their own habit from their previous family life, it is not easy to change these habits to get along with other people. However, it seems like there is no better way than to find a partner. If they do not have a partner their children will worry about them, in the past children supported the elderly but that's changed now, it is not good to stop them from finding a partner. For

> example one of my sisters' husbands passed away three years ago, she is just two years younger than me, now she is living in the house on her own, she's got heart disease and I always worry about her, this has become a load on my mind. You know at our age, late sixties and seventies, if we live alone and have a sudden illness at home there will be nobody who knows about it or who can save us on time. One example is a relative of mine who was just 66 years old, her husband died before her and she lived alone, she died because she fell over by accident in her house, her children found her corpse one day later, how tragic it is!
>
> (AnYi, Long-lasting marriage-Female-73 years old-Qingdao)

An Yi's relative died living alone, which made her worry about her sister who lives in a similar situation. An Yi knows that elderly remarriage can be difficult to adjust to but when faced with the tragedies that happened to her relatives, she sees it as the best alternative. Health and support is obviously older people's main motivation for seeking a partnership, however, health also become an important precondition in older people's remarriage marketing:

> After I met my partner, others asked me how was I able to find a partner who is younger than me? I said, no other reason apart from my health situation was good, I can cook and I'm able to do housework, if I lost my capabilities and needed to rely on others, nobody would like to marry me. Because we are able to look after each other. So why did I find a partner after I lost my late wife? As whether my partner is at home or not I can still cook for myself, I do not need to work [since retirement] but at least I have a companion, it doesn't mean I found a partner in order to use her. That is why I think old people who are younger than 70 years old make more suitable partners, as their health still would be good, at least it will seem good enough for a woman to be willing to marry them. If an old man is completely useless I mean if his health was bad and he has no money at all, who wants to marry him?
>
> (Lao Xuan, Remarried, Male-73 years old-Jinan)

In 2011 when Lao Xuan was 66 years old, he remarried his current wife, who is 12 years younger than him. Lao Xuan was very confident about sharing his ideas with me to confirm that his remarriage was mainly the result of his good health. He emphasises how his 'capabilities', both his good health and his economic status, made the remarriage possible and this indicates the important role health plays in the older people's remarriage market when it comes to mate selection. But when Lao Xuan began looking for a new partner he was also weighing up their potential for looking after him in the future. This is explained in the example he gave me below:

> Many friends introduced me to potential partners during that period, one introduced me to a woman who is one of my classmate's friends, her son got a job and settled down in America and she used to be a teacher, actually her condition is good enough. We met each other and she looked good but my analysis was like this: her only son lived in America and she needs to travel to America to visit him at least once per year, this okay for me, by rights she is a good potential martial partner, as her son is married I don't need to think about helping her son, but I thought if one day she became ill, my children won't look after her because there is no blood relation between them; likewise if I was ill, would she would like to look after me? Perhaps she would find an excuse to go to her son in America and leave without me. You know, I have to think about these things for the future, and in the end I found an excuse to reject her.

Instead Lao Xuan chose to get remarried to a woman whose son works in the centre of Jinan nearby their current location. His priority was finding a woman able to give him stable care in the future and the choice he made was very rational and similar to a long term 'investment': Lao Xuan mentioned that he did not want a woman with a complicated family, such as adult children who have not yet married, as he might need to help her to deal with the next generation's marriages; moreover his preference was for a woman able to deliver stable care for the foreseeable future. This example shows that, although he thought the woman was 'good enough' in terms of her social status as she used to be a teacher, and was also good looking and has a son who is already married, it

was finding a stable and long-term beneficial form of remarriage that was most important to him. This was even more vital than avoiding the risk of adding to his burden by having to help with his new partner's family issues, if his current wife's son had not married yet. Apparently, his choice of marital partnership is a very rational choice weighing up the advantages and disadvantages of personal benefits gained against the social structure and pre-existing gender inequalities.

As well as seeking a partner who can care for them physically, there are also psychological reasons for wanting a new relationship - loneliness was one brought up by participants. Remarriage or partnership is aimed at finding a companion to eliminate loneliness:

> I think old people's marriages are just a way to find a companion, I won't disagree with this, as old people would feel lonely, I think the reason why old people to stay together is not because of love or passion, it is just a type of need, the needs of living or the needs of company, if they have no partner they would feel empty … it is maybe easier to fulfil their basic survival needs but it is harder to get rid of old people's feelings of loneliness, right? They are just purely interested in finding a companion.
>
> (Lao Dang, Long- lasting marriage-Male-60 years old-Qingdao)

Regarding the issue of loneliness, many male participants like Lao Dang who are in long lasting marriages hold the view that loneliness is another challenge for the older singleton, therefore seeking a partner to play the role of companion is the way to fulfil this need and prevent loneliness. This is evident in Lao Mao's comments:

> …I think people like me are unfortunate, I had a good relationship with my late wife but she left before me and I felt lonely living alone, I was jealous of the couples who were able to grow old together, the couples lasting from their youth in relationships till marriage and living until now, they can experience their hair turn grey together, I am really jealous, jealous of this type of couple that can stay

> together until their hair turns grey … before I moved to the care home, I lived in my house alone, and the house was empty, every time I went back home I felt emptiness and very lonely.
>
> (Lao Mao,Widower-Male-85 years old-Guiyang)

Lao Mao's feelings echo other studies of widows who anticipate feeling lonely when they see or think of other couples (see Bennett and Bennett, 2000; Bennett et al, 2018). Lao Mao is not the only participant who mentioned loneliness when comparing situations with peers who are still in couples, because this enhances the sense of loss of a significant attachment. For certain participants the situation was even worse, especially in the first few years of loss,

> He passed away in 2003, I went to senior's college from 2005, I remember the feeling when I was seated in the classroom but I felt upset as I felt others looked down on me, I felt alone and the feeling of loss, if I stay at home alone I would always be in tears, this feeling didn't disappear until many years later …
>
> (Pan, Widow-Female-87 years old-Guiyang)

> My mood was not good after she passed away. I felt I couldn't eat well and didn't eat very much when I was at home alone. It was better to go out and travel somewhere but once I came back home I always felt short of something …
>
> (Lao Yong,Widow-Male-82 years old-Jinan)

Victor et al (2009) report that the rate of loneliness amongst older people in China is between 15% and 30% which is higher than in the UK (by up to 9%). The feeling of loneliness stems from the loss of a significant attachment (Weiss, 2007; Bennett et al, 2017). For example Pan's loss led to her feeling of stigma for a while until she went back to social engagement; whereas Lao Yong could not adapt to the new lifestyle without his late wife. Loss of a partner meant loss of both emotional and physical companionship (Bennett et al, 2018) as well as the norm of couplehood in the social realm.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the dilemmas and challenges associated with remarriage and family relationships in later life. The chapter reveals that the older people's remarriages and repartnerings are gender-specific. Most male participants are seeking company from a second partnerhood or remarrying in order to receive long-term health care and would benefit from a partner's support. However, the disadvantages of remarriage potentially cause various family conflicts, such as the contested redistribution of their estate and arguments with their adult children about their loss of inheritance. On the contrary, most female participants prefer to remain single to achieve freedom during their widowhood, because most of them have devoted themselves to the family, doing housework and caring for the family members for their whole life. Staying single allows old women to get freedom back from family and the relevant gendered work, which to some extent reflects the Chinese patriarchal and male-dominated society that shapes the gender differences in their remarriage choices during later life as well as the different gender roles. For example, in remarried families there are many invisible boundaries such as the role women play as kin keepers, or the men's relationships with their (adult) children, all of which impact on the stepfamily's dynamics and family relationships. The increased power and authority of adult children and the tricky issue of inheritance is a major consideration in later life remarriage. Although most of the participants who have lost a husband or wife showed different degrees of loneliness, there were a few who eventually remarried or found partners during their later lives. They had to weigh up the pros and cons under the family structure and social structure, and balance their various family relationships. My grandfather is possibly similar to them as well, despite the fact that I do not know what his thinking processes were, how he negotiated the idea with his surroundings in these circumstances or why he finally gave up on the idea of remarriage. However, a few years later while I am writing this chapter in the UK, I have gained a deeper understanding of what it was like for my grandfather to live alone in China on the other side of the earth, of his dilemma, his choice, his suffering and loss, even his

feelings of loneliness. In the next chapter, I will use the lens of the May-December love phenomenon to explore the attitudes and values of the older Chinese towards family ethics and the social order.

Chapter 7 May-December Love (Lao-shao lian[19]), Remarriage and Cohabitation: Morality in the Cultural Hierarchy Context

Introduction

In 2014 there was a popular TV drama called 'May to December Love' (*Da Zhang fu*) which depicted the love story of a 23-year-old woman married to much older man who was a similar age to her father. In Chinese the most common phrase to describe this type of age-dissimilar marriage is *lao shao lian (old-young love relationships).* Old-young love relationships are becoming more frequently reported in the mass media, one controversial example being the well-known Chinese scientist Yang who aged 82 years old married a young woman who was just 28 years old in 2004 (Sohu news, 2019). Their love story became a controversial talking point for a while. Although their marriage has lasted for many years, when I brought up the dilemmas of older people's intimate relationships during the fieldwork many participants mentioned this inter-generational love story as an example to illustrate their controversial opinions.

In addition, continuing on from the last chapter, which examined older participants' dilemmas associated with complex familial negotiations, most participants pointed out that cohabitation could be a compromise for elderly singletons in a love relationship. Cohabitation would help them to avoid inheritance issues and the relevant family conflicts, as well as making it possible for these older people to support and look after each other. Although cohabitation is an ideal solution to family conflicts, it gives rise to some controversial moral issues in the Chinese cultural context.

[19] Lao-shao lian: (老少恋) Old-young love relationships

In this chapter I will focus on the older people's shifting norms, values and expectations associated with the issues of age-discrepant relationships, cohabitation and extramarital affairs. Based on the different reflections from the participants who come from different genders, social classes and age categories, in the first section I will analyse people's accounts on the phenomena of age-dissimilar love relationships and the underlying moral dilemmas; in the second section, I will focus on the different views and norms about their choices of intimate relationships during later life, such as cohabitation and extra marital relationships to discuss the relevant moral values in the Chinese cultural context. In doing so, I will also draw on some notions from the research literature to help address the analysis later, such as the life course approach (Hockey and James, 2003) and Mills' (2000) ideas on biography and history, which are used throughout the thesis to examine older people's personal experiences of the historical process. Duncan's (2011) concept of bricolage describes how people use whatever they have to hand in everyday practice whether it be styles of thinking, social norms or relationships in order to muddle through the existing institutions and piece together a response to changing situations. Similarly, Ji's (2017:11) 'mosaic' society idea can be used to analyse intimacy practices in the context of the Chinese transition from socialist to capitalist modernity, whereby the Confucian tradition, socialist modernity, market modernity and later reflective cosmopolitanisation walked hand-in-hand. These concepts and theories are also useful for analysing the tensions within the elderly cohort's intimate and family relationships, and explaining some older people's intimacy practices against the backdrop of a changing and transforming Chinese society.

May-December love: Challenging Chinese family ethics

Old-young love relationships was one category that most older participants discussed from a moral and ethical perspective. In the following I will argue that May-December love to some extent challenges family morality and the family order, drawing on some

participants' accounts to unpack their complicated views and how their historical and biographical background, social milieux and class location shaped their values and choices during later life.

Lao Zhan and his wife are in a long-lasting marriage and they are about the same age. He used to be a director of a hospital before his retirement and is critical of old-young relationships:

> I felt that this ... [old-young relationships] … is abnormal. When there is a small age gap this is okay, even sometimes with women who are a bit older, although most of the cases are with men who are older than the women, they all can be acceptable. However, if the age gap is too much, like in the news that reported a 30 years old woman got married with an 80 years old man, similar to a situation I heard about in feudal society where most of the emperors were given younger concubines; and the old times, the rich, such as landlords, they married with younger women too, but these are not love … in my understanding, this relationship is a type of slave-owner and slaves …
>
> (Lao Zhan, Long-lasting marriage, Male-74 years old -Jinan)

As discussed in Chapter Two and Chapter Four, biography and the political atmosphere shaped individuals' definitions of love and marital choices, similarly Lao Zhan's early life experience also shaped his moral framework of age-hypergamous intimate relationships. Lao Zhan grew up in a rural village, he worked hard and obtained a university degree in medicine in 1965, the year before the Cultural Revolution, then he moved to the city shortly afterwards. However, in his student time various social movements emerged during the early stage of the Cultural Revolution and were highly critical of the officially defined political enemies of the state such as rich farmers, capitalists, landlords and so forth. According to Lao Zhan's interview, intimate relationships between classmates during his university studies were considered taboo and critiqued as a 'Western bourgeois lifestyle'. Although about 50 years have passed since that period, he still adopts a similar pattern of thinking based on the idea that

‘slave owners’ and ‘landlords’ oppress and exploit the proletariat, to critique the old-young age-hypergamous relationships and contemporary marriages. Lao Zhan uses the discourses from the past (Cultural Revolution period) to critique the ‘feudal’ phenomenon in the present and emphasises the, for him, unacceptable type of old-young age gap love relationships in contemporary society. This is reminiscent of the way Mills (2000) links personal experiences and historical process, treating ‘the individual as a biographical entity and within the scope of his immediate milieu - the social setting that is directly open to his personal experience and to some extent his wilful activity’ and notes that personal troubles emerge in the milieu when ‘values cherished by an individual are felt by him to be threatened’(2000:8). Lao Zhan’s viewpoint embodies the ideology of Mao’s era, however Chinese social milieu and mainstream values have changed since then and his cherished values have been challenged by the contemporary liberal ideology.

Like Lao Zhan, Lao Wen who is of a younger generation also holds critical view on this type of relationship but for different reasons:

> A very young woman marrying an old man would not generally happen among us mortals, as ordinary people would not do that, they would laugh at him if a younger man married a 10 years older woman. I think this type of relationship would not exist by love, if they have that it would be a type of psychological disorder. This is because the younger one would want the older one’s property and economic materials, that is what I am understanding.
>
> (Lao Wen, Remarried-Male-60 years old-Jinan)

Lao Wen defines age-dissimilar relationships not in terms of the relationship per se but according to the material motivations of the partners. This reflects how Lao Wen was affected by a different historical experience of the social transformation process to Lao Zhen and a different historical period (the post-reform era of China) has shaped his past as well as his present values. Unlike Lao Zhan who reuses an older political discourse to defend his values and moral correctness, Lao Wen critiques the large age gap in the old-

young love relationship, implying that younger partner's main motive is the pursuit of material gain. Whereas Lao Zhan's older cohort were influenced by the Maoist era, Lao Wen spent his twenties during the Chinese economic reform period (after 1978), he gained a degree in the city of Jinan and then became a teacher. Although the social transition to a liberal market economy gave rise to opportunities for individuals to make choices based on sexual motives, the seeking of wealth and getting rich became the main goal of one's life (Farrer, 2002:17). Through the lens of the life course approach, people's experiences are socially structured and the social institutions 'have been adopted as a broad schema through which we might make sense of social change and the way in which social identities are produced and reproduced over time'(Hockey and James, 2003:77). Therefore, the different discourses regarding old-young love relationships shifted from a political orientation (as in Lao Zhan's account) to material concerns (as in Lao Wen's account).

In addition, Lao Wen points out the gendered judgement inherent in age-dissimilar relationships, that the public would be more tolerant of an older man marrying a younger woman, but a younger man would be stigmatised for marrying an older woman. In the age-dissimilar love relationship, the age hierarchy and gender hierarchy work together to enhance the discordance of the relationship, as well as challenging the Chinese family order and social ethical order in everyday life. Before I focus on the gender hierarchy I would first like to discuss the ethical order in everyday practice against the backdrop of the Chinese Confucian cultural setting.

Challenging the Chinese ethical order in everyday practices

Regarding the pattern of old-young love relationships in the context of Chinese Confucian society and the historical transition of China, I would argue that there is a tension in individual choices and values in response to the social institutions, which reinvent traditional norms and past experiences through the means of everyday practice, thereby reproducing the new norms in contemporary society. In this section, I will

unpack in more detail how individuals use the pre-existing norms and values regarding the phenomenon of old-young love relationships in the more liberal contemporary Chinese society. Then I will analyse how much they are impacted by the past, including the norms of previous eras and the eras they personally experienced.

Age-dissimilar love relationships can disturb traditional generational hierarchies. I will discuss this based on a set of examples from the following participants:

> It is an ethical problem in couples where there is a big age gap because she should call her husband 'grandfather' or 'father' based on his generational status, as maybe her age is similar to the older one's children. When I read about cases like this I confuse their ethical and family positions. I believe that the age gap between elderly partners should not be too big, their ages should be close.
>
> (NaNa, Widow, Female, 94 years old, Guiyang)

> I do not support the form of old-young relationships, I think it is a type of moral problem, I think even if they have strong feelings for each other they should still not do this. At least in the matching of young and old, they should be properly matched. They cannot match the age like a granddaughter to a grandfather.
>
> (Lao Mao, Widower, Male, 85 years old, Guiyang)

Nonagenarian NaNa was born in the year of 1923 and Lao Mao in 1932, before the Mao era and the founding of the People's Republic of China (in 1949). They view bringing disorder to the family hierarchy as causing both ethical and moral problems. Their comments about marrying a husband from the generations of 'father' or 'grandfather' and intergenerational age matches reflect their awareness of the cultural hierarchy. Their ideology is influenced by the Confucian family order, in which the Chinese moral universe is conceived as a family-based system (Jankowiak and Moore, 2017:17). Tian and Xu (2018) also analyse family hierarchy from a linguistic perspective to exemplify this type of appellation in use. They argue that these appellations come from traditional blood relations and their lineage, because the patriarchal system would follow a rigid

hierarchy and young people would be expected to show respect for seniority in general: the family was the basic unit constituting this patriarchal social society; in addition, the young-old order also meant the power hierarchy order as authority would be passed down through this age hierarchy within the family lineage.

In practice, this commonly held opinion reflects how traditional norms and moral frameworks are still impacting on the older group's values and potentially shaping their marital choices during late life. Lao Cao used the word '*beifen*' (position in the family hierarchy) to explain it:

> May-December love, in my view, is not harmonious, they must have ulterior motives. Imagine having the *beifen* of father, and yet the other one is the *beifen* of daughter - how they can live together? Not many people can accept this, anyway I cannot accept it as it is really not harmonious. With the big age gap, if the older one has a son or daughter whose stepmother or stepfather is at a similar age, I cannot believe they can accept that, if it happened to me I could not accept it. Imagine a 60 years old man matched with a 20 years old woman, I guess the old man's son would already be about 30 to 40 years old, this is bad for morality and *beifen*, it is really disharmonious.
>
> (Lao Cao Long-lasting marriage, Male, 79 years old, Qingdao)

The values of the older generations are affected by the norms of *beifen* and the traditional family hierarchy, as their experiences in the era they grew up in has shaped their outlooks and perceptions. In the context of Confucianism, as Hammer (2017) notes, the ideology of family relationships extended to the social order and shaped the individual's sense of respect for whoever or whatever was older in general. However in the old-young relationship, the equivalent of family position in the order like 'father' and 'daughter' breaks with Confucian ideas about social order as well. The appellations of father and grandfather go beyond the family context and extend to the young-old order in general. This cultural hierarchy is still practised in everyday life and, as mentioned in Chapter Three, during my fieldwork, I would call participants 'uncle'

(*shushu*) if the man was from my father's generation and 'grandpa' (*yeye*) if the man was of a similar age to my grandfather. In this case, 'grandfather' or 'granddaughter' represented a boundary between different generations as well as a boundary in the ethical order in the context of Confucianism.

Obviously, the intergenerational age gap in intimate relationships challenges this ethical and social order, however, the principle is also applied within the same-generation relationships. Such as in the example of Lao Shi who uses his early experience to illustrate how he has never been willing to accept an older woman as a potential spouse at any point of his life.

> I had a classmate who was two years older than me, she treated me very well and I knew that she liked me. But I think it is better when the man is older than the woman, I do not know why but I've just held on to this type of idea. Because she is older than me and should be equivalent to my *jiejie* (older sister) when I think about her as a *jiejie*, *jiejie* should be older, a holy and respected group, as youngsters we cannot make contact with them, can't dare to casually make physical contact with them.
>
> (Lao Shi, Long-lasting marriage, 82 years old, Beijing)

Here, the age hierarchy overlaps with the gender hierarchy to challenge the ethical social order. And the ethical orders are internalised and have been practised in everyday life. An individual's sense of position in the social order is socially structured by their 'doing' this cultural hierarchy in everyday practice. In the Analects of Confucius, one of the rules is that 'as a younger brother and son, be filial at home and deferential in the community'(Roger and Rosemont, 1998), and Mencius has a similar expression: 'I shall treat my elders with the due respect, and then extend that respect to the elders of others; I shall treat my juniors with the appropriate care, and extend that same care to the juniors of others'(Hammer, 2017: 487). Hammer (2017) explains that, in the practice of everyday life, no matter who one met, whether they were a colleague, student or friend, an analogous family role would be used to define the relationship and treat each other

accordingly (2017:488). These appellations are used by juniors to show respect to older people in this hierarchical system (Chin, 2018). This social order transferred from the family order is also apparent in Lao Shi's example, where a woman who is a few years older than him would have an analogous family role of 'older sister', and in fact he also practises this social order by showing respect for the woman like an 'older sister'. However, this social order also potentially becomes an obstacle with regard to courtship relationships. It reveals that firstly, the use of such appellations in everyday interaction helps to maintain the boundaries between the generations, and is a process shaping different generations' identities. Secondly, this everyday 'doing the cultural hierarchy by appellation' resonates with Lao Shi, whose early experiences with traditional norms from the past allow him to use these pre-existing to critique the present. Thirdly, the age-dissimilar love relationship is not merely challenging the age hierarchy, rather it also works with the gendered hierarchy to challenge the family order. Lao Shi took it for granted that the older woman -'*jiejie*' -should be respected and was not a suitable partner. However, on the contrary, a younger sister -'*meimei*' - would be acceptable. This reveals that age and gender hierarchies are superimposed on each other. In the following section, I will draw on certain examples to unpack and illustrate this.

Challenging the position in the gender hierarchy

Members of the younger cohorts among my participants, those in their fifties and sixties, also hold similar values but they have more diverse views about the age gap than the older cohorts. For example, Lao Ren aged 51 years old, whose second wife is about three years older than him, had this to say:

> Lao Ren: For the May-December love, I think that they married not because of love, I cannot see any love from this type of relationship, imagining an old-young relationship would already transgress morality.
> Kun: Why ? Is it because of the big age gap?
> Lao Ren: I cannot agree with this anyway, I know anything is possible, but if a

young woman who is in her 20s or 30s married an old man over 60, her parents would not be willing for her to do so, because her husband's age is enough to be her father or grandfather. I think everyone would think about themselves first, if it was me I would not do that, I think this should not be happening. Although love should not be limited by age and nations, if there is a big age gap it would be against the law of human being's normal development.

Kun : So what is the range of the age gap in old groups that would not be against the law of human being's normal development then?

Lao Ren: I think for the old group's remarriage, women shouldn't older than men too much, as I heard my grandfather told me an old Chinese saying that in marriage, 'if a woman is three years older than the man it is a good match that as if a man got a gold brick, but if a woman is five years older this is equal to be a man who got a stepmother'.[20]

(Lao Ren, Remarried, Male, 51years old, Guiyang)

Comparing the various tensions between the two generations' views, Lao Shi cannot accept a 'jiejie' who is just a couple of years older than him, whereas Lao Ren can within certain limits as his second wife, who he married a few years ago, is about three years older than him. But he could not accept an age gap of more than five years and he uses an old saying to explain why his marriage is within the realm of acceptance, a 'golden' relationship. Cases beyond these limits would disrupt the moral or family ethical order due to the fact that a woman five years older than a man would be considered the equivalent of a 'stepmother'. Certain Western studies have suggested the gendered double standard when considering age-dissimilar love matches: there is a 'great frequency of older man/younger women and less support for the older woman/younger man, and more variability in men's age at marriage compared to women' (Berardo et al,1993:96). Women dating with younger men can be considered as disruptive to the traditional heterosexual dating script due to the expectation that woman should play a passive role and be chosen by the man (Alarie, 2019). Against the

[20] In Chinese: 女大三抱金砖，女大五赛继母

backdrop of a male-dominated Chinese culture and society, the gender stereotype is that 'men are valued for their economic status and women are valued for their appearance' and the prerequisite for choosing a wife is the woman's youth, beautiful appearance and other characteristics of being a 'good wife' (Zheng, 2013:323), especially in the young people's matchmaking market. In this heterosexual dating script, the family position order and social order enhance this age-hypergamy in the Chinese cultural context. In Lao Ren's explanation this refers to the position of the family hierarchy, but it overlaps with the gender hierarchy. Like the concept of a 'stepmother' match, younger men here represent an older generation's identity that would trigger disorder in the family hierarchy order, as well twisting the Chinese gender order stereotype regarding hegemonic masculinity and men's superior status both in family and social realms.

Within the framework of this ethical social order and in the context of a patriarchal system, women face more moral limitations in the unequal gender hierarchy.

> I feel this type of 'old cattle eat tender grass'[21] relationship is bad, it shouldn't be happening. These old-young couples must have a mental illness, as the younger one must be aiming for the older one's money. If she is not greedy she would suffer a big loss. As the older one would die earlier and she would become a widow; if she wants to remarry to a good man, I guess nobody would want her. A traditional Chinese saying is, 'A good horse does not want a second saddle; a good woman will not marry twice'.[22] A woman had better just marry one time, it is not good for remarriage, if she got remarried because her husband died this is okay, and the age gap can be up to 10 years old, beyond that I cannot accept it.
>
> (Lao Wu, Long-lasting marriage, Male,63 years old, Qingdao)

Apart from Lao Wu highlighting women's gender inferiority and disadvantage in the marriage market, the age-dissimilar love relationship also reveals materialism and the

[21] In Chinese: '老牛吃嫩草'

[22] In Chinese: '好马不配二鞍，好女不嫁二夫'

wealth exchange between an older man and younger woman. This materialistic ideology challenges the norms and normative order shaped by the party-state in the past. Lao Wu took it for granted that younger women who marry older men are motivated by financial concerns. This view fits within the social milieu of the mainstream, where the pursuit of economic capital has become increasingly important. As mentioned in Chapter Two, since the 1990s China has experienced the liberalising growth of the private sector and the Communist ideology of the Mao era has been replaced by neoliberalism, which has given rise to mobility channels and led to hundreds of millions of Chinese being on the move (Yan, 2009: xvi). In addition, over the past few decades in the contemporary consumerist social environment, male entrepreneurs in urban areas in particular have become a privileged class in this booming neoliberal economy and society (Xiao, 2010:742). Against this backdrop, the Chinese sexual economy enables Chinese women to trade their youthful attractiveness for men's wealth (Zurndorfer, 2016). As a male entrepreneur, Lao Wu has been successful enough to change his identity from rural to urban, he has used his economic power during this reform period to change his and his five children's lives, sending all of them to study abroad and supporting all of them when they migrated to Japan. However, Lao Wu's ideology and values seem to be lagging behind the neoliberal style of his achievements and actions, rather they represent more conservative ideas and Maoist socialist ideology. For example, Lao Wu thinks that old-young love relationships are a form of 'mental illness', a term which was politicised after the Chinese communist party (CCP) took over the country in 1949. Mental illness was considered a leftover from the 'old society' that was produced by the evils of feudalism and capitalism (Guo and Kleinman, 2011). During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) mental illness was also connected with wrong political thinking and as a label was used as a weapon to attack political dissidents (Guo and Kleinman, 2011: 195). Lao Wu's account suggests that he is holding on to a political ideology shaped by Maoist socialism and which is challenged by the contemporary ideology of materialism.

Challenging the family hierarchy

The intensity of the challenge to family, gender hierarchies and the general social order depends on how big the age gap is in an intimate relationship. Below I pick out two cases of May-December love relationships to explore participants' subjective views about this in more depth.

One is Tong, who used to be a businesswoman and has twice experienced marriage but is now cohabiting. After Tong divorced her first husband, she married a man more than 20 years older than her but, ironically, during the marriage her husband had an affair with a woman 40 years younger than him. Her narrative shows how she felt about her husband's May-December love affair.

> He had an affair with a girl who was even younger than me, I could not bear that, because he was already more than 20 years older than me, I definitely could not accept that [his affair with a younger woman]. That girl worked for me for at least a year when I was running my business, I treated her as my daughter as her age is similar to my child. You know, I used to treat her as my daughter, bought her food and clothes as gifts, she was like my daughter. Of course I could not face and accept her once I knew that. Although that girl told me afterwards 'Aunty Tong, I am so sorry', she apologised to me many times …
>
> (Tong, Cohabiting-Female-58 years old-Beijing)

Tong emphasises that she treated her husband's mistress like a daughter before she knew about the affair, which reveals that the big age gap has enhanced her sense of unfairness and being a victim in the marriage. However, in the Chinese cultural hierarchy, as age sometimes refers to position in the family hierarchy, the different ages would match the different 'identities': Tong treated the girl as a 'daughter' due to her being similar age to her child, and to show the honorific the younger ones would call the older women 'Aunt/Aunty' which is shown in the quotation. In terms of the age and identities, the standpoint difference would result in the different attitudes towards the positions of the family hierarchy. Tong's second marriage was criticised by her parents because of the large age gap between her and her husband,

Tong: To be honest when I decided to marry my second husband, my dad disagreed with that. He strongly disagreed, as he thought he was too old for me. Many years later, my mom told me, my dad cried for a whole night on the day he found out.

Kun: Why did he have such a strong reaction against your age gap?

Tong: During that time, the elders could not accept this, not at all. My second husband called my father from behind him respectfully 'father, father', my dad ignored him and never answered him, my dad could not accept him. Although my father likes a man who is knowledgeable like him, he could not accept him.

Kun: How did you convince your parents in the end?

Tong: I failed to convince them, they just had to acquiesce to it in the end.

(Tong, Cohabiting-Female-58 years old-Beijing)

In the eyes of Tong's father, his son-in-law's age placed him in his peer group, which challenged Tong's father's position in the family hierarchy and contravened traditional seniority rules. While Tong could not accept her husband's affair with women her 'daughter's' age, Tong's father could not accept her daughter marrying a husband the same age as her 'father' and this breach of the seniority rules also enhanced the hostility between the family and the couple. The responses to these old-young matches not only reflect the traditional family hierarchy, they also indicate the two generations' value conflicts. Tong displays her more liberal ideology when she marries a man from her 'father's' generation, while her father's mindset is shaped by a strict interpretation of the hierarchy of family positions. However, the picture became more complicated when Tong was faced with a mistress from her 'daughter's' generation and invoked the traditional cultural hierarchy to critique her second husband's affair. Duncan (2011) uses the concept of 'bricolage' to illustrate the process whereby agents use existing traditions such as the thinking styles, presumptions of particular social groups and places and social norms to 'patch' or 'piece together' responses to changing situations. People make do with what they have at hand, mixing the traditional and the modern in order to cope with new or changing situations; and when making choices and

decisions, agency varies in different circumstances, furthermore such 'detraditionalisation also involves retraditionalisation, and individualisation involves relationality' (Carter and Duncan, 2018:2). Tong's case supports Carter and Duncan's (2018) analysis: on the one hand, her behaviour shows the effects of detraditionalisation and individualisation on love and romantic relationships, as she has divorced, remarried and cohabited, actions which subvert the Chinese traditional norms, seniority rules and family hierarchy; however, on the other hand, paradoxically Tong's response to her second husband's affair was to invoke the traditional values of the family hierarchy, which she attempts to use in order to defend her marriage. Her double standards regarding the family hierarchy, the use of traditional seniority rules in her marriage and her ex-husband's affair show how a mixture of tradition and modern values and norms are patched together in Tong's responses to various situations in a transforming society.

Lan's account is another good example to illustrate this bricolage. She divorced about 30 years ago and now is cohabitating with a man who is 23 years older than her and due to his not having divorced yet, Lan is playing the role of mistress in their relationship. Nevertheless, she has critical attitude towards May-December love relationships, as is shown in the following remarks,

> Those old-young relationships are bad, not a correct match. Because their ages are different and there will be a wide gap between their ideas, lifestyles and way of thinking. The correct match in my mind is the youth married with the young age and old live with the old age. I think their age is better similar, the gap can be up to 15 years old … [in terms of] ... why there are some younger women married with older men, I think because the younger ones are too greedy, they have a problem relying on others, and they are avaricious, they want the older ones' houses, status and future of the career.

However, in terms of her relationship and the big age gap between her and her cohabitation partner, Lan's explanation shifted completely,

> Because I am young, I am 23 years younger than him, but his wife is already over 80, the same age as him, she is too old and not well educated so they have no common language. He thinks I am a very energetic woman and we are a perfect match for each other.
>
> (Lan, Cohabiting-61years old-Female-Beijing)

Contradicting her earlier statement, Lan gives a completely different opinion about her own age-dissimilar relationship, criticising her partner's wife for being 'too old and not well educated', in contrast to her own youth and energy. This reveals her views on 'cradle robber' relationships that can be the opposite depending on her standpoint. In this case, when placing the form of old-young love relationship in the extramarital affair context, there are two moral lines that can be judged: one is about the moral evaluation of the affair, such as the judgement of disrupting the other person's family; the other is the ethical issues of the dissimilar age-hypergamous. Unlike Tong who re-invokes the norms to cope with her personal crisis in different circumstances, Lan downplays the moral judgement of the affair by highlighting the advantages of her younger age compared with her partner's wife.

When I asked her 'would you like to marry your current partner?', she responded,

> 'I do not want to remarry, because I have already finished my mission as a woman … as a woman's foundation is her children. For a woman if she has experienced marriage or has children then she has already finished her life's mission'
>
> (Lan, Cohabiting-61years old-Female-Beijing)

Due to the fact that Lan has a son with her ex-husband, she therefore thinks that she has already finished her 'mission' as a woman. Having discharged her duties, she now chooses to cohabit with a man 23 years older than her, despite the fact that this man is still married and not willing to divorce. Ji (2017) uses the conceptual metaphor of

‘mosaic’ and a gender lens to examine family and its transformation in a transitional society, arguing that modernity and tradition stand side by side, that agents work together to negotiate the traditional norms and modern desires (2017:8). In terms of this mosaic, Lan negotiates between her interpretation of the gender norms (woman’s mission) and her desire for intimacy (cohabitation) while expressing concern for her reputation and a desire to remarry. By the end of the interview, she was complaining to me that her partner should give her a wife’s name/status (in Chinese: *Ming fen*),

> Most of the time he lives with me but he never gives me *Ming-fen*, I am the selfless woman who feeds and looks after him … I pay the bills and feed him but how can I explain our relationships to others? I can’t, it’s very hard to explain my status due to us not being married … He is not wise, I feed him but he should think about my status and give me an explanation. He is too kindly and he thinks too much about his family’s and children’s feelings

Lan’s values seem paradoxical, her ideas are pushed and pulled by the mix of tradition and modernity in this mosaic society. In the role of mistress to her partner, she has suffered from a strongly held view against her from her partner’s children and wife, therefore her partner has failed to negotiate a divorce and marry her. She then explained that she was against remarriage due to having ‘finished woman’s mission’, though this was in contrast to her complaining that she was deserving of a wife’s name to better value her position in the relationship. This paradox to some extent reflects the competing social structures, values and morality as principle and practice in modern China: on the one hand, the older group of participants had not given up on the traditional values; on the other, such as in Lan’s case or Tong’s experience, they engaged in more open relationships but still hold contradictory values, they are struggling to negotiate with the opinions from their families and others. According to their actual behaviour and choice of family practice, there is a crack between structure and agency, as they hold the same traditional values as their peers, but their practices are going in the opposite way. Ji’s (2017) concept of ‘mosaic’ can explain to some extent how individual reflexivity works in a social context where patriarchal and neoliberalism

coexist, and how the participants' choices reflect this mixture of tradition and modernity. Also relevant here is Chang's (2010) concept of 'compressed modernity' which he uses to build up a theoretical framework and illustrate the various structural or historical characteristics of contemporary South Korean society resulting from rapid modernisation. He explains compressed modernity in non-Western societies and how in the process of being internalised 'they superimposed, borrowed or adapted instantly from outside with the internal civilizational elements subjugated willingly or unwillingly'(Chang, 2010a: 450). In the following section, I will use Ji and Chang's theoretical frames to unpack some participants' different perceptions of morality by drawing on their extramarital affairs.

Morality in cohabiting and extramarital affairs

> Lao Ai: You know it is fashionable for older men to find a younger woman, they change to a different woman frequently.
> Kun: What is the community's attitude towards them?
> Lao Ai: There must be some criticisms of them, but the older cadres do not care, they are ageing and they are bold-faced and shameless.
>
> (Lao Ai, Long-lasting marriage, 61 years old, Male, Guiyang)

Since the Mao years, the sex industry has developed in pace with the economy opening up and extramarital affairs, mistresses and multiple wives are now the norm amongst the elite, wealthy entrepreneurs and government officials (Osburg, 2013:41). These women are more than sexual objects for men's pleasure but also part of the power-play amongst men. Meanwhile the state blames this phenomenon on 'spiritual pollution' and sees it as a byproduct of the economy opening up (Uretsky, 2016). Lao Ai is a governmental cadre, in charge of the old cadres' life issues, however his friends revealed to me that he has been having an extramarital affair with a younger woman. He did not mention this at any stage of the interview, instead he expressed views against older people cohabiting or having affairs. Unlike his concealed extramarital love affairs, compared with the

mainstream critiques about 'immoral' choices, different voices were heard from other participants from the elite class. In the following, I will use Lao Kan and Lao Yan as examples to show the different attitudes of the participants towards immorality. I will argue that their judgements of the standard of morality are various and to some extent shaped by their social class and social milieu.

Lao Kan used to be a government official and during the economic opening-up period he went to law college, becoming one of the first generation of qualified lawyers in China. He gradually developed a professional reputation in Guiyang city, where he runs his own law firm, which is called after his first name. Although Lao Kan is over seventy years old, he is still actively engaged with his business circle and the interview took place in a restaurant before one of his business banquets.

> My marriage is not good but not that bad. Because in my friends' circle at least, half of them are divorced, among them there are two to three who haven't divorced but have two families with different children. My marriage is better than those who run two families or who are divorced, although it is not good enough but at least we are still together. I have had some affairs but I did not build up two families. You know life lasts for so many decades, who will not have extramarital affairs?
>
> (Lao Kan, Long-lasting marriage-72 years old- Guiyang)

The judgement of morality is shaped by one's location within class stratification. In the interview, Lao Kan shared some personal details about his affairs such as how he met a young woman during a business trip, how they roamed along the seaside and how he made up poetry for the woman afterwards. Lao Kan concealed these affairs from his wife, therefore as his narrative above shows, his marriage is not good but they are still together and this is much better than his friends in his business circle, who have divorced or fathered children outside of marriage.

Unlike the participants who critique affairs as immoral, throughout the interview he explains his affairs from various perspectives.

> Kun: Why did you have those affairs?
> Lao Kan: When I had arguments with my wife they always triggered this way of thinking, in addition when I met some women who I liked at work or at social occasions, if we mutually agreed we would have an affair; the other thing I think is it is because of human nature.
> Kun: How do you explain human nature?
> Lao Kan: You know, human nature is liking the new and loathing the old, although having affairs is not a positive thing but generally speaking it is not wrong. Because this is part of human nature, it includes people liking to make new friends or liking a new person, this is nature. The only difference is that some can control their nature but some hold on for a while but finally can't control it, so they have to follow human nature, after all human beings are a type of very complicated animal.

The privilege of his social position gives Lao Kan more opportunities to engage in extramarital affairs. Mistresses and female beauties are often introduced to elite males and officials through their informal networks, and this sexual bribery is used by some entrepreneurs to 'secure a meeting with a hard-to meet high-ranking official or businessman'(Osburg, 2013: 74). This norm of corruption and the exchange of power, money and female sexuality in elite male groups is contrary to views of the participants from other classes, who considered extramarital affairs 'immoral'. Lao Kan attributes his affairs to 'human nature' and does not see them as 'wrong' but his more open views and behaviour knowingly violate both moral discourse and the law itself. The 1980 Chinese Marriage Law defines extramarital affairs as illegal, takes more punitive action against violators, and adds more physical protection for women and children (Zhang, 2002). In addition, in the revised marriage law of 2001 if a spouse was 'cohabiting with someone else' their partner could divorce and sue them for the damage caused (Tian et al, 2013). Lao Kan denies that his affairs are 'wrong' but does not explain himself from

a legal perspective, rather his denial comes from the values or moral perceptions shaped by his elite environment. As well as being a lawyer, he is also a successful businessman.

Businessmen have emerged as a result of the opening up of the Chinese economy. During the Mao era there were no lawyers, business consultants, CEOs or pop stars (Kleinman et al, 2011) and it is only since the 1990s that business people have become a powerful and recognisable new social group, mainly due to the one party state promoting the expansion of private business (Kleinman et al, 2011:17). In the first decades of the People's Republic of China (PRC) entrepreneurialism was repressed but now financially successful men are part of the social elite and in the sexual economy these wealthy and/or politically influential men are able to consume femininity and sexuality (Zurndorfer, 2016:5). The accumulation of wealth enables men like Lao Kan who have become successful businessmen, to achieve the 'hyper-masculinity' identified with high earning, professional status and power (Farrer, 2002; Zurndorfer, 2016). Meanwhile, by the 1990s extramarital love had become a popular theme in the mass media and television dramas, and at the same time extramarital affairs came to be understood as a product of social change (Hershatter, 2007:19). As for Lao Kan, in business and elite men's circles, extramarital affairs are a very common phenomenon which dilute the traditional moral judgement within the field. This is closer to Bauman's (2003) concept of 'liquid love', that personal life in modern liquid society is characterised by discontinuity and the forces of consumerism, which cause love relationships to become 'top-pocket' choices. This is very much like Lao Kan who, on the one side, is able to have an affair with a younger woman when he wants and practices this with flexible extramarital affairs in the domain of his social life which fits in the business circle's mores of sexual consumption; on the other side, he still keeps his marriage as a type of security to follow the traditional marriage pattern, as it fits into the traditional norms and the political discourses of the responsibility of family. This convergence of tradition and neoliberalism reflects both Ji's (2017) mosaic conception and the features of compressed modernity. However, it also goes beyond these models, as class stratification is a significant factor shaping individual perceptions, norms and

their extramarital affair practice. In the following I will use an older participant, Lao Yan, to unpack this additional dimension uncovered by the interviews.

Compared to Lao Kan, Lao Yan has a more liberal view on extramarital affairs. He is a very honest male participant who was willing to share his private affairs,

> In the eyes of my late wife I am a playboy, an amorous and considerate husband, because when I had affairs with other younger women she always understood me, she said as long as you do not sleep with them it was fine, she could accept hugs or kisses. She could completely understand that I am an actor and she knew I had these emotional needs and biological needs, because a man without emotional needs he won't be loving, she understands this. Although sometimes she would give me warnings about marital responsibility but she never locked me up or tried to control me, she freed my emotions, I cannot find such a good wife anymore.
>
> (Lao Yan, Widower-96 years old-Guiyang)

Lao Yan was born in 1921 and used to be a movie actor. His late wife was a professor at a university in the city of Guiyang. Lao Yan's marriage was close to a type of 'open relationship' but with some preconditions. Lao Yan's late wife and Lao Yan's class position were in the middle or elite class, and their openness supports what Chen (2017:962) found when studying Chinese women's attitudes to sexuality and extramarital affairs, that there is a class distinction between the middle class, who express more tolerance and openness, and the working class who show less tolerance for extramarital affairs and for women who become 'second wives'. However Lao Yan's case departs from Chen's (2017) findings on generational differences, whereby the elderly remain more attached to the Maoist legacy and subject to social morals. Instead, Lao Yan is more relativistic in his approach.

Lao Yan was very open when sharing his experiences and in his narrative he recounted several different love stories. Before he married his wife, he cohabited with a woman

who gave birth to a son for him but, because of the civil war, the woman and the son moved to and settled down in Taiwan leaving Lao Yan behind in Mainland China. Eventually, he met and married his late wife, and during their marriage as well as a few small affairs limited to 'kisses and hugs' he also had a very 'passionate' sexual relationship with another actor. When he showed me her picture I asked him: 'Was every love experience or affair experience you had true love?' He gave me a positive answer and used the phrase 'true feelings' to demonstrate that he was emotionally devoted to each woman he had an affair with. Unlike the other participants, who lived within a rigid moral framework, Lao Yan seems to have found more freedom outside of the prevailing moral system; in contrast with Lao Kan's explanation that affairs stem from 'human nature', Lao Yan's narration of his biographical experiences displays the trait of modernity with their emphasis on sexual desire and the pursuit of true love.

In the privileged cohort that both Lao Yan and Lao Kan belong to, the ability to choose lifestyles is class based (Carter and Duncan, 2018) and their respective social milieux provide them with chances to practice affairs outside of marriage. In addition, the two men reveal a pragmatic approach to extramarital affairs that reflects Carter and Duncan's (2018) notion that: 'Tradition was a resource to guide proper behaviour, but was adapted and changed as new situations developed' (2018:43). This to some extent also explains the views of participants like Lao Ai whose account was included at the beginning of the section. In his interview, he defers to the public/political discourse when he critiques the old cadres who have sex outside of wedlock as 'bold-faced and shameless'. Carter and Duncan (2018:2) stress that the mixing of tradition and the modern is created through people living their personal lives. People 'use, adapt or even invent tradition as they improvise family practices in new or changing situations' (Carter and Duncan, 2018:2). They use different strategies to renegotiate the public moral discourses within the traditional marriage framework and modern neoliberalism. However, putting aside the participants who come from the elite class, what are the differences in the other social classes' opinions and sexual practices? And how do they put into practice traditional morals and political discourses? In the following part I will draw on the moral dilemmas of making choices in various forms of intimate

relationships to illustrate in more detail.

Cohabitation and the tensions of morality of later life

Views on cohabitation from a moral perspective

> After all, cohabitation is illegal, I think people should laugh at this phenomenon, I feel it is bad, old people should get a legal marriage.
>
> (Lao Wu, Long-lasting marriage-Male-63 years old-Qingdao)

> There are both advantages and disadvantages to elderly people's remarriage, but in terms of cohabitation, it is not a civilized thing.
>
> (An Yi, Long-lasting marriage-Female-73 years old-Qingdao)

Most of the participants indicated that elderly people cohabiting were becoming more and more common nowadays, however, when talking about cohabitation some negative comments like 'bad' or 'uncivilized' were mentioned by the senior age groups. In the following I will use some examples from participants to illustrate how their values are shaped by their past experiences, social-historical and political discourses, and how they use moral discourses to cope with their moral anxiety and crisis caused by the liberalisation of sexual mores in contemporary Chinese society.

Lao Bao comes from a rural area but when his children got jobs in the city of Qingdao he and his wife decided to retire there, moving into a villa which was bought by their children. When asked about his views on seniors' cohabiting, his narrative made links to the past and Chinese cultural history,

> Lao Bao: In the past, we called this 'cohabitation' thing abnormal and unreasonable, it was considered dirty. Now people feel free to live together or break up, I still think it is dirty and bad.

Kun: Why do you think cohabitation is dirty?

Lao Bao: I think it comes from the feudal idea, in the past if a woman's husband died then she became a widow, she would be not allowed to remarry, not to mention to sleep with another man. If they slept together the leaders of the locality or village would break them up and give them punishment. Unlike today, people do not even have to register their marriage before living together.

(Lao Bao, Long-lasting marriage,70 years old, Qingdao)

The binary of urban and rural social milieux also shaped the different content of moral discourses on sexuality. Lao Bao's views reveal that the social control that existed in village life, as Lao Bao has spent most of his life in a rural area and his use of the expression 'bad' and 'dirty' for cohabitation can be dated back to 'the past', however the 'past' in this context does not only mean the participant's early life experiences, it also reflects the historical ideology of the time and traditional sexual discourses. Sigley (2006) indicates that 'in contemporary China and its relations of moral discourse to sex and politics owes much to historical considerations'(2006:45). As in Lao Bao's narrative, widows in feudal society were not supposed to remarry, cohabitation without marriage was shameless and would lead to punishment. In Yan's (2003) fieldwork in a northern village of Xiajia during 1998-1999, he was surprised to find a 64 year old widow being ritually shamed when she remarried. Coming from this kind of background, Lao Bao was not only shaped by the same traditional values, he relies on them and reproduces the moral discourse to defend tradition when faced with the sexual liberation of social change. However, traditional moral discourse also reflects the political discourses in the public sphere, and the people in the seventy-plus age group who hold this moral ideology are not limited to rural areas.

The pattern also applies to some participants in higher social status groups in urban areas: for example, Ling is 84 years old and living in Beijing; both she and her late husband have a university degree and used to be architects before retirement; her husband died in 2012 and since then she has lived alone but sometimes her children come to her house to keep her company. During the interview, she showed her dislike

for people cohabitating and still uses the same moral standards of her early life experience to critique the cohabitation phenomenon of today.

> In our time there was no one in cohabitation without marriage, not like that it is nowadays, even now I cannot bear to see people in cohabitation. I think lovers who've been in relationships for a couple of years should get married directly, I cannot support their cohabitation. In our youth, people who cohabited were equal to rogues, now I do not want to see even a bit of this phenomenon.
>
> (Ling, Widow, Female, 84 years old, Beijing)

Ling married in the late 1950s during the Mao years (1949-1976) when, as mentioned in Chapter Two, socialist politics shaped marriage and people's ideology. Moreover, within this historical period the sexual norms were strict and sexuality was seen as a shameful and taboo subject (Zheng et al, 2011). 'Sexuality and reproduction were seen as inextricably linked and sex outside marriage, both premarital and extramarital was regarded as highly immoral for both sexes' (Zheng, et al, 2011:498). Although since 1970s the CCP has pushed the process of 'reform and openness' in contrast with the iconoclastic nature of policy and ideology during Maoist period, in the realm of sexuality, the institution of marriage and family attitudes towards sexual behaviour, there remains a strong element of social conservatism (Sigley, 2006:45). Against this backdrop, Ling's moral stance on cohabitation was shaped by her early experiences and the historical political ideology, which is still deeply impacting her present choices and moral judgements of herself and others. When studying older women's marital relationships and sexuality in China, Shea (2011) also suggests that it was primarily practical exigencies and historical-shaped personal priorities that led women to behave as they did, more than a lack of knowledge (2011:375). Ling as a middle-class woman in the cosmopolitan city of Beijing criticises other people's intimate behaviours and cohabitation, which challenges the findings that Chinese women in later life hold more liberal attitudes towards sexuality (such as in Shea, 2011). In addition, Ling expresses anxiety about present-day China's sexual liberation and sexual freedom, which in turn reflects anxieties in the wider social milieu about the impact this is having on the CCP's

political authority. Likewise, 'there is a great deal of official anxiety about the sexual revolution' as Western or bourgeois notions of sexual liberation and sexual freedom have challenged social and family conservatism (Sigley, 2006:44-45).

Lao Mao is 85 years old and used to be a skilled worker in an industry of Guiyang city. He is now living in a care home and shows his attitude towards cohabitation by describing a case from his care home,

> Lao Mao: I heard from others that there are two old people here, they slept together for four years but without marrying. Old people's private life is very rich, but they should do it reasonably, right? Or others would look down on them, they should not do this.
> Kun: So how do you view their cohabitation without marriage?
> Lao Mao: I think they just want to *wan* (玩：play) with each other, playing for fun. Their children can't stop them as they are living in a care home, but they are just playing, what a mess! In the past, as we held with feudal thought, we did not do that, but now because of sexual liberation people's behaviour is getting messy, undermining the public order. Especially sexual liberation, it is unruly, it is bad and immoral.
>
> (Lao Mao, Widower-Male-85 years old-Guiyang)

Similar to Lao Bao and Ling who think cohabitation is immoral, Lao Mao also indicates that cohabitation violates 'feudal thought', but this 'feudal thought' here can be translated as the Confucian traditional norms and moral regulation of intimate relationships in the past. Traced back to the Chinese communist movement of the 1920s, 'feudalism' refers to the negative aspects of traditional Chinese culture, including 'traditional feudal views' and 'old worn-out traditional customs' (Shea, 2011:366). Shea (2011) argues that compared with young people who have received sex education, older people are 'subject to stale, rotten, worn-out, out dated notions passed down through the ages of history'(Shea, 2011:366). Although Confucianism, however, has been revived and some of these ideas are being rebranded not as feudal but as part of socialist

morality, in the interests of creating a harmonious society. Lao Mao praises the traditional 'feudal thought' when compared with the current sexually liberated behaviours common in Chinese society, because in Lao Mao's view without the traditional norms or thought to guide social behaviour, private intimate life would be '*chaotic and disturb the social order'*. For example, he considers cohabitation equivalent to 'play (*wan*)'. Dating back from the 1990s, '*wan*' or 'playing around' was popular among the youth when referring to romantic love relationships that were not expected to lead to marriage (Jankowiak and Moore, 2017:109). According to Farrer's (2002) study of Shanghai youth sexual culture, 'play' is a way for people to experiment with new social roles and choices in the world of the consumer society (2002:16) and it also refers to a sexual choice without long-term consequences. Farrer suggests that 'playfulness like romance and irony is an acquired competency and an emotional rhetoric for dealing with the fluid sexual interactions in the new market society' (2002:325). In addition. when talking about the rhetoric of 'play' or 'play for fun', play (*wan*) is just for the pursuit of irresponsible sexual play (2002:325). Lao Mao's account categorises and blames cohabitation for this short-term, lack of responsibility in sexual liaisons. Actually, as well as Lao Bao, there were other participants that do not want to engage with this intimate practice who used the word '*wan*' or the more negative '*hun*' (*混*：dawdle) to make comments on the elderly cohabiting. They commented that such older people were living together simply as a way to pass the rest of their time. Under the influence of 'sexual liberation' cohabitation has become more common in the social realm, along with more elderly people choosing cohabitation, and some of the participants would prefer to critique it as sexually deviant. From another perspective this reveals that choice does not merely exist for the youth or younger generations, rather it applies to senior age groups also. However, the moralistic boundaries among their peers of the older age group are still impacted by the past, public discourse and social classes. According to Carter and Duncan's (2018:42) framework of the pragmatist, mostly older, more religious and less educated persons prefer to be traditionalists and follow external roles and mores. Like Lao Mao who thinks cohabitation is a breach of morality and leads to older people's private lives becoming messy, and who attributes this to 'sexual liberation'.

Lao Mao continues,

> I think as the elders, we should be good role models for others. We should behave better, then others will respect us. If we are not doing well, not to mention the others, my family would look down on me, They would see me as licentious, society would discard me and even the children would abandon me. Those criticisms and curses would impact on my happiness in my elderly life.
>
> (Lao Mao, Widower, Male, 85 years old, Guiyang)

Lao Mao has to negotiate his behaviours and choices with the public discourses, changing family structures and decline of his parental authority within the family. When facing sexual liberation and the related moral crisis, furthermore the increase of individualism and the deconstruction of collective norms during the social transformation period gives rise to the older people having more choice. Against this background, some of the older generation like Lao Mao persist in maintaining the ideology that existed in the traditional family roles of old and the family order - that one should be a good role model and respectable. Lao Mao is following the traditional hierarchy based on age and agreed moral standards. In the traditional Chinese family hierarchy, the seniors' place should be at the head of the family and be respected by others. Yan's (2003) study of a Chinese village shows that in the past most activities were within family and kinship networks, and within the family system, power and authority were based on the authority of the senior generation over their juniors, the older over the younger, and men over women (2003:229). In the traditional values, parental authority within the family should carry more weight and is supposed to be respected and obeyed by the younger generations.

Furthermore, they have the power to be in charge of the family, especially men who are to play the role of family leader. But from the 1950s to the 1970s, radical socialism undermined the moral ground of parenthood and collapsed the notion of filial piety

(Yan, 2003). Lao Mao's experience embodied this as well and his narrative reveals that he cares very much about his reputation and maintaining the image of a respectable senior role model, but it also released some of his worries and anxieties about both his children and the wider society 'abandoning' him if he engages in less respectable behaviours.

In fact, as parental authority has declined and been challenged, Lao Mao's maintenance of a traditional moral image looks like the result of a negotiation with his relationships to his children, and even considers the wider societal arena. Although the care home is becoming popular in urban areas now, because of the influence of traditional filial piety, care homes are not everyone's first choice when it comes to looking after their ageing relatives. Lao Mao was twice sent to a care home by his children (he has three children, two sons and one daughter). The first time was in 2016 but he refused to live there and left after a short time. He told me that the reason he left was that 'the staff in the care home did not really care about me'. He eventually decided to come back though as 'I could stay in my house but there's nobody to look after me, my children cannot look after me and I would have to live on my own'. His children have their own families and live apart from Lao Mao, they are busy with their careers and do not have time to look after him. Unlike the participants in Yan's (2003) study of a rural village where parental authority is based on the family and kinship networks, Lao Mao is living far away and separately from his children who have built their own families and are busy with work. On the one hand, he exercises traditional moral judgement and maintains parental authority and a fatherly image, on the other, he has to face the collapse of his parental power and the faded filial piety of children.

The dilemma of choosing cohabitation

In the cities, unlike the seniors in their seventies or eighties, the younger cohorts among the participants were more liberal in their thinking and more likely to be cohabiting or to have remarried. For example, Tong is aged 58 years old and after having experienced

divorce, remarriage and widowhood, she is cohabiting with her current partner of a few of years although she conceals her cohabitation in front of her neighbours and friends,

> My current partner is living together with me, all my friends do not know this, they all think we got married but they do not know we are just cohabiting. I think if we can get along well then we will stay together, if not we can separate.
>
> (Tong, Cohabiting- Female-58 years old- Beijing)

When I reviewed Tong's interview, I found that at the beginning of our talk she did not mention she was cohabiting and when I asked 'who are you living with now?' she did not directly answer my question. She just told me that 'he is not in, he is on a work trip at the moment'. But as the interview progressed she gradually opened up to me and revealed how she had not told anyone about the true nature of her current relationship. Among the participants, Tong's marriage experiences are more complicated than others, due to her second husband having an affair which lead to her being deeply hurt and losing trust in men. Now cohabitation is easier for her as she has the choice to stay or separate. Unlike the older participants above, Tong did not use the relevant moral words to make negative comments on cohabitation, but she prefers to conceal the fact of cohabitation because she is still not willing to risk her friends or neighbours judging her in this way. This strategy of dealing with their moral crisis in the public sphere is similar to Lao Ai's strategy of concealing his extramarital affairs. However the difference is that Tong does not use the mainstream moral discourse to accommodate to conservative traditional values.

Unlike Tong, Lan presents many paradoxical ideas, one example being her views on cohabitation,

> Cohabitation is abnormal, you see this is out of responsibility for the family. You know, because elderly cohabitation is not aimed at marriage nor giving birth to babies, this is a lack of responsibility for families. If without children, when they are getting very old then who would support them? … whether men or women,

> their children should support the ageing, those who are in cohabitations show a lack of responsibility to family and society …
>
> (Lan, Cohabitation- Female- 61 years old-Beijing)

Currently Lan is cohabiting with a partner 23 years older than her but in her view, elderly cohabitation can neither perform the key functions of marriage such as 'giving birth to babies' nor show responsibility for family. This point reflects some traditional ideas about marriage. Underling the logic of cohabitation here is the popular Confucian idea that sex is socially inappropriate after one's reproductive ability is compromised or lost (Shea, 2011:376). According to Guan (2004) the lives and sexual activities of the Chinese elderly are influenced by traditional norms about sexuality and cultural expectations such as the code of appropriate behaviour outlined by Confucianism, which stipulated that sex was for married people and breeding purposes only, and considered all other sexual activities as undignified and disreputable (Gaun, 2004:105). In this cultural milieu, the functions of marriage and sexual activities were oriented towards carrying on the family name and producing the next generation. Compared with this, elderly cohabitation is missing the reproduction function and is thus outside of the mainstream norms of marriage.

In contrast with Tong's cohabitation, Lan's choice to cohabitate was more reactive and the result of conflict with her partner's family. As Lan's partner's family were opposed to their affair, she was left with no other choice but to cohabit; furthermore his children's opposition has also prevented Lan's partner from obtaining a divorce. In the last part of the interview she explained to me how terrible the relationships between her partner's family are, how his children are against them, the disputes they have had over property and so forth. She also gave me examples of how she tried to persuade the children to agree to their father's divorce by promising to look after their father and taking care of his funeral duties. But they could not reach an agreement and so Lan and her partner have to cohabit rather than marrying.

Most of the participants preferred to stay single after they lost their spouses. When

referring to the choices of cohabitation, divorce or remarriage, some of the seniors would link them to a 'lack of responsibility'.

> Hong: In the past those types of people [cohabitation without marriage] were called 'worn out shoes'. Now the old people are very open. I have nothing but disdain for these old people, as they take no responsibility for their families or for society, they do not even take responsibility for themselves.
> Kun : How do you understand 'responsibility'?
> Hong: Responsibility, first of all is a response to family, that is love your family and children, and maintain family harmony. When you go out do not cause trouble, within the family do not bring up bad children. As long as the family runs well, society will run well, because the family is the cell of society, if a family can be run well then society will be harmonious, if not they will go on to cause trouble in society.
>
> (Hong, Widow-Female-65 years old-Beijing)

This narrative to some extent reflects the socialist gender ideology, which emphasised women's obligation and sacrifice to both family and the state (Ji et al, 2017). Hong has stayed single and refused to take a partner since her husband died of cancer. She helps her son and daughter-in-law look after her grandson and is in charge of the house chores. According to everyday family practice, Hong plays a traditional gender role as 'grandmother' and housekeeper for her son and daughter in law, she sacrifices herself to the family. In addition, Hong uses the values of her upbringing to explain the word 'cohabitation' and criticises elderly cohabitants as irresponsible. However, the responsibility here is not merely limited to the couple or their children but extends to the wider family and even society as a whole. This social responsibility reflects to some extent the collective ideology cultivated by political influences and Kleinman et al (2011: 5) note that in China there is a long tradition of calling for individuals to sacrifice their personal interests or pleasure for the sake of a larger collectivity. In pre-reform China, state propaganda used the ideology of gender equality to call for men and women to make sacrifices for both families and the socialist state (Ji et al, 2017). This can be

seen in Hong's depiction of self and family as the cells of society, in which maintaining the social harmony of the whole is a personal responsibility. This also reflects a basic Confucian idea that is central to the CCP political ideology on family that defines family as the cell of society and the foundation of social stability (Jackson and Ho, 2020; Sigley, 2006)

Responsibility versus divorce and remarriage

As discussed above, responsibility was a factor mentioned when referring to cohabitation without or outside of marriage but personal divorce potentially undermines this societal integrity and stability, which is shaped by the ideology of maintaining a complete family. The importance of responsibility is also highlighted by Lao Shi below,

> My values are, maybe because of the traditional ideas, I think when people get married they should not divorce; if they have children and one parent dumped them, that is a lack of responsibility. Responsibility is, try your best to avoid divorce. But for now, more people divorced because of a lack of this responsibility, if they cannot get along well, it is very easy for them to get a divorce.
>
> (Lao Shi, Long-lasting marriage-Male-82 years old-Beijing)

Lao Shi discloses that he dislikes his wife and their marriage is without love. The main reason they have remained married for about 60 years is because of this sense of responsibility. Although he holds the fashionable view that 'without love, marriage would be immoral', because of the traditional constraints of family responsibility he continues to be committed to the marriage. It may be that compared with the moral critique of divorce as a 'lack of responsibility', the moral prohibitions regarding 'marriage without love' are much less pronounced. His choice to maintain a marriage without love fits with 'traditional ideas'. So how strong is this traditional value shaping individual choices? Let us see with some quotations from other participants.

One example would be Lao Gao's divorce during his later twenties,

> … to be honest, one of the reasons for the divorce was that she failed to give birth to any children, if we have children and even if she can give birth to a daughter I would not have divorced her. I was dissatisfied with her about this [infertility], not only me, we [their families] were all dissatisfied, although we did not speak about it but we were all unhappy with her infertility. After we divorced, for years she got treatment and later she had three children in her remarriage.
>
> (Lao Gao, Widower-Male- 82 years old- Jinan)

Lao Gao's first marriage was arranged by his parents in a village when he was twelve years old. However, in rural areas, divorce for a man would not be considered immoral if the woman had an infertility problem; in the family based system, especially in rural areas, a woman's fertility is important for carrying on the family name. Because in Chinese society, the boundaries between individual and family and between family and village are blurred (Murphy et al, 2011) reproductive assistance from health agencies is often exercised at the family rather than individual level (Lee and Wang, 1999; Murphy et al, 2011). In addition , the responsibilities, obligations, rights and powers of family relations are underpinned by the norm of patrilineality and the male-centred line of descent (Hu and Scott, 2014:3). Against this background of patriarchal and gendered inequality, as Lao Gao's first wife was infertile and could not carry out her reproductive duties, this in turn led to the whole family being dissatisfied and Lao Gao's divorce being approved and supported by both his family and the surrounding community.

Compared with rural areas, divorce among the younger old generation in urban areas is actually more common but not without the potential for shameful gossip spread by others, as is the case with Jingjing who divorced in 1993 because of her husband's affair and became a single mother,

Jingjing: At that time, divorce was not a good thing, once I divorced, I left Tianjin [hometown] for Shanghai, my colleagues in Tianjin could not contact me for many decades, as I was cut off from all of them.

Kun : Why?

Jingjing: Because I was afraid that they would ask me about it, actually they did not know I had divorced until recently, two to five years ago, as we had only just started to contact each other again. My colleagues were all retired, one contacted me and then the rest all gradually renewed contact with each other. During the divorce, I concealed it and did not mention it to my friends or colleagues. I kept on closing myself off.

(Jingjing, Divorce, Female-64 years old-Shanghai)

Jingjing married in 1976 when she was 23 years old and divorced at around 40 years old but her husband had been having an affair since 1986. During those seven years the *danwei* tried to help Jingjing and persuade her ex-husband to change his mind and go back to his family but their efforts failed, her ex-husband quit job from the hospital and migrated to America with the woman. Divorce for Jingjing was humiliating, therefore she quit her job and moved to another city, cutting off all her friends. When we did the interview Jingjing told me that she had only just recently started to talk about this with other people in the last few years. Hershatter (2007) notes that 'divorce was often portrayed as disadvantageous to women, particularly when it was preceded by a man's extramarital involvement with a younger, more attractive 'third party' (2007:20)'. This reveals that over the preceding decades, even in urban areas, divorce for Jingjing was considered a shameful thing despite the fact that she was not the guilty party, although the men like Jingjing's ex-husband would receive more criticism from their social surroundings, the workplace about their lack of family responsibility.

Conclusion

This chapter revealed that there are some tensions in older people's intimate relationships in practice, as well as in their perceptions of social norms and standard morality. I have employed some theories to analyse how individual norms and values mix tradition and modernity, for example, Ji's mosaic society thesis. Initially, the meaning of mosaic is a pattern or image composed of small pieces of coloured stone or other materials. Ji uses this pattern as metaphor to describe the transformation of Chinese society and the negotiation between traditional norms and modern desires (Ji, 2017). This idea helped me to explore how the different older cohorts' norms and values have been shaped by their life experiences against the background of social transformation. Similarly, the term bricolage was first used by Levi-Strauss (Cater and Duncan, 2018) to describe the process of how an artist shapes something beautiful or useful out of the debris of human activity (Levi-Strauss, 1962). This metaphor is very helpful for explaining how older people practice their everyday lives, as they too must go through the process of putting together moralities and ideas into a more useful form. It also shows that their ethical and moral practice is not fixed, rather it is flexible and older people use it as a discursive tool to make the best of what is available to them in terms of fulfilling their needs, or finding a reasonable explanation for their 'dilemmas'. The older participants faced moral dilemmas at different levels, depending on their social status and class background, age, gender and so forth. Norms or moral standards were practised by individuals within each of their fields and through their interactions and choices were further internalised, in the process creating new norms through everyday practices.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

> The explanation of love and marriage is different as it is not only a relationship between two individuals but also bound up with families and society. Unlike my love experience in the army [during the early 1980s], the older generations probably sacrificed their private love for the country, and now it has different meanings that link to the economic reform era, you know each of our love stories is personal, but at the same time each is universal.
>
> (Lao Sun, Long-lasting marriage, 63 years old)

In this concluding chapter, I will draw together the main themes discussed throughout the thesis and make links to the relevant theories employed to clarify how I achieved the research aims. The older generations in this research have portrayed for me a picture of love and marriage in the different historical contexts of China. Each of the participant's love stories and marital experiences is particular but they also have similar collective memories, ideology and identities due to their shared social and political environment. As Finch and Summerfield (1999) note in their study of marriage during social change and reconstruction, the 'different types of marriage relationship were the product of a wider set of relationships in which individuals are involved, rather than of their personal or social characteristics' (1999:12). In the Twentieth Century, the Chinese people lived through a series of tumultuous upheavals that deeply influenced the family and cultural system as well as value orientations (Jankowiak and Moore, 2017). Against this backdrop, the research examined the intimacy of older cohorts in China and has made connections between Chinese history and individuals' biographies and personal experiences. The significance of this is that the research has unveiled the relationships between individuals and the social, as Mills (2000: 6) notes, by 'grasping history and biography and the relations between the two within society'.

This empirical qualitative research has filled the existing gap in research on older Chinese people's love, marital and intimate relationships in later life. By drawing on older people's experiences of love and marriage, their values, attitudes to intimate relationships and choices regarding remarriage in later life have been examined. This thesis has been successful in achieving the research purposes and objectives outlined in the opening chapter and Chapter Three. In the four analysis chapters I explored: love and marriage in different political atmospheres; the meaning of love and marriage through the eyes of older Chinese people; and the dilemmas older people face when negotiating love and remarriage in the family and moral domains. This has enabled me to develop a critical understanding of how older people practice intimacy and embody the changing values of the social transformation process China has undergone from the Mao era to the post-Mao era.

Summary of the research

The political permeates older Chinese people's love and marriage

As discussed in Chapter Four, politics has permeated every aspect of Chinese people's lives since the Mao era. Mills' (2000) conceptualisation of the links between individual biography and personal experience within a specific social environment has been particularly useful in exploring the older Chinese cohorts' experiences of love and marriage in the different societies of the Mao and post-Mao eras, as well as the bonds and interactions between individual ideologies and social-structural changes. Looking through the lens of the older generation's love lives and marriages, one can see how they depict two different social milieux, political and social environments in China: Maoist socialist society and post-Mao economic reform society. According to the narratives of the older generation, during the Mao era their love lives and marriages were played out in the service of political goals (Ding and Zhong, 2014). Political class labels and the implications of political identities played an important part in people's marital partner choices and family lives in practice, both of which were deeply shaped by Maoist

political ideology. As I argued in Chapter Four, marriage in the Mao era was an important social mechanism for maintaining one's political status, reshaping political identity or escaping political stigma. In addition to this, the participants' narratives of their pasts reflect their shared collective memories of the Mao era. However, during the post-Mao era the political discourse shifted from Maoist socialism to Deng's reformist policy of opening up the economy and because of this, the older people's private lives and marital choices also underwent an ideological shift towards a more economic orientation. These findings correspond with the research aims and purposes of exploring how love and marriage have been embodied throughout the older generation's lives.

Against this social reform backdrop, in Chapter Five I unpacked further older people's understanding of love and marriage to examine how their perceptions and values interplayed with the social norms of their lived social milieux. Their definitions of love and marriage are various in that they are formed by their different genders, social classes, rural-urban locations, age cohorts and life experiences. Following a number of writers (Baker, 1979; Croll, 1981; Fei, 1992; Pan, 2015) some of the oldest old and middle old groups, who in their own words 'did not know love' were shaped by the arranged marriage system in rural areas. This evidence showed that the traditional cultural norms were internalised, although the older people who live in urban areas had more liberal and diverse explanations of the meaning of love and marriage than those living in rural areas. This binary pattern among the elderly participants also reflects the differences in their social class statuses and life experiences, as well as the interaction and relationship between their agency as individuals and the social structure.

Older Chinese people's marital choices and dilemmas

In Chapter Six I address the research question posed in the opening chapter and Chapter Three: 'How do older people deal with and negotiate their love relationships during later life?' I therefore turned to explore intimate relationships and older people's choices regarding remarriage and re-partnering. This has unveiled more detail about the

dilemmas older people face, specifically those associated with remarriage and family conflict. Firstly, I argued that the choice of remarriage and/or second couplehood is gender-specific, with most male participants preferring to remarry or have a second couplehood for the physical support and companionship this brings; whereas most female participants preferred to stay single after widowhood, withdrawing from their gendered role as 'wife' and without the burden of domestic work, they are enjoying their freedom during later life. Secondly, the participants faced dilemmas when dealing with family members as a result of remarrying or re-partnering, which are phenomena not merely limited to the individual level and the couple's relationship but also encompass the family and kinship realm and even the wider social realm. Remarriage for older people in China goes beyond the individual level as it incorporates two sets of relatives and extended families, and especially when looking through the lens of stepfamilies' conflicts, older people face challenges dealing with stepchildren and fulfilling parental functions as well as family conflicts over inheritance distribution. As with Morgan's(1996) concept of 'family practices', the way everyday life is practised between step-children and step-parents will decide the relationship dynamics of the remarried family and its conjugal relationships. In addition, the relative decline in the power of older people and the increased power and authority of adult children will also have an impact on any elderly Chinese person considering entering second partnerhood. In this context, the participants had to weigh up the pros and cons of a new partnership, in terms of both their family structure and the social structure as a whole.

As well as the dilemmas of negotiating familial relationships, another theme was the way older people's morality influences intimate practices in later life (Chapter Seven). The participants' different moralities and their diverse norms and values reflect the tensions in contemporary Chinese society. Their accounts of old-young love relationships, cohabitation and extramarital relationships, on the one hand, highlight the fact that some of older people still hold traditional values and adhere to the norms of gender hierarchy, traditional family order and social order; on the other hand, there is a tension in their practice as they would use the moral discourses as a discursive tool to fulfil their needs or resolve their dilemmas.

Theoretical considerations

Throughout the thesis and based on the analysis of my empirical evidence, as 'life course is a central structural condition that affects intimate relationships in later life' (Biltgård and Öberg, 2017: 13), I employed the life course approach to investigate the views of the participants and how these interplay with their lived social milieux. I drew on scholars such as Mills' (2000[1956]) who links personal biography and history to explore the relationships between individuals and social structure, as well as Hockey and James' (2003) study of ageing and life course. This approach has been helpful for exploring how older Chinese people's social identities are constructed, how their views or values were shaped during their early life experiences and the different types of social system they lived through, as well as for researching how they made sense of the social changes that have taken place in modern China. As Lawler (2014:2) states, 'identity is a social and collective process' and the older cohorts' narrations of their pasts and presents provide us not only with a sense of them as individuals but also how their lives embody the collective social memory (Weedon and Jordan, 2012). For example, in this thesis the older participants located their personal memories in the wider political and social environment, sharing similar social memories from the Mao era and the post-Mao era.

When exploring the young-old group's marital choices and intimate relationships during the post Mao era, I also referred to Bourdieu's (1984) theory of economic and cultural capital, specifically to discuss the Chinese political discourse framework. In addition, to analyse older people's values and intimacy practices in the context of the social change of China, some theories were generated in a western context such as Duncan's (2011) notions of bricolage, which are useful to explain an individual's blend of tradition and the modern when building their personal lives. Similarly some East Asian theories were developed in the context of much more rapid social change in Asian societies such as Mosaic (Ji, 2017) and compressed modernity(Chang, 2010). These theories have helped

me to analyse the older people's moral discourse and how they embodied the contradictions of contemporary Chinese society, which mixes the traditional and modern.

The limitations of the research

It is worth noting some limitations of the research and some themes that may potentially be suitable for the future research. As mentioned in the methodology chapter (Chapter Three), the main recruitment method was snowballing, which led to all my participants being of Han ethnicity. This failure to recruit from minority ethnicities was caused by me relying on my relative's social network in Guizhou province. I could have probably accessed some more diverse minority ethnicity groups in Guizhou province by using other supplementary methods to recruit participants (such as the opportunity sampling I used in Beijing). There are differences between the cultural and marriage norms of minority ethnicity groups and those of the majority Han group, therefore the results of the data collection would have possibly been different had I been able to access this subset of the population.

Because there is a big gap between the living environments in urban and rural China, this gives rise to another limitation of the sample used in the research. All the participants interviewed were living in cities when the research took place, although some were born and grew up in rural areas before later moving (either permanently or temporarily) to urban areas for varying reasons., However, if the research had been expanded to include older people living in rural areas, the results might have been different from those obtained from my urban-based sample.

In addition, the age gap between the researcher and researched also probably had an impact on the results. As mentioned in Chapter Three, when the fieldwork took place in 2017, I was a 27 years old female researcher carrying out interviews with participants older than my parents and in some cases, my grandparents' age. During the interviews,

the interaction between me and participants was limited to some extent by the age gap and I sometimes failed to relate to older participants' experiences when they stated their opinions or recounted their biographies. As I have not had similar 'life experiences' and do not have the same background knowledge as my participants, most of time I played the role of listener as they told me about their pasts. Sometimes they would even have to teach me, for example, by explaining the meanings of political terms used in the Mao era which I do not understand. The age distance also led to a slight language gap between me and participants, and this also potentially impacted the data and findings. An older researcher might have obtained different information and data from the participants.

The contribution of the research and future studies

There is very little qualitative research on older Chinese people's love lives, marriages and remarriages. Among the existing literature on intimacy, love and marital relationships in China, most of the research focuses on issues faced by young people (see, for example, Fincher, 2014; Luo and Sun, 2014; Zheng, 2013; Zheng er al, 2011; Zurndorfer, 2016; Yang and Wang, 2014). There is some research on the family in China (such as Qi, 2016; Yan, 2003; Zheng and Ho, 2016) but most research on the older people is focused on medical matters and care support for the ageing (for example, Cheng et al, 2011; He and Ye, 2014; Lou and Ng, 2012; Wong, 2005). Therefore this research is significant in that it fills the gap in the existing research literature by drawing on in-depth qualitative data on the older cohorts' views of love, marriage and re-partnering from both male and female perspectives, in a Chinese cultural context.

This research has made some significant contributions to the field of analysis. First and foremost, the research provides a valuable account of older Chinese men and women's views and values regarding love and marriage, based on their life experiences. In particular, the analysis of the older participants' life histories provide us with an insight into the older generations' ideology, identities and how their intimate lives have been

formed by different historical and social environments; they have been influenced by the prevailing political discourses and a series of political campaigns during Mao era, as well as the continuity and changes during the social transformations of the post-Mao era. Therefore, this research makes an important contribution to understanding the ties and interactions between social agency and social structure in recent Chinese history and social transformations.

Secondly, this original empirical research contributes to the research on the meaning of love and marriage for older people in a Chinese cultural context. Unlike some scholars in the Western world (such as Bauman, 2003; Giddens, 1992) whose work on love and intimacy is situated within the framework of individualism and post modernity, this research suggests that older people's conceptions of love and marriage are socially and culturally constructed (Jackson, 1993). This is exemplified by the fact that some of the rural oldest-old and middle-old claimed to 'not know love' due to their early experiences with the arranged marriage system; whereas the younger old group gave more liberal definitions of the meanings of love and marriage. These findings contribute to the empirical evidence on and fill gaps in the existing research literature on love and marriage in China.

Moreover, looking through the lens of older people's intimate relationships has unveiled class differences, gender differences and how their diverse values and norms are formed in the Chinese cultural setting. The contrasting narratives of older people from urban and rural backgrounds depicted different ideologies springing from the urban-rural social division, as well as the relevant cultural continuity and changes in marriage norms, which are embodied in the family order as well as the social order. In particular, the research explored individuals' family practices and the interaction with public moral discourses and social norms in the changed society. For example, focusing on how their values and views are embodied in their intimate lives, the older Chinese cohorts present diverse values and moral thinking inherited from their biographies, shaped by their social status and family backgrounds. In addition to this, the research has revealed how the elderly people's intimate relationships go beyond the individual level and involve

family and kin in a Chinese cultural setting. The existing related literature (such as Huang, 2012; Lui, 2016 ;Yan, 2003;Yan, 2016) on China's economic reform period is focused on villages, meaning this research is significant as it fills a knowledge gap by exploring how people from various class backgrounds manage their family and intimate relationships.

The semi-structured interview used has given me an in-depth view of love and marriage among the elderly Chinese but there is still more to find out. For instance, in some interviews participants (such as Lao Yan and Lao Mao) showed me personal photos, videos or articles to illustrate the stories and histories behind these visual documents. Thus, in future studies, personal documents and media outputs could potentially be a useful method for exploring older Chinese people's pasts. In addition, because in my sample some of the younger old aged participants are still in long-lasting marriages, and because they are not yet singletons considering remarriage, it would be interesting to see whether their views change with their circumstances. Likewise with the current singletons, their decisions too might change in the future and it would be worth carrying out a long term follow-up to explore the influences on their decision making as they progress through later life.

After about forty years of economic reform since the Mao era, China seems to be continuing to undergo a transformation. In March 2018, the Chinese constitution was altered to remove the two-term limit for presidents of the Republic stipulated in Article 79 (Mottura, 2018). This means 'Xi Jinping now is the most powerful leader since Mao Zedong, with a constitutionally recognised thought associated with him personally' (Hayes, 2020: 36). Under Xi's tightening of state control and censorship (Ho et al, 2018), I am concerned about how the public's political discourses will shift in the future. How will individuals' ideologies and value orientations be shaped by the ongoing Xi era? What impact will Xi and his rule of the CCP have on the political landscape, the social environment and ultimately, on older people's private and intimate lives and family relationships in the future? These issues are questions that will need to be explored in the future.

In short, this research provides insight into older people's love lives and marriages based on their accounts of their life histories and experiences. It contributes to the existing research on intimacy among the older generations and how this is linked to biography and the political, cultural and social contours of contemporary China. It is important to unveil elderly Chinese people's choices and preferences regarding intimate relationships in later life, as these also highlight the dilemmas older people face when considering remarriage or repartnering, the struggles with family relationships and how they cope with the resulting moral crises. This thesis suggests that local government and the relevant policy makers should engage with the older cohorts' narratives and the issues surrounding their intimate relationships and dilemmas in later life. In addition, with the rapid increase of the ageing population in China, it is worth doing more research in this area in order to gain more insight into the older people's views on private life, family relationships and living at this stage of the lifecourse.

Appendix 1 List of interviewees with the personal information

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Marital situation	Retired situation	Occupation	Current place of residence	hometown	Educational backgrou nd
Lao Wu	63	Male	Long lasting marriage	Doing business	Owner of a company	Qingdao	moved from Dong Ying for retirement	High school
An Yi	73	Female	Long lasting marriage	Retired	textile mill worker	Qingdao	Qingdao	High School
Lao Bao	70	Male	Long lasting marriage	Retired	Doing small business	Qingdao	Rizhao (son got job in Qingdao)	Middle school
Lao Cao	79	Male	Long lasting marriage	Retired	Quit Army and be a farmer	Qingdao	Qingzhou (children got jobs in Qingdao)	High school
Lao Dang	60	Male	Long lasting marriage	Doing business	Run company about quantity surveyor	Qingdao	Qingdao	University degree
Fanfan	57	Female	Long lasting marriage	Retired	Worker-Housewife	Qingdao	Qingdao	High school
Lao Gui	61	Male	Long lasting marriage	Retired	Member of the committee of the people's congress(works	Qingdao	Jinan (joined army in Qingdao at a young age)	University level

					for government)			
Hehe	61	Female	Long lasting marriage	Retired	Commune employee	Qingdao	Jinan(moved with husband)	High school level
Lao Ai	63	Male	Long lasting marriage	Retired	Provincial level officer	Guiyang	moved form Shandong province in youth	High School
Lao Jia	57	Male	Long lasting marriage	Doing business	Businessman	Guiyang	Moved from Shandong for business	Middle school
Lao Kan	72	Male	Long lasting marriage	Partly retired	Famous lawyer	Guiyang	Qufu(Shandong)	University degree
Lao Lee	89	Male	Widower (Single)	Retired	Printing Technician	Guiyang (care home)	Wuhan(escaped from the war)	Middle school
Lao Mao	85	Male	Widower (Single)	Retired	Local police station	Guiyang (care home)	Guiyang	Primary school
NaNa	94	Female	Widow (Single)	Retired	High school teacher	Guiyang (care home)	Wuhan(escaped from the war)	University degree
PengPeng	62	F	Long lasting marriage	Retired	Accounting	Guiyang	Sichuan	Middle school

Pan	87	Female	Widow (single)	Retired	Worked for Local women's federation	Guiyang (care home)	Guiyang	High school level
Lao Yan	96	Male	Widower (single)	Retired	Film Actor	Guiyang (care home)	Guiyang	College
Lao Ren	51	Male	Remarriage	Doing business	Government cadre ; quit job then become a Businessman	Guiyang	Heilongjiang (got job then moved to Hebei at a young age; now doing business in Guiyang)	Correspondence College
Lao Sun	63	Male	Long lasting marriage	Retired	Army--- official secretary	Guiyang	Shandong (joined army in Guiyang when he was young)	High school
Lao Tian	59	Male	Long lasting marriage	Retired	Woodworker	Guiyang	Hunan village and migrant working in Guiyang	Primary school
Lao Jin	83	Male	Long lasting marriage (arranged marriage)	Retired	Salesman	Jinan (care home3	Jinan (move form village to town and city)	Primary school
Tian	90	Female	Widow (arranged marriage)	Retired	Farmer	Jinan (care home)	Rural area, she was sent to a	Illiterate

							care home by children	
Ban	64	Female	Widow	In service	Carer	Jinan	Come from rural area	Illiterate
Lao Hai	65	Male	Long lasting marriage	In service	Army--- building worker	Jinan	Grew up in rural area	Primary school(did not finish after second grade)
Lao Zhan	74	Male	Long lasting marriage	Retired	Doctor (head of a hospital)	Jinan	Jinan	University degree
Lao Ma	69	Male	Long lasting marriage	Retired	Farmer and doing small business	Jinan	Born in Anqiu rural area, moved to Jinan	Primary school
Lao Wen	60	Male	Remarriage	Part time job	Association director in local Bureau of education	Jinan	Jinan	University degree
Lao Xuan	73	Male	Remarriage	Retired	Community	Jinan	Jinan	High School
Lao Yong	82	Male	Widower (single)	Retired	Middle school teacher	Jinan	Jinan	technical secondary school
FeiFei	77	Female	Widow(single)	Retired	Cotton cloth seller	Jinan (care home)	Rural area (sent to a care home by children)	Illiteracy

JingJing	64	Female	Divorce（single）	Retired	Accounting	Traveling in Qingdao	Shanghai	Middle school
YiYi	60	Female	Long lasting marriage	Part time job	Doctor in an airline company	Qingdao	Qingdao	University diploma
Ling	84	Female	Widow(single)	Retired	Architect	Beijing	Jiangxi (moved to Beijing at her young age)	University degree
Lao Zhi	65	Male	Long lasting marriage	Retired	High school teacher	Beijing	Beijing	University degree
Tong	58	Female	Divorce- ---remarriage--cohabitation	Doing business	Businesswoman	Beijing	Beijing	High school level
Kankan	66	Female	Long lasting marriage	Retired	Middle school teacher	Beijing	Beijing	University degree
Lao Xia	65	Male	Long lasting marriage	Retired	Senior mechanic	Beijing	Beijing	Middle school
Yuan	57	Female	Remarriage	Retired	Cashier	Beijing	Beijing	High school
Lao Shi	82	Male	Long lasting marriage	Retired	Senior architect	Beijing	Shanghai; read university in Beijing then got job and settled down	University degree

Lan	61	Female	Divorce (cohabitation)	In service	Carer; run small business	Beijing	Beijing	Senior High school
Hong	65	Female	Widow(single)	Retired	Textile worker	Beijing	Beijing	Senior High school
Lao Gao	82	Male	Widower (single)	Retired	Director of a local government agency	Jinan	Jinan	Primary school
Lao Shen	81	Male	Long-term marriage	Retired	Engineer; Director of a local government agency	Jinan	Jinan	University degree
Lao Long	65	Male	Long-term marriage	In service	Employee(electric power company）	Qingdao	Qingdao	Senior High school
Mei	55	Female	Divorce (single)	Self - employment	Farmer	Qingdao (hospital)	Qingdao rural area	Primary school (unfinished)

Appendix 2 Main interview questions schedule (in English and in Chinese)

1. Would you like to introduce yourself? 你能介绍下自己吗?

2. Who do you live with? 你和谁住在一起？

3. How many children do you have? 你有多少个孩子？

4. How did you meet your (late/present) husband/wife? 你怎么遇到你的老伴的？

5. How many years have you been divorced/married? 你结婚多少年了？

6. Do you mind telling me why you divorced/why did you decide to marry her/him? 什么原因你决定娶她/他？

7. What are the different feelings that you have had throughout your marriage, such as what is the different feeling between being young and old in your marriage?（how do you think these have changed along with your marriage） 婚姻过程中您的感受有什么不同？

8. Have you thought about finding another partner after your current partner passes away? 你会不会考虑在如果有一天老伴去世后再找一个老伴？

9. If so are you going to join the matchmaking market in the future and why? Which way would you prefer? 会不会考虑相亲？你更倾向于哪一种？

10. Did your partner support you when you were young and how? Did you cook for him/her during your daily life? 年轻的时候你老伴支持你吗

11. Are you doing the housework in everyday life? 你平时做家务吗？

12. Who played the role of educating your child? You or your partner? 在子女教育中你扮演什么角色？

12. Would you like to talk about what your feeling is to be a grandmother/grandfather？你愿不愿意说一下成为奶奶是什么感觉？

14. How do you view the attitude of your partner's children (are they against your marriage)? 如果子女反对父母再婚怎么办？

15. Would you like to talk about your view of elderly people's love and their marriage? 你对老年婚恋怎么看？

16. What is your view on elderly cohabitation? 你对于老年同居的现象怎么看？

17. What is your view of the May-December relationship for elderly people? 你是怎么看待老少恋的？

Appendix 3 Consent form (English version and Chinese version)

Consent form:

This form is for you to state whether or not you agree to take part in the study. Please read and answer every question. If there is anything you do not understand, or if you want more information, please ask the researcher.

I understand that/confirm that:

- My participation is entirely voluntary
  Yes □ No □
- I have read and understood the information leaflet about the study and I have opportunity to ask questions about the study.
  Yes □ No □
- I understand that I am free to withdraw for any reason at any time during the interview
  Yes □ No □
- I am free to refuse to answer any questions
  Yes □ No □
- I consent to the audience-recording of my interview Yes □ No □
- The project has been explained and I've had the opportunity to ask questions
  Yes □ No □
- I concert to my recording being analysed as part of the present research study by Kun Li
  Yes □ No □

- I understand that anonymous, transcribed extracts from my recording will be used in written and verbal reports on the present study's findings
  Yes □ No □
- I understand that all the data will be kept strictly confidential
  Yes □ No □
- I understand that while excerpts from the results may be made part of the final research report, under no circumstances will my name or any identifying characteristics are included in the report.
  Yes □ No □

• (OPTIONAL) Recording and written material from this research might be used in future studies

Yes □ No □

I consent to take part in this research

……Participant signature

……Participant name (printed)

……Date

(Researcher/moderator to keep signed copy and leave unsigned copy with each participant.)

知情同意书

次同意书让您以受访者的身份参与到本研究，请详细并回复以下每一个问题，如果有不了解的地方或者了解更多咨询，情立即咨询我

您是否阅读并了解研究参与说明？ 是 ☐ 否 ☐

你是否有机会对这个研究提出问题？ 是 ☐ 否 ☐

你是否了解研究者会对你提供的所有信息完全保密？ 是 ☐ 否 ☐

你是否了解你有权利拒绝回答任何问题？ 是 ☐ 否 ☐

你是否了解你提供的信息可能用于研究者以后的相关学术发表但你的信息完全保密？ 是 ☐ 否 ☐

你是否同意参与这个研究？如果同意是否同意你的采访将被录音？

是 ☐ 否 ☐

（你可以选择不被录音但是参加这个研究）

姓名：_____ 研究者姓名_____ 日期_____

Appendix 4. Information sheet: (English version and Chinese version)

My name is Kun Li, a PhD student at the University of York in the UK. My PhD supervisors are Prof Sarah Nettleton and Prof Stevi Jackson. I am doing research on a study of love and intimacy among elderly people in China, which is entitled: Love, marriage and intimate relationships in later life of China.

Project description:

The research is to explore Chinese elderly people's attitudes toward love and marriage during their senior years. By using both their views on love and their personal experiences, the purpose of this project is to explore how their attitudes towards love and the meaning of marriage in old age shape their self-identity and relationships in later life. In order to achieve this aim the research plan is to interview a sample of elderly people in China who are aged above 60.

Method about data collection:

The date of the interviews will be from March of 2017 in a number of Chinese cities. The interviews will be face to face and the length of each interview will be between one and two hours. Before each interview I will ask for the participant's permission and then record each interview for transcription. The consent from will be given to participants before the interviews. I will guarantee that each interviewee will be anonymous. All the information that is provided by participants will be only used for academic purposes. If interviewees withdraw their consent during the process or after the process, I will delete all of the data related to this interview without leaving any copy. If any interviewees enquire as to the result of the research I will give them some feedback regarding the final research. The interview may include and refer the some issues as following,

1. The interviewees' family background, educational experiences and the marital status.
2. Interviewee's views of love in later life.
3. How do the personal experiences and life stories impact on the interviewees' attitudes towards love and marriage issues?
4. The interviewees' family relationships and how it impacts on their personal values of love attitudes.

My Email address: kl775@york.ac.uk

我的名字叫李堃，是约克大学在读博士， 师从 Sarah Nettleon 教授 和 Stevi Jackson 教授。我正在做关于中国老年人的爱情和亲密关系的研究，论文的名字是:中国老年爱情,婚姻与恋爱关系。

课题描述：

这个研究主要探索老年人以及在老年的爱情和婚姻问题。通过采访老年人口述的亲身经历和他们的爱情与婚姻故事， 来研究老年群体对于爱情和婚姻的理解和态度，以及他们自我认知与老年的家庭关系。为了达到研究的目的，研究受众在 60 岁以上。

研究方法和研究数据的采集：

采访数据将在中国的几个城市展开，采访讲基于面对面的采访，每个采访将持续一到两个小时。在采访之前我会问您是否自愿参加到研究中而且录音采访内容。知情同意书将会在采访前发给您。研究中我会将所有的名字都化为匿名。所有的采访内容将会保密且仅用于研究目的。如果在研究的任何阶段您想反悔并撤出研究，我将会删除掉所有的数据和复制品。如果您想知道研究结果，我也会给您回馈和研究结果。访谈会涉及到主要以下几个方面，

1. 家庭背景和过去教育经历
2. 对于爱情和婚姻的看法
3. 爱情故事和经历对您的影响
4. 家庭关系以及对于爱情关系的影响

有问题请联系我邮箱：kl775@york.ac.uk

Glossary

Beifen	辈分	position in the family hierarchy
Chushen	出身	family class origin
Chengfen	成分	political class status
Chou-lao-jiu	臭老九	a disdainful term for intellectuals
Da ban yang lao	搭伴养老	companionship for supporting ageing
Danwei	单位	work unit/work place
Dang-quan-pai	当权派	those in power(such as party officials)
Di-fu-fan-huai-you	地富反坏右	'landlord' 'rich peasant' 'rightist' 'counterrevolutionary' 'bad element'
Feng-zi-xiu	封资修	feudalism, capitalism, revisionism
Fengjian	封建	feudalism
Feinongye	非农业	non-agriculture
Guanxi	关系	social network
Guo-ri-zi	过日子	to live life
Hukou	户口	a system of household registration
Laoganbu	老干部	old cadre
Lao-shao-lian	老少恋	old-young love relationships
Mendanghudui	门当户对	matching gates(similar family background)
Mingfen	名分	wife's names/status
Nongye	农业	agricultural
Hongweibing	红卫兵	Red Guards
Shang shan xia xiang	上山下乡	Rustication Campaign
Tie-fan-wan	铁饭碗	iron rice bowl
Xiao-hong-shu	小红书/毛泽东语录	little red book (quotations from Mao Zedong)
Zhiqing	知识青年/知青	educated youth

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