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**FAMILY NETWORKS AND LIFE  
IN SOUTHEASTERN CHINA**

**BY**

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**THESIS SUBMITTED FOR  
THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**IN**

**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL STUDIES,  
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**NOVEMBER, 1992**

020250626

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# Acknowledgements

The financial support from the SBFSS scholarship is fully acknowledged, without which my study in the U.K. would have been impossible. I also appreciated the grant from the City University, which covered my living expenses during the period of fieldwork in China.

For the individual persons I like to thank, the first one is Dr. Stephan Feuchtwang, my supervisor. I thank him for his constant encouragement and invaluable advices throughout the period of my study in City University. Among many teachers and friends who have provided a lot of help and whose help is greatly appreciated, I would like to particularly single out Professor Chen Guoqiang, Mr. Shen Mingshan, and Mr. He Xingzhang.

Finally, I would also like to use the opportunity to thank my parents for their constantly emotional support in the past years.

# Declaration

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# Abstract

This thesis examines social relationships and patterns of social interaction in contemporary rural China with a network perspective. Based on first hand data collected in southeastern China by the method of anthropological fieldwork, it tries to understand peasants' social behavior in the context of their concrete, multi-dimensional inter-family relations. This context of relations is called "family network". Family network is defined in this thesis as a quasi group formed by families that is directly linked by kinship and friendship and have frequent social exchange and interaction with the focusing family. It cuts across the boundaries of villages and of kin and non-kin. Throughout the thesis the emphasis is placed on patterns of social interaction in relation to different kinds of social relationship, and on the utilization of these relationships in social and economic life. In explaining people's behavior of supporting others, it is not the notion of group solidarity, but the idea of reciprocity (and mutual exploitation) between both sides of a relationship in the process of social exchange, that is considered as significant. The empirical materials described in this thesis also suggest important changes in patterns of social interaction and the notion of social relationship brought by a rapid economic development in the past ten years.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Nearly half a century ago, Fei Xiaotong proposed to use *cha xu ge ju*<sup>1</sup> – a hierarchical structure of social relationships – to describe the character of Chinese society. He stated that the Chinese tended to be egocentric, taking care of themselves first, then their families, then their villages and gangs (parties), and finally their country. In difficult times they were willing to sacrifice others in reverse order. In order to protect themselves, they were prepared to sacrifice their families. In order to protect their families, they were prepared to sacrifice their villages and gangs. And in order to protect their villages and gangs, they were prepared to sacrifice their country (1948: 28). Consequently, the Chinese social structure was “like the concentric circles created by someone throwing a stone into a pond”. In the structure, each person was the centre of the concentric circles, and the area of the circles reached was the social influence he had through his social relationships. It changed for the same person in place and time, and for different persons according to wealth and power (24).

In this thesis, I intend to adopt this notion and the more recent conception of “social network” in Anthropological and Sociological literature, which elaborates the notion in a more systematical way, to structure the inter-family relations in a rural community in Southeastern China. In line with the theoretical position of network perspective in general anthropology (Mitchell, 1969; Boissevain, 1973), I propose a loosely connected and boundary flexible concept, “family network”, to replace the conventional *corporate* descent group, “lineage” (*zong zu*), used by Maurice Freedman (1958, 1966) and many of his followers (e.g. Potter, 1968, 1970; Ahern, 1973;

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<sup>1</sup>Romanization of all Chinese words and names in this thesis follows the *pinyin* system, except some cited names of Chinese scholars outside the PRC which are kept as the original to avoid confusion.

Cohen, 1970, 1976; Pasternak, 1969, 1972; Watson, 1975; Kuhn, 1970).<sup>2</sup> With the network perspective, and a set of individualistic and interaction-oriented concepts in Chinese society, such as *guanxi*, *laiwang*, *ganqing*, *renqing*, *bao*, *mianzi*... etc., I then try to describe patterns of social interaction in these concrete, multi-dimensional inter-family relations within and beyond the boundary of the community. In contrast to the conventional approach emphasising *a priori* social structure and its influence on individual's behavior, my attention will be directed to the formation, maintenance and utilization of social relations in daily life, and to the socio-economic organizations resulted from the daily activities.

## 1.1 The network perspective

Social network analysis in the past decades has been one important expression of a theoretical trend in all social science, particularly in anthropology and sociology, to turn away from concepts implying relatively static cultural patterns and fixed social institutions toward concepts implying change and adaptability.

The network metaphors as partial, allusive description of social structure could be seen as early as in Radcliffe-Brown when he wrote in 1940, of the aboriginal Australians, that "direct observation does reveal to us that these human beings are connected by a complex network of social relations. I use the term 'social structure' to denote this network of actually existing relations" (1952: 190). Likewise Fortes referred metaphorically to it in *The Web of Kinship Among the Tallensi* (1949). However, the use of network as a social perspective and an analytical tool, which emphasizes on independent human beings and the concrete social relations formed by them, has arisen out of the dissatisfaction of a number of anthropologists with the conventional approach stressing culture, rules, belief systems, and collective representation of groups (cf Mitchell, 1969; Boissevain, 1973). This may have its merits when applied to simple, stable and bounded groups such as tribes, but it is found inadequate to cope with the study of rapidly changing complex societies

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<sup>2</sup>Criticisms on lineage theory in the China field have been offered by Claes Hallgren (1979), James L. Watson (1982, 1986), Rubie S. Watson (1985), and many Taiwanese scholars (e.g. Chun, 1984; Chen, 1985). For a critical review of anthropological literature in lineage theory, see Kuper (1982). I share with these authors a view that lineage theory is problematic. It is in any case less applicable now than it was before the fundamental changes that have occurred since 1949. I am concerned here less with those changes than with the current situation. For this, I take a network exchange approach which, though long in anthropological repertoire, is never suggested by anyone of them.

in both the western and the third world (Barth, 1966, 1967). It is particularly difficult to deal with social systems in which ties cut across “the framework of bounded institutionalized groups or categories” in complex ways (Barnes, 1969: 72). To study these crosscutting social ties, several anthropologists in the 1950s shifted attention away from cultural systems toward structural systems of concrete ties and networks (e.g., Barnes, 1954; Bott, 1957) and began developing social network concepts more systematically and consciously. These analysts defined a network as a set of ties linking social system members across social categories and bounded groups (Mitchell, 1969).

At the time, after World War II, anthropologists began studying what were called “complex societies”, especially the massive process of urbanization in which large streams of migrants leaving culturally homogeneous tribes and villages for polyglot cities and industrial areas. They feared that these migrants, in leaving behind the normative guidance of their homelands, would become isolated and disorganized in “mass societies”. Yet researchers soon discovered that not only were the migrants forming strong, supportive ties within their new urban milieus, they were retaining strong ties to their ancestral rural homelands. Rather than wilting under the impact of urbanization, industrialization, capitalism, and technological change, the migrants were enmeshed in complex and supportive social networks, cutting across tribal, residential, and workplace boundaries (Wellman, 1988).

These researches focused on the migrants’ actual ties rather than on the ties that normative prescriptions suggested that they *ought to* have. Such work soon came together with similar anthropological work on concrete social relations in western social systems. In 1954, Barnes had self-consciously used the concept of “the social network” defined as a field of relationships between individuals which cuts across kinship groups and social classes to analyse the social behaviour of the parishioners in a Norwegian fishing village. Not only did the network concept help him to describe more accurately the social structure of the village, but it was more useful in explaining such key social processes as access to jobs and political activity (Barnes, 1954). Soon afterward, Bott’s (1957) work brought the network concept to the wider attention of social scientists. She developed the first distinct measure of network structure – “knit” (now called “density”) – to show that densely knit, English urban family networks were more apt to contain married couples who did most things independently rather than jointly.

The network concept was at the beginning seen only as one addition to the intellectual tools of social scientists, which provided a way to incorporate crosscutting

relationships into the analysis confined to bounded groups. After the formulation of basic concepts and development of preliminary quantitative measures of properties such as density to describe the form of social networks, it was gradually expanded to become a special area in British social anthropology – that of “network analysis”. At the same time, the scope also expanded from the links of kinship, friendship and neighborliness to virtually “links of all kinds among a set of individuals” (Mitchell, 1973: 22).

Most important work in anthropology to conceptualize network and to formulate network models was done in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and in Britain mainly by students of Gluckman in Manchester University who are conventionally called the Manchester School in social anthropology. Works of these scholars are largely reflected in two collections of essays (Mitchell, 1969; Mitchell & Boissevain, 1973). These scholars developed a series of important concepts concerned with various properties of a network and its links. They include such concepts as the anchorage, range, density and reachability, representing the structural respect of a network, and the content, directedness, durability, intensity and frequency, representing interactional characteristics of a network (Mitchell, 1973). Techniques to represent the structure of a network were developed and applied. One example is a graphic picture which contain points and lines to represent people and relationships respectively. A similar example is a mathematical matrix. Some preliminary statistical models for measuring such network properties as density were also formulated.

The interest of network analysis in anthropology has declined since then, though the concept of network as an analytical tool has never been abandoned in anthropology particularly in the area of urban anthropology (e.g., Lommintz, 1977; Wallman, 1984), and the idea of network as a theoretical perspective has been widely used by anthropologists to construct their social theories (e.g., Howell, 1988). The decline of interest in network analysis was largely due to a notion widely believed among these scholars that significant advance in network analysis lay only in the possibility to quantitatively measure the structure of a network and properties of its links. This requires applications of sophisticated statistical analysis which is not what anthropologists are good at or like to do, on the one hand; on the other, complexity of the social network was proved to be beyond the capability of any statistical techniques available at the time, not to mention that there are many properties which are hardly able to be quantitatively measured. Thus, it is not surprising that work in network conceptualization and modelling has largely declined in British social anthropology with scholars (e.g., Kapferer) diverting their interest toward other areas such as ritual and religion.

However, about the same time, more and more scholars in sociological circles, in particular from the other side of the Atlantic, found themselves fascinated by the concept's great promise to the understanding of social reality and construction of powerful social theories. The work of studying and modelling social networks structure was picked up and advanced by sociologists in the United States and Canada. As knowledge of the above work of British anthropologists diffused across the Atlantic, it intersected with, reinforced, and modified American sociological interest in structural analysis that had been stimulated by the post-World War II translation of Georg Simmel's work into English. Simmel's early twentieth-century argument that the forms of social relations greatly determine their contents led to an interest in how the size of social systems and the way in which relationships are interconnected constrain individual behaviour and dyadic exchange. This structural emphasis is to some extent a reaction by some sociologists to the more psychologistic, needs-driven analyses of the Parsonsian brand of structural-functionalism which at the time dominated American sociological thought. The scope of inquiries expanded, "as British empiricism fits well with the American penchant for quantitative measurement and statistical analysis" (Wellman, 1988:23).

A significant element of the network concept is its advocacy of a new theoretical perspective to the social reality through focusing on individuals in society and the concrete relationships they form. In theory, everyone in the social world has interlocking network relations of this or that kind, directly or indirectly. In the network, people are viewed as interacting with others, some of whom in their turn interact with each other and yet others, and that the whole network of relations so formed is in a state of flux. For instance, in a Chinese village community, a person is firstly interacting with other members of his family. The family at the same time is interacting with most other families in the village as well as many families in other villages who are relatives or neighbors. Many of these families in turn are interacting with each other because they themselves are linked by relations of relatives (and friends or neighbors in a multi-surname village). Therefore, all families in the village community are linked together in a network of relatives and friends or neighbors. Further, each family in the network has relatives and, for some families, friends in other villages, whom in turn have their own relatives and friends in yet other villages. Through interactions between families in the village and other places, the network in the village is extended to the whole region, and other regions in the country. All the people in the society are thus in the same a large social network. Starting from one individual or family (called *ego* or *anchorage* in terms of network analysts), it is possible to trace to any other individuals or families in the society

through direct linkages or intermediaries. The network constructed in this way is thus called *ego-centered network*.<sup>3</sup>

An ego-centered network as such also effectively represents a cognition of one's social world. Note the striking similarity between the notion of network discussed here and Fei's (1948) idea of *cha xu ge ju* referred to at the beginning, in which he metaphorically describes the Chinese social structure as a picture created by throwing a stone into a pond. In a cognitive picture so constructed, individual is at the center of his social world, and all the other people in the society are differentiated into categories according to types of linkages and their relative "distances" to ego. These are the *lun* in the Confucian classics, referring to order or "differentiated order" among individuals in the society (King, 1991). According to Pan (1948: 133), the Confucian concept of *lun* is concerned with both the differentiation to be made and the relation to be established between individuals. *Lun* in Fei (1948) is the base of *cha xu ge ju*, referring to differentiated and hierarchical relations to the individual in terms of degree of intimacy.

The criteria of linkage typology and of "distance" can be determined by different emphasis of different people. For instance, linkages can be divided into agnatic kin, affinal kin and friends, or into more specific types; while "distance" can be geographical (e.g., village, township, county ...), social (e.g., higher, equal, lower statuses), or affective (e.g., intimate, close, distant and remote), or combinations of them. Some models of categorizing social relationships especially kinship have been suggested (e.g., Caplow, 1982; Liu, 1982. For details see chapter three). For the Chinese, "distance" of a relationship most frequently refers to the affective closeness (*ganqing*), which is by and large quite subjective and situational. Hence positions of people in different categories of "distance" in the network are subject to constant changing in the process of interaction.

Social networks of different individuals have different characters in structure. Although theoretically everyone in a social group is linked together (Barnes, 1972), meaning that the ego-centering network of each one in the group is overlapped in the whole, a same individual may fall into different rings in different ego-centering networks. Therefore we may say that even in the same social group, different persons have different social networks in terms of numbers of links in different categories of distance. If we just restrict our inquiry to certain proportions or categories of people's network, as most network analysts do (since it is virtually impossible or no

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<sup>3</sup>Although there are other formulations of social networks, the term "network" in this thesis mostly refers to an ego-centered network.

point to study a large scale network that includes all people in the society), we shall have another way to identify people's social networks. That is, they have different people in their networks. It is this uniqueness of each individual's network that makes the network concept not only a theoretical perspective, but also a very useful analytical tool, if it is carefully defined. Having this point explained, we are now in the position to proceed to a key concept of this thesis: "family network".

## 1.2 Family networks in rural China

As pointed out above, everyone in the society is in theory in the same large network. With the mobilization of kin's kin, or friend's friends, Chinese believe that it is possible to reach anyone in the society when this is necessary. At practical level, however, it is impossible or unnecessary to study a network larger than a certain scale. In this respect, any kind of network analysis is "partial", i.e., only one part of a larger social network. Exactly how large the part should be, or how far the links should be traced starting from an anchorage, is decided by the unit of study which in turn is determined by the specific problem raised by the researcher. For the consideration of research interest of this study (inter-family relations in a village community) and the practical situation in rural China, as I will explain in more detail below and in chapter three, I take a family as the basic unit of social network and confine my investigation only to direct links. These two refinements, together with a further criterion on interaction which I shall explain later, become basic elements of my definition of a "family network".

A family network here is thus formally defined as the social phenomenon formed by a set of families that are directly linked by kinship, friendship or other relationships and frequently interact (*laiwang*) in daily life with the ego family.

The restriction to direct links is a convention in network analysis, but family as the basic unit deserves some explanations, although recent developments in network analysis in sociology have made it clear that techniques in network analysis can be applied to explore relations between individuals, organisations, even countries (Wellman & Berkowitz, 1988). To take family as the basic network unit is partly a research strategy to simplify the matter by reducing the number of network links to be considered so that I regard here that there is only one link between two families (though this may not necessarily always be the case). It is also based on the fact that a rural Chinese family is both an economic entity and a social entity. Since the end of 1970s, with the policy of decollectivization implemented

in almost all the rural area in China, family has become a real “resource system” (Wallman, 1984). Families in rural China at the moment are not only the basic units to organise activities of production, consumption, but also basic units of social life, such as various kinds of exchanges within and outside the villages. Moreover, the welfare of the family in societies like China has always been more overwhelming than that of the individual. Although it is true that the exchange relationship in a social network is established between individuals rather than families in some cases, considerations in exchange activities in such cases are often related to the whole family, i.e., the individuals involved in exchange relationships are regarded as the representatives of the respective families. Therefore, it appears convenient and sensible to treat a family as the analytical unit in the study of rural social networks and the transactional exchanges within them.

A family network in rural China so defined differs from a lineage organization used by Freedman and his followers in many ways:

- It is a quasi group rather than a corporation. What links its units together is their common relationship to ego family. According to Boissevain, quasi-groups are the forms of social organization that “lie somewhere between intimating individuals, on the one hand, and formal corporate groups, on the other”. They are networks of relatives, friends, and acquaintances, and the more intimate but often temporary coalitions which are formed out of these; the cliques, interest groups, and factions of which all persons are members (Boissevain, 1968: 542). Although some of them may also be directly related to each other, which is especially possible in rural areas where most relationships in a village community are played out in a single arena, family network structurally can only exist as a quasi-group temporarily formed around ego family. Unlike a corporate group which has a clear boundary of membership, linkages in a network can be changed as the situation changes. However, a network, more oftenly part of it, is also able to develop into a corporate group provided that some situations are satisfied.
- What is important in the group is not solidarity and collective representation that are emphasized in the concept of a corporate descent group (lineage), but the affective closeness (*ganqing*) each link (*guanxi*) has toward ego family. On such a basis, links in family network are often differentiated into categories such as intimate, close, distant, and remote relationships by the family concerned. This differentiation is very subjective and can be changed in time and in contexts. It nevertheless indicates the potential utility of a link and determines

in what occasion it can be resorted to for support. One of the most important reasons for the existence of a family network is that it provides a body of social relationships with different distance to be exploited by the family in different circumstances.

- It includes not only links of agnatic kin, but also that of affinal kin as well as non-kin such as friends, hence avoids an obvious theoretical handicap in lineage theory. It has been clear that lineage organization described by Freedman and others as such is only a regional phenomenon and one expression of the Chinese kinship system. Even in the strong lineage regions in the south, it is believed that not all peasants live in lineage communities. "In fact, even in rural Guangdong no more than 30 per cent of the male population belonged to well-organized lineages (this is probably an overestimate), The majority of peasants lived in communities that were not dominated by a single lineage" (Watson, 1982:606). Furthermore, patrilineal descent on which lineage theory focuses is but one of many organizing principles that Chinese peasants, including those who lived in the environment of strong lineage organizations, used to structure their social life. For most people, agnates are probably no more significant than affines, matrilineal kin, and neighbours. This crucial fact has been noticed by some scholars (e.g., Gallin, 1960, 1966; Harrell, 1981) and will be further discussed in this thesis. Thus, no family network is the same as another, in that either they do not contain the same group of people or the same person has different kinds of linkage in two networks when they do. Affinal kin and friends in the past had already been noted to be important in villagers' subsistence and social life. With village communities' closer socioeconomic integration to the outside world resulting from penetration of the state in the last decades and villagers' desperate efforts to seize opportunities of family economic development, affinal kin and friends are playing more and more significant a part in socioeconomic life since they are geographically and socially more dispersed.
- On the other hand, not all agnatic kin in the village are automatically included in the family network. As it had been noted by some scholars (Hsu, 1949: 129; Gallins, 1966: 171), competition and conflict have put most agnatic relationships at odds. The traditional kinship ideology and solidarity of kin group further eroded in the process of Communist collectivization since 1950s (cf Chan et al, 1984; Madsen, 1984; Siu, 1989; Huang, 1989; Potter and Potter, 1990). We will see later that in a single surname village like the one studied here a family does not maintain interaction (*laiwang*) with a large number of

other families in the village. Without the frequent on-going social interaction to make them real links in one's family network, genealogical relationships for these families remain only *guanxi* bases, if borrow the terms from Jacobs (1979). For the intensive competition and other reasons, though they form the largest part of a family's social network, most agnatic links are not very close. They are in the more outer rings of the network.

- As indicated by Fei Xiaotong's notion of *cha xu ge ju* (1948: 24), the scale and composition of one's family network usually differ from that of others', and they are not the same for a single network in different periods. New relationships could be created, while some old ones could be disconnected. Both are done by a series of transactions. Although different parts of it can be contacted and renewed on various occasions, and some links (e.g., kinship) are more enduring than others (e.g., friendships), a family network is maintained and changed through constant interactions between ego and the rest.

The last point is of particularly importance for understanding the structure of a family network. It is from here that family network used in this thesis is distinguished from the network concept of "network analysts" who simply attempt to explain people's behaviour by their network structure (Mitchell, 1969: 4). To put it in another way, this study is in a sense not a "network analysis".

I follow the above network analysts in focusing on concrete social relations rather than cultural prescriptions in the society, and in insisting on starting with these relations and then discerning the social structure inherent in the underlying patterns of behavioral exchanges. I also accept that by describing their relationships to one another and the characteristics of their linkages, people's behavior can be effectively explained (Mitchell, 1969: 4). However, unlike the network analysts who simply emphasize the structural character of a network and assume the stability of the network structure, I put a family network in the time dimension and see it in a process of change. The introduction of the time dimension in effect allows me to have a more dialectic view on the relation between network structure and people's behavior, and to combine the strength with that of another important area in anthropology: the notion of reciprocity.

At one level, the structure of network does determine the mode of behaviour. For instance, in a rural Chinese community where kinship is predominant in all social relations, it is easy to notice that *ganqing* is highly correlated with the genealogical distance of kinship (Liu, 1982). Close kin tend to have more frequent contacts and reciprocal exchanges, and one can rely more on a close kinsman than a distant one

for support. If we know the structure of one's family network, that is, who are close or distant to the ego family, then we can by and large infer who will provide social support in cases of its being needed for the family. On the other hand, as the process of social interaction and exchange between both sides goes on, the interaction and exchange become part of the relationship. It is exactly by the process of reciprocal exchange that a relationship may be changed. We see, for example, new links in family network are continuously created through family divisions and through marriages. The affective distance can be changed as well. A conflict or dispute may turn a close kinsman into a bitter enemy in the village. Further, structural closeness, such as some agnatic kinship in the same village, is not always accompanied by frequent transactions, and more distant kin even non-kin may have as intense an interaction as close kin in some cases. One may purposefully initiate intense interactions with someone who was "distant" in order to get "closer" *ganqing* with him, in anticipation of getting support in future, he may at the same time try to distance the relationship with another by controlling the mode and frequency of their interactions. These imply that the structure of a network, its continuity and change, needs to be explained in itself, and the explanation, as will be shown below, interestingly lies in the process of reciprocal exchange and interaction among people in the network.

### 1.3 Reciprocal exchange in network

The concept of reciprocity has long been exploited by anthropologists and sociologists in understanding people's behavior in social world and building their social theories. <sup>4</sup> *Reciprocity*, or social exchange, is important to a social relationship, in that it substantializes and symbolizes the relationship. As a relationship between persons or social units, reciprocity both unifies them by the relationship of exchange, and divides them as separate members of the exchange relationship. This double function of setting apart and uniting makes reciprocity a particularly appropriate means for the expression and manipulation of social relationship and social identity. The best definition of it so far seems to come from Lomnitz. He defines reciprocity "as a form of exchange of goods and services having the following characteristic features: (1) it develops as part of a social relation; (2) the reciprocal flow of goods

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<sup>4</sup>For summaries of the huge body of literature on reciprocity in sociology and anthropology, besides those given below, see Ekeh (1974). For a criticism of conventional social exchange theory, see Heath (1976). Useful recent references on the subject especially in anthropology can be obtained from Gregory (1982), and Howell (1989) and Foster (1990).

and services persists beyond a single transaction; (3) it is not governed by the law of supply and demand” (Lomnitz,1977: 189).

Many scholars in the area of social exchange take a notion, which is sharply different from that of network analysts referred to above, that exchange makes the world go round. This was first seen in Mauss (1954), and revitalized and developed by Levi-Strauss (1967). The stress on exchange process in relation with social relationships and social structure is necessary. But we must avoid going to another extreme, as people like Barth (1966) do, to reduce all social systems or cultural values to processes of “transaction”, because it is obvious social exchange at any time must occur in a certain structure of social relationship. Exchange behaviour and exchange relationship may be just the two sides of the same coin. Structurally speaking, exchange between individuals may just link the individuals into a dyadic relationship, or they may symbolize ramifying cooperation or competition between groups or aggregates of individuals. As Sahlins puts it, “... the connection between material flow and social relations is reciprocal. A specific social relation may constrain a given movement of goods, but a specific transaction – ‘by the same token’ – suggests a particular social relation. If friends make gifts, gifts make friends. A great proportion of primitive exchange, much more than our own traffic, has as its decisive function this latter, instrumental one: the material flow underwrites or initiates social relations” (1972: 186).

Social exchange must be understood as a series of action in time. In *The Gift*, Mauss states that among primitive societies exchange takes the form of what he calls “total prestation” – they are at the same time economic, juridical, moral, aesthetic, religious, mythological and socio-morphological phenomena. Giving a gift in these societies puts the receiver under obligation to return, which is part of what Mauss calls the obligation to give, the obligation to receive, and the obligation to return. What distinguishes primitive societies from others is that people not only exchange material goods as others do, but also non-material values, such as “courtesies, entertainments, rituals, military assistance, women, children, dances, and feasts” (Mauss, 1954: 3). Exchange as a process was more clearly stated by Belshaw (1965, 1967) and Barth (1966, 1967) in their analysis of “transactions”. Transaction is defined as a process, a flow and counterflow of prestations:

It is constituted by a basic flow of prestations between two or more actors; in its most elementary form “A” offers prestations “x” and “B” reciprocates with prestations “y”... (and) each party consistently tries to assure that the value gained is greater than the value lost... (Barth,

1966: 13).

Since social exchange usually takes more than a single transaction to complete, we can say at the moment the action of exchange is initiated, a relationship is created. The exchange relationship in a series of transactions is, on the one hand, maintained and renewed by continuous transactions and, on the other, serves as basis for further transactions. Thus, social exchange forms the most important part of the relation itself. In Chinese terms, a *guanxi* is only counted when continuous interactions (*laiwang*) are maintained between the individuals concerned. Affective closeness of a *guanxi*, *ganqing*, can be seen as a “natural” result of social exchange, because any social relationship is the joint product of the actions of both sides, with the actions of each being dependent on those of the other. As Mauss (1954) has pointed out, gift exchange is a “total prestation”. For the gift concerned is not simply a material good in itself, it conveys and carries some sort of sentiment or affection (*ganqing*). In giving a gift to a person, the gift-giver is also sending his symbol of affection and his will to continue and develop the relationship. Similarly, in receiving the gift offered, the gift-receiver in effect does not only accept the gift, he at the same time accepts the good will of the gift-giver both to him and to their relationship. In other words, in receiving the gift people at the same time accept the one who offers the gift, the relationship between them, and the obligations attached in this relation. Thus, exchange is a process to objectify or renew a social relationship. The changing in their established pattern of exchange will result in changing the nature of the relationship. For instance, an increase in amount and quality of exchange items or in exchange frequency creates a closer relationship, and vice versa. Withdrawal of one party from the exchange process, or refusal of one party to another’s gifts or offers, signifies the termination of a relationship.

Some cultural values play a significant part in this process. The terms *renqing*, *bao*, *lian* and *mianzi* in Chinese society represent such cultural values to regulate social exchange in the society. Mauss’s (1954) whole notion on exchanges in primitive societies is built in what he calls the “spirit of the gift” and moral sanctions behind it. It is this “spirit of gift” that ensures a return of a gift and exchange thus becomes possible. This spirit of gift in China is *renqing*. *Renqing* is a term designating the somewhat contractual and obligational feeling among individuals with *guanxi* in the process of transactional exchange. It is based on a Chinese moral discipline, that if you receive a favour from someone, you have a moral obligation to pay back (*bao*) at some suitable time. The obligation to return (*bao*) a *renqing* in China is further ensured by the idea of “face”. Face in Chinese society is both an expression of one’s internalized moral integrity and a symbol of his social standing, being represented

respectively by face (*lian* and *mianzi*) (Hu, 1944). Concerns for one's face, either its moral or social dimensions, to a great extent help to ensure one's returning the *renqing* he owes to others. A person who properly returns gifts and favors will maintain his face, which can further be increased by showing his generosity in the process of exchange and interaction with others. He loses his face, on the other hand, by being unable to do so.

More discussion of these indigenous concepts will be given later to help to elaborate the theme of this thesis. The theme can be summarized as follows. People in Chinese rural areas are living in a family network formed by kin and friends. The structure of one's family network defines the scope of his social and economic activities in daily life. However, more emphasis should be placed on the process of exchange and pattern of social interaction among different categories of people in the network, because social relationships should be objectified through the process of exchanges and interactions in daily life. Although different occasions in socio-economic activities involve different parts of the family network, it is this process of objectification that helps to explain the continuity and change of the network.

The thesis is organized as follows. Chapter two provides a background knowledge of Lower River village and the surrounding area where the fieldwork was conducted. Chapter three describes the basic elements of family networks in the village, giving a general picture of network structure for the understanding of social exchange and interaction described in the following chapters. Chapter four puts the family network in time dimension and discusses its origin and development in relation to the change of family structure. This is followed chapter five by a description of patterns of social interaction between kinsmen and friends within and outside the village, and a discussion of general elements of social interaction and its meaning for the maintenance of social relationships in a network. From chapter six, attention is focused on utilization of social relationships in the network in economic and social spheres. Chapter six looks at cooperation of kin and friends in business activities in the village, using prawn growing business as an example. Chapter seven discusses the commercialization of social relationships by giving more examples of such an economic utilization of kinship and friendship. Chapter eight explores the mobilization of social support in crisis with cases of dispute in the village, suggesting that one's ability to get support in such a crisis depends both on the structure of his social network and on his effort in the cultivation with people in the network through social exchange and interaction. In conclusion, I summarize what the concept of family network has brought us in understanding social life in Chinese rural society, and discuss the social practice of utilizing relationships in Chinese society and its

theoretical implications.

## 1.4 A note on fieldwork

Fieldwork for this study was carried out in Lower River village in Zhaoan county of southern Fujian, during the period from August, 1990 to February, 1991, by way of participant observation supplemented with, largely unstructured, interviews of some key informants in the village. Some shortage of materials were remedied by subsequent communications with my key informants in the village throughout the period of writing up.

It was possible for me to get direct access to Lower River since it is physically near and historically closely linked with my natal village. People in the two villages share a same surname with a clearly demonstrated common ancestor. But to avoid any unexpected trouble I decided to follow the “official” procedure – to prepare an introductory letter before going. During the fieldwork period, I was affiliated with the Department of Anthropology of Xiamen University, my *danwei* before I came to study in Britain. From the university I got an official introductory letter issued to the Zhaoan County Government. The letter, just like the format of any “formal” introductory letter issued by a *danwei* in the country, is full of formal official language and stamps. Its contents include introducing me as a postgraduate student of the university to carry out a “social investigation” in the county and asking the local authority to provide assistance required in the work. With the letter I contacted the county government from which I had another introductory letter to Meiling *Xiang* government to which Lower River village belongs. I was formally introduced to the village cadres at the first time I came to the village by an official who accompanied me.

Some of my friends who worked in the county government provided some inevitable help during the period of fieldwork. They served as my “living introductory letters” by accompanying me and using their influence to help me going through various offices at county and *Xiang* levels. With their help, most of the above “formal procedure” were simply played in form.

To get into the field through formal official procedure is the normal channel in China. It may have some negative effects, which I tried to counter-balance after I got into the village by consciously distancing myself from some officials. However, I did enjoy some benefits. From the *Xiang* government, which is located alongside the settlements of Lower River, I was provided a room to sleep in the night during the

fieldwork period. I was also allowed to dine in its canteen with its officials, provided that I paid for my meals. I was able to get access to most official documents I needed, such as land obligation contracts, household registers, figures of birth planning and dispute mediation records. Above all, it might have just saved me some political troubles without my noticing it in such a political sensitive country as China, since not many people in the country know what anthropology and its fieldwork are all about. Compared to the anxiety Taiwanese anthropologists experienced in the 1960s when they started their fieldwork in *Han* Chinese communities, that every move they made was watched by the security men (Wang, 1991), I think I was far more lucky in the field.

The fieldwork site was selected largely for reasons of convenience to access. It is difficult to determine the typicality of the village chosen, but Lower River does not appear to differ significantly from other villages in the area in terms of style of life. It even does not differ greatly from the county seat and other townships in the county. Like any other villages, it has its own characteristics, but aside from its bigger size and more diversify in economic activities compared to other villages in Meiling peninsula, few social or cultural differences of major consequence exist.

By choosing Lower River village, I enjoyed a lot of advantages in my field work, which enables me to cut my fieldwork time. Lower River is a village less than three miles away from my natal village. People in the village have the same surname as that of my natal village. There is a close historical relationship between the two villages in that they have a common ancestor according to the genealogy and that my natal village was an outgrowth of one branch of Lower River. I found myself easily accepted by the villagers, to various village activities in the annual cycle and family events. In other times, invitation to come to a villager's house, having tea and chat, was quite frequent and ordinary when I was in the village. Besides, I have several old friends or classmates working in the village or nearby area, which enables me to exploit their relationships with local people and their knowledge about the village and events in it. Most importantly, there is a striking similarity in custom and pattern of social life between Lower River and my natal village. Thus, I was able to grasp without much effort meanings and implications of some important symbols and signals in social interaction, although the subtlety of signals and gestures used by local people in the course of social interaction was at the beginning more than I had imagined, for I have long been confined in the environment of school and university. My experience and knowledge of social life and custom in my natal village acquired in the long period of growing up over twenty years, and the extensive travels in the region during the fieldwork and in the country in past decade, have given me a lot

of benefits both in the field and in the data analysis period.

In the mean time of enjoying these advantages, however, my native identity also posed some negative constraints which are created mostly unconsciously by my acceptance of cultural values as others in the village. For instance, I frequently experienced uneasiness in asking questions like “why it should be done in this way”. In the local custom, the “why” and “how” questions are not always considered appropriate to ask. It may be simply a “silly question” if you try to acquire simple and basic social reality, because, as a native, you should know. Besides, in local custom, one should learn from experiencing rather than from asking questions. In many circumstances, people just follow the custom and do not ask why things should be in that way. For instance, why in some rituals three sticks of incense are used while in others it must be five or even more? Or, why in some situations money gift is considered appropriate while in others not? Things as such have long been taken for granted. People might be embarrassing for being asked because they are unable to explain. Sometimes, a simple question may turn out to be a “sensitive” one because people find difficult or unwilling to answer. For example, one of my friends who worked in the village succeeded to get transfer to a more favorite job in the county seat after more than one year’s great effort to mobilize help from his “family network”. I once tried to get information about who he went to and how many gifts he sent out. He told me, I guess it was because I was considered a friend, which were the offices and officials who were in charge, but simply refused to give details no matter how hard I pushed. As a native, considerations as such unconsciously posed constraints in acquiring some social facts during the period of fieldwork.

In these areas, a foreign researcher may have a much better position. If a foreigner ask a question which for local people is a “silly” one, it is “understandable” because he is a foreigner. Some people may even feel proud of answering it because they get a chance to “educate” a foreign professor. On the other hand, since a foreign scholar who comes to do fieldwork in a village is ultimately an “outsider” who will leave afterword and may never come back again, whatever you tell him will be less likely to have a negative consequence for you. This is the reason why a foreigner may have more freedom in some “sensitive” issues in local terms. It can find support from a common observation and experience of most people in the country: people are more willing to open their heart to a total stranger in some contexts such as in a train, or a small remote hotel. Because in the specific context one feels the need to talk. More importantly, talking to a total stranger who will never be met again in such a context, it is almost certain that both parties will soon forget the contents of story.

Thus one feels free to tell anything, including what he would never tell his wife or his best friends.

Therefore, there is always tradeoff in a fieldwork. Getting easily into some parts of reality means you have more difficulty gaining access to other parts of it. This may explain a difficult situation for anthropologists posed by a paradox in the methodology of the discipline: to be at the same time an “observer” and a “participant”. For a native researcher, it is easier to participate; for a foreign researcher, it is easier to observe. It may also help to sort out one of my puzzles in reading anthropological literature in the China field in the past few years: I felt a difference between the work by native authors and by foreign authors, but was difficult to tell exactly what was the difference and to understand why. Now it appears more clearly the difference is in the unconscious identification when doing the research. As a foreign researcher is more likely to be in a position of outsider and observer, his impression and idea of a local community are largely the result of observation and questioning. What he gets out of the fieldwork, as a result, is often the “structure” of the community, including the structure of relationships and the “structure” of life (a whole set of description of social norms and rules). This often enables him to give a clear (something like X-ray), and in a sense “complete”, picture of the community that readers can easily grasp without much difficulty. But it is simply the fact that it is so “clear” and “certain” that makes native readers feel it cannot always be “true” because real life in the Chinese society always appears more complicated than a structure or a set of norms. For a native researcher, as a result of long process of enculturation, he is easily identified with the local people who would consider him as an insider. He acquires his knowledge of the community mainly by participation and experiencing. What he concerns with are often less in the structure of relationships and sets of norms and values, but more in the usage of these relationships and norms in practical situations. In his usually very rich description of local people’s mind and behavior, the existence of such a set of norms is implicitly admitted but he does not devote much effort in describing it structurally and completely. This often prevents him from developing a more generalized theoretical framework, though some discussions may be thoughtful and stimulating.

I hope the rest of this thesis will justify my great effort in balancing my roles as a participant and as an observer during the period of fieldwork.

# Chapter 2

## The Setting

Phoenix Mountains zig-zag into the sea, forming the backbone of the Meiling Peninsula in Zhaoan County, southern Fujian. A dozen fishing settlements are scattered over the peninsula. Lower River village, standing right at the middle of it, is the largest among them.

### 2.1 Population

There are thirteen *Xiang*/townships in the county. Meiling *Xiang* is the only one that relies mainly on fishing and water related economic activities. It used to be among the poorest regions. With the implementation of rural reform policies, it has become one of the richest areas in the county since the end of 1970s.

Meiling Peninsula as a whole has only recently been made an independent administrative unit, although frequent changes in administrative units and their names at the *Xiang/Qu/Commune* level were made in the early 1950s, in the processes of combination and division. In January, 1978, it was divided from Qiaodong Commune to be Lower River Commune. In July, 1982, it was changed to Meiling Commune, and to Meiling *Xiang* shortly afterwards.<sup>1</sup> The total area of Meiling *Xiang* is 29.7 square kilometres, including 15 administrative villages, 21 “natural villages” (hamlets), with a population of 26,555 in 1990.

Among these 15 villages, Lower River is the largest (see table 2.1). It has a population of 4146, living in 867 households. The village has three hamlets, Front House, Back House, and West River (table 2.2). Among them, Back House, standing

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<sup>1</sup>“Meiling” was the name of the area before 1949. Literately it means “Plum Hills”.

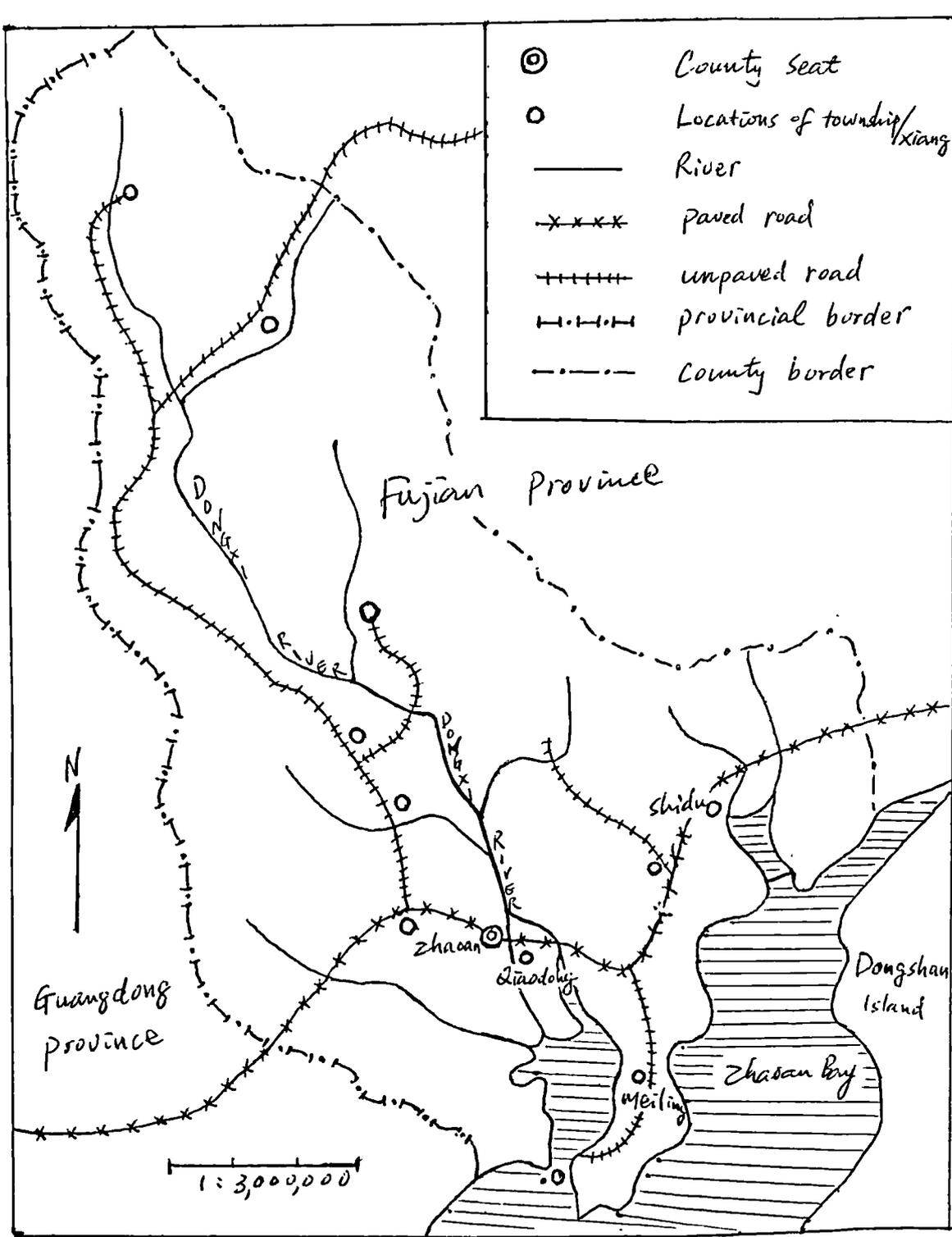


Figure 2.1: Map of Zhasan County

Table 2.1 Population of the villages in Meiling *Xiang*<sup>a</sup>

	September 31, 1989	July 1, 1990 <sup>b</sup>
Dongmen	762	780
Nanmen	1241	1340
Cheshiwan	1049	1236
Gongkou	1217	1299
Xianzhong	2495	2577
Lazhou	769	784
Tianzhongyang	1002	1030
Xiafu	2261	2357
Tian village	2770	2990
Lin village	2799	3136
Lower River	4044	4277
Huang village	2139	2214
Shichen	1154	1174
Fengzhi	1045	1076
Liaoya	1016	1060
Total	25763	27330

a. Records in the *Xiang* government. 5/10/90.

b. Figures in this column are the result of the census carried out on July 1, 1990. They are not necessarily compatible with that of the *hukou* records in the village and *Xiang* governments, such as the figures of Lower River and of the whole *Xiang* given elsewhere in this chapter, due to a fact that they include those who live in the village but do not register there at the time of census.

Table 2.2 Household and population of the three hamlets (1990)†

	No. of		Population		No. of	No. of
	household	total	male	female	Births	Deaths
Front House	281	1313	666	647	29	6
Back House	398	1980	1005	975	44	10
West River	188	853	444	409	7	3
total	867	4146	2115	2031	80	19

†Based on the *hukou* records in the village government.

in the middle of the three hamlets, with a population of 1980 in 398 households, is the largest as well as the dominant section in the social and political affairs of the village. In the southwest direction from Back House is Front House hamlet. It is said that there was a small stream between the two hamlets in the past. Due to a rapid increase of population, houses of the two hamlets have been merging together, although the traditional line of division – the small stream – has been preserved in the form of a drainage ditch built in 1985, with the surplus money collected for repairing the ancestral hall in Back House. The drainage ditch is about 2 - 3 meters wide, 1 meter deep, usually full with rubbish, occasionally washed by a storm shower in the summer. The population of Front House hamlet is 1313, with 281 households.

West River is the smallest hamlet among the three, with 188 households, 853 people. It stands to the northwest of Back House, about 200 meters away. Between them is the sweet potato field of the village. A village road connects the hamlet to Back House; another village path joins the highway through which the villagers can reach Back House too. The other side of the hamlet confronts across a path the buildings of Huang village which is the traditional rival village of Lower River. Today we can still detect past hostility between the two villages in the strongly-built high walls between them, although their relationship has been reasonably good since 1949. The continuous combat between the two villages made West River famous for village solidarity and its ability to fight.

The rapid expansion of village population in the past decade can be seen in table 2.3.

Table 2.3 Household and Population in the Village (1981 - 1990) †

Year	No. of		Population		No. of Births	No. of Deaths
	household	total	male	female		
1981	-	3764 (?)	-	-	51	28
1982	711	3756	-	-	22	13
1983	722	3806	1903	1903	61	9
1984	733	3876	1919	1957	74	19
1985	741	3881	1919	1962	58	12
1986	748	3939	1945	1994	82	16
1987	772	3966	1964	2002	65	19
1988	828	4012	2001	2011	59	20
1989	836	4044	2021	2023	68	26
1990	867	4146	2115	2031	62	19

† According to records of the *Xiang* government.

## 2.2 Subsistence basis

Traditionally, Lower River village had a diverse economy. Fishing was the dominant economic activity, supplemented with agriculture: planting sweet potato, rice and some vegetables. Small business involved in buying and selling fish was also important. Life was generally difficult, but people in the village managed to survive through diversifying their economic efforts, both in households within the village and in members within a household.

Fishing as a way of living is traditionally the most honorable and prestigious in the village. The catch is mainly for sale in order to get the money to buy rice and other daily necessities of a family, although the daily product of a bamboo boat is not very large. Only a small proportion is left for own consumption. With fishing, speciality in fishing technique can be observed among different villages in the peninsula. Unlike some villages nearby, such as Tian village, Xiabu, Nanmen in the south of the peninsula, where people using large fishing trawlers equipped with powerful machinery go to fish far away in the outer sea, people in Lower River use mainly small bamboo boats to fish in the inner sea, Zhaoan Bay, although there are also half a dozen large fishing trawlers in the village. There were 330 bamboo boats in the village in 1990. The bamboo boat is usually made by binding 10 - 12 bamboos together. The bamboo suitable to make a boat must be about 15 cm in diameter, 5 meters in length, so that a bamboo boat is about 5 meters long, 1.5 meters wide.

They should have a special treatment before being used, to dry, to peel off the skin, to paint with water-proofing asphalt. The bamboo boat was driven by man power in the past, with scull. Now it is equipped with motor power, the man required is also reduced from two to one. Fishing nets used in various boats also differ. To catch different fishes requires different nets. Sometimes they use fishing rod. Again, to catch different fishes requires different line, hook, and bait. The main catch of a bamboo boat is usually small fishes, such as shrimps, crabs, octopus, squid, sardine, mackerel, butterfish, flatfish,... etc.

Another crucial activity in the village concerned with the sea is water transport, mainly of shells, from here to Shantou city in Guangdong province and its nearby counties such as Jieyan, Chaoyan and Jiexi, by using container ships. This economic activity in the area is monopolised by Lower River villagers, or rather, traditionally only Lower River villagers were involved in the activity. It takes less than one day from the Gongkou harbour to Shantou by sea. Shells in this area are used as important construction material by burning them into slacked lime powder in a lime kiln. Like cement, it is very sticky when an appropriate amount of water is added and can be very hard after it dries off. The walls of most houses in the village are made of this lime powder with sand and red earth. In 1990, there were 85 transporting container vessels in Lower River village, carrying shells and some other goods between the sea of Fujian and Guangdong.

This activity also involved another kind of work: “washing” shells in local terms. To “wash” shells is in fact to collect them from the “shell field” in the sea by digging and washing before transporting them from the field to the place required. The dredgers involved are quite large, about 30 - 40 tons in weight, with special equipment. In 1990, the village had 6 such ships.

Agriculture is the most important activity for most of the population of 520,000 in Zhaoan county. Located at  $230^{\circ}35' - 240^{\circ}10'N$  and  $1160^{\circ}55' - 1170^{\circ}22'E$ , with a subtropical climate, the annual average rainfall of the county is about 1600 mm and the average temperature is  $21.30^{\circ}C$ . Dongxi river flows from north to south irrigating the land of the county. The alluvial plain in southern Zhaoan created by Dongxi river is fertile land, which once made Zhaoan “a place of fish and rice”. However, agricultural activity in Lower River village is only a supplement, in spite of the fact that almost every household in the village is involved in it, with a diverse scale of effort and resource. The amount of cultivated land in the village has decreased greatly since the early 1980s, and is continuing to decrease. The total amount of cultivated land of the village in 1990 was 611 *mu*, about 0.12 *mu* per

person. Agriculture as subsidiary in the village economy is shown not only in its low proportion in the whole income both of the village and of an average household in the village, but also in the fact that its labour force is almost without exception the women, who are always regarded as less significant in social and economic life of the village. The main crops planted are those requiring not very much energy and can expect a reasonable return, such as sweet potato, peanut, and various sorts of vegetables for man and pigs.

Rice cultivation which requires good irrigation and labour involution was very scarce before 1949. However, it was the most important activity in the village from the 1960s to the early 1980s. In the early 1960s, under the guideline of the policy that grain is the key line, the county government mobilized thousands of people to "claim land from the sea" (*wei hai zhao tian*). With vast expenditure of resources, several dams along the water area of the Gongkou Harbour at the mouth of the Dongxi river were built. It did create hundreds and thousands of *mu* of paddy land. The land was then given to the brigades near to them as a rice field. Lower River village received about 600 *mu* of such land, which, according to the cadres in the village, produced more than 600,000 *jin* of rice grain annually. As a result, the village was not only self-sufficient in food, but also able to sell rice to the state.

With decollectivization in the village and nearby areas in the early 1980s, the whole agricultural infrastructure has been greatly damaged. The irrigation system was blocked, preventing fresh water in the upper parts from reaching the rice fields of the village. As a result, they became too salted to plant rice any more, and eventually had to be abandoned. Consequently, the village had to conceal the contracts of the land and to pay the agricultural tax collectively to the state for the villagers, which they refused to pay for the reason that no harvest could be had from the land. Meanwhile, the lands were officially given back to the management of the village authority. In 1983, 14 villagers who had the entrepreneurial spirit jointly contracted a piece of the land from the village government to convert it into a fish pond for a period of 20 years at the rental rate of 27.5 RMB per *mu* each year, which by the current standard is extremely low. But the result was not very promising since they wanted to grow fresh water fish and as for the rice cultivation, there is little fresh water to be had. They had not made any money in the first two years by raising fishes.

In 1985, following the wind of growing prawns in the other coastal areas of Fujian, the authority at the county level government made policies to encourage people in the coastal area to make use of the county's 6667 hectares of shallow sea area, 2667 ha.

of beach and 4667 ha. of fresh water area to raise fishes and prawns, which included low interest loans and a favorable tax policy. The county authority also promised to provide technical assistance. Thus, the village government encouraged the villagers to contract the former rice fields which had been left unused and convert them into prawn ponds for a period of 15 years. However, response from the villagers was very disappointing; no one except those who had contracted the fish ponds liked the idea, since it required a large sum of money to dig a pond and to start the work. More importantly, the villagers had no previous experience in such work. The risk was thought too large. For those who owned the fish ponds, there seemed no alternative but to try the new idea. It proved to be a great success. More and more people joined in the work, more and more credit and resources were invested in it. The prawn ponds are continuously expanding. The 600 *mu* of the original rice land in the village had all been converted into prawn ponds in 1988. Prawn growing and its related activities have become a new arena of economy and life style in the village (see chapter seven for more details).

Prawn growing also expands the scale and area of commercial activities in the village. Lower River was a marketing town in the peninsula, although it does not fit his definition perfectly. It is only regarded as a large village rather than a town. Nevertheless, there was a daily market in the village, called *xu* where people from all over the peninsula came together to sell and exchange their own products, as well as to get their basic daily necessities from the stores and groceries here. For instance, people from the agricultural areas might come to sell rice, vegetables and fruits, and buy fish in return. Whereas those from the fishing villages might come to sell fish and buy rice, vegetables and fruits for consumption. Pork that people from both areas require was sold in the market as well.

During the Cultural Revolution, according to local people, the market in the village in effect disappeared for several years, although it was not officially closed, since people had nothing to sell and little money to buy. It was not until the end of the 1970s that the market was revived and started to develop. In 1988, a new market place was built by the village authority, with the permission of the county commercial bureau, in the south of Back House hamlet, along the west side of the highway that passes by the village. Two rows of two - storey "commodity houses" (*shanpin huan*) were built by the village government and sold to the villagers to be used as stores and shops. Two more rows of such commodity houses are being completed. There are more than 100 variously sized stores, shops, and groceries in the market and within the village, selling things from rice, salt, and sugar, to matches, soap, clothes and incense, to components of machines for tractors, buses

and boats, as well as TV sets, and jewelry. The market, together with the already existing commune's Supply & Purchase Cooperative, Credit Cooperative, Grain Supply & Purchase Station, Subsidized Food Station, a subbranch of the county branch of the Bank of China, Post Office, etc. forms the sketch of commercial activities in the village and the peninsula.

## 2.3 History of Lower River

Zhaoan has been established as a county since the Ming Dynasty (1368 - 1644). However, the history of the people living in the area can be traced to at least ten thousand years ago. Several New Stone Age archaeological sites have been found in the county. Before the first Han people came to reside here in the Southern Dynasties (420 - 589), it was the territory of the minority peoples called Man who had been living in the area for centuries. It was only after the Tang Dynasty (618 - 907) that more and more Han people came in from the north to force the aboriginal people to move away or to merge into the Han nationality. Today, all the residents in the county belong to the Han, the majority of them speak Minnan dialect (Hokkien), while the people in the mountain area in the northern part of the county speak Hakka. Until 1949, members of all three hamlets in Lower River belonged to a lineage organization with a common ancestor. Such a single surname village was quite typical in Zhaoan in imperial times.

Like many other people in Zhaoan, villagers of Lower River believe that their ancestor originally came from Guanzhou Prefecture of Henan Province in the Tang Dynasty (618 - 907), following Chen Yuanguan, the General Commander, to fight against the aboriginal people in Fujian, and settling down later. People of He surname here claim that their ancestor was the official in charge of the army's food and equipment supply for General Chen, who came from Gushi county of the prefecture. He was awarded the title of Marquis of *Zhaode* because of his outstanding work in the army. This belief can also be observed on the antithetical couplets (*duilian*) on the gates of all their ancestral halls which conventionally show the origin and the glory of ancestors.

However, the exact genealogy from the Marquis of *Zhaode* is not clear. What is much more certain about the origin of Zhaoan He surname is that they came from Putian City of northern Fujian late in the Yuan Dynasty (1271 - 1368). According to local legends and the remaining uncompleted genealogy, the direct ancestor of the He people in Lower River village, and in fact all He surname people in Zhaoan

county, was a man named He Yingquan in late Yuan Dynasty. Born in Putian county in northern Fujian, Yingquan was of the local gentry. Although he did not take part in the imperial examination, being educated by Confucian discipline he was famous for his talent since he was a child. He was chosen to serve as governor of the local district. Being upright and straightforward, and caring much about community affairs, he therefore frequently disputed with other local gentry and local bullies. In the last reign of Yuan dynasty (about 1350), he was forced to escape from his native place because of losing a lawsuit with rich local gentry, leaving two wives and four sons behind. He wandered to the south, entered Zhaoan, and settled down at the place that later became today's Lower River village. It is said that the name of the village in local accent, specifically the pronunciation of "river" (*wua*), came from the pronunciation of the Putian local dialect, which is quite different from the Minnan dialect currently being used in Zhaoan ("River" in Minnan is pronounced as *ho*).

Having settled down in Lower River, Ancestor Yingquan married a daughter of a Lin family nearby, and got a son called Liangbi who was reckoned as his fifth son. Whether or not Yingquan died in Zhaoan is not sure, however, Liangbi grew up and eventually went back to Putian when he was old, following the cultural tradition that "The fallen leaves should go to their roots" – to die and be buried at the native place. At that time, he had been married and had a young son named Yingfa. Since Yingfa was too junior to tolerate the hardship of a long distance journey, he was left in Lower River with Grandmother Lin.

The He family started to be prosperous in the fourth generation. Yingfa had as many as nine sons. Among them, according to the genealogy, the oldest son moved to Linxilang, a small village several kilometres to the northeast of Lower River village. This branch was dim and eventually the village was abandoned. The second and ninth sons moved to the Pearl River Delta of Guangdong province. This branch had a great development, their descendants scattered all over the delta. The third migrated to Meixian county of Guangdong, and was prosperous too. Some of his descendants moved to Dabu later, the next county in the same area, while some others moved back to Zhaoan and set up two villages in southwestern Zhaoan. A group of people in this branch crossed the Taiwan Strait from Meixian to settle down in central Taiwan in the early Qing Dynasty (1644 - 1911).

Descendants of the brothers who stayed in Lower River village not only expanded the village into the current three hamlets, but also scattered to all over Meiling Peninsula and the southeastern part of the county, setting up single surname villages or living with other surnames.

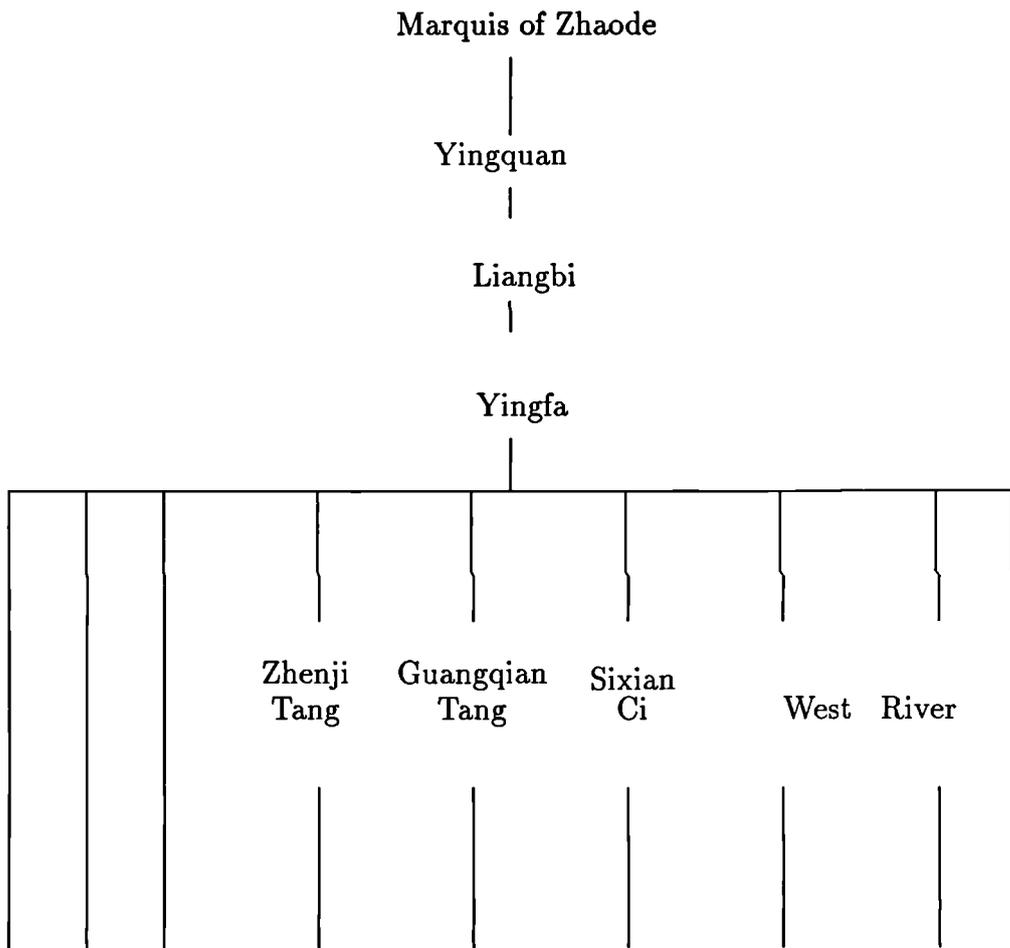


Figure 2.2 The chart of genealogy in Lower River

The fourth and sixth brothers are the ancestors of the Back House hamlet. Descendants of them set up two ancestral halls, respectively the Zhenji Tang and the Sixian Ci. Later, two brothers who belong to Zhenji Tang – the branch of the fourth son – went to reside in Xialiao (lower hamlet), about three miles north from Lower River.<sup>2</sup> The older brother returned to Lower River later. The younger brother stayed there and became the founder of Xialiao village. Because one son from Xialiao, Jianke, passed the provincial examination (*jueren*) in mid Ming Dynasty (1557) and became the governor of Taiping prefecture of Guangxi province, who happened to be the highest ranked official in the nearby He surname villages in the past, it was a custom here to let Xialiao start first in the traditional ancestral ceremonies held twice each year in the Spring and Autumn, which always made the people in the village proud. The sixth brother had two sons. One branch of his descendants moved to establish a new village named Chaiyuanbu (“the garden plot for vegetables”). From here, some people migrated to Zhanghua in Taiwan in the Qianlong Reign of the Qing Dynasty (1736 - 1795). Another branch of descendants left to set up Liaoya village in the Kangxi Reign of the Qing Dynasty (1662 - 1722), where it had a son pass the provincial military test (*wuju*), who eventually became a General in charge of military affairs in Gaozhou prefecture in Guangdong province, and donated to build an ancestral hall for the whole He surname in Zhaoan in the county seat.

The descendants of the fifth son set up Front House hamlet, and built an ancestral hall, Guangqian Tang. Two brothers among them went to establish Xishan village near Xialiao, which conventionally divides into two parts (hamlets), Upper Xishan and Lower Xishan, having one ancestral hall each.

The seventh and the eighth sons together established West River hamlet, which therefore has two ancestral halls in it. Some of their descendants moved to Dongmen village at the end of the peninsula late in the Qing Dynasty.

Counting from Ancestor Yingquan, most adult villagers of Lower River now belong to the 22nd to 25th generations, some old men of small branches belong to the 21st even the 20th generations. But except among those close kin, generation difference is not significant any more in terms of social status. In the past, the generation difference might make an old man aged sixty address a teenager “uncle” or even “great uncle”. This can only be a joke for the villagers nowadays. In the past decades, great changes have occurred in social organization and kinship ideology in the village.

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<sup>2</sup>Xialiao is my natal village.

## 2.4 Social organizations and problems of village solidarity

Social organization in Lower River was greatly changed after the village and the rest of the county were taken over by Communists in December, 1949, with the new government's radical policies aiming at organizing peasants into rural socialist mass collectives – people's communes and brigades – gradually being carried out in the 1950s and especially during the Cultural Revolution. Rituals of ancestral worship and other ceremonies in the village were considered to be superstition and elements of feudalism and banned. Copies of genealogy were burned. Those who were active in these rituals, most of whom were local gentry in the past, landlords and rich peasants under the new class status system, were subjects of "struggle" and punished in the never ending political campaigns. In 1953, villagers in Lower River started to organize "Mutual Aid Groups", which in 1957 were transformed into "Cooperatives". In 1958, in the tide of "Great Leap Forward" all over the country, Lower River and its traditional rival village, Huang village, formed a "People's Commune".<sup>3</sup> Shortly afterward, it separated to be an independent brigade. The brigade and its 14 production teams had been the basic socio-political organizations of the village throughout the whole period of collectivization. Production teams cut across the traditional boundaries of close kin groups (*fang*). The scarcity economy particularly the shortage of subsistence caused by radical government policies and mismanagement of local leaders, in the mean time, forced a peasant proletariat to be involved in conflicts and disputes over materials and power (thus control over such materials of one's own and others) within the village and particularly the production team. Under the specific circumstance, one's gain is usually at the expense of another's loss. Conflicts and disputes occurred not only between those belonging to different kin groups (*fang*) but also among those within the same group and even very close kin like brothers. Therefore, the collectivization led to a serious damage to kinship solidarity and ideology in Lower River. The decline of traditional kinship ideology also reflected in the appearance and increase of intravillage marriage since late 1950s – to find alliances in the village in order to secure more support (see chapter 4).

While the brigade remains in existence in much weakened form in the villagers' committee, the production teams were abolished in the process of decollectivization in the early 1980s. Land and other properties of all production teams were formally

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<sup>3</sup>Local people call it "small commune", to be distinguished from the "commune" later in the system of commune, brigade and production team.

distributed to be managed by each member family of the team between January and February of 1980. Family thus regained its status as the basic unit of social and economic life in the community. This was followed by a series of repairing and rebuilding of temples and ancestral halls and a revival of various rituals in the village. In Autumn of 1981, the temple of Mazu on the seaside in the east of the village was rebuilt. At the end of 1982, a new wooden ancestral statue was carved, made from a trunk of a camphor tree. The ancestor has a red face, long beard, with black official cap and red gown, sitting in the ancestral hall and surrounded by a dozen other spiritual statues. October, 1985, the ancestral hall in Back House hamlet, the Shixian Ci, was repaired. In Autumn of 1986, the temple of West River hamlet was rebuilt and a small wooden ancestral icon replaced the old earth one in the temple. October, 1987, the Guangqian Tang of Front House hamlet was also repaired. In the mean time, a dozen small Earth God temples were set up or rebuilt. They, together with the above ancestral halls and temples, form the ritual centers of the village in the annual round. Most ritual performances before 1949 have been restored. Among them are the three major festivals of the village: the birthday ceremonial of founding ancestor on February 15 (lunar calendar, as in following), the birthday ceremonial of Mazu God on March 23, and a three days Pingan festival in October (dates chosen each year). They differ from other rituals in that their sponsorship is rotated in three hamlets and normally a local opera troupe is hired to perform during the period of the festival.

The major works of restoration above were financially supported mainly by people living in Malaysia and Singapore who were originally from the village and the nearby area, supplemented by donations of the villagers. A temporary working committee (*lishihui*), formed by representatives of these overseas donors and important villagers in Lower River and nearby villages (such as the *lishihui* of Mazu temple and ancestral statue) who were active in the village's affairs, in each of these events was set up to oversee works of the event and supervise the ritual celebration of completion that followed. On the basis, a more formal "old men's committee", *Laorenhui*, formed by 13 old men representatives in the village including 3 from Front House, 7 from Back House and 3 from West River, was set up in March, 1990 to organize and practise the annual ancestral rituals, as well as to supervise all other religious affairs in the village. The committee was expanded to 15 people in January, 1991. Among them, 4 from Front House, 8 Back House and 3 West River.

All these elements can be regarded as a revival of some respects of community rituals and kinship ideology in the past. However, evidences from Lower River suggest that one must be very careful in arguing a restoration of lineage organization

in this process of decollectivization, as some scholars (e.g. Potter & Potter, 1990) are tempted to do. For instance, in terms of leadership, the old men's committee is only an informal organization to supervise rituals in the village, although it also exercises some power in other social and political affairs within and outside the village boundary. Unlike the *zu zhang* (head of lineage) and the elderly in a lineage, who had significant power over most social and political spheres in the village which frequently came from their control of lineage common property and connections with outside power bodies such as the bureaucracy (Freedman, 1958), the influence of the old men's committee, outside the arrangement and practice of annual village festivals, is very limited. Besides, its importance in village politics depends very much on the relative strength of the official government body and Party organization. These official organizations exercise their influence on the villagers by carrying out the usual administrative work in the village and, particularly, implementing state policies such as birth control which currently costs local cadres more than a half of their time and energy. In some nearby villages in the peninsula, old men's committees once replaced the Party organization to serve as the most important power body in these villages in the chaotic early 1980s. With completion of government's effort in transforming local administrative system in mid 1980s, the Party organization slowly recovered its lost territories, although the days of absolute power will certainly never return. In Lower River, the old men's committee was under some control by the villagers' committee and Party organization since the day of its birth. Arrangements of major village festivals by the old men's committee, such as hiring an opera troupe in the three major village festivals, should get consensus and support of the village cadres.

On the other hand, there is no common property in the village to derive income for the expenditure of the village's annual rituals and festivals. All these rituals, though organized and supervised by the old men's committee, are currently financed by equal contribution of each family in the village. Expenditure in offerings (pigs, cakes, etc.) and others (such as fee of opera performance) is budgeted beforehand by the old men's committee, which decides the amount that should be collected from each family. Offerings to local gods and deities in a ritual are normally separated into two parts: that of the whole village and that brought by each family. The common offerings, which are believed to have carried some sort of mystical power to bring fortune to the consumers, will be distributed back to every family after the ritual. Occasionally, in the Mazu birthday ritual on the 23th of March, for example, owners of a fishing or water transporting ship, usually several families, may make joint offerings (financed by the specially reserved income of the ship) besides their

individual family's offerings, to thank their good fortunes brought by the gods in the previous year.

The important function of rituals in group solidarity has been commonly stressed by anthropologists. It is believed that a collective consciousness is created by taking part of the rituals or ceremonies. By collectively sponsoring and taking part of the village's rituals and performances, villagers surely more or less consolidate their common identity that differentiates them from the people of other villages. With the revival of many rituals in the village, the sense of common identity as members of the village for most people in Lower River in the past decade is clearly stronger than before. But there is little evidence to suggest that group solidarity among villagers has been strengthened as a result of these ritual activities. Many villagers, especially some old men, are continuously complaining about people's "selfishness" and "disunity" in the village. As mentioned previously, unity is what people of Lower River especially West River were proud of and one of the weapons to beat its neighbouring Huang village in the past. The decline of village solidarity may be one of the consequences of collectivization particularly the Cultural Revolution during which traditional social organizations were destroyed and ritual activities banned, in particular fellow villagers were forced to "struggle" with each other driven both by political campaigns and by need of subsistence for survival in the situation of general economic shortage. This decline of village solidarity is not limited to Lower River only, but a common phenomenon in the area where a clear revival of ritual activities has been witnessed in the process of decollectivization. If it is true that the ban of village's ritual activities during the period of collectivization contributed to the decline of village solidarity, then it is clear that little improvement, if any, has been made by the reappearance of various ritual performances in the past ten years.

The collective performance of rituals can undoubtedly lead to group solidarity. However, it appears that the relation is not always so direct and thus to be taken for granted. A collective ritual performance may also be the result of a group of individuals driven by self-interest. This seems to be quite the case in the recent ritual activities in the Lower River area, in which we can see not only cooperation but competition. Generally speaking, people in the area take part in various rituals for mainly two reasons. Firstly, it is because of local custom, that is to say, other people (whether they are ascendants or contemporaries) take part in them; Secondly, it is for own good, it is believed that taking part in these rituals will bring luck or good fortune, whether by coming naturally as a result of the action or by positively praying in the ritual. In terms of self interest, these two reasons are in fact the same. By following others to take part in the same ritual, one thus prevents others from being

in an advantageous position, or in other words, without being left behind himself. In this respect, many ritual performances are the result of complex cooperation and competition among their participants. This is symbolized in the two parts of offerings in a ritual. The common offerings of the whole village (such as pork) should be distributed to each family after the ritual symbolizing collectiveness of the village community. The individual offerings brought by each family, which is different from family to family in kind and amount, implies the necessity to differentiate among families. By bring their own small bowls and plates of dishes, cakes and others to pray for their own good, they are also in a silent competition for, in the sacred sense luck and fortune given by deities, and in secular social status and prestige, in the process of ritual activities. Therefore, the social function of ritual activity is more complicated than is usually believed. It is both a mechanism of social solidarity and a battle field for social status and prestige. When the latter becomes overwhelming, ritual practices in effect help to weaken the group solidarity.

## 2.5 Connection with outside world

In relation to the weakening of traditional social organization and a decline of village solidarity, there has been a steady increase for the village community in integration, economically and socially, with the outside world in the past forty years particularly in the last decade. Such an integration is represented by the building of many government bodies, such as the government, the hospital, the Supply & Purchase Cooperative and the Credit Cooperative in the period of collective, and by the establishment of a telephone station and the subbranch of Bank of China, and increase of radios and televisions in the village and buses connecting to the county seat in recent years.

For a very long time, Lower River has served as a marketing town for the peninsula. There is a market in the village which is the only one in Meiling peninsula. The market was formally recognized by the county's Bureau of Industry and Commerce in 1988. People of the rest of the peninsula come to sell their fish, vegetables and other local products in the market and purchase their daily necessities. It takes less than one hour to any corner of the peninsula from Lower River by bicycle. Meanwhile, it is directly connected with the higher level marketing center – the county seat, which is 10 kilometres away, and the other marketing towns in the county. Many goods selling in Lower River market are distributed from the county seat. At present, private buses run their service nearly every hour in the day from the county

seat via Lower River to the end of the peninsula: Gongkou harbour. It takes less than 30 minutes from Lower River to the county seat. By bicycle, it is about 35 minutes if taking a short cut. The economic activities provide extended relations, linking Lower River with the other villages in the peninsula and nearby areas in the county.

In addition to the economic factor, there are other factors operative in integrating the village community with the larger outside world, of which the most significant is the patrilineal and patrilocal kinship system. As a result of the kinship system and its marriage rules, there is an extension of kinship relationships beyond the village community. As we shall see in the proceeding chapters, the matrilateral and affinal relationships furnish important social and economic links between Lower River and people in the other villages of the immediate area.

With the stead penetration of state power and impingement of outside world on the village in the last forty years, as well as development in transport facilities, the village is also becoming more and more closely integrated with the region far beyond the boundaries of the marketing community and the county, of which the prawn growing business and hand knitting distribution network examined in chapters six and seven of this thesis are two examples. The county forms a part of the coastal region of Fujian and Guangdong provinces, especially the area that includes the Golden Triangle of Southern Fujian, i.e. the area including the three cities of Xiamen, Zhangzhou and Quanzhou, and the Chaoshan (Chaozhou and Shantou) Plain of Guangdong Province. This is the area of ancestral places of people in Taiwan. People in the area speak broadly the same dialect – the Minnan (Hokkien). In recent years, it is one of the better areas for economic development in the country.

Geographically, Zhaoan county, midway between Xiamen and Shantou cities, is the Southern Gate of Fujian. To the east is the Golden Triangle of Southern Fujian. To the west is the Chaoshan Plain of Guangdong Province. Fenshui Pass at the southwest border, where the Fujian-Guangdong National Road (N.R. No: 328) crosses, is traditionally regarded as the place where Fujian and Guangdong meet, which is consequently called “the first pass of Southern Fujian”. It used to be a military stronghold in imperial times, and is an important commercial checkpoint at the present. The National Road crosses the southern region of the county, linking Zhaoan to the important cities in the coastal region of the two provinces: Zhangzhou, Xiamen, Fuzhou in the north, and Shantou, Chaozhou, Guangzhou, Shenzhen and Hong Kong in the south.

Compared with the rest of the county, Meiling peninsula, which is located in

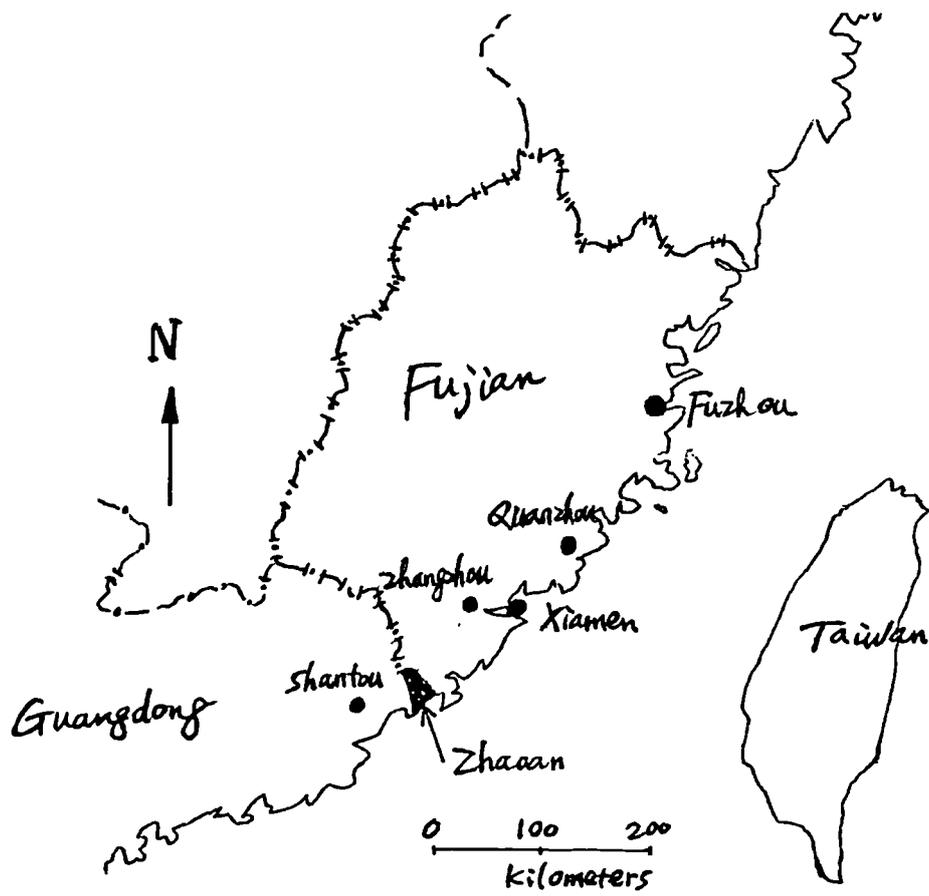


Figure 2.3 Map of Fujian province

the coastal area of southern Zhaoan, has an extra advantage in linking with this larger outside world. It is surrounded by Zhaoan Bay to the east and the south, and Gongkou Port to the west. The latter is in effect the mouth of Dongxi River which is the biggest river in the county, named after the village at the end of the peninsula where there is a quay to harbour most big ships of the county. Zhaoan Bay in the local people's mind is the "inner sea". It is a paradise for fishermen working on small boats. The clean, soft sands of the beach under the warmth of the sun, the calm, gentle, blue water, embellished with a couple of sails in the light wind heading into the distance, are just like a traditional Chinese landscape painting. Its impressive beauty remains vividly in my mind. To the east of Zhaoan Bay is Dongshan Island, the second largest island in Fujian. Further east is the Taiwan Strait. From here, to Zhoushan Islands in the East China Sea in the north, and the Dongshan Islands in the South China Sea in the south, is the area called the "outer sea" by local fishermen, where they work with larger and stronger fishing vessels. The waterway thus enables people in Lower River to reach easily to the vast coastal regions of Fujian, Guangdong and Zhejiang provinces.

The distance from Zhaoan to Shantou city by road is 79 kilometres, which takes about two hours by bus. It is much less than to Zhangzhou (139 kilometres and five hours) and Xiamen (over 200 kilometres and about 7 hours). The geographical closeness and transporting convenience therefore make Zhaoan more closely linked with Guangdong in economics and culture, although administratively it is a county of Fujian province. Evidences for this are, briefly, most businesses local people do are with Cantonese, the traditional local opera that people here enjoy is *chao* opera originated in Chaoshan plain which differs in many ways from the local opera in Quanzhou and Xiamen, and the radio and TV favored by most local people, except the CCTV, are channels from Shantou stations.

To conclude, descriptions of economic activities and social organizations in the village in this chapter strongly imply the importance of family in economic and social life in Lower River which will be discussed in more detail next chapter. As the unit for organizing major productive activities, the central position of family in Chinese rural social system has become even more apparent since the dismantlement of the collective system. The interfamily relationships rather than presupposed social organizations should therefore be the focus of study if one is to apprehend the current pattern of social life in rural China. On the other hand, due to the steady impingement of outside world on the village, as well as the villager's positive integration with the larger social world furnished by villagers' great effort in the last decade to seize opportunities for family socioeconomic development provided by the

general economic and political environment in the country during the period, it is evident that the village is not a bounded community any more, if it ever was. It is for these reasons that I propose in this thesis the concept of “family network”. I shall hereafter concentrate on the nature of family network and, with it, the way of social life in Lower River.

# Chapter 3

## Fabric of the Family Network

This chapter is devoted to describing some general features of the social networks of families in Lower River, and as such to provide a base for discussions of patterns of interaction, utilization and mobilization of social relationships in the following chapters. Features of family – the basic unit of many social systems and the unit of social network here are firstly identified. Then the structural characteristics of family networks in Lower River are examined.

### 3.1 The family in Lower River

Family, *jia* or *jiating*, is currently the basic unit of social and economic life in rural China. It is a unit consisting of members related to each other by blood, marriage or adoption, and having a common budget and common property (Lang 1946: 13). Family may be the most important centralized institution in rural China nowadays, by which sex and age groups are articulated in the main divisions involved in labour and administration. Ties outside the family would exist in form of a network of relationships. It has been recognized that the anchorages of families, and the networks formed by marriage and kinship, rather than other institutions, are the basis on which at present the Chinese rural society functions. Since this study is designed mainly to see the interfamily social relationships functioning in the context of a village community and beyond, the relations within the family will not be regarded as important in the study, or, if they are included, they will be treated as attributes of the research unit rather than as an independent arena of research. On the other hand, unlike many other studies where family inevitably leads to more complex social organizations such as lineage, this study will treat the family as an independent

entity in a “family network”, a quasi group of families which are related together by bonds of blood, affinity and friendship or whatever, cutting across the traditional boundaries of the descent group and/or village.

Before proceeding to this network, let me firstly look at some features of family in the village which I think will help in understanding the characteristics of the network and the nature of interactions going on in it.

### 3.1.1 Jia and hu

Family (*jia* or *jiating*) and household (*hu*) are two different concepts in sociological literature where one is based on kinship (How are people related?), and the other on propinquity (Who lives with whom?), and the two units need not necessarily overlap all together. Theoretically, people can live together without being kin; and they will remain kin when they live apart. For instance, those in military service and in school are family members but not necessarily household members.

However, difference between “family” and “household” in China especially in rural area is not as sharp as in other societies. This may be clearly seen in their linguistic meanings. In the Modern Chinese Dictionary, *jia* refers to, besides other derivative meanings, two basic meanings: 1) a family; 2) the place where a family lives, that is, home;<sup>1</sup> while *hu* has two basic meanings as well: 1) windows of a house; 2) the household (this may already be a derivative of the first). Thus we see the two terms in Chinese are very close in meaning, even though the former has a wider connotation and there is a tendency of preference in certain contexts. For instance, since *jia* is more general in meaning (cf. Fei, 1939; Cohen, 1976), sometimes

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<sup>1</sup>It is very interesting to note that no one so far tries to interpret the concept of “jia” to ordinary people in China in terms of its meaning as “home”. I think an inquiry from this direction should be very interesting. The fact that, unlike people in the western society, Chinese use the same word to refer both to “family” and to “home” at the same time is quite suggestive. These two words, in other societies, may not be quite the same, although they are obviously related. However, for the Chinese, a home is a *jia*, and so is a family; where there is a home, there is always a family, or vice versa. This may well explain the social and symbolic significance of *jia* in Chinese society. “Home” is a general concept that covers anything from a house to an area of location which in turn can be a village (home village), a town (“hometown”), or even a county (frequently expressed as the “motherland”). This “spatial” expansion of *jia* is paralleled by the “social” expansion of it. Fei (1948) once pointed out that Chinese concept of family, *jia*, was able to include anything from the conjugal family to a large group of people. The usage of *jia guo* in the past indicates that the family was traditionally linked to the whole of the country. On the other hand, affiliation of Chinese toward both their “families” and their “homes” may help to explain why the ideology of kinship on which the *jia* is based was so crucial both to the society and to the individuals in it.

people prefer to use the term household to specify the unit whose members share a common budget, and usually live together. Government documents often use household for the same specific reason. The *hu* has formally been treated by the Chinese authorities as the basic unit for tax and social control in Chinese rural areas since the imperial times. The villagers themselves too usually treat household as a unit in most social and ceremonial activities.

In the present administration system in rural areas in China, the basic means of social control is the *hukou pu* (household register) system in which each household has a separate page (or pages) in the household register of the village. The household register record book is specially made and provided by the higher level of authority. It lists the name and social characteristics of every household member, including the name, date and place of birth, sex, relationship to the head of the household, class status designation (which was set in the time of the land reform in the 1950s and inherited from father), occupation, marital status, and always a column of "others" to include other necessary information not listed in the above columns.

There is a cadre in the brigade, normally the brigade's statistician, who takes care of making and keeping the records. The quality of the records to some extent is determined by the sense of responsibility of the cadre. Normally the cadre is expected to take notes of any change of a household in the village on the records. When a child is born, or a daughter-in-law is married into the household, the name and other social characteristics are added in the appropriate place on the page(s). When a daughter marries out, it is entered in the record, probably with a note of her new place of residence. The same thing is done in cases of other migration of the household or members of it, which is quite limited in the current social system. Examples are going to college, or the whole household moving out of the village to live in a town or city. When households separate, a new page is created for the new household. The name and other information of those who are no longer members of the old household are crossed off the page, or omitted in the new record made in the next year.

The household record is a formal document of the village for various socio-economic purposes in the countryside, such as paying taxes, public security, and birth control. For example, the statistician is obliged to report any change of the village population to the public security office in the *Xiang* government every year, and, with the tightened population policy in rural China in recent years, to the birth control office every month on top of that. Therefore, the record is both a general guide and a very useful data source for population and family structure in the village.

When I was in the field, I used a lot of the information provided by the household record of Lower River village both as basic data and as source for further inquiry.

Although household may in theory include temporary residents such as relatives or servants in addition to the members of the family, it is rarely the case in rural population nowadays. No additional people in Lower River's families. A *hu* is almost always a *jia* in the village, as in the case of Hsin Hsing (Gallin, 1966: 137). The only difference is the *hu* is officially registered at the village and *Xiang* public office and as such is considered the official tax unit. In this thesis, therefore, "family" and "household" are used interchangeably in most places. If there is any difference in their usage, it is because I use "family" where kinship is important and "household" when an independent economy is stressed.

### 3.1.2 Types of family in the village

Families in Lower River village fall into different categories determined by their structure horizontally and vertically.

Most Chinese scholars of family structure at present adopt the typology proposed by Fei Xiaotong (e.g. Pan & Pan, 1982). There are four types of family in Fei's scheme (Fei, 1982) : Type I consists of incomplete nuclear families (*buwanzheng de hexin jiating*), in which one of the spouses has died or otherwise absent, or in which unmarried orphans live together. This type of family is unstable and considered abnormal; Type II consists of living units formed by one couple and their unmarried children which are equivalent to Western nuclear families (*hexin jiating*) which in China are generally called "small family" (*xiao jiating*); Type III, or enlarged families, includes nuclear families plus other members who are unable to live alone, usually a widow or widower living with children after a spouse has died but sometimes more distant relatives or even unrelated persons; Type IV, or joint families (*lianhe jiating*), is made up of married children who continue to live with the parents' unit. These are sometimes called two-tiered nuclear families. If married brothers do not set up independent households, then they become a joint unit of related nuclear families. In the past, this type of family was generally termed the "large family". This scheme very much resembles O. Lang's (1946) conjugal, stem and large families except Fei treats the uncompleted nuclear family as a separate type.

If one accepts in addition the notion of Cohen (1976) that a family has three elements: members, property and economy, this classification of family structure

basically developed some fifty years ago (Fei, 1939) is still able to cover the wide range of family types at present. However, if one considers the effect of *fen-jia* especially the transfer of authority in the process, it is necessary to make some adjustment.

As has been indicated in the introduction of this thesis, one of the advances in the studies of social structure since the Second World War has been the endeavour to introduce the time dimension into the conceptualization of social systems. In the area of kinship studies, the work that most outstandingly represents this advance is the notion of a “developmental cycle” in the domestic group (Goody, 1958). It can be summarized as that domestic groups grow, change and dissolve with the growth cycle of (the effective minimal) lineage, and a particular elementary family is just an episode in this cycle which therefore should be examined as a process, and that at any given time we find domestic groups at every stage of development in a community. This notion was later adopted by Myron L. Cohen in his study of Chinese family structure. The conventional family categories of conjugal family, stem family and joint family became stages of a developmental cycle in which the event of *fen-jia* was a critical point (Cohen, 1970;1976: 57 ff).

This study follows the above trend. On the basis, an effort has been made to try to re-classify the Chinese family. On top of the three elements of family suggested by Cohen, I add authority structure as one more criterion to the classification. I think authority in Chinese family is as important as other elements such as *jia* estate. In other words, who is the *jia zhang* is not only the question of who has a final say in any decision making within the family, but also a question of who represents the family to the outside world on most occasions. In this study, as I will explain in the following, since *jia zhang* is usually taken by the villagers as a reference point to decide the kind of relationship the family has with other families in the network (of course, there are other ways of reference determined by the need in the context), the symbolic position of *jia zhang* is of particular significance. In Lower River area, this is often expressed by referring to a given family with the name of its *jia zhang*. The transfer of the authority of *jia zhang* from the father to his sons in *fen-jia*, as it will be clear in the next chapter, symbolizes both changes in family structure and changes in its relations with other families. Based on the above argument, I propose the following scheme of family type in Lower River area: conjugal family, extended family and three generation stem family. A family is always in the process of developmental cycle of these three types in a direction from conjugal to extended to stem, and from either the latter two back to the first.

Conjugal family here is defined, like others, as a married couple with their unmarried children in which the husband is normally the *jia zhang*. When one or more of the sons of the couple get married, it develops to the next stage, the extended family. Note that structurally the extended family can contain the conventional joint family when more than one son has been married and there has not yet been *fen-jia*. The authority structure in the family does not change before the event of *fen-jia*. The father is still the *jia zhang*. After *fen-jia*, his authority as the *jia zhang*, together with other resources of the family, slowly transfers to his sons in the process of setting up their own families and social networks. *Fen-jia* in effect changes parents from powerful figures to be dependents of their sons' families. One possibility of an extended family after *fen-jia* is to become a three generation stem family. This is a family form that contains a married couple and their unmarried children, plus one or two aged parents of the husband. Note that now the *jia zhang* is no longer the aged father although symbolically he is still in a prestigious position. Lang (1946: 14-15) has noted that

In China the stem family is not infrequently a reduced joint family. Some of the married sons break away from their parents after having stayed with them in a joint family; one of the sons and his wife and children continue to live with them until their death. But often the Chinese stem family is also an enlarged conjugal family... A Chinese conjugal family which has only one son is enlarged when the son marries and brings his bride home, without being even temporarily separated from his parents.

Stem family, therefore, in most occasions does not lie in the place between the joint family and conjugal family in a developmental cycle, as some scholars tend to believe (Cohen 1976: 69). I will return to the institution of *fen-jia* in the next chapter.

At the end of the year 1990, the family structure in Lower River was as follows. Of the 867 families in Lower River village, there were 547 conjugal families which included at most a couple and their dependent unmarried children. This was 62.96 percent of the total families in the village. The figure included a few broken families and so called one person families. The remaining 321 families in the village were 171 three generation stem families including a conjugal family with one or both living, aged parents (or grand parents) of the husband; and 150 families composed of a couple with married and unmarried children living together, usually only one son is married. It is extremely exceptional for a family to have one couple and more than one married son, i.e. the so called "large family" or "joint family". All these are

Table 3.1 Family structure in Lower River (1990)

	Number	Percentage
Conjugal family	547	63
Extended family	150	17
Stem family	171	20
Total	867	100

summed up in table 3.1.

This is quite compatible to the finding of the Potters in Guangdong province where the figure of conjugal families is 60 percent of the total number of families in the village, and the patrilineal stem families (includes the latter two types here) is 25 percent (Potter & Potter, 1990: 217). If we consider the average size of the family in the village, 4.78 person per family, this is very close to 4.84, the figure Chen and others find for the Chinese history since the Han dynasty (Chen & Lai, 1980). The idea that large family was actually not the most common form of family structure seems to be further confirmed in this case.

The typical family in Lower River is thus a couple with two or three unmarried children, or a couple with one or two unmarried children and one or both aged parents of the husband. However, there are a few large families in the village. The largest family is in Front House hamlet. Its head is named He Guoyin. His family has 19 members, including the family head and his wife, seven sons and two daughters, the wife and two sons and two daughters of the eldest son, the wife and one son and one daughter of the second son. Recently the third son got married and the elder daughter married out. People in the village told me that relationships in this family were very good. Admiring attitudes of the villagers toward large families as such and the fact that He Guoyin's family is one of the "model families" in the village indicate that a large family, though usually hard to find, remains the ideal in the rural community today.

### 3.1.3 Some features of families in Lower River

There are basic features common in all types of family in Lower River. They are described as follows.

All the members of the family live under one roof, except for a few who may work outside temporarily to supplement the family income and therefore live away

from the village. The most familiar people of this kind in China are the sojourners who work as temporarily hired labour in towns and cities. In Lower River, these people are not considered extraordinary, since a lot of villagers who work in large fishing boats or in water transport are normally absent from their homes for weeks or even months many times in the year. A few college students from the village who study and later work in the city are, however, regarded as a different case. They are different both because their social status has been changed from a villager to an official (*ganbu*), and because they are to be separated from “home” to live in the city. Even so, before he sets up his own family and settles down outside permanently, a person as such is still considered part of the *jia* of his parents, though he is not part of the official household, *hu*. After he gets married, he is still closely tied to hometown. When he comes back to “home” occasionally, he is treated as a member of the “home family”. This example indicates how important *jia* (both family and home) is in the mind of the Chinese, as I mentioned above.

Family has long been a basic socioeconomic institution in Lower River. “The *jia* is in theory supposed to function as a single cooperating unit in all of its activities – economic, social, religious, or any of the other areas of daily living. Therefore, all property – land, house, farm equipment, and general household furnishing – belong to the *jia* as a whole” (Gallin, 1966: 138). Other than the family, there is at the moment no clear and stable corporate group (except the official villagers’ committee and the Party branch), although cooperation of various forms in many areas of social and economic activities do exist among close kin families in the village. As a basic economic unit, family in Lower River demonstrates a clear labour division in terms of sex and age. Men in the village work as main earners in fishing, prawn growing, water transport, or business, while women work on family land to supplement family necessity such as planting peanuts, sweet potato, and growing vegetables for human as well as domestic animals. Housework is women’s work. Very few men will help their women to do the housework even though they have nothing to do in the spare periods from their own work. Women also have to care for their children. If there is an old grandmother in the family, this will usually be her job. In a large family, the boring housework can be shared or rotated by several women in the family. This is one of the advantages of a large family. Of course, the greatest advantage of a large family lies in its ability to have a diversifying economy in order to create sufficient wealth to be socially prestigious in the village.

As a basic social unit, family members in Lower River show their sense of unity when interacting with others in various social activities, even though there is a clear differentiation of authority in terms of gender, generation and age within the family.

This point is particularly important in studying interfamily relations and social interactions in rural China. Male domination remains the norm in the patrilineal system in Chinese rural areas like Lower River. The oldest male in the family normally serves as family head (*jia zhang*), and the status of son is usually better than that of daughter. In the village, the family head represents the family not only in name in the governmental register, *hukou*, but also in reality in various important village affairs such as village rituals, the decision meeting concerning village affairs, marriage feasts, and in dealing with other families in daily life.

But it is necessary to point out here that this does not mean that only family head represents the family. Other members of the family also act as representatives of it whenever they interact with others. Two examples may well explain this point. The daughter-in-law in a family, in theory, represents the interests of her husband's family (in fact, her "own" family) when she returns to her natal family. When she marries out, she becomes a member of the other's (her husband's) family. "Out-marrying daughters are water thrown away" is an old saying. Local people often use the term "thief" to describe an out-marrying daughter. She is believed to have been trying to take anything she can from her natal family to her "own" family. This is, of course, not always true. There are examples of a daughter-in-law trying to use resources of the family she married into to support her natal family. And in reality, she may feel closer to her natal family. But these often result in an ambivalence in *ganqing*. Probably a more clear example is children in dispute. One might feel like laughing at first when I say children represent their respective families when they are playing together. However, if one thinks a bit deeper, he will admit that children do represent their families when dealing with other children. It is easy to notice that the position of a boy in his playing group is to a large extent determined by the relative social status of his family in the village. Moreover, disputes among children frequently lead to disputes among adults of the concerned families. A lot of examples of this can be found in Lower River, and, in fact, any village in the area.

## 3.2 Types of social relationship

Bruce Jacobs may be the first who tries to systematically classify Chinese *guanxi* types. Based on field data in Matsu township of Taiwan in 1970s, Jacobs establishes a scheme with nine types of *guanxi*. They are *guanxi* established on locality, kinship, co-worker, classmate, sworn brotherhood, surname, teacher-student, economic, and public *guanxi* bases (1979, 254).

The problem with Jacobs's *guanxi* typology in the first impression is that the categories in it are not mutually exclusive. For instance, all the other categories except sworn-brotherhood can be kinship at the same time, i.e., kinship is able to include the other categories in the typology. So are many other categories in the scheme. More difficulty, it seems to me, rises from its exclusion of friendship from the scheme. Most scholars dealing with Chinese social relationships would regard friendship as a very critical *guanxi*. Yet even Jacobs himself admits that "numerous friendships exist" in Matsu township. The reasons he gives is that: friendship occurs as a result of fairly sustained social interaction. However, this interaction is of a particular kind, because a) the term friend cannot be applied to agnates and affines; b) friends almost invariably are of similar social status; c) friends are often of the same age and sex; d) friends tend to have similar inclination and values. He notices that most Matsu friendships tend to develop in school, the military, during work or during evening when villagers relax and chat in a shop or someone's home. In Matsu, thus, "friendship is not a true *guanxi* base. Rather a *guanxi* base such as classmate, coworker, or fellow-villager seems a prerequisite to the establishment of friendship" (ibid, 255-256). Nevertheless, even if friendship is not a true *guanxi* base, it still can not account for why friendship is not a type of *guanxi*, since according to Jacobs *guanxi* base is only one element of *guanxi* rather than the *guanxi* itself, and more significantly, since the Chinese themselves see friendship as a kind of *guanxi* – according to Jacobs, people in Matsu "occasionally" use the term "friendship *guanxi*" (*peng-you guanxi*) (Jacobs 1979: 256).

Hence, in this thesis, I would instead treat friendship as a significant part in a family's social network. The reason for this is that friends are chosen, and usually cover a larger geographical area than kinship or other social relationships in China, which makes them stand out as important in the purposeful manipulation of social relationships. Friendship opens out a new arena of social resource for potential utilization out of kinship, and I would suggest that more friendship can be found in the *guanxi* network of a more successful family in rural China. The significance of friends will be demonstrated in chapter five.

Chiao (1982) once distinguished generally in China 12 kinds of *guanxi*: kinship, locality, schoolmate, co-worker, shared hobby, *shijiao* (inherited relationship of friendship), old superior, old subordinate, teacher, student, same political faction, and finally, acquaintance. This scheme is quite confusing. In the first place, the author seems to confuse social relationship itself with the actors who form it. Although those who formed the social relationship themselves may see it differently, or their relative status in the relationship may not be the same – such as those

in a vertical relationship of teacher and student or superior and subordinate, they form just one relationship rather than two. Hence, the distinctions between the old superior and old subordinate, and that of the teacher and student, as different types of *guanxi* are rather unnecessary here. Of course, it is of no less analytical power to categorise *guanxi* in term of the related actors. However, in such case, kinship cannot be taken as one category. It should go to, say, father, son, uncle, nephew,... etc. As the result, the typology is not only 12 types, but more than that.

Following the arguments of Cohen (1974) and Lomnitz (1988), social relationships in Chinese society, and perhaps in other societies as well, I think, can be divided into two general categories: 1) the formal relationships, referring to those relationships between people in the context of a well-organized bureaucratic system such as *danwei* and the like, e.g. a superior-subordinate, or teacher-student, relationship, in which theoretically no personal sentiment and gift transaction are involved, where the actors are supposed to act in accordance with a set of impersonal, formalized rules specified in the context, and subjectively regard the relationship as “formal”; 2) informal relationships such as friendship, which are social relationships between people outside the context of bureaucratic systems where personal sentiment and gift transaction are involved, where the actors subjectively take the relationship as “informal”, and their interactions are based on, relatively more personal and flexible, rules of reciprocity. This dichotomy may only be made on a theoretical level. They are difficult to distinguish in practice where formal and informal social relationships tend to be intermingled with each other. For instance, in the *danwei* in China, friendship can be developed out of the formal relationships of colleagues even between superiors and subordinates, or a superior official in the same work unit may be at the same time a relative, while kinship may be formal in such contexts as rituals and ceremonies where generation and seniority are often particularly emphasized and informal in other occasions of social encounter in daily life.

The field of this study is mainly concerned with those informal relationships. When a formal relationship such as superior-subordinate is involved, what is considered to be important is not the formal statuses of the two parties, but rather the informal sphere supposedly existing between them out of the formal context, based on kinship or friendship or whatever. In other words, in such context, behavior is preoccupied not by the rules of formal bureaucratic statuses but by informal rules of kin or friends (*ganqing*, *renqing*, *bao*, etc.). Again, the distinction is only possible at a theoretical level. It is very difficult to tell when and where the actors are preoccupied by formal rules or informal rules, and I do not intend to deny the possibility of intersection between the two in reality. The assumption here is that they may

be separated and used by the actors themselves when the separation is required. This distinction between formal and informal relationships, and hence their different rules of behavior, is critical to understanding some patterns of social interaction in *guanxi*, especially for *guanxi* manipulation where one's decision to behave in two alternative ways, either being "formal" (distant) or "informal" (close), is vital for other party's effort to exercise the relationship.

One further distinction in the informal category here can be made between kin and non-kin based on the existence of blood or affinal relationship or not, which can be loosely categorized into two types of informal relationships, kinship and friendship respectively. Kinship is the relationship based on reproduction and marriage. Kinship in China can further be divided into agnatic and affinal kinship. There are two terms used by people in Lower River area, *qin-ren* and *qin-qi*, to refer agnates and non-agnates respectively. *Qin-ren* are patrilineal kin in the village, most frequently referring only to those in the same close kin group (*fang*) or its subgroups. Sometimes it is also used to include more distant kin in the village, or even extended to refer to those of the same surname in other villages, depending on the specific contexts when the term is employed. However, it is worth pointing out here that *qin-ren* always excludes the patrilateral cross cousins within and beyond the village, which belong to the category of *qin-qi*. In a sense, *qin-qi* includes all the rest of kinship that are not in the category of *qin-ren*. Besides the patrilateral cross-cousins, it also includes matrilineal kin, relatives from wife's side, from families of sons-in-law and of daughters-in-law.

Friendship in this study is the informal relationship beyond kinship, based on shared experiences. It can also be further divided into several categories. Here we can adopt some of the ideas in Jacobs's *guanxi* base concept, such as classmate, co-worker, common economic and social practices, ... etc.

This dichotomous scheme may have some difficulties in handling such relationships as teacher-student, and the old superior-subordinate or patron-client, which are sometimes relevant to the informal contexts, and which obviously cannot be included in the kinship category, or the friendship category if the conventional definition of friendship as a kind of relationship between those people with approximately same social statuses is accepted. I intend to tackle the problem in this study by assuming that what is relevant in these relationships is their sphere of "friendship". Of course, here the term friendship should be used as a more general term to include both horizontal and vertical relationships, at the same time keeping in mind their differences. Another question is that, even so, there are people who are neither kin

nor friends, but may have some other relationships among them, e.g., the sworn-brotherhood. I shall consider it as a special kind of friendship, though it has a clear quasi kinship character. As for other relationships beyond kinship and friendship as defined above, they are not informal relationships and hence not in the area of this study. We assume that informal relationships always have a kind of personal affection, which in Chinese terms is *ganqing*.

One of the technical difficulties in practical situations is whether there is friendship among members of a single surname village like Lower River where everyone is supposed to be agnatic kin. But one can observe that some villagers have close relationships with each other although they are relatively not close in genealogical terms. This is particularly obvious among play groups of young people and children. In Lower River, children's play groups to a great extent are composed of children of same sex and similar age. Since they usually live near each other, they are therefore most frequently close kin, such as children of brothers, or of patrilineal first cousins. However, some children's play groups also include those who are neighbors but not close kin, at the same time exclude those with relatively close kin. They may be schoolmates who attend the same class. Relationships developed in children's play groups can become very deep and may last into adulthood. When the close relationship in childhood is brought into adulthood, it often involves close cooperation in economic and social life. For instance, business partnerships in fishing, water transport or prawn growing may be developed among them. They involve as well a lot of interactions (*laiwang*) in daily life. An example of such kind of group is given in chapter five.

In cases such as these, one can say that the same people are at the same time kin, friends, neighbors, or others. But I would clarify relationship like this into kinship category while maintaining that kinship alone does not determine the closeness of *ganqing* and pattern of *laiwang* (see chapter five and subsequent chapters for examples). Friendship in this thesis, as people of Lower River would do, refers only to relationship of people without blood relationship. In Lower River, since everyone in the village is related to others by kinship, this means that friendship is a relationship with outsiders.

As a consequence of this definition, it is not surprising to see in the following that there are not many friends in an ordinary family network in the village, since there is not much chance as well as resource for a villager to meet and make friends beyond the boundary of village. A related point to this is that not every family in the village has friend relations in its social network. Friends of Lower River villagers

largely result from either people coming from outside to work in a *danwei* (e.g., Meiling Hospital, the schools, Credit Cooperative, Supply and Marketing Cooperative, *Xiang* Government) based in the village or nearby areas (such as doctor Zhou in the example given in chapter five), or the villagers going outside to work or do business. These people thus represent a kind of vital resource for the villagers in certain contexts for their positions and their ability to reach other people in various governmental offices. Despite their limit in number, they are a critical factor in the economics and politics of the village community. I shall give some examples in the following chapters.

A special form of friendship is sworn brotherhood, *tong nian* in the local dialect. Unlike other kinds of friendship which use no formal rituals to announce their establishment, there is a formal ritual in the Lower River to mark the establishment of a sworn brotherhood. On the other hand, sworn brotherhood in Lower River is also quite different from sworn brotherhood in Kaixiangong (*xiao xiong di*) (Fei, 1939) and in Hsin Hsing, Taiwan (*jie bai xiong di*) (Gallin, 1966: 172). They are established in late teens or early twenties to form a group of nonkin to help each other in any emergency and to cooperate in many of the ordinary chores of life. For instance, when there is birth of child or death of parents, sworn brothers band together to render assistance “above and beyond that expected of ordinary villagers” (Gallin, 1966: 172). But sworn brotherhood in Lower River area (*tong nian*) is an individualistic relationship and is most frequently established in childhood and early teens. The relationship is always with nonkin, hence people from other villages for a single surname village like Lower River. It is always a dyadic relationship of two persons (boys). Normally one can only have one sworn brother in his life. If he has more than one, they must have been established in different periods of life with different people normally without any connection with each other. Since a sworn brother in this area is in fact chosen by parents, the sworn brotherhood relationship, like other relationships concerned in this study, is in the first place a relationship between families.

The family nature of sworn-brotherhood may well be seen from its establishing ritual. The establishment of the relationship is usually very formal and it often turns out to be a family ceremony. In Lower River, it involves both sides accompanied by their parents to other’s home to perform a ritual of worshipping family ancestors and local gods. The ritual is to inform the ancestors and local gods the relationship to be established and to pray for their blessing on the two boys. There are some cases in the area in which the sworn brotherhood is established by the concerned persons themselves in adulthood. In such cases, however, it may not be treated as

formally and seriously as are those which are established by their parents. Once a sworn brotherhood relationship is established, it is usually very close. There is continuous and intensive interaction between the two families. In the Lower River village area, it is not surprising if someone says that he feels much closer with his sworn brother than with most of his close kin, sometimes even his real brothers. The important position of sworn brother in many rituals such as marriage and death in the area to a great extent supports this opinion.

### 3.3 Basic characteristics of family networks

Having defined the types of social relationships in Lower River, we are now in the position to identify some basic characteristics of family networks in the village.

#### 1. Kinship as the dominant relationship

Based on the above definitions of social relationships, it is not surprising to see the first characteristic of a family's network is that kinship is the predominant relationship in it. Kin form the most intimate and important *guanxi* in an ordinary family's social network in Lower River. This may be generally the case in other single surname villages in the country like Lower River when all the members of the village are kin in various degrees of intimacy or closeness, and when kin are at the same time neighbors, workmates, same group of worshipping and recreation, which in the western society are differentiated components of a social network.

We observe in the following the composition of a poor family's social network in Lower River village as revealed in a serious incident caused by a strong typhoon.

He Shuangzhi, age 58, has a family of six persons: himself, his wife, two sons and one daughter, and his aged mother. It was one of the poorest families in the village when I was there. I was told that the family was always one of the receivers of relief projects held by the village or the *Xiang* and county authorities. Shuangzhi has a physical handicap, lame in one leg, and cannot do strong physical work such as fishing, which had put the family in a very disadvantageous position especially since the decollectivization of the late 1970s. Much more than that, his elder son has long been mentally ill. To cure his illness, the poor family has spent over 3,000 RMB on him, bringing him to the hospital in Zhangzhou city several times in the past years. But the effort did not make him recover. He instead becomes more serious and violent, chasing and beating any person he meets when he is upset. I was told that all the other members of the family have been beaten by him. The

patient has become a threat to the family members and the neighbors. There is no other way than to tie him in the room by a strong chain. The main income source of the family in recent years has been from his 18 year old second son, fishing with his small bamboo boat. The boat is poorly equipped, with not enough fishing nets, so the catch is normally very small.

However, bad luck never leaves this family. A typhoon on September 14, 1990, one of the strongest and seriously damaging in the year, ruined their only house. After the incident, with support of the villagers' committee and the Party branch, the newly-formed old men's committee in the village campaigned to raise money in Back House hamlet for the miserable family to build a new house. From the records kept in the village headquarters I had the names and amounts of money people gave to the family. Besides the 200 *yuan* RMB given by the village government and another 200 *yuan* by the cadres of the village, 260 people representing their respective families in the village donated money to make a total sum of 1,250.5 *yuan* RMB and 120 *jin* of rice. Among them, 1 gave 100 *jin* of unhusked rice, 1 gave 20 *jin* of rice, 1 gave 30 *yuan*, 8 gave 20 *yuan*, 38 gave 10 *yuan* and more, 77 gave 5 *yuan* and more, and 134 gave less than 5 *yuan* RMB.

When I went to visit the family, Shuangzhi told me that he also received support which was not in the record. It came from the close relatives of the family in Lower River and other villages. The former were his younger brother and sister's husband, they each gave 500 *yuan* RMB. The relatives outside the village include another sister's husband of Shuangzhi who brought 100 *jin* rice, the sister of Shuangzhi's wife who sent 200 *yuan* RMB, and his mother's brother's wife who promised to give the stone for the new house's balcony which cost approximately 200 *yuan* RMB at the time. These were in fact all the relatives the family had at the time, as Shuangzhi told me.

With the above help of the relatives, as well as the village government, he quickly built a new house on the site the village government permitted in about two weeks after the typhoon and moved in from the temporary shelter provided by kinsmen in the neighbourhood.

This case was later reported in the regional Party-controlled newspaper, Minnan Daily, as an example for propaganda of the mutual support among the villagers, a spirit always promoted by the Party, entitled "It Is Really Good To Be In Socialism". The number was changed to "415 people donated as much as 4,200 *yuan* RMB within four days in the village" (see Minnan Daily, Nov.15, 1990). This kind of exaggeration in the newspapers is not the subject of the study. What is interesting in this case is

that, of the people who came to the rescue of Shuangzhi's miserable family (among the 260 people in the village, the majority, as I will show in the following, is not considered in Shuangzhi's family network), they are without exception all agnatic and affinal kin of the family. The closeness of their relationships in a sense is indicated in how much they gave in the incident.

The structure of the social network of Shuangzhi's family, which is formed exclusively by kin, should not be seen as an exception, but as rather ordinary in the area of Lower River. According to my experience both from the fieldwork and from more than twenty years living in the area, the social interactions of the vast majority of families in this area are mainly with their relatives within and beyond the village. They have almost no other social relationships except relatives of different kinds. A few families' social networks may be composed of some other social relationships such as friendship. These are usually the families of higher social status in the village. Most of these cases include family members who work as local cadres or officials in other places. However, even in such cases, the larger proportion of the family's social network is still with kin. This will be more clearly seen below.

## 2. The size of family network

Obviously, it will be impossible to tell exactly how large a family's network is without confining it by certain criteria, given that, in theory, every family in the village, in the area, in the county, even in the whole country, has interlocking network relations of this or that kind, directly or indirectly, according to one of the founders of network analysis in social anthropology (Barnes, 1972). In this thesis, as I suggested in the introduction, a link in the family network must satisfy two conditions: 1) it is directly connected; 2) there are frequent social interactions going on between the two sides. These criteria will thus define a family network in this study in theory. In practical situations, we will still face some difficulties caused by the fact that the boundary of a family network is always flexible, being determined by different needs on different occasions. This is especially the case in *guanxi* manipulation. In other words, the family network can be expanded to include any given person who is regarded as useful in certain circumstances, and to exclude the same person in another situation.

Although it is difficult to see the full size of a family network in the village, we are able to estimate it on many occasions. In Lower River, cases of marriage and funeral, or some other important life cycle events such as a birthday ceremony, provide the opportunities to measure the social network of a given family from the number of participants. Some events in the annual festival ceremonials in the

village also provide chances to see a certain proportion, most frequently the most active section, of the family network. Examples of these are the Pingan festival, the birthday ceremonies of the founding ancestor and the Mazu deity, etc. In the ceremonials, relatives and friends in other villages are invited, especially when there is a Chao opera to be played in the event. Among these, perhaps the one that is able to demonstrate the most part of a family's social network in Lower River area is a funeral.<sup>2</sup> The event of a funeral provides the best opportunity to see the size of a family network, because, in Lower River area, unlike other circumstances such as a marriage ritual or a birthday celebration in which the host is able to decide the scale of the event (thus number of relatives and friends to be invited) based on his social status and economic situation at the time and the relatives and friends of the family are able to choose to attend or not, custom in this area obliges all kin and most friends (or their representatives) to appear in the funeral ritual.

When a person is passing away, since members of his/her family are in mourning and are too grievous to do anything, most tasks of the funeral including its preparation are usually carried out by close relatives in the neighborhood who come over to help without being asked. One of the tasks in preparing a funeral is to formally inform all the relatives the family has. This is done in the area by sending the relative a piece of white cloth that symbolizes mourning.<sup>3</sup> When the related families receive the pieces of white cloth and information about the schedule of the funeral, they will come to the funeral. In the Lower River area, a funeral ritual will not be able to carry on without the attendance of, at least some most important, relatives. People who come to represent their families to the funeral will give a certain amount of cash to the host family. The sum is usually determined by the distance of the relationship and economic capability. All the money received and spent is recorded clearly by close kin who help to organize the funeral. The budget of the funeral will be presented to the host. One of the purposes of the record of amounts of cash given by relatives in the funeral is for the host to give an appropriate return in future. Because of this, it is possible for us from the record to estimate the size of the family's social network. The following is an example.

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<sup>2</sup>According to a communication with Professor Shen Guanbao of Department of Sociology in Shanghai University, the best event to detect a family network, from his experience of research in northern and eastern China, is not a funeral but a marriage ceremony, when more kin and friends will show up. I guess this is perhaps due to the different emphasis of social events in different locations in the country.

<sup>3</sup>It seems that friends, who come to attend the funeral, do so without being formally invited. This is indicated from the fact that they do not receive pieces of white cloth as relatives do. Of course, since friendship is maintained through constant interaction, a friend will normally have news of the funeral.

The funeral of Xingzhang's mother, held in July, 1990, was one of the biggest in the village's recent history. Its scale matched the official funeral of He Yaopo held more than a decade ago, who was the CPC deputy of the county in the sixties and was killed by Red Guards in the Cultural Revolution. According to Xingzhang, about 1000 people attended the funeral. In the day, a big feast was held, which had more than 100 tables and costs 22,535.28 dollars RMB including over 7,000 that went on cigarettes and wine and more than 2,000 on prawns.

Perhaps some account of the background of the family will help to explain the scale of the funeral and more importantly the social network illustrated by the event. Xingzhang, born in 1922, the last *baozhang* (village head) of Lower River village in the National Party period before 1949. Thus he belonged to the "four bad types elements" after 1949. However, since he cooperated with the Communists in helping to organize fishermen to support the army in attacking Dongshan Island on the other side of Zhaoan Bay in December, 1949, he escaped the tide of persecution of landlords and local agents of the old Kuomintang authority shortly after. He was relatively well treated by his fellow villagers during the Cultural Revolution period, not only because he did not do any harm to his kinsmen during the time of his headship, but also because he is one of the few educated people of his generation in the village who helped his kinsmen in such things as writing letters, supervising ritual performances and settling disputes. His education and ability in many social activities made the *Xiang* government employ him in mid 1980s when "class background" was no longer a criterion of employment but relationships overseas were emphasized.

He had three brothers and three sisters. One of his younger sisters married in the same village, so did two of his own four daughters. He is the youngest among four brothers. The eldest brother died during the Japanese invasion. This brother's only son is now the head of a food canning factory in the county. The other two brothers moved to Singapore before 1949. They provided a lot of financial help for Xingzhang's family in the last decade, which was crucial for the family to be able to seize every opportunity and become better off quickly at the beginning of the 1980s. Now the family is standing well in the small group of rich families in the village. It has investments in many businesses, such as a store selling all kinds of medicine (Western and Chinese for human beings and for animals), a saw mill with relatives in the village processing timber for building boats and houses, a small workshop in the marketplace making and polishing golden and silver jewellery, and shares of prawn ponds. The first two now belong to his two sons respectively after they married and divided from the family to set up their own. The workshop is in the charge of his third son who has not married yet. He had learned the special skill for

several years, firstly from a teacher in Quanzhou through an advertisement in the local newspaper, but after finding out that he could learn little from this teacher, he was eventually helped by a relative in the county seat who normally would pass the skill to only his own direct descendants.

Xingzhang's mother, died on the 6th of the seven month in 1990 (lunar calendar), at the age of 105 year old. She was the oldest person in the village and in the county. Because of this, as well as the fact that two of her sons were living in Singapore and Xingzhang himself has worked in the Meiling *Xiang* government's Office of Overseas Chinese Affairs for the last couple of years, people from the county's Civil Affairs Bureau and Office of Overseas Chinese Affairs came to her birth day every year. Representatives of such government bodies as the county's and *Xiang*'s People's Governments, the county's Civil Affairs Bureau and Office of Overseas Chinese Affairs etc. not to mention the village authority of Lower River, all came to attend her funeral, bringing "official" flower rings with them.

Xingzhang kindly sent me a list in November, 1991 and I have checked it in subsequent communications between us. Excluding those representatives of various government bodies and the indirect contacts (people who sent money to or attended the funeral through other relationships, such as 85 workers in the food canning factory whom I consider as the contacts of Xingzhang's nephew), I have a list of people who represented their families to attend the funeral. It includes 419 agnatic kin families in the village who gave from less than 10 RMB to 30 RMB, 60 families of affinal kin from Lower River (12) and other villages (48) who gave from 10 to 100 RMB, 2 families from sworn brotherhood relationships giving 60 and 40 respectively, and 52 friends of both Xingzhang and his two married sons (including 15 classmates and 2 colleagues in the *Xiang* office) who gave variously from 5 to 200.

Since the family network is always in the process of changing as a result of both structural change in the family (see chapter four) and change in content and frequency of social interaction (see chapter five), it is difficult to tell exactly the size of a family network. It is only possible to estimate approximately the size in a given period by some events like the above typhoon incident and the funeral. In so doing, however, it is also necessary to note that we cannot simply count all the people who appear in the event as members of family network defined in this thesis. They should be cross-checked with the situation of social interaction in daily social life. Take the example of Shuangzhi's case described previously, among the 260 agnatic kin who gave money in the event, I think most of them (e.g., the 211 who gave less than 10 RMB) should not be automatically taken to be in his family network. In ordinary

daily life, they are in fact not considered as *qin-ren* by Shuangzhi. This also means that these people in turn do not take Shuangzhi as their *qin-ren* either. They have no or very little interaction with Shuangzhi in ordinary day of life. The reason why they gave money in the specific event partly because of mercy, and partly because people organized by the old men committee in the village came to their homes to ask them to donate. The *qin-ren* of Shuangzhi are a small group in the village composed of about 20 to 30 families in Back House hamlet (including his brother's family). They all gave more than 10 RMB (cash or rice) in the event. Their relationships are maintained through relatively frequent social contacts. Therefore, the size of Shuangzhi's family network is very small. It consists of only 4 affinal kin and about 30 agnatic kin, who live within and outside the village.

Similarly, figures in the funeral, in particular the 419 agnatic kin in the same village, should be subject to further classification if we try to establish the size of Xingzhang's family network, though for a different reason. Let us firstly look at the amount of money they gave in the funeral. Among the 419 agnatic kin, 8 gave 30 RMB, 35 gave 20, 18 gave 12 - 15, 163 gave 10, and 195 gave less than 10. If we consider the number of *qin-ren* of Xingzhang, then the meaning of distribution among the 419 people into different categories is clear. According to Xingzhang, the term *qin-ren*, in the village context, usually refers only to those in the same *fang* in the village or even just a branch of it.<sup>4</sup> The *fang* to which Xingzhang belongs at present has 72 families. If excluding the four families of Xingzhang, his two sons and nephew, this figure is close to the sum of first three categories among the 419 people (i.e., 61 who gave over 10 RMB in the funeral). Thus it seems appropriate to exclude all the 195 people, who gave less than 10 and whose names and exact amount of money did not appear in the list Xingzhang sent to me, from Xingzhang's family network. They have little social interaction with Xingzhang's family in ordinary days of life. For the same reason, I think the vast majority of 163 people who gave 10 RMB in the event can also be excluded.

In Lower River, beside the affinal kin and friends, normally only those who are considered *qin-ren* in the village, which is usually confined by the boundary of *fang* or even its sub-groups, come to attend the funeral. People in the same *fang* are still considered important because, apart from their frequent social exchanges in other areas, they provide each other help and service in a funeral ritual. Xingzhang's

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<sup>4</sup>It is necessary to note here that *fang* is only used as a reference to a group with relatively intensive social interaction, without its usual meaning of lineage segmentation as in the past. The number of *fang* and their boundaries in the village are in fact the same as that of pre-1949 period. Since there has been no lineage organization after 1949, no new segmentation has taken place.

mother's funeral was one of the two exceptional cases in recent history of the village in which agnatic kin beyond the normal boundary of *qin-ren* were mobilized to attend the funeral ritual.<sup>5</sup> In such a case, the concept of *qin-ren* has apparently been expanded. Why people from other *fangs* in the village came to attend the funeral may have different reasons. Such as, the quasi official nature of the funeral demonstrated in the fact that a lot of official bodies sent their representatives, Xingzhang's sociability and social status in the village and nearby area, and the positive mobilization of social relationships in the event by Xingzhang or people from his close kin families. However, since they do not have frequent social interaction in ordinary life, I will not consider them to be in Xingzhang's family network.

The family networks of Shuangzhi and Xingzhang could be considered as two extremes in Lower River. They represent respectively the networks of a poor family with low social status and of a well to do family with high social status in the village. The networks of following two families are probably more typical because they are closer to the average in the village in terms of family structure and income. The data on their social networks were collected through interviews by the author during the time of the fieldwork.

The first one is the family of Kunbao, age 38, husband of the women's head in the villagers' committee (Xiuming). The family is composed of four persons, Kunbao, Xiuming, and their son and daughter. The main income sources were from prawn farming and a saw mill for timber used in house-construction and fishing-boat building. The annual income of the family in 1990 was about 14,000 - 15,000 RMB. The social network it maintains is made of - the family of Kunbao's parents living with two unmarried sons, the family of his brother, about 50 families of kin of the same *fang*; 7 families of affinal kin in the same village (including those from Xiuming's side, and the families his two sisters married into); 16 families of affinal relatives outside the village, among them, 8 in the area of the peninsula, 7 in Qiaodong *Xiang* and 1 in the county seat. There was no friend in the network with which the family intensively interacted.

The name of the second family's head was Yaojiang, age 44. There were five people in the family: the couple, one son, two daughters. He was the pianist in the opera troupe of the village which was one of the main income sources of the family. He also went out in his spare time to make extra money by repairing articles of daily use in the rural area. The income of the family in 1990 was about 5,000 -

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<sup>5</sup>Another case is the funeral of He Yaopo mentioned above. In the funeral, many people from other *fangs* in Lower River village attended the ritual. People from the nearby He surname villages described in chapter two also sent their representatives to attend the funeral.

Table 3.2 Four family networks in Lower River

	agnatic kin†	affinal kin	sworn brothers	friends	total
Shuangzhi	30	4	0	0	34
Kunbao	50	23	0	0	73
Yaojiang	50	50	5	0	105
Xingzhang	70	60	2	52	184

†All figures in this column are just estimated

6,000 RMB. The social network of the family includes over 50 agnatic kin, 13 affinal kin in the same village, 37 affinal relatives outside the village, and 5 from sworn brotherhood.

The four family networks discussed above could be summarized in Table 3.2. In the table, difference in the size of these family networks is most clearly seen in the different number of linkages in the categories of affinal kin and of friends. The difference of the size of family network is also highly correlated with wealth and social status. On the other hand, it appears that difference in the number of agnatic linkages is decided by the specific *fang* or its sub-branch to which these families belong, given that villagers tend to claim all the people in the same *fang* to be their *qin-ren*, and that in practice most people in the same *fang* are involved in frequent social interactions in daily life. If this is true, then most families in the same *fang* should have quite similar number of agnatic linkages in their networks. However, it will be very wrong to jump to a conclusion that these families in the same *fang* have the same agnatic linkages, because the same people will have different positions in different family networks. In other words, the distance of linkage is different.

### 3. Distance of linkages in the family network

The distance of linkage is a very difficult concept, in the sense that it is usually very subjective and difficult to measure. No convincing objective criterion appears to be available here in its measurement. In a kinship link, the genealogical distance (see below) between two kinsmen seems to be an objective criterion. But a close kin in genealogical terms does not necessarily equal to a close kin in interactional terms in practical situation. Besides, it cannot apply to measure non-kin relationships. Nevertheless, “distance” is a concept that is theoretically important in understanding, and practically useful in handling, the structure of family network and the pattern social interaction and exchange among people in the network.

It is unlikely in general for two families having the same people in their network. Two brothers may have largely overlapping networks, but at least one part of their affinal kinship – the relatives of their wives – would certainly be different. Even if two families have the same other families in their networks, the positions of families in the two networks, i.e., the relative social distance of their linkages to ego family, would never be the same. For instance, the two brothers of Xingzhang in Singapore, their positions in Xingzhang's network (brothers) is not the same as in, say, the networks of his sons or his nephew (uncles), although in the latter case they still remain quite close. If we put the family network in time, a quite similar argument can be reached. That is, distance of the same link in the family network may change in different points of time. The most obvious example is found in villagers' links to overseas relatives. In the first 30 years after 1949, especially during the Cultural Revolution, due to the political constraints, overseas relationships in many people's families were disconnected. People were afraid of its being known that they had a such kind of relationship which would certainly bring troubles to them. However, things have greatly changed in the last decade. Overseas relationships have been positively emphasized in the society. Renewal and re-establishment of them has been encouraged by the authority. There had been no contact, for instance, between Xingzhang and his two brothers in Singapore until the end of 1970s. Once the relationships were renewed, as indicated previously, they became very important for the family's economic development in the last ten years. More examples can easily be found in the daily life of the village. A family or village ceremony, particularly the intensive interaction with other families in the network which it brings, renews and reinforces the existing social relationships. A dispute in the village as the one to be examined in chapter nine, for instance, alters to a great extent the relationships of those who are involved. I will return to this in later chapters.

On the other hand, social networks of different people may have a similar overall structure in terms of social distance. This is easily inferred from the basic fact that anyone has his own parents, close kin, or best friends, although his parents or best friends may not be the parents or best friends of others. As the notion of *cha xu ge ju* (Fei, 1948) suggests, the network of any individual family can be differentiated into different "rings" (categories) in terms of social distance (or *ganqing*), with "closer" kin and friends occupying more "inside" position close to the focusing family, and "distant" kin and acquaintances in the "outside" positions.

Based on certain criteria, it is possible to depict and even quantitatively measure the social distance of each link in the network in a specific time period. In fact, some models of categorizing kinship in this sense have been suggested. For instance,

Boissevain (1974: 47 - 48) divides a social network into different “zones” outside the “personal cell” according to the degree of intimacy, frequency of contact and pragmatic importance of its linkages. They are “intimate zone A”, “intimate zone B”, “effective zone”, “nominal zone”, and “extended zone”. People in different zones can be changed when the above elements change. Wallman (1984: 60 - 62) divides people in a social network into two categories: kin and non-kin, both of which further differentiated into four types. For instance, in the kin category, they are: 1) important relatives who remain close (maybe living near or far away); 2) close contacts of individual family member; 3) relatives with whom you usually have outside contact, e.g. in visiting – casual relationships; 4) kin of those connected with kin – distant relationships. A structural, and in a sense more “objective” in criterion, model is developed by Caplow (1982) in his study of the pattern of flow of Christmas gifts among kin families in America. He divides kinship into the following categories: 1) primary kin, referring to those whose relationship to Ego can be specified by a single term, e.g., father, mother, brother, sister, husband, wife, son, daughter. These terms describe the relationship precisely, and imply co-membership, present and past, in a nuclear family; 2) Secondary kin are those whose relationships to Ego require two of the primary kinship terms for adequate description, such as, father’s father, mother’s brother, or brother’s wife; 3) Tertiary kin, by definition, the relationships are described by three of the primary kinship terms, such as father’s sister’s daughter; and 4) Remote kin, are those beyond the tertiary category. One of the characteristics about this scheme is it does not distinguish, as the conventional does, between consanguinal and affinal kinship (1982: 384).

The most sophisticated but generalized model is no doubt that of Liu Pin-Hsiung, a Taiwanese scholar. It is interesting, therefore I shall introduce it in more detailed. Since the mid 1960s, Liu has published a series of articles in the Bulletin of the Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, reflecting his work in the development of a mathematical model of “genealogical space”, in which a kinship category is defined as “consisting of all egocentric relationships expressible by a given sequence of sex-generalized lineal links, i.e., in terms of parent and child” (Harvey & Liu, 1967: 1). The model has been systematically elaborated in one of his essays (Liu, 1982). The following is summarized from the essay.

In the model, all the key concepts are defined in terms of mathematical language. For Liu, a genealogical space is composed of a basic set (including elements such as a, b, c,...), and one or more structures which are subsets of the basic set. Relation, which refers to “the nature of a pair of entities” in non-mathematical terms, is defined in mathematics as “a set of subsets”. The subsets of relations consist of

“pairs”, such as husband-wife, wife-husband, parent-child, and child-parent. Different relations can be made explicit by a graph. In the graph, individuals are indicated by points and by the way that the point of a parent is put above that of a child, and pairs are indicated by lines. The relation of any two individuals,  $a_0$  and  $a_n$ , can then be defined through the path from  $a_0$  to  $a_n$ , that is, the array of elements  $(a_0, a_1, a_2, \dots, a_n)$ . Since pairs can be reduced to two basic pairs: child-parent, P, and parent-child, C, and the pair of each two conjunct elements,  $(a_0, a_1)$ ,  $(a_1, a_2)$ , ...  $(a_{n-1}, a_n)$ , is either of the two, then the *length of path* is the *steps* to reach  $a_n$  from  $a_0$ . Any kinship type can thus be expressed by an array of P and C: a collateral link may be replaced by ascent to and descent from *lowest common ascendants*, the understood parents, and an affinal link by descent to and ascent from *highest common descendants*, the actual or potential offsprings. For example,

spouse = CP; uncle = PPC; cousin = PPCC;  
and spouse's sibling's spouse = CPPCCP.

By giving each kinship category a numerical designation (e.g., parent = 10; child = 01; sibling = 11; spouse = 0110; cousin = 22 and spouse's sibling's spouse = 012210), Liu is able to establish a mathematical analogy which is able to subject to sum and reduction in mathematical terms. The complicated elaboration of this is irrelevant here, so I do not intend to repeat it. Attention here is focused on the simplest level, his discussion of the length of a path in the model, which I think opens the possibility quantitatively to calculate the social distance of a kinship link in a family network. For instance, in the above, the length of link of a spouse from Ego is 2 steps; an uncle, 3 steps; a cousin, 4 steps; and a spouse's sibling's spouse, 6 steps.

All the above models are interesting and stimulating. At the same time, they all appear to have weakness in certain respect. For Boissevain's and Wallman's models, the criteria are not specific and objective enough, which in practical situations may have difficulties in deciding which category a relationship should be put. For Caplow's and Liu's models, the criterion is clear and specific. But they are unable to deal with distance of friendship. Further, they concern merely the “structural” distance of kinship. In the discussion of network analysis, we have already known that a link also has its “interactional” dimension. Is the structural dimension of a link able to fully reflect the interactional one? The answer is “No”. It has been already noted that, among the kin that are maintained to be active by any family in China, agnatic kin are always many more than the affinal ones in number (Baker, 1979: 23). On the other hand, due to various conflicts in their intensive day-to-day

contact, the overall relations among agnatic kin in the same village are often less close than that of affinal kin in smaller number. In other words, the *ganqing* of latter is better than that of the former. For example, we find in the above two events, the amount of money given by affinal kin is generally more than that of agnatic kin. This is much to do with difference in mode of social interaction between the two categories of kinship which will be discussed in chapter five. Besides the traditional social emphasis on agnatic kinship, the most outstanding point, is that unlike affinal kinship which can be disconnected if the two sides do not feel like each other and thereafter never interact again, agnatic kin in the same village, even if they hate each other, cannot avoid encountering in many contexts.

A more complete scheme of social distance, therefore, should be considered which has both the structural and interactional dimensions of the link, and is able to cover both kinship and other social relationships. The development of a set of criteria for quantitative measurement and techniques of operationalization must, however, regrettably have to be left for further studies, since the current research concentrates on the concept of “family network”, its property and some theoretical issues it raises for the conceptualization of society. Here I just suggest a possible scheme for the distance of linkages in a family network as follows. It divides linkages of a family network into three categories using the amount of cash kin and friends gave in the two events as an indicator. If we take the focusing family as a center, immediately around this center there are a few families which are very close in relationship. In the case of Xingzhang, they are the two families of his married sons, that of his two younger brothers who live in Singapore, and that of his nephew who is the head of a canning food factory. In Shuangzhi’s case, it is his brother’s family, bound together with the family of Shuangzhi by their aged mother. I would call these families as the “core” of the concerned family network. Outside the core, there is a group of a slightly larger number of “close kin and friends”. They are, in Xingzhang’s case, those who gave more than 30 RMB in the funeral, including 8 agnatic kin, 2 sworn brothers, 27 affinal kin and 7 friends (here I exclude the 3 classmates from Taiwan who gave altogether 520 RMB). In Shuangzhi’s case, they are 4 affinal kin and 10 agnatic kin who gave 20 RMB (8 plus 2 who gave equivalent value in rice) in the event. The rest can be taken to be “distant and remote kin or friends”, of which further differentiation is possible.

The criterion, of course, may be subject to question, such as, the amount of money each family gave in the event is constrained by its economic condition, thus it may not necessarily reflect the actual social distance in some cases. However, as a direction, to use gifts in social interaction as indicators of distance should well reflect

the objective nature of linkages. Although the Chinese, and possibly other people as well, like to cover everything in the social sphere with a rose colour, and consider using the amount of cash as a measure of one's relationship to be an insult, on many more occasions, the Chinese also state that good intention should not just stop at one's lips, it has to be "substantialized"; and, good *ganqing* is always expressed by something unique, such as the quality of gifts or the way of interaction. This is the reason why I insist in this study on focusing in the social interaction rather than the structural aspect of network.

I have stressed in this chapter the central position of family in Lower River's socioeconomic life, and classified the social relationships in the rural Chinese community. On the basis, I have identified, in three respects, basic characteristics common to all family networks in the village: they are mainly composed of kinship within and outside the village community, they all have a considerable size in order for the family to maintain its basic social life, and among linkages of the network there is a clear differentiation in degree of intimacy. Of course, differentiation among families in such as the network size and the proportion of non-kin relationships (i.e., friendship) is also evident, of which the comparison between Shuangzhi's and Xingzhang's cases is quite suggestive. Drawing from the above comparison, such differentiation is clearly related to the social status especially wealth of the concerned families. However, to simply use family's wealth to account for all characteristics of family network will be misleading. For example, in the funeral case, the economic capability of the family especially the full support of his two brothers overseas allowed Xingzhang to hold a luxurious funeral for his mother. In a sense, the large social network (more friendship links in particular) reflects the family's level of wealth and thus the amount of resources available in interacting with others. But the large number of people who attended the funeral is not due only to the wealth of the family. We should understand it as part of a series of activities in time. As being indicated by the fact that in local custom the amount of cash each family of kin or and friend gives in a funeral should be carefully recorded in order for the host to return on a similar occasion in future, their attendance and donation of cash to Xingzhang's mother's funeral is due to the local custom and, more importantly, to Xingzhang and other members of his family doing the same on similar occasions before and after the event. This indicates that the exchange of gifts and service among people, or more generally, the process of transaction in daily life, is more important for maintenance of social relationships and for continuity and change of a family network. I will return to this important issue in chapter five.

## Chapter 4

# Division, Marriage, and Kinship in Family Network

As a step toward insight into the structural characteristics of family network in Lower River described in the last chapter, the following chapters intend to look at the origin, maintenance and usage of linkages in the network. It means, first of all, to put the family network in the time dimension, with a notion that family network is in a constant process of changing. The notion of a changing network, which becomes a starting point of the following chapters, is derived naturally from my assumption that the family is the basic unit of social network in a village community like Lower River because family itself is in the constant process of expanding and dividing. The idea of a developmental cycle of family has become well-established and widely accepted due to the outstanding work of some anthropologists such as Goody (1958) in Africa and Cohen (1970, 1976) in China. Based on the work of these scholars, this chapter will focus on the structural change of kinship links in a family network in relation to two critical events of a family's developmental cycle: family division (*fen-jia*) and marriage. They structurally produce most of network links for a family in general – the agnatic and affinal linkages. In Lower River, as will be demonstrated, *fen-jia* is an institution of network division while marriage results in network expansion. Friendship or other relationships, if existed, is the creation of the socio-economic activities of the family members. They are not the inevitably structural outcome of family development but will only be developed through social interactions between individuals in specific contexts. Therefore we see in the village some family networks have friendship while others not, but all have kinship. I will discuss the development of friendship in the next chapter.

## 4.1 Fen-jia and division of a family network

In this section, I will further discuss the custom of *fen-jia* that has already been touched on in the previous chapter, particularly to look at the relationship between *fen-jia* and the division of a family network. *Fen-jia* as a social institution is a key to understand the developmental cycle of Chinese family (Cohen, 1970, 1976). Not surprisingly, its function for the change of a family network basically resembles that for the structure of a family. It ends an old family's network in the mean time creates one or several new networks, if it happens in the focusing family. It serves to duplicate the number and change the nature of linkages if it happens in other families of the network.

### 4.1.1 Fen-jia revisited

Before going into the relations between *fen-jia* and changes in family network in Lower River, it is worth returning to some notions concerning *fen-jia* in anthropological literature directly related to the issues that I am going to discuss below.

Contrary to Freedman's findings (1958: 21) that "as long as at least one of the parents is alive, married brothers are more likely to remain together", family division in the Lower River area, as in Hsin Hsing of Taiwan (Gallin 1966: 144), usually takes place before the death of the old parents. It occurs as early as shortly after the oldest son has married. It is often found extremely difficult for a family to put off the division until all sons have married, not to mention the possibility of holding together after the death of both parents. In an early family division as such, the married son and his wife and children set up their own independent family, while the parents who are often not very elderly, may form a conjugal family with their unmarried children. Thus, for a given family, *fen-jia* may not be, as some scholars tend to believe, an event that just happens at a particular point of the family developmental cycle, and that once it happens, the parents' family is completely divided into several families of the sons. It can happen several times in the same family if the early *fen-jia* did not, as in Lower River it usually does not, include division of the rest of unmarried brothers. In other words, it will take a long time, often years, for the process of *fen-jia* to be completed.

To have a better understanding of the above argument, perhaps we had better start at the original question: what is *fen-jia* ?

Discussion on this question has been traditionally based on an emphasis on the

large family in Chinese society. It has been an agreement among anthropologists since the 1940s to dismiss the idea of large family as a typical hence most popular Chinese family form, and to take it instead as an "ideal" family type that only rich landlords and merchants were able to realize (cf Fei, 1939: 29; Hsu, 1943; Freedman, 1958: 9; Baker, 1979: 2). This is because of the structural difficulties that inevitably lead to internal conflicts and dismantle the large family. For instance, Hsu (1943, 1949) argues that the structure of a joint family should be examined in terms of two contradictory forces: the father-son identification and the husband-wife relation. The former, he believes, is the underlying force to make for a joint family. The latter, on the other hand, is a potential for cleavage in it. If the father-son identification is overwhelming, then the joint family is able to remain in harmony, otherwise separation is bound to happen. Wealth makes some large families of landlords and merchants become practical, whereas conflicts among sisters-in-law will accelerate this process of disorganization of the joint family. Yang (1945: 67), on the other hand, accounts for the family division by the conflicts in in-law relations. He states that conflicts between mother-in-law and daughters-in-law, as well as that of sisters-in-law, are the reason for a joint family to be dismantled. This argument was later echoed by Lin (1947).

For Freedman (1958), the above discussion does not catch the real point, because these conflicts are just expressions of a more fundamental difficulty in the Chinese family. This is economically the rule of an equal share of family property that each son is entitled to inherit after the death of the father. It is the rule that leads to conflicts among brothers which are more often expressed by way of conflicts among women of the family because of traditional patrilinealist values. This economic explanation may be valid on most occasions, as pointed out by Gallin (1966: 142): "There are certain inherent difficulties in the large family form which almost inevitably lead to eventual division of a large family. An insufficient economic base and land scarcity are probably the most common reasons for division. A *jia* may have enough sons to form a large family, but there may not be enough land to maintain a group of several small families, and it may be difficult to obtain the additional land needed for their maintenance." For Gallin, the family's economic inadequacy gives rise to many division forces. "A son, and especially his wife, may come to feel that the other family members are not contributing equitably to the family maintenance and are thus the cause of inadequate family income. These feelings may be based on fact. One son may not be working as hard as the others, and have more children than others, or a son or brother may be absent from the village, leaving his family behind" (ibid).

In the Lower River village area, *fen-jia* is always the result of explicit or implicit intrafamily conflicts. As for questions of conflicts for what, between whom, and scale of conflict, they vary greatly from family to family. However, it seems that the complexity of family division in China can not be reduced to just one economic factor, although it is true that many divisions result directly from conflict of economic interests between brothers. This is proved by the fact that many landlord families in the past, though they had sufficient land and other property, could not prevent their families from division. Other factors such as authority structure within the family, the way of family decision making, etc. are very important as well. For instance, in one family in Lower River the parents have only one son and no other person in the family will dispute with him the family property. But the son, after marriage, decided to divide his family from his parents. The pursuit of young couples for autonomy and independence becomes a more and more important force for family division. In consequence, as I have demonstrated in the last chapter, large families exist as exception, and only for the time being; the conjugal family becomes the predominant form in the area.

In a large family, with a more diversifying family economy, sons carry out different economic activities. Some work in the field or grow prawns, others go fishing or water transport in the sea. Their contributions to the family may vary greatly. With those more able persons demanding more money to spend or more say in the family affairs, their conflict with other brothers and the family head is to a certain degree inevitable.

The rule that every son will get an equal share of family property without accounting their respective contribution to the family income is the underlying factor for many conflicts in the family. This rule in effect makes the older sons in some families see that economically it is not in their best interests to stay with the large family after their marriage. For he will find not only that they are working to help support their younger brothers who are not able to produce anything for the family income and totally depend on the family, but also that their great effort in developing family property will have to be shared equally with their brothers in *fen-jia*. In some other families, the more able brothers, even though younger, may find that they are facing the same situation. Therefore, they will try to have the family division as soon as possible. When their demand for family division is not satisfied, conflicts frequently accompany their reaction. Or they may choose not to conflict openly with other members of the family but to use chances in handling part of family income to snatch some money into their own pockets for their future independent small families. It has been noted that in many cases, these divisive forces

in the family find their expression in forms of conflict between daughters-in-law, or between daughter-in-law and mother-in-law. This is because there is a stronger moral constraint on conflicts of brothers or father and son, regarded as loss of face. Conflicts between daughters-in-law or between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law are considered more acceptable or “legal” because they do not come from the same family and thus there is no ascribed sentiment (*ganqing*) between them. Moreover, local people all understand that these women are not disputing with others in the family for their own interests but for the interests of their husbands and their small family units, and under the patrilineal system in Chinese society, they have an “obligation” to dispute with other women in the family for the interests of own small families.

However, when *fen-jia* will take place is also largely determined by the family head in handling family affairs, including conflicts between brothers and potential conflict between him and older sons when he tries to act as protector of younger sons’ interests under the obligation to bring up all his sons and treat them equally. Ideally, every parent wants to see all his/her sons, and their wives and children even children of their children, living together peacefully and cooperating to develop a common family economy for the good of the whole family. In reality, it has been accepted that the ideal can seldom be achieved. The ideal of a large family and the reality of internal conflicts inevitably put every parent in a dilemma. Parents are always trying to hold the family together for the common good of all sons, while the married sons instead are constantly trying to seek their own economic interest and, equally important, their independence and autonomy. For a specific family, division at a particular point is in fact a compromise of the two forces in the family, with an excuse for the family head that each son will after all work harder and do better for his own small family when he is independent and on his own, which in economic terms is of course better than forcing them together and making them unhappy to work.

The authority of a family head is no doubt a critical factor in the time and form of family division. A strong and authoritarian family head will normally keep the family together longer than a soft one. But any wise family head would have the family divided peacefully before the dissatisfaction of some members develops into an open conflict, or before disputes between its female members become a fighting of male ones (brothers). It is also necessary to note that in the decision of *fen-jia* taken by the family head, close kin of the family often play an important part. They are involved in the matter as a consequence of the family’s internal conflicts, which require its close kin to do the mediation between the conflicting parties. In

many circumstances, the disputing parties, especially the female ones, will turn to the family's close kin for support. This is usually related to a local custom of "telling others the story" by the women concerned after a dispute through telling their relatives the part of story of the dispute that serves best her purpose. "Telling the story" in local community is a mechanism of manipulating the public opinion, and in so doing the fact is often twisted to serve the interest of the speaker. It is widely used by women both in interfamily conflicts and in intrafamily dispute in the village community, as a means of mobilizing support (see chapter eight). The involvement of close kin in the event of *fen-jia* is not limited to listening to the different versions of the same story from the disputing parties and trying to mediate its settlement in the long process of pressuring before the division actual takes place. They also help to reach an agreement in the event of division and serve as witnesses of the division agreement to make sure in future its carrying out especially about the care of the aged parents.

#### 4.1.2 Fen-jia and the creation of a family network

Cohen (1976: 76) once summarized the developmental cycle of a Chinese family in this way: a conjugal family becomes a stem family when one of its son gets married; it will further develop to a joint family if more of its sons have been married and decided to stay together; after the event of family division, this joint family is divided into several conjugal families; and the process of development of these conjugal families will follow the same track again. This is largely true except two points that do not quite fit the situation in Lower River. Firstly, the division of a family is not just an event happening at a particular time, it often takes several stages for the process to be completed. Secondly, the arrangement among the adult sons to support their aged parents may be in various ways, which, on the one hand, is closely related to the actual decision on the way family division will be carried out, and on the other, directly determines the formation of a family network that is created by the division and formed by the separated families after the division. Let me try to elaborate these two points separately in the following.

There are actually a lot of options of division a family can choose. Suppose there is a family newly formed through division, consisting of a couple and three unmarried sons. The developmental process of the family is accompanied by a series of decisions concerning *fen-jia* or not *fen-jia*. The process in theory can be as follows.

1. After the first son gets married, the conjugal family develops to become an extended family. The parents may start to get pressure from the eldest son or his

wife to have the division. Suppose they in consequence decide to have it, then the extended family would become two conjugal families. The married son would form his own family which would then go through its own developmental cycle. The parents would remain with the other two unmarried sons to become a conjugal family (when the second son got married, the question of division would come up again). But more often the parents at this stage will decide to hold the family together, so it goes to the next stage.

2. When the second son has been married, the question arises once again. This time more pressure to divide will be created, especially from the conflicts between the two married brothers and their wives, which usually forces the parents to consider seriously the tradeoff of holding them together and the possibility of division. If they choose to divide the now joint family, the result is possibly three conjugal families, with the two sons having their own independent families and the parents staying with the youngest son. Alternatively, if they successfully mediate the conflicts and decide to stay in the family, it goes to stage 3.

3. When the youngest brother gets married as well, the pressure for *fen-jia* will be greatly increased. This time the parents themselves may positively consider to divide the family responding partly to the pressure from their sons and daughters-in-law, and partly to their own temptation to retire and to rest in peace. At this stage, all three sons married, the parents are considered to be very successful. Even a family division at this stage does not damage their image in the eyes of fellow villagers. If the family is able to stay harmoniously together now, it goes to stage four or five.

4. Division when the parents die. In consequence, the joint family becomes three conjugal families.

5. No division after parents die. The joint family is thus maintained in which the oldest brother is the head.

All the above stages are possible in theory. In reality, examples of the first three can be found, but of the last two there is no example in the Lower River area. In other words, they have currently not been realized. Therefore I conclude that family division in theory can happen at any point in the process of family development, and that the question "Why *fen-jia*?" in fact should be asked in another way: "why *fen-jia* happens in a particular point of family development for a particular family?" This corresponds to a particular belief held by the local people that the division of a family is inevitable eventually, and that people can never keep a family together forever. We find the belief not only in the mind of people, but also frequently

written into the *fen-jia* contract. The reason for family division is very complicated in reality. Any single factor such as economic reason cannot fully explain why family A divides at stage 1 whereas family B has it in stage 3 or even 4 in the above.

In the discussion of when division can happen in the process of family development, an important issue of this chapter (i.e., the relation of *fen-jia* to family network) emerges. This can be summed up as that, *fen-jia* is one institution which leads to the creation of a family network. We can see clearly from the above stages of family development that a family network formed by family of parents and/or of their son(s) is in the process of creation.

When *fen-jia* happens at the early stage, as we see from above, the married son's family is separated from his parents'. But often this separation is not completed. Not only do they frequently interact and help each other in various situations, but they are usually taken by others in the same village to be the same unit. In a sense, they are a family network in its simplest form, with the son's family in subordinate position. When he is short of something, he will go to his parents' place without hesitation. When he is in trouble, he will resort to the parents. Similarly, the parents will call the son for help when they need. Generally speaking, in Lower River, this flow of resources and help between the two families is more from the parents's family to the son's. This observation is confirmed by some relevant studies in other cities and rural areas by Chinese sociologists (Ruan et al, 1990; Pan, 1990).

If the family division happens *after all sons have been married, the conjugal families of the sons effectively form a network. After *fen-jia*, the original family has been divided into several smaller families. Although as its definition, these smaller families are now independent socioeconomic units, and theoretically each brother looks after his own family's welfare, they are often closely bound together especially during the lifetime of their parents who in effect serve as a symbolic center for the family cluster. This is usually related to the arrangement among the brothers of supporting their aged parents.*

In Lower River, the arrangement for the care of old parents will usually take either of the following two forms, if we assume *fen-jia* takes place after all sons married, to simplify the matter. One is that the parents join the conjugal family of one of the sons, thus forming a stem family. Another is that they set up another conjugal family as each of their sons does. In the former, the son who lives with the parents will get a somewhat larger proportion of family property than his brothers in the division in order to care for the parents. More frequently he will receive a fixed amount of money and food from each of the other brothers yearly or monthly

if he did not receive an extra family property in the division. In the latter form, the parents are likely make each of the sons provide a proportion of the food, money and other necessity for their living, or they decide to be fed and cared for on a rotation basis by each son's family. All the arrangement in *fen-jia* about the distribution of family property and the care for old parents must be generally agreed by both the parents and sons. The arrangement is normally recorded in written form in a *fen-jia* contract with the help and witness of closest agnatic and affinal kin (e.g. paternal uncles or great uncles, and maternal uncles). The kin have a responsibility to ensure everything in the contract is carried out as agreed, especially the arrangement of caring for the old parents.

The system of caring and supporting aged parents on rotation basis by each of several sons' families is usually called *lun huo tou* (meal rotation), which has attracted a lot of attention from scholars in Chinese studies (cf Hsieh, 1985). However, the concern here is not for the interesting system of caring for the aged parents, but the family network which is formed on the base of the system.

The question of how to categorize a group of families rotating support of one or both aged parents has puzzled many scholars, especially native scholars, of Chinese family structure for a long time. Some efforts have been made in the past decades. For instance, in 1965, when Wang Sung-hsing went to study a fishing village in a small island of Taiwan, he noticed that there is no joint family in the village. Those who might form a joint family, i.e., the parents and their more than one sons, set up what he called "conditional conjugal family" and "conditional stem family" after *fen-jia*. Why "conditional" ? This was because the families of these brothers did not separate completely. Although the original family of parents no longer existed, and was replaced by the families of their sons, the newly established families of the brothers were still linked to each other by the obligation to support their aged parents by way of meal rotation. In 1970s, Chung Ying-chang proposed the concept of "federated families" (*lian bang shi jiazhu*). In the Taiwanese village where he conducted his study, he found that urbanization had led many young men to migrate to the city. They set up their own small families in the city after marriage. However, the family of their parents was not dismantled at the same time. In fact, he noticed that, although they did not all reside in the same place, these small families of young migrants were closely linked together. With the mediation of the parents, economically they had frequent transactions, and socially they sponsored the social and religious activities in the village. Chung argued that they in effect formed "federated families" centred by the parents. This idea was further advanced later by another Taiwanese scholar, Hsieh Ji-chang, who suggested the "levels" of

a family definition, which is believed to be traceable back to the work of Kulp in 1920s (cf Wang, 1985). He stated that a lower level of family definition was close to that of Lang's *jia*, which is a group of people living under one roof, being linked by kinship and having obligation and right of descent and inheritance. A higher level of family definition was what Hsieh called *jia hu qun jiazu*, a term I find very difficult to translate; loosely it may be "clustering families". He defined it as the unit composed of the parents' original family and independent families of their sons. Both Hsieh and Chung claimed that the clustering families or federated families are variations of a joint family (ibid).

In this thesis, I would rather consider in theory these "federated families" or "clustering families" or whatever as a family network in its simplest form. The creation of this network is by family division. Of course, in reality there are always many other families besides these closest kin families in a network tracing from any one of them. But the intimate kinship links among these families make them the most important part in the network. This is the reason why I called them the "core" of family network in the last chapter. The intensive interaction and mutual support among these families will be discussed in the next chapter. Here I would like to point out that the force to link the sons' families closely together is not just the obligation for them to support the aged parents. The symbolic status of the parents is important as well. We find that after *fen-jia*, parents will still have great authority revealed in their roles as supervisors, consultants and intermediaries of the families of the separated sons. The father maintains a lot of prestige and respect as well, both by their sons and other people around who will habitually consider him symbolic family head (now the leader of the cluster) and go to him should there be any problem with his sons. In one word, the parent helps to tie these families together in two ways: i). As a care taker, helping to do some light work at home and in the field, such as guarding the prawn field, or feeding domestic animals. Parents may help care for the properties of sons' families. The wife would look after the grand children and do the cooking; ii). As a consultant and mediator. The aged parents have wide experience both in economic and social life. The sons would go to consult their old father when they are in trouble. When conflicts happen between the brothers, the old parents become mediators to resolve their differences.

### 4.1.3 Fen-jia and changes of network linkages

In the previous discussion, *fen-jia* was seen in relation to the creation of a family network. I was in fact ignoring the fact that the family concerned had already had

its own social network in existence. Just as family structure changes in the process of family development, social network of the family alters in the same process. In order to complete the picture, here I would start to consider how this network changes in the process of *fen-jia*. In other words, after asking *how fen-jia* takes place, we would have to consider the question: *what* is divided in the process? *Fen-jia* according to Cohen (1970, 1976) involves three dimensions, division of *jia* group, *jia* estate and *jia* economy, which he thinks are the three components of *jia*, the family, in Chinese society. Recently, some Taiwanese scholars have criticised Cohen by pointing out that, *fen-jia* is a long process rather than a point in time, and what is divided is not just the above three elements. For instance, it may also include division of ancestral tablets of the family (cf Peng, 1988). Here I would like to demonstrate that *fen-jia* also involves another dimension that was not mentioned before. This is division of the family's social network, which is a long, slow process, and to some extent, closely related to Cohen's three dimensions.

The division of family network is a long process. When a man is born, he automatically becomes an actor of the existing social network of the family. We can certainly say that in theory at the time he was born, he had a social network of himself if we take an individual as the unit of network analysis. However, in this study, in order to make the matter simpler, I assume that the basic network unit is a family (thus between two families there is only one link rather than more) and the family head represents the family to the outside. So it follows that before he gets married and his conjugal family becomes an independent household in which he has the authority to make decision, when interacting with others, a person is considered here as a representative of his family in the name of its head. He acts along the lines of the family's social network. The fact that he is a member of his family is obviously taken for granted, though in practical situation it is difficult to say exactly how much the consideration of family poses constraint on his behaviour in interacting with others, especially with friends.

After *fen-jia* that the relationships in the social network of parents slowly alter and transfer to become fabric of the sons' family networks, which may only be completed after the death of the parents. This is accompanied with the slow transfer of family authority and other social knowledge. *Fen-jia* thus marks a new stage in the developmental process of a family network. With the creation of new households, new social networks are set up on the base of the old ones. Although the actors (or units) in the old and new networks may largely be the same, the links between them are now different. The son's family network replaces that of the father's. The new network is basically composed of two parts. The first is those transferred from

the network of his father, including most of its kinship and friendship relations. This part of the network is shared with his brothers. It is overlapped with that of his brother. The second part includes those friends he made before and since, and those affinal kinship links established through his marriage. This part is particular to himself, differing from that of his brothers.

Marriage, like reproduction, is a major means of creating social relations in Chinese rural areas. When a man gets married, he creates not only a relation with his wife, as a representative of his family, he also helps to establish relations with the family of her parents and other relatives, her friends as well as others. In other words, through the establishment of the relationship between him and his wife, the social networks of two families have been linked, or, the size of both families' network has been expanded, parts of other networks joined in each original network. It is important to note that in the view of local people an affinal relationship is of the whole family's at the time it is established. This is in line with my usage of the concept of "family network". The transfers of betrothal gift (*pinjin*) and dowry, including money, clothing, jewelry, household goods and food (Croll, 1981), during the period between engagement and marriage are made in the name of the two families rather than of the bridegroom and bride themselves. The cost of marriage likewise is considered as that of the whole family. I shall describe patterns of marriage in Lower River in the next section. At the moment I would notify the fact that affinal relationships established through marriages are considered as part of the social network of the family under the name of the father. These relationships are shared in the family with brothers and sisters. This can be easily apprehended in the idea that traditionally the bride's family gives her to the bridegroom's family rather than to the bridegroom himself. Before the *fen-jia*, if the bride's relatives such as her parents or brothers come to pay a visit, although a new conjugal unit in the sense of western societies has been set up with the marriage, the parents of the bridegroom usually play an important role in receiving and entertaining such a visit. The visit is usually regarded as a social activity, and in a sense, the visitors come to the family rather than the bride only. After the event of *fen-jia*, however, such a visit will be mainly to the small family of the new couple, although the visitors may also come over to the houses of the bridegroom's parents and brothers. But we will see it happen less and less in time, and probably stop after the death of the parents. In other words, the relationship is gradually passed to the young man himself as part of the long process of family division.

Friends of each brother will follow the same process in confining their network interactions, if they are not the common friends of the brothers from before.

Therefore, *fen-jia* leads to two results: i) the old family network centred on the father has gone, replaced by one or several new family networks in which the sons become key persons and centers of these networks; ii) with the replacement of father by sons, the relationships have been changed, although there may still be the same people in the networks as in the old one. In other words, although the structure of son's network may well be the same as that of the father's in terms of categories of relationship, the people who are in the relationship differ. Structurally, all relationships in the father's network become more distant by the increase of "steps" in Liu's (1982) terms, or by losing "grades" of closeness, if they can be categorized into different "grades". For instance, the grade that includes (father's) brothers and sisters changed from the "first grade", if they are so defined, to the "second grade" – they now become uncles and aunts. The other relationships follow this rule to change. The "first grade" is now occupied by other sons and daughters of the father, i.e., the brothers and sisters of the son. In this developmental cycle of family network, some new relationships have been created while some old ones, especially those relatively distant relationships in father's network, may be dropped and no more social interaction between the family and them. For those who remain in the new family networks, since the nature of relationship has changed, their tempo and content of interaction (*laiwang*) hence affective closeness (*ganqing*) with the focus family, i.e., the son's family, will be different. Changes as such can be the result of *fen-jia* in other families in the network, but to simplify the matter, I shall ignore them.

## 4.2 Marriage and expansion of a family network

There are many ways of looking at marriage. For the descent theorists, marriage is the basis for social reproduction and continuity of the line of descent. Alliance theorists, on the other hand, view it as a means to ally two social groups such as moieties among Australian aboriginals so that it leads to basic social structure. These efforts to link the system of marriage to forms of social structure have of course their theoretical merits. In this study, however, marriage is taken to be an institution responsible for the creation of affinal relationships of a family network. It is a vehicle for the families concerned to enlarge or enhance their existing social network by adding affinal links on the agnatic one created by *fen-jia*. The importance of marriage for the people concerned is not only for the man to take a wife so that they together create a family to have children and to carry on the line of descent, it also creates in consequence a link between the families of both sides. As a result of

it, the two families, and possibly their close kin, will hereafter be connected to each other, adding one or more links in the networks of the two families thus increasing their existing scale. Or, if it happens between two related families, their existing social relationship will therefore be greatly reinforced, thus increasing the value of the link, in other words, reducing the social distance between the two families.

The normal form of marriage in the area, like elsewhere in the country, is monogamous marriage which means a man can only take one woman to be his wife. This has become a legal form of marriage since the 1950 Marriage Law. Before that, polygamous marriage, although not very common, was allowed, provided that one was rich enough to be able to afford it. Hence, polygamy was not unpopular among the landlords and rich merchants before 1949. In fact, to some extent, it was a symbol of their wealth and social status.

The only example of polygamous marriage in this village is found in West River hamlet. The man called Pingxi, who owns one of the three lime kilns in the village with his brother, has two wives. Both of his wives came to the family before 1949. He was a small businessman, first got married with a woman from Shichen village in the peninsula. During the Japanese invasion, he went to Shantou city for business and could not come back due to the War. So he took a local woman and lived there until the war was over. People in the village told me that the relationship between the two women was quite good, with a reasonable division of labour, one doing the housework at home and the other taking care of the work in the field. They also told me that “the three are still sleeping together in one bed”, a fact they gave with a mixed feeling of amusement and embarrassment. I remember clearly when I first came to visit his home accompanied by his nephew who worked in the *Xiang* government as an employed staff, he was a bit uneasy when we were talking about his family, saying, “it (the fact that he took two wives) happened before the Liberation”, followed by pointing out proudly that, “the two women and the children are getting on very well”. I also noticed at the time that all of his children addressed his first wife as “mother” and his second wife as “aunt” (*gu*), regardless of the fact that some of them were born to the second wife. Such interesting uses of kinship terminology are commonly found in the area. For example, in my own village, which is not far from Lower River, there is also one case of polygamous marriage which took place before 1949, which came about because the first wife could not bear any children, so the second wife was taken and had three sons and two daughters. The children address their real mother as “aunt” and the first wife as “mother”.

There are other cases in which the children call their real father “uncle” (*bo, shu*

or *zhang*), or the real mother “aunt” (*shen*, *gu* or *yi*). However, these terms, *bo*, *shu*, *zhang*, *shen*, *gu*, *yi*, are in normal situations for addressing respectively father’s elder brother, father’s younger brother, husband of father’s or mother’s sister, wife of father’s younger brother, father’s sister, mother’s sister. The reason for this is clearly not because of polygamy but probably for some religious reasons. These phenomena are quite interesting but further exploration is beyond the scope of this study, so I shall leave them here to go on discussing marriage in relation to development of a family network. Relating to the previous section, I would again start from the event of *fen-jia*.

Supposing we are in the stage of a conjugal family after dividing from the family of husband’s parents. After a period of time, the children of the couple have grown up and the eldest son reaches the age of marriage. So it is time for the couple to find a daughter-in-law for the family. Finding a daughter-in-law is one of the two most important social events for peasants in traditional Chinese society (the other one is building houses). It is rather interesting to see that in extremely paternalist societies like China, such an important task is the job of women, although any arrangement of marriage made by the women must be through the consensus of the men.

In 1987, I was in Feian county, one of the coastal counties of Fujian like Zhaoan, doing fieldwork with my teachers of the Department of Anthropology of Xiamen University. Feian is famous for the custom of *can zu nian jia* (the bride goes back to live for a long time in her natal family immediately after the ritual of marriage), and for unique patterns of women’s clothing apparently different from the surrounding areas. My job in this investigation was to observe the family structure in the village. When I inquired of our male informants about how a daughter-in-law was found, he pointed to his wife sitting at the corner of the house, and said, “Ask her. It’s their job. We the men never care about this thing”. It is interesting to notice that the job was regarded as a duty rather than a right of the woman in the local community. The wife later told me that there was no professional match maker in the area, any woman could do the job. It was believed that match making was a kind of activity to accumulate *de* (virtue). Or, to put it in a more understandable way, matching a marriage could bring luck to the match maker, so the more marriages you matched, the more luck you would have. However, she stressed, it was the duty for a woman to match at least one marriage in her life in order “to be good in The Other World”. The Other World was of extreme importance in the mind of women in this area.

People in Lower River made similar statements. Here match making was also a non-professional work generally carried out by women, and it was a kind of virtue

accumulation activity (*ju de*) too. However, the sense of duty was not as clear and strong as in Feian. Moreover, it was not necessarily regarded as a “woman’s job”, as in the case of Feian. Although the major roles were played by women, I did come across occasions in which men played the role of intermediaries, i.e., the match makers. I also noticed that in such activities as finding a daughter-in-law where a woman was dominant, the consensus of the man who was the legitimate head of the household, was of equal importance.

J. & S. Potter pointed out that there was a network formed by women in Zhengbu to carry out the job of finding a daughter-in-law from other villages:

Out marrying women form a network across the countryside, tying their villages of birth to their villages of marriage. These social networks are maintained by the frequent visits women make back to the villages into which they were born. On all the major holidays of the year, women dress in their best clothes and prepare chicken or some other gifts of food for their parents. Leading their younger children by the hand, and carrying their gifts in ceremonial baskets hung from carrying poles, they retrace the lanes and paths back to their villages of origin, where they visit with their parents, their brothers’ families, and the sisters and aunts who have also returned. At these gatherings, information about young people who are ready to marry can be exchanged, and possible matches can be suggested. The network of ties between women is an effective one for making marriages (Potter & Potter, 1990: 206).

This vivid description holds true as well in the area of Lower River village. We can see from the household register record of the village a lot of examples of women here coming from the same village. The women marrying into Lower River village mainly come from Tianchu, Gongkou, Cheshiyuan of the peninsula, Hougang of Shidu *Xiang*, Jiazhou, Aozhitou, Linjia, Hanyin, Xishen of Qiaodong *Xiang*, and Sijian of Shenqiao *Xiang*. There are many cases of both mother-in-law and daughter-in-law of the household coming from the same village. For instance, in Front House, both the mother and wife of He Yuanlu came from Hongzhou village of Qiaodong *Xiang*, and in He Yongjie’s family, both his mother and wife came from Shijian village of Shenqiao *Xiang*.

However, I think the network is not formed by the women concerned only, as the Potters hold, but by the households concerned. The making of marriages here is only one arena of the network practice in which women are the agents of the

activity. There are many other interactions in the same network. This point can be seen more clearly with the increase of intravillage marriages in recent years.

The household register in Lower River records a sharp increase of intravillage marriage (both among the three hamlets of the village and within each of them) in the past decades. If we remember that Lower River is a single surname village, we will then easily understand that this increase reflects an important change in the lineage ideology in the area since 1949. Lineage or surname exogamy used to be the universal rule in Lower River area as well as elsewhere in China. Marriage between people in a single surname village, even between people of same surname from far away to which there is virtually no blood relationship, was forbidden in the old days. People of the same surname often said, "we were in the same family five hundred years ago". Thus marriage between them, for some old style people, was no different from incest. However, it is interesting to see that all this has changed since 1950s. With the marriage reform carried out by the new government, in the spirit of freedom of choice, marriage between people of the same surname, or between people of the same village in a single surname village, is no longer illegal in the new Marriage Law of 1950 provided that they are not lineal blood relatives. However, at the beginning, marrying with a person from the same village in Lower River was still an idea not easy to accept. We find that such a kind of marriage was hardly seen throughout the 1950s in the village. Villagers said, in the old society, marriages between people within the same village were acceptable only in cases where one side of the married couple was not a "real" member of the village, that is, having been bought or adopted from other places so that there was no blood relationship in the biological sense with her or his spouse. The existing cases of such marriages in Lower River before the 1950s followed this rule.

According to the villagers, the first intravillage marriage in Lower River definitely came after the collectivization in the late 1950s, but they did not remember exactly who were the first couple of such a marriage. The reason for this may be that, as some people may hold, Chinese peasants like those in Lower River village were always so ignorant that they never paid any attention to the important changes in the world. Or, much more possibly I think, such changes may not be so "significant" for them as other people think, but rather quite minor or "natural" changes for them. Intravillage marriage may not lie as much in the spirit of freedom of marriage promoted by the new government, as the Potters seemed to stress in Zhengbu of Guangdong. It might simply be one of the natural consequences of other policies of the government, such as forbidding the buying and selling of children, and collectivization.

Before 1949, it was popular for some families to buy or adopt a child, both boy and girl, in this area. Such families were usually those who had no children at the time. To buy or adopt a son was certainly related to the idea of continuity of the descent line of the family. Whereas to buy or adopt a daughter might have other reasons. Those who liked to buy or adopt a daughter were usually: 1) the couple who had no children to have a daughter in order to further find a son-in-law later to carry on the family line, because they might find that to buy or adopt a son was impossible; 2) the couple who could not have children temporarily, to buy or adopt a daughter they believed could bring the couple children of their own later; 3) the couple who already had their own children, but wanted to find a daughter-in-law for their son in future. Adoption of this kind was well studied by A. Wolf (1974); 4) the couple who had their own son(s), but just like to have a daughter, not necessarily with the plan for their son to marry the adopted girl in future.

Buying and adopting a child may have a lot of differences. One of them is that, in the latter, the adopting family may maintain certain kinds of relationship with the adopted family afterward, while in the former, there is usually no such relationship once the buying and selling procedure has been completed. Buying and selling children, even of their own, has been made illegal since 1949, although not actually eliminated totally. Adoption has not been interfered with by the government, if it is not promoted. More and more cases of adoption have been reported in recent years in the rural areas as one way of finding loop-holes in the government's birth control policy. We therefore see that adoption of a daughter in this area is not always for the consideration of finding a future daughter-in-law for the family. It might be one of the most important considerations indicated by the fact that, in the local dialect, the term for such an adopted daughter is *simpua*, quite similar to the term for *simpu*, the daughter-in-law. Other considerations such as creating or strengthening a link of family network are important too.

The recently very fashionable intravillage marriage in Lower River and other villages in the area, in my opinion, is a logical development of the long existing marriage pattern between adopted daughters from other villages and young men of the village, be it the adopted daughter marrying one son of the family, the so called "minor marriage" by Wolf (1974), or she marry outside of her family in the village.

According to the household records in the village government, there were 1123 married women in Lower River village in late 1990. As showed in table 4.1, among them, 566 came from the same village (either from the same hamlet or two other hamlets); 115 from villages within the area of Meiling *Xiang* to which Lower River

Table 4.1 Birth places for the married women in Lower River

	Number	Percentage
Lower River	566	50
Meiling <i>Xiang</i>	115	10
Nearby <i>Xiang</i> /townships	317	28
Outside Zhaoan	34	3
Unclear	91	8
Total	1123	100

belongs; 317 from villages of other *Xiang* / townships in the county, mainly the villages of Qiaodong and Shenqiao *Xiang* to the north and west of the Meiling peninsula, and Shidu and Jinxun *Xiang* to the northeast; and 34 from outside the county, mainly from Shantou areas of Guangdong, and Dongshan Island on the east side of Zhaoan Bay. The remaining 91 were not clear where they came from, because there was nothing in the column of “place of birth” in their household records. From their surname, age and others, I reached the conclusion that the majority of them were from other villages and they married into this village before 1949.

Unfortunately, for the majority of the women, information about when they got married was not in the household records in the village possibly due to the continuous renewal of the records and change of the person who took care of them, so it was not possible to tell the exact number of intravillage marriage out of the total number of marriages which took place each year in the village, and the exact amount of the increase. However, from their age I reach the conclusion that the majority of intravillage marriages in Lower River happened after the 1960s according to the present average age of marriage. The statements made by villagers, that intravillage marriage started after collectivization in the late 1950s, is in general confirmed.

Most of the above intravillage marriages are results of decisions made by parents of families concerned. Reasons for preference of intravillage marriage provided by villagers of Lower River are:

Firstly, the first hand knowledge of the boy and girl and their families. Since the two families live in the same village, both sides have better knowledge on the state of the other, including the boy and girl, as well as their parents and close relatives. Of course the social and economic status of both families are important in the consideration. All these will affect the future life of the concerned people and families and are important issues in choosing the spouse for both sides;

Secondly, a possible disadvantage for intravillage marriage, especially for the husband's family, is that since the two families live very close, they can easily develop bad feeling and are involved into conflicts, because every detail of how the daughter-in-law is treated by her husband's family immediately reaches her natal family. However, this is considered good from the point of view of the bride's family since they do not want their daughter to be badly treated after the marriage. A nearby natal family is believed to some extent to prevent the husband's family from treating the bride badly. The idea is so prevailing that to send a daughter far away from home village is interpreted to mean that the parents do not really care about the future of their daughter. Not to mention that the girl or the family is so unpopular that no one in the village wants to marry her. It has so become a fashion to marry within the village that most parents will find a mate first in the village for their son or daughter;

Finally, probably the most important reason is supporting family network. When the young couple set up their independent family after *fen-jia* which often happens shortly after marriage as we have seen, they are in a better position to be able to have very handy both sides of relatives to go for help whenever it is necessary. This is a situation more favored by the bride's side since she is responsible for housework such as caring for children. She is usually more likely to go to her natal family for help. In fact, many young couples in the village told me they have more social interactions (*laiwang*) with her family in the village. For the bride's family, it is relative better to have a son-in-law in the handy position to help for many trivial matters. People in the area say, a son-in-law is "half of a son" in the sense that a son-in-law is able to carry out a lot of obligations for the in-law parents. Many people experienced that sons-in-law frequently are more helpful in many circumstances than their own sons. They are more handy as well. Consequently, people may go to a son-in-law rather than a son first when they need help.

Thus we see the increase of intravillage marriage is very much to do with the interests of the bride and her natal family.

Some intravillage marriages in Lower River have been the result of a secret love affair. In the commune system, young boys and girls worked together in the same work team. Later, some young men and women still maintain frequent contact with each other. Although these contacts are not in a form of person to person but taking the form of group to group which is seen as not so "dangerous" in the village, they do provide some of them a chance to be involved into a love affair, or to "like each other". Under the current moral values, the eventual union of the

two young people still has to go through the basic procedure of marriage, that is, match maker, parents' permission, engagement and finally marriage ritual. There were a few extreme cases in which the two had been secretly in love with each other and had sexual intercourse before even an engagement so that their families had to marry them as soon as possible. This is considered serious loss of "face" for the two families, particularly the girl's family. I can still remember now the vivid impression on her face when an old woman selling sweets and other items for children in front of the ancestral hall of Back House told me about so and so's daughter "suddenly" being pregnant.

Nevertheless, for the majority of young people, it is only after they have been engaged that they dare to openly see each other and go out together. For the local people, having been engaged, their interaction becomes "legal". Even sexual intercourse, which is vividly described as a cat (the boy) stealing a fish (the girl), is considered not so unacceptable for the bulk of villagers except some of the older generation. Engagement is regarded as an important procedure of marriage in which both families agree and publicly announce the establishment of alliance relationship between the two young people and their families. The time from engagement to marriage in the area varies from several months to several years. Normally it is about one year. Interactions between the two young people in this period serves to get to know more about each other and create affection (*ganqing*) between them. On the other hand, although an engagement once made will never be broken in the village, things happen in the newly yet incomplete established relationship which often become the subject of jokes by other people around. Interesting enough, these jokes of people around, though a bit embarrassing, may help the two to feel more "close" with each other by being caught on the spot together.

From the point of view of networking, the basic purpose of a marriage is either to extend the family network by establishing new relationships with families in other places, or to reinforce the existing connections which were not very close in the network. The whole picture about how and why some of the Lower River families still choose the former while more and more others prefer the latter should be subject to further studies. Here I can only offer some speculations based on available data.

Since the late 1950s, people in the village were organized into the commune and later brigade and its work teams. Collectivization and a series of subsequent political movements led to the dismantling of traditional lineage organization and a decline of lineage ideology. "Class struggles" promoted by the authority during the time inevitably created mutual distrust among fellow villagers. This was made even

worse by the economic scarcity in the collective system which led to more and more internal conflicts. Under such circumstances, those who had intravillage marriages thus affinal relationships out of agnatic ones in the same village demonstrated certain advantages in mutual support in many areas (e.g., dispute with others). In other words, although people could get support from their affines in other villages, it was not easy to mobilize kin in other villages in some small matters in which support from agnatic kin might not be sufficient but at the same time not big enough to bother kin in other villages. Therefore, intravillage marriage which might originate from the movement of collectivization that led to a decline of lineage ideology, once it appeared, was reinforced by the increase of internal conflicts in the village which had the same root.

Whatever the reason, the intravillage marriages in Lower River have clearly led to some significant consequences for the family networks. These consequences, if expressed in terms of network analysts, are chiefly, in the structural respect, increase of the network density and decrease of the network size, and in the interactional respect, intensification of the social transaction in the existing links.

Increase of the network density was illustrated firstly by an increase of proportion of agnatic kin. People of the same village in a single surname village community like Lower River are, theoretically, all related to each other by various agnatic relations, though the fact may not always be recognized by themselves, as indicated in the discussion of the categorization of *qin-ren* in Lower River given previously. The establishment of affinal relationships among these agnates, the so called *qin shang jia qin* (making an already close relationship closer), increases the density of their social networks in the sense that linkages of the network become multi-stranded by the intensification of the existing relationship between relatively distant agnatic kin through the establishment of affinal relations between them. This also inevitably leads to a decrease of the network size. The increasing intravillage marriage means more and more affinal relationships are established on the base of the old ones, thus reducing chances to establishing relationships with formerly unrelated people and expanding the size of the social network of the family.

The interactional aspect of the social network also changes as a result of the increase of intravillage marriage. The traditional lines of segmentation in the village have been complicated by the affinal relationships that were established among agnates. Therefore, no clear cut social groups based on agnatic relations are able to be identified in the village. Furthermore, as the Potters noticed in the Pearl River Delta of Guangdong, the existing structure of rules and norms in the village is

becoming confused as people are not sure whether to treat others as agnatic kin or as affinal kin to which different patterns of interaction apply. These changes in the way of interaction between people in the same network in Lower River village was seen in many arenas of daily socioeconomic life. I shall explore all these consequences of intravillage marriage in the following chapters.

## Chapter 5

# Social Interaction in Kinship and Friendship

In the context of a village community in China, one cannot fail to notice that people's behavior is closely related to their type of relationship and the degree of intimacy on both sides. However, as indicated in the introduction of this thesis, researchers with diverse theoretical orientations tend to stress different sides of the correlation. Structuralists emphasize the importance of the structure, by stating that people are bound to act in certain ways toward others, determined by the structural characteristics of their relationships. The structure of one's social network sets the social field of his behavior, determining who he will go to ask, or who will provide, help in crisis. On the other hand, people do not usually provide intimate service to a total stranger. Who helps whom and in what also indicate what sort of relationship exists. Interactionists, therefore, stress the importance of social exchange and interaction in creating and maintaining social relationships in the society. Apparently, they are not at the same level in terms of the time dimension. Structuralists usually ignore the time dimension or isolate the social fact at a point of time while interactionists assume a process of transaction in people's behavior. Thus, it seems misleading to try to ask which one, the structure of links or the form of interaction, is more important without referring to the assumptions of each approach. At a time, people's behavior is set by the social structure; in a period, maintenance or change in social structure can only be explained through the process of people's behavior. They are, in a sense, the two sides of a same coin.

The complicated relation between social interaction and relationship is, to a large extent, exemplified by two Chinese terms: *laiwang* and *guanxi*, referring respectively to social interaction and a relationship. To some extent, *guanxi*, which is frequently

used in other parts of the country particularly in urban areas, is seldom used by the local people, although they do know the meaning of it. Villagers in the Lower River area, on most occasions, use *laiwang* rather than *guanxi* to refer to the existing social relationship between two individuals, especially in the case of talking about social relationship in general without referring to the specific nature of them, e.g., whether they are kinship or friendship, and the structural character of the social relationship as a whole. Literally *laiwang* means people or things “come and go”. So it can also be said *wanglai*, namely “goes and comes”. At a more general level, *laiwang* is the process of acts and counter-acts between the related two parties. In the gift exchange, *laiwang* involves a series of transactions in which one party presents gifts to the other, the other receives them and returns gifts or other favors to the first party next time. Hence, the term *laiwang* indicates both of a series of at least two transactions – *lai* and *wang*, and of a time period during which the process of transaction is completed. For this reason, one can argue that *laiwang* infers implicitly the existence of a relationship. This in fact is the exact meaning of *laiwang* for people in Lower River. If two persons have *laiwang* to each other, then they have definitely a *guanxi* of this or that kind. On the other hand, if there is some kind of *guanxi* between two persons, they tend to have *laiwang* to each other, although it is not necessarily always the case.

Nevertheless, *laiwang* should not be equated with *guanxi*, because *laiwang* has a clear emphasis on the interactional respect of a relationship.<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, I will follow the emphasis of local people in *laiwang* and describe general patterns of social exchange and interaction among agnatic kin, affinal kin and friends in relation to different degree of intimacy. Some detailed examples of social interaction among these people are provided in the following chapters where I discuss of utilization of different types of relationships in various areas of economic and social life which is

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<sup>1</sup>Some differences between these two terms in Chinese, in general, can only be distinguished by examples. For instance, when asking someone whether or not he has connection with or access to a particular person, people will seldom say, “Do you have any *guanxi* with so and so?” Rather, they will say, “Do you have any *laiwang* with so and so?” Similarly, when people claim that they have a close relationship with someone, they usually say “I have *laiwang* with so and so”; or “So and so and I have *laiwang*”. They never say that, “I have *guanxi* with so and so”, especially when the subject and the object are not the same sex, from which will easily be inferred by the audience that the speaker and the referring person have an affair. This could be avoided by saying instead that, “I have *guanxi* in so and so *danwei* (work units)”. Therefore, if A has already known that B has kinship relation with C, he would not ask B whether or not he has *laiwang* with C. Similarly, if he has already known that B has *laiwang* with C, he would not ask whether he has any *guanxi* with C. Instead, he may ask, “What kind of *guanxi* do you have with C?” The expected answer is the specific kind of *guanxi* they have, such as “He is my uncle/cousin/friend”.

considered the most important part of social interaction.

## 5.1 Social interaction among agnates

The connotation of *laiwang* in Lower River varies from such as paying visits to each other's home, exchanging gifts and meals, lending each other money, writing letters..., to greeting only when meeting each other. In a word, it means both formal visits in times of ceremonies or festivals, and informal as to drop in to have a little chat on an ordinary occasion, with or without any specific purpose. The most important criterion of *laiwang* for the local people is whether or not the parties involved visit each other's families, and exchange gifts and services. This becomes a key element to decide the existence of a social relationship. For the people in Lower River, it is quite obvious that all friendship will involve some kind of *laiwang*. If there is no *laiwang* between two persons, it is impossible for them to claim to be friends. Similarly, kin without any *laiwang* are not regarded as members of the family network, although it does not exclude the possibility of renewing the *guanxi base* (Jacobs, 1979) by contacting them in future when it is necessary.

We see in a single surname village like Lower River, as I have mentioned previously in chapter three when discussing the concept of *qin-ren*, where in theory everyone else is an agnatic kin (*qin-ren*), in practice only a small proportion of villager members are considered to be so. In the village, although all its members admit themselves descendants of the same founding ancestor, meeting each other almost every day, taking part in the same rituals in annual village festivals, and involving in the same kind of economic activities and many other village affairs, some of them still claim that they have not had any *laiwang* at all with each other, hence do not belong to the category of *qin-ren* in their mind. In Lower River, as pointed out in chapter three, people of other *fang* are seldom included in the category within the context of village, it usually refers only to those belonging to the same *fang* or even its subbranch.<sup>2</sup> Compared to affinal kin (*qin-qi*) and friends who are normally living in other villages (places), and whose relationships are dropped when there is no more social interaction (*laiwang*), i.e., both sides do not see or contact each other any more, confusion can sometimes arise from the category of agnatic kin in this respect, because the boundary of *qin-ren* can be very flexible, and practically even

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<sup>2</sup>In my natal village, Xialiao, which is another He surname village not far away from Lower River, for instance, my family belongs to the second *fang* which is the largest in terms of population and number of households. The *qin-ren* of my family include only a subbranch which is two thirds of population of the *fang*.

if they do not have any *laiwang* they still live in the same community.

There is clearly a distinction between agnatic and affinal kin in terms of behavior pattern. With affinal kin the stress is on entertainment in their contacts, while agnatic kin have a clear emphasis of cooperation and mutual support in daily life. Agnatic relatives in the same village, unlike affinal kin from other villages, are frequently not considered to be “guests” when a visit is paid. The visit of a relative from the same village is not treated as an “event”. Many people in Lower River, who belong to a kin group, see each other almost everyday. But the daily contacts are less meaningful in terms of the social relationship, viewed by the actors themselves, and are paid less attention. They are usually too frequent to be taken seriously. Tea and cigarettes may be offered, but seldom a formal meal. Sometimes the host may just not bother to stop his work while receiving a “guest” of this kind. I notice local people often use two different terms to describe the nature of behavior toward their kinsmen: *keqi* for affinal kin (sometimes for all important persons) and *shuxi* for agnatic kin (occasionally for all those who are considered in the same group).

*Keqi* is very hard to translate into English. Loosely, it is quite close to the term “polite” in English in terms of speech and behavior in contexts of social interaction. But they are not totally the same. Literally, *ke* means “guest(s)” while *qi* is “air” or “manner”; *keqi*, the way a guest should behave in a specific situation. In a social encounter, it means for the host to be very hospitable, and for the guest to eagerly express his appreciation of it. So *keqi* implies obedience to a certain procedure and code of conduct in the context of social interaction. Another word in Chinese having the meaning of “polite” in English, *limao*, though seldom used by villagers in the Lower River area, expresses this more clearly. *Limao* came from “*li*” (rites) and it means to behave according to *li* – the Confucianist “rules of conduct”. As a way of behaviour in the interactional context, *keqi* is used by the Chinese toward two different types of people: those with a higher social status and those who are not familiar enough. It has thus two different dimensions of meaning: “respect” and a sense of “distance” (psychologically). Some people may be both with a higher social position and unfamiliar. *Keqi* here means both respect and a sense of distance, as the phrase “keeping at a respectful distance” expresses.

The opposite of *keqi* in Chinese is *shuxi*. *Shu* means “ripe” and “cooked” when referring to fruit and food. When referring to people, it means “familiar”, “sharing” and “acknowledged” because of frequent contacts. The term *shuren* thus means a familiar person being known by the speaker for a long time. Familiar is compared to the unfamiliar in a relationship between two individuals. To be familiar means

both sides have a lot of mutual understanding or knowledge. It is an inevitable consequence of long history of social interaction and an indispensable characteristic of long term intimate relationship in Chinese society. In terms of rules of behavior, as opposed to *keqi*, to be familiar is to behave freely, without heavy constraint by the rules. In other words, to behave “naturally”. A phrase, which is surely very old and which is used frequently by local people, expresses the point clearly: “*shu ren wu li*”, meaning that “no *li* is necessary among familiar people”.

There is nothing good or bad of politeness or familiarity, as a way of behavior, in itself. To take the “right” mode of behavior in the “right” situation is good. The questions here are: when and where to be “polite”, and when and where to be “familiar”? And how to be polite or familiar? There are some unspoken codes for these vital questions anyone faces in his everyday life. However, like most other norms of behavior in the society, there is no practical textbook for people to follow. They are valuable only at the level of discourse. To some extent, norms of behavior in the society are like ingredients of Chinese food, most people know them, but the dishes made by different people by using the same ingredients may have very different taste. Thus, in spite of all these codes of behavior, some people in the society always have difficulty in behaving “properly”, while others develop their own pragmatic knowledge in practice, which is usually referred to as *guanxi xue*. Nevertheless, it seems that familiarity is generally regarded as the ideal theme of social interaction in Chinese society, and there is always a tendency for some people to try to be as “familiar” as possible. This is most clearly seen in the Chinese custom of treating non-kin as kin both in address and in actual behavior (Baker, 1979).<sup>3</sup> Mayfair Yang (1986: 60 ff) has demonstrated the significance of “familiarity” in contexts of *guanxi* manipulation. Familiarity as the state of a relationship, in Mayfair Yang, is a prerequisite for *guanxixue*, which can be found in importance attached to relationships in which there is a shared identity or shared personal experience.

Having explained the meanings *keqi* and *shuxi*, it is easier to understand what local people say about the way of treating agnatic kin in the same village. *Keqi* in such a context is indeed unnecessary or inappropriate because it implies more a sense of distance than respect. For the fellow kinsmen in the same village who see each other everyday and who know everything about each other, it could be seen as

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<sup>3</sup>Of course, it is done with those who are seen to be important and useful for them. Treating non-kin as kin is in fact only one way of manipulating social relationships in the society. It is equally easy to find examples of people trying to behave as “polite” as possible, to disassociate themselves from those they do not like or are not useful to them. The latter case is most frequently found among those whose relationships are not close enough. But it is also sometimes found among close kin and friends.

a sort of “unnatural performance”. Familiarity (*shuxi*) is thus the general mode in the interaction among agnates in Lower River.

However, one should not jump to a conclusion that relationships among agnatic kin are all close and good, as the term *shuxi* seems to imply. Although interactions among these kinsmen within the village are in general more frequent than that of kin of different villages, it does not mean the relationship between relatives in the same village is always closer than that with kin in other villages. In fact, I found that among agnatic kin in the village, it is not easy for them to get close. Relation among them is tense in general. For social interaction in a relationship is a chain. Each time it can either reinforce the existing social bond, or it can damage it because one or both parties does not act according to the rules or the expectation of the other. A good relationship based on interactions before can be finished immediately once the behavior of one side dissatisfies the other, even though the interactions over a long period before have been very good. Therefore, an increase of frequency of interaction among agnatic kin in the same village, although it also leads to a closer relationship, often means an increase of opportunity of mutual dissatisfaction and hostility caused by failing to fulfil some social obligations. If interaction, at least sometimes, means to serve or favor others, it is obviously much more difficult for a person to serve or favor others everyday than, say, once in a couple of months. This is one of the reasons why one’s relations with many kinsmen in the same village are often worse than with relatives in other places.

A more important reason for a subtle relationship among agnates in the village is the frequency of dispute. Dispute in a village community like Lower River is a fact of life and an everyday occurrence, which leads to a gradual erosion of the agnatic bond (see chapter eight). It would be difficult to find a family never in dispute, serious or trivial, with others in the past. Villagers believe that conflicts between kinsmen are unavoidable. To prove it they often use the example of the relationship between husband and wife. An intimate relationship as such cannot prevent the occasional dispute over family affairs, not to mention others in which conflict of interest always exists. In other words, kinsmen cannot prevent unpleasant things from happening between them, given the fact that each person looks after firstly the interests of his own family and then possibly others according to degree of closeness in their relationship, and that different families in the same village often see their own interests are in a conflict or competitive position with that of others.

The tendency of being self-interested among agnatic kin in the village, has become more apparent in recent years. People in the village themselves are well

aware of the intensifying competition and mutual distrust among agnates in the past decades. The traditional social emphasis on agnatic relationships rests in cooperation and mutual support within the group, and unity against outsiders. Some old men in the village I visited still have a good memory of the historical glory of the village in unifying to beat its neighbor villages, a Huang surname village in the northwest and a Lin surname village in the southeast. Both were about the same size in population as Lower River. According to these old men, they were beaten because they were not as unified as Lower River. These stories may be idealized. However, it seems we cannot deny all together their truth. Conflicts with rival villages nearby could have suppressed or diversified internal disputes in the past. With open rivalry between villages being effectively controlled after 1949, internal conflicts become apparent. The tradition of village solidarity has been greatly changed by the conflicts in the collective after 1949 in which one's livelihood was controlled by others in the same production team, especially the team leaders, and by intensifying competition after the decollectivization when one has to stand on his own feet. The competition or conflict in the past decade has been for opportunities of family economic development, and before, for survival.

This does not mean, however, that no cooperation has been going on among agnatic kin. They still hold and take part together in some village rituals, sponsoring festivals for their relatives in other villages to be entertained. They bring offerings together to worship common ancestors both in-door in major annual festivals and out-door to grave yard in *Qingming* festival in the third lunar month. Cooperation is also found in economic arena such as in fishing and in prawn growing, even though most economic activities are carried out by a single family. But it is a fact that economic cooperation is not wide spread in the village, it has been largely confined to a smaller number of closer kin. I will return to this in chapter six with the example of cooperation in prawn growing in the village.

Agnatic kin in the family network, like affinal kin and friends I will describe below, are involved in social exchange with each other. The items in the exchange among people in Lower River are gifts, feasts and favor, which are very similar to the situation in Peking investigated by Yang (1986: 70). Most gifts exchanged in these relationships are subsistence materials, food and other consumer goods. On some occasions, money is used as a gift, such as in marriage and funeral. On other occasions, in the New year for instance, money gift is given by the older generation to the younger one, especially parents to children. Money gifts have in recent years become more popular and widely used in social exchange among kin and friends. This seems to be in line with the tendency of more and more corrupt

officials to receive bribery in cash in the process of economic development of the society. For these people, money is the only thing that counts. It does not work any more nowadays to send a few bottles of liquor or some cartons of cigarettes to make someone unknown before do a big favor. They used to be so effective in the early eighties that they were called metaphorically *shou liu dan* (hand grenades) and *zha yao bao* (explosive packages) respectively, to blow any stronghold of favor (Yang, 1986: 72). A “red envelope” with a sum of cash is now the conventional form. Its value is determined by the favor itself. This is because of the authority’s tougher measurement to punish corrupt officials. Money is easier to conceal for these corruptive officials. It is also possible to give a fairly large amount at a time, since now the risk is greater, the “mouths” of these people are ever “bigger”.<sup>4</sup> The “red envelope” in certain areas of Chinese society has indeed the capability of “ascending to heaven or plumbing the depth of hell”. Corruption, however, is not the area of this study, although it is clearly related to the practice of *guanxi* and so is touched upon here. I leave it to be explored in future. What will concern me in the following are the “money gifts” given on certain occasions by kin and friends. The function of “red envelopes” in this sense should be explored.

In exchanges of gifts on ordinary occasions among kin and friends in the Lower River area, money gifts have become increasingly significant in recent years. There are more and more occasions in which people prefer cash to other substantial goods to be exchanged as gifts. Several reasons may account for this, among which the most obviously may be its practical advantage. For instance, in a marriage ceremony, to send a gift is necessary for some kin and friends. But choosing a gift is an art in itself. One may wrack his brains and spend a whole day shopping, and he still will not know whether or not the other person will like it or need it. That is not nearly as good as wrapping money in red paper, which on the one hand saves work and on the other is more useful, so everybody is happy. Another reason is probably that money is a substantial help in such events as marriages and funerals. Sending a sum of cash at the marriage of a friend is conventional. Not only is sentiment (*renqing*) expressed, it is also substantial help. The local custom in Lower River area of sending cash at marriages, funerals, and other events such as when a kin or friend goes to study in college, is in effect a mechanism of social support incorporating the idea of *renqing* in various social institutions, if we consider the fact that in the norm of reciprocity to give this time will mean to receive in the next.

There is a differentiation in frequency and scale of social exchange among agnatic

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<sup>4</sup>Local people vividly describe a corrupt official’s asking or receiving bribery as “eating” money or valuable gifts, thus the more needed to satisfy him, the “bigger” his mouth.

kin in the village. Intensity, generally speaking, decreases with kinship distance. The most intensive interaction among kin in the same village is not surprisingly in the area of what I have called previously the “core of family network” which includes families of parents, of sons and of brothers. The close relationships imply that they lived in a same household not long ago. Although they are separated to be different households, they remain closely tied together by social and economic obligation, such as caring for aged parents among brothers. Interaction among some close kin outside the core is fairly intensive as well. Much less frequent interaction is found among more distant kin in the village.

Contents of social exchange in Lower River also differ in accordance with the closeness of relationship. In Caplow’s (1982) study of Christmas gift exchange in American Middletown, a similar pattern is reported. In the Christmas of 1978, the 110 respondents in his sample gave 2,969 gifts and received 1,378, a mean of 27 given and 13 received. The respondents, all of whom were over 18, gave 801 more gifts to persons under 18 than they received in return, and 1101 more gifts to their own children and grandchildren of all ages than they received in return. The number of gifts given, especially what he calls “multiple gifts”, i.e., two or more gifts from the same giver to the same receiver, decline sharply with the increase of relational distance. Most gift exchanges happen among primary and secondary kin. Primary kin account for about half of the total number of gifts. Most of the remainder is divided between secondary kin and nonkin. Tertiary kin are relatively unimportant either as gift givers or receivers, and remoter kin play a negligible part in Christmas gift giving. The value of gifts in the exchange also decline with the increasing distance of relationship. Most what he calls “modest gifts” (with a monetary value from 5 to 25 dollars) and “substantial gifts” (from 25 to 500 dollars) are exchanged among secondary and primary kin, whereas most gifts exchanged among tertiary kin and nonkin are “token gifts” (valued less than 5 dollars). I was not able to collect quantitative data of this kind in Lower River during my fieldwork period. But my observation in the period and experience in the past confirms that only a small proportion of agnatic kin are involved in exchanging gifts of various kinds, and contents of exchange among agnates are different according to their different social distance. Take the cash gift given to children at New Year’s Festival as an example, normally they come from only parents, grandparents and uncles. That is to say, among the agnates, those who are involved in exchanging money gift to each other’s children are normally limited to brothers.

Transactions in a social relationship in Lower River may be loosely divided into two dimensions: the largely “social” dimension including help, care and support,

and the largely “economic” dimension most understandably being in the form of money transaction. Of course, as will be illustrated in chapters seven and eight, this separation is somewhat artificial. The two dimensions often overlap. Social exchange frequently also includes transactions of money or material goods with unmistakable money value, and economic transactions in many contexts clearly have a social meaning. However, it does help to identify a difference in interaction of the closest relatives from that of the rest.

The most significant help and support both in daily activity and in crisis (e.g., dispute with others) come from the core of a family network, especially between the households of parents and of their children. For some families, in-law relationships in the village created by intravillage marriage in the past decades have also proved to be essential for help and support. Exchange between people in the core of the family network in Lower River happens in all arenas of social and economic life. Contents of exchange among these close related families include virtually everything that is being exchanged in the village, from love, caring and sense of support, to entertainment and labour service, to money, food and other material goods. In terms of the frequency of exchange, transaction in the group is apparently much more intensive than the rest of the family network. Although the reciprocity in the close kin group is largely “generalized” as defined by Sahlins (1972), which means that they do not care much about the balance of transactions, the idea of “return” (*bao*) remains in their consciousness. Traditionally, exchange between parents and children has a very heavy color of morality. Parents have an obligation to bring up their children, and the children in turn, when in adulthood, have to support their aged parents – to “return” (*bao*) the grace of being given birth and brought up. This get and give of both sides, particularly the obedience and supportiveness of children toward their parents, has an unmistakable moral meaning imposed by traditional values.

The pattern of exchange between families of parents and of children usually also experiences a process of change. A careful observation on the economic transactions between parents’ family and their sons’ families in the Lower River area reveals that the flow from parents’ family to sons’ families is often more than that from the latter to the former, particularly after *fen-jia*, when sons separate their own families from parents’. The young couple often find themselves in a difficult situation because of the coming of their own children. The income of the family is hardly sufficient to cover the increasing expenditure due to a rapid increase of family population and other reasons. They thus have to ask help from parents of both sides. During the period of fieldwork, I often heard of parents complaining that, after finding

wives for them and giving them houses, they not only could not get anything from their married sons but had to continually support them in getting out of all kinds of trouble. Even though the young couple can manage their own living, advice and emotional support of old parents who have wide experience are necessary. For instance, after *fen-jia*, the two married sons of Xingzhang, Qiongwen and Qionghui, set up their own families, doing their own business. Qiongwen runs a medical store in the market place, selling Chinese and Western medicines to customers from all over the peninsula. Qionghui owns shares of a saw mill and a prawn farm. Both are very successful in their business, to which the advice and support of Xingzhang largely account. Other aspects of help from parents, especially the grandmother helping to take care of children, are also crucial. Evidence from elsewhere also supports the observation that, contradictory to the social emphasis in traditional society, support from parents to their children's families are often greater than that of the latter to the former. This is true both in urban and rural areas (cf Pan, 1990; Chung, 1985). This situation may be slowly reversed in time. When the parents become really old, their lives will depend on support from their children.

Help and sharing of various kinds with each other form an important part of social interactions of other close agnatic kin outside the core of family network. Most frequently the exchanged objects among these people are foods of various kinds. It usually takes the form of exchanging drink, meals and entertainment in family events such as the life cycle rituals of family members, the memory ritual of the nearest ancestors of the family, celebrations of completion of a new house, or a new ship starting service, harvest celebration of a prawn pond, etc. Since different families have such events at different times, these events become opportunities for inviting other kin for a big meal. They therefore facilitate a mechanism for exchanging meals and entertainments among close kin. It sometimes also includes sharing of food received in their exchange with affinal kin in other village in major village festivals. Besides, these people are also involved in borrowing small articles of family necessities when they are short of. Sometimes they lend each other small sum of money.

Unlike the closest kin in the network, exchange among these people has a more conscious balance in terms of kind and quantity. A meal is for exchange of another meal in the past or in future. A gift of one party requires a returned gift from the other party. The sense of moral obligation in helping or sharing among kinship becomes very weak in daily exchange as such. On the other hand, the value of exchanged objects and frequency of transaction decline with the closeness of kinship among these people. As for more distant kin in the village, their interaction

with each other involves much less substantial contents. The relationships are usually expressed and maintained merely by addressing and greeting each other during encounters of daily life.

The number of agnatic kin one maintains in social exchange and interaction, and the frequency of interaction, are to a certain degree determined by his wealth and relative social status in the village. There is an old saying: "The rich has distant kin far in the mountains, the poor no one calls in though living close to the market place". For poor fellows in the village like Shuangzhi mentioned previously, they are the one who really knows the meaning of this phrase from daily experience. One is humble because he is poor. No one comes to his house to have a visit. No body pays any attention to him in the public. Most of the relatives are trying to distance themselves. It is all too obvious: nothing except embarrassment can be resulted from dealing with the poor and humble fellow. Even worse, they may join in others to bully him. As I have said before, in the incident of typhoon, if there had not been several old men in the village to exercise their influence, it is for sure that not many people would have come to offer their help to Shuangzhi. For some people in the village, such as the village cadres, it is the opposite. A young man in the Villagers' Committee told me that, the party secretary of the village was often chased by fellow villagers to dine and drink with them. Sometimes he received several invitations in a single day. Village cadres are not as powerful as they were. However, they remain the figures who others cannot afford to ignore or offend. Under the current political system, there are a lot of occasions one has to deal with, or rely on, them. Village cadres carry a double function in rural society. On the one hand, they are agents of state power to penetrate into and control the village community. A lot of administrative work of the government, birth control for instance, have to rely on them. On the other, they often become patrons of fellow villagers in their dealing with the bureaucracy. Permit or giving birth a baby, certificate for building or repairing a house, settlement of a dispute with outsiders ..., all these have to be handled through their hands. They thus enjoy a lot of prestige and respect in the village because they are in the position of favoring, or troubling if offended, others.

But the prestige and respect based merely on political power do not usually last for long. Once they step down, they will soon find themselves ignored by others in the village. Of course, not all respected people in the village have to do with political power. There are people who earn others' respect not by their power but by their knowledge and sociability. Xingzhang is one of such people in Lower River. Since he is one of the few literate people of his age in the village with exceptionally wide social experience and contacts outside, Xingzhang is very frequently asked to

help and advise in many social occasions including ritual performances not only by his closest kin but also by many others in the three hamlets of Lower River. Besides, he is often asked by the village for help in its social interactions with the outside. For example, in December, 1990, the opera troupe of Lower River had been performing in another He surname village in Dongshan county. The village was celebrating a local festival at the time and the *Chao* opera troupe of Lower River was hired specially to perform for three nights for the festival. For various reasons the leaders of the brigade decided to pay their *qin-ren* in Dongshan a visit. The only two other non-village leaders being asked to go together were Xingzhang and me. Much of the talk with the leaders of the host village was about the “historical connection” between the villages, and it was carried out by Xingzhang. In January, 1991, the village leaders decided to send dozens of new year’s cards to villagers living overseas thanking them for donating money to help several projects of the village. Xingzhang was asked to write the cards because he was the only one in the village able to write full characters on an envelope. The unprecedented scale of participation in the village to his mother’s funeral, which was discussed previously, indicates his social standing in the community.

For the ordinary villagers, since they do not possess either political power or extra social knowledge, their exchange with others is heavily constrained by the limited family resource, and can only take the form of a gift for a gift, and a service for another service. A dilemma thus exists in their interaction with relatively distant kin in the same village. A family will try to maintain as large a network as possible, but in practice it cannot afford to maintain too large a proportion of the social network with intensive interaction, given the general shortage of resources such as food and other necessities. This dilemma may be exemplified in a family event such as a celebration of the completion of a new ship. The house budget as well as the ability to pay, and the *renqing* owed or created must be the main considerations, since there are a lot of chances to spend the limited amount of money and resources in the whole year. The question of who to invite is also a difficult one. If you invite only A without B, suppose that both of them are in the same position, it will jeopardize the relationship with B since B will start to think that you look down upon him and a feeling of hostility and resentment will be created.

The same dilemma is also found in other party in the question whether or not to accept the invitation. To be invited means you are a person with whom people like to *laiwang*, a matter of face and social status. If this happens among relatives and friends, it could mean the host wants to maintain and hopefully strengthen the existing relationship between both sides. So if you refuse it, the relationship could

be damaged because it is an indication of hostility by refusing an invitation directly. Refusing to attend in such a context, like failing to invite, is a “face threatening act” in Brown and Levinson’s (1987) terms, which can be changed to some extent by turning down the invitation indirectly, e.g., finding a reasonable excuse. On the other hand, “there is no free meal”. To accept the invitation means you have to accept the commitment to fulfil the obligation to return the invitation later or to be ready to help the one who invited you – an act of showing friendliness which should be reciprocated. Thus, people wish to be invited to prove their popularity, showing resentment when they are not, while at the same time, they are afraid of being invited in order to escape the obligation to reciprocate if they feel they do not have the proper resources to return the meal or drink next time, or the ability to help when required by the people who invited them.

We can detect this mixed feeling from a classic example: the host comes to the house of the guest again and again, whether the family head himself or his children, insisting the guest come over three or four times, to show for the host’s side how important the guest is in the mind of the host and the invitation is not regarded as a big *renqing* by telling the guest to “just have a glass of wine” or “only have a bowl of rice” while in fact it is probably a big banquet. For the guest, the strategy is usually to turn down the invitation by finding lots of excuses to say “no” indirectly while at the same time trying not to hurt the feeling of the host at the beginning, even if he really wants to accept the invitation in the first place. The behavior of the latter should not simply be seen as an indication of politeness in the local custom. It also indicates a reluctance to involve in the social exchange among peasants who have very limited resource besides the basic need for keeping the families alive. In the recognition of the norm of reciprocity, to receive this time means to give next time in a chain of social exchange. Although in a long run there will be a balance between give and receive, the balance for some people does not mean no gain and no lose. It is a result of extra consumption of own limited resource. Thus, in an exchange of feasts, some people tend to say: this time eating yours, next time eating mine, but both is eating of oneself. Of course, to maintain some kinds of exchange is necessary in keeping the relationship in the view of local people. I will return to this later.

## 5.2 Social interaction with affines

From the four cases given in chapter three, we know that the number of affinal relatives maintained by a family in Lower River area varies from several to dozens (see table 3.2). Like the agnatic kin, they are differentiated into categories in terms of social distance which, as demonstrated below, are expressed in the different ways of social interaction.

The increase of intravillage marriage results in a proportion of affines now being in the same village. In the table 4.1 of the proportion of married women in Lower River, 50 percent of them came from the same village, in which the majority got married after 1949. This indicates that a quite large proportion of newly-established affinal relationships in Lower River after 1949 are in the same village. As suggested in the last chapter, this results from the intensifying interfamily conflict and a decline of lineage ideology in the process of collectivization and the Cultural Revolution from the early 1950s. It leads to a situation in Lower River that more and more people are related to each other not only by agnatic kinship but also by the affinal relations. These multi-stranded relationships on the one hand create closer ties in the village, and on the other, result in confusion in people's perception of the structure of social relationship and thus the pattern of interaction. For instance, when an affinal relationship is established between two families in the village, for the local people, not many problems are created since intravillage marriage is now acceptable after several decades of uneasiness and since people in the other *fang* are usually not considered as *qin-ren*. But problems arise immediately when they are faced with the question of how to treat each other's close kin in the village, especially when the marriage happens between two families with a quite close agnatic relationship (e.g. in the same *fang*).<sup>5</sup> Will they be considered agnates or affines? A solution for this question has to be made because it will decide how to treat them in contacts, such as in addressing. It may vary according to the agreement of two sides. Normally, only the families of bride's or bridegroom's paternal lineal blood relatives, such as parents, brothers and sisters, will be taken as affines. Occasionally we also include uncles and first cousin. Address to these people thus changes accordingly, while others remain the same.

Nevertheless, in-law relations in the village have been proven very important in many arenas of daily life. Sons-in-law, for instance, are always regarded almost as important as sons in the Lower River area. One villager told me that he would rather

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<sup>5</sup>Marriage in the same *fang*, though seldom seen, does happens in Lower River and in my own village.

go to his son-in-law when he needed help who would come immediately, because his sons “always made excuses” when they were asked to help. This perception of a better son-in-law is by no means exceptional in the village, although a careful observation reveals that sons in reality provide no less help, if not much more, than do sons-in-law. One usually does not hesitate to refuse a request of help from his agnatic kin, but he would try as much as he can to avoid offending his affinal kin. To explain this, villagers have the idea of “flesh and bone”. Agnates are bone while affines are flesh, according to it. A belief accounting for the fact that whatever the relationship, close or not, agnatic relationships are always there, whereas affinal relationships, once broken, will be extremely difficult to repair. For the limited number of affinal kin who remain in contact, as a consequence, they are more willing to help and support when asked. They are usually on a better terms and become closer than agnatic kin in perception.

Affines in the same village are usually closer than affines in other places because, as mentioned previously, only a few very close families are counted as affinal relationships when a marriage is made in the same village in Lower River. In addition, they are living close and able to provide help and support needed in daily life. For a family, they are usually among the few closest relationships in the village. This is proved to some extent by the sum of money in cases of typhoon and funeral described in chapter three, in which they gave much more than agnatic kin outside the core of family network. It also finds its evidence in many close business partnerships in the village, such as those of prawn farms in the next chapter. Of course, I also came across during my fieldwork affinal relationships in the village that were not on very good terms. There are also broken affinal links in the village caused by bitter disputes between both sides of the relationship. Just like agnatic kin, affinal kin in the same village are very likely to be involved in conflict and dispute in their frequent day-to-day contacts.

In spite of the rapid increase of intravillage marriage in recent decades, for each family in Lower River, since it is a single surname village and the custom of alliance with outsiders has a longer history, most of its affinal relatives remain in other villages. For instance, in the four family networks discussed in chapter three, as shown in table 3.2, their affinal relatives are 4, 23, 50 and 60, among whom the numbers of affines not in the same village are respectively 3, 16, 37 and 48. In Xingzhang’s family, he has one sister among three and two daughters among four, marrying into the same village. One of his two married sons also took his wife from the same village. However, among the 60 affinal relationships only one fifth, 12, are in Lower River.

As the figures in table 3.2 and table 4.1 imply, the vast majority of these affinal kin are in Meiling peninsula and several nearby *Xiang* or townships. In other words, the estimated radius of marriage links from Lower River does not exceed 30 kilometres. The figure is quite close to that found in a sociological survey of rural marriage mobility conducted by the Heilongjiang Institute of Marriage and Family completed in 1989. In the 1441 peasant households sampled from six provinces of the country, 85 percent of peasants marry within the same county, 51 percent in the same *Xiang*/township, and 30 percent in the same village. The marriage mobility of the majority of them does not exceed 25 kilometres (see RMRB, June 2, 1989). It is further supported by two more recent case studies in villages of Hubei and Inner Mongolia (Qiu & Din, 1991; Liu, 1991). This means the time it takes to go to most relatives in other villages is within two or three hours by bicycle.

Physical distance is thus not a serious obstacle for visiting a relative outside the village. However, it does become a constraint. The physical distance may make regularity of mutual social interaction and support slightly more difficult, which is expressed in an old saying that “relatives at a distance are less useful than neighbors nearby”. The nearby neighbors are always much easier to access and thus are the more important sources of social support in some areas of daily life. This is not to say that a more distant relative is always less valuable. In fact, in China, with the low productivity of rural economic production, the possibility to exploit resources from a larger physical area can be vital for the family’s economic development. This is partly proved by the fact that in traditional Chinese society, most of the rich families in a local community were usually engaged in commercial activities or in government, both merchants and government officials accumulated their wealth by exploiting a much larger environment out of their local communities, and the ranges of marriage partnerships were far greater.

Just as agnatic kin, affinal kin of a family are greatly differentiated in terms of frequency and content of social exchange. From the maternal uncles and newly established affines such as sons-in-law, to brothers-in-law (e.g., sister’s husband or wife’s brother), to cross-cousin and some remote affines, frequency of exchange declines with the content of transaction. Exchange happens most frequently between a family and its closest affines. Many social exchanges for a family with its close affinal kin, such as between parents and married daughters as discussed below, are defined by the local custom. For those distant affinal relatives living in other places, it is not unusual among them to see each other for as little as once a year. Some of them even remain uncontacted for several years. Some remote affinal links in a family network are disconnected in this way by gradually reducing contacts as

time goes by. However, frequency of interaction is only one indicator of closeness of relationship. This is because a visit from an affinal relative in another place is usually more seriously treated by the host. The visit of kin from a far place will be taken to be a big “event”. For, unlike the interaction of agnates in the same village in which emphasis is placed on collective action to help each other and against outsiders, the stress of interaction between affines in the area seems to be in its value of entertaining. Therefore, unlike the agnates who meet every day, most of the outside interactions are confined to occasions of ceremony and big family events. Going to visit a relative and “being a guest”, i.e., to be treated as a guest and entertained, is a social activity which serves to renew and reinforce the existing social relationship. It is also a leisure activity to relax temporarily. The festival atmosphere, the delicious food, and the hospitality of the host, etc., all make it a pleasure for relatives to come to be guests.

Generally speaking, in contrast to interactions between agnatic kin in the same village in which cooperation and mutual support are stressed, interactions between affinal kin, especially between those who live in different villages and do not frequently visit each other, is characterized by an emphasis of entertainment. They are more *keqi*, as the local people say. According to the discussion of the term above, behaviour of affinal relatives toward each other during the course of interaction follow more strictly the procedure and have a more clear element of ritual or performance. In terms of Goffman, there are more “interaction rituals” in the contact of affinal kin.

Interaction ritual, for Goffman, exists in what he calls “the small behavior” or face-to-face interaction in a small group, in which “somehow, but only somehow, a brief time span is involved, a limited extension in space, and a restriction to those events that must go on to completion once they have begun. There is a close meshing with the ritual properties of persons and with the egocentric forms of territoriality.” “The ultimate behavioral materials are the glances, gestures, positionings, and verbal statements that people continuously feed into the situation, whether intended or not. These are the external signs of orientation and involvement – states of mind and body not ordinarily examined with respect to their social organization” (1972:1). The notion is largely stimulated by the concept of ritual used among anthropologists, especially Radcliffe-Brown who claims that, “There exists a ritual relation whenever a society imposes on its members a certain attitude towards an object, which attitude involves some measure of respect expressed in a traditional mode of behavior with reference to that object” (1952: 123). Ritual is here regarded as the symbolic element presented in almost every interactional activity of daily life,

for the activity, “however informal and secular, represents a way in which the individual must guard and design the symbolic implications of his acts while in the immediate presence of an object that has a special value for him” (Goffman, 1972: 57).

The ritual aspect of social interaction in Chinese society can be seen most clearly in a marriage ceremony in which an affinal relationship is formally established and publicly announced through a series of gift transactions and rituals – the so-called “Six Rites”, or in ancestral worship in which social relationships are celebrated and reinforced (cf Freedman, 1970). However, what will be concerned here are not the somewhat sacred rituals as such, but the more secular in nature and in people’s ordinary contacts in life, such as paying a visit. The interactional ritual in such a context is seen in the procedure of entertaining guests. I will use the example of a tea section, which is one part of this procedure, to demonstrate the existence of a ritual aspect in people’s daily interaction.

In southern Fujian and northeastern part of Guangdong, one of the inevitable actions in the whole course of entertaining guests is to serve the guests “*gongfu* tea”. The term *gongfu* refers, in most cases, to the fantastic and sometimes mystical Chinese martial art. But a close look reveals that it has a far broader usage in Chinese language and in the local dialect. It can be used as a noun to mean special skills or knowledge, in particular the martial art of fighting. In Lower River area, people describe those who possess special skills in crafts as “having *gongfu*” or “having deep (here good) *gongfu*”. In Hokkien, *gongfu* also means time. This usage is found in ancient Chinese too which is because, as scholars in linguistics believe, Hokkien is one of the remains of ancient Chinese.<sup>6</sup> *Gongfu* in local dialect is sometimes used as an adjective, which means i) time-consuming; ii) extremely careful (sometimes much more than necessary); and/or iii) (something) requiring extra (or great) amount of work.

How the name “*gongfu* tea” came about is not known. But why it got the name, as we shall see below, may be more easily apprehended. Firstly, it is because making and drinking the tea takes a lot of time, thus there is a saying “*xian lai xi pin gongfu cha*”, which means to enjoy the taste of *gongfu* tea (only) in spare time. Secondly, to make and drink the tea requires special skills and knowledge about the nature of tea, water, and most importantly, the complicated custom of serving it. Moreover, great effort is required in caring not to break the tiny tools in the course

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<sup>6</sup>Perhaps it should be pointed out here that, in modern written Chinese language, *gongfu* for time has a different character from *gongfu* for special skill.

of serving tea, and for some people especially for outsiders, special ability is needed in drinking such a strong and thick tea. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that, the term is used largely by outsiders who are bound to be impressed by its unique characteristics. For the local people, if one is going to make and drink tea, this is the way it is. They never think about whether it is “*gongfu*” or not.

The unique character of *gongfu* tea, in the first impression, is indicated by its specialized tools. The overall characteristic of the tools can be summarized by one word, “tiny”. The teapot, tea cups, and the kettle are all very small. In the eyes of people from other areas, they are so small that they cannot imagine what they are used for in the first place. The shape of a tea cup is very much alike one half of a table tennis ball. The choice of tea cups follows four words: tiny, shallow, thin and white. There are normally only three to four tea cups in the set, and people drink in turn if the number of guests exceeds the number of the cups. Besides, the specially made furniture including table and chairs, the tea pan to place the teapot and cups, sometimes called “tea boat”, the tea bowl to put wasted water and tea, called “tea sea”, and the tea spoon to put tea into the teapot, are all inevitable tools for making “*gongfu* tea”.

Another characteristic of *gongfu* tea is that, it involves a lot of knowledge both in making and drinking. People often say, *wenzhang fengshui cha, shi huo mei ji ge* ( There are not many people who know literature, geomancy and tea). From this remark we see the social value of the knowledge of tea, which here means knowledge of quality of tea and water to make it, knowledge on how to make a good cup of tea, ability to appreciate it, as well as the ritual or etiquette of serving it. In fact, as local people often say, one can estimate the sociability of a person from his behaviour in two contexts: serving tea in ordinary time and drinking wine in a feast. The procedure of *gongfu* tea is so complicated that making and drinking tea itself has become a kind of “art”, if viewed from one perspective, or “ritual” from another. There is a very strict procedure to follow in making *gongfu* tea:

- Showing the tea: the first step of *gongfu* tea is for the host to show and introduce the name and good quality of the tea to be made to the guests;
- Warming teapot and cups: before putting the tea into the teapot, warm up the teapot and cups by hot water; it also cleans the teapot;
- putting the tea into the teapot: this is done by using a small tea spoon with the help of a funnel or a piece of paper, avoid using the hand directly so as to maintain the purity of the taste of the tea. Tea usually fills two thirds of

the teapot, or even fills it, which is a stunning fact for those who have never encountered *gongfu* tea before;

- Washing the tea: use boiling water poured into the teapot fully, remove the foam on the surface, then pour out the water within the teapot to the teapan or a larger cup specially prepared for the used water. This is believed to “wash” the tea before it can be drunk, because people think that there dirt left in the tea during the processing of it;
- Filling: to fill the teapot with hot water again, cover it, pour the hot water over the outer surface of it in order to balance the temperature inside and outside the teapot – to make a good cup of tea;
- Cleaning the cups: while waiting for the tea to be ready, clean the cups in the teapan by using the water in the cups already for warming them up in the earlier steps;
- Going round the pot: now the tea is ready, but before pouring it into the cups, circle the teapot along the edge of the teapan so that wasted water on the bottom of it will not be mixed with the tea to damage the taste of it;
- Pouring tea: pour the tea into the cups bit by bit in turn, avoid to fill one cup at once in order to balance the cups in their strength, which is a usual mistake;
- Presenting tea: present the tea to the guests. The first cup always goes to the most prestigious if there is status difference among the guests, this especially true on occasions such as the marriage ceremony and at banquet tables of any kind where status differences are emphasized;
- Admiring and enjoying tea: the guests will not drink the tea presented to them immediately; they would rather admire the colour and smell of it before drinking it slowly to enjoy the taste. This is the most enjoyable moment in the whole process, especially for those who are good at drinking tea.

The tea in the teapot can be used several times until the colour of it becomes light by repeating stages 5 - 10 of the procedure. If the number of guests is more than the tea cups available, it should be drunk by the guests in turn, for it is not the custom to add a spare cup to the usual three or four cups in the set of the tea making tools.

There is not much difference in the basic procedure of making and serving *gongfu* tea to agnates in the same village or affines and friends from other places. People follow a similar procedure and the same codes of etiquette in both cases. Ritual, which arises from the routinization of any recurring relationship activity such as morning coffee at the kitchen table in western society, or the tea offered in Lower River village when a visitor comes, is a vital component of any social relationship including agnatic relationships and affinal relationships. Ritual aspect exists in the process of social interaction in any relationship. However, compared to agnatic kin in the same village, it is more clearly seen and emphasized in the way local people treating guests of affinal kin from another places. For instance, *gongfu* tea is not always served whenever an agnate pays a visit and the procedure is not strictly followed all the time even if it is served, since an agnatic kin is a more familiar person and he comes over more frequently. Rather than waiting for the host to make and serve the tea, he can instead make it himself and serve it to the host. When an affinal kin from other place comes, *gongfu* tea is an inevitable part of entertainment. The procedure is more strictly followed too. Moreover, the host will do as best as he can to entertain the guest: serving tea, offering cigarettes, buying wine, and preparing a table of delicious dishes. In other words, he will spend far more in entertaining an affinal kin who lives in other place and does not frequently come to have a visit. The whole course of entertainment usually turns out to be a somewhat ritualized performance for the host to show his hospitality and respect to the guest.

The context in which affinal relatives interact also adds to its ritualised impression. Visits of affinal kin in other villages most frequently happen on some special occasions of rituals or ceremonies. The first series of occasions of *laiwang* among relatives of different villages are the family events of rituals or ceremonies in a relative's life cycle, including the birth of a new child, his one or four month celebration, marriage, *fen-jia* ritual, birthday celebrations starting from 60 years old, and finally, death ritual (funeral). On these occasions, guests are required to present gifts of various kinds or money when they come. For instance, in a celebration of a new-born child after one month, the child's maternal grand parents are required to give a silver necklace decorated with a special designed silver tablet on which the names of the founding ancestor and the most important local deities of the mother's natal village are put, clothes and some other things. Among the clothes, there is always one red cloth which symbolizes their blessing of health and good fortune in the whole life of the new-born child. Further, the necklace will hereafter be presented to the ancestor and the deities in the birthday ceremonies of the ancestor and the deities

which in turn require the daughter and her child to come to her parents' village on these occasions. Another example is in the division of family, *fen-jia*, wife's parents are again required to give rice, cookery, and probably other basic furniture for the newly established family of their daughter within three days of the formal ritual of family division, called *tan fen jia*, "to visit the newly divided family". As for the out-marrying daughters, they are required by custom to visit their natal families in some specific festivals. For instance, in New Year's Festival, on the second or sixteenth day of the lunar first month, the visit is said to be for the daughters to express their affiliation to their parents, and one gift they should bring with them in this visit are pig's feet.

Among the gifts obliged by local custom, some are "basic", required specifically by the occasion, others are added and supplementary according to will and particularly the economic condition of the family concerned. The exchange of gifts in the above occasions may be asymmetrical, both in kind and in quantity, for some relationships such as parents and the out-marrying daughter, as defined by the role to which each belongs according to custom. In the above example of customary exchanges between parents and their out-marrying daughter, it seems the daughter gains more than what she gives. This may be quite true in general. Local people often say that an out-marrying daughter is like a dog, who is only loyal to her husband's family, and who seeks every opportunity to get valuables from her natal family to her husband's. Even so, a daughter is still regarded as one of the most reliable close kin by her parents. For she will support them in time of need.

People are required to give gifts in some occasions and obliged to receive gifts in others. Although the gifts they receive and give away may not be the same in kind and amount, people take them for granted as long as others behave in accordance with the custom. Nevertheless, in the long run, the giving and receiving should be approximately balanced, especially among those who are in a relatively distant relationship, even though there is probably no one who actually makes a careful calculation to work out exactly how much they gain or lose in a relationship openly.

Another important series of occasions for *laiwang* among relatives in different villages are annual festivals and among them the unique festivals in a village, i.e., the village's own events. Examples of the former in Lower River are the *Zhongyuan* (mid year) festival in the seventh month and *Pingan* (harvest celebration) festival in the tenth or eleventh month of lunar year. Whereas the birthday ceremony of the founding ancestor on the 15th of the second month is an example of the latter. Besides, the birthday ceremony of *Mazu* on the 23th of the third month is held

only in villages of the coastal area such as Lower River where fishing is the most important source of living. In the Zhongyuan and Pingan festivals, different villages in the Meiling Peninsula and nearby areas celebrate the festivals on different days of the month, forming a circle of festivals in the area, from the first day to the last of the month. The reason for this is not clear; its origin certainly was very long ago. Nevertheless, this situation has in fact become part of the mechanism of festivals which offer a chance for relatives in different villages to entertain each other, particularly when there is local opera (*pingan xi*) – which is always *Chao* opera in this area – to perform during the period of the festival. This includes visits to each other's houses on the days each village holds the festival, to exchange food and other items with each other, which are usually pork, chicken, duck and the like, as well as various kinds of cake.

The situation is like this, people in a particular village, if their Zhongyuan or Pingan festival is in the beginning of the month, serve as the host in the first place. They thus receive guests relatives from many other villages, and distribute gifts of food to their relatives in the other villages. However, they will then go to the relatives in the other villages when they hold the festival later and receive the same treatment and gifts in return. For instance, the Pingan festival of Lower River in 1990 was held on the seventh day of the eleventh month when almost all the villages in the peninsula had already finished their Pingan festivals the previous month, therefore many people in the village had been treated as guests in the places of relatives in other villages of the peninsula, and now it was their turn to serve as host to entertain their guests in the festival. Exchanges like this are usually symmetrical where the same people serve as host and guest in turn, giving out and receiving gifts of food on different occasions. For example, if a person receives 10 guests in the festival, it may mean that he and his family members have been or will be treated as guests in the houses of 10 relatives when they hold the festival, although the numbers of the two times may not necessarily be the same.

A lot of food is prepared during the festival. A lot of cakes are made to be distributed to various relatives in other villages, which from the point of view of the government is an illustration of the waste of resources in the superstitious local festivals and the main reason for banning traditional festivals during the Cultural Revolution. Obviously, both sides of the relatives have to spend several times the resources and money needed just to celebrate the festivals themselves. When I asked why not save this expenditure by celebrating the festivals on their own, people gave two kinds of answers. Firstly, since the food exchanged as gifts is usually reciprocal, that means what you spend on your guests will largely be received and consumed

later by yourselves, or, to put it in another way, what you received from your relatives will have to be paid back later, in your own days of the festival. It may be just the same food which people can make themselves at any time, so why bother to exchange? An old saying among the local people may well explain this: "The food to be shared is more delicious than that eaten on your own". In the sociological terms, sharing of food creates a kind of social relationship, whereas consumption of the same kind and amount of food does not. Secondly, festivals require a lot of people to come and celebrate, i.e., what the Chinese call *renao*, in English "noisy", a scene of bustle and excitement. For the local people, a good festival atmosphere means a lot of people, a lot of various foods, and a noisy environment such as fire crackers, opera, etc.

Besides, there is another point they failed to mention. For the peasants and fishermen in the area, there is not a division of weekdays and weekend, they work everyday for most of the year. It is only on these traditional festival days that they leave their work to relax and enjoy life, to exchange entertainments with each other and with their relatives, a little luxury they cannot have during ordinary time. In a word, local festival in the Lower River area is the most important part of villagers' social life that contains religious, social and cultural meanings.

On the other hand, preparation of various cakes in festivals, which is usually the job of the house wife, means much more work than usual for the house wife. To save the trouble for both sides may result in the relationship becoming more distant if they cannot find an alternative to counter balance the interactions. For example, one villager told me that the relationship between his family and the family of his son's sworn-brother in Tian village at the other end of the peninsula used to be very close since the relationship was established more than ten years ago. They used to exchange foods and visits during the important annual festivals such as Pingan and Zhongyuan. It has become more and more distant as a consequence of their trying to save trouble to each other several years before. They used to help each other to prepare some of the cakes to be made in the festival of the other. The ingredients of the cakes were sent to the other family before the festival day. The family made the cakes for the other and brought them with them when coming to be the guests of the festival. They took part in the festival and took some food and cakes as gifts with them when it finished. Several years ago, they both agreed that no more cakes be given as gifts in the festival in order to save trouble for both sides, but still come to enjoy the festival in the first year and take gifts of food as before. Later, though they did not remember which party was the first to do so, they did not show up in the festival of the other, which was understood as the signal to want to distance the

relationship. Although they still visit each other once or twice a year, both sides obviously feel that the relationship is not as close as it was. Perhaps the relationship based on sworn-brotherhood is more fragile than blood or affinal relationships, but this example conveys a general point for any social relationship in the Lower River area, that is, to maintain a relationship, both sides have to invest not only resources and money, but also effort of other kinds, such as hospitality in a unbroken chain of exchange. Sometimes one just has to take the trouble to do the exchange which appears to be unnecessary or meaningless, if he still wants to keep the relationship.

Therefore, social exchange and interaction among kinsmen, as part and parcel of their social life, are inevitable for maintenance of their relationships. They express the existence of a social relationship and substantialize it. After all, as villagers argue, what a kinsman means is for *laiwang* in the daily life. It is therefore only, for the kinsmen in the village, when they are involved in the process of social exchange that their kinship relations start to count.

There are some differentiations in the pattern of interaction between agnatic and affinal kin and between close and distant links in the same category of kinship. For the agnates in the same village, traditional kinship ideology emphasizes cooperation and solidarity with an in-group mode of interaction (*shuxi*). This has been greatly deteriorated by the constant dispute among them in the past decades. The frequent contacts among them do not lead to a close relationship, and the familiarity often becomes another term of ignorance. Consequently, rivalry and competition become apparent themes in their interaction. In contrast to this deterioration of agnatic relationships, the affinal links have been strengthened and become relatively closer in general, though the traditional out-group mode of interaction (*keqi*) with a stress of entertainment remains largely unchanged in their behavior. This distinction between agnatic and affinal kin in their general mode of social interaction is overshadowed by a further differentiation in frequency and content of exchange in relation to the closeness of relationship in both kinship categories. Generally speaking, frequency of exchange declines in line with closeness of the relationship, and most important help and support are exchanged only among closest agnatic or affinal kin.

On the other hand, there is a generally underlying norm of reciprocity, or the obligation to return, to regulate social exchanges among these kinsmen. Transactions of goods or services go in both directions, which is most clearly indicated in the local term, *laiwang*, for social exchange and interaction. The balance of exchange between two kinsmen is usually kept through such means as holding feasts or festivals in turn in different times. Although exchanges between kinsmen on the

occasions of such as the village festivals lead to consumption of more resources and bring more troubles for both sides, they are in themselves parts of the festivals and become inevitable for the maintenance of their relationships. The *laiwang* between kinsmen, the come and go of gifts and services, becomes the dynamic of their relationship. It is the spirit created in the process of come and go that binds them together. In Chinese society, the norm of reciprocity is called *bao*, and the spirit of exchange *renqing*. I will discuss these indigenous concepts later.

### 5.3 Social interaction among friends

The concept of friend in China is ambiguous both in definition and in usage. Its meaning may differ greatly for different people and in different situations. Friend, *peng you*, in the Modern Chinese Dictionary, refers to: a) people who have *jiaoqing* with each other, while *jiaoqing* in the same dictionary is the affective feeling resulting from interactions in the past; and b) parties who are in love. The second meaning seems hardly to appear in the dictionary of people in Lower River village. "Friends" in Lower River, as defined in chapter three, refers only to those from other villages, who have interactions (*laiwang*) with each other, specifically come to visit each other's home, but are not related through blood relationship or marriage. Friendship is built up by interactions in the past such as shared experience in social and economic activities. In the local people's mind, like kinship in the village, it has to be maintained through constant social interaction.

Compared to kinship, however, the importance of social exchange and interaction is more apparent in the maintenance of friendship. Unlike kinship in the local community in which the bond of blood provides, more or less, a combining force for the relationship and a moral constrain in the behavior, friendship is established and maintained only through the force of social interaction itself. Although there are *guanxi bases*, as suggested by Jacobs (1979), for the establishment of a friendship link, the development of friendship among friends depends ultimately on the process of interaction (*laiwang*) afterward.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, unlike most kin, friends are chosen, of which the instrumental value of a person becomes an important factor for the formation of the relationship. This does not mean to deny the sentimental element in a friendship. On the contrary, I intend to argue that the distinction between sentimental and instrumental relations (Hwang, 1987) holds very little value

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<sup>7</sup>One usual way for local people to strengthen the friendship link is to formalize the relationship by adding something else into it such as establishment of an alliance or a sworn brotherhood.

in Chinese society, in which the instrumental and sentimental elements are intermingled together. Affection comes largely out of the mutual support and care, which in turn is seen in the process of social exchange and interaction in daily life. In this respect, there is no difference between kinship and friendship. An observation of the pattern of social interaction among the limited number of friends in the village can thus throw light on interaction among kin, and provide insights into what keep the process of social exchange and interaction going, and the relation between this process and social relationship in general.

### 5.3.1 Friendship in Lower River

Friendship in Lower River is not common, as suggested by the cases given in chapter three. Not every family in the village has friends in its social network, and the proportion of friends in those who have is usually very small. On the other hand, the limited number of friends in the family network is usually treated as extremely valuable by members of the family, because friends provide channels to contact and reach key persons who possess a vital resource on exceptional or urgent occasions, such as a serious illness, a conflict, or a development attempt.

This is to a large extent determined by the social structure in rural China. Despite the fact that a village community in rural China is now less isolated, people in Lower River remain largely in the circle of kinship (agnatic and affinal) in respect of social interaction. They still rarely interact intensively with others outside the circle, that is, friends defined in this thesis. With the government's policy of restricting social mobility, villagers have very little opportunity to develop friendship with non-kin in the other places. Generally speaking, the limited number of friends some families in a village have come largely out of their special positions which enable them to contact outsiders in various social and economic activities, such as, for the village cadres, to go to a political campaign or a meeting, and for the newly emerged businessmen, to go out doing business. In Lower River, since it is a marketing town and the location of many state owned business organizations, as I mentioned in chapter two, it is also possible for some villagers to make friends with those who come to work or do business in the village. The case of doctor Zhou and his friends in Lower River examined here is very typical in many respects of establishment and maintenance of friendship in the village.

Doctor Zhou, age 28, was born in the county seat of Zhaoan. He is an easy-going young man, a bit shy in personality. Since 1987, he has been working in Meiling *Xiang* Hospital located in Lower River, which is nearly opposite the market

on the other side of the highway. There are some friends of doctor Zhou in the village. All of them are young men around the age of 30. They are Shaoci, Jingfa, Qionghui. They also include Shaoci's brother Shaoyan, Jingfa's brothers Jingtai and Jingyi, and Oionghui's brother Qionghwen, as well as several other young men in the village who are close to them. These are young graduates from middle school, with open minds and an entrepreneurial spirit. Their fathers have relatively high social status in the village, respected by other villagers. All of them are involved in business of various kinds, such as prawn ponds, a newly developed section of the village economy. Therefore their economic condition and social condition are relatively better off compared to ordinary fellow villagers and have the resources to make friends outside the circle of fellow peasants and fishermen.

Before moving to the daily interaction among this group of friends in the village, it would be interesting to tell how these young men used to live in two different social worlds to become friends.

Zhou graduated from Fujian Medical Studies College in Fuzhou, the provincial capital, in 1986 and started to work in the Zhaoan County Hospital in the county seat as a junior doctor. At that time, the county's medical authority was carrying out a policy to send in turn all young doctors and nurses who recently graduated from medical colleges and schools in the county seat to the county's 13 *Xiang*/township hospitals in order to strengthen manpower in the countryside hospitals. By doing so, the authority said, "to help the young men grow up more quickly from experience of medical practices in the vast countryside". The open secret, however, is to compromise the crowded hospitals in the county seat with the poorly facilitated, lack of staff countryside hospitals. For the young men themselves who were sent down, this was understood as the authority's effort to get rid of those who they did not like in a situation when more medical students would graduate from colleges, if the current system of higher education and job assignment remained unchanged, competing for the very limited number of posts in the county seat. As a young doctor said, "How can we *grow up more quickly* in such a place without basic facilities to do the simplest research? *We are simply losing all our knowledge learned in college!*"

Although in fact the young doctors armed with modern western medical knowledge and techniques are desperately needed in the countryside, almost no one likes the idea to be sent down, even those who were born in the countryside. Because they are afraid to be left out there permanently, in spite of the authority's promise to transfer them back to the original county hospital after three years service in the countryside. Not many people really trust the promise and believe that they can

come back so easily. Experience during the Cultural Revolution and before tells of too many promises which were not kept. Some stories I heard last year when I was in the field about young doctors who were sent down two or three years before struggling to come back when the three years limit approached, further confirm their worry. Nevertheless, people like doctor Zhou went to the countryside hospitals without any choice. What they could do to protest was to work unenthusiastically in their new posts, like doctor Zhou has been doing. He goes to work very late, and frequently takes holidays for himself. He has a name for laziness in the hospital.

Meiling Hospital where Zhou works was established in 1958 in the Great Leap Forward as a "medical station". It contained only three amateur doctors with very little professional training. It was moved to Lower River in 1962 and housed in two rows of one - storey building of which one still remains in the same place at present. In 1978, a new two - storey building was built on the site, to be the "Lower River Commune Hospital", which was changed to the present name: Meiling Hospital. The hospital has 22 staff at present. Among them, 10 are labelled "doctors" (qualified or not is another matter), 11 are medical technicians and nurses, and a woman in charge of collecting fees for medicine and service. Most of them come from the county seat (13), others from Meiling, Qiaodong *Xiang* and Xitang *Xiang*, one from Guangdong province. None of them come from Lower River. Doctor Zhou is the only one who was trained in a western style medical college and thus is a better qualified doctor. He has a room in the two - storey building which is used both as his work place during the daytime and bedroom at night. Normally he stays in the hospital during week days and goes back on weekends to his family in the county seat. It takes about half of an hour bicycle trip by a short cut from Lower River to the county seat. Sometimes he also goes home during week days, since work discipline in the hospital is not tough. This is probably because the director of the hospital is himself a young man in his late thirties who graduated from a medical technician school in 1980 and has been working here since, or due to the very fact that most people in the hospital pay little attention to the rules or discipline of the hospital because they are not satisfied to work here while at the same time cannot move to other places.

The young men in the village came to know Doctor Zhou through Baohui who is a medical technician in the hospital, in charge of pharmacy of traditional Chinese medicines. Baohui, who came from Shidu township, graduated from Zhaoan First Middle School in 1981, the same year as Doctor Zhou. They were in separate classes, but Baohui has a good friend who, also from Shidu, was a classmate of Zhou both in middle school and in medical college. For this reason they had known each other

before Baohui went to study in a medical technician school in Fuzhou for three years. However, it was not until they met in Meiling in 1987 that the relationship became very close. After graduation, Baohui worked in the Chinese Medical hospital in the county seat where he met and married his wife who was a nurse in the hospital and who happened to be my classmate in primary school and junior middle school. She graduated from a nurse school in Zhangzhou in the same year as Baohui. In 1987, the couple was sent down to Meiling Hospital according to the policy I discussed previously. So, by the time doctor Zhou was sent to Meiling, Baohui and his wife had already been there for a year and those young men in the village mentioned before had got to know them and had *laiwang* with them in the hospital. But, how did the young men in the village come to know the doctor in the hospital? They told me it was because of another two young men, Huang and Lin, in the hospital who had been there when they came to Lower River in 1987. Both Huang and Lin had transferred back to the county seat before I went to Lower River. They made friends with two of these young villagers: Qionghui, Jinfa and Shaoci when they were in Lower River.

Qionghui is the son of Xingzhang, described previously. He owns shares of a saw mill next to the hospital and of a prawn pond. Shaoci owns one third of a prawn pond since 1988. He used to work in a water transporting vessel. Later he tried the work of repairing watches, clocks, TV sets, and selling the components family electric facilities. He went to Dongshan Island in 1990 to grow prawns with another villager, and had success. One of his friends told me that in the year he earned 20,000 yuan from this venture. Another important figure of the group of these young men in the village is Jingfa who owns one share of a large prawn pond, and works regularly in a shell washing vessel. <sup>8</sup> We may say that all of the friends in this quasi-group are newly emerged rich families in the village. They have money and resources, as well as confidence, to make friends usually regarded as higher in social status than theirs.

The young men themselves have often played cards and games together since they were small children. They went to the same schools as well, from primary to middle school in Qiaodong. All of them failed to pass the examination to get to higher education and went back to the village to take up traditional fishing and water transporting. They succeeded in seeking the opportunity to develop their own family economy in the trend of rural reform, because they are relatively better educated than other young men in the village, perhaps more importantly, because

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<sup>8</sup>The prawn ponds in which these young men own shares are, respectively, No.7, No.19 and No.10 in the next chapter.

their fathers were an elite in the village whether as village cadres or the traditional gentry. Although they are not the richest, they belong to the group of richest young men in the village. Wealth has become the most important indicator of social status in the village and the nearby area, including the county seat. This is especially true among young men in the area. They compete in the clothes they wear, cigarettes they smoke, wine they drink, as well as many other things in their daily contacts. The consequence of this is stratification in the type of people who have *laiwang*: only those who are rich *laiwang* with the other rich. This group of young men are not only involved in competition with each other in many areas of social life in the village, they are also active in many areas of the village's affairs. The relatively poor do not have the resources to join in the activities of groups like this one in the village. They are too busy keeping their families survived.

To have friendship links with outsiders thus also become a symbol of social status in the village.

### 5.3.2 Social interaction among friends

The friendship between Doctor Zhou and these young men in the village is maintained through frequent contact and exchange of entertainment and help between them. Their social interaction mainly takes place in the hospital. These young men often come to the hospital to play cards in the evening or in spare periods during the day. What they played when I was there is a card game called *fuzhi*. Three or four persons start the game with an even number of cards in their hands. To win, one must finish his hand first. The number of cards still in your hand when someone else finishes are points lost. The points each person loses in several games are accumulated to an amount of money according to the rate of exchange agreed beforehand. It is a gambling game. However, since the money won in the game is for a meal and wine to enjoy together later, it is not considered as real gambling which may damage the existing relationship among the players, but as a fashion among young men, especially these friends, in the area at the moment. The players enjoy the game and the atmosphere of playing, and making jokes of other's mistakes in the game, with friends. The winner will enjoy a free meal and drink, paid by the losers. But on most occasions, there is no real winner or loser. In the end, everyone gives his sum for a meal and drink of the group.

More frequently, they come to drink tea and chat. Doctor Zhou's place is obviously a neutral territory to which they like to come. At other times they gather in Baohui's place. Baohui has to stay at the medicine store house to give patients

their medicine during the working hours of a day, so he just has to leave the young men to make themselves at home when they drop in, making tea or playing cards. Occasionally he comes over to join in the chat. The topics vary from current political events in the country, to the local news being circulated in the area. But on most occasions the topic is directly related to their life, such as how much money so and so in the area makes from his prawn farming this harvest, the sum so and so lost in the prawn growing this year, or whose ship has just made a fortune in water transport, the story of a newly sunk ship, or one of them who came back from a trip to Guangdong recently telling his story of the journey, boasting of the fantastic experience when the public security men at night sealed off the local small hotel he was staying in and searched out seven “chickens” (prostitutes), etc.

Since competition is an everyday occurrence in the village, the gathering of these young villagers often involves a “war of words” among them. It is a competition in boasting, trying to make oneself a superior to opponent, and positions can change in different situations, by joking about mistakes, the incidents of clumsiness, or whatever is embarrassing for the others. This is just like the competition in making and spending money, in the clothes they wear, the cigarettes they smoke, the lighter they use... which may be called the “silent competition” in which they compete in action. For instance, I once witnessed Jingfa and Qionghui in argument about whether or not there were as many prawns in the former’s pond as they expected. The argument occurred the day after Jingfa’s pond sold part of its produce. They had not caught as many as they expected. There is no secret how many prawns each pond sells every time in the village. Qionghui thus tried to use the fact to make a point, that owners of the pond were going to suffer a severe loss, in order to humiliate Jingfa, because Jingfa’s father is famous for his confidence in doing things and in business. The pond is the largest in the village. It had brought the families good profit every year since they contracted it from the village, a fact which was often in the topics of Jingfa’s boasting. Jingfa argued back that it was impossible to have only a small harvest, as Qionghui tried to “convince” him, because his brother, Jingyi, who is better than their father in the matter of growing prawns firmly believed that the harvest that year would be much better than the year before. The reason why they could not catch much the day before was due to the cold weather when the prawns had dug deeply into the mud, so that the net could not catch them. His argument was later proven right, which surely became part of the capital of his boasting next time. But the example demonstrates the way, among these young men, one tries to use every opportunity to be superior to others.

Sometimes, they also try to do business among themselves. An example of

this is Jingfa's elder brother, Jingyi, in discussion with another young businessman Huaizhong about bidding for a fish pond. On December 5, 1990, after lunch, I found Jingyi chatting with Qionghui and another young man in Baohui's room in the hospital when I came in. After greeting them I sat down as usual to listen to what they were talking about. It was about a fish pond, for which Jingyi's family had bid. The business the year before had been a failure – only about 300 *jin* of fish were caught and the money for selling them did not even balance the price they paid for the baby fish before. Thinking of selling off the right of the pond or finding others to join in the venture, he was trying to persuade the other two to invest in the business although he said he had found a Cantonese who was interested in it. He gave a list of “advantages” in joining in the investment. They included 20 years long term contract for a fixed rent of 140,000 yuan all together, from which they can get 70,000 yuan refund if they decide to give the pond back to the village authority 20 years later, a 10,000 yuan low interest loan from the bank and 18,000 yuan governmental poverty loan – a kind of development loan to help people out of poverty which has extremely low interest, etc. The atmosphere in a situation like this is rather different from the above example I gave. There is no joking at all. Everyone is very seriously in the businesslike negotiation. Although Jingyi made a lot of effort, the other two showed their sympathy in the failure but no interest in putting their money into it, obviously based on their own calculation.

As opposed to the above subtle competition in the interaction among themselves, the interaction between these young rich villagers and Doctor Zhou and Baohui is characterized by mutual entertainment, in which tea, cigarette and liquor play an important part. The three items are in fact the most important media in casual contacts in any social relationship. Beside the above playing and chatting in the hospital in daily life, and exchanges on some special occasions, such as in the funeral Qionghui's grandmother (Xingzhang's mother as referred in other places) at which doctor Zhou and some colleagues in the hospital attended as friends and gave their sums of cash, *laiwang* among them also takes the form that these young men offer doctor Zhou drinks and meals and the latter provides help related to the medical profession.

When there is a village festival, e.g., the birthday celebration of the founding ancestor on February 15, the birthday of Mazu on March 23, or the Pingan festival, or there is a more individualistic celebration such as harvest of prawn farm, etc. Doctor Zhou and Baohui are invited to their houses to have a meal with their families. These are the occasions when the young men show their respect to doctor Zhou. Feasts of this kind serve as a means to strengthen the existing relationship.

The attendance of a person of higher social status like doctor Zhou also brings face or honour to the host on such occasions. In the village festival such as Pingan festival, he has to go to several families of his friends each day in turn. Doctor Zhou also receives small gifts such as cigarettes, tea and wine, food of various kinds in exchange for his free service from the villagers. One day, several days after the Pingan festival of the year 1990, I found there were two ducks tied in front of his room in the hospital when I dropped in. I asked him jokingly, "where did you steal the ducks? I think I should report you to the public security office." He explained that he had been several times to see a villager patient without charging him anything. "It was through the request of a friend. Or else I would never bother to go to the home of a patient. Anyway, even were I to charge him for the service at the price set in the hospital, the money would not go to my pocket. So why not have it as a *renqing*?" Now the patient has recovered very well, and is very grateful. So they sent over the two ducks. He complained, by way of joking, "why not send cooked ones? I can hardly kill them. Instead I have to bring them back home in order to eat them!"

In exchange, Doctor Zhou provides very good services for his friends when they or their family members become ill, including going to their homes to see patients, which is regarded as exceptional since as a doctor in the hospital he does not have to go out to see patients but the patients go to the hospital to see him in working hours. He will be more careful about the conditions of friend-patients, to tell their relatives the real situation if he feels it is better to suggest they send the patient to the county hospital, or even larger hospitals in Zhangzhou, Xiamen, Fuzhou or Shantou, and asks friends in these hospitals to "look after" them – to give them special treatment.

For instance, in October, 1990, nearly one month before the Pingan festival, Shaoci's mother became seriously ill. Doctor Zhou, as a friend of Shaoci, came over to see her whenever he was asked, which occurred every day sometimes. She was over 70 years old. To die in this old age is by the local standard quite normal. Her relatives realized they had to accept the fact that she was going to die, after they brought her to Zhangzhou City Hospital for a full medical check and found that she had breast cancer which meant not much time for her to be alive. Doctor Zhou went with them to the hospital in order to get help from his friends working in the hospital. What they could do was to try their best to satisfy any demand the patient had. The only hope they had was to keep her alive as long as possible, at least until after the Pingan festival, because it is no good to have a funeral during the period of festival when people of the whole village are celebrating. It is not easy to get people to help at a funeral at this time. Not very many people except the very close

kin would be willing to come. For more than a month, Doctor Zhou personally took charge of her health. He came to the house almost every day in his spare time to see her. Whenever her condition was critical, someone rushed to ask him to come over, and he came immediately. On one weekend, when her condition was really bad, they sent a cab to fetch him in his home in the county seat late at night. He came over without hesitation.

In discussing his behavior to help his friends, doctor Zhou explained it by using a phrase: *peng you zhi jian* (between friends). It conveys anything happens among friends: playing together, sending gifts, providing help, ..., as well as a kind of obligation to do so. All these are related to a native concept, *renqing* (human sentiment), which in Lower River is crucial in the process of social exchange among friends as well as in the kin group.

## 5.4 Human sentiment and maintenance of social relationships

*Renqing* (human sentiment) is a key concept to understand the idea and practice of social relations and interaction in Lower River area and in Chinese society generally. It is so important that it is often taken by many people and some scholars to be the social relation or social interaction itself. The Chinese often consider themselves, or are taken to be, a nation with high regard for *renqing*. No one can have been brought up in Chinese society, without knowing the existence of *renqing*. Interestingly, perhaps due to the fact that it is a general and obvious phenomenon, attempts at conceptualization or systematic discussion of such an important concept have been found only in recent years, and, as far as I know, only by Chinese scholars (e.g., King, 1980; Yang, 1986; Hwang, 1987).

Despite of its frequent appearance in early literature,<sup>9</sup> the first to systematically discuss the meanings of *renqing* and its relation with Chinese social structure is perhaps Professor Ambrose Yeo-chi King of the Sociology Department in the Chinese University of Hong Kong. In 1980, he published an article entitled “An Analysis of *Renqing* in Interpersonal Relationships: A Preliminary Inquiry” (in Chinese) (King,

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<sup>9</sup>The first definition of *renqing* can be traced back to *Li-Chi* (Book of Ritual). It says: “What is so-called *renqing*? It consists of happiness, anger, sadness, fear, love, hate, and desire; all of the seven are acquired at birth.” Some sparking discussions of the *renqing* in Chinese society appeared in the early work of some scholars such as Fei (1948). But it was only in King (1980) that *renqing* started to be treated as an important sociological term.

1980). In this article, professor King points out that the term *renqing* has more than one meaning. He defines it as a relation of people: “*Renqing*, sociologically defined, refers to relations among people, that is, ‘the way to be with others’”. The article is a pioneering effort to uncover the meanings of *renqing* within Chinese social relations and social structure in terms of both Confucian ideology and Western theories of social exchange (of, e.g., Homans and Mauss). It leads to, in my view, a very promising new area of studying Chinese society – a sociological inquiry of the idea and practice of social relationships. However, his definition of *renqing* is too ambiguous, which limits his insight about the concept.

A better definition comes from Mayfair Yang. She says: “There are three senses in which *renqing* is understood by the person in the street: 1) It is human nature, that which distinguishes human beings from animals. Human beings are possessed of feelings and emotions, *ganqing*. 2) It is the proper way of conducting oneself in social relationships, treating each according to their specific status and relationship to oneself. 3) It is a bond of reciprocity between two people based either on emotional attachment or sense of obligation and indebtedness” (Yang, 1986:19). Just as King, Yang recognizes the significance of *renqing* in what she calls “the art of *guanxi*”: “One can either ‘perform an act of *renqing*’ (*zuo ge renqing*) by doing someone a favor, or ‘call on *renqing*’ (*tou renqing*) or appeal to the moral bonds of obligation between two persons. The ‘power of *renqing*’ (*renqing shili*) or the pressure of its moral force is such that it is very difficult to decline a request for help or to fail to return a debt of *renqing*” (ibid, 20).

The most sophisticated elaboration of the concept of *renqing* is perhaps that of Hwang (1987). Hwang, similarly, identifies three different meanings of *renqing* in Chinese culture. First, it refers to the emotional responses of an individual confronting various situations of daily life. In Hwang, *renqing* in this sense is to do with psychological empathy. “If an individual can understand other people’s emotional responses to various circumstances of life – feeling happy or sad when and as others do, or even catering to their tastes and evading or avoiding whatever they resent – then we may say such a person knows *renqing*. If, however, one is not sympathetic to other people’s feelings or ready to help them when they are in great need, then such indifference to people’s emotional responses will certainly foster a reputation of not knowing *renqing*” (1987: 953).

Second, *renqing* is a resource that an individual can present to another person as a gift in the course of social exchange. “In Chinese society, when one has either happy occasions or difficulties, all one’s acquaintances are supposed to offer a gift

or render some substantial assistance. In such cases, it is said that they send their *renqing*. Henceforth, the recipient will owe a *renqing* to the donors. By this, we see that *renqing* means a certain kind of resource that can be used as a medium of social exchange” (Hwang 1987: 954). In order to explain this point, Hwang borrows a scheme of Foa and Foa (1976) employed by them in their resource theory of social exchange. In the scheme, they use dimensions of “concreteness” and “particularism” as coordinates for describing the properties of six resources that are frequently exchanged in social interaction. They are money, goods, information, service, status, and love, in which money has most obviously to do with the dimension of concreteness, while love has the highest position on the dimension of particularism. Hwang adopts the scheme of resource properties by replacing love with *renqing*. He claims that, “an individual will be likely to exchange *renqing* only with particular partners in his interpersonal network”, and, he adds, “as a resource for social exchange, *renqing* may contain not only such substantive materials as money, goods, or service but may also include some abstract component of affection. This is the reason why *renqing* is so difficult to calculate and why one is never able to pay off debts of *renqing* to others” (ibid).

Third, *renqing* connotes a set of social norms by which one has to abide in order to get along well with other people in Chinese society. “This norm of *renqing* includes two basic kinds of social behavior: (a) Ordinarily, one should keep in contact with the acquaintances in one’s social network, exchanging gifts, greetings, or visitations with them from time to time, and (b) when a member of one’s reticulum gets into trouble or faces a difficult situation, one should sympathize, offer help, and ‘do a *renqing*’ for that person” (ibid).

The elaboration of these authors reveals some basic points about the concept and its relation with, or implications in, social interaction and social relationships. All these authors, however, have in different degree confused *renqing* with other concepts around it, such as *ganqing*, *bao*, *lian* and *mianzi*. They fail to distinguish “what is *renqing*” from “what *renqing* means to a person or a relationship”. The definition of King, as I said, is too ambiguous. Both Yang and Hwang take the expressions of human nature, of being able to respond to the outside world and other people as the first facet of *renqing*. This apparently comes from *Li-Chi*. However, what concerns *Li-Chi* about the natural emotional feelings a man has is how these feelings should be controlled in order to make him a member of society. All these emotional feelings are taken to be “natural” of every human being, which is often referred to *ren zhi chang qing* (the natural feelings of human beings). Although they may be the basis of *renqing* psychologically, as Hwang using the concept of “empathy” explains it,

they should not be confused with the concept of *renqing*, which, at least among the people of Lower River, is related to the process of social exchange between kin or friends.

A related issue here is the distinction between *renqing* and *ganqing* in Chinese society. *Renqing* as an analytical concept should be carefully distinguished from another concept *ganqing*, especially the “*ganqing*” used by Fried (1953) and Jacobs (1979). The basic difference between them is that *ganqing* expresses the degree of closeness of a relationship, while *renqing* refers to a specific social interaction and is indicated by the relationship of credit and debt between two parties of the relationship. Hence *ganqing* is generally related to the concept of “trust” while *renqing* is closely connected with the concept of “obligation”.

Both *ganqing* and *renqing* are “natural” result of the process of social exchange. *Ganqing* is attached to the relationship in the process. As Mauss (1954) points out, gift exchange in primitive societies is a collective representation. For the gift concerned is not simply a good in itself, but a symbol of the whole relation of reciprocity, thus in giving a gift to a person, the gift-giver is also expressing his trust that the person will repay the gift in future. Similarly, in receiving the gift offered, the gift-receiver does not only accept the gift, he at the same time accepts the gift-giver as an exchange partner. In other words, in receiving the gift people at the same time accept the one who offers the gift, the relationship between them, and the obligations attached in this relation. Thus the reciprocal exchange and the common accepted norms of returning in the relationship inevitably lead to the psychological feeling of closeness (*ganqing*). Other things being equal, more frequent reciprocal exchange in a particular *guanxi* should lead to “closer” *ganqing* between partners of the *guanxi*. If this is true, the “degree” of *ganqing* in a relationship should be testable in terms of the frequency of reciprocal exchange between its partners, or the length of the chain of reciprocal exchange in the particular relationship.

*Renqing*, on the other hand, is attached to the gifts or other exchanged objects in the same process. Here I should point out that it is misleading for Hwang to say that *renqing* is a resource that can be exchanged as a gift among people, though it is by no means a personal observation of Hwang but a very popular idea among the Chinese. Hwang confuses *renqing* with its carrying objects (gifts, favor or whatever being exchanged in the social interaction). Difference of the two is clearly demonstrated in Mauss’s (1954) idea of “the spirit of gifts”.

In his classic work, *The Gift*, Mauss introduces “spirit of gifts” by using the indigenous Maori idea of *hau*, which is “the spirit of things and particularly of the

forest and forest game” (Mauss, 1954: 8). He uses the words of a New Zealand Maori informant of Elsdon Best (1909), Tamati Ranapiri, which I quote here, to explain what *hau* means to the Maori.

I shall tell you about *hau*. *Hau* is not the wind. Not at all. Suppose you have some particular object, *taonga*, and you give it to me; you give it to me without a price. We do not bargain over it. Now I give this thing to a third person who after a time decides to give me something in payment for it (*utu*), and he makes me a present of something (*taonga*). Now this *taonga* I received from him is the spirit (*hau*) of the *taonga* I received from you and which I passed on to him. The *taonga* which I receive on account of the *taonga* that came from you, I must return to you. It would not be right on my part to keep these *taonga* whether they were desirable or not. I must give them to you since they are the *hau* of the *taonga* which you gave me. If I were to keep this second *taonga* for myself I might become ill or even die. Such is *hau*, the *hau* of personal property, the *hau* of the *taonga*, the *hau* of the forest... (Mauss, 1954: 8-9)

The text means that, according to Mauss’s subsequent explanation, the *taonga* and all strictly personal possessions have a *hau*, a spiritual power. It is attached to a gift. Even when given to others by the giver, it still forms part of him. Therefore, the *hau* of *taonga* obliges the recipient to repay the *taonga* when received as a gift. Although here we see, logically, this Maori *hau* explains only why gifts are repaid, it is raised, by Mauss, to the status of a general explanation: obligations to give, to receive and to repay, and the prototypical principle of reciprocity in Melanesia, Polynesia, and the American northwest coast, the binding quality of the Roman *traditio*, the key to gifts in Hindu India (Mauss, 1954).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Mauss’s interpretation of the *hau* had come under attack later by Levi-Strauss, Firth and Johnson. Levi-Strauss questions in general Mauss’s reliance on an indigenous rationalization. Firth and Johnson, criticise Mauss on points of Maori ethnography. For them, Mauss simply misunderstood the *hau*, which is a more passive spiritual principle than Mauss believed, beside confusing different types of *hau* that in the Maori view are quite distinct – the *hau* of persons, that of lands and forests, and that of *taonga*. His account for an obligation to return gifts by the supernatural sanction of *hau* is accordingly rejected by Firth. By re-examining the original texts of Best on the Maori including the one quoted above, however, Sahlins defends and further elaborates Mauss’s notion. Sahlins agrees that the idea of *hau* in Maori comes from the belief in supernatural spirit and *hau* in Maori belief is “housed” in *mauri* of the forest, but he argues the logic is also applicable to secular exchange. For Sahlins, the meaning of *hau* that one disengages

The concept of *renqing* in Chinese society, in particular the Lower River area, is similar to Maori *hau* in terms of obliging a return of gift and thus creating a bond of social exchange. Transactions of gifts and various other resources among kin and friends in Lower River are mostly bound by *renqing*, the Chinese “spirit of gifts”. However, it also differs from Maori *hau* in many respects, among which the most important is that it is more secular. Although *renqing* in Chinese culture is often related to the concept of *bao* to designate a strong moral obligation of returning favors in the process of social exchange, it is also expressed in terms of business-like contract. To exemplify, if B receives a gift or a favor from A, then A has *renqing* to B. According to the Chinese norm of *bao* (Yang, 1957), it is a moral obligation for B to return the favor later in the suitable time. But the obligation is sometimes explained by Chinese people by regarding the favor as a kind of “debt”, which is often found in the expression of *renqing zhai* (the debt on *renqing*) frequently used in everyday conversation in contemporary China. Thus, A is a creditor while B is a debtor in terms of *renqing* at the moment. Next time B gets a chance to help A in doing something, he then discharges the “debt” of *renqing* he owed A in their last transaction.

There is a common agreement among the above authors that the concept of *renqing* in Chinese culture connotes norms to ensure the proper behavior of people in specific social contexts, in which they seem to confuse *renqing* with some existing concepts used by scholars in the field, such as *bao*, *mianzi*, *lian*. The elaborations of these concepts by Yang (1957) and Hu (1944) have already become classics in the literature on Chinese society. *Renqing* apparently has a very close relation with these social norms in society. In a sense, it is only when it is related to them that *renqing* starts to be meaningful both to a social relationship and to the society generally. But it is another matter to equate it with these norms because it can only bring confusion. Therefore, despite the fact that in their discourses Chinese tend to use the concept of *renqing* both to cover a wide range of meaning, including what has been discussed by Yang (1957) and Hu (1944), and to refer it to different things in different situations, at a theoretical level, in order to avoid the confusion between different meanings of the concept, as the above authors do, and the confusion of it with other concepts such as *bao*, I will define *renqing* in this thesis the Chinese “spirit of gifts”, borrowing the term of Mauss (1954), or more specifically, *a sense of obligation or indebtedness among people created by exchange of gifts or favors which functions together with the norms of reciprocity to maintain their social relationships*.

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from the exchange of *taonga* is as secular as the exchange itself. For more on the controversy, see Sahlins (1972).

*Renqing* defined as above can therefore be seen as both a product of social exchange between two individuals and an important component of their social relationship. It is produced by a transaction, which creates a temporary imbalance, and discharged by the next transaction in the process of social exchange. *Renqing* in this exchange process, whether being considered to be an obligation or a debt, serves as an evidence of a conscious awareness of this imbalance for both sides, which under the norm of reciprocity (*bao*) requires the *renqing* debtor to return something in order to address or change his status in relation to the *renqing* creditor. Through the process of sending gifts or doing favors – creating *renqing*, and returning (*bao*) the gifts or favors, thus *renqing* attached to them, the social relationship between two individuals is thus maintained and strengthened. Social exchange and interaction in this sense are the “dynamics” of a social relationship.

In the example of doctor Zhou and his friends in Lower River, the help Zhou gave to Shaoci during the period of his mother’s illness was considered by the latter to be a big favor. Shaoci hence owed much *renqing* to Zhou, which obliges him to do something in order to express his gratefulness in future. But whatever Shaoci does, it is always difficult for him to say that he has paid “all” the *renqing* he owed Zhou for such a big favor. *Renqing* as a sentimental concept is very difficult to measure (Hwang, 1987). Chinese people often say that debt of *renqing* is much more difficult to repay than debt of money. A more important reason for people in a long standing relationship having difficulty in repaying all the *renqing* is due to a high frequency of transactions. It is not unusual among close kin and friends in Lower River to be unable to sort out their relations of *renqing*. As Fei, in referring in general the Chinese of the forties, points out,

Intimate kin relations have constrained various social activities... Kin are members of an “in-group”, the branches of a trunk, so basically they should support each other and share whatever they have or are short of. In intimate social life, among close kin, interdependence is multi-dimensional and long standing, thus it is almost impossible to sort out clearly a balance of giving and taking each time. In fact, solidarity of the intimate kin group depends on unpaid *renqing* among its members. In our society, this is most clearly seen in friends’ rushing to pay the bill, which means to make the other party owe *renqing* to oneself, just like making an investment. Owing others *renqing*, one has to find an opportunity to repay it with more gifts. Giving more gifts is to have another party owe *renqing* to oneself in reverse. Transactions like these sustain mutual support among people. In an intimate group, it is impossible

for one not to owe others *renqing*, and to be afraid of “sorting all out”. To sort all out means to discard the relationship, because if they were not owing *renqing* with each other it would not be necessary for them to interact (Fei, 1948: 80).

A social relationship is thus maintained through the process of exchange, which is taken here by Fei to be the one of investing and reversing *renqing*. Apparently, the norm of reciprocity, to which Chinese refer as *bao* (Yang, 1957), is vital in the whole process of exchange. It is a “starting mechanism”, to borrow the term of sociologist A. Gouldner. To Gouldner, the norm of reciprocity is the very foundation of society. It activates people to exchanging and interacting behaviour before there is a personal benefit in doing so (Gouldner, 1960: 176). In this respect it is interesting that Blau (1964: 92) turns Gouldner’s notion around, arguing that human societies begin with people exchanging because it is self-serving to do so, and then, in time, norms are generated to govern the mutually satisfying exchanges in order to keep them going during those periods when there is an imbalance in the beneficiality of the interaction. The question here is: which came first, the norm or self interest? The difference between them in answering the question is due to their different theoretical stand-point. Gouldner, as a functionalist like Radcliffe-Brown, tends to emphasize the balance in exchange as basic to society (Schneider, 1974: 115). But an agreement also exists, that is, the importance of a norm which keeps people interacting in time during which no near benefit can be gained. In this respect, the norm of reciprocity becomes a kind of obligation, driving people to return gifts and favor received and to keep the exchange going.

The obligation of returning a favour should not be understood as a pure morality matter. Rather, it is a mixture of social morality and consideration of personal interest. The emphasis of fulfilment of the obligation, as Firth (1959: 421) points out, lies very much in the social sanction – the desire to continue the useful social and economic relations, the maintenance of prestige and power. In the Lower River area, it is clearly related to the notion of “face” which, as will be demonstrated below, has both moral and social dimensions. Face can be defined generally as a person’s image in public. It is a conception combining such socio-psychological elements as prestige, honour, reputation, status, and their negative aspects such as shame, etc. The idea of “face” is a cross-cultural phenomenon, having its different versions in different cultures. <sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>For example, serving guests with big feasts and damaging the precious bronze metalwork and expensive blankets in the *potlatch* among the Northwest American Indians are closely related to face; the competition by all effort with all resources with rivals to become a “big man” in Melanesian

Face in China has two dimensions, corresponding to two different words used by the Chinese representing face: *lian* and *mianzi*. This argument was firstly made in a classic work by Hu Hsien-chin (1944). According to Hu, *lian* is related to evaluation of the ultimate moral right or wrong. It is “the respect of group for a man with a good moral reputation: the man who will fulfil his obligations regardless of the hardships involved, who under all circumstances shows himself a decent human being. It represents the confidence of society in the integrity of ego’s moral character, the loss of which makes it impossible for him to function properly within the community. *Lian* is both a social sanction for enforcing moral standards and an internalized sanction” (p.45). *Lian* is thus the result of an individual’s socialization process which creates an internalization of society’s basic moral codes. Violation of such moral codes, such as the incest taboo, leads to a loss of *lian* which in turn will result in social ostracism and the collapse of ego as a whole. Therefore, *lian* is where a person becomes a human being, the essential property of every individual in the society. *Mianzi*, on the other hand, is related to a person’s social status and prestige. It stands for “the kind of prestige that is emphasized in this country: a reputation achieved through getting on in life, through success and ostentation. This is prestige that is accumulated by means of personal effort or clever manoeuvring. For this kind of recognition ego is dependent at all times on his external environment”. *Mianzi* is gained or lost in battling for social prestige and social advantage. One accumulates *mianzi* by showing oneself capable, wealthy, generous and possessed of a wide network of social relationships (ibid).

Some disagreements appear recently. Ho, for example, recognizes that the meanings of *lian* and *mianzi* vary according to verbal context and are not completely differentiated from each other in that the terms are interchangeable in some contexts (Ho, 1976). M. Yang, on the other hand, argues along the line of Hu that

“I found that *mianzi* is a more common factor constraining *guanxi* reciprocity than *lian*. In conversation regarding the practice of the art of *guanxi*, the word *lian* was seldom used. Perhaps this greater importance of *mianzi* in the art of *guanxi* is an indication that, as a pragmatic

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islands is partly for face; the pretending to be “moderate” and the unique behaviour observed in a restaurant when paying the bill are also for face; and the shopping in one particular supermarket in Britain, such as “Harrods”, where the same goods cost much more than in ordinary department stores, is often not for convenience but for the face of customers themselves. However, the exact meaning of face in different societies may be slightly different. In the North American Indians, the gaining of face means making others in the same community inferior. In Melanesia, face is embodied in the political power of the “big man”. While the example in Britain may be seen as one expression of the pride and snobbery of British middle class.

set of tactical manoeuvres, the art of *guanxi* eschews the universalistic and transcendental morality associated with *lian* and instead is guided by a set of situational ethics which allows for the pressing of social and personal advantages without jeopardizing self-esteem and social standing and without prescribing fixed social roles and expectations” (1986: 85-86).

King (1986) further claims that the distinction between the use of *lian* and *mianzi* by Hu is only found in Mandarin speaking area in the north, while in regional dialects in the south, in Cantonese or Hakka for instance, no such distinction can be made. Examples he gives indicate that the word *mian* in Cantonese includes the usages and meanings of both *lian* and *mianzi* in Mandarin, which finds support in Minnan dialect speaking in Lower River area. Nevertheless, he admits the existence of different dimensions in the meaning of “face” in Chinese culture implicated by the argument made by Hu on *lian* and *mianzi*, and further clarify them respectively as the “moral” face and the “sociological” face (King, 1986: 43-49).

All these authors agree the notion of “face” is an important social and moral factor in maintaining social relationships by regulating people’s behavior. Face in Chinese society is clearly related to the confirmation or violation of certain rules and norms obliging people to act in certain ways. In the context of social interaction between friends or kin, it is related to the concept of *renqing* and the obligation to repay it (*bao*). Generally speaking, a person who fails to express his appreciation for the help received and pay the *renqing* he owed will lose face in the public eye (*mianzi*); he himself may also experience the feeling of shame (*lian*). In contrast, the one who properly expresses his gratitude and generously returns the favours received before will obtain his face. Because a person’s face is so important in his social life, the “loss of face” in fact means social bankruptcy, which is a severe sanction for him. Therefore, the idea of face functions as a mechanism of social control, which regulates the proper operation of social relations.

To conclude this chapter, I should once again emphasize the importance of social interaction in a social relationship. As local people see it, it is only when two persons have *laiwang* that existence of their *guanxi* is to be recognized. The flow of gifts, favors, entertainment, information and so on between both sides is to substantialize the relationship. That is, the process of social exchange between them helps to maintain the relationship. This is most clearly seen among friends. Friendship in Lower River is found only between villagers with outsiders. It is built on the basis of long term social interactions in some specific contexts where villagers are able to

regularly contact non-kin within or outside the village. The friendship relation is kept alive by constant social exchange and interaction (*laiwang*). In the process of social exchange between friends and kinsmen, several elements, including *renqing*, *bao*, *lian* and *mianzi*, are very important. The ideas of *renqing* and *bao* in the society explain why transactions between relatives and friends usually become a long process of social exchange. *Renqing* is initiated by a transaction of gift or favor, which obliges the receiver to return the gift or favor next time under the norm of reciprocity (*bao*). The idea of *bao*, i.e., to return or pay back, as a social norm is the basis of any social exchange in Chinese society. It is the promise of return that makes people initiate the exchange. But the enforcement of this social norm, as the previous discussion shows, depends very much on another important concept in the society. This is the idea of “face”. Face in China has both sociological and moral meanings. It is moral because it is based on individual’s confirmation to the basic moral codes of the society, which are largely internalized in the process of socialization. It is sociological because the confirmation in itself brings the individual social prestige and power. The close relation between face and kinship or friendship indicates the complexity in the behavior of kin or friends, which seems to be ignored by scholars in their argument of a “moral” or a “rational” peasant (Scott, 1976; Popkin, 1979). It is found in the village that people’s behavior have both moral and rational considerations, which frequently takes the form of maximizing personal interest within the framework of basic moral constraints.

## Chapter 6

# Social Relationships in Economic Cooperation

If asking Chinese people what their social relationships mean to them, the answers on most occasions will be related to their usages in various fields of socioeconomic life. The term *guanxi* in Chinese language has an immediate implication, whether implicitly or explicitly, of utility. This is even more clear in the local term of *laiwang*. It is this mutual utilization or exploitation in daily life, which often takes the form of reciprocal exchange of favor and support, that keeps most social relationships in existence. The action of utilizing social relationships itself has always been part of the social interaction between both sides. With the implementation of farmer's contracted responsibility system in Lower River since 1980, the organization of economic activities in the village has returned from the collective and production team to the basic socio-economic unit— the family. The idea of utilizing and exploiting available social relationships in family's economic development become ever more important.

Economic activity in Lower River now is a kind of “family business”, in which much of the work is decided and carried out independently by members of the family. A typical family business in the village is found in one of its traditional subsistence activities – fishing with a small bamboo boat. Here an individual family take care of its subsistence on it own. Cooperation is only found within the family in the form that different family members carry out diverse economic activities in order to support the whole family. For these families in the village, a bamboo boat is usually the most important property which provides the main portion of the family income. Since each fisherman owns his own bamboo boat, no cooperative partner from another family is required. Bamboo boats provide their owners with a sense

of independence that some people in the village prefer to have. They go fishing without cooperating technically and financially with others. Thus one does not have to negotiate with others on what to do and how to do it. Although the catch of a bamboo boat each day is not as large as a big fishing ship which is able to go further in the sea, some fishermen in Lower River like to have the sense of autonomy and independence which others do not have. Men who own bamboo boats go fishing everyday according to the tide. They go out when the tide is high and come home at the next high tide. Sometimes they go out in the very early morning and come back before noon, or out in the morning and back in the late afternoon, or out in the evening and back next morning. Equipment in a bamboo boat is quite simple. Besides some fishing nets and baskets to put the catch in, there is nothing on the boat. All these can be carried by the man on his shoulder from home to the sea. Fishing nets may vary according to seasons and the kind of fish to catch in the water area. The catch of each bamboo boat all depends on the personal luck and skill of the fisherman. Thus it is not surprising that different people, even fishing in the same water area, may have different catches.

Nevertheless, there are a lot of economic activities a single family is unable to operate independently. For instance, those who go fishing by using larger fishing boats in order to go further out to sea in the hope of catching more, or those in the business of shell washing or in water transport. A boat or ship is usually owned by several families, and the business is carried out cooperatively by them. Even in the example of fishing with bamboo boats, cooperation in a more general sense is necessary. Fishermen of this group often go out to sea together at about the same time, creating a wonderful scene on the beach characterized by noise and excitement, sometimes a sense of sacredness. For some of the close kin, they go out together and fish in the same water area in order to mind each other in case of accident. This is very important to the extent that psychologically they are in a position to assure each other in the dangerous sea where one can never be sure what will happen. This is of particular significance for those who are greenhands in the business.

This chapter looks at the use of social relationships in economic cooperation in the village, with the example of prawn growing – the newly emerged business in the area, focusing on the use of kinship and friendship in the formation of business partnership.

## 6.1 A case of joint venture in prawn farming

The first time I came across prawn growing – which is believed to be one of the ways for peasants in coastal areas to be quickly better off – was far earlier than when I went to Lower River to do my fieldwork in 1990. It was in 1987 when I was still in the graduate school of Xiamen University. At the time the Department of Marine Studies of the university joined a venture in Zhaoan to help development of prawn growing enterprise in the county, as part of a large package to assist the county's socioeconomic development. <sup>1</sup>

The place for carrying out the joint venture was chosen at Xishan state farm, only about two miles away from the present prawn farms of Lower River. It was a joint venture by three parties. The other two parties were the state farm and a group of farmers who contracted to manage a piece of water area from the farm. They came from a village near the county seat represented by a man called Lin Binkun.

Two of the three personnel sent by the university were Zhaoan born, working in the Department of Marine Studies. One is a lecturer and the other an official. The former had been working in the prawn farms near Xiamen city for a couple of years before he was sent by the department to Zhaoan. He had obtained a lot of experience and developed techniques in the artificial growing of prawns. The third person, a professor in the department, only went to Zhaoan occasionally during the period of the cooperation to help to sort out problems. I had been acquainted with former two for years. So I soon learned the whole story of the project from its initiation to failure. But most data given here were checked once again when I went to interview them in October, 1990. Copies of documents of the cooperative including the original contract and reports by the official to the university authority

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<sup>1</sup>This followed a new policy of the government to encourage institutes of higher education in the country who possess most of China's intelligence to help, with man power and techniques, economic development of the poorest areas in the country. Xiamen University chose to help Zhaoan county in order to implement the policy. The county was poor in the sense of its weakness in industrial base, thus lack of a stable tax source for the local government whose finance had been in the red for a long time since the reform. The title of poor county, which is not something to be proud of, was in fact won by the county leadership through *guanxi* at provincial level for it could bring to the local government more favorable tax and financial policies. People in Zhaoan were not poor compared with the average of the country and the province. They have been taking advantage of geographical position to trade across the border between Fujian and Guangdong which frequently have very different local policies and taxation. The average bank deposit per capita in the county was said to be one of the highest in the province at the time when it got its "poor county" title.

on reasons for failure of the project were also obtained from them at the time.

According to the contract signed by representatives of the state farm (as A party), the group of farmers (as B party) and the university (as C party), a cooperative was set up in March, 1987. The contract also set the amount of investment each party required for the cooperative and the distribution of its share. All three sides agreed that ownership of the cooperative be divided into ten shares: one for A, five for B, and four for C parties. The actual sum of money and form of investment for the three parties are as follows:

A – 80,400 dollars RMB, which is in effect the calculated total rent that would be paid in five year's time for the 268 *mu* water area provided by the state farm for building the prawn farm of the cooperative.

B – 180,000 dollars RMB, paid in cash based on a time table agreed by other two parties.

C – 150,000 dollars RMB, half of it paid by cash and other half by the prawn-feed provided by its two feed-processing plants.

A board of management for the cooperative was formed by three representatives from the state farm, the farmers and the university respectively. Xiamen University would also provide one or two technicians to take care of technical matters of the prawn farm. The contract also includes other personnel and labour hiring of the cooperative, and the distribution of profit, management of finance, rights and duties of each party in the cooperative.

The 268 *mu* of water area was divided into six ponds variously from 40 to 70 *mu* each. On April 14, 1987, the first season's baby prawns were put into the ponds to grow. They were the "Eastern" prawns purchased with the help of the county's Bureau of Agatic Products from Shandong province. However, when the prawns were ready to harvest in October, the cold storage of the county's Bureau of Agatic Products in Gongkou village contracted to buy all their prawns was not yet ready. The cooperative had to wait for its completion and suffered a serious loss, for the cost of a large amount of feed and the death of prawns not harvested in time. As a consequence, no money was made in the season, which seeded all the later troubles that led to the end of the project in the next year. In the second season "Long hair" prawns were grown. The baby prawns were put into growing in May and started to be harvested in November of the year. Initially the contract was for five years, starting from April of 1987. However, it ended in March of the next year, following

Table 6.1 Final report on finance of the cooperative

<b>Expenditure</b>	
baby prawns	106938
prawn feed	388930.45
tools	8213.94
medicines	360.80
other materials	3622.80
administration	14600.64
wage	20000
rent	80400
tax	1872
total	631518.63 †
<b>Income</b>	
prawns	453936
wage refund	2700
rent refund	26800
selling property	8246.66
total	491682.66
<b>Deficit</b>	<b>139835.91 †</b>

†These figures in original document were not correct according to my own calculation. They should be 621315.83 and 129633.17 respectively.

firstly the failure to meet targets of production and profit in the first season, and then a dispute between C and B parties in the harvest time of the second season of the year. The dispute was caused by the farmers' leaking prawns to the water area which was next to the prawn farm. The water area had been contracted by some of the Lin brothers since 1984.

A final report of finance of the cooperative given in table 7.1 shows a severe loss in the first year of the cooperative which is probably the more important reason for its end.

As I have mentioned previously, the group of farmers owned five of the ten shares of the cooperative, investing 180,000 dollars RMB into the business. They were the most important party in the cooperative both for their shares and their obligation to raise most of cash for the starting and running of the cooperative. They were

at the same time the most vulnerable party too. The other two parties were state enterprises. The success or failure did not affect too much the “iron rice bowls” of their personnel involved. The state farm in effect provided nothing more than a piece of land which had been useless before. It used the rent to join the cooperative. It was simply trying to make something out of nothing. Hence, no great expectation had been put on the business, although some leaders of the state farm – the head and deputy – who had a personal interest would certainly have prayed for its success. As we shall see below, they owned ten percent of the shares that belonged to the group of farmers. The university tended to see this project as an experiment to open new ways for its alliance with local enterprises in the situation that there would be less and less government funding, and it would be pushed to become an enterprise to fight for its survival in future. Thus although this cooperation was taken seriously, it was allowed to be either success or failure in the end since this was treated as an experiment. Whereas for the group of farmers, 180,000 dollars was a huge amount of money. Most of the money was borrowed either from the bank or from relatives. They could not afford any loss in the business, which could only end for them either in prison or in debt for the rest of their life even for the next generation. This is the main reason why they decided to take the unhonored action to leak prawns into their own contracted water area in the second season after the unexpected failure of the first.

However, the important issue concerned here is not the interesting pattern of joint venture between an institute of higher education, a state farm, and a group of farmers in the particular socioeconomic context of the country in that period, or their different interests and thus attitudes toward the cooperative among the leadership and other personnel in the cooperative, which in my view inevitably led to failure of its business and end of the cooperative. What I want to bring forward here is the pattern of peasant investment demonstrated in this case, which is a typical form of family business requiring some sort of cooperation among relatives since the scale of investment is too large and no individual family can take it on without support of others. Kin here serve as a system of security in spreading the risk of the investment since the risk is high with a high expected return profit.

The group of farmers was in fact a family network linked by kinship and friendship. At its core was Lin Binkun who was the third of the Lin brothers and who represented them in the cooperative. The rest are brothers and close kin or friends of him. It may be worth pointing out that the Lin brothers are all ordinary peasants. Their occupations vary only from farmer to village barber or hired labourer. The only thing that might be a bit unusual was that, I was told, the father of the Lin

brothers once joined the Communist led Wushan Guerrilla Force which was active in the mountainous areas of the western part of the county before 1949. He left the force for some unknown reasons. During the Cultural Revolution he committed suicide for being punished in the village.

Within the group, they divided their shares into ten, each for 18,000 dollars RMB, as follows: Lin Binkun, his second elder brother, and three younger brothers each had one share; the eldest brother who married uxorically and lived with his wife in the county seat before 1949 owned half a share, the other half was for Zhang who used to be a friend of the father of the Lin brothers. Zhang was hired by the cooperative as an accountant too; the son of Binkun's eldest sister who married to a next village owned one share; a cross-cousin of the brothers, Shen, who worked in the county's agricultural committee and helped the brothers to contract the water area next to the prawn farm in 1984 and made the deal with the state farm and Xiamen University later, also owned a share; another cross-cousin, son of father's sister, Cheng, who lived and worked in the county seat, owned another share; the last share was given to the leaders of the state farm, who the Lin brothers got to know through their cross-cousin Shen. There were 8 hired labourers for the cooperative. Most of them were relatives of the brothers in villages near the state farm.

Thus there are 55 percent of the shares owned by the Lin brothers themselves, 30 percent by their close relatives, and 15 by friends. This composition, as we shall see in the case of prawn farms in Lower River, is quite typical in the new profitable business in the area. The cousin of the Lin brothers who works in the county agricultural committee, and the leaders of the state farm, represent a patronage relationship that is vital for the business both for economic insurance (e.g., of loans from banks) and political protection.<sup>2</sup>

## 6.2 The development of prawn farms in Lower River

Before the "claiming land from the sea" in 1960s, what are now prawn farms of Lower River, and in fact of many other village in the peninsula, were part of the

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<sup>2</sup>Xiamen University once threatened to take the Lin brothers to court for their leaking prawns from ponds of the cooperative to the water area contracted by them. After a long process of subtle negotiation, with the help of some leaders in the county, the dispute resulted several months later in March, 1988 in a compromise with the loss of each share reduced from about 14,000 RMB to less than 10,000 RMB which was the top limit acceptable for the university.

mouth of Dongxi River. During the period of 1962 to 1963, in the tide of “learning from Dazhai”, the county authority mobilized thousands of peasants in the nearby areas to claim land from the sea by building dams and other irrigation system. The project was led by a man named He Yaopo, the then deputy party secretary of Zhaoan county, who was from Lower River village and was killed by the Red Guard during the Cultural Revolution. <sup>3</sup> The reason why I specially mention He Yaopo here is partly because he is by far the highest rank cadre from Lower River since 1949. More importantly, after the turning over of his case, the family group formed by his sons and his brothers has become the most powerful group in the village and the peninsula region. His three younger brothers all hold an important position in the county. Yaoci, the first brother, is in charge of the county’s Bureau of State Security. Jutai, the second brother, is head of the county’s Office for Taiwan Affairs. Jushou, the third brother, is director of the county’s Bureau of Industrial and Commercial Administration. Not surprisingly, children of the brothers are becoming important too. This will be shown in the following.

As mentioned in chapter 2, the campaign to claim land from the sea created several thousand *mu* of paddy field from the sea. 600 *mu* were given to Lower River, the biggest village in the area which, according to the villagers, produced sufficient staple food for the village before the decollectivization. The 600 *mu* of paddy field produced no more rice and became useless in the early period of eighties for the irrigation system had been damaged since the end of 1970s. They were soon used for another purpose in the mid 1980s. They have been progressively converted into prawn farms.

The first prawn farm in Lower River came from a fish pond. In 1982, Huaguan, Zhangzhi and Yuntan (who died several years later) led a group of villagers to contract 200 *mu* of water area and unused land from the brigade to make a fish pond. The rent to the brigade was fixed during the contract period at 27.5 dollars RMB for each *mu*, and the contract lasted for 15 years. The group of contractors included 14 people. Their names are as follows: Huaguan, Huazhang, Zhangzhi, Xuguo, Hailong, Shilong, Jinlong, Jinxi, Rongpo, Yigui, Yici, Jiuteng, Jiuwei, Jiucan. The shares of the fish pond was divided into 13.5 shares, with 15 *mu* each. Shilong owned half of a share, all the rest owned one share each. Among the 14 people, Huaguan and Huazhang are brothers, sons of He Yaopo. Huaguan works in the grain station located in West River and is now the head of it, while Huazhang works in the county’s Bureau of Enterprises in the county seat. Zhangzhi, Jinlong, Jinxi were then village

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<sup>3</sup>The case was re-examined shortly after the Cultural Revolution and an official re-burial ritual carried out consequently.

cadres in the brigade, although they are not at present. Yigui, Yici, Jiuteng, Jiuwei, Jiucui are brothers. Their father Yuntan, who had nine sons, was brigade cadre and one of the leaders of the group of contractors. Jinxi is a brother-in-law of these brothers. The group of fourteen later broke up in the process of developing prawn growing. If we remember these relationships specially pointed out here, we will find later that, with the group breaking into small groups, relationships among members of a group become closer and closer.

Following the wind of prawn growing in the coastal region of the province in 1984 - 85, they decided to convert the fish pond to a prawn farm in 1985. By the winter of the year, construction works were finished. The culverts and waterway to let sea water in and out were completed. They started to grow prawns in 1986. All this was made possible by a low interest loan (135,000 RMB) which came ultimately from the World Bank.<sup>4</sup> Since then, there has been division twice. Soon after the baby prawns were put into grow in the spring of 1986, they decided to break the group and pond into two. The first group was composed of Huaguan, Huazhang, Zhangzhi, Xuguo, Hailong and Shilong. The second group were the ex-cadres Jinlong, Jinxi, villager Rongpo, and sons of a former village cadre: Yigui, Yici, Jiuteng, Jiuwei, Jiucui. Ownership has been slightly changed too. Shilong decided to pull out at the moment the group wanted to change from fish to prawns, which required more money to put into the business. He sold his ownership of half of a share to Zhengsheng, son of Youci who was the party secretary at the time, which he later regretted when prawn growing turned out to be a very profitable business. In 1987, the first group further broke into two, with the brother Huaguan and Huazhang, together with the young businessman Zhengsheng in one and the rest in another. The latter also absorbed two more villagers, Huzhi and Xianlai, into their business in need of more cash. The second group divided into four in 1989: Jinlong, Jiucui; Rongpo, Yigui; Jinxi, Jiuteng; and Jiuwei, Yici. Yigui sold his share to Weiming because he was short of cash in 1990.

The second tide of prawn farms building in the village was between 1985 and 1987. At the end of 1985, Ganqian and Huokun, with support from Huaguan and other people in the village and outside, contracted from the brigade more than 60 *mu* of unused land in the east next to the fish pond mentioned previously to build a prawn farm. This was about the same time when owners of the fish pond started to talk about prawn growing due to the failure of the fish pond in making expected

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<sup>4</sup>I was told by the head of the county's Bureau of Agatic Products that the county absorbed totally 12 millions RMB World Bank's Development Loans into the prawn growing business at the time.

money. The pond finished its construction work in early 1986 and started to grow prawns that spring. It was later divided into three smaller ponds. In 1989, Hanshen and his father-in-law, separated out from it to build an independent pond. In 1990, Ganqian and Huokun further divided into two ponds.

Meanwhile, former village cadres Yiqing and Yaocheng, with support of some villagers who worked outside as officials, each collected enough money to bid a piece of land to a prawn farm.

In 1987, Xuci and others began to build another pond to the east of the pond of Ganqian and Huokun. In fact, in this case, Xuci, who is an ordinary fisherman, was only used as a puppet by others of the group in the contract. There were four people in the group in which only Xuci was an ordinary villager. Juleng, from Lower River, was then party secretary of the Shidu township. He is currently the deputy of the county's Financial and Economic Committee. Yimao, who is not from Lower River but a friend of Juleng, was then the deputy party secretary of Meiling *Xiang*. He was recently transferred to the same post in his home place – Shidu township. Guiping, nephew of Juleng, was then the deputy party secretary of Lower River village.

All these ponds in Lower River are conventionally called “old ponds” in contrast with “new ponds” built in 1988.

In 1988, the village authority decided to bid out the rest of the 600 *mu* unused rice land for more prawn ponds, which was before considered unsuitable to build prawn farms because of its higher position, in order to raise more money. As a result, seven new ponds had been built by those who succeeded in the bid. The new ponds are normally less than 20 *mu* each thus no further division seems to be possible. One of the two bigger ponds among these was owned by Jinlong and others. In January, 1990, they had to give part of it to its neighbor owned by Songzhi and others to make it become two, for the pond was too big to run economically. Another bigger pond among those built in 1988 was the so-called *ganbu chi* (pond of cadres) owned exclusively by the village cadres in power at the time. There is a story of corruption of these village cadres in the bidding that led to interference and investigation of the county procuratorate and consequently collapse of the village leadership. I will return to the incident of cadres' pond in chapter eight when I discuss conflict and competition in the village.

Looking at the history of prawn farms in Lower River, I notice the following general tendencies.

Firstly, ponds have been divided into smaller and smaller ones. Two reasons account for this. One is prawns growing is a new business in Lower River and even in China, there is not much experience about it. Although fishermen are not unfamiliar with prawns in the sea, growing them artificially is different. With more information on techniques tried elsewhere coming in, owners of the farms began to have differences in how to handle the day to day growing, in which they have put a lot of money. People found that it became more and more difficult to find agreement on the matter of management. The other reason is that, with the increase of growing seasons from one in a year in 1986 and 1987, to two seasons from 1988 and three in some ponds since 1990, more and more money is required for the same unit of water area, and more labour to the intensifying care of prawns. Thus, division into smaller ponds is the way to adapt to the situation.

Secondly, with the division of the group, kinship becomes more apparently an important base for partnership in the business. This is on the one hand to do with trust that any business requires, and on the other with the idea of how to do the growing in the day to day care of prawns as pointed out in the above. Close kin not only find it easier to trust each other, but also tend to have a closer idea (or more easily reach an agreement) about what to do in the business.

Finally, since prawn growing, though it needs large investment, has proved to be a profitable business, it is not surprising to find the most most obvious fact in the business in Lower River, and indeed in the nearby area, is that people involved in the business are largely local cadres – whether village cadres, villagers serving as officials in other places, or outside officials who work in the area. Their posts in the village leadership, or their status of agents or former agents of state power in the village, as well as the extensive outside contacts for them to be able to get low interest loan from the bank and various other kinds of help required in the business, enable them to be the group who are in the position to benefit first from any opportunity of economic development made available by the new state policy. This will be more comprehensible below when we look at the owners of prawn farms in the village.

### **6.3 Prawn farm owners and their relationships**

Details of prawns farms in Lower River and their owners are shown in the following tables.

Relationships among owners for some ponds have in fact already been provided

Table 6.2 Old Prawn Ponds in Lower River

Name	units( <i>mu</i> )	rent(/ <i>mu</i> )	owners	attributes
1.Zhangzhi	44.5	27.5	5 <sup>a</sup>	villagers
	3.78 <sup>b</sup>	80		cadres/kinship
2.Huaguan	44.5	27.5	2	officials
	3.78	80		villager
3.Jinlong	25	784 <sup>c</sup>	2	cadres/fisherman
4.Rongpo	31.5	985.4 <sup>c</sup>	2	villagers/businessman
5.Jinxi	29.6	925 <sup>c</sup>	2	brother-in-law cadre
6.Jiuwei	33.4	1045.4 <sup>c</sup>	2	brothers/fishermen
7.Ganqian	33	80	3	cadres officials
8.Huokun	30.4	80	3	cousin/official outsider
9.Hansheng	33.4	80	5	outside official in-law relations
10.Yiqing	50.3	80	5	brothers-in-law cadres
11.Yaocheng	44	80	9	kinship
	9 <sup>d</sup>	310		officials
12.Xuci	42	80	4	kinship/friendship outside official

a. The owners may own different shares of it. For instance, Huaguan owns two thirds of the pond.

b. This was expanded in 1986 when they began to grow prawns rather than fishes. Note the rent is different.

c. These figures represent the total rent including two kinds: largely 27.5/*mu* in 1982 and very small proportion for 80/*mu* in 1986.

d. This part was expanded in 1988, so the rent is same as the new ponds.

Table 6.3 New Ponds in Lower River

Name	units(mu)	rent(/mu)	owners	attributes of owners
13. Pingcai	16	310	3	cadre kinship/outsider
14. Youci(2)†	42	310	9	cadres/kinship outside officials
15. Jinlong	18	310	2	outside official cadres
16. Songzhi(2)†	37	310	5	villagers outside officials
17. Zhonghui	18	310	4	villager outside official
18. Maohui	18	310	1	outsider
19. Shaoci	18	310	3	villagers outside official

†Two ponds in this line.

in the previous description of the history of prawn farms in Lower River, such as pond No.6 owned by Jiuwei and his brother Yici, and pond No.5 which belongs to Jiuwei's other brother Jiuteng and his sister's husband, Jinxi. These are close kin relations.

A more general pattern of co-ownership is composed of both close kin and friends or more distant relatives. Two examples of this have been given in the above description of the history of prawn farms in the village. Pond No. 2 is owned by Huaguan and his brother Huazhang, with the son of former party Youci. Pond No. 12 is owned by Lower River born county official Juleng with his friend Yimao and nephew Guiping, and villager Xuci. Another example of this is pond No.10 owned by Yiqing, Zhengui and Yaozhong. The wives of latter two are sisters. This is the largest pond in the village. Its ownership is divided into six shares. Three of them belong to Yiqing, two to Zhengui, and one to Yaozhong. A close look reveals that the three shares Yiqing has in fact belong to a family group formed by four independent households. Yiqing has five sons. The first three Jintai, Jinyi and Jinfa, who I mentioned in the last chapter, have been married. They divided to set up their own households, while Yiqing and his wife and other two youngest sons were left to form another household. The three shares of the prawn farm in this division were given to Yiqing, Jinyi and Jinfa respectively, while Jintai, the eldest son, took

the family's shop on the highway selling clothes and other items.

Another obvious character of ownership of prawn farms in the village is that a significant share is taken by village cadres and officials working at *Xiang* and county levels. They have "positional advantages", revealed in many respects, in the business. The first is their power in crucial resources' control and distribution in the community. With household responsibility system, China's rural economy has experienced a rapid transition from a redistributive/collective economy to a marketlike economy. In the transition, the power and privilege of cadres to a great extent have been diminished. However, cadres continue to exercise substantial control over many resources and market outlets. Under the two-track price system, some essential factors of production, such as chemical fertilizer, gasoline, and herbicides, are distributed by the state at lower than market prices (Oi, 1986, 1989). The second is their ability in accessing vital information under the current rural administrative system. Although the Chinese rural administrative system has greatly changed in the last decade, the way government's policies are implemented, and the way relevant information is channelled, remains virtually unchanged. As before, new policies formulated at the higher level of authority have to be informed and implemented by way of meetings in which lower level officials are informed the contents of policies, and of their new responsibilities.

For example, local representatives of the People's Congress at *Xiang*/township and county levels were due to be replaced or re-elected in 1990. The election was actually held in Lower River and nearby villages on December 16, 1990. However, as early as on September 28, 1990, the Party Secretary and leader of Villagers' Committee of each village of Meiling *Xiang* were meeting at the *Xiang* headquarters, to be informed by the deputy Party Secretary of Meiling *Xiang*, who attended a similar meeting at county government the day before, about the government policy of the election. In the system, local officials and cadres in the village are always the first to know any change in government's policies. They are thus the first to be able to have the benefit (or to avoid the damage) brought by the change. The advantageous position of local officials and cadres is further consolidated by establishment of network among themselves to exchange information and favors. Official meetings provide them with a good opportunity to meet each other and establish contacts.

Therefore, local officials and cadres act as patrons and protectors in the business, to provide ordinary peasants and entrepreneurs access to the resources and protection against the uncertainties of marketlike environment in which the institutional

Table 6.4 Owners of prawn farms in the village

categories	number	percentage
Officials from Lower River	7	11
Village cadres	3	5
Former village cadres	7	11
Ordinary villagers	34	54
Officials from other places	8	13
Ordinary outsiders	4	6
Total	63	100

safeguards and regulated procedures of a true market economy are lacking.

The important share of local officials and village cadres in Lower River's prawn farms is revealed in tables 6.2 and 6.3 above and becomes more clear in ownership distribution among the three groups of people in table 6.4 where the terms "cadres" and "officials" stand for these two groups of cadres. The distinction between them is made because the latter in current bureaucratic system belong to the "*ganbu*" category while the former do not. It is taken here that the latter is more powerful because their ability to reach the economic and political resources which are often vital in prawn growing and other businesses in the village.

The proportion of cadres and officials is 40 percent which in itself is very high considering the small number of them in the whole village's population. If we look at the rest of prawn owners, we further find most of them have a close relationship with village cadres or local officials. The important share of local officials and cadres in the new profitable business is further shown in the following list of those who own shares of more than one pond, in which we can see all of them are either officials and cadres themselves, or closely related to people of the category.

- Huaguan — Ponds No.2, 7. Elder son of He Yaopo who was the deputy party secretary to Zhaoan county in early sixties. Head of the grain station in West River. Owning many businesses and property besides the prawn farm, such as a hotel which was in the stage of decoration when I left Lower River in February, 1991. Most villagers believe that he is the richest man in Lower River and the peninsula.
- Weiming — Ponds No.4, 19. His father just retired from the head of the

economic committee of the county. Owns stores in the market place too. Support financially from relatives overseas.

- Zhengui — Ponds No.10, 14. Son of Youci who was the party secretary of Lower River village and currently a village cadre after the incident of “Pond of cadres” in 1988. Owns other businesses such as fishing ship and bus as well.
- Pingcai — Ponds No.11, 13. Local architect and head of a private construction team since the end of seventies. People can see wealth from his large house in Front House. Besides, his brother is an important official in Meiling *Xiang* government.
- Lisheng — Ponds No.7, 14. Director of Qiaodong *Xiang* government office. Son-in-law of Youci. Local official since graduation from a Quanzhou college in 1984. Overseas relatives.
- Kunci — Ponds No.13, 14. Current care-taking party secretary of Lower River village. Long service as a village cadre.
- Jinlong — Ponds No.3, 15. Former head of village militia.
- Huaduan — Ponds No.8, 16. Younger brother of Huayong who is the care-taking head of villagers’ committee of Lower River. His father is brother of He Yaopo, and head of the county’s State Security Bureau.

Of those who are not Lower River villagers but own shares of prawn ponds in the village, most are officials working in the area. All of them joined in the business of the village through kinship or friendship with key persons in the village. The following is a list of these people.

- Zhang Yimao — Pond No.12. From Xizhang village, Shidu township. Deputy party secretary of Meiling *Xiang*. Joined the partnership through his friend, Lower River born county official, Juleng.
- Tu Huimao — Pond No.14. From Shuantang village, Qiaodong *Xiang*. Director of the branch of Bank of China in Lower River. Joined in through the Lower River’s former party secretary, Youci.
- Shen Chengmu — Pond No.15. From the county seat. Cadre of the Supply & Purchase Cooperative in Lower River. Joined in through former village cadre and friend, Jinlong.

- Xu Sheqin — Pond No.16. From Huogang village, Shidu township. Official in the county's Economic committee. Joined in through Lower River born county official He Yaoci, brother of He Yaopo and father of present village leader, Huayong.
- Shen Gongzhi — Pond No.19. From Xiya village, Qiaodong *Xiang*. Head of the Supply & Purchase Cooperative in Qiaogong. Joined in through a Lower River born retired county official, father of another owner, Weiming.
- He Hansheng — Pond No.9. From Xishan village, Qiaodong *Xiang*. teacher in the primary school in Lower River. His brother is head of Public Security Office in Shidu township. His wife from Lower River.
- Cheng Huomu — Pond No.17. Origin unknown. Used to be teacher in the primary school in Lower River.
- Shen Huokun — Pond No.8. From Xiya village, Qiaodong *Xiang*. Businessman selling baby fish to fish ponds in the area. Experience in prawn growing obtained elsewhere. A friend of Ganqian and Huaguan.
- Yang Yaozhang — Pond No.13. Xianzhong village, Meiling *Xiang*. Businessman. Father is a millionaire in Nanyang (southeast Asia). Joined in through his father-in-law, the acting village party secretary, Kunci.
- Shen Maohui — Pond No.18. From the county seat. Businessman. Married to the adopted daughter of Jushou. Jushou is another brother of He Yaopo, and head of the county Bureau of Industrial commercial Administration, a very powerful person in the county government.

Note that among the above ten outsiders, there are only three who own “old ponds”, the other seven are in “new ponds”. All “new ponds” have outsiders joining in investment. One of them is even owned exclusively, at least in name, by an outsider. This is pond No.18, owned by Shen Maohui who married the adopted daughter of He Jushou who, as mentioned previously, is a member of the most powerful family group in Lower River. The ownership of pond No.18 is suspected to be more complicated than it appears to be. At least part of its share is believed to belong to his father-in-law. This can not be proved because it is called “covered share” – the owner does not want his ownership to be exposed. This is very popular in the area among local officials because of government policies against officials being involved in business which is regarded as one of the signs of corruption. “Covered share” is also a measure for these people to protect themselves from “possible” future

political campaigns. In the case of joint venture discussed in the beginning of this chapter, the share that belongs to leaders of the state farm within Lin Binkun's group is in the form of covered share. In other prawn ponds in Lower River, most of the outsiders listed above join in the business in the form of covered shares. Their identity has been dug out through continuous effort during the fieldwork.

## 6.4 Prawn growing as a business

The formation of partnership in prawn growing business reveals a kind of rationality, so to speak, in the particular situation. As the above description demonstrates, social relationships, kinship and friendship, are very important in the co-ownership of prawn farms in Lower River. Trust among these people is a prerequisite for the formation of a business partnership. In a village community like Lower River, business partnerships are formed largely among close kin and friends in order to ensure trust that is crucial in such an important activity. In the area of economic cooperation, indeed in almost all socio-economic activities, local people believe that close kinsmen or friends are more reliable. Hence in looking for a business partner, one naturally starts with the closest kin and friends. The trust among them, built on the basis of long term social interaction and exchange, undoubtedly will enable them to work together more easily. On the other hand, trust, though important, is not sufficient. The success of a business in the area also requires other conditions, for instance, outside contacts, information, and political protection. These are especially important in a new business with both high potential profit and high risk like prawn growing, which in itself explains an equally important fact that, in the village, most people who are involved in the business are local officials and village cadres, or villagers with the protection of these people.

The rationality, revealed in the formation of partnership, is also clearly demonstrated in the practice of business management. In spite of the close relationship, people's behaviour in the area of prawn farming is not simply determined by the consideration of the social relationship. Since it is a business and profit oriented, it requires people to act according to a business rationale. Growing prawns is a special business with its unique character different from other productive activities and businesses in the village. Some people in the country tend to call it "commercialized agriculture" because it has characters of both agricultural production and commercial activity. The idea of agriculture here is a more general one since production is not for self consumption as rice in traditional agriculture but for the market.

Two main characteristics stand explicitly in the productive activities:

1. Seasons – it has to follow the seasons and to be planned very carefully. Different prawn species grow in different periods of the year. For example, the Long Hair prawns should be put into water in the fifth or sixth month to harvest in the tenth or eleventh month of the year, while the Eastern grows from the third or fourth month to harvest in the eighth or nine month of the year. The technique of growing baby prawns in a small corner of the pond makes it possible for the same pond to grow more than one season of prawns in a year.

2. Labour and capital involution – a lot of investment is needed during the period of growing and intensive care is required day and night. The latter includes changing water at least once a day in order to get fresh water with enough oxygen for the prawns, and to feed them day and night. The size of prawns determines the times to feed them in a day and the amount each time. When the prawns are small, they have to be fed many times in a day, each time a small amount. When they are bigger, less times are needed but more feed should be put into ponds each time. In addition, great care must be taken to prevent diseases. One of the measures used by local people is that when there are no prawns in the pond each year in the winter, water is drained out to clear the mud that is formed mainly by the waste of the prawns and the feed in order to prevent diseases. It is also believed to be good for the bottom of ponds to get as much sun as possible in order to kill germs in it and prevent disease. Therefore, owners, or their hired labour, have to live in a shed beside the prawn pond throughout the period. They sleep and eat in the very simple shed without electricity, even though the prawn farm is very close to the village.

Main expenditure in the prawn growing, besides the investment in building the pond in the first place to construct the drainage system and to dig to a certain depth to contain much water, are baby prawn and prawn feeds including the compound feed produced by special processing plants and small fishes and shrimps bought from fishermen in the area. It also includes food expenditure, tools, rent and tax. In some ponds the final expenditure is wages. This happens in a situation that not all owners can provide his share of labour thus some hands have to be hired. In such cases, owners who work in the pond are also paid by fixed salaries. Rents in prawn farms in Lower River are of three different kinds for the land was contracted out in three different periods. Those converted from the fish pond contracted in 1982 are 27.5 dollars RMB each *mu*, those built or expanded in 1985 - 7 are at 80 dollars RMB per *mu*, while the “new ponds” built in 1988 are 310 dollars RMB each *mu*. Thus

we see the great difference of expenditure in rent. For instance, pond No. 2, 12 and 14 are about the same size (48.28, 42 and 42 *mu*), but their rents to the village each year vary greatly from 1,526.15, to 3360, to 13,020 dollars RMB.

Expenditure and income in the prawn farm have to be carefully and clearly noted down. They have to be shown to all owners too. This is very important for the proper running of the business even though partners of the business usually have close social relationships – kinship or friendship, since a lot of money is involved in it. A clear account of the farm necessarily helps to enhance better management and establish a good business relation, while a confusing one will inevitably lead to conflicts and the break of partnership. Table 6.5 is a record of a pond farm in the village. It was provided by Jinxi (Pond No.5). The pond is owned by Jinxi and his brother-in-law. It is quite typical in terms of pond size and profit of the year among the prawn farms in Lower River. They had two seasons in the year, with a total product of 9,736.10 *jin* of prawns. By selling the prawns to Guangdong businessmen who came to the village, they had an income of 91,056.10 RMB. Taking out of the total expenditure of the year, including the interest of a short loan of 20,000 RMB they borrowed from the Credit Cooperative, which they returned after the harvest with its interest, they had a profit of 38,145.37 RMB in the year. They decided that each should take 10,000 RMB home, and kept the rest, 18,145.37 RMB, for investment of next year. I was told that the profit of this pond was not the best in the year. For instance, in pond No.10, owners were able to bring home 30,000 RMB each share in the year.

As has been pointed out before, growing prawns is a market-orientated business in the village in the sense that almost everything required, except labour, has to be obtained from the market, such as baby prawns and prawn feeds. The product is not for local consumption but to be sold to the markets in big cities such as Guangzhou and Hong Kong, as well as exported to other countries. Prices of materials for production (e.g. baby prawns and prawn feeds) as well as the product (prawns) of the prawn farms are all determined by demand and supply in the market locally and internationally. The close relation of prawn growing in the village with outside markets creates brokers to bridge between the farmers and the market. Brokers in the business of prawn growing are mainly for buying baby prawns and selling product prawns for the local prawn farmers. They are from Lower River or surrounding villages who are familiar with the farmers here and more importantly who have connections in Guangdong province where most baby prawns come from and all product prawns go to. Most businessmen buying prawns from the area are from Guangdong. Local businessmen cannot compete with them for their better transport

Table 6.5 Records of a pond farm in Lower River (1990)

Expenditure (unit: <i>yuan</i> )	
Baby prawns	8891.20
Prawn feed	35071.20
Medicine	895.36
Food	1749.70
Rent	1071
Tax	1360
Interest of loan	1623.07
Others	2249.20
Total	52910.73
Income	
Selling prawns	91056.10
Profit	38145.37

equipment and more importantly their more sufficient *guanxi* and hence wider access to the market in large cities like Guangzhou. They find it difficult to deal with officials from various government departments and offices there. There are two ways of keeping the prawns fresh in the long distance transport from Zhaoan to Guangzhou. One is to put the prawns into ice immediately after they are caught from the ponds. The other is to put them into boxes with fresh water which are specially designed for the truck for this purpose. Only Cantonese businessmen have the equipment to keep the prawns alive for several days in transport. The cost of transport for the first method is cheaper, but the price of ice prawns in the market is much lower than the ones that are still alive. It was this better equipment that helped the Cantonese businessmen to beat local ones in business competition.

No local businessman buys prawns here and transports them to the market in Guangdong. Brokers are local businessmen who can create a bridge for local prawn farmers to businessmen in outside markets and mediate business transactions for the two sides. A certain amount of commission is charged by the broker for any business transaction. This is usually paid by the businessmen who buy prawns from the farmers, which makes the latter consider that the brokers represent the interests of the outside businessmen rather than themselves, although they rely heavily on the brokers to sell their product at harvest time, and the brokers have a certain trust with the farmers since they come from the local area. During the period of

1990 - 1991, most prawns in the village were sold to Cantonese businessmen with the help of two brokers. One is from Lower River who used to be a village cadre. The other is a young man from the next village. Both men had business experience in Guangdong before.

The close link to Guangdong market helps prawn farmers in Lower River and nearby area to survive in the difficult time in 1989 when most prawn farmers in the province were badly hit by the trade embargo imposed by western countries on China. Channels to export prawns abroad especially to Japan were blocked and unexpected severe losses were caused. From a lecturer of Xiamen University, working as a technical consultant for the prawn farmers, I knew that there were a lot of prawn farmers in suburban Xiamen went bankrupt and a few even committed suicide during the period. However, most of the prawn farmers in Lower River managed to earn back their investments by selling their prawns to cities in Guangdong. Some even made a small profit in the year. People here proudly told me that most of them have managed to make profit, "though not much", out of the business every year since 1986. By the time of 1990, most prawn farms in Lower River have earned back all the investments that were first put into the business for the construction works. They even survived, by a miracle, the flood caused by a severe typhoon in the summer of 1990 which destroyed the house of Shuangzhi I mentioned in chapter three.

We have seen in this chapter, from the example of prawn farms, the nature and character of economic cooperation in the village. Cooperation with others is necessary when the business is beyond the capacity of a single family's resource. For instance, the involvement of a large amount of capital in prawn growing needs more people to raise collectively the needed money and to share the risk. But what has been my concern here is not how to cooperate, but with whom the cooperation is made. Evidences in the prawn growing business point to two crucial facts in cooperation in Lower River. One is that cooperation has been largely found among close kin or friends where trust is best ensured. People tend to believe that only close kin and friends are reliable in a business upon which a whole family's subsistence is relies. At the same time, not every kinsman or friend is eligible to be invited to the partnership. This leads to another important point, that is, the obvious advantage of cadres in this economic cooperation. Cadres are found to be the kind of people with whom others favor to cooperate for their power over key resources and access to vital information. Or, it is only a cadre who is able to form a group of people around him to collectively carry out the business. As demonstrated, all the co-ownership of prawn farms in Lower River are composed of local cadres or officials and rich

villagers who are usually linked by close kinship or friendship, and the former often have a role of patron and protector.

In short, it is a cooperation among close kinsmen and friends, at the same time an alliance of power and money. Social relationships and posts in offices are apparently crucial in the formation of the alliance. The success of prawn business has already created a hybrid elite of cadre-entrepreneurs in the village community. By using their social relationships (*guanxi*) with local officials and cadres, entrepreneurs gain the needed access and protection in business. By taking the new roles of being patrons and protectors in business, local officials and cadres effectively turn their positional advantages into substantial material benefit, which apparently becomes a new way for them to maintain their power and privilege in the new era.

## Chapter 7

# The Commercialization of Social Relationships

Commercialization of social relationships in Lower River is closely related with economic development and rapid increase of business activities in the past ten years. It is a consequence of local people's intensive utilization and exploitation of social relations in their business. Commercialization leads to a quite unique phenomenon in the community: the intermingling of business relations and social relations. In one respect, business relations are not pure, i.e., impersonal, ones. Business relations in the community are frequently found inseparable from social relations, in the sense that most business activities in Lower River have occurred among those who have close social relationships. In another, the social relationships are no more the same. A dimension of market rationality, that is, a clear consideration of gain and profit, is added to the existing social one. As a result of this, the business rationale alone is not sufficient to explain people's behavior in the business. Business relations, being established on such a social basis, are also constrained by the basic social norms.

An example of utilizing social relationships for business purposes has been provided in the area of prawn growing in the village in the last chapter. This chapter will focus on three further areas: hand knitting, small groceries and health business.

### 7.1 The network of hand knitting

Hand knitting was a traditional leisure activity of the village girls and young women to make, for instance, woollen sweaters for themselves and other members of their families. In a sense, it was a basic skill for these girls and women because their

families could not afford to buy the city-made sweaters in the store. In making the beautiful woollen sweaters, cotton hand bags and pillar cases, they also had an opportunity to display their talent of creation and their taste of beauty among themselves. In the tide of exploiting the vast cheap labour in the country to develop processing and to increase export in the last decade, hand knitting became a new opportunity for girls and young women in the Lower River area, using their patience and skill, to earn extra money in their spare time. It is paid on the base of piece work finished in a set period of time. The salary of each piece ranged from 10 to 30 dollars RMB according to the material (cotton or wool) and complexity of its pattern. Salaries are usually paid after the work has been finished. For some urgent pieces of work, a payment is made beforehand, together with a higher salary, as an incentive to finish more quickly. It is favoured by girls and young women because firstly it is a light work – what it requires is not strength but patience and skilfulness of hands which are the two things most Chinese women have been brought up to have. Secondly, it can be done in their spare time when they usually form a small group to gossip. Thus, although the work usually has a deadline to be finished, it can be done as a leisure activity, sitting at home comfortably gossiping or watching TV.

The cotton yarns, through the skilful hands of these village girls, will finally become beautiful tablecloths, bedspreads, pillowcases, sofa cloths, etc. These handicrafts will eventually be exported to Hong Kong and from there to many western countries. Woollen yarns are often knitted to become sweaters. All raw materials and designed patterns of final products are provided and distributed by businessmen through a multi-level network. In Zhaoan, for instance, people receive all the materials from Guangdong – Shantou city, or more closely, Huanggan township, the county seat of Raoping county of Guangdong province next to Zhaoan. Some of the materials and designs of pattern are, in fact, distributed ultimately from Hong Kong through Guangzhou, Shantou, and Raoping to the county seat of Zhaoan first, then distributed finally to village women in Lower River through middlemen in the village. After processing, products are brought back to Hong Kong and re-exported to the world. This is part of a massive migration of manufacturing industry from Hong Kong across the border since the mid-1980s, to combine the capital and technology of Hong Kong industry with the bottomless pool of cheap mainland labour. A typical form of this alliance is through a subcontracting relationship. The Hong Kong side brings in capital, equipment and sometimes raw materials for mainland factories to process, and Hong Kong businessmen pay the mainland partners processing fees based on volumes of production. Hand knitting is also an example of Guang-

dong's beginning to shift lower-value-added processing to surrounding provinces, as the province integrates upstream to parts and materials.

The network of the delivered work and distribution is thus a hierarchical one in Skinner's sense, although the girls who finish the work may not know exactly where the materials come from and the products go to. There are "middlemen" (who, in fact, are often women) at every level of the distribution. Village girls such as those in Lower River are the lowest end of this business network. They receive materials and designs of patterns from their head of group who acts as the lowest level of middleman receiving materials and design from, and sending back the products in the end to, the middleman in the county seat. They use the materials provided to knit according to the pattern designed by merchants who distributed these materials and who will receive the final products made by the hands of the village girls through the brokerage of middlemen at many levels.

For the middlemen at all levels, this is a business without any investment. All the materials required are provided. What they have to do is to distribute the materials to the lower level middlemen and receive the product from the latter and hand over to the businessman – who may himself be a larger middleman or an agent of a trading company. He charges a certain amount of commission for doing this and making sure the sweaters are made according to the original design. People who act as middlemen in the business, at least those in the county seat and village level, should be able to read the blueprint of the design or a specimen and to knit accordingly in order to have the final product patterned as the design. They are responsible for teaching others the special way of knitting to get a designed pattern. The network of the group of each middleman in the village is relatively stable, so is the number of lower level middlemen for a higher level middleman.

Perhaps a more important characteristic of the network, for the concern of this thesis, is that linkages are often established on the basis of social relationships such as kinship and friendship. This is more clearly seen at the lower levels of the network. For instance, a middleman in the city level, after receiving the raw materials, will usually distribute them to his kin and friends in the county level to turn them into lower level middlemen. The latter in turn further distribute the materials to their relatives and friends in the county seat or in the village level. The business is operated on the basis of trust among kin and friends. No written contract is necessary in the operation of the business except at higher levels which I am not concerned in this thesis. All we find are oral agreements on the amount of payment and the date to have the work finished. Contents of these agreement

may be noted down by the middlemen for management purposes because of the involvement of large amounts of raw materials and many people. Trust that is needed in any business transaction is largely ensured by loyalty in long-standing kinship or friendship which has been brought up through long term social interaction. This seems to work very well. I never heard of any break up of agreement, although delays for payment or work did happen because of incidents out of control of these people.

This strategy of making use of existing social networks in the operation of business has in fact long been used by some state owned companies in the area to produce traditional artcrafts to export to other regions and countries.

At the village level, the lowest end of the business network, it is usually organized in the form of small groups by the middlemen in the village. Each group has a relatively stable number of members which varies from 5 - 20 people. These people are often kin of each other, living close together in the village. More frequently, they are members of a same childhood group, playing together in the past. There are several groups in the three hamlets in Lower River, receiving work from different middlemen at the county level. The group's head (middleman) usually has a relative or relative's relative in the county seat who is a middleman. She learns the technique of knitting in the designed pattern from the middleman in the county seat and teaches her group members. How much the group head gets in commissions out of the distribution may not necessarily be known by the others in the group. However, it is considered right for the group head to have a small amount of commission for her work in receiving, distributing the materials and collecting the final product to hand to the county seat, as well as teaching others the techniques required for a special design and sorting out problems of others. But the amount should be reasonable. Usually it is about 2 RMB for each piece of work.

These women groups are not formal organizations but only temporary and task-oriented. The membership of each group is relatively stable but by no means fixed, and it is possible for a person to belong to more than one group at the same time, that is, to get work from several more than one middleman in the village. If we view the group as a network around the group head's family, since everyone in the village has kinship relations of this or that sort, one can identify herself with a specific group on the basis of a specific relationship. The decision for a village girl to join in one group rather than others is determined by a series factors in the particular context. These include closeness of kinship relation, past social interaction, and the price of the work. The price for each piece of work is set by the group head and is

not negotiable. However, it is more or less the same among the different groups in the village, which is one of the reasons why there are not many cases of changing group membership as long as the work is stable.

One of my friend's sisters who is a music teacher in a middle school in the county seat told me her experience of being a middleman in this business. In the summer vacation in 1989, she went back to her natal village in the countryside, bringing with her materials and design of hand knitting from her county seat neighbor who was a middleman across the other side of the street. She distributed the materials to girls and young women in her village, teaching several of them how to knit according to the design and let them teach others. When the work was finished, she collected them to hand in to her neighbor in the county seat. From the middleman she then received the salary for the work on the base of piece work to give the girls in her natal village. It was 28 RMB for each piece. She made 2 RMB each as commission according to the general rate and gave 26 RMB to the girls who finished one piece of work.

Although she treats the business as temporary and for some fun, she made more than four times her monthly salary as a middle school teacher. There were over 400 pieces of work finished during the vacation, which made her over 800 RMB for commission charge. She did the work herself too, partly because she had to teach the girls how to do the work, and partly because she had nothing else to do in the village. She finished herself altogether about ten pieces of work during the period, which added another 200 dollars to her income during the vacation. She told me,

It's not difficult to make money (in the business). If I didn't have a family in the county seat to take care of, and did not care much about my reputation (as a teacher), I would continue to do it.

There are no statistics of the number of people involved in the business, nor of the investment and output. From my experience in the area where I travelled extensively during the fieldwork period, it is quite sure that there are a vast number of people involved producing a huge figure of product to sell abroad. Almost all girls and young women in Lower River and villages in the area are more or less involved in the business. As a consequence of the operation, both the middlemen and their group members in the village benefit. Income of these village girls and young women has been increased. Now they have their own pocket money to buy new clothes and decoration. Some of them are even able to use the money they earn from hand knitting to support their families. In a few families, it becomes one of

the important income sources. With their ability to earn and control the money, their status in the family is also changed. At least, they become more independent.

The hand knitting networks in the village are, in theory, partial networks. They are components of a larger business network that transcend the boundaries of administrative and geographical regions to link villages such as Lower River to large cities like Guangzhou and Hong Kong. We can regard both hand knitting and prawn growing business described in the last chapter as examples of the increasingly close incorporation of local economy with the larger economic system. More importantly, they are examples of what I call commercialization of social relationship in the Lower River area, that is, social relationships are gradually turning into business relations in the process of economic development. Or, more accurately, social relationships are more frequently used for economic purpose. As a result of building business relations on the basis of social network, an economic dimension is added to the existing social relationship, which inevitably alters the nature of the relationships. We thus see in the village today that people are not only involved in such social activities as taking part together in ritual performances and exchanging entertainment with each other, they also form business partnerships and make deals with each other.

On the other hand, business relationship established on such a basis is not a pure one, in the sense that it is not impersonal and that some social values have to be adopted in the operation of business. In the example of hand knitting business, the element of business is apparent. Both the middleman and group members get economic benefit from the work. The latter receive a payment for each piece of work done, while the former charges commission for the distribution work. However, between a middleman and a group member there is not strictly an employer-employee relationship. They are more obviously kin and friends. In the specific situation, the former just organizes the latter and other group members to help to finish a job that is given by a relative or friend elsewhere. In the operation, such a social relationship between kin or friends is constantly reminded and emphasized. In relation to this is the stress of loyalty and sense of mutual support in the process of business operation. The middleman is not expected to overcharge the commission, such as no more than 2 RMB each piece, and the group members are expected to stay in the group, at least before a certain period's work is finished. Such a mixture of social relationships and business relationships, and closely related, a mixture of social morality and business rationale, are also widely observed in other areas of business activities in Lower River, including the following examples of village groceries and health business.

## 7.2 The small groceries in the village

In a discussion of business activities in peasant China nearly half a century ago, Fei Xiaotong made the following remark:

In China's peasant society, there are village markets specially for trading. They are usually located not in the village but on an empty field. People from surrounding villages appear in the market place, without any *renqing* with each other. Here, people just lay aside all their relationship in order to complete all the transaction on the spot. I frequently observe my neighbors going to the market place miles away to make exchange there and bring goods back. Why do they bother to go to there? Why not make the exchange right in front of their doors? But the trouble is worthwhile, because they are neighbors in front of their doors. It is only by going to the market place that they are strangers. To finish all transaction on the spot is the behavior of strangers. It cannot be related to other social relationship (Fei, 1948: 82).

If this was true, the picture of marketing and business activities in Chinese rural areas has greatly changed. One of the changes, among others that have mentioned or will be discussed, is the appearance of many small village groceries and consequently the special business morality in the economic transaction among the familiar and close relatives.

There are about 80 stores and groceries, big and small, in the market place newly established in 1988 and on both sides of the highway crossing the village. They vary from selling food, clothes and other daily necessities, family furniture, electrical equipment, components of various motors for trucks and boats, timber and other construction materials, to making and polishing jewellery such as gold finger rings, earrings and silver necklaces, to barber shop, ... and bicycle repairing etc. They provide virtually everything people in the area need in their socioeconomic activities and daily life. Besides, there are also dozens of small groceries located on the streets within the three hamlets which are mainly for the villagers of Lower River. Commodities sold in the small groceries range from wines, beers, cigarettes, teas, to sugar, soap, matches, to paper money, incense specially for supernatural spirits, and small items such as sweets and cakes for children. Many of them are very small but essential in life. And it is only when they are in need that people realize that they do not have any in the house. Almost all these stores and groceries are owned by villagers of Lower River where money only is not enough for opening

a new business. In the area, it is virtually impossible for anyone to open or carry out a business without having sufficient *guanxi* as well as money. Grocery shops in the village provide a good example.

Small groceries in the village are the product of Chinese rural reform and economic development. There were only a few shops of the collectively owned Marketing and Supply Cooperative where people could buy limited items of daily necessity. Most basic goods could only be purchased on the basis of a strict and limited quota from the Cooperative. The recently appeared village groceries are generally very small in scale. They often make use of a small area of the house. By opening a new window on the wall, putting some goods on a shelf, business starts. Since the business is to relatives and neighbors living around, its capacity is very small. The daily retail amount varies from dozens to around a hundred RMB with a marginal profit of a few RMB.

Here business relationships (shop keeper and customer) is personal, mixed with kinship and neighborhood. This more or less leads to a kind of special business morality, mixing a business rationale with some basic social values. It is true that when entering into the arena of business, people intend to behave in the way “business is business”, without counting on what social relationship they have. One is obliged to pay for the goods he gets from a shop owned by his relative or friend. Otherwise no business is possible, particularly in the case of village groceries where almost all customers are kinsmen living in the same village. Local people would generally agree that economic exchange and business affairs should be separated from social interaction in daily life. As an old saying puts it, “close brothers, clear accounts”. This is in fact the Chinese way of saying “business is business”. However, in the mind of local people, this does not mean to entirely ignore the close relationship. On the contrary, it is frequently reminded by both sides in the process of economic transaction with different emphasis. As I have said, the customers of a village grocery are at the same time kin and neighbors, such as brothers, cousins, or other more distant kinsmen. In the situation that there are many of the same kind of groceries within the village, people are expected to go to the nearby one which is owned by their close kin, rather than to a more distant one, or to go to the shop owned by kin rather than to one by an outsider. There is a local old saying for this, “Fei shui bu liu wai xi” (The fertile water should not go to streams outside.) This is a metaphor to say that any benefit will go to one’s own people, a phrase to indicate or enforce kinship loyalty in distributing economic resource or political power. In this particular context, it means to shop with one’s own kin and let them have the benefits of the inevitable business. The logic behind this is that, since one has to

buy things from the shop and others are bound to make some money out of it, why not let the money be earned by kin with whom one has a close social relationship of exchanging help and favor?

However, one should not try to understand this as a kind of altruistic behavior. If possible, Chinese peasants will make everything needed in their life and never let others, even their relatives, make money out of them. This should be clear. But since in modern society this has proved impossible, they have to go to the market to get some of their living necessities, which means, as they understand it, other people get a chance to make money from them because of this. The only thing that makes people in this community different from that of others in a more urbanized society probably is that if there are two persons offering them the same goods for the same price, they will definitely go to the one to whom they are closer. If the price for same thing, or quality of the goods, is different, the answer for this may be different. When the gap of price or quality is large enough, Chinese peasants like any people in other societies will definitely go to the one that is lower or better. Hence, the sense of loyalty to kin in the context of business must not be over emphasized, although it does represent one of the characteristics of business relationships in the area.

Moreover, the loyalty to kin in business can not taken for granted. It is in a sense reciprocal, determined by the fulfilment of obligations on either side. There are obligations for the kin shopkeeper to give a return for the loyalty. Firstly, owners of groceries must not intend to make a unreasonable high profit. On the one hand, kinsmen and neighbors, as customers, respect the “reasonable” profit of groceries for their time and effort in running the business and in effect making life easier and more convenient. On the other, these people are making money out of their own relatives and neighbors in the business. Considerations such as these pose constraints on them from trying to make extra profit. They have to be “fair” in money making, or their relationship with the rest of the kin group is at risk. Secondly, what are sold in the groceries must not be fake commodities, especially things such as wines, cigarettes and teas which are frequently fake. Cheating in the business in this area happens all the time, especially in the imitated goods. Cheating a stranger, for most of the local people, is allowed and inevitable in a market place, though all people consider cheating one’s relatives and friends with fake commodities is immoral. However, there are many businessmen who believe that reputation is important in any business. Even though their shops are in the market place where most of their customers are strangers and business transaction is completed on the spot, they still avoid doing “the ad hoc business” – cheating. When a customer finds out he has been cheated, he usually will not come to the

same shop again.

For the village groceries, there is an obligation to be honest toward kin and neighbors besides the consideration of business reputation. All the owners of village groceries claim that they never intend to cheat their customers. Some of them admit that they once sold fake commodities that they knew were fake, but they immediately suggest that this is because they are in the first place victims of their wholesalers in the county seat. They express sympathy to themselves as well as their customers. It is a difficult question to be answered for these shop keepers in the village that when they find they have been cheated by others in buying in fake goods, what they will do with them: whether to suffer loss themselves in order to protect the interest of their customers who are at the same time their kin and neighbors, or just sell the fake goods to customers all the same, to let others suffer from them? The answer for this of course depends on how much these people are concerned about kinship obligation and their personal views on how kin should behave toward each other in the business context. The general answer to this question lies somewhere between two extremes, from a pure market rationale of maximizing profit without caring about social relationship and the morality behind it to a view that takes it as a kind of service to one's kin rather than trying to make profit out of it.

The importance of no cheating in quality of goods is quite important because of the rapid increase of fake product in the market produced by underground factories and some rural enterprises or smuggled from Hong Kong and Taiwan (e.g., tobacco). Reports of discovery of fake product frequently appear in the local and national newspapers. For the villagers, this is not only paying a normal price for commodities with a much lower quality. It is also a matter of face. For example, it would be very embarrassing to send a friend a gift which proves to be fake and has a bad quality. Some of these fake product, alcohol for instance, may cause fatal problems. Fazhi Ribao, on February 6, 1990 reported seven incidents of alcohol poisoning in neighbouring Guangdong province in the previous six months, the latest being in Baoan county, Shenzhen on December 6, 1989. These incidents happened in cities like Zhaoqing, Shantou and Chaozhou, and Chaoyan, Jieyan, Lufeng and Baoan counties. They altogether had poisoned 374 people, among them, 60 had been killed and 13 blinded. The most serious one happened in two counties and one district of Zhaoqing city in November, 1989, which killed 20, made 6 blind and seriously injured 209 people. Thus, it is interesting to note that, in the past decades, the main purpose of using *guanxi* to buy commodities in the market in China has been changed from getting "scarce" goods before the economic reform when almost every basic items was in shortage in the market, to the "cheaper" goods after the implementation

of the two-track price policy in mid eighties, and currently the “original” or “real” goods since anything in need can be bought from the market provided that its price is paid, however, what one gets from the market may not necessary be the best in quality but often is a fake commodity.

Another characteristic of village groceries is delayed payment. In other words, people sell and buy on credit. This happens naturally in situations where a business relation exists on the basis of other social relationships such as kinship or friendship.<sup>1</sup> Customers take goods from the grocery, and pay for it later, or pay for everything they buy after a certain period of time. Two reasons account for this: either the buyer is short of cash at the moment, or he forgets to bring money with him. It often happens that a villager may just drop in the shop on his way home to get something, or he may rush to the shop at the moment when he urgently needs something.

The custom of “postdated chegues” practised by businessmen in Lukang, Taiwan (De Glopper, 1972) is in fact a kind of delayed payment. In Lukang, retailers can pay wholesalers after a certain period of time or until he has sold out the goods. This is a strategy used by the wholesaler to attract and maintain customers in the situation that competition is tense. However, a postdated check from a complete stranger will never be accepted because no previous transactions prove that he is reliable. Trust or credit (*xin yong*), as De Glopper points out, is vitally important in the business of communities such as Lukang.

Credit in business is in effect the same as trust in social relationships revealed in the notion of *renqing* and *bao* in social exchange. It is not surprising that credit is important for business in this way. One of the cadres of Lower River village, Yizhong, owns a store at the eastern side of the highway selling mainly construction materials. He tells me that several years ago when he opened the store, he had to go out searching desperately for suppliers of materials like cement which were extremely short, and he had to send gifts to people in the factories and other businessmen who could provide him such kinds of material. The situation nowadays is reversed. With more supply than demand of construction materials in the market, it is the suppliers

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<sup>1</sup>Delayed payment is also practised among many state owned enterprises, with more money involved, which has caused a series of problems the authority called the phenomenon of “triangular debts” which is typically expressed as A enterprise has a large sum of money owed by B company who owed delayed payment by a C company. When A tries to collect the money, it may finally find out the chain of debts to C company who again may have business relationship with A, and the latter then deals with C without paying it. This seems to be explained by more complex reasons, for instance the socioeconomic structure of the country particularly the state ownership, although *guanxi* do have some account on it.

who have to rely on retailers like him to make their money. One day, when I dropped in his store, there was a truck in front of it. Inside, he was talking with a man who I knew later to be an agent of construction materials who had *guanxi* in factories in Longyang city of western Fujian and Meixian city of Guangdong. He just unloaded one of his customers in the county a truck of cement and came to offer Yizhong a deal of a truck full of cement made in Longyang which could reach Lower River the next evening if it were accepted and he phoned the factory. After a serious negotiation, Yizhong accepted the deal on condition that he paid for it over a period of time. He explained he was at the moment short of cash because of a lot of payments being delayed by his customers in the peninsula. But my own judgment is that this can only be partly true. My observation of his business reveals that in spite of the widespread delayed payment it would have been no problem for him to pay immediately for the truck of cement if he wanted to. He has far more than sufficient reserve for something like a truck of cement. The more important reason is that his store was not short of cement at the time and he was not worried for the supply. Under such a circumstance, he wanted to get not only the best price but also the favored form of payment.

The deal was eventually done in Yizhong's favor. The salesman had no choice but to come to Lower River an extra time to collect the payment. Another disadvantage he suffers in a deal like this is that no interest is expected on the amount of delayed payment. The only advantage for the seller is that through delayed payment a business relationship is maintained, because people are expected to continue business with their creditors. Therefore the custom of delayed payment is often used by wholesaler to turn a disadvantage into an advantage, to preserve a stable network of customers which is vital for survival in a situation of tense competition in the market. Of course, all this is based on the fact that they had been in business before and Yizhong proved to have *xin yong* (trustworthiness or credit). When there is no base for trust, doing business in this way may run the risk of bankruptcy. There is not much written evidence in any business transaction as such, and even little proof of the payment being delayed. So it is no use to take the offender to court when someone decides to refuse payment. What people rely on in the business are credit and business morality that attach to one's reputation. My friend, Yugui, has been doing the business of buying medicines from factories in Xiamen, Quanzhou, Fuzhou and Guangdong and selling them to practitioners in the area for a couple of years. When I met him in November, 1990, he was desperate to borrow more money from relatives and friends at the same time trying to collect debts owed by his customers in order to save his business from cash shortage.

In the case of small groceries in the village, trustworthiness is to a large extent ensured since those people involved in the business are kin and they will stay in the village for their life. Thus delayed payment is more common. Almost all the village groceries have a long list of debtors for delayed payments in their notebooks in which name, amount and time of the purchase are noted. Although each customer may only owe the owner up to a dozen RMB, the total can add up to a large sum. Credits of village groceries vary from several hundreds to several thousands. Some of them have been in this state for years. It is not very unusual for a grocery, with only a few hundreds in goods value to be in credit for thousands. Anyone who wants to open a grocery in the village should be prepared for delayed payments by his customers and have enough credit to run the business on the one hand, and know the art of making others pay their debts through an appropriate way that does not cause ill feeling. It is normal for someone to buy a bottle of wine in January and not pay for it until December of the year. A local custom is to have the debtor pay their debts at the end of the year. For some people, collecting the debts others owed him or paying the debts he owed others is one of the contents of the New Year Festival.

The recognition of some social values besides a business rationale of profit pursuing in economic transactions among kin and friends in the Lower River area, as well as the unique way of business operation represented by the custom of delayed payment, is quite different from the “rational” way of doing business – represented by the impersonal nature of business relations and the art of advertisement to promote the sale. Businessmen in Lower River all face a difficult question on balancing between the market rationale and the traditional social values. This may be a general phenomenon reflecting a transitional period that at the moment we are witnessing in rural China. Nevertheless, as long as business activities happen among kinsmen and friends, we expect to observe a similar phenomenon in which some basic social norms and values still play a part in regulating and constraining people’s behavior in business contexts, and resistance of a cold and impersonal business rationale. This will be demonstrated in the following account of the health business in the village.

### **7.3 Health business in Lower River**

There are two village doctors in Lower River other than the Meiling Hospital – Zhoulin and Hanping. Both of them opened their private clinics in the early eighties. They were formally recognized by the authority in 1984. In that year, the medical

authority of the province organized an examination for those practising medical service in rural areas in order to re-establish order in health care of the province, which was in a confused situation due to the transformation of rural socioeconomic structure from the collective to household responsibility system. Those who passed the exam were rewarded with the title of “village doctor” and allowed to carry on their medical business, and those who failed in the exam were suspended. Both Zhoulin and Hanping passed the exam.

Zhoulin had been to Fujian Normal University in Fuzhou to study Chemistry in 1956. He gave up his study for reason of poor health in 1959. In the early sixties, he worked as a temporary teacher in the village’s primary school. At this time he started to read a lot of medical books because of his own health as well as personal interest. When he was able to take care of his own health, he occasionally used this knowledge to help fellow villagers when they became ill. As more and more people received his help, he became an amateur doctor in the village. In 1970, when the village started its cooperative medical service, he entered the village’s medical station to become one of the three “bare foot doctors” there. Zhoulin acted as the head of the station. The other two were Yanjiang and a woman who married into Lower River from a village not far away. The medical cooperative was a self-sustained enterprise, free from the brigade’s management. The same kind of stations in other villages were normally supported in finance by the brigades. In 1980, with the consent of the brigade, the three people in the station decided to disband and start their own businesses. Zhoulin set up a private clinic in his home. Yanjiang joined his brother-in-law Hanping to set up a private clinic, while the woman divorced her husband and went back to open her own clinic in her natal village.

Hanping has a quite similar background to Zhoulin. He had been to college in Fuzhou after graduating from middle school in the early sixties. He became a teacher later and taught Chinese Language and Literature in village schools nearby. The post of teacher as a formal occupation was not abandoned even after he set up his private clinic in the early eighties. He is still a teacher in recently established Meiling Junior Middle School located next to the headquarters of the *Xiang* government. Like Zhoulin, he learnt medical knowledge in his spare time from teaching since the sixties.

There is a tradition in this area to learn some knowledge of medicine for the good of oneself as well as relatives. A lot of people in the village possess a certain amount of local knowledge on how to handle various health troubles learnt from

older generation or by their own experience. They may spend a lot of time in the mountains searching out herbal medicines and give them to relatives and friends in cases of need. These people learn the knowledge not for money, but as a personal hobby and for helping relatives and other people they know, probably in exchange for renqing and gratitude. Hanping and Zhoulin both belonged to this kind of people before they changed the hobby into a profession. Hanping taught in many village schools in the peninsula and nearby area over thirty years. His reputation has been built through favoring others when they were ill during that long period. At the beginning, he treated occasional patients and their relatives and friends only. When he saw patients, he gave prescriptions for relatives of the patient to go to a medical store to buy the medicines required. As more and more people recovered from their illnesses after having the medicines he prescribed, his name spread to other people in the area, and then more people came to him.

Those who recover after his treatment are very grateful. They are local down to earth peasants. Their way of expressing thanks is to go to his home and bring with them products of their own – a small bag of peanuts, rice, beans if they came from agricultural villages, or a small basket of fresh fish, a packet of dry fish such as dry squids if they came from a coastal village. People expressed their thanks wholeheartedly, and he received them as old friends. In the relationship of amateur doctor and patients, no sense of money is involved, all in it is renqing and respect.

Some changes did occur during this period though. With the growth of his fame, people found it more and more difficult to have his help. In the past, he would come over immediately when you asked him. Now he would tell you that he would come over but you would wait for a long time and still he had not appeared. From the end of 1970s, he started to receive “red envelopes” for his services and more and more often he gave people the impression that he preferred them to the less valuable rice, peanuts and dry fish. People found that if you gave him a red envelope, he would be more obliging to you next time when you came to him again. The sum of money inside the red envelope increased steadily, from 2, 2.4, 4.8, 5, to 6, 8, 10, 12, and 20 or more. It was originally determined by the economic situation of the patients who gave whatever they felt appropriate. It became more and more fixed and something like a “market price”. When he finally opened his clinic in his home, it was never clear that this transition from a traditional service for renqing and gratitude to a market oriented “business” had been completed.

I know a person in a nearby village who has been a patient of Hanping for about 20 years. He experienced the process of change in the way Hanping treats

his patients. He has suffered from headaches since the mid seventies. Through somebody's introduction, he knew that Hanping might be able to do something about it. At the time Hanping was a teacher in the school of the next village, and he only saw people as a kind of favor. With the introduction of someone in Lower River, this man came to Hanping. The latter promised to treat him after asking about the symptom. The medicines according to his prescription were found very effective. The man recovered after a period of taking the medicines. He was extremely grateful to Hanping and went to his home to thank him, bringing with him a bag of five jins of peanuts produced in the private plot of the family as gift. He went to Hanping's home several more times, sending him other agricultural products the family produced. Moreover, he felt he owed Hanping a lot of renqing for the treatment. Whenever he or his family members met Hanping in the village or on the way, he greeted him from very far away, which is one way of showing respect to someone, as presenting gifts is one way of demonstrating gratitude for the local people.

Several years later, he found the headaches came again and went to Hanping. But this time he found agricultural products were no longer suitable things for giving to people like Hanping as gifts. Instead he gave him red envelopes just like other people did. He also found that although he gave Hanping much more valuable gifts – each time he was fetched by bicycle from Lower River, he was given a red envelope of from 2.4, 4, to 8 RMB, but he was not as friendly as before when he was only given a bag of peanuts or something else. When he went to Hanping's clinic after 1985, he found it had become a “pure business”. He behaved like a famous doctor and you were just one of his tens and hundreds of patients. You paid for the service and medicines as you went to the market place not far from his clinic to buy a fish.

Interestingly, in spite of all this, he still sticks with Hanping for his illness until today. People in this area are very loyal to their doctors. Doctor Zhou once discussed this interesting phenomenon with me. He told me that even in the hospital with a lot of doctors, the patients will stick to the doctor they first came to see. When they come to the hospital and find the doctor is not in, some people will hesitate to go to other doctors and repeat everything the first doctor told him before, hoping that they will receive exactly the same kind of treatment, while others may just go home and come back another time. There is probably another reason for this. The man told me he did go to the County Hospital and hospitals in Zhangzhou and Shantou to have treatment for his headaches. A lot of money was spent without results. Although Hanping can not cure the illness totally, whenever taking the medicines prescribed by him, he feels better.

Although Hanping and Zhoulin have similar backgrounds, their ways of doing the special business of life and death are quite different in the eyes of their fellow villagers. This is the difference between a pure marketing logic and a recognition of traditional social values in business.

Zhoulin established his own clinic in his home in Front House, receiving patients as well as selling medicines, both Chinese and Western, to patients and other practitioners in nearby villages. His house is a two-storey building, quite ordinary in the village. The ground floor is used to meet his patients and store western medicines. It is also the place for the family to dine. Besides, part of it is occupied by the beds of his two daughters, being separated by a cloth curtain from the rest of the room. The upper floor is the bed room and place to store Chinese medicines. Thus, the house is full of medicines and family furniture. Almost no space to put a spare foot. Most of his medicines are bought from the county's state owned Medical Corporation. He buys some of his medicines from private dealers too. These are the people who came into the business after the mid eighties, buying medicines from medical factories and selling them directly to hospitals and practitioners usually at a lower rate than the state owned medical companies who used to be the only legitimate dealers.

The family has six members – the couple, one son, two daughters, and Zhoulin's aged mother who lives separately in a small room built in the front of the house, where there is usually a courtyard. His son, aged 19, left school several years ago to help him, and at the same time learn both from him and from a medical course by correspondence,<sup>2</sup> in order to inherit the business. The son has been able to handle some simple illnesses such as colds or stomach troubles. But the most important work he is carrying in the family business is to take care of the daily purchase of various medicines required according to a list provided by Zhoulin. When a large purchase is involved, it is handled by Zhoulin himself.

Zhoulin's wife and two daughters take care of the small amount of land divided to the family in 1980, growing sweet potato, peanuts, and various vegetables for own consumption. In most of their spare time, the two daughters do hand knitting

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<sup>2</sup>One of the educational forms as distinct from the formal education system of schools and colleges. This form of education teaches courses through mailing textbooks and receiving course work. The students learn the textbooks by themselves and then finish the course work to send back to the teachers. They can write to the teachers if they have any question concerning the course. Examinations are arranged and, if passed, certificates recognised by the education authority issued for students of this kind. Unlike the formal education system, no entrance examination is required, nor is there a time constraint for finishing the course.

as temporarily paid work, making extra money for the family and themselves.

Patients largely come from Front House. Some people in Back House and West River also like to come to him when they are ill. Charges for the service and medicines in Zhoulin's clinic are relatively cheap for the village and surrounding area. In consequence, a lot of people come to see him or buy medicines from him. For instance, one day when I went to visit him in his home, while we were chatting, a vet from the next village came to his place to buy over 20 yuan of medicines. I asked the vet why he preferred to come over here rather than other places to buy his medicines. He told me it was cheaper than other places, including the dealer in his own village. Zhoulin once told me that the average monthly income of the clinic was over 300 RMB. Although the real figure I think would be slightly higher, this is quite moderate compared with other village doctors in the area, e.g. Hanping. The relatively cheap rate for charges of service and medicines, as well as his poor health that prevents him from going far to see his patients, are probably the reasons. Perhaps a more important explanation comes from his view about making money out of the business. I remember he once told me that he wanted to earn just sufficient for the living expenses of the family. This distinguishes him from many other people in business such as Hanping. It is clearly one of the reasons why local people like him more than Hanping.

What Zhoulin in recent years has done as a village doctor is to sit in his armchair in the house waiting for patients to come, or the relatives of patients come to ask him to their houses when patients themselves are too ill to move. The latter case will cost the patient an extra 0.50 RMB within the village or 1 RMB out of the village on top of normal cost of service and medicines, according to the rate of charge set by the local health authority. However, he told me that he rarely went to patients in other villages except his old friend patients because of his deteriorating health condition in recent years. He also told me that, sometimes when a really poor fellow villager came to him, he not only did not charge his service, but paid the cost of medicines for him. I was told by his neighbours that relationships in the family were odd. He and his wife hardly spoke to each other. His wife who I never met while I was in the village cooked for herself and did not dine with the rest of the family. Meals of the rest of the family were prepared by his daughters. Each member of the family has his/her own set of bowl and chopstick, without mixing with others. All these are very peculiar in the eyes of the neighbours. But none of this affects the opinion of fellow villagers on him as a village doctor. All the villagers to whom I spoke agreed that Zhoulin, as a village doctor, is much better than Hanping, in the sense that he treats his patients not only as patients, but as kinsmen and fellow villagers as well.

He would come over immediately whenever required by the relatives of patients day and night, no matter there is sunshine or rain. Some villagers told me that he is “always” sitting asleep in his armchair at night. I asked him whether this was true. He admitted he often did, in case someone came to call him out to a patient.

Another thing that impresses his fellow villagers and me as well is the TV programme he prints and distributes to people owning TV sets in Lower River and in fact other villages in the whole Meiling Peninsula without any charge. With the process of economic development, TV sets – from black and white to color TV – have become a “necessary” consumer good coming into lots of families in the region in recent years. People find it difficult to know the programmes in advance. Newspapers with TV programmes of various channels are only available in the county seat. Each channel forecasts its programmes next day only at the end of the programmes of the day. Being aware of this difficulty, Zhoulin uses his chance to go to the county seat frequently to purchase his medicine supply to help the others. He buys a lot of newspapers with TV programmes receivable in the region – Chinese TV, Fujian TV, Shantou TV, Minnan Daily, etc, and selects the programme in which local people might generally be interested, and prints an integrated “new” programme with a printer bought by himself. Anyone in the village or other villages who wants to have a copy of the programme can have one free. However, those who often come to get the programme, while appreciating his time and effort, often feel like giving him small amounts of money “for helping him to pay for the materials (paper and ink) required”.

In many other ways, Hanping is different from Zhoulin in doing the business. He is more famous, thus his patients are not only from Lower River village, but also people in the nearby villages in Meiling Peninsula. The latter have in fact become more and more important in proportion. Most of them come here because of the reputation of his capability in curing various illness, or because the tradition in this area that patients often stick to a particular doctor from beginning to end. They believe each doctor has his special skill and method in dealing with the illness. If a patient changes his doctor during the course of treatment, it is no good unless he feels no better after having a certain period of treatment by a doctor. Doctors usually do not like patients to change to other doctors or take patients who were with other doctors for fear that his way of treating a disease may differ from and contradict others.

The scale of his clinic is bigger. The clinic was firstly located at his home when it was set up. It was moved to the present location in 1987 because at the time the

space at home was often not enough to accommodate the rapidly increasing patients. The present clinic is rented and is approaching its time to be handed back. It is separately located on the east side of the highway across from the village. Hanping still teaches in the Meiling Middle School, but the clinic has expanded in the last several years. Firstly Yanjiang, his brother-in-law, joined in when it was set up. Later, his two sons, having received some formal training in the county hospital, were able to help and handle most of the basic illnesses independently.

They also go to other villages in the peninsula when they receive messages from patients asking them to come over. Only the two sons and his brother-in-law go to the patients in other villages. Hanping stays in the clinic only when he has no lesson in the day or during the spare hours of the school. I was told that he behaved "like a famous doctor in the city" nowadays. He rarely went out of his clinic to see patients at their homes, unless the patient was important for him. If someone really wanted to see him, he had to go to the clinic and wait for his time. One day when I was in his clinic to talk with him, I saw him receive a note from someone. From the form of address, it must have been written by someone who was at least an acquaintance in a not far away village in the peninsula, and who was ill, asking Hanping himself to come. But he just told the man who passed the message to return home without saying whether he would go or not. He seemed to have no intention of going at all. For a long time he had been sitting in his chair chatting about something unimportant with me. I guessed this patient was not important enough for him to go himself.

It is a local custom that doctors enjoy a lot of respect and prestige in the village for their service in helping the ill. Life and death were in their hands, and almost all the people in the village have to go to him sometimes, whether for himself or for his relatives. However, as Hanping's family make more and more money out of the business and build up new houses, the family also suffers serious damage in popularity in the village, although nobody seems to dare to openly challenge the family. The family has been less and less popular in the village because they care very little about personal relationships with other villagers. The way of their treating patients is very much business-like. They do not even bother to maintain a good relationship with the local cadres, which not many people in the village dare to neglect. They have a terrible relationship with other doctors in the village and in Meiling Hospital as well. Doctor Zhou once told me very angrily that Hanping's two sons had been helped and trained by him during their time in the county hospital, but they never came to visit him since he was sent to Meiling Hospital more than two years before. They seem to have forgotten all about help from other people.

This kind of ingratitude is considered very bad in the local custom. Besides, the price of their service is much higher than Meiling Hospital and Zhoulin. Villagers told me that the same medicine in his clinic normally is about one third higher than that of the hospital which is only a couple of minutes' walk away. The newly-built large house indicates the wealth the family has made out of the business. The family has become one of the richest in the village, having a large house which few others in the village can match and shares of several fishing boats and water transport vessels. Thus more and more people would go to the hospital since the service there is improving after some young better trained doctors like doctor Zhou mentioned previously came to the hospital. This is also due to the death of several patients believed privately to be caused by the clinic's misconduct in handling penicillin.

In conclusion, the change in social relationships brought by economic development and expansion of business activities in the village is obvious and significant. The three examples in the above reveal in different respects a clear tendency of commercialization of social relationships resulted in the Lower River area. From the hand knitting network we see business activities in the area tend to operate on the basis of existing social network. Social relationships (kinship and friendship) have been widely and effectively used by people in doing their business and making profit. The small groceries within the village further indicate the fact that such an intensive utilization of social links in business has complicated the relationships. But the use of social relationships has at the same time created a special form of business morality in which both market rationale and social value is emphasized. From the case of health business in the village we see how a traditional community service with high social regard has been gradually transformed into a profit oriented business activity. The commercialization of social relationships is here no more clear. An action of helping to cure a kinsmen or a neighbor used to be taken as a favor to be repaid by respect and gratitude. It has now become a paid service with a set price. This may be an inevitable result in the social environment that encouraging some people to get rich before others do. Nevertheless, the decline of popularity of village doctor Hanping and his family in the community indicates that a virtually impersonal business relation with a pure market rationale is yet to be accepted by the majority of the villagers, and the tendency to care nothing but make money is still strongly resisted in the local community. Generally speaking, business relationship here is not a pure one but is characterized by trust ensured by something out of business context – loyalty of kin in the first place, and reinforced through good business transactions defined by concerned people's obedience to both business rules and social norms. Business transactions, in the view of local people,

should be constrained by basic social values besides the business rationale of seeking a reasonable profit.

## Chapter 8

# Mobilizing Support from the Family Network

It seems naturally to move from the utilization of single social relationships to discuss the utilization of the whole family network. This is what is here called support mobilization. An action of support mobilization in the village can be defined as an effort in manipulating links in one's family network to get a desperately needed resource, to reach a key person, or to have the work done in a specific situation. Like the utilization of a single relationship, support mobilization from the whole network is understood as part and parcel of the process social interaction among kinsmen or friends within and outside the village. Mobilization of support of various kinds is somewhat habitual or an everyday necessity. It happens very frequently in people's everyday life. Examples in the village are found in such as a marriage, a funeral, a business activity, or even a act of borrowing a match from the next door neighbour. In these examples, some or all of the relationships in the family's network are mobilized to perform a marriage or a funeral ritual, to form a business partnership, or to get the match. All these are desperately needed in the particular situations.

Thus the cases in the last two chapters can also be understood as examples of support mobilization in its economic aspect: to achieve family's prosperity one seeks to utilize the existing social relationships. This chapter will focus on another important aspect of utilizing a family network – mobilization of sufficient social support in times of difficulty. The nature and mechanism of support mobilization in the Lower River area in the following will be demonstrated with examples of dispute between villagers, in which the considerations of personal interest and of reciprocity among close kin families will be particularly singled out.

## 8.1 Dispute and its settlement in Lower River

Dispute or “exchanges of fire of words” (quarrel) can happen between people with any kind of social relationship in Lower River. It is an everyday occurrence because competition for power, fame and gain in the community is intense and villagers tend to give tit for tat in the most trivial matter. Disputes in the village differ greatly in their scales, from a noisy quarrel between women to a serious street fight between men. Reasons leading to a dispute also vary from children’s squabbles in their games to the right of property such as land and houses. Most disputes in the village are small in scale. Since it is so frequent and ordinary, the disturbance by such kind of dispute normally does not last for long. It is not unusual that shortly after the noise of scolding each other on the street, children of both families play together as usual, and the adult, though they may not speak to each other for a period of time, conduct their own business as usual and gradually forget the matter. However, there are serious disputes in the village, which may lead to long lasting hostility and hatred.

The current system of dispute settlement in the Lower River area is as follows. Most disputes are settled by the involved parties themselves with mediation of kin or neighbors. If it cannot be settled, it is taken to the Village Committee level. The village cadres act as the judges in its settlement. This is where most disputes in the village settle. When the villager cadres cannot handle it, it goes to *Xiang* level, to the judicial affairs office of *Xiang* government. If a solution can still not be reached, or one or both parties are not satisfied with the mediation of cadres in village and *Xiang* government, it can be taken to the court at the county level. There are several court chambers located in different *Xiang* of the county, e.g., Qiaodong civil chamber. It is extremely exceptional for people to take a dispute in the village to the court beyond county level.

The exact number of incidents of dispute settled by the involved parties themselves is hardly possible to collect. But it is possible to have the figure of disputes handled by and through village cadres from records of mediation kept in the brigade headquarters due to a new measurement in effect in the village from September 1, 1990. On August 2, 1990, a new village government was set up. The old one collapsed in 1988 because of the incident of *ganbu chi* (cadres’ pond) mentioned before in which the village cadres were accused of “collective corruption” in the bidding for prawn farms. Three village cadres succeeded in their bid at the time. Shortly afterward, a Taiwanese company intended to invest to build a factory farm to produce baby prawns in Lower River. The village leadership used the opportunity to

join in a venture with the Taiwanese the prawn pond for which the three cadres had bid. According to the policy of favoring Taiwanese venture, the original rent was greatly reduced. A report from the village by some former brigade cadres and villagers working as officials in other places led to an investigation of the county's party disciplinary committee first and the prosecution of the county procuratorate later. To an extent, the incident is only an example of tense competition within the village which is the focus of this chapter.

As a result, the contract signed by the village leadership with the Taiwanese company was denied its legitimacy. The head of the villagers' committee, the party secretary, Youci, and his deputy were arrested. The former, who had offended a powerful figure in Meiling *Xiang* government, got the worst punishment. He was accused of taking 4000 RMB of village money beside the offence of the cadres' pond incident, and held in prison for one year. He was the only one who lost both his post in the village government and his share of the cadres' pond later. The party secretary, a representative of the county's people congress, was released one month later through exercising his contacts in the congress and in other parts of the county government. He received a party disciplinary punishment of one year suspension of membership and came back to the newly established village government two years later. The deputy was also released at the same time through his maternal uncle who was the party secretary of Shidu township and at the moment is the chief of the county's financial committee. He got one year's membership suspension too and was kicked out of the village power. The rest of the village cadres, Kunci, Xiuming, Yuping, all received their party disciplinary punishments of "serious warning" or "warning". In July, 1988, the *Xiang* authority sent two of its officials to form a temporary village leadership, to replace the corrupt one. Two young village cadres, young businessman Yizhong and army veteran Baokun, were admitted into it. It ran the village for about years until August of 1990.

The new village leadership formed in August, 1990 consists of seven persons: Kunci, Baokun, Yizhong and Yuping are in the village's party branch, Huayong, Yuoci and Xiuming form the villagers' committee. Kunci, Youci, Yuping and Xiuming are members of the old leadership. Huayong, the only new figure, is an army veteran and the elder son of Yaoci who is the deputy of the county's Bureau of State Security. He serves as the acting director of the villagers' committee and dominates the leadership because of his powerful family background mentioned previously in chapter six. Kunci, who has been in and out of the village leadership since the late 1950s and was "relatively clean" in the cadres' pond incident, is the acting party secretary. To give a "new" impression, the leadership, driven by Huayong, has made

a series of regulations concerning particularly the public order and environment of the village, having them printed and distributed to every family. In the Regulations Regarding Public Order, three articles are concerned with disputes and physical fighting in the village. They are as follows.

1. From September 1, 1990, each party of any civil dispute and physical fighting, of individuals and of groups, will have to pay costs of public order administration 40 RMB to the village. The injured should go to the hospitals for treatment. Costs of treatment have to be provided in advance by both parties before its final settlement through village cadres' mediation.

2. Any third party or outsider who joins in the dispute or fighting will be fined 80 RMB without exception, beside the punishment for his/her offence.

3. Those who produce fabricated stories in order to stir up trouble will be severely punished as a criminal offence by the public security authority in addition to paying a fine of 80 RMB to the public order administration of the village.

All the fines will be used to hire movies or local opera for the villagers in which village regulations are propagated. The names of offenders are publicized to be humiliated, a social punishment which is found more effective than the economic one, i.e., fine. Meanwhile, a responsibility system of dispute mediation is also established in the leadership. There is a village cadre who is responsible for mediation and settlement of disputes in each of the three hamlets. They are: Baokun for West River, Yizhong for Back House and Yuping for Front House. In cases that they are unable to handle and when a major dispute happens, all the village cadres are responsible for mediation and settlement. It is only in case of a serious conflict, which the village cadres can not settle or their mediation is not accepted by the disputing parties, that it should be handed over to the higher levels of authority.

These new measures may more or less help to reduce or minimize disputes in the village. It nevertheless can not prevent them altogether. They are bound to happen because interests of villagers are always in conflict. According to the records of mediation in the village government, there were 38 incidents of dispute in Lower River mediated and settled by the village cadres from September 1, 1990 to the end of the year. This does not include the figure of disputes that are settled among villagers themselves (which are surely many more to judge from my experience in the village) in order to escape the fine and, more importantly, the public humiliation of

both sides. Since none of these disputes were handed over to the *Xiang* government's legal office, adding to its figure of 107 incidents it handled in the year, the leadership of Lower River was named the best in public order administration by the *Xiang* government at the end of the year.

The dispute caused by a pappy in West River which happened on January 21, 1991 serves as an example of how cadres handle disputes among villagers. I happened to be in the brigade headquarters that morning. At about 10:00 am, while we were drinking tea and chatting, a mid-age woman from West River rushed in, saying that her nephew had been beaten by someone called Guoping, that a doctor was needed, and asked the cadres of the brigade which doctor they should go to. She also asked the cadres to go to settle the dispute. Baokun, who was responsible for dispute settlement in West River, told her: "You should certainly go to doctors in the *Xiang* hospital, otherwise the costs will not be recognised when the dispute is settled". After she went out, I said, "it looks as if your Regulations Concerning Public Order are quite effective, doesn't it? Now those who have a fight know to come to you first." "How dare they not to come", replied Baokun.

A short while later, another woman cried in. She was the mother of the boy who was beaten. She said her son had been shocked by being beaten by Guoping, and she herself was punched several times on the back. "Please come over to settle it", she pleaded. Kunci and Baokun told her to send the boy to the hospital first. "We will come over in a minute", they said. I was not surprised at all that they remained there unmoved half an hour later, since I had spent quite a long time with them in the fieldwork and was familiar with their way of treating their humble fellow villagers. As a matter of fact, they had not quite finished their tea yet. Later, Baokun and Kunci went out together. I did not notice when they were out because I had not seen any sign of them preparing to go to "settle" the dispute that morning. So I went to another room in the village headquarters to chat with Xiuming, discussing the interaction of her relatives within and outside the village. If I had known that they were going to the dispute, I would have been interested to go with them and see myself how they handled a situation like this. In the evening, I was invited to have a drink by a young man, who is working in the *Xiang* government, in his West River home. I met Baokun there. He was invited too. I asked him about the dispute in the hamlet. He gave me details of the dispute and how he and Kunci dealt with it the whole day.

It was a so-called "civil affair dispute", caused by a pappy. On the day before the dispute, Guoping's baby dog was found missing. The family spent a long time in

searching for it. They saw a similar pappy in neighbour Haizhi's house and reckoned that their pappy must have been stolen by Haizhi's family, a charge the latter angrily denied. Guoping then strongly urged them to return the dog. But Haizhi argued that it was his own pappy and refused. Guoping's wife forced her way into Haizhi's house to search for it. Being afraid of Guoping's forcefully taking away their pappy, the family hid it somewhere else. In the morning, Guoping met the son of Haizhi on his way and stopped him to demand once again the dog back. After a short argument, he grasped the boy and started to hit him. Guoping was over 30 years old, how could a teenager fight with an adult man? The boy was beaten, collapsed on the ground. This was about the time when the mid-age woman rushed into the headquarters to call for the village cadres. According to the doctor in the hospital, the boy had several places of injury on his body. The injury to his head was the most obvious and serious. But when Baokun and Kunci arrived, Guoping did not admit that he had beaten the boy. His "attitude" was quite bad, as Baokun put it.

Further investigation carried out by Baokun and Kunci showed both Guoping and Haizhi's family had a pappy given by a neighbour, whose mother dog gave birth altogether to five pappies. The neighbour proved that Guoping was earlier in taking his pappy than Haizhi. The cadres asked Guoping whether there was any special character of his pappy. He told them it was a black dog, with an area of white hairs on its chest. The neighbor who gave the dog to him said that it was true. The cadres then asked Haizhi the speciality of his dog. He said it was a black dog without any white hair, but its tail was a bit crooked. The cadres then had the disputing dog examined. No sign of what Guoping said – a small area of white hair on its chest, it rather fitted the description of Haizhi. They thus decided that the dog belonged to Haizhi who did not steal it from Guoping's family. It was wrong for Guoping to accuse Haizhi of stealing his pappy. Guoping, an adult, injuring Haizhi's teenager son based on a speculation had made the thing worse. Therefore, Baokun and Kunci, after discussion, announced their punishment: Guoping assaulted other people with an unacceptable excuse, his attitude toward his neighbours as well as brigade cadres was too bad. According to the village's new Regulation Regarding Public Order, he should be fined 80 RMB for the offence. Besides, he seriously injured the son of Haizhi, so he should pay all the expense for the medical care of the boy. In order to ensure the payment, he should pay 400 RMB to the village in advance, which would be added or changed when the boy completely recovered. All the money should be paid to the brigade headquarters before 9:00 the next day.

According to neighbor villagers in West River, Haizhi is an honest and harmless person in the village, whereas Guoping is a trouble maker, especially his wife, who,

nicknamed “chicken egg”, has a big mouth, keen on spreading rumours and arguing with her neighbors in the village. This time, according to the brigade cadres, they were determined to “read them a lesson”, for the sake of “public order” in the village. However, when I met Baokun in the village headquarters the next afternoon, I asked whether or not Guoping had paid the 80 RMB fine and the 400 RMB for medical care in advance. He said they had not been paid yet. Moreover, he told me with obvious anger that Guoping and his wife had been spreading a point in the village that Baokun and Haizhi were *qingren* (close kin of the same *fang*). Thus the decision made by Baokun the day before was not “fair” because, as an old saying circulated in the area which goes as “The bigger end of a melon is bound to fall toward the wall”, village cadres tend to favor their own close kin in a dispute settlement. All the cadres in the village were annoyed by Guoping’s “bad attitude”. Huayong, the acting director of villagers’ committee and architect of the village’s Regulations Regarding Public Order which he no doubt copied from similar documents in his father’s office, suggested that if he did not pay the money, they should go to the public security office and asked them to punish him. The punishment, if carried out by the people from Public Security Bureau, would most certainly be more severe than the one decided by the village cadres.

I remember Kunci, the acting party secretary, once told me quite sincerely that rural cadres have great difficulty knowing how to behave in many situations, especially in cases of dispute among villagers. “You should give your decision quickly in arbitration, otherwise you would not be able to do so any more”, he said. The disputing parties will use any means to influence the mediation and decision of cadres, among which the most difficult situation for the cadres is the involvement of people other than the disputing parties which often complicates the dispute. This is the mobilization of support by both sides from kin in the village and even kin or friends from outside. They keep coming to the village cadres, asking favor for the party they represent. When a village cadre is close kin of one of the disputing parties, the pressure from his kin to lobby a favored decision in the village leadership will be very difficult for him to resist. On most occasions, it is more than likely that different village cadres act as patrons of different groups to which they respectively belong, and which often catch them in a dilemma position that requires a lot of social skills to avoid offending both sides.

In the case of Guoping, since he did not have a close kin cadre in the village and was unable to get somebody from his close relations to negotiate for his interest, he chose to use the last resort which is also more aggressive – to use “public opinion”, by spreading the point that the village cadre did not arbitrate the dispute “fairly”

but favored his close kin. It is often very dangerous because it offends the cadre who is in power, which may lead to further suffering. This is exactly the case in the example of Guoping. It is possible for a village, as I said, to go for a settlement at *Xiang* government or even at court level if he does not satisfy the arbitration of village cadres. Even so, the opinion of village cadres remains very important. They are agents of state power in rural society, as Siu (1989) pointed out. The work of higher levels of authority in rural China has to rely on them in many respects. In a dispute between two fellow villagers, for instance, wherever they go to for a settlement, the officials who take charge of the case still have to go back to the village cadres for evidence or for assistance when they conduct the investigation. The case of houseland dispute discussed below is an example. This is one of the reasons why village cadres remain powerful in the eyes of their ordinary fellow villagers, and why many of the latter seek every opportunity to cultivate their relationship with the former by, for instance, sending them gifts or entertaining them by meal and drink.

## 8.2 A case of serious dispute

Most disputes in a village community like Lower River are small in scale, usually caused by trivial matters – what Chinese people call matters of “chicken feathers and garlic skins” (*jimao suanpi*). They happen very frequently in the village, but seldom go to the court level for settlement. This kind of dispute normally ends with a retreat of one party or, in most cases, a compromise of both sides through the mediation of kin or village cadres. However, if one or both parties refuse to retreat from the hot argument and are determined to win the dispute, it can lead to a large scale and serious conflict. This often happens in case of a dispute on important property, such as land and houses. It may be caused by very trivial matters if the two fellow villagers have long been hostile and conflicting with each other, which is by no means unusual in the Lower River area. Development of a serious conflict between two families, or two groups of family in the village since the close kin of both sides are often more or less mobilized and involved, has in general more than a single cause. Its mediation and settlement are, as a result, more complicated. An unsettled dispute in the village, for instance, is always a source of further conflicts in the future.

The following is a serious conflict upon land for building which did not happen in Lower River but in my natal village, which is not far away from it, in the Spring of 1987. I heard about stories of the dispute before. However, it was an argument about

it which I came across in October of 1990, at a feast held by a villager celebrating his son's going to college, that caught my real interest to dig into it. The guests at the feast were the closest kin and a few important figures of the second *fang* in the village to which the host family belonged. As I pointed out in chapter five, a feast is one of the important occasions for kinsmen in the village to exchange their entertainments as well as ideas. During the feast, having drunk some wine provided by the host, some of the guests, as usual, started to talk about the "situation" in the village. After congratulating the host family who had provided a college student – a future government official, it seemed quite natural when someone mentioned that Balong's family had just finished "the pigsty", which I knew was connected to a serious dispute between Ahua, one of the host's close families, and Balong who belonged to another important family group in the village some years ago. The result of it, marked by the completion of the disputed pigsty of Balong, was a defeat of Ahua and his closest kin.

The man who mentioned the incident then stated that a main reason for Ahua's losing in the dispute was lack of "own men" in various government offices that handled the dispute. Others, however, followed to claim that the more important reason, both for the loss of the dispute and for the fact that the second *fang* men (i.e. "us" of the speaker) out-numbered but were often bullied by the third *fang* men (i.e. "them"), was lack of a sense of solidarity among people of the second *fang*. The son of Ahua even held that everyone in the second *fang* was thinking only of himself and his own problems, no one, except one or two, in the group was "really" willing to support his family during the dispute. His statement immediately caused disagreement from a distant but important kinsman who pointed out, "if you had made Jianleng and Tengqu <sup>1</sup> to come to Uncle Shaozhi and me <sup>2</sup>, we would have seen how they dared to claim that piece of land was theirs !"

I found that, beside the incident itself, the argument among them about it quite fascinating. Thus I decided to find out more about the dispute and its settlement after the feast.

In the first place, I must confess that most of my sources of information about the incident came not directly from the two families of the conflict, but from relatives and neighbours of both sides among whom some were more or less involved in the conflict. The two involved families were unwilling to talk about it. Why it is so, for

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<sup>1</sup>Jianleng was an official in *Xiang* government's land management office and Tengqu was a chief brigade cadre. They were both important in the settlement of the dispute then.

<sup>2</sup>Both of them were distant kin in the feast at the time. Both were production team heads in the village when the land of the village was decollectivized in 1981.

the losing side, is quite understandable, but for the winning side, I could not figure out the exact reason until I knew more about the process of its mediation.

It is often very difficult to find out what really happened in a conflict between two fellow villagers after several years, because different people, standing in different positions, have their own versions of the story, especially about the acts and counter-acts behind the scene which are usually kept secret and are often more to do with the result of a conflict. Of course, there is no real secret in a village community where people intensively interact with each other. One can figure out the general picture of an incident from the different versions given.<sup>3</sup> The story which follow is the result of great effort in a jigsaw puzzle like searching of materials about the conflict. It is a combination of several versions of the story from the relatives of both sides. The argument in the feast mentioned above to some extent is a reflection of those different versions. I give my own version of the story from these different versions according to two criteria. One is the same fact mentioned by different people should largely be true. The other is the relative positions of informants to two sides of the dispute, to which I take the point that a story given by those who are in a relatively neutral position must be closer to the real situation of what happened.

The two families involved belong to two dominant *fang* in the village. Ahua's family belongs to the second *fang* which is the largest in population. Balong's family belongs to the third *fang* which is less in population but by no means less powerful than the second *fang*. The two families live in the same neighbourhood, in two rows of houses in the eastern part of the village where most new houses, built in the last 10 years, stand. Ahua's house is in the front while Balong's is in the back. Ahua also has a piece of houseland right behind the house of Balong. This is where the dispute happened.

In the Spring of 1987, after the traditional New Year's Festival, Balong started to build a pigsty behind his house in order to breed more pigs. It had become an important income source for the family in recent years when the price of pork had doubled. However, Ahua, who owns the houseland right behind his house, tried to stop the construction. Ahua thought it would in effect take the place of the road between two rows of houses which was against the custom in the village that people in the front row should not occupy the road behind. More importantly, although

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<sup>3</sup>The different versions of a past story in a village community itself is quite interesting, without regarding the matter of whether or not it is true. It is often related to the interests of various people in the village. One can find that people often twist a story to suit their own interests. See James Scott (1985) for an interesting analysis of this phenomenon in terms of class struggle within the village community.

the pigsty in building did not reach Ahua's house on which a new house would be built in near future, as Balong tried to argue at the beginning of the quarrel, it in fact would damage Ahua's interest by depriving his right of utilizing the same space, and bringing inconvenience to the family when they complete and live in the house. In local custom that has lasted for hundreds of years, it is always an obligation for owners of back row houses to ensure the space for a road between the two rows of houses. In planning to build the houses, people in the back row automatically reserve the space for the road, which is for the sake of themselves as well as other villagers because it will mostly be used by owners of back row houses themselves. Any obstruction in the road would cause inconvenience, especially for the owners of the houses facing the road. Balong argued that he was simply following the move of his next door neighbour in the same row who had built his pigsty years before. He asked why Ahua did not try to stop the neighbour then. The latter answered that it was wrong for the neighbour in building the pigsty, but it was the matter of owner of the house right behind it to stop the construction at the time. In spite of the fact, it was a right as well as a duty for him to stop Balong to do the same. If Balong continued the building, it would be destroyed by force.

An argument like this in the village is unlikely to have a result without a fight, since there is a conflict of interest between two families behind it and neither of the two sides was prepared to compromise. So the quarrel went on for several days. As the argument became hotter and hotter, both sides lost their temper. The involvement of Balong's close kin in the neighbourhood eventually helped it to become a serious physical fight. Ahua's family was defeated in the fight, the first time this had ever happened. Ahua was hurt, so were his two sons. The air in the village in the days after the fight was tense, as Ahua, like Balong had already done at the early stage, started to mobilize his close kin. The dispute was later taken to court in the county for settlement. It turned out to be a marathon competition of mobilizing support from kin and friends in the process. In the end, Balong, once again, succeeded. Ahua's family suffered both a physical defeat and a loss of social standing because he could not revenge the earlier defeat by physical or legal means. To understand the result of the dispute, we should focus on support mobilization of both sides in the process of dispute and settlement.

### 8.3 Mobilizing support in the dispute

There were a lot of factors leading to the result of the houseland dispute. Among them, support of close kin and other *guanxi* links in family network proved to be the most critical. The successful mobilization of these relationships helped Balong to win the fight in the first place and the long process of its settlement later. Ahua's loss in the dispute, to a large extent, was a failure of getting support from close kin in the village which in turn was accounted for by the uneasiness of their relationships. Let me explain in more detail below.

To begin with, it is necessary to look at the two disputing families in relation with close kin in the village. Ahua is in his mid sixties. He has three sons and one daughter. The eldest son married and had a son and a daughter. His wife came from the same village. The second son married a girl from a nearby He surname village and had a daughter and a son. The family had a division not long ago before the dispute because the two daughters-in-law did not get on well with each other and with their mother-in-law. Both of the two married sons set up their own family. Ahua lived with his wife, the daughter and the youngest son. So what I called Ahua's family is in fact composed of three independent households with twelve members altogether. It was one of the strongest families in the village. It had been relatively well off under the successful management of Ahua who had the absolute authority in the family. In the time of collectivization, most of its members were full labourers who could earn work points in the production team. In frequent disputes with other families in the village, the family seldom lost in the past. Ahua had probably the loudest voice in the village, which earned him a nickname "gong". It had a lot of advantages in a quarrel. His loud voice and dead red face when he was angry, together with his wife and daughter who did not mind using the most dirty words in order to win a quarrel, and his three strong adult sons who were always ready to fight with his command, often helped Ahua to win a quarrel in the village in which good points of argument or even reasoning were, in most cases, not important.

Compared to Ahua's, Balong has a weaker family which was composed of a widow mother of middle age and five junior children. Balong's father was a strong man in the village. But he died in his forties in an accident of house construction in 1985, which some villagers who hated him because of being bullied by him believe to be a justice done by heaven. He fell from the unfinished ceiling of a house. Balong, in his mid twenties and unmarried, was named the head of the family based on traditional custom of the village, living together with his widow mother and three junior brothers and a sister. His elder sister had married out before his father died.

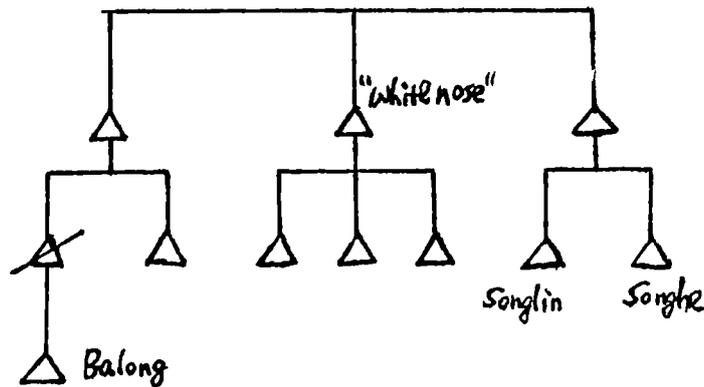


Figure 8.1: A chart of Balong's close kin in the village

However, Balong had the support of a strong kin group. As I mentioned previously, Balong's family belongs to a branch of the third *fang*. The branch is one of a few closely bound and "unified", hence strongest, family groups in the village. The main components of the group, shown in figure 8.1, are the families divided from Balong's grandfather and his two brothers. All three are still alive. Balong's grandfather is the eldest who has a daughter and a son. A man from another village came to marry the daughter and live in the family. He was Balong's late father. Two families were formed after the son got married. The second brother, who has a nickname "white nose", has three sons and three daughters. The three daughters were all married, two of them married into the same village. The two elder sons were married and separated. "White nose" and his wife live with their youngest son. The youngest brother has two sons and two daughters. They were all married, both of his sons took a wife within the same village. The younger daughter married into a family which belongs to the same *fang*, the third *fang*, in the village. He and the two married sons separated into three different families. Referring back to chapter four, these families become additional examples of the increase of intravillage marriage in the area in the past decades. Therefore, there are overall eight families stemming from the three brothers. Looking from Balong's family, the other seven families form the closest links of its "family network" in the village.

Several reasons make this group of families one of the few strongest within the village. Firstly, they are closely bound and relatively more unified than most family groups in the village. Although minor disputes do exist among them, as all the other kin groups in the village, there is a strong sense of solidarity in situations of conflict with others. People in this kin group are always prepared to support each other

whenever one of them is in dispute with other people. This is sharply contrary to many others in the village, such as the kin of Ahua as we will see in the following.

Secondly, there are several people in the group who are physically strong and are good at fighting. Among them are the two sons of Balong's youngest great uncle, Songlin and Songhe. The two Songs, in their thirties, are commonly regarded as trouble makers in the village. Their father used to be a soldier of the Nationalist Party before 1949. He learnt some martial skill for physical fighting, *gongfu*, during the service. Songlin and Songhe, and some other young men in the family group, learnt the skill from their father. They are among the strongest in physical contact. It is said that very few in the village can match them in a fight. In the village community where the result of most disputes are decided, directly or indirectly, by "fists" (physical superiority), as the local people say, this is very important. In the dispute between Balong and Ahua, for instance, it was actually the two brothers, Songlin and Songhe, who played a significant part in defeating Ahua's family.

Finally, they have relatively more outside contacts, or wider family networks than most people in the same village. The second of the three brothers, "white nose", had long served as a brigade cadre during which he cultivated a lot of relationships, which proved critical in the settling process of the dispute discussed here. He had already retired when the dispute happened. However, he had important influence in the village. Most cadres in the brigade at the time, were promoted and helped to be promoted by him. It was him who acted as a key figure in the whole process of the dispute, in organizing kin and mobilizing support within and outside the village context. His nickname, "white nose", came from local opera in which a "bad" character is usually featured by a white nose. His ability in strategy, or his cunning, became widely known in his period as a brigade cadre.

All these were well manifested in the incident of houseland dispute between one of its group members, Balong, and a strong figure in the village, Ahua, from the second *fang*. When the first quarrel happened, some people from this group were already at the site. Among them were Songlin and Songhe, the two sons of Balong's great uncle. They live in a close neighbourhood with Balong near the site of dispute.

It is usually the case that the noise of a quarrel attracts many children and adult by-standers, among whom are close relatives of one or both sides of the dispute. They are important for the development of the dispute because they can either join in to enlarge the scale of it or try to settle it by separating the disputing parties who have lost their control of temper. Their decision to act in either of the two ways is largely determined by the situation on the spot of dispute. Normally the kin

of both sides maintain, or at least appear to be in, a neutral position, and help to stop the argument by taking away the involved parties from the site. It is rarely the case in the village for the relatives of both sides to be directly involved in a quarrel and join in a fight. The situation in the village between people of the different kin groups is just like the nuclear balance of the two former super powers of the United States and Soviet Union. Large scale involvement usually only serves as a threat, to prevent any party from actually resorting to it, thus to minimize the scale of disputes in day to day contacts. For, both sides have their own kin, if the parties of a dispute are from different kin groups in the village. People have to think twice before they actually do anything. Any involvement of the people other than the direct parties of a dispute can easily lead to a large scale of conflict in the village. In the case of the conflict between Ahua and Balong, a few of Balong's close kin directly joined in the fight to defeat Ahua's family. It was a move based on their strong sense of solidarity and a careful planning and calculation in advance. But if the relatives of Ahua's family in the village had decided to help him to revenge by force it would have led to a bloody faction fighting in the village. They decided to settle the dispute through the court, which in effect avoided further bloodshed in the village.

The physical fighting happened a few days after the first quarrel. During these days, Balong went to "white nose" and others of his close kin to seek help. Contacts among them were intensified and meetings were held in the house of "white nose". Details of the process of negotiation within the group remain largely unexposed. Apparently a decision to collectively support Balong was made in the process in which "white nose" played a key role. As a result, Balong was assured to continue the pigsty construction. If Ahua tried to use force to stop him, the kin would help him to deal with it. So Balong started to build the pigsty again, this time a fight was prepared. Ahua and his family members, as they did last time, went to stop him. The quarrel broke out once again. Soon the two uncles of Balong, Songlin and Songhe, who were believed to be waiting specially in their houses for the dispute, joined in the quarrel.

Threatening to resort to physical fighting is not unusual in a dispute between villagers but on most occasions it is only a threat in order to win the quarrel. However, this time it eventually became a real fight because at the time neither side would retreat from the site. For Balong and his kin, this was a calculated move planned in advance. For Ahua and his family members, though it proved later that they were just to fight a losing battle, they had to respond to the challenge from other side. Retreat meant a defeat without a fight. They felt it would be a loss

of face if they did so. They might know that Balong had made his preparation, otherwise he would not have dared to start again the construction work stopped by them several days before. However, they probably did not foresee a situation that Balong's close kin, Songlin and Songhe, the two "trouble makers" in the village, would deliberately join in the dispute and invite them to fight, which changed the situation and became the direct cause of their defeat. The fact that Ahua's second son was not at home on the day when the fighting broke out is a strong indication of his lack of preparation.

Moreover, none of Ahua's close kin was on the spot of the fighting, to stop the direct involvement of Balong's close kin. This, on the one hand, helps to prove Ahua's failure in anticipating the situation on the day so as to try to mobilize his own kin's support. He and his family just blindly followed the planned move of the other side. On the other, it is also an indication of Ahua's poor relationships with his close kin in the village. Compared to that of Balong's, they were not at all on good terms. As it will further be demonstrated in the following, this is probably the most significant factor in his loss of the whole dispute.

At this time, we should look at Ahua's close kin in the village and his relationships with them. Ahua has two brothers and four sisters. He is the second among seven children. They came respectively from two wives of his father who took a second wife after the death of the first. His eldest sister went to Malaysia and there has been little contact ever since. His newly born little brother had to be given to a family in a nearby village after his father died. It was the hardest time for the family in one of the worst periods of the country in general because soon after the Japanese invaders were defeated the civil war broke out again. He had not married for long when his step mother also died, so did his two sisters next to him. The second brother and the youngest sister, who were children of his step mother, lived with him in the family. But Ahua, especially his wife, did not treat the brother very well. Although his brother actively joined in the political activities in the village and nearby areas and managed to find a wife in the new era of post-1949, the family was not divided properly. At the time all land belonged to the collective, but the houses and family equipment remained privately owned. After his brother's marriage, Ahua gave him a small house at the side of the village distributed by the collective, together with a few pieces of family furniture, and let go of him. He himself occupied the original big house of the family and most of its property. This became a source of a bitter dispute between the two families at the end of 1960s. The result of the dispute proved to be the start of Ahua's brother's long history of being bullied by others in the village.

Although the two brothers were reconciled later by mediation of their father's younger brother's wife at the end of 1970s, the two families never returned to a close relationship. The reason, beside the past dispute, was mainly Ahua's wife and daughter who always treated their close kin in the village meanly. For instance, when one of his brother's sons became a college student in the early 1980s, all relatives of the family came to congratulate, bringing with them chicken eggs and noodle – the local symbols of good wishes and fortune – as well as small sums of cash. This is a local custom of treating a relative who is to be far away from home. Ahua's wife also came, but instead of giving the conventional words of congratulation and good will, wishing the boy a good future, she made a remark which was generally regarded as caustic, or at least envious, in the specific context: "May this cash add up to the lot of money that you are going to make". A remark like this is often irritating for the kin of the family. Together with the sense of superiority members of the family always show in front of kin because of being relatively better off, in particular the constant dispute between them, added up to create a generally poor relationship for the family with its close kin in the village.

Beside the three households of Ahua's brother, formed by the brother and his married sons, there are eleven families in the village who are genealogically close to Ahua. They have only to be traced back to his grandfather who had four sons. Three among the eleven families are descended from the eldest brother who in turn had three sons, one was given to a family in the next village with the same surname. Ahua's father was the second among the four sons of his grandfather. The third brother died young without any descendant. The youngest brother had three sons, among whom the second married into another family in the village in the early 1960s, the other two formed four of the eleven families. The remaining four families of the eleven were descended from the brother of Ahua's grandfather. Adding up together, there were 17 households in the group. A chart of their kinship relations can be seen in figure 8.2, in which I omit children who have not married and set up their own households.

People in the group of this 17 households are no doubt *qin-ren* of Ahua. But for Ahua's family, the category of *qin-ren* usually also includes another 17 households in the village who are descendants of Ahua's great grandfather's brother. These two groups compose the main body of the second *fang* which is the largest in the village. Therefore, the picture of kinship structure in the village, if looking from Ahua's point of view, is as follows. At the centre is his own family and families of his married sons. Outside the core is firstly three families of his brother and the brother's two married sons. Then the seven families of children of his father's

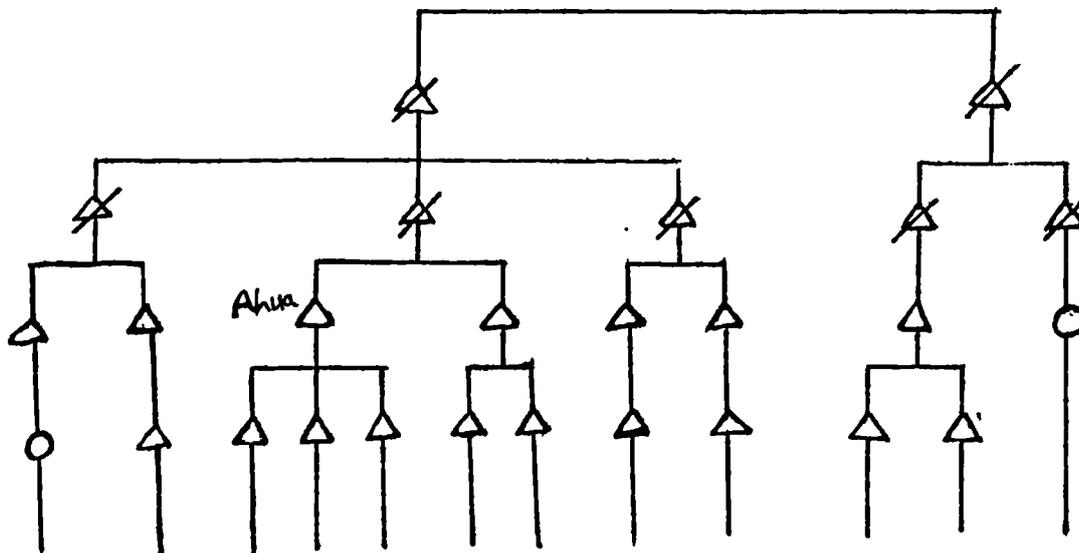


Figure 8.2: A chart of Ahua's close kin in the village

brothers. What differentiates these people from the rest is the domestic ritual of ancestral worship they conduct together in major annual festivals. Then the four families from his grandfather's brother. And then comes the 17 families from his great grandfather's brother. Then the rest of the second *fang*. Finally, the rest of the village. Differentiation of relationships in genealogical distance is very clear for the people outside his own immediate family.

However, a mere picture of this kinship structure provides no immediate help to explain Ahua's loss in the houseland dispute. Ahua's close kin are more in number than that of Balong. If only the number of close kin was counted, it could simply lead him to win the dispute, the opposite of what had happened. The case of Ahua serves as an example of an argument I will elaborate in the next section, that is, one's successfulness in mobilizing support is surely related to the number of relationships he has, but more importantly to willingness or ability of others in providing the support he wants. The former is to do with the structure of one's family network, the latter closeness to the people in the network which in turn results from interaction between them in the past.

As pointed out above, Ahua had more kinsmen in the village. However, his relationship with them was unfortunately not very good in general. The fact that none of his kin came to help in the fighting, and after the fighting he had to rely on

his little brother who was given to a family in a nearby village to organize and get together his kinsmen in deciding what to do next, is a very good piece of evidence for this. Rivalry and dispute were the main theme in their daily interactions. There were various reasons for this, of which Ahua and members of his family's meanness in treating others contribute a big part. The example of Ahua and his brother I described above is very suggestive. In the past decades, Ahua's family had various scales of dispute with, without exception, all other kin families in the group of 17 households. Hostility grew as a result of the constant dispute. What made many kinsmen most unhappy was not the dispute itself, which happens among any of the kin groups at every corner of the village, but rather Ahua's behavior in disputing with his kinsmen, in which he was always determined to win the last word of the quarrel without even thinking of the close kin relations or to make some compromises. Their meanness to kinsmen was clearly seen in daily contacts too. As I have mentioned previously, Ahua's family was relatively better off among the kinsmen, so members of his family were always showing their sense of superiority, without much respect to others in the group. Some of them, such as members of his brother's family, were not at home or did not know the fighting because of living on the other side of the village, whereas others might just have decided to stay away from the trouble even though they knew it.

Given the above, it is not difficult to understand the result of the fighting. On the day Ahua's family was out-numbered by Balong and his close kin among whom some directly joined in the fighting while others gave their help less deliberately by holding members of Ahua's family during the fighting, in the name of trying to separate the two sides. After the fighting, Ahua found himself injured. So did a few other members of the family at the site. His two sons, the most important force of the family, were most seriously hurt.

After being defeated for the first time, Ahua started to turn to his kin, trying to mobilize their support in order to fight back. What Ahua preferred was an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, to revenge by force, with the help of his kin in the village who outnumber that of Balong. But he soon found out that it was not easy. In the first place, a lot of effort was necessary in simply getting together all the close kin because of, as I described above, rivalry and disputes between them in the past. It was only made possible by the great effort of Ahua's youngest brother who was given to another village shortly after he was born. He was the only man who was able to call together all the people in the kin group, partly for his success in business, and partly for his staying outside the village thus being able to avoid the inevitable disputes caused by daily contacts and maintain generally good terms

with everybody in the group.

In deciding what to do, difficulty is more obvious. Beside Ahua's second brother in the village, few in the group really liked the idea of revenge by force. That would mean to them not only open conflict with the people in Balong's kin group to whom some had affinal relationships as a result of intravillage marriages, but also to commit themselves to an uncertain and large scale of fight. No guarantee for them to win even though they have more people on their side. This uncertainty and poor relations with Ahua's family added to the usual disputes with each other to make it hard for most people to think that they would really act collectively against the other side. The strong moral element for Ahua's brothers obliged them to commit their support without considering much of their self interest and the unhappy history between them. But for many others in the group, the price was too high, considering their own interest and how Ahua treated them in the past. The accusation, that Ahua's son made to most of the close kin in the feast, of thinking of only themselves and their own problems, which I described in the beginning of this story of houseland dispute, was more or less a just one. From the very beginning, it was hard for Ahua to gain the full commitment of support from his close kin other than his two brothers. This became yet more apparent later when the dispute settlement turned out to be a long exhausting exercise of support mobilization for both sides. Not very many among these kin offered their help. Although it might be true, as they said, that they were not in the position to help in the circumstance, it was also a fact that most people at the time cared only to pay their lip services, very few actually tried to help Ahua by, for instance, mobilizing their own relationships.

Having had a lot of discussion, therefore, instead of revenging by force, they decided to help Ahua to seek justice by legal means, although the air in the village was full of fire power, as kin of both sides frequently contact and got together, and watched eagerly each other's move. Accordingly, Ahua's little brother went to one of his classmates who worked in the procuratorate of the county seeking for help. The classmate then phoned the public security office to arrest Songlin, uncle of Balong who played a major part in the fighting. The second brother of Ahua served as a witness to prove the criminal offence he had committed in the fighting. At the beginning, it looked as if Ahua's side would get the dispute settled in its favor. But as time went on and Balong's side started to mobilize its network in various government offices in the county seat, Songlin was released after one month in custody, which later proved to be the sign of success for Balong's side in the long process of dispute settlement. With great effort, Ahua's side managed to get the case to the court for settlement. However, the settlement of the dispute became a long

term battle of both sides in mobilizing their *guanxi* and other resources for support. During the period of court investigation, both sides were busy visiting relatives, friends, and relative's relatives or friend's friends, to get as much support as they could. The purpose for this exhausting mobilization appeared to be very simple, to get these relatives and friends to exert influence on those who were in charge of the investigation and mediation, including officials in the county's procuratorate and the court, and later the cadres in *Xiang* and village governments as the court required materials concerning the dispute.

The most vital link that helped Balong's side in winning gradually the marathon dispute settlement after the fighting were a cross-cousin of "white nose" in the county seat, who had a son working in the county's procuratorate. Through him Balong's side not only managed to free the man who was arrested and held in custody at the public security office, but also exerted important influence on the county's procuratorate and the court throughout the process of investigation. Links of "white nose" in *Xiang* and village governments cultivated during his long history of service in the village leadership were also proven important after the court took over the case from the county's procuratorate and decided to conduct its investigation. Whether or not it was a decision influenced by Balong's side remained clouded, the persons who were in charge of the case in the court ignored the argument about the local custom on the right or duty between owners of houses in two rows which was a direct issue for the dispute, and the fact that Ahua and his two sons were seriously injured by Balong's kin who had nothing to do with the disputing houseland. They focused instead on what they regarded as a more "fundamental" issue: who owned the piece of land? For them, it was simple: the one who could get a note from the newly established *Xiang* Office of Land Management to prove that he owned the land, was right in the dispute and hence the side that should be favored in its settlement.

But it was in fact not as simple as it appeared to be. Both sides in a situation like this would say that he owned the land, since both sides did not have any hard evidence to prove otherwise of the claim of the opponent. The land was distributed at the time of decollectivization many years ago, and it was not distributed by the whole village but by each production team. The right of management for property such as land belonged to the team under the collective system. Ahua and Balong used to belong to different production teams. Therefore, it is possible that the border between each other's houseland was not so clear as it was supposed to have been. So when the official in the *Xiang* Office of Land Management came to the village, both Ahua and Balong stood firmly to claim that it was him who had the right over the piece of land. The official asked the village cadre who accompanied

him, as in the usual case in which officials in *Xiang* or higher levels had to rely on the village cadres in their control and administration of rural society. The village cadre who was close to “white nose” as I have indicated before, decided to say that he did not know. It would favor Balong’s side at the same time not to side openly against people of Ahua’s side. It might be true that he did not know, but if he decided to favor Ahua’s side, he could immediately call together all those who served as production team leaders at the time of decollectivization to find out.

After several months’ marathon competition in *guanxi* mobilization, the court decided to drop the case and suggested its settlement through mediation of village cadres. The decision was again made in effect in the favor of Balong’s side. Ahua’s attempt to get the dispute sorted out in court failed. The village leadership (consisting mainly of people from other hamlets) did not want to be involved in the dispute, which on the one hand favored Balong’s side for the current result of the fighting and on the other did not openly offend the great number of Ahua’s close kin. The dispute finished without a settlement. This result was generally considered to be Ahua’s failure in the village.

It is necessary to point out that Ahua’s defeat in the dispute was not due to lack of sufficient number of close kin. As indicated previously, it lay rather largely on the unwillingness of his close kin to support him, which in turn resulted from the unhappy history of social interaction between them in the past. The more important base of support, therefore, is not structural, but interactional, in the family network. Based on the description of the case of houseland dispute, I will discuss this point at a more general level in the following, by referring back to some arguments about social interaction and the idea of *renqing* made in previous chapters.

## 8.4 The mechanism of support mobilization

Social support among close kin in many areas, such as in marriage, funeral and shortage of some daily necessities, appears to be so ordinary and natural that it is often taken for granted by some local people. For others, it is based on kinship morality that close kin should support each other in difficulties, which is constantly strengthened by some old sayings in the society. One old saying, for instance, is that kin are as close as lips and teeth; when lips are hurt, teeth will also suffer. Kinship morality certainly poses a significant constraint on people’s behaviour in their social life. But the example of Ahua in the incident of houseland dispute suggests that morality constraint in itself is not sufficient to ensure the kind of support that one

needs in a particular circumstance. The most important mechanism of support mobilization, I would argue, lies rather in the concrete process of people's day to day interaction and social exchange, in which a favor at this time expects a return in future. Some sorts of conscious manipulation become possible in this process of exchange for the unique characteristics of social exchange. Let me explain in more detail.

At a theoretical level, I assume that everyone in a social network is utilizing these relationships by manipulating them at the same time based on a rational choice. Thus when speaking of manipulation of a relationship, I do not mean an individual taking advantage from a particular relationship at the expense of his partner's generosity. Examples of generosity and altruism can surely be found in any society. For example, to be generous to relatives or friends is seen as a kind of virtue to be promoted by social norms in China. It is supposed that people with a close relationship do not, and in many cases it is true that they actually do not, "count every penny" between them. In the following discussion, however, I do not take the altruism of some people in the society to be theoretically important in social support, although the possibility is recognized. Instead, I tend to view generosity in exchange as a kind of rationality, based on a general agreement or norm of reciprocity, in the hope to receive a generous return in future. The return needs not necessarily be material goods of the same kind. It can be a return of something intangible, such as power, status, or "face". Here I have to return to the nature of reciprocal exchange between two partners of a relationship and to employ the concept of "value" to facilitate my discussion.

In a short term relationship which involves, for instance, a single transaction in the exchange, the mechanism of manipulation lies on the nature of social exchange. Unlike the strictly economic exchange, which has a standardised measurement, i.e. money, to measure the value of each object being exchanged, social exchange does not have such a standardised measurement. That is to say, the same kind of resource may have different relative value to both sides, since what is exchanged in social sphere is frequently not the substantial material but the intangible resource, such as power, protection, status, influence, and access. It may also include exchange between material goods and power or social status. In an asymmetrical exchange like this, as has been pointed, both parties may benefit from the same exchange as both give up what he feels is of less value in order to obtain what is of greater value (Barth, 1966: 13). A handy example of this is found in the exchange between a political leader and his followers: the leader promises to bring material benefits to his followers in order to obtain support from them in the political campaign. Both

may benefit from the exchange. For the followers, they get material benefits. For the political leader, he obtains political power. Hence, the success in manipulating a relationship from this point of view depends on one's ability to use resources he does not need to get from his partner resources required in the specific circumstance. This can also be well demonstrated with cases of dispute settlement in the Lower River area, in which the disputing parties are often ready to pay their ways to reach the key persons for getting a favor that is desperately needed.

Homans has a very similar idea about the value of social exchange. He calls it "psychological value", and the profit from the exchange "psychic profit", they cannot be calculated in the same way as that of market exchange but in terms of "the forgone value of alternative uses" of the exchanged objects (Homans 1961: 61 - 62). Based on this, he argues that "no exchange continues unless both parties are making a profit... The open secret of human exchange is to give the other man behavior that is more valuable to him than it is costly to you and to get from him behavior that is more valuable to you than it is costly to him" (ibid).

Rationality is seen, most frequently, only with a recognition of the inappropriateness of a strictly economic measurement in the value of objects in social exchange. Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that the idea of "relative value" may just be applicable to a situations of general scarcity in needed resources, where, on the one hand, specialization or other conditions makes the exchange with someone else become a necessity for life, and on the other, no formal institutionalized channels of exchange, such as a market in economic arena, are available. The idea of "relative value" or "psychological value" may be especially useful in explaining exchanges of helps and favors, because help and favor cannot be obtained at wish, their value is obviously incompatible with goods in the market which are subject to the law of supply and demand. In China, it is also useful to explain phenomena such as bribery and corruption since the economic market in China is not a free market and the economic exchange sometimes, like the social exchange discussed, flows only in particular channels. In the case of houseland dispute discussed above, I take the direct or indirect exchanges between Ahua or Balong with the persons in the court and other government departments who were in charge of the dispute settlement an example of this category, in which the former brought gifts or cash to the latter in order to get a favored decision of settlement.

However, such an *ad hoc* exchange, though it is by no means rare or unimportant in the society, will not be the focus of the current study. The social relationships concerned in this study are kinship and friendship. What is important here, there-

fore, is the support mobilization from those long term social relationships. I have demonstrated previously in this thesis that a social relationship (*guanxi*) like kinship or friendship involves a series of reciprocal exchanges or transactions between partners, which usually take a long time. I have also shown that there are norms and rules (*renqing* and *bao*) in society to assure, to some extent, the repayment of a favor or a gift, which make social exchanges possible. These conditions are, in fact, bases of manipulating these long term relationships and mobilizing support in time of need. As Hwang (1987: 946) points out, “the principle of *renqing* implies not only a normative standard for regulating social exchange but also a social mechanism that an individual can use to strive for desirable resources within a stable and structured social fabric”.

For people in these long term social relationships, a transaction at a time is only part of the long chain of social exchange, in which the transaction can be a result of past transactions or a base for future transactions. In other words, it can be a payment or a loan. There is a general agreement among anthropologists and sociologists who study exchange behaviors in human societies that, in a long run, social exchange between two partners should be approximately equivalent provided that there is a freedom to stop the relationship whenever one of them feels it to be unsatisfactory (MacCormack, 1976; Homans, 1961: 63). At a particular point of time, however, there are always a creditor and a debtor in the series of exchange between two partners of a relationship, since most of the social exchange between kin and friends are “delayed exchanges” which take a certain time period to complete. For instance, in a marriage or funeral, a return of the received gifts and service can only be made at the time when the other side is holding a similar event. By the same token, a gift sent by a person to his kin or friend at the time of marriage can only expect a return gift in the similar event of himself.

This kind of “delayed exchange” with kin and friends in the whole social network becomes a significant mechanism of support mobilization for a person who requires a lot of support on a particular occasion. It is possible for one to collect a great amount of resource at the time by mobilizing his social relationships in the family network as long as he has them invested in the past and commits to repay them in future. That is to say, a family network can be manipulated to mobilize sufficient needed resources for the special events in life, such as birth, marriage, and funeral. For instance, in the case of funeral discussed previously, a lot of kin and friends of Xingzhang came to the ritual, bringing with them various amounts of cash. Beside their inevitable roles performed in the funeral ritual, the total sum of cash given by these people contributed a significant proportion of the expense of the funeral.

This is a typical case of support mobilization in the village. However, it should be understood as part of the series of exchange between Xingzhang and his kin and friends. On similar occasions in the village in future, Xingzhang is obliged to attend and to give his sum of cash accordingly. This is the reason why the sum of money each gives in the funeral has to be carefully written down. In the case of dispute, help of Balong's kin obliges him to commit his support to them in a similar circumstance in future.

Thus, manipulation of network links here is based more importantly on norms of reciprocity and mutual support, and the family network as such can be regarded as an institution of social security. For, based on the norms, everyone in the same situation has the same right to call for support from other people in the network. The manipulation of relationships here should not simply be understood as people mobilizing family networks for their own special ends, because at the same time when they are trying to take advantage of others they should prepare to do the same by others next time. The resources that are mobilised from a network for a special event may include two parts: one part is regarded as returned credit coming from people to whom he has done a favor before, the other part is considered as debt he has to return in future.

The norm of reciprocity, or idea of *renqing* and *bao* in local people's terms, is very important in this mechanism of support mobilization. As I pointed out in a previous chapter, *renqing* is closely incorporated in the process of social exchange of gifts and favors. No exchange, no *renqing*. *Renqing* is also a base for further exchange. In the above example of houseland dispute, Ahua's failure in getting support of his close kin is not surprising. From the accusations and counter-accusations between them after the incident (for instance, in the feast described at the beginning of the case), it is apparent that there is not much *renqing* between Ahua and his close kin. This is a main reason why he failed to have the full commitment of support from his close kin in the dispute. As one of them pointed out: close kinsmen should certainly support each other, but this should also be mutual, one could not expect others' help without helping others. In other words, it is very difficult for one to receive a loan without some sort of credit. This example also indicates that kinship support, though having a very heavy color of morality, often operates on a conscious rationality base.

The dimension of time is also important here in a sense that a possibility arises for the pragmatic use of this time lag between receiving and returning. The intervening time lag is a period for investing, accumulating, liquidating or earmarking resources

so that one can mobilize sufficient support on a specific occasion and make a proper return in other time. Andrew Strathern has provided an example of how the time gap can be effectively used by people who are engaged in social exchange and status competition in *Moka* exchange in Mount Hagen in the New Guinea Highlands. *Moka* exchange in Mount Hagen is a kind of ceremonial exchange of pigs and shells between and within tribal groups. The whole *Moka* chain is a series of exchange transactions in which “big-men” of different groups mobilize resources of themselves and their groups to compete with each other for relative status. It involves complicated processes of accumulation and distribution of exchanged objects within a group or several groups together in order to defeat rival groups in the ceremonial prestation. The time lag in the transactional process is crucial for this accumulation of resources. As Strathern shows us, one important strategy in *Moka* exchange is to accept a temporary inferior status by presenting less pigs and shells and receiving more in one *Moka* prestation in order to collect sufficient resources to fight back next time, to provide a larger *Moka* than the rival so as to inverse their relative status (Strathern, 1971). In Chinese society, or more specifically in the area of Lower River, competition and its support mobilization are not as institutionalized as in the New Guinea Highlands. Everyone acts as a “big-man” in some circumstances, such as in disputing with others. However, the time lag is equally important here in mobilizing support. It allows people to accumulate resources for times of need by doing others favors in other times, or to go into debt (of *renqing*), which will be repaid in future, by seeking support from others in order to meet the need at a time.

Beside mobilizing the social relationships one maintains through frequent contacts in daily life, support mobilization in Lower River often involves using these links in the family network to reach people outside one’s immediate contact. Kin and friends on such occasions become intermediaries between ego and those who are not in his family network but are important for him in the specific circumstance. M. Yang (1986: 20) made a distinction between *renqing wang* and *guanxi wang*. The *renqing wang*, or “network of human sentiments”, is composed of a small group of people who can be trusted and are dependable: family, kin, friends, and other long-standing relationships who could come to each other’s aid without hesitation. It is distinguished from “*guanxi* network” (*guanxi wang*), which is made up of people who enter into relationships out of mutual interest and for the purpose of material exchange. This distinction is somewhat superfluous because on the one hand both of the two involves exchanges of gifts, favors, supports, or whatever, thus of *renqing*, and on the other both requires some sort of trust in the process of exchange. However, the distinction does suggest a difference between long-standing relation-

ships with multiple functions and temporarily pursued relationships made through intermediaries for specific purposes in specific contexts, and accordingly a difference between the ways of operation in support mobilization.

The basis of mobilizing relationships of latter kind is also in the idea of *renqing*, though not the same as long standing relationships in many ways. This is a mechanism that can be called the “chain effect” of *renqing*. *Renqing* in Chinese society is personal and thus untransferable. If A does B a favor, and B does C a favor, then B owes some *renqing* to A, at the same time C owes some *renqing* to B. B cannot transfer the *renqing* that C owes him to A directly. In the same token, A’s relatively superior status toward B can not be transferred to C, if C owes A nothing. However, through the mediation of B, A can exert influence on C who he might never know before. Thus, when a person seeks help from another one he does not know well, instead of going directly to the person, he usually choose to find an intermediary from his relatives or friends. In the case of houseland dispute between Ahua and Balong, for instance, to reach the persons in the court who were in charge of settling the dispute, both sides used people in their networks as intermediaries. The one who acted as a key intermediary for Balong’s side was the son of a cross-cousin of “white nose” who worked in the county’s procuratorate. In Ahua’s side, he relied largely on the sworn brother of his second son in the county seat, working in a grain station. The sworn brotherhood was established in their military service in Xiamen city during 1979 - 1982.

The use of mediators may not necessarily be Chinese only. According to a detailed and vivid description provided by Mary R. Hollensteiner, people in the Philippines work exactly in the same way:

In Hulo, when a person (A) goes to visit another person (C) with an intention of asking a favour, he rarely goes alone unless he is closely related or on very familiar terms with the person being visited. Person A will hesitate to approach any person not in his alliance system unless he has with him someone (B) who is allied to that individual. Without B (the intermediary), A will be too *hiya* or embarrassed to talk to C as their relationship is not such as to provide a basis for the opening of delicate negotiations. Moreover, A realises that C owes nothing, that is, has no *utang na loob* to him and, therefore, will not be compelled to help A. (If C did have *utang na loob* to A, then A would approach C directly). But if A can find a relative, compadre, *utang na loob* creditor, or other ally of C’s, then he creates a defined situation where the mere

existence of an alliance puts the visitor at ease; they know they have the right through the intermediary's relationship to ask a favour of C ... (Hollensteiner 1967: 210 -211).

Compared to the direct links, the process of mobilizing support through an intermediary is much more complicated. A's influence on C in the above example depends not only on the relationship between A and B, but also on the one between B and C. In other words, A's success in getting support from C is determined by both the *renqing* he has with B, and the *renqing* B has with C. Moreover, C's willingness to help is not directly related to A's position, but largely to a consideration of B's position. Whatever C does, he does it for B not for A. Thus, the status of an intermediary is crucial. The more important a position B for C, the more likely C will be compelled to help A. This was proved in the case of houseland dispute. For those in charge of dispute settlement in the court, an official in the county procuratorate was no doubt more important than a worker in a grain station. The former is a colleague in the legal profession, to whom they have more opportunities of exchanging favors in future. This was one reason why Balong's side had a more favored decision from the court.

In general, the influence one can exert through intermediaries is obviously quite limited. In order to ensure the support, a usual strategy used by local people in such a circumstance is to mobilize more than one chain of links to reach the key person(s). The mobilization of his contacts to help his brother getting into college during the period of July to September, 1990 by my friend Shenli serves as an example. His brother's total mark of six examined subjects was just above the year's bottom line of admission to institutes of higher education. Competition among those who stay above the line is always tense, for getting into a better college and for avoiding becoming part of the statistic for the 5 percent drop out in the selection of college students each year. Having carefully considered the situation, Shenli chose Zhangzhou Teacher's College as his target. The key figures Shenli wanted to reach were a few staff who were sent by the college to Fuzhou to be in charge of selecting students for the college in the year.

To do so, he firstly went to Xiamen University where he used to study. This is a "roundabout" strategy often used by people in *guanxi* exercise when they have no direct access to the target. Although the target was not Xiamen University, from his past experience in the university, Shenli thought he still could get some help from the university through those teachers who were going to Fuzhou to choose students for the university. They would be inside the high security hotels where all work of

students admission for the province took place. The staff from different universities or colleges were locked inside the hotels, to prevent them from communicating and being influenced by relatives and friends outside, until the whole process finished. These people from different universities and colleges, however, could make exchange favors among themselves. Everyone had his own relatives, friends, or friends' friends to take care of before they left for Fuzhou. The man Shenli managed to approach was a young man who just graduated from the Department of Oceanic studies of the university, working in the university's department of student affairs, who was to be chosen to go to Fuzhou. Shenli contacted him through a friend who was born in Zhaoan and was the teacher of the young man in the Department of Oceanic Studies. In the home of the teacher friend, Shenli met the young man and sent him ten packs of imported cigarette as gift, asking him to help to contact staff of Zhangzhou Teachers College in the hotels in Fuzhou. Shenli understood that the young man was in the position to ask these people for favor because he could favor them by helping their friends to get into Xiamen University – a place many students were dreaming to be. He promised to send more gifts if they succeeded.

Thinking they were not to be totally relied on the young man, Shenli sought additional lines of contacts to reach his target. He went to another close friend he made in the university who worked in the Organizational Department of the Zhangzhou City's CPC Committee. Shenli thought he could provide some sort of help. The friend promised to contact his friends in the city's Higher Education Admission Office and in Zhangzhou Teacher's College. The office is an organization to supervise the work of every year's examination and admission to higher education in the city. Another contact Shenli had was a middle school classmate who studied in Fujian Normal University in Fuzhou and who had a man in the same class working in Zhangzhou Teacher's college. The man was involved in the college's annual work of students admission in recent years.

All these lines of contacts had been mobilized by Shenli to work for the same purpose: to ensure his brother getting into Zhangzhou Teachers College. In the end, Shenli's brother received a formal letter at the early October informing him to go to register in Zhangzhou Teachers College, although it was known that he had been accepted long before he received the letter.

Therefore, one's ability to mobilize support is in general related to: a) the structure of his social network, i.e., number and kinds of relationships he has, which decides who he can go to when needing help; b) the interaction and social exchange (hence *renqing*) between them based on the norm of reciprocity (*bao*), which affects

the willingness and readiness of help he can expect from these people. The case of houseland dispute between Ahua and Balong shows that the latter is more important. Ahua had more kin in the village, but he failed to mobilize them in the dispute due to their unwillingness to support. The relationship between Ahua and his kin in the village was deteriorated by constant rivalry and dispute in the past. The behavior of Ahua's kin in the incident also suggests that when facing a question of whether or not to help a kin in a particular circumstance, it is the calculation of personal interest rather than kinship morality that becomes decisive. Although a bare form of self interest as such has still to find its legitimacy in the village community by an accusation of other's breaking the traditional kinship code, its rising is apparently in line with the dismantlement of lineage organization in China in the past several decades and a decline of kinship morality attached to this process.

# Chapter 9

## Conclusion

Conventional social theory in China, based on the assumption of a corporate kinship group and of a common interest in the group, is tempted to depict the village community as a whole, in which the “common good” of the collective is above the immediate good of individuals or their own small families. For many scholars in the China field, such a vision of the social world finds its support from the traditional Chinese kinship ideology that all kinsmen are descendants of a same ancestor, they are branches of the same trunk, they should therefore help and support each other in any circumstance. The stress of kinship solidarity in the moral discourse, being facilitated by ancestral worship and other communal rituals, is believed to have greatly shaped the behavior of people in traditional Chinese society. I do not intend to deny altogether the existence of such a romantic picture of rural Chinese society. However, I should here point out that the picture of an overwhelming “common good” in the village community and the group solidarity remain in the society only as an ideal, in a sense, an “official” statement of *what ought to be*, which is apparently not the same as *what really is*. It would be a big mistake to take the *ideal* as the *reality* of the society.

In Lower River, the real picture of a village community demonstrated in the empirical evidences of villagers’ behavior examined by this study is clearly different from the ideal picture advocated sometimes by them in a moral discourse. The real world is characterized by the obvious fact that the line between one’s immediate family and the rest has been clear-cut in terms of subsistence. Each family has its own subsistence, which is frequently seen to be in conflict of interest with others’. In the recognition of this independent family subsistence, the village is not regarded as a corporate group like a Confucian metaphorical big family, but a federation of small families bound together by networks of overarching kinship and other social

ties. Although solidarity and mutual support remain as the theme in the kinship ideology and are occasionally propagated or reinforced by communal activities, in real life, villagers follow a golden rule to stand on their own feet without expecting too much from others. They also see it right and just to put concern for the welfare and prosperity of their families first, before concern for any larger public good. In relation to these, conflicts of interest between individuals and groups not only exist, they become an everyday occurrence happening in every corner of the community and among any group including the closest kin. In seeking the prosperity of their families, villagers often find themselves having to compete with others in the same community. Of course, it is true that a person or an individual family can not live in the society alone. Cooperation in the various areas does occur and becomes necessary for survival. To safeguard the family's welfare and further its prosperity one has to rely on the help and cooperation of other people outside one's immediately family, which are usually acquired by cementing relations with others and in the form of reciprocal exchange made with appropriate expression of good human sentiment. The various social relations one cultivates with other people for the sake of interests of his small family consist of, in the terms of this thesis, the fabric of his "family network".

Family network, as defined in the introduction, is a "quasi group" (Boissevain, 1968) of families directly linked by kinship and friendship, having social interaction with the focusing family. Under certain circumstances, it is possible for a family group to form a real group, such as a business organization. In the concept, a person first of all is not taken to be living in the abstract "community" or "society". He lives instead in a concrete social environment represented by various social relationships in his family network. The social world is in essence a world of relations between related families. For the villagers of Lower River, people outside their immediate, face-to-face contact are strangers, who generally speaking have no reference to their own way of life, whereas those in immediate contact belong to the social circle that is directly related to their life. These people and their families are differentiated into different categories according to the kind of social relationship they have with the concerned individual, such as agnatic kinship (*qin-ren*), affinal kinship (*qin-qi*) and friendship (*peng-you*). Each of these categories of relationships is further divided into several subtypes, such as intimate, close, distant and remote, according to the affective closeness (*ganqing*) of the particular relationship. In the end, each of these families occupies a particular position represented by a specific relationship with their own families. They are the linkages of their family networks.

The structure of one's family network defines the scope of his social and economic

activities in daily life, though it should be remembered that the categorization of linkages is always very subjective and is subject to change in time. It indicates the nature of the flows of goods, service and information between his family and others in the network. Since it cuts across the conventional boundaries of village community and descent group, each family's social network is not completely the same with that of others in the village, though a considerable proportion of their links includes the same people (i.e. the agnatic kin in the village). We see in the Lower River area people not only depend on their agnatic kin in the village in many areas of social and economic life. They also have to rely on their affinal kin and friends outside the village. On the other hand, the nature of a relationship is directly related to the kind of behavior in a social context. Or the particular kind of behavior expresses the specific nature of the relationship. We see in the village the content and frequency of social exchange is closely related to the kind of relationship and the degree of intimacy in it. A close relationship in general means more transactions of gifts and favors between the two sides, and the transaction is usually asymmetrical in kind and a less clear sense of balance, while a more distant relationship usually has less transactions going on and a more clear sense of symmetry and balance. Since social exchange happens more frequently among close family ties than distant family ties, people tend to seek and expect help and cooperation from close kin rather than from distant relations. Further, emphasis of different kinds of relationship is placed in different aspects of the process of social interaction. For instance, I found in Lower River agnatic kin tend to stress the behavior of cooperation, while affinal kin and friends more often emphasize the mutual entertainment. Therefore, the structure of social network does not simply reveal how families are related to each other, it also expresses what people will do in interacting with others in a specific context.

The idea about man as a relational being in the society, advocated by the network perspective, can basically be found in the Confucian classics. Traditional Chinese culture, which without dispute was developed largely from Confucianism, has long been depicted in the literature as a system that tends to mould the Chinese into group-oriented and social dependent beings. This is in fact a misunderstanding. Confucianism does occasionally stress the importance of the group and group solidarity, revealed in the famous Confucian metaphor that society is just like a family, and in the concern of unifying the whole world. However, Confucian social theory does not derive from a classification of social groups. It is rather based on a definition of dyadic relations between particular individuals such as ruler and subject, parent and child, brothers and sisters, husband and wife (Sun, 1983). The emphasis of Confucian social theory is not placed on groups but on the construction of

relations (King, 1991). This is clearly seen in the notion of *lun*, the differentiated social order, in Confucian classics and the five cardinal relations (*wu lun*) as basic elements in structuring the society.<sup>1</sup> Confucius believed once such relations were clearly defined and the codes of behavior of people in these relations established, the society would surely be in order.

In contrast to a clear and well defined concept of relation, the concept of group in Confucianism is less articulated and elastic in boundary. This elasticity is exemplified most clearly in the term *jia* (family). The concept of *jia* in China may cover anything from a nuclear family to a lineage or a clan, sometimes even to any person in the society one wants to include. It is entirely up to the individual to expand or contract its boundary. For, theoretically, it can be extended to an unlimited number of people and thereby “all the world belongs to one family”. It is also demonstrated in the familiar concept of “lineage”. There is not a purely genealogical definition of the lineage. In fact, as has been pointed out, every adult male, at whatever level on the genealogical tree, represents a point of potential segmentation, which may be actualized for a social or economic purpose (Chen, 1985). The further back in time and genealogical space people trace their founding ancestor, thus the time of origin of their lineage, the more they push back the boundaries of the lineage, and more people are included in the group as the assimilative power of genealogical ideology grows and its distinctive power decreases (Bourdieu, 1990: 167). It is then clear that the concept of group in Confucianism is only an extension of its concept of relation, and the elasticity of the boundary of group (the family or other collectives) is simply a result of people’s manipulation of social identity in different occasions of social life. The elasticity of group boundary serves to give the individual sufficient social space to construct his social relations with an unlimited number of other individuals on kinship or other bases, and to utilize these relations for diverse purposes in different situations (King, 1991).

## 9.1 The social practice of utilizing relationships

The cultivation and utilization of various social relationships, as shown in the previous chapters, become the most important part of social and economic life in the Lower River area. This may also be true as well in other parts of the country. As mentioned in the introduction, the significance of social relationships (*guanxi*) in

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<sup>1</sup>The five cardinal relations are those between ruler and subject, between father and son, between husband and wife, between older and younger brothers, and between friends.

social and economic life of Chinese society has already attracted considerable attention in the field (De Glopper, 1972; Silin, 1972; Jacobs, 1979; Yang, 1986, King, 1991), but the theoretical implication of the Chinese practice of relation construction (including cultivation and utilization) has not been fully appreciated. Yang (1986) is quite right in pointing out that social relationships (*guanxi*) are crucial in the particular social and political situations of Chinese society. She also notices the important role of *renqing* and *mianzi* in *guanxixue*, which she uses to refer to the tactical art of resistance, the weak to resist the powerful, in Chinese society. But she fails to see the fact that the art of social relationship (*guanxixue*) in the society is not only used by the weak and in the arena of social resistance. Almost everyone in the society is practising it in both political and economic spheres, trying to manipulate others for his own purposes in different circumstances, and it is used more frequently and effectively by the powerful to control the weak and to maintain and strengthen their powerful position. The fact that the powerful people are more effective practitioners of the art of social relationship has already been indicated by the work of Jacobs (1979, 1980) in the example of political election and alliance in a Taiwanese township, and of Walder (1986) in the case of management and control in a Chinese factory. It is made more clear in my description of social and economic activities in Lower River.

In the village, as demonstrated in the preceding chapters, kinship and friendship are widely used in operation of many businesses, in economic cooperation and in conflict and competition between individuals in the village community. They are so important in economic and social activities that, for any person, life is impossible without them. I also pointed out that, although kinship is the dominant network link in the village, the characteristics of family network are not the same for different people with different social status. Some people's family networks are larger than others', and some have extra social relationships on top of kinship. The larger social network and diverging social links give these people, most of whom are cadres or former cadres, a better position in economic development and social competition in the village. Therefore, it is not surprising to see the majority of benefits of the government's new economic policies in rural areas, as well demonstrated in the case of prawn farming, go to local officials and village cadres. Their social position in the village and wide outside contact enable them to find appropriate partners, or become attractive partners of others, in the profitable but heavy investment required in business. The advantage of wider social links beyond the village boundary is also seen in the case of houseland dispute between villagers Balong and Ahua. In the discussion of the last chapter, I demonstrated that Balong's successful mobilization

of his close kin in the village helped him to defeat his stronger opponent in the fight, and the contacts of Balong's great uncle, "white nose", in the brigade and the county seat proved to be vital for them to win the dispute settlement competition.

A related aspect of utilization of social relationships in the society is indicated by the fact that in different circumstances Chinese people would utilize and exploit different links (*guanxi*) in their social networks. Jacobs notices various types of *guanxi* have different utility for political alliance in Matzu local politics: agnatic kin are more important at the village level, especially in the villages where one or only a few lineages predominate; affinal kin usually play an important role at the multi-village level as well as within villages; whereas *guanxi* based on locality is the most important one in the township level politics (1979: 244-247). The "value" of each particular, he further points out, depends on closeness or distance of the relationship, which is in turn indicated by the *ganqing* ("good" or "absent") of the two sides (ibid: 243). Both of the two points is by and large confirmed by the evidences in the Lower River area. We see in the village that close kin tend to be more ready to provide substantial support in times of difficulty. In disputing with others, villagers need to mobilize different people in the family network, e.g., close kin, village cadres, relatives and friends in other places, or even strangers through intermediaries, depending on the different situations such as the scale and place of settlement of the dispute.

From the practice of utilizing social relationships in the Lower River area and elsewhere in the country, I would conclude that social relationships are a vital resource that everyone in the society more or less possesses, though people are differentiated in this respect. The art of social relationship (*guanxixue*) should be seen as a general practice in Chinese society, by which Chinese people seek to exploit different parts of their social relationships for different purposes in different situations, such as forming a business partnership or mobilizing support in social and political life.

The utilization of social relationships should not be seen as an isolated phenomenon. As we have seen, it is closely related to the idea of *renqing* (human sentiment), or more specifically, it is incorporated in the flows of goods, service and information in the empirical process of social exchange and interaction within the family network. Since flows can be stopped, channelled, realigned, or redeveloped, it is important to see the integration of families into larger or smaller family networks as a continuing process, influenced by a recurrent pattern of events (festivals, rituals and visits in ordinary time) which themselves are changed and developed. This has

two facets of meaning.

First, the utilization becomes part and parcel of the process itself which local people refer to as "*laiwang*". *Laiwang*, the coming and going of people, the flow of gifts, favors and entertainment between the two sides, in the local people's mind is vital for a social relationship. Without the process of exchange and interaction, the social relationship does not have any meaning. It is impossible to utilize without the presence of *renqing* created in the process of social exchange, a fact demonstrated in the case of houseland dispute described in the last chapter. The importance of social exchange and interaction for a relationship lies in the fact that it activates and substantializes the relationship. In other words, it gives flesh and blood to the relationship which itself is only a bone, a theoretical possibility of behavior. Thus an action of social exchange with someone becomes an action of cultivating and utilizing the specific relationship in a lot of possibilities objectively present in the social field revealed in, as I mentioned previously, the elasticity of a group concept. The conventional idea of descent is such an example of utilizing a certain part of (i.e. the agnatic) relationships by excluding another part of (i.e. the affinal) relationships that is also objectively provided in the society.

Second, the utilization of social relationships is in effect the manipulation of other people and mobilization of needed support in daily life, which is demonstrated most clearly in the situations of crisis. As the term "*laiwang*" implies, such behavior is mutual for the two sides, and it rests in the cultivation of the relationship and investment in the long process of transaction. Nothing ventured nothing gained. A man being able to manipulate others lies in the fact that in the same process he himself is being manipulated by them. In this respect my argument is in line with that of Barth (1966: 4, 13), who claims that in a reciprocal social exchange "each party's behavior is modified by the presence and behavior of the other in a progressional sequence", and that parties in the course of their interaction "systematically try to assure that the value gained from them is greater or equal to the value lost".

Indeed, if *guanxixue* is the art of exploiting connection (*guanxi*), everyone in Chinese society is practising it in daily life. But the fact that in the society some people are better able to exploit their connections indicates, apart from the difference in effectiveness of people's networks, the significance of calculation and performance in the process. To calculate in social exchange means to anticipate and evaluate the possible result of an action in the process of exchange. An individual is here taken as a rational man able to exploit all possibilities and to maximize his interest by perpetually scheming, struggling, and making decisions. Every action he contem-

plates is the outcome of a transaction in which the returns are expected to be at least equal, if not in excess of, the outlay. Performance in the process of utilizing social relationships is like the skill in playing cards or in cooking Chinese dishes, with which the same “hand” or ingredients may have greatly different result. It includes the arts to play down or conceal naked self-interest in exchanging with others, or, as Barth says, to convince the other party that the value lost is at least not greater than the value gained.

Of course, it is apparent that the set of basic social norms and moral values, which serve as the rules of the whole game, are inevitable in the society for the context. Although in many situations tactics that are off the record should be used, it is the set of basic social norms and moral values that makes exchange behavior become possible. In the context of social exchange in Chinese society, as I indicated, such norms and values are represented by the notion of *bao* (Yang, 1957) and the idea of “face” (*lian* and *mianzi*) (Hu, 1944; Ho, 1976; King, 1986). *Bao* is the Chinese term of norm of reciprocity widely used in anthropology and sociology. The norm of reciprocity, i.e., the obligation to return a gift or a favor received before, makes social exchange possible in the society. The obligation of returning is further enhanced in the society by the social and moral sanction contained in the concepts of face: *mianzi* and *lian*. Therefore, people in the context of utilizing social relationships are at the same time moral and rational. They are moral in the sense that at whatever situation they have to follow the basic social norms, such as the norm of *bao* in Chinese social exchange, which are the guideline of their behavior and which are often imposed in the society with a heavy colour of morality. They are rational in that within the framework set by these basic social norms and values they are always trying to strive for the best result by choosing or reinterpreting the most appropriate set of social norms and cultural values in order to justify their behavior.

## 9.2 Theoretical significance of the practice

The social practice of utilizing social relationships in the society contains theoretical significance in at least two general respects.

One is about the persistence and recreation of the social relationships (and possibly groups that are composed of them). As local people’s notion on *laiwang* implies, a social relationship is meaningful only when both sides are involved in frequent social interaction including the mutual exploitation in the process of reciprocal ex-

change. It must be maintained through a series of transactions in the process of social exchange. When no more transaction goes on between the two sides, a relation automatically stops existing in practice. This applies to any social relationship in the society. We see in Lower River where theoretically all people in the village are agnatic kin but only a small proportion of them actually enter as agnatic linkages in the family network because the rest of them do not have frequent social exchange and remain merely kin in genealogical sense. Thus it is possible to say that each time of transaction of gifts and favors between the two sides serves to persist the relationship by recreating it. Where there are relatively stable relationships, just as the kinship and friendship links in a family network discussed in this thesis, it is because these relationships are multi-stranded, having multi-dimensional functions. They are continuously used for different purposes in the same time or same purpose in different time. This is especially true for kinship, e.g., social activities such as taking part in various rituals and providing social support, which also formed the basis of economic organization and is significant in business. As Bourdieu rightly points out, social relationships are “something that people make, and with which they do something” (Bourdieu, 1977: 35). I have indicated in previous chapters that the most important function of kinship and friendship in Lower River is their usages in various areas of social and economic life. The persistence of social relationships therefore depends very much on their utility for people in social and economic life.

A related respect of theoretical implication of the social practice of utilizing social relationships is that it raises a general question of how the formal and informal systems of the society are related. This should start with a distinction of “official” and “practical” kinship made by Bourdieu when he is examining the functions of kin relationships or usefulness of kinsmen in traditional societies (Bourdieu, 1977: 33). According to Bourdieu, official kin relationships are “genealogical”, reserved for official situations in which they serve the function of “ordering the social world and legitimating that order”. In this respect they are opposed to the other kinds of practical uses of kinship relations. The genealogical diagram of kin relationships which the anthropologist constructs thus merely reproduces the “official” representation of the social structures, “a representation produced by application of the structuring principle that is dominant in a certain respect, i.e. in certain situations with a view of certain functions” (ibid, 34). Elsewhere, he further contrasts the two kinds of kinship:

... to schemize, the kinship that is put on display is opposed to the unofficial (which includes the secret and the scandalous); as the collective to the particular; as the public, explicitly codified in a magical or quasi-

legal formalism, to what is private, kept implicit and even hidden; as collective ritual – practice without a subject, which can be performed by collectively mandated and interchangeable agents – to private strategy, which is directed towards satisfying the practical interests of a particular individual or group. Abstract units produced by simple theoretical division, such as, here, the unilineal descent group (elsewhere, age groups), are available for all functions, in other words for none in particular, and have practical existence only for the most official uses of kinship. Thus ‘representational’ kinship is nothing other than the group’s self-representation and the almost theatrical presentation it gives of itself when acting in accordance with that self-image. By contrast, practical groups exist only through and for the particular functions in pursuance of which they have been effectively mobilized; and they continue to exist only because they have been kept in working order by their very use and by maintenance work (including the matrimonial exchanges that they make possible) and because they rest on a community of depositions (the *habitus*) and interests such as that which is also the basis of the undivided ownership of material and symbolic patrimony (Bourdieu, 1990: 169 - 170).

Accordingly, we can say that, in Lower River, all agnatic kin in the village are in the category of “official” kinship, who are genealogically all descendants of the same ancestor, while those who have frequent social exchange and interaction (*lai-wang*) and thus are in the family network may belong to the category of “practical” kinship because it is only these people who are practically used in social and economic life. If this is right, then it appears that it is not quite true for Bourdieu to hold above that official kinship and practical kinship are two separated sets of relationships opposing to each other, though he does admit that “official” kin group may sometimes correspond to “practical” kin group with the working of ecological (neighbourhood), economic (undivided patrimony) or political factors (Bourdieu, 1990: 170). According to the evidences in Lower River, the relation between the two sets of relationships seems more likely to be as follows. On the one hand, they are different both in the sense of different uses of kinship as Bourdieu says and in that the groups of individuals they include are always not altogether the same. On the other, practical kinship relationship are bound to correspond, at least partly, to the official relationships because they are created on the basis of the latter. In other words, when certain elements are presented official relationships are at the same time practical relationships. For instance, when agnatic kin in Lower River village

have *laiwang*, they become members of the family network.

To take this argument a bit further, I shall refer back to a distinction I made in chapter three between “formal” and “informal” relationships. Formal relationships were defined as those between people in the context of a “formal” system, notably the superior and subordinate relationship in the bureaucratic system of modern societies, in which actors are supposed to behave according to a set of impersonal rules. Informal relationships were those relationships established outside the context of the formal system, where people behave according to a set of personalized and flexible rules of reciprocity. I considered kinship and friendship as informal relationships, though in a later stage a further distinction between kinship with *laiwang* and kinship without *laiwang* was made. Theoretically I took the involvement of transaction of gifts and favors (thus *ganqing*, *renqing*, *bao*) as the most critical criterion to distinguish informal relationships from formal ones. Nevertheless, as I pointed out, such a distinction may only be made at a theoretical level. In practical situations kinsmen may work together in the same bureaucratic system and it is also possible for colleagues or even superiors and subordinates to develop a friendship. The general social practice of utilizing relationships in the society will inevitably lead to informal uses of formal relationships and to the establishment of what is called “informal exchange networks in formal systems” (Lomnitz, 1988), which is probably a universal phenomenon indicated by such institutions known as OBN (Old Boy Networks) in Britain (Heald, 1983), “pull” in America, *blat* in Russia, *cuna* in Chile, *protezia* in Israel, *palanca* in Mexico (Lomnitz, 1988), and *guanxi* in China (Chiao, 1982; Yang, 1986; King, 1991).

The distinction of formal and informal systems of relationships in society and, in particular, the idea of informal exchange networks in the formal system are especially useful to explain the so-called “second economy” in socialist societies including such as economic crime, black market (Zafanoli, 1988), and political corruption, including such as departmentalism and localism within the formal bureaucratic system, in all societies. Here it is necessary to mention the theory of Lomnitz who claims that informal modes of exchange, which obey a symbolic-cultural logic that differs from economic rationality or the formal ideology of the state, “grow in the interstices of the formal system, thrive on its inefficiencies, and tend to perpetuate them by compensating for shortcomings and by generating factions and interest groups within the system”; and the more a social system is bureaucratically formalized, regulated, planned, and yet unable to satisfy social requirements, the more it tends to create informal mechanisms that escape the control of the system (Lomnitz, 1988: 43).

Based on the evidence of general social practice of utilizing relationships in Chinese society described in this thesis and in the work of many scholars (e.g. Chiao, 1982; Yang, 1986; Walder, 1986; King, 1991), and the collapse of socialist system in USSR and eastern Europe, it appears possible to take Lomnitz's point a step further. It is undoubtedly true that informal exchange networks are related to the inefficiencies of formal systems in satisfying social needs, but we should also recognize their relation to the society's tradition. The logic embedded in Chinese informal transactions, i.e. the ideas of *renqing*, *bao*, *lian* and *mianzi*, has deep root in traditional Chinese culture (King, 1980, 1986; Yang, 1957). The informal exchange networks may be created in the first place to compensate the inefficiencies and shortcomings of the formal system, and in so doing help to maintain the latter, as Lomnitz says. However, as a result of its development of the factions and interest groups, some officials in the formal system can undermine the normal limitation and regulations of the system, extend their influence to other parts of the system by exchanging favors with other officials. The seeking of self-interest of these interest groups and conflict of different factions, if not effectively controlled, will damage and rot the system until they eventually destroy it.

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# Glossary of Chinese Terms

<i>Pinyin</i>	Chinese Character	English Translation
bao	报	reciprocate
cha xu ge ju	差序格局	hierarchical relationships
danwei	单位	work unit
fang	房	segment
fen jia	分家	family division
ganbu	干部	cadre, official
ganbu chi	干部池	cadres' pond
ganqing	感情	affection
gongfu	功夫, 工夫	skill, knowledge; time
Guangqian Tang	光前堂	Guangqian Hall
guanxi	关系	personal relationships
guanxi wang	关系网	network of relationships
guanxixue	关系学	knowledge of relationships
hu	户	household
hukou	户口	household register
jia	家	family
jia zhang	家长	family head
keqi	客气	politeness
laiwang	来往	social interaction
lian	脸	moral face
lun	伦	differentiated order of relations
Mazu	妈祖	Mazu deity
mianzi	面子	sociological face

<i>Pinyin</i>	Chinese Character	English Translation
peng you	朋友	friend
pingan	平安	peace festival
pingan xi	平安戏	peace opera
qinren	亲人	agnates
qinqi	亲戚	affines
renqing	人情	human sentiment
renqing zhai	人情债	debt of human sentiment
renqing wang	人情网	web of human sentiment
shuxi	熟悉	familiarity
Sixian Ci	祀先祠	Sixian Hall
wangluo	网路	network
xinyong	信用	credit
Zhenji Tang	振基堂	Zhenji Hall
zhongyuan	中元	mid year festival
zong zu	宗族	lineage