Gender, Modernity and Male Migrant Workers in China

Rural–urban migration within China has transformed and reshaped rural people's lives during the past few decades, and has been one of the most visible phenomena of the economic reforms enacted since the late 1970s. Whilst Feminist scholars have addressed rural women's experience of struggle and empowerment in urban China, in contrast, research on rural men's experience of migration is a neglected area of study. In response, this book seeks to address the absence of male migrant workers as a gendered category within the current literature on rural–urban migration.

Examining Chinese male migrant workers' identity formation, this book explores their experience of rural–urban migration and their status as an emerging sector of a dislocated urban working class. It seeks to understand issues of gender and class through the rural migrant men's narratives within the context of China's modernization, and provides an in-depth analysis of how these men make sense of their new lives in the rapidly modernizing, post-Mao China with its emphasis on progress and development. Further, this book uses the men's own narratives to challenge the elite assumption that rural men's low status is a result of their failure to adopt a modern urban identity and lifestyle. Drawing on interviews with 28 male rural migrants, Xiaodong Lin unpacks the gender politics of Chinese men and masculinities, and in turn contributes to a greater understanding of global masculinities in an international context.

This book will be of great interest to students and scholars working in the fields of Chinese culture and society, gender studies, migration studies, sociology and social anthropology.

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Gender, Modernity and Male Migrant Workers in China

Becoming a 'modern' man

Xiaodong Lin

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To Martin, Po-Wei and Shibo

Contents

Foreword

From a western perspective, the emergence of China as a world power has tended narrowly to focus on socio-economic and political questions. From a Chinese perspective, rural–urban migration has become a central government issue of policy intervention in order to establish a 'harmonious society'. A major focus is a group of people that the government describes as 'peasant workers', or *nong min gong* in Chinese. *Gender, Modernity and Male Migrant Workers in China: Becoming a 'modern' man* is a most interesting and sophisticated text that breaks new ground in exploring the post-Mao project of modernization.

Reading through the chapters clearly highlights what has been missing from western studies of men and masculinity. Theoretically, this is an important book, providing a fresh analytical framework to understand the contemporary socio-economic and cultural transformations of a modernizing China. The text brings together very effectively sociological and cultural studies perspectives that advance scholarly knowledge in this field of inquiry. Methodologically, it is an important text innovatively deploying a life-history narrative approach, as part of an ethnographic multi-layered study that enables us to enter a hidden world of internal migrants, as they reinvent their new social and gendered urban lives. Central to their urban masculine performances is the *guanxi* network, built around established social connections and contacts in terms of friendship, classmates and relatives from their rural homes. From a western perspective, it is difficult to understand the dramatic shift in the representation of the internal migrants: from 'heroic peasant' during the Mao period to current 'modernization "loser"' in the post-Mao era. The text wonderfully captures how peasant workers make sense of their new social position and experience the process of rural–urban migration, in terms of their constrained and creative responses in a transitional modern globally-inflected Chinese society. The quality of the material produced from the fieldwork is first class. Of course, this is the great advantage of a theory-led methodological approach that rigorously seeks to open up new ways of knowing.

From a gender and migration studies perspective, the critical exploration of male migrant workers and the complexity of their identity formation make great reading for a wide range of audiences. In this nuanced account the men are portrayed as actively fashioning a masculine identity as (absent) fathers and sons. There is a most insightful illustration, in contrast to the western assumption that

tradition and modernity exist in an oppositional logic, with the former being displaced by the latter, of how the migrant men use traditional resources from rural spaces to produce modern urban life-styles. The study could become a template for future work on mobile men and masculinities across international contexts. For example, the argument about using western concepts to make sense of 'non-western' places and research subjects provides a most enlightening example of researcher reflexivity. Western scholars working in the field have much to learn from this text in moving beyond reductionist approaches in how to creatively translate empirical data into analytical claims that have a wide resonance globally as well as locally. I get the sense here of a new generation of writing from transnational young scholars studying in western universities. I am pleased to witness the emergence of such work within the international academic community.

Professor Máirtín Mac an Ghaill
Birmingham, UK

Preface

Rural–urban (internal) migration within China has transformed and reshaped rural people's lives during the past few decades. Within this context, feminist scholars have addressed rural women's experience of struggle and empowerment in urban China. In contrast, research on rural men's experience of migration is currently underdeveloped within the field of gender and migration. This book is a sociological study of Chinese male migrant workers' identity formation. A primary aim of the book is to explore their experience of rural–urban migration as an emerging sector of a dislocated urban working class. In so doing, it addresses the absence of male migrant workers as a gendered category within the current literature.

The book seeks to understand issues of gender and class identity formation through the accounts of rural migrant men within the context of China's pursuit of modernization. It provides a multi-layered understanding of gender inequality and well-being, while critically examining social class and social stratification in a contemporary urban context. More specifically, the book provides an in-depth analysis of how these men make sense of their new lives in the post-Mao modernization project, marked by concepts of progress and development. At the same time, it examines how they actively accommodate themselves within urban spaces with reference to the assumed dichotomy of tradition and modernity. It seeks to unpack the gender politics of Chinese men and masculinities. Methodologically, the book critically engages with the representation of (male) migrant workers as 'dysfunctional others', while at the same time, epistemologically privileging their own narrated life histories through ethnographic research on the life experiences of 28 men working in urban spaces. Of importance, the male migrant workers' own narratives serve to challenge the assumption of elite commentators that rural men's low status is a result of their continuing to occupy a traditional cultural habitus, thus failing to take up a modern urban identity and lifestyle. Such a position assumes that tradition and modernity exist in an oppositional logic, with the former being displaced by the latter. In contrast, the men's own narratives illustrate a more complex picture. The male migrant workers deploy traditional cultural practices, such as *xiao* (dao) (filial piety), as a resource to develop multi-layered 'modern' masculine identities as urban workers. The book adds to the growing literature on modern migrant men's experiences, thus contributing to an understanding of global masculinities in an international context.

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I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Professor Máirtín Mac an Ghaill, for his intellectual guidance and support during my early academic career. He has provided advice, understanding and support to international students and generous encouragement for us to develop our academic potential. His intellectual contribution has been fundamental for this book. Most importantly, he is a role model of what it means to be an academic.

I would also like to thank the School of Social Sciences at Cardiff University, especially Professor Karen Henwood, for her generous support. Thanks to Lancaster University for enabling me to develop my academic interests in Sociology and Cultural Studies.

Special thanks to my best friends Dr Po-Wei Chen, Zhang Shibo, Zhang Shasha, Dr Philip Lloyd-Williams, Luo Yan, Jin Shan, Yang Yu and Zeng Yan, who are always there whenever I need them.

Also, I wish to express my thanks to the editorial and marketing team at Routledge for the incredible job they have done to launch the book.

Most particularly, I would like to express my gratitude to all the participants, especially to the male migrant workers in this research. Without their participation this book would never have seen completion.

Finally, I am indebted to my parents, not only for their belief in me, but also for their understanding about my absence from the family. I am grateful for this understanding and for their support. Therefore, this book is dedicated to them – as always.

Xiaodong Lin
Cardiff, UK

Glossary

benshi	本事 Skill and ability
cadre	干部 A person in a position of authority, such as a departmental head or a government or Party administrator
chuxi	出息 Promise, prospect. Or 'you chuxi': 有出息 promising
dagong	打工 The colloquial term for selling one's labour to a boss; to work
guanxi	关系 A personal relationship or network which is built on pre-existing social connections and contacts in terms of friendships, classmates, relatives. It is preserved and renewed by giving gifts, favours and banquets
hukou	户口 Refers to the household registration system, which divides the Chinese population into urban residents and agricultural residents
laoxiang	老乡 The colloquial term peasant workers use to refer to people from the same village or area. Sometimes referred to as 'tongxiang': 同乡
mei	妹 The colloquial term referring to a sister or young girl
nengli	能力 Capability, ability and skill
nong min gong	农民工 peasant worker or migrant worker
shifu	师父 This is literally translated as 'teacher and father', which refers to a male mentor and supervisor in an apprenticeship or some senior skilled workers in factories. Someone who calls another person 'shifu' is also showing his/her respect to the person addressed
suzhi	素质 This is literally translated as 'quality'. It mainly refers to the somewhat ephemeral qualities of civility, self-discipline, and modernity
xiao (dao)	孝道 Filial piety
yuan	元 Unit of Chinese currency: £1 roughly equals 10 yuan (2009–10 exchange rate)
zai	仔 The colloquial term in Cantonese for referring to a young man or son

1 Introduction

Background of the book

In contemporary China, a key element of the changing social structure has been the major impact of the new market economy as part of the economic reforms of the late 1970s. This was initiated by the central government's modernization project, named as 'reform and opening up'. Rural–urban labour migration is one of the most visible phenomena of the economic reforms, in terms of urbanization and industrialization, offering rural people opportunities to work in non-agricultural sectors, and to leave the rural household, so as to generate income and thus overcome poverty. It has been a remarkable intervention in both developing urban industrialization and rural household economic development and modernization. In response, studies on Chinese rural–urban labour migration have focused on the macro level of economic, social and political structures; for instance, many studies have addressed the household registration system accompanying the rural/urban division and social inequality.

I grew up as part of a generation at the beginning of the Chinese government's modernization project. It was a time of rapid social, cultural and economic transformations. These transformations have taken place across public and private domains of ordinary Chinese people's lives. At a personal level, we experienced a wide range of changes in our lives that included: a move *from* buying limited daily necessities using government-issued ration coupons *to* choosing a variety of commodities at large shopping malls; having increasing access to western popular culture, listening to *Westlife* and the *Backstreet Boys* when we were teenagers; witnessing local and overseas entrepreneurs setting up new businesses in the city, alongside a fast-changing landscape with economic growth enabling the building of skyscrapers in the city centre. Most significantly, the increasing ownership of automobiles replaced the stereotypical images of Chinese cities in the western media with thousands of bicycles on the streets. At an institutional level, 'meeting the west', in terms of development has become a central aim of the government. Modernization in terms of economic prosperity has been unprecedented in the last few decades. Within such a fast-changing socio-economic context, China has experienced major population movement, with thousands of rural people moving to work in the cities of the

southern provinces – including the city in which this study is located, Shantou.[1] In so doing, they were taking part in the modernization project, while seeking to 'have a better life' and to 'make their fortune'. This group of people is what the government describes as 'peasant workers', or '*nong min gong*' in Chinese. The term mainly refers to those people whose houschold registry is classified as agricultural, moving from rural villages to work in non-agricultural labour markets in economically developed urban regions (Chinese State Council, 2006a, 2006b).

Rural–urban migration has become a central government issue in its development plans, as a key part of a policy to establish a 'harmonious society'[2] (和谐社会, *hè xié shè hui*). In order to achieve this, the government needs to resolve the material conditions of inequality and the attendant social tensions resulting from the post-Mao economic and social development. However, within this context, public representations of peasant workers are highly contradictory. On the one hand, there are narratives in the media describing these migrants as a potential threat or national burden to the social order of the new cities.[3] On the other hand, there are political representations of peasant workers that portray them as the heroes of China's modernization project. Meanwhile, there is also, within the government and media narratives, concern and sympathy for migrants as victims of discrimination and social injustice in urban areas. However, it is important to stress that the dominant image – the 'preferred reading' in Stuart Hall's (1980) terms – that circulates across the society is that peasant workers constitute a major problem in modern cities. Such representations of peasant workers resonated with my experience of growing up in China. I was told when I was a child to keep a distance from peasant workers. There are still some parts of the small city of Shantou to which I have never been, as I was warned that migrants lived in such areas and it was not safe to go. These childhood memories initially informed my methodological approach.

The book was initially informed by the cultural habitus of my earlier life, that is, I began by sharing some common public stereotypes about these migrant men as a problematic working class group. It is explicitly located within the social and cultural conditions emerging from China's economic reform and modernization. From a western perspective, it is difficult to understand the dramatic shift in the representation of these men: from heroic peasant during the Mao period to current modernization 'loser' in the post-Mao era. There is a need to understand how peasant workers make sense of their new social position and experience the process of rural–urban migration, in terms of their constrained and creative responses in a transitional modern globally-inflected Chinese society. Therefore, it is important to critically move beyond the assumption of definitions that suggest that these rural men's low status is a result of their continuing to occupy a traditional cultural habitus, thus failing to take up a modern urban identity and lifestyle. In turn, such a position assumes that tradition and modernity exist in an oppositional logic, with the former being displaced by the latter. We can place this position within a dominant understanding of Chinese modernization and modernity, as 'catching up with the west'.

All starts from here: the pursuit of modernization in China

Modernization is one of the most important concepts in Chinese history, which political leaders and academic elites have been dedicated to pursuing for centuries. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the discourse of western modernity was introduced into China, alongside the invasion of western imperial forces. While western imperialists were materially exploiting the old dynasty, including signing a number of unequal treaties with the Chinese authorities, they also introduced into this old empire the western notion of modernity with advanced technology and scientific thinking. Western modernity was perceived by some Chinese officials and intellectuals in positive terms as an important resource for the nation's own modernization. Since the May 4th movement in 1919, Chinese people, particularly young elite intellectuals and politicians have discussed what China could learn from the western enlightenment. Critiques of Chinese tradition and established beliefs were overwhelming. Traditional values, such as Confucianism in particular, became a target for Chinese intellectual criticism to justify the appropriation of adapting the advanced western model of modernity in terms of liberty and democracy into China. Modernization is usually associated with development and progress, aiming to 'meet the west' or to 'catch up with the west'. Chinese modernization history can also be seen as part of western colonization history. Within a global context, an uneven world order historically enabled western modernization, initially in Western Europe, to be seen as the default model for non-western countries to pursue. Paul Gilroy (1993) criticizes the universality of Eurocentric modernity, arguing for a notion of modernities in non-western societies. Similar notions include second modernity (Beck and Lao, 2005), multiple modernities (Eisenstadt, 1999), alternative modernity (Ong, 1997) or 'other modernities' (Rofel, 1999). For theorists such as Gilroy (1993), traditional societies including those within Africa had already experienced modernity and civilization before the introduction of the western model. This chapter does not set out to trace in detail the history of Chinese modernization since the twentieth century, which has already been well documented (see Rofel, 1999; Dirlik, 1989). As an introduction to the book, this chapter aims to provide a socio-economic and historical background within which this study is located, seeking to problematize the issue of Chinese neoliberal modernization and its related issue of class formation currently discussed within the academy. Importantly, it is argued that an exploration of peasant workers' migration provides a lens through which to problematize the modernization project and to enable a more comprehensive and critical understanding of modernity and the formation of contemporary Chinese society in 'new times'. Equally important, masculinity also provides a lens that serves to challenge the underconceptualized understanding of the gendering of the modernization project.

Modernization in 'new times'

In more recent Chinese history, the socialist revolution in terms of the nation-building of the People's Republic of China is seen as one of the major modernization

projects in the twentieth century. It was also accompanied by establishing modernity with 'Chinese characteristics', while deploying a Marxist–Leninist communist ideology, commonly understood as 'Mao Zedong Thought' or 'Mao's Marxism' (Schwartz, 1965; Knight, 1986). Founded in 1949 by Mao Zedong, a Marxist revolutionary leader, the new China aimed to build an independent country that would challenge western power (Dirlik, 1983) and most importantly, internally, to overthrow the 'three mountains'[4] on the Chinese people's back and 'class antagonism' (Renwick and Cao, 1999:123). The main ideologies in this newfounded socialist state were anti-imperialism, anti-feudalism and anti-capitalism, which positioned new China as a more advanced nation state to her counterparts in Europe (Dirlik, 1989). Socialist new China was dedicated to building an ideal society with equal opportunity and distribution, while at the same time, bypassing the stage of primitive capital accumulation. Mao's idea of communism was that the Chinese economy was centrally-planned and under the administration of the Chinese Communist Party. Chinese people's lives were regulated by the central communist government and materials were equally distributed to its people under the one-party administration. However, as a result of inefficient production, an uncompetitive economy, plus the great famine[5] between the late 1950s and 1960s, followed by the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s–1970s, China's economy remained depressed and a large proportion of the population continued to live in poverty. Meanwhile, the Chinese socialist revolution was also seen as an alternative modernity to western capitalist modernity (Liu, 1996:198), with the former emphasizing a spiritual cultural revolution, even though the 'reality' of poverty was evident across the country on a large scale.

Within the discourse of this new socialist modernization,[6] the Chinese government prioritized its economic development by opening its socialist market to the outside world, attracting foreign direct investment, setting up special economic zones in the coastline cities with distinctive tax and economic policies, encouraging private businesses and stimulating competition in the market in order to boost economic growth. At the same time, Deng's liberal economic policy prioritized certain regions, mainly in the south east, to take the lead in achieving economic development. He justified this uneven regional development in terms of allowing 'some people to get rich first and ultimately there will be common prosperity' (允许一部分人先富起来最终达到共同富裕) (see Fan, 2006), which has helped to change Chinese people's understanding of modernization from revolution and class struggle in the Mao period to economic development and growth in the post-Mao period.

Meanwhile, such an economic policy has also shifted the ideology of this socialist country from an emphasis on a spiritual position that was highly advocated by Mao to a more material-based approach, although the government always encompasses both in its policy making. The modernization process in the past 30 years witnessed unprecedented social and economic changes with the emergence of the western capitalist market economy in China enabling its integration into the world order. China started to 'progress' from a traditional agrarian nation to a modern industrial nation with its market-oriented economy. Featherstone (1995:87) maintains that 'the move from traditional to modern societies was seen as accountable in terms of a range of specific processes: industrialization, urbanization, commodification, rationalization, differentiation, bureaucratization, the expansion of the division of labour, the growth of individualism and state formation processes'. All these characteristics of modernization have been taking place over the last 30 years in China. At the same time, they have also gradually changed the image of China from an isolated obscure country to an open and internationally recognized society in the global capitalist community (Dirlik, 2003, 2004), aiming for progress and development.

Globalization and the market economy have enabled China to gain access to the global market, to erase its '*luohou*' (backward) history, and to build up an advanced nation state similar to western developed countries. Indeed, China's rapid transformation has narrowed the gap with the western world through impressive economic development and other social and cultural spectacles, such as the Beijing Olympics in 2008 and Expo Shanghai in 2010. Communication in terms of social, cultural and economic encounters have been opened up within the global community that generates many similarities between China and the west in terms of a model of development. Modernity[7] and globalization cannot be separated since a consequence of western colonial history is that it has enabled the western version of modernity to be universally recognized. Within the discourse of globalization, which is defined by Giddens (1990:64), 'as the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa', it is rather easy to draw contradictory conclusions, such as the threat of Chinese nationalism with the emergence of Chineseness, China's westernization[8] or China as a hybrid nation embracing global information and exchange with its own culture. One's conclusion depends on whether one either emphasizes the internal power of Chinese culture as the hegemonic force of Chinese nationalism or the external force of western culture and its impact on Chinese society in the process of globalization. For Robertson (1995:26–7), Giddens' account of globalization in terms of an 'action–reaction' relationship between the local and the global does not fully capture the complex interrelationship between the two.

For example, as is finely illustrated in the empirical data in the following chapters, the material reality in contemporary China is more complex and cannot simply be read off by such western/Chinese or global/Chinese dichotomies within the discourse of globalization, as the division is conditional and blurred. And more importantly, the relations between the local and the global are dialectically interconnected and integrated. Such a complex reality also raises discussions about China's entry into postmodernity (Dirlik and Zhang, 2000; Liu, 2004) with the emerging conditions of social economic change, an increasing western style consumerism and diverse popular cultures, alongside the local Chinese culture. Dirlik and Zhang (2000) highlight the complex changes and intercommunication between China and the global economy:

> On the one hand, it exposes the Chinese market and the realm of daily life to global capital and to international fashions and ideologies .... On the other hand, the world market's spread into China, and China's willing entry into it,

> enables Chinese consumers to encounter a world of difference, unevenness, inequality, and hierarchy, often delineated in terms of nation-state borders.
> (Dirlik and Zhang, 2000:6)

A focus on globalization has lead to increasing discussion about the progress of the neoliberal modernization project currently operating within China.

Exploring and contesting modernization in post-Mao China

China's current market economy, or neoliberal modernization project, is recognized by some modernist scholars as a westernization or capitalization process (Guthrie, 2008), as its market economy corresponds with the development of western capitalist societies in contributing to the global capitalist economy. However, within the 'socialist market economy' launched by Deng Xiaoping, there are various internal tensions and conflicts, since the capitalist market economy operates alongside another element of the modernization project, that of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Within this context, China's path to modernization and the issue of modernity have been highly contested, experiencing controversies from the introduction of economic reform in the late 1970s, especially around the emerging neoliberal[9] model of development and its coexistence with a socialist national identity of anti-capitalism. Ong (1997) maintains that China encounters a crisis of cultural identity with its integration into the global market and the influence of capitalism in this socialist state. While western societies are conscious of the emergence of China's rising power in the international arena as a threat to their hegemonic position, there appears to be little awareness or a deliberate attempt to ignore that China's current modernization project is never as smooth as it seems to be through simply concentrating on its highly visible rapid economic growth. Internal explorations of and debates about a suitable modernization model for China are ongoing within the new socialist market economy, in terms of evaluating and justifying its adoption of western liberalism of the free market in relation to an understanding of Chinese modernity.

The emergence of Chinese neoliberal modernization

Chinese neoliberal modernization (Harvey, 2005) has been theoretically supported from the beginning of the transition period from a planned economy to a market-oriented economy. Intellectual discussions exploring and explaining the transformations that have taken place in Chinese society have attempted to provide theoretical frameworks for the building of a modernized society by embracing western modernization theory and promoting the importance of primitive capital accumulation before achieving the ultimate socialist aim of common prosperity. Thinking about the relation between western modernity and Chinese culture dominated that period. There were nationalists who supported the idea of localism as a rejection of western capitalist modernization. In contrast, the New Enlightenment Movement in the 1980s was a group of intellectuals who supported the liberalization of the economy. Wang (2003:144) maintains that the intellectuals' reflections on modernization during the 1980s

> ...was on the one hand a search for wealth and power along the path to the establishment of a modern nation-state; on the other hand, it was a process of re-evaluating their society and tradition against the yardsticks of Western society and its cultures and values.

During the post-Mao economic reform period, this movement advocated the need to absorb western enlightenment philosophy into China and tried to build up the ideological foundation for China to pursue the path of western neoliberal modernization, in order to catch up with the west. One of the main tasks was to critically confront and abandon the old beliefs, such as the pre-reform anti-capitalist communist revolutionary ideology promoted by Mao. Rather, they promoted a New Chinese Socialist ideology, by encouraging a capitalist model of a free market and engagement between western liberal thinking and Chinese political and intellectual elites. These pro-western intellectuals developed within socialist China new western ideas such as liberalism and democracy, which were regarded as a standard model for development, corresponding with the government's intention of building a socialist market economy and an ideal modernized society, similar to that of the United States and other western developed countries.

The critiques of Chinese neoliberal modernization

Discussion about Chinese neoliberal modernization since the 1990s continued to dominate Chinese intellectual life, even though people started to doubt whether the market economy could survive and whether it was an appropriate model for China. However, after the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident, economic development did not slow down because of this political interruption. Rather, after the southern economic success reaffirmed by Deng's 'South Tour'[10] to the frontline of an economic developing region – Guangdong; and his famous slogan – 'to get rich is glorious', the Fourteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China[11] in 1992 declared the main task in the 1990s was to achieve greater economic success by building on Deng's theory of 'socialism with Chinese characteristics'. Western neoliberal modernization became the official model of the nation's development and policy making. The neoliberalization of the socialist market economy in the era of globalization dramatically transformed society with increasing commercial activities, information and value exchange with the western world. At the same time, criticism of the 'neoliberal turn' developed to contest this western modernity model and its suitability within a Chinese context with the expansion of poverty and polarization between rich and poor and other social issues, including the environment. Evidence of the latter has been documented by economic and sociology scholars (see Khan and Riskin, 2001).

Since the early 1990s, research started to address the emergence of neoliberalism with discussion of a 'new order' (Wang, 2003) in contemporary China. Such discussion did not only envisage the incorporation of China into western neoliberalism but also raised questions about the consequences of a Chinese 'Anglo-Saxon Style' neoliberalism, critically addressing it with reference to the issue of modernity, discussed among China's 'new left' intellectuals, or 'critical intellectuals', such as Wang Hui (Wang, 1998, 2003, 2004, 2008). While witnessing the successful economic reform led by the government with unprecedented growth, Wang is critical of the pro-west New Enlightenment intellectuals in the 1980s who combined criticism of Chinese socialism with welcoming western capitalism that developed into the formation of a neoliberal model of modernization. Wang (2003:148) argues that socialist Chinese modernization is different from others

> ...not only because the question of its modernization was posed by Marxists, but because Chinese Marxism itself is an ideology of modernization; not only was the goal of the Chinese socialist movement modernization but the movement itself constitutes the main characteristics of Chinese modernity.

The Chinese socialist movement is modernization with Chinese characteristics, which ideologically bypassed the stage of primitive capital accumulation. He is sceptical about why such criticism towards Mao's socialism by these pro-west intellectuals does not lead to their reflection on the issue of modernity and the suitability of their adaption of a neoliberal model of modernization in a Chinese context. Therefore, from his point of view, the criticism of Chinese socialism should have entailed a critical perspective towards modernity, so that people could have a comprehensive understanding and critical perspective about the western origins of neoliberalism.

Wang Hui (1998) points out that, since the 1990s, the world order has changed from two world powers to a global capitalist world, even though the Chinese Communist Party is still in power and ideologically committed to socialism. He argues that the current Chinese government 'in all of its behaviours, including economic, political, and cultural – even in government behaviour – China has completely conformed to the dictates of capital and the activities of the market' by embracing the western neoliberal model of modernization (Wang, 1998:9). However, Wang's (2004:56) critical perspective of the latter suggests that 'European capitalism and its history of global expansion cannot become the standard against which China is measured; by the same token, these must become the object of our critique and rethinking'. Meanwhile, Wang (2003) believes that contemporary China cannot simply be read off from the abstract dichotomies of: China/West, tradition/modernity, socialist/capitalist, as the situation in Chinese society is more complex in the current historical setting. His work has criticized China's neoliberal thinking and policy making by suggesting that a Chinese theory of modernization based on its historical experience should be produced in order to prevent China from being westernized or misled by western modernity, which as he maintains, cannot explain the specificity of the nation's present and future needs. For him, simply adapting a western frame or relying on the explanation of pure Chineseness cannot provide a full picture of Chinese society, as they are interdependent and we cannot be certain that what historically happened in China did not happen in the west or vice versa.

China may historically have had its own model of modernization (see Wang, 2008). However, within the contemporary context of globalization, there are limitations with over-emphasizing national exceptionalism. Rather, discussion of a particular society and its modernity needs to be located within a global context, serving to highlight the interpenetrations between the local and the global, which is compatible with a critical understanding of both *local* experiences and *global* structures. This is illustrated in the empirical data in Chapters 3 and 4 that addresses the complexity of the interconnections of migration, gender, class and generation.

Local practices as cultural critique of neoliberal modernization

Returning to the issue of neoliberal modernization within a globalization-based post-Mao economic reform period, the current Chinese modernization project in creating a socialist market economy has produced a new social structure and mobility. The nation is projected as an imaginary space aiming to progress through capitalization and neoliberal economic practices. However, empirically, what is the implication of this neoliberal modernization for local Chinese people and their response to western modernity and the global development trend? More specifically, its consequence of uneven geographical development and creation of conditions for class formation (see Harvey, 2005) has become a central critique to question its viability in socialist China. However, Nonini (2008) questions whether neoliberalism is occurring in China. He argues that Chinese neoliberalism is incomplete, as it exists only for the new form of cadre-capitalist class and this is not entirely incorporated into neoliberalism in practice. He has a similar understanding with his Chinese counterparts on the issue of social transformation since the post-Mao liberal economic reform, in terms of the formation of class as a result of neoliberalism: 'a new cadre-capitalist class has emerged during liberalization, while large numbers of farmers, urban workers and a "floating population" of urban migrants have been dispossessed of land, employment and political rights' (ibid. :145).

Nonini (2008:146–7) argues that 'it may make sense to speak of the prevalence of "neoliberal" ideology among certain privileged urban residents of China, and specific leaders and factions of reformers within the CPC (The Communist Party of China)'. However, he is sceptical whether 'the Chinese population has widely incorporated neoliberal subjectivities and practices' (ibid.:147). He maintains that plural histories of neoliberalism and scepticism about the power of the western notion of neoliberalism are taking place through local cultural practices. Located within a Chinese context, he uses '*guanxi*',[12] as an example to illustrate

that the socialist market economy is operating under these interpersonal relations among the cadre-capitalist class. This challenges the essential characteristics of the neoliberal logic of a free market, since government cadre and the capitalist are mutually dependent on each other to rationalize their daily practices and to sustain their interests. Nonini suggests that 'in considering whether and to what extent the Chinese population "buys into" market logics of thinking and acting, one must take into account the sheer diversity of class (and class-associated traits such as educational, and urban vs. rural) backgrounds in China, the discursive formation that exists in China today (Maoist, Confucianist, Daoist, Buddhist, etc.) as alternatives to a ruling market logic, and the presence of large-scale protests exhibiting widely held moral economies that draw on socialist values to make claims on the reformist state' (ibid.:146).

With respect to the Chinese New Left's discussion of Chinese modernity, Nonini's perspective about the uncompleted neoliberalism in China challenges the notion of the 'universalization of neoliberalism' (Harvey, 2005), which also indicates that there is a unique understanding of modernity and a proactive modernization among Chinese people, which is different from the state's neoliberal model of modernization initiated by western-style modernity. The local cadre-capitalists' *guanxi* relations and practices, for example, can be seen as resistance or as an alternative[13] to western neoliberal modernity, which blur the boundaries between 'what is state and public, and what is market and private' (ibid.:161) that should be clearly defined in neoliberal conditions. In this case, we can see that neoliberal modernization does not erase local cultural practices such as *guanxi*, but enables neoliberalism to function in the Chinese context in its own way for the cadre-capitalist class, while at the same time, excluding those people (such as workers and peasants) outside the network from 'buying into' neoliberalism in China (ibid.:163). What Nonini's (2008) example of *guanxi* suggests is that a capitalist market economy gives rise to traditional interpersonal relations continuing to be important in the formation of Chinese modernity through local experience. In response to the relationship between the local and the global, Nonini's account in terms of Chinese local responses to neoliberal modernization illustrates what Robertson (1995) and other non-western scholars (see Ohnuki-Tierney, 2006) maintain about the continuity of the past and the mutual interconnection between the local and the global across time and space.

Current practices of the new cadre-capitalist class are a product of Chinese neoliberal modernization, which consists of local cultural practices, such as the cadre-capitalist *guanxi* network. We can see this *guanxi* network as the continuity of Chinese culture, across different historical periods of the modernization process, from 'old times' as well as an expression of local modernity and a dimension of global modernity in 'new times', in the age of globalization. This identification of the formation of modern classes is specifically important in the book in terms of challenging the dominant representations of the 'peasant workers' that are circulating within the new emerging class system.

A study of male migrant workers and identity formation

Within the dominant discourse of neoliberal modernization and development, current research on Chinese rural–urban labour migration is focused mainly around issues of the marginality or vulnerability of peasant workers, in terms of their social status in contemporary society. Within such research, the *hukou* system[14] is a topic that has been highlighted as of central importance. Its impact on this internal labour migration has been identified through social stratification and classification, positioning 'peasant workers' as *modernization losers* of this institutional system, implemented by the central government's economic development policy. Researchers from both mainland China (see Q. Li, 2004a, 2004b; Jian *et al.* 2008) and overseas institutes (see Solinger, 1995, 1999a, 1999b; Xiang, 2007; Knight and Song, 1999, 2005) have acknowledged that the social classification, stratification and inequity of rural migrants in the cities fundamentally results from the household registration they hold, as well as other institutional barriers relating to *hukou* (i.e. the different benefits available to the agricultural/non-agricultural household registrations) at the state level. For example, from a Weberian analysis of social stratification and rural–urban labour migration, sociologists such as Q. Li (2004a) maintain that the stratification of peasant workers, who occupy a low social status position in society, is partly due to their exclusion within the dual rural/urban division with its associated *hukou* system serving as an institutional barrier.

From this materialist point of view, *hukou* is also seen as a domestic passport which manages population movement, as well as an initial source of identity formation which maintains a social and economic configuration (Chan and Zhang, 1999) within a two-class structure, as a result of the rural/urban dichotomy (Solinger, 1999a). Such research suggests that because of the household registration system and the government's policy preference in regional development, rural–urban labour migrants have been treated as second-class citizens (Solinger, 1995, 1999a, 1999b; Knight and Song, 1999, 2005), as they are less likely to be able to access jobs, education, housing and health care compared with their urban counterparts who have urban *hukou*. As Solinger (1995:117) notes, all rural migrants start from a common base, as a result of a low status peasantry household label. Meanwhile, this label also contributes to the social classification of the migrant community. Xiang (2007) illustrates the impact of the current household registration system on the lives of rural–urban labour migrants:

> While citizens can move elsewhere to search for jobs as labourers and they can purchase basic subsistence as consumers, they (rural–urban labour migrants) cannot settle down as they wish as social and political subjects.
> (Xiang, 2007:182)

In other words, rural–urban labour migrants are not entitled to a series of social and political benefits to which urban citizens have access. More significantly, they are socially discriminated against by local urban residents in the urban places

where they work (Chan, 1998:889). However, a problem with such research is that while it emphasizes the role of the state in institutionalizing migration and its impact on social segregation in the wider society, it also tends to neglect and leave unproblematized the historical development of this phenomenon of social stratification in terms of rural–urban divisions, as well as the complexity of class formation in contemporary China. For example, class boundaries are not clearly shown (see Bian, 2002; Bian *et al.*, 2005) in relation to the identification of certain groups of peasant workers, who have access to economic resources, as current materialist accounts indicate that there are diverse understandings in terms of class position for migrant workers. In addition, if we trace back the issue of the rural household and peasantry to the 1950s, when the household registration system emerged in China, the Chinese government's campaign slogan was 'Go up to the mountain and go down to the village' (上山下乡), sending urban intellectual youth to be re-educated in rural villages by the peasants, then we might realize the historical significance of the formation of such social stratification.

A key motivation for the study is the under-representation in migration studies of male migrants as a gendered category, particularly in a Chinese context. In 2006, the *International Migration Review* (*IMR*) issued a special collection on 'Gender and Migration Revisited', in which Mahler and Pessar (2003, 2006) claimed that 'gender matters' emphasizing gender as a cultural process rather than a natural phenomenon. They also argued for the importance of the dynamic interrelationship between gender and migration in light of recent poststructuralist analysis which understands gender as 'relational and situational' (Mahler and Pessar, 2006:28) moving beyond the dichotomy of male and female. The collection made a significant contribution to current literature on Chinese rural–urban labour migration. More specifically, within this special collection, Curran *et al.* (2006:200–1) have pointed out that a major problem within this field of inquiry is that sociological studies have failed to produce an inclusive approach to gender. They highlight the under-representation of men's experience of migration and the necessity to study migrant men as a gendered category in order to provide a more comprehensive and critical contribution to the field of inquiry. My research specifically addresses the relative absence of male peasant workers in current mainstream Chinese research on gender and rural–urban labour migration. In order to contribute to this field of analysis, the study critically builds on Chinese literature on rural–urban labour migration, Chinese feminist scholarship on female peasant workers, western research on men, masculinities and identity formation and new British feminist cultural studies scholarship on working-class women.

Current Chinese research on gender and migration, represented by feminist literature (Pun 2005; Jacka, 2006; Yan 2008), emphasizes female migrants' agency, highlighting their self development and their critique of traditional patriarchal power relations located within rapid social change. For example, Pun (1999, 2005) examines the formation of the new worker-subject – *dagong mei* (working girls or female migrant workers) within a Foucauldian analysis of 'techniques of the self', with a focus on their class identity through the lens of

gender. This is located within the context of modernization, in which the cumulative effects of the state communist party, the capitalist market economy and Chinese patriarchal culture are examined. Ethnographically, she explores female migrant workers' experiences within a factory, arguing that these women live within conditions which are shaped by socialist institutional regulation such as *hukou*, capitalist exploitation, as well as the restrictions of a patriarchal culture that leads to multiple, interconnecting layers of repression and discrimination. For example, she illustrates that women experience discrimination owing to their *hukou* status and gender identity, which are associated with backwardness and subordination, thus becoming obstacles for them to position themselves in urban modern space. She explores a variety of possibilities for rural women to resist the authority of the three institutional hegemonic powers (global capitalism, state and patriarchal family) that position them as subordinated subjects. For example, Pun (1999, 2005) illustrates the dynamics of power relations in terms of kin-ethnic relations in the formation of different social identities among female migrant workers, with their different status and social hierarchy represented by these kin and ethnic identities, within and outside the workplace. Rather than simply arguing for the inevitability of these women's difficult lives and passive acceptance of their destinations, Pun raises the issue of the women's pursuit of modernity in conditions of globalization, emphasizing the autonomy of these women's agency with an accompanying expression of desire for independence and choice, such as consuming modern goods to construct their emerging self identities, which she maintains are different to traditional rural identities.

Such an approach is also commonly adopted in research on female migrant workers, in which western concepts, originating within a framework of second-wave feminism,[15] such as patriarchy and sexual politics, are deployed. In this case, these western concepts tend not to open up the research, but rather to limit our exploration of the local construction of subjectivities and our interpretations of Chinese women's experiences in the process of rural–urban labour migration. Adkins (2004) suggests a critical perspective on the conceptualization of female subjectivities, as engaging in practice between the social and the subject rather than simply understanding the subject as a blind follower of the social. She maintains that: 'this notion of the subject as not simply engaged with the world, but in the world is one which has great appeal to feminists' (ibid.:10).

Skeggs' (1997) *Formations of Class & Gender* illustrates the usefulness of Bourdieu's social theory and offers an insightful perspective in terms of the construction of identities and subjectivities of working-class women, based on a British Cultural Studies tradition of exploring 'the lived experience of how ... women inhabit different social positions and cultural representations' (Skeggs, 1997:1–2). She argues that:

> Identities are not ... reflections of objective social positions which is how class is often theorized (if at all). This ... would be to see identities always retrospectively. Nor are the social positions essential categories. Identities are continually in the process of being re-produced as responses to social

> positions, through access to representational systems and in the conversion of forms of capital.
>
> (Skeggs, 1997:94)

By using Bourdieu's (1989) metaphors of capitals,[16] Skeggs' (1997) critical examination of women's social location and subjectivities suggests that the women in her research are not the originators in producing their identities, as they do not occupy the economic and cultural conditions that would enable them to construct what she refers to as a middle-class notion of self-identity. It is through 'the nexus of structures, power relations and capital transfers which produce frameworks of representation and values which establish what it is to be a White working-class woman' (Skeggs, 1997:160). She also argues elsewhere that 'the cultural resources for self-making and the techniques for self-production are class processes and making the self makes class' (Skeggs, 2004a: 75). McNay (2008:163) maintains that 'this socio-centric orientation towards embodiment does not undermine an account of agency by asserting an indivisible complicity between dispositions and social structures; it rather construes it in terms of 'regulated liberties', which serves to defend its viability in understanding individual social practice against a poststructuralist perspective'.

Such an argument provides useful access to the study of Chinese male peasant workers. Particularly, it enables us to move beyond current structuralist-based feminist studies of Chinese gender and migration, in which female peasant workers are passively located as a disadvantaged, vulnerable group or second-class citizens. Skeggs (1997) suggests that working-class women operate within a different trajectory to middle-class women in constructing their subjectivities. As she maintains, there are limitations that constrain them in how they 'deploy many constructive and creative strategies to generate a sense of themselves with value' (Skeggs, 1997:162) within the dominant discursive ideology, operating within British society. In this process, a particular culture of working-class women is revealed in constructing their various subjectivities, which are developed within the context of close relations with others and more public social relations rather than an individualistic project. Her argument in terms of the theorization of the self provides a profound criticism of the project of the self as a 'western bourgeois project' (Skeggs, 1997:163).

The under-representation of male peasant workers' experience has led me to adopt a critical perspective, in order to produce an alternative account with a focus on the public representation of (male) peasant workers, alongside my primary investigation of the migrant men's self-representation; thus, emphasizing the transformation of meanings of their lives within a rapidly changing contemporary urban China.

Chapters of the book

This book provides a pro-feminist sociological study of Chinese male migrant workers' identity formation. A primary aim of the book is to explore rural men's

experience of rural–urban migration as an emerging sector of a dislocated urban working class. In so doing, it addresses the absence of male migrant workers as a gendered category within the current literature (see Jacka, 2005, 2006; Pun, 2005; Yan, 2008). At the same time, it addresses the intersectionality of gender and class in understanding the men's experiences of being and becoming urban working-class men through their own narrated identities.

Chapter 2 critically addresses the historical background of Chinese rural–urban migration and its relation to intellectual discussions of modernity and modernization. It examines representations of (male) migrant workers in the modernization process. It also raises the issue of the importance of critically understanding social class within different historical contexts and its complexity within the current historical context of post-Mao neoliberal economic reform and modernization.

This is then followed by two chapters that examine the male migrant workers' subjectivities through their narratives, in relation to their social relations within the family and workplace. Chapter 3 investigates the men's accounts of their inhabiting ascribed feminine domains of 'private spaces' and masculine identity formation in relation to their family lives. It emphasizes male responsibilities and a sense of familial interconnectedness of being a man in rural families. The chapter also documents that traditional gender norms, such as being a 'filial son' associated with the traditional (patriarchal) family, are lived out, albeit reworked, in modern Chinese society, even though migration is changing the family structure of male migrant workers whose masculine identities have been dislocated in the process of migration. More specifically, the chapter critically examines the role of traditional familial gender norms, which are central resources in constructing the men's subjectivities, which serve to make sense of their masculine identities in the city, in the process of becoming urban working-class men.

Chapter 4 documents how male migrant workers negotiate and construct their masculine identities within the 'public domain' of the urban workplace. There is a specific exploration of non-conventional male occupations, such as service and light industrial work, due to the geographical location of the study. This provides alternative accounts to conventional gendered representations of male migrant workers' occupations, as construction workers and miners. Here, the men are seen deploying a range of strategies in negotiating their masculine subjectivities. It is argued that symbolically and materially Confucian 'father–son' relations are a central resource for male migrant workers to creatively engage with the social relations of the urban workplace and to (re)construct their masculine identity through social interaction at work.

The concluding chapter (Chapter 5) summarizes the arguments and findings of the book. It also maps out significant policy implications for enhancing the well-being of (male) peasant workers that move beyond the dichotomy of tradition and modernity in new times.

The Postscript highlights the importance of this research to a study of a younger generation of male migrant workers' aspirations and well-being within

the context of accommodating themselves within globally inflected urban spaces. The chapter provides a socio-cultural explanation for the formation of their emerging subjectivities and well-being. In so doing, it critically responds to the government's concern about working conditions and psychological pressures on a younger generation of migrant workers, among whom there is a high level of suicide, as well as labour shortage among urban manufacturing industries.

2 Representing 'peasant workers'

Introduction

The chapter has three interconnected themes. First, it critically examines the concept and the genealogy of peasant worker as a term that does not have a long history in Chinese social and political narratives. It is a concept that was generated with the emergence of Chinese neoliberal modernization and the combination of two prestige classes from the Mao period – peasant and worker. The major public narratives of peasant workers are that of a group of socially and politically 'marginalized' people since the period of post-Mao economic reform. This chapter aims to examine the hegemonic ideology of modernization operating within contemporary China, and its role in the construction of the current representation of male peasant workers. Hall (1996a) understands ideology as

> ... the mental frame-works – the languages, the concepts, categories, imagery of thought, and the systems of representation – which different classes and social groups deploy in order to make sense of, define, figure out and render intelligible the way society works.
>
> (Hall, 1996a: 26)

The chapter traces the representations of Chinese (male) peasant workers in different discursive contexts, consisting of shifting, contradictory images including: hero, role model, criminal, sex offender and marginalized national urban resident. A historical discursive approach deployed within this chapter highlights the current ideological transformation of Chinese society.

Second, the chapter also aims to explore the cultural transformation of the material conditions since the late 1970s in the formation of (male) peasant workers through the lens of gender. It critically examines public representations of peasant workers through governmental texts and public narratives, such as the media. Such representations are of importance in critically contextualizing rural–urban migrating masculinities.

Third, given the transformations in public narratives, dominant representations of (male) peasant workers discursively shape the general population's understanding of migrant men in 'new times', in light of the new values and ideology

marked by the neoliberal modernization project. In response, the chapter addresses urban residents' perspectives of male peasant workers, as part of the dominant public understanding of these men, that serves to contribute to a broader understanding of their social stratification. The latter includes their social position in terms of what the peasant workers are perceived to lack within the dominant discourse of post-Mao modernization.

Peasant worker: a 'modern' subject?

One of the problems in the current literature on rural–urban labour migration is its reflection of the dominant narratives of modernization and development, which construct a new taken-for-granted 'stereotypical' social category, the peasant worker, as a group with problems. However, as Foucault suggested, meanings and knowledge about subjects vary in different historical periods (see Hall, 1997:46). Currently, there is a failure to trace the historical trajectory and changing meanings of the concepts of 'peasant' and 'worker' to 'peasant worker' and a failure to explore the continuities and discontinuities of meanings of its formation within China's modernization process at both the state and local level. The process of presenting (male) peasant workers as others essentializes and fixes the identity of this group of people. Given the political implications of representation, it is necessary to critically explore official and academic notions of 'othering' and the social stratification of peasant workers as a group through a discursive analysis of the public representation of this particular group of the population.

Nonini (2008) argues that social groups, such as peasant workers, are excluded from the market economy system, due to their lack of resources to build up interpersonal relations that are required in gaining socio-economic status. Hence, the pursuit of modernization may have led to a disconnection between the state and its people, in terms of the implementation of modernizing ideology. In contrast to the success of the cadre-capitalist class, peasant workers are discursively portrayed as 'disadvantaged', particularly due to lack of education in terms of improving the 'quality' (*suzhi*) of their lives that would enable them to participate in the modernization project. *Suzhi*, according to H. Yan (2003:494),

> ... refers to the somewhat ephemeral qualities of civility, self-discipline, and modernity ... (*suzhi*) marks a sense and sensibility of the self's value in the market economy ... it is often used in the negative by the post-Mao state and educational elites to point to the lack of quality of the Chinese labouring masses. Improving the *suzhi* of China's massive population has become vitally important in the planning of governing elites for China to become a competitive player in the field of global capital ... a new ontological valuation and abstraction of human subjectivity through examining the linkages among poverty-relief campaigns, labour migration, and development.

In the Chinese government's current political discourse, the peasant workers' assumed inability to positively engage with the modernization project constitutes a major problem. How well the government's modernization ideology penetrates into their daily practices is of importance in understanding and evaluating the project initiated by socialist China. Ong's (1997:172) argument about alternative versions of modernities within a single country also indicates that if the cadre-capitalist class in neoliberal China has its own version of what constitutes modernity, then peasant workers may also have their own practices in pursuing their imagined modern lives. As Ong (1997:173) notes:

> There are alternative[1] modernities expressed by subalterns that are marginalized or even suppressed by the dominant forms.

Modernization discourse since the late 1970s has provided an 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1983), offering Chinese people a sense of community and commitment, which has been captured by the national slogan to get rich and to make progress, while at the same time unintentionally excluding particular social groups. However, Chinese peasants have been provided with two different definitions in two different periods of Chinese modernization: Mao's anti-capitalism and Deng's socialist market economy. It may be suggested that the category of class seems more appropriate than modernization to capture the experiences of peasant workers. For example, Thompson (1980) defines the formation of class in the following terms:

> If we stop history at a given point, there are no classes but simply a multitude of individuals with a multitude of experiences. But if we watch these men over an adequate period of social change, we observe patterns in their relationships, their ideas, and their institutions. Class is defined by men as they live with their own history, and, in the end, this is its only definition.
>
> (Thompson, 1980:10)

A critical interrogation of Chinese modernization and modernity cannot be evaluated without referring to local 'disadvantaged' Chinese people's accounts, since the aim of China's neoliberal project is to provide a fair, harmonious society for all of its people.

While cultural globalization suggests the homogeneity of cultural practices, Chinese peasant workers who are experiencing dislocation may find it hard to identify and connect with the modernization project. At the same time, discussion of modernization and globalization seems to be an official discourse that makes sense of elite or middle-class lifestyles, which results in the writing out of peasant workers from this projected homogenous process (Zhang, 2001). The contestation of modernity from these mobile people is of importance in understanding China's narratives of modernization and the uniqueness of its modernity at this historical juncture of rapid change. Dirlik and Zhang (1997) maintain that:

> Chinese states and populations are no longer merely the 'objects' of forces emanating from Euro-America but are themselves significant contributors

> to the operations of capitalism; hence the seemingly contradictory representations of China and Chinese at once in conventional Orientalist (or self-Orientalist) terms as a location of the exotic other but also as the carriers of values expanding the frontiers of capitalism.
>
> (Dirlik and Zhang, 1997:4)

In contrast to the visibility at a global level of changing images of China in the international community, there is little space to document at a local level Chinese people's diverse narratives. More specifically, we need to create alternative spaces to understand peasant workers' accommodation to and contestation of the new socialist modernization process, in response to the current discussion around modernity and neoliberal modernization, explored above. In particular, under the open-market mechanism, the demand for cheap labour attracts thousands of peasant workers in the cities. However, the importance of studying this mobile population is not only because they are categorized as 'poor' and 'disadvantaged' in the socialist market economy but also because they were a privileged class in pre-reform socialist China that currently still exists in the government's communist ideology. Understanding such a contradictory transformation, I believe, will provide an important resource in making sense of a range of meanings of China's path to modernization and the specificity of Chinese modernity emerging in this historical setting. Mac an Ghaill and Haywood (2007:246) maintain the integral role of the personal in nation-making and economic modernization and that private experience is 'making visible its intimate relationship to that which continues to be redefined as its opposite, the public'. This is further explored in Chapters 3 and 4.

Chinese policy makers, who assume that the modernization project will benefit all the population, have not taken into account the complex processes of accommodation and struggle involved. It may be argued that Chinese peasant workers, as with the urban cadre-capitalist class, are undergoing their own modernization process in their own particular ways. If modernization means progress, which both Mao's socialist movement and Deng's socialist market economy promote, the transformation of Chinese peasants and workers, and the formation of peasant workers remain problematic with the move to post-Mao modernization. Peasant workers, who are undergoing the experience of 'cultural struggle' (Ong, 1991), remain under-represented within the new social structure. It is argued that peasant workers' engagement with the modernization project is of central importance to current intellectual debates about modernity and modernization, to which this book makes a contribution.

The socialist market economy and the transformation of 'class'

Public representations of 'peasant workers' have been controversial within different discursive arenas. They vary on different media platforms, different narratives from Chinese people as well as statements from government documents in

different periods of time. If someone asked me about my first acquaintance with peasant workers, I would recall a memory from the mid- or late 1980s when I was still a child. I remember at that time, whenever I was naughty or did not listen to what my parents said, they and other adults in my family used to frighten me by threatening to send me to the 'Jiangxi Monkeys'. Later, I understood that this referred to male peasant workers from outside Guangdong (the province where I lived), who were looking 'to make their fortune' in southern cities of the country. They were publicly represented through very negative images, including abducting city children. The meanings of peasant workers or *nong-min gong* had no positive images in my early memories. Such negative images have a specific cultural history in relation to locally produced meanings. For Hall (1997:5) 'meaning is thought to be produced – constructed – rather than simply "found"'. These images emerged at the same time as the rapid development of China during the economic reform period, which produced a wide range of social and cultural changes. As Wacquant (1987:77) suggests, 'any social hierarchy must have a material grounding'. During the last two decades, rural–urban migration has become a significant feature of population mobility in contemporary China, accompanying post-Mao neoliberal economic modernization. It is important to develop a critical investigation about how this economic phenomenon and contemporary meanings of the peasant worker have been produced culturally and historically at a macro-level, in order to gain a more comprehensive and critical understanding of their current social and economic status. The discourse of post-Mao neoliberal modernization and rural/urban divisions has strengthened the ideological formation of the dichotomy of the urban and the rural, which has gained new meanings in relation to the associated concepts of the 'modern' and the 'traditional'. Such a geographical dichotomy is also accompanied by unequal power relations, which are seen to have intensified since the introduction of the government's uneven regional development policy, as well as imaginary differences of space existing among urban residents and migrant men. What is significant is the explanation of such geographical differences, as a result of neoliberal economic modernization, in helping to construct Chinese male peasant workers' migrating masculinities through the representation of them in their move from rural villages to cities.

The 1970s is an important decade in modern Chinese history, which marked the end of the Cultural Revolution. It was also the end of an era with the death of Mao Zedong in 1976 and the beginning of a new era represented by Deng's return to the Chinese political arena, as the successor, with his new economic policy of 'reform and opening up' in 1978. However, historically, this was not just a political transformation from one leader to another, but also a social, cultural and ideological transformation for a socialist new China, moving gradually away from Mao's centrally-planned economy to a market economy. Given the economically successful examples of its neighbours within the region, including Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore, plus the reality of large-scale internal poverty, Deng's policy highlighted the fact that it was initially important to achieve primitive capital accumulation and economic growth. This would

enable all Chinese people to gain *xiaokang*[2] (literally meaning a little prosperity, being well-off); the aim of socialism which provides an ideal society for people where everyone is equal with common prosperity. The launch of Deng Xiaoping's modernization project shifted economic reform and encouraged an open market and competition in order to achieve economic growth and efficiency. Chinese sociologists call this transformation the 'social transition'.[3] A major difference between Mao's and Deng's theory of modernization was the latter's adoption of a market-oriented economy and the integration of Chinese society, culture and economy into the global capitalist system (Wang, 2003:152).

Economic prosperity, science, technological development and international political impact all speak of the success of Chinese socialist neoliberal modernization in the past 30 years. However, alongside the national specificity of the success of socialist economic reform or 'neoliberalism with Chinese characteristics' policy making (Harvey, 2005:120), there is also a series of institutional and structural changes within Chinese society sharing a similar trajectory to other neoliberal societies. These include an uneven regional development strategy, the redistribution of capital under the control of central government and other extended social issues, as a result of capitalization, such as income inequality (Knight and Song, 1999; Wu, 2004), and social stratification (Nee, 1991, 1996; Bian and Logan, 1996) with the expansion of the market economy. As rapid economic growth continues, tensions intensify between the principle of neoliberal modernization, represented by progress, wealth and fairness (the eleventh development objective of common prosperity between 2006 and 2010) (Fan, 2006), and the material reality of social inequality, stratification, and wealth polarization that a socialist nation state aims to move beyond, claiming to be superior to capitalist societies. Such controversies have become highly visible in Chinese society as a result of the socialist neoliberal modernization project.

Criticisms of the neoliberal modernization project act to contest the western model of development as it causes social inequality and income polarity between regions and individuals. Economic reform and modernization are seen as having an impact beyond economic growth at a structural level, which causes major changes that destabilize the old social order in Chinese society. In other words, a neoliberal style of economic development provides China not only with impressive figures of economic growth, but also a range of social issues that are currently differentially experienced by different classes. Of major significance is the issue of social inequality between the regions. For example, rural–urban migration and peasant workers have been excluded from the neoliberal discourse of modernization, as the system favours the needs of the new cadre-capitalist class and their interpretation of neoliberal modernization.

However, under the impact of modernization, led by the Chinese communist party, the market and economic expansion, there emerges a new labour process and expanding demand for labour within the context of industrialization. These changing economic and political structures mean that the stable socialist social order and existing social divisions are challenged by this transformation process. For example, Pun and Chan (2008) have developed a genealogy of the working

class in China. They argue that, 'we observe a double alienation, if not trauma, of class formation in China: first, an articulation of "class" or "class struggle" from above in Maoist China, and second, an abrupt subsumption of "class" discourse in the reform period' (Pun and Chan, 2008:76).

Bian (2002) has highlighted the changing meanings of working class in different historical periods since the founding of new China in 1949 in which peasant workers have emerged as a product of a fragmented working class within the historical transformation to post-Mao economic reform:

> Mao's working class was officially and politically recognized as a 'leading class'. Post-1978 market reforms eroded this status recognition and differentiated the working class into wage labour in the private sector, unprotected labour in the state sector, layoff labour wandering in search for a job, and deprived migrant peasant-labour.
>
> (Bian, 2002: 96)

Indeed, material conditions, such as social inequality and uneven regional development in Chinese society, challenge the utopian socialist market economy, which aims to use the 'invisible hand' of the market to control society and to achieve common prosperity. There is continuity and discontinuity in this transformation for Chinese people. Social mobility is also facilitated within the neoliberal discourse, as the formation of internal migrant labour is the result of the neoliberal labour restructuring. In the case of China, the neoliberal turn leads to the demand for cheap labour for its competitiveness within a market economy. China's economic power in modernization is partly due to its labour-intensive manufacturing, which is constituted by thousands of peasant workers moving from rural agricultural sectors to urban industrial and manufacturing sectors since the 1980s. Particularly important was China's modernizing strategy, shifting from the development of the rural to the urban and privileging southern and eastern cities of China as part of its uneven regional development plan.

Urban space has been an 'imagined' place of modernization, which attracts thousands of rural dwellers 'to look for their fortune' as well as to supplement the labour market. Appadurai (1996) assumes that people can imagine so-called modern lives through media consumption and geographical mobility – migration. The 2000 Census reported that there were about 121.07 million internal migrants up to the year 2000, among whom 88.4 million were rural to urban migrants, which accounts for about 73 per cent of the total volume. This amount has rapidly increased on a yearly basis. People tend to move from poor areas, located mainly in the north, west and inland regions to the better-off south, east and coastal areas. For example, coastal areas, such as Guangdong, Shanghai and Zhejiang are the most economically developed regions and also the most popular destinations of rural migration. According to Deshingkar (2006), the official estimate of peasant workers is that it has increased from about 26 million in 1988 to 126 million in 2004. However, this number could be an underestimate, as there is still a large number yet to register with local authorities and there are a large

number of about 200 million labourers who are potential migrants. According to a recent national statistical survey in China, there were 230 million peasant workers by the end of 2009, of which 65.1 per cent were male, 34.9 per cent were female.[4] Movement from agricultural to non-agricultural areas since 1978 is considered one of the most significant components of the current rapid pace of economic growth and modernization in China (Logan, 2002).

However, this trend of labour movement also creates a new 'class system' that has not yet been officially recognized by the Chinese government (Goodman, 1999, 2008). Harvey (2005:121–2) writes of local struggles in neoliberal economic transformation:

> For what the Chinese had to learn (and to some degree are still learning), among many other things, was that the market can do little to transform an economy without a parallel shift in class relations, private property, and all the other institutional arrangements that typically ground a thriving capitalist economy.

This is also targeted by critics who argue that neoliberal ideology is in the interest of specific social groups, so that not everyone can benefit from the market economy with its effect of social stratification and the formation of a new 'class', which is in contrast to the ideology of a socialist nation state. For Harvey, this process of neoliberal economic development and its consequences in terms of the restoration of class is 'accumulation by dispossession' (Harvey, 2005:159). In particular, the social and economic status of peasants has suffered dramatic changes in this transition. For example, Harvey (2005) notes that before Deng's economic reform in 1978 rural dwellers were seen as a privileged social class, which was separated from the urban population by the household registration system. However, their status has been overshadowed by the neoliberal market economy and the policy of prioritizing urban regional development.

This uneven regional development, in particular, with reference to rural and urban areas has created a class society, made highly visible by rural–urban migration. Such recognition is rarely documented in public policy owing to the sensitivity of the Chinese government to the notion of class since the period of Mao (Pun and Chan, 2008). Class recognition is not included in the government's neoliberal discourse, even though it is subsumed in political narratives in terms of the recognition of their subordinated circumstances in the modernization process. The neoliberal model of modernization creates a discourse with the effect of currently ending the 'privileged' position of the working class and the peasant class, while promoting the cadre-capitalist class in the new system. This 'class' system is not just about the nature of work, it is ideologically generated within a modernization discourse, in terms of uneven regional development that socially places peasant workers in an inferior position, represented as of 'low quality (di suzhi)' (Anagnost, 2004:192). The accessibility of capital for local Chinese people has been challenged owing to the coexistence of the free market and central control. The success of the state's economic progress, as well as the

emergence of new values in people's daily lives has changed local Chinese people's perspectives about themselves, their society, their culture and about how different classes see each other. However, Wang (2002:15), pointing to the paradoxical circumstances in China with the emergence of the new market economy, suggests that: 'for the Communist Party it is a matter of principle, of its political survival as a party historically identified with socialism, that it cannot, or cannot afford to, draw on bourgeois values openly or on a significant scale'. Nevertheless, peasant workers are dislocated in the current socialist market economy, with major issues of material survival and identity formation for rural men living and working in the city.

Peasants, workers and the historical formation of (male) peasant workers

Therefore, an historical analysis of peasant workers is necessary, which enables us to see that representations of peasant workers are connected to rapid social change in China. More specifically, this section explores the changing images of 'peasant' and 'worker' to 'peasant worker'. At present, peasant workers and associated social issues such as household registration, health care and social insurance are centrally linked to the economic reform and transition of 'modernization with Chinese characteristics', alongside Deng Xiaoping's aphorism: 'to get rich'[5] since late 1970s and early 1980s (see Chapter 1). Peasant workers have become a top priority on policy makers' agendas because of a series of social inequality issues associated with their migration to the city, which are also projected as the failure of pre-reform economic development, highlighted by rural poverty. Such awareness has resulted in specific public representations of peasant workers being generated through government reports, the media and art work.

However, 'peasant worker' is a relatively new concept developed in the late 1970s. Of importance, during the past few decades, representations and images of both peasants and workers in China have been an important basis for understanding the historical significance of the formation of the contemporary 'peasant worker'. 'Peasant' and 'worker' have been transformed *from* role models, which were highly positively projected in the Maoist period, when young people from towns were sent to be re-educated by peasants in rural areas, *to* current images of them as unprivileged residents. They have come to represent a sense of 'otherness' in the city, owing to their economic and social status, as marginalized urban dwellers, even though the government acknowledges their central contribution to the modernization project and attempts to enhance their political status and representation.

Gendering from 'old times' to 'new times'

The role of the state is of particular importance in the historical formation of the identity of (male) peasant workers. Peasant, in Chinese, *nongmin* (农民), literally means resident in the agricultural sector, based on Chinese characters: 农 (*nong*),

which refers to agricultural and rural; while 民 (*min*) refers to people. Traditionally, China was an agricultural society and people's lives depended on what they grew to enable self-sufficiency for their families. Peasants continue to constitute the major segment of population in China,[6] even now, within the rural–urban household system. The transformation to post-Mao modernization has also resulted in the terms peasant and worker being retranslated as peasant workers, with accompanying connotations shifting from privileged class groups to urban 'others'.

Mao's privileged peasants and workers

During the civil war before the new People's Republic of China was founded in 1949, peasants were a major military force for the Communist Party to fight for the new China. The Communist Party won the war with the support of peasants and other urban proletarian classes defined by the Communist Party, such as urban industrial workers, who also became a key element of the national constitution of new China in ideologically and politically securing the Party's ruling power. For example, such a privileged political position can be found on the Chinese national flag, the 'Five Stars Red Flag', on which the big star represents the Chinese Communist Party, and the four small stars represent four major social classes within China: workers, peasants, national bourgeoisie and national capitalists. The peasants' and workers' political and social status, alongside the other two classes, are still represented in national political discourse. Fifty years ago during the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese government set up a programme of *Shang Shan Xia Xiang* (Go up to mountain and go down to village), during 1967–78, in which 17 million urban youth were sent to live and work with and to be 're-educated' by the peasants in rural areas (Bernstein, 1977; Zhou and Hou, 1999). Highly positive images of peasants were projected at that time, indicating that they were a privileged social class in China. They were represented as the state's master, who would teach and lead the whole nation to common prosperity (Chen, 2002).

At the same time it is particularly salient in understanding gender issues in terms of masculinity and femininity in the early Maoist period, that the 'gender erasure' of women marked by 'class struggle' and 'masculinization' (Brownell and Wassertrom, 2002) within which 'women were pressured to dress and act like men, but not vice versa' (ibid.:251). It was seen as 'progress' to act like a man, while to act like a woman was labelled as regression (Honig, 2002). Such representations emphasize the privileged social and political status of peasants. Similarly, images of peasants as physically strong and masculine became a model for urban youth to adopt and, in the cities, people at that time felt very proud to be a worker in the factory. Workers were depicted as masters of the country, represented mainly by a group of masculine-like workers. During that period, before the late 1970s, if you had a family member working in a factory, that meant your whole family would be entitled to social security and welfare benefits, as well as high social status recognized within the whole society. My parents informed me

that at that time people tended to pass on their factory jobs to their children, as they were secure with the entitlement of state benefits.

From the late 1970s, peasants started to leave their home to work in non-agricultural sectors[7] following Deng Xiaoping's new economic policy of modernization and development, in light of his political slogan 'to get rich', alongside the reality of rural poverty. However, because of the dual social structure set up by the Household Registration System (*hukou*),[8] their original agricultural *hukou* became an obstacle in the process of moving from rural villages to cities. Within the context of this particular institutional barrier, the notion of peasant worker emerged as a new social category or social class that was associated with urban marginalization. From a historical perspective, peasants' and workers' social status has been falling since the introduction of economic reform. Such changes of meanings and connotations were accompanied by a government discourse of a post-Mao modernization project, in which the idea of 'getting rich' and the neoliberal market economy now dominated the whole nation. Prior (1997:70) argues that

> ... a representation should be understood not as a true and accurate reflection of some aspect of an external world, but as something to be explained and accounted for through the discursive rules and themes that predominate in a particular socio-historical context.

Ideas of modernization, development and getting rich have become the new hegemonic ideology operating within people's lives in the current historical context, which guides people's thinking and seeing and, importantly, the production of knowledge of the peasant worker.

'Peasant worker' as the post-Mao 'hero'

Kam Louie (2002), in theorizing Chinese masculinities, suggests that "ideal masculinity can be either *wen* or *wu* but is at its height when both are present to a high degree" (2002:16), with *wen* associated with the cultural, intellectual, civil and non-physical, while *wu* is associated with the martial, military and physical. His conceptualization of *wu* as one of the characteristics of Chinese masculinities is well represented in images of peasants and workers in the Mao period, as I illustrated above. Such representations, emphasizing images of the 'hero', continue to exist within contemporary political representations of Chinese (male) peasant workers. In such representations they are associated with the notion of *wu*. For example, in 2006, the Chinese Council issued a report on 'Some opinions on resolving the problems faced by peasant workers',[9] which describes peasant workers as

> ... a *new labour army* working in the process of reform and opening-up industrialization, urbanization of our country.
>
> (My emphasis)

Meanwhile, the Chinese State Council launched a report in 2006 entitled 'Research Report on Chinese Migrant Workers',[10] deploying superlative adjectives to describe peasant workers' lives in direct contradiction to their images as an 'army' and 'heroes':

> Peasant workers, or migrant workers get the *lowest* salary, working in the *heaviest, hardest, dirtiest, most tiring, most dangerous* job; meanwhile, they are wearing the *cheapest* clothes, using the *cheapest* goods, eating the *cheapest* food, living in the *cheapest* houses.
>
> (Chinese State Council, 2006b) (My emphasis)

In responding to the government report, state newspapers have produced similar narratives of peasant workers' lives:

> The peasant worker is *an important resource of the new industrial workforce* of our country. It is a *necessary constructional power* in the process of urbanization. This group of people are still in mobility and change at present. Their lives are comparatively hard. Their rights are easily affected. The Party's 17th congress report points out, it is necessary to develop basic democracy to insure people are entitled to more practical democratic rights ...
>
> ('Let the peasant worker participate in the political life of the country' *Workers' Daily*, 25 November 2007)[11]

> From 2003 to 2007, peasant workers' salaries with a total amount of 43.32 billion yuan have been resolved, the situation of salary delay is under control. Deputy Minister of the Labour Ministry said, 'solving the problems of peasant workers is a huge task of social management and public service in our country ... There are also some main issues within the legal rights protection of peasant workers: *low* numbers of labour contracting, *bad* working environment, *long working hours, occupational diseases, work accidents, low salary, delayed salary, low number signing up for social insurance*'.
>
> (*Workers' Daily*, 27 December 2007)[12] (My emphasis)

In such narratives, peasant workers are portrayed as 'a new labour army', who contribute to the success of Chinese neoliberal modernization. The statement has a historical resonance that recalls peasants' and workers' important social political position in new China. Although there is no explicit gender reference regarding male peasant workers in current state narratives, however, the figure of the peasant worker still carries images of peasants and workers with strong *wu* masculine connotations. However, such representations of peasant workers in terms of images of physical labouring are seen as not compatible with the national ideology of modernization or 'getting rich'. Their masculine characteristic of *wu* associated with physical labouring is marginalized and overshadowed by 'money', 'knowledge' and other forms of characteristics associated with *wen* masculinity. Representations of peasant workers in relation to labour or *wu* masculinity generally emphasize inferiority within the material conditions and

hegemonic discourses of the post-Mao modernization period. As the above news commentary states: 'their lives are comparatively hard. Their rights are easily affected'. They are portrayed as the 'labour army' that serves Chinese modernization; while, at the same time, they are officially described as 'unprivileged' without specific legal rights to which their urban counterparts are entitled. Such references as 'occupational diseases', 'low salary' and 'no social insurance' illustrate their low status and subordination in the context of Chinese modernization. Most importantly, socio-economically, they have been subordinated, which is represented by 'wearing the cheapest clothes, using the cheapest goods, eating the cheapest food, living in the cheapest house'.

In general, the above narratives emphasize a contradictory image of peasant workers in the post-Mao society, as both heroic and socially subordinated. A report in a leading state-owned newspaper, the *Workers' Daily*, illustrates that even when peasant workers are portrayed as role models in the media, the images remain problematic and controversial:

> Feng Huijun, a normal peasant worker, donated 63,800 ml blood in the past seven years without reward, which is equivalent to 10 times of the total volume of blood of a human body. His blood is running through countless bodies, *rescued many lives, and saved many happy families.*
>
> (*Workers' Daily*, 22 December 2007)[13] (My emphasis)

The representation of the (male) peasant worker in this story may be read as the Chinese state attempting to construct a masculine 'heroic' image of peasant workers. However, what is paradoxical here is that the image of such a 'hero', who sacrifices his life for others, is not the privileged *wu* masculinity of the pre-reform period, in which peasants were represented as progressive. Rather, located in current material conditions, such representations reinforce their 'otherness' because they cannot demonstrate their modern identity by donating money or other material-based goods but only their blood. In this case, the peasant worker is a signifier of the poor, which does not fit in the materialist-oriented society in transitional Chinese society. His masculine 'heroic' behaviour is not based on his economic ability but on his body. This story suggests the old dominant ideology of the peasant as hero and role model has been reconstituted to symbolize a new mode of masculinity with contradictory meanings. Their masculinity is not self-evidently recognized in contemporary China but discursively constructed by the continuity of the state ideology. However, the more the government emphasizes peasant workers' 'heroic' images, the more they reinforce the image of men outside the current national 'modern' ideology of 'getting rich', progress, and development. In short, within the mainstream dominant discourse of modernization, their marginalized social status has been generated and reinforced in terms of what they are 'not'. Disseminated through state documents and media images, the men's 'heroic' *wu* masculinity is marginalized within the discourse of Chinese post-Mao modernization. In the following sections I further illustrate such marginalization and subordination of these men within public fora.

Peasant workers as low suzhi *migrant 'men'*

Within post-Mao modernization, peasant workers' subordinated status is also due to their low *suzhi*, represented by their low level of educational qualifications. The images of peasant workers are associated with a form of labour that lacks knowledge and skills, which are seen as essential in modern society. Such representations are projected within different forms of public narratives, which resonate with Chinese people's reference to peasant workers as a group of people without 'culture', with strong connotations of 'tradition' and 'backwardness'. (In Chinese, 'culture' means educated, civilized and intellectual.) The following report illustrates how their 'no culture' image affects their working lives as male peasant workers:

> The security department of Songzao Mining Group proposes *redundancy* for a peasant worker, Zhou, as a group leader ... Zhou was selected as the workshop leader of a mining team two months ago, when *he* had been working for only six months. Colleagues think he is down to earth, doesn't mind eating bitterness (hard working) and is willing to help people ... But the security department says they cannot recruit a new peasant worker as the leader of the mining group for security reasons that they *do not have sufficient ability to lead the mining group and ask them to elect a new leader for the workshop*. This decision was opposed by his colleagues, seeing it as discrimination towards peasant workers.
>
> (*Workers' Daily*, 1 November 2007)[14] (My emphasis)

Peasant worker in this case is associated with a range of collective characteristics. Here, we see how these ascribed (male) characteristics are valued by different social groups. To his colleagues, Zhou's characteristics are the basis of trust that they have in him, to choose him as their representative. However, from the Security Department's perspective, these characteristics are interpreted in a negative way as illustrating Zhou's lack of 'modern' qualifications to take up a leadership role. At a broader level, a major issue is the lack of 'positive images' of peasant workers as a key social group in the modernization project. In terms of academic representations, even in gender studies and literature on Chinese internal migration that critique mainstream studies, a positive profile of male peasant workers tends to be absent in these fields of inquiry. However, male images constantly appear in political representations in Chinese government reports and state-owned media. The discursive shift to modernization does not fundamentally change the government's representations of 'peasant' and 'worker', in attempting to politically articulate a positive identity for (male) peasant workers, as significant players in the process of Chinese industrialization and modernization. However, as pointed out above, these representations consist of contradictory elements as both the state-portrayed labour army and a marginalized population. This contradiction within political discourses of (male) peasant workers is the result of the national dominant discourse of the Chinese path to

modernization and urbanization and the simultaneous unbreakable connection to the communist spirit and ideology. Other spectacles of (male) peasant workers are available in the media, which culturally formulate a more complex representation of male peasant workers in the current transitional modern Chinese society, to which I will return in the next section.

Meanwhile, representations of gendered peasant workers in contemporary art and new media technology in 'new times' resonate with dominant government and media discourses narrating the men's low *suzhi*, as well as their status of 'otherness'. On the one hand, within the current discourse of modernization, the rural/urban dualism has provided an institutional language to conceptualize contemporary China and empower the urban to gaze on 'the rural', highlighting the latter's economic marginality in the government discourse of modernization and development. On the other hand, politically, such differences are read as serving to advocate the advantages of a current post-Mao neoliberal modernization project, while highlighting the Maoist failure of rural-based development (Yan, 2003, 2008). Within such different narratives, the meanings of men and masculinity change in relation to the changing meanings of rural and urban in different historical periods.

Current representations of male peasant workers are pervasive across China, associating them with being dirty, involved in hard work, uncivilized and backward. The figure of the peasant worker in the media is assumed to be male, if not specifically referred to as female. This is compatible with government reports on peasant workers which concentrate on males. Such public narratives are of central importance in helping to formulate more complex images that constitute people's understanding of (male) peasant workers. They help to create the 'otherness' of male peasant workers, for example, when people read about them on media platforms, such as newspapers. Peasant workers' masculinities are also constituted through such negative representations. Hall (1997:259) argues that power is understood 'not only in terms of economic exploitation and physical coercion, but also in broader cultural or symbolic terms, including the power to represent someone or something in a certain way – within a certain "regime of representation"'. What I mean by 'negativity' is the way the media deploy a range of dichotomies such as rural/urban and modern/tradition within dominant public narratives, which *emphasizes difference between* peasant workers and established urban dwellers. At the same time, such representations are of importance in stereotyping male peasant workers. This will be illustrated in the following sections.

Peasant workers as problematic gendered others

As I indicate above, peasants and workers as well as peasant workers have been gendered as urban 'others' within post-Mao modernization discourses. Although the government continues to provide positive, albeit contradictory, images of male peasant workers, across popular culture and among established urban residents the major representation is extremely negative. These images inform the government's development policy, with its concern of taking care of these

marginalized people, to enable them to overcome their ascribed characteristics of potential criminality, violence and sexual repression. In so doing, the government claims that male peasant workers will be able to benefit from the opportunities opened up by the modernization project.

Male peasant workers: violence and criminality

Currently, male peasant workers are frequently projected as a group of people with irrational behaviour that serves to suggest their lifestyles are not conducive to a modern urban society. One of South China's main newspapers reported on new peasant workers in terms of 'The worry of the criminals of the new generation of peasant workers':

> Zhu, born in 1984, often surfs pornography web sites. One day, he suddenly got an idea to imitate what he learnt from the internet. He *raped a six year old girl* when he visited his relatives ... Xiaoliang, and another 11 mates *stole cars and motorbikes* during the period of December 2004 and June 2005 ... [editor comments on it:]. No money, no work, which does not necessarily lead to criminal behaviour. There is a 'city dream' behind the phenomenon. The gap between the rural and the urban results in the increase of the desire for material goods for the new migrants.
>
> (*Yangcheng Evening*, 16 April 2008)[15] (My emphasis)

This report is an example of a wide range of representations of male peasant workers that carry tabloid effects in sensationalizing negative images of them. Migrant men are defined by association with criminal behaviour, such as that of thieves, rapists and paedophiles. Such media commentary also often emphasizes urban residents' fears regarding male peasant workers' projected criminal behaviour. While one report represents these men through their criminal behaviour, another report focuses on their inability to challenge institutional discrimination, for example, their action towards unjustified treatment at work:

> On 22nd of July, a labour contractor with thirteen peasant workers in Wuhan had a *fight* with the employer when they were tracing back their salary of more than a hundred thousand Yuan. Five of them were beaten by the security staff, the other nine peasant workers claimed they *would jump from the top of the building if they could not get the money back.*
>
> (NetEase, 23 July 2008)[16] (My emphasis)

Such representations of male peasant workers indicate not only their assumed violence, but also how urban-based commentators construct them as stubborn, suggesting images of low *suzhi*. For example, rather than using legal channels to claim money owed to them, they threaten to commit suicide if they are not paid. On the one hand, they are represented as using illegitimate, irrational (masculine) primitive strength to gain their rights. On the other hand, it reinforces the image

of their relative powerlessness within the discourse of urban modernization. Such different representations of these men within a single report illustrate the complex relations between male peasant workers and urban institutions.

Male peasant workers: the 'sexual' myth

Among the range of negative representations of peasant workers, their health and sexual practices are another major issue in public narratives that contribute to their projected otherness. Public narratives classify them as a group of men who are unhealthy and sexually repressed. With the increasing media visibility of peasant workers, they have become a popular topic for discussion across society. The difference between the representation of male peasant workers and female peasant workers (*dagong mei*) is emphasized on the net. For example, if you search '打工妹 Dagong mei' (female peasant worker) on any online search engine, most of the results are about the vulnerability of *dagong mei* in the city, where they may have been robbed or raped, their difficult experiences of working in the city, their unfair treatment in the city and more significantly, their experience of being an *er nai*[17] in southern urban cities. However, if you input 'male peasant worker' (in Chinese 男性民工), into 'Google' and search, the top ten results are stories and reports that cover the problems of male peasant workers' sex lives. They have been caricatured as a group of men suffering sexual repression, with an assumption that their sexuality cannot be expressed without a satisfactory sex life because of their status of being alone in the city without the company of a wife/partner. The term of 'male peasant worker' has become a popular signifier that has major connotations in relation to prostitution and sexual diseases:

> The 28th of October is the Fourth 'Male Health Day'. The theme of this year is '*Male Health, Scientific Knowledge*' ... The sex life of married and mature peasant workers cannot be fulfilled and some of them are suffering *sexual repression*. Psychological problems are present among these sexually repressed peasant workers for a long time, and causing a series of social issues.
>
> (Xinhua Net,[18] 7 November 2003) (My emphasis)

> 'Their [peasant workers'] *mobility, loneliness, sexual morality, knowledge and the status as visitors* make them easier to be infected and spread HIV/AIDS', according to Jing Jun, director of the HIV/AIDS policy research centre, Tsinghua University... . [He adds] Frequently mobility results in unsettled residency. According to a survey carried out by the Central China Medical University, living places of mobile populations are mainly in rented apartments (50%) and collective dormitories (33%), in addition to long distance emotional relations and insufficient income, it is inevitable that some people become the victims of some *indecent behaviours* (prostitution), which makes them *easier* to be in a situation that is *infected by and distribute HIV/AIDS* ... Peasant workers' *attitude to sex is relatively open*, 1/3 of them expressed they have no problem having sex before marriage, *especially to*

> *those unmarried male peasant workers* ... Their educational level is relatively low. The lack of education results in their lack of knowledge of sexual health. That is why they have become the focused group of HIV/AIDS prevention.
>
> (*Workers' Daily*, 1 December 2007 'Why peasant workers become the focus group to prevent/diagnose HIV/AIDS'?)[19] (My emphasis)

> 'A survey of peasant workers' sexual health in Guangzhou reveals that 10% of *unmarried male peasant workers* have *multiple sexual partners*, 1/4 of whom do not use condoms. Some people name them as the '*origin of* disease'.
>
> (*Yangcheng Evening*, 14 March 2007)[20] (My emphasis)

This is a new media-based gender stereotype of male peasant workers created within contemporary China, which constantly appears in public fora, identified by male peasant workers in my study as a major negative issue for them in living in the city. Barthes (1972) argues that repetition and familiarity legitimize the organization of signifiers in a culture, which become naturalized and valued in what he calls a mythology, which 'does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but of a statement of fact' (Barthes, 2009:269). The dominant media representations that constantly appear in people's daily lives discursively constructs the myth of 'sexually dangerous' male peasant workers. This reflects the unequal power relations within contemporary Chinese society, in which the knowledge of (male) peasant workers has been produced and maintained by urban commentators through elite officials' narratives and representations. Importantly, within the context of the cultural politics of the modernization project, it serves to define the dichotomous notions of the 'urban' and the 'rural', with the former projected as modern and civilized and the latter as backward and inferior. Hall (1997:49) notes that knowledge linked to power can produce a truth. The myth of male peasant workers' sexual health reflects such power relations between them and their urban counterparts. This includes the fact that there are few institutional public spaces to challenge dominant media images. For example, one of my interviewees responded to the media representation of male peasant workers' sex lives in the following way:

> Liu Xiong (35 years old, tricycle rider): It seems that only *dagong zai* (male peasant workers) have sex life problems. There must be some people looking for sex with 'Miss' (prostitute). But it is not all of us ... I work very hard during the day. I am too tired to look for 'Miss' ... There must be more city men looking for 'Miss'. They have money. I don't have money to look for 'Miss'.

In the following chapters I provide evidence from the male peasant workers' narratives of their responses to the negative material conditions that helped shape their dislocation and marginalization within the city. However, there was little

evidence of the working-class men feeling that they could counter the elite representations that were highly pervasive across post-Mao society. Within the national project of modernization and development, peasant workers are ideologically projected as modernization losers. Larrain notes that 'a negative concept of ideology which pretends to know which are the contradictions in society and how they can be truly solved, shares with other "meta-narratives" a totalitarian character: they are not only over-simplifications but also "terroristic" in that they legitimate the suppression of difference' (Lyotard, 1984, cited by Larrain, 1996:63). A lack of social and cultural capital prevented the migrant men from establishing their own media material to challenge the ascribed characteristics of potential criminality, violence and sexual repression.

Living with difference

Within the dominant discourse of modernization and development, rural men are generally categorized as urban 'others', marked by backwardness, lack of education, and violence (physically as well as sexually). In other words, they are ideologically positioned as outside the post-Mao modernization project. A pervasive image of them as uncivilized circulates among established urban residents. During my fieldwork in China in 2007, I interviewed urban citizens, seeking to understand how dominant stereotypes and representations of the men were played out in their interactions with peasant workers.

'Us' and 'them': urban residents and (male) peasant workers

As illustrated above, media representations of male peasant workers tended to be extremely negative. Urban residents' understanding and common-sense conceptions of male peasant workers were mainly shaped by media and political representations of the men. In turn, the residents added another layer of negative stereotyping of the working-class migrants that circulates across Chinese society. Such representations reinforce the fact that the discourse of neoliberal modernization has created a culture and language of 'distinction' for people to differentiate 'us' and 'others'.

INTERVIEWER: Can you tell me about your impression of peasant workers?

YAO YU (27 YEARS OLD, FEMALE, CIVIL SERVANT): er ... *Not very good looking (bushi hen hao kan), dirty (zang), impolite (mei li mao), no culture (mei wen hua)*. (My emphasis)

INTERVIEWER: Why do you have such an impression?

YAO YU: They work on construction sites...

INTERVIEWER: Do you make any distinction between male peasant workers and female peasant workers?

YAO YU: It seems to me that it is unsuitable to call female peasant workers 'peasant workers'. People usually call them *dagong mei* (working sister) ... I believe 'peasant worker' refers to male.

INTERVIEWER: Why?

YAO YU: 'Peasant worker' gives people an impression they do *'Ku Li Huo' heavy physical work* ... So it is strange to call women 'peasant worker'. We call male peasant workers 'dagong zai' (working brother) sometimes. But 'dagong zai' does not necessarily mean peasant worker. But to me, 'peasant worker' refers to a man. (My emphasis)

Yao Yu's understanding of peasant workers resonates with the state's reductionist notion of them as people carrying out heavy, dirty, physical work, which for Yao Yu exclusively defines them. In patriarchal societies such as China, such work is also associated with men rather than women. Therefore, conceptually peasant workers are associated with a range of work-based masculine connotations. Furthermore, the masculinization of peasant workers is reinforced within government discourses, in which they are projected in a more positive way, as a (male) labour army central to the success of the modernization project.

Maintaining 'urban' space and distance from (male) peasant workers

Integration of peasant workers into the city is a central social and political issue for the Chinese government. There is a social hierarchy operating within urban spaces, generated within the current discourse of modernization. Because of their low-skilled jobs, the peasant workers are located at the base of the hierarchy; while at the same time been excluded from other social spaces in which urban modern values are constituted.

WANG LING (49 YEARS OLD, FEMALE, SCHOOL TEACHER): They (male peasant workers) are poor, carrying down rubbish every day in summer like this ... very hot ... I do feel sorry for them ... Some of them are *very rude* ... They have *no culture* (uneducated). The other day, a *waisheng zai* [外省仔, literally refers to men from another province; male peasant workers) pressed the door bell downstairs and said 'open the door, rubbish!' in a very bad manner. I am afraid of them, they have very *bad manners*, like I owe them money ... You can't shout at them, in case they break in when we are away ... Some of them are very *jealous* of rich people in the city, (I think that is why) they are very *rude* to us. I always tell my family to keep the door locked in case they (male peasant workers) come to steal something. (My emphasis)

YING QI (40 YEARS OLD, FEMALE, HOUSEWIFE): There are many *waishengzai* (male peasant workers from other provinces) on the street, *but I never talk to them*. (My emphasis)

INTERVIEWER: Why?

YING QI: Errrr (she shows me a face) They *don't speak our language* ... One day, I asked a *waishengzai* (male migrant worker) to take me to Small Park (a place in the city), I didn't know how to say it in Mandarin, he didn't understand me and I didn't understand him ... He asked me to sit on the bike ... I didn't sit on it. They are *dangerous*, in case they took me to places I don't know and I couldn't jump off of his bike ... I don't want to *cause myself trouble* to talk to them in a different language ... You don't talk to strangers, do you? And they are peasant workers. (My emphasis)

The words italicized are the description of male peasant workers made by an urban female resident; the words highlighted are her reaction to male peasant workers. Based on residential and social spatial segregation between peasant workers and urban residents, as well as the media's pervasive negative representations, established urban residents imagined that male peasant workers were a potential threat to their lives. At the same time, some of the residents were sympathetic to media narratives that the male peasant workers' economic vulnerability had the potential to push them into criminality.

What interests me in such a narrative is urban residents' categorization of male peasant workers, with whom they have little interaction. Labelling them *waisheng zai* is a way to distinguish 'us' from 'them' as outsiders. Such practices resonate with Skeggs' (2005) understanding of the living out of class relations, that 'the middle class comes to "know" its inner city other through an imposed system of infinitely repeatable substitutions and proxies: census tracts, crime statistics, tabloid newspapers and television programmes' (Skeggs, 2005:65). While at the same time, Reay (2007:1192) adds that 'they also come to "know" the working classes through "place-images"'. This resonates with my research findings in which urban dwellers spoke of dangerous 'no-go' areas inhabited by peasant workers. In the narratives, the men are described in terms of being 'rude', having 'no culture', being 'dangerous', 'causing trouble', corresponding with the media narratives of (male) peasant workers that I illustrate above. Such articulation of 'insider/outsider' relations resonates with Finch's (1993:144) understanding of the origin of the concept of working class. She maintains that the concept had no meaning outside middle-class consciousness, with an accompanying discourse providing language, knowledge and power for naming the category of working class. Meanwhile, Ying Qi does not want to try to explain to the peasant worker where she would like to go because they do not speak the same dialect. There are some cultural differences, such as language, that exist between the peasant workers and the urban residents in the Guangdong province. Such language boundaries carry important symbolic capital, resulting in unequal power relations between rural and urban people, especially between people from outside the province and local people.

Urban residents, peasant workers and local language

South China, especially the Guangdong province has become the national pioneer of modernization as a prioritized area of government economic development. This means Guangdong is the centre of capital flows and an important destination for rural migrants to 'get rich'. In the past 20 years Guangdong has attracted more than 19 million peasant workers[21] from other inner provinces, and

accounts for one-third of the total population of peasant workers in the country. Most of them speak different dialects from people in Guangdong.

YU KE (20 YEARS OLD, FEMALE, UNIVERSITY STUDENT): I haven't heard the term male peasant worker, but I know they are called *waisheng zai* [literally means young men from outside the province] here ... (My emphasis)
INTERVIEWER: Could you tell me your impression of *waishengzai*?
YU KE: ... En ... they are poor, doing Kuli ([hard manual work], very rude ... The other day, I saw a group of male peasant workers having a fight on the road, I don't know why. I guess they were fighting for a customer for their service [tri-cycle rider]. They were very *noisy*, like *Po Fu* [泼妇: like a shrew shouting abuse in the street]. (My emphasis)
INTERVIEWER: Why were they like *Po Fu*?
YU KE: It sounds like that. I couldn't understand (their language) what they were shouting about ... very noisy.
INTERVIEWER: Have you ever talked to them?
YU KE: Never. We have a male *zhongdian* worker [hourly paid house cleaner] to clean our home every week, *I never talk to him*. When he needs to work in my room, I move to the other room ... (But) sometimes my mum asks me to *keep an eye on him* occasionally in case he steals something from the house ... My mum sometimes gives them some left-over food. She said they are poor, that they cannot afford food. It is better giving the food to them than throwing it away. (My emphasis)

Alongside the term *waisheng zai*, people in Guangdong also use specific local-based terms to refer to male peasant workers.

SUN YING (26 YEARS OLD, FEMALE, TV EDITOR): We don't call them male peasant workers. We call them *'Lao Tao'* (捞头) or *'Lao B'* (捞B). (My emphasis)
INTERVIEWER: Why?
SUN YING: It is the way we call people who come from other provinces 'Lao Tao' or 'Lao B' ... I think it is because they don't speak Cantonese. They've got very strong accents of the North ... They *look very stupid* so we call them 'lao'. (My emphasis)
INTERVIEWER: How about female migrant workers? Do they have any particular nick names?
SUN YING: As far as I know, we call all peasant workers 'Lao Tao' or 'Lao B'. But it seems that it refers to men. I don't know any other name for women.

The above conversations with Yu Ke and Sun Ying illustrate the important role of a local language in maintaining social distance and accompanying unequal power relations between (male) migrant workers and local residents. For Bourdieu (1991) language has a central capacity to create 'symbolic domination'. For example, according to Thompson (1991:12), 'language creates a cultural habitus, which serves to secure the domination of a ruling class, facilitating a process of symbolic violence upon less powerful individuals or collectivities'. For example, 'Lao B' means slag in Cantonese, which results in peasant workers being named as 'others'. In Chinese Cantonese, *lao*, according to Sun Ying is associated with being primitive, backward, stupid and foolish. 'B' has a colloquial connotation referring to a female's vagina. The term 'Lao B' appears as a cultural signifier used by urban residents to name male peasant workers as culturally different and in the process establish their superiority over people from outside Guangdong. Urban citizens in other cities in Guangdong refer to male peasant workers in their own local ways, such as naming them as 'monkeys'.

Mac an Ghaill and Haywood (2007:30–1) maintain that 'particular social relations in localized contexts enables us to map out the material, cultural and psychic (unconscious) practices and constraints that produce formations of masculinity'. A key concern of this chapter is that in exploring the public gaze and the cultural production of masculinities, we need to address the specificity of the power relations operating within the post-Mao modernization period. Within the hegemonic discourse of modernization, according to Connell (2005), men (and women) are able to position other men in relation to themselves as being in subordinated, complicit or marginalized relationships, within different social contexts and situations. The power relations emanating from the national discourse of modernization are important in defining the position of male peasant workers in the city. Within a Chinese context, the public gaze and the cultural production of working class migrant masculinities is a result of complex sets of interconnecting power relations. According to Mac an Ghaill and Haywood (2007), when we think about power relations, it is important to think about power relations to whom. Song (2004) argues that the formation of a Chinese masculine ideal is not imagined in opposition to women but within a situation where different hierarchies of social and political power operate.

One of the major limitations of structuralist-based accounts of class classification in examining the position of the peasant workers is that they are not able to address the multiple categories of social inequality and cultural difference operating within contemporary societies. In response, adapting new feminist accounts, working within a British Cultural Studies tradition, which suggest the need to focus on the intersectionality of categories, including gender, class and ethnicity, enables us to examine the cultural formation, identity and subjectivity of men and meanings of masculinities (Skeggs, 1997; Reay, 1998) (see Chapters 3 and 4). For example, such an approach opens up our analysis to interpret, in the above extract, the linking of male peasant workers with a colloquial reference to a female's vagina, as part of a broader process of the feminization of the men. This resonates with post-colonial accounts of the deployment of dominant state power to feminize colonial and diasporic men and masculinities (Brah *et al.* 2000; Salih, 2003). In other words, dominant power relations are marked by a discourse of 'internal orientalism' (Schein, 1997), which is of central importance in creating 'otherness' within Chinese modernization.

In addressing the intersectionality of the power relations of the public gaze and cultural production of Chinese working-class masculinities, we might

also explore the western notion of racism. Hall (1992:16) describes how racism works in relation to cultural difference by being 'directed to secure us "over here" and them "over there", to fix each in its appointed species place'. Solinger (1999b) has compared China's rural–urban migrants with ethnic migrants in western societies, such as Germany and Japan. In my study, the 'racialization' of peasant workers also provides a contextual language that facilitates the cultural production of the male peasant workers' masculinity, which locates them in a relatively powerless position within urban settings. As Mac an Ghaill (1999) argues, the reproduction of racial inequalities can help to formulate male identities, in this case, the inequality resulting from the rural/urban – North/South and West/East dualisms.

In terms of living with difference, if the notion of the intersectionality of categories is conceptually productive, as illustrated above, it appears to have less salience politically. I found no sense of a cultural politics emerging that might begin to problematize the pervasive ideological positioning of the male peasant workers by elite commentators and established urban residents. The latter tend to operate within a fixed social world of modernization 'winners' (us) and 'losers' (them). Future research in this area of inquiry might address possible alternative futures for peasant workers, in terms of class mobilization and/or a cultural politics of difference that acknowledges the complex interconnections of multiple power relations.

The need to understand self identities

Many current studies of Chinese rural–urban migration exploring integration and recognition are influenced by the legacy of an economic materialist perspective and the suggested strategies to tackle the problem of overcoming institutional barriers in order to achieve the objective of 'common prosperity' (共同富裕). However, the problem is that they do not acknowledge the diverse experiences of peasant workers within the current socio-economic context, but rather position them as a result of Chinese modernization with a similar stable and fixed life experience (see Wang, 2009). What is underplayed here is the question of identity formation, which cannot simply be read off from the structural or material differences of inhabiting rural/urban, agricultural/non-agricultural contexts. The migrant men's identity formation needs to be historically and culturally contextualized. The modernization project in China is of particular importance. More specifically, this has involved the official reclassification of peasant workers as 'industrial workers', granting them urban citizenship with the aim of integrating them into an urban environment, both politically and ideologically. At the same time, it is intended to construct a new social class even though in reality it has existed for years, subsumed within the dual household registration system and the rural/urban division within the modernization process. The problem is that this recreation of social class no longer entitles them to a privileged social position as it once did in the pre-reform era.

Questions about the recreation of class stratification, raised by rural–urban labour migration have started to emerge in contemporary Chinese society. Within the rural/urban dichotomy in post-Mao China, Solinger (1999b: 456) notes, urban Chinese generally view rural Chinese as 'ethnically distinct', and that country-born Chinese have been excluded from the rights of urban citizenship owing to the *hukou* they hold and the entitlement under this residential identity. They have been discriminated against historically and culturally, particularly since the economic reforms of the late 1970s and early 1980s, with China's entry into the global market and the state's policy of developing selected regions. In more recent years, peasant workers' social insurance, the education of peasant workers' children in the city and health services for peasant workers have increasing visibility on the government's policy-making agenda. In relation to these issues, the main aim here is to minimize discrimination and marginalization experienced by peasant workers, resulting from rural–urban social divisions.

More recent studies tend to propose integrating peasant workers into their urban communities by means of reforming the household registration system, to grant them urban citizenship, or promote 'peasant workers' citizenization' (Liu and Xu, 2007; Jian *et al.*, 2008) in order to remove institutional barriers resulting from rural–urban divisions. For example, a recent policy think tank in China has proposed changing the household registration system, as well as changing the name of 'peasant workers', to integrate them into a new social category as 'industrial workers'.[22] Research, such as that of Jian *et al.* (2008), supports the citizenization of peasant workers, maintaining that it is a fundamental principle of social justice to tackle the issues raised by peasant workers and rural–urban labour migration. However, such research is based on a simple positivist hypothesis that rural–urban migrant workers will gain better living conditions once their collective identity problem has been solved, without addressing the complex interconnecting historical, social, cultural, economic and political elements that help shape current representations. Wang (2009) critically points out that the integration of peasant workers into a general citizenship system may indicate the end of the term 'peasant worker' but not the end of the problems initiated by it. In response to the government initiative, I argue that there are deeper and more complex cultural issues involved, including an urgent need to address the men's self identities. These issues relating to modernity and the modernization project in China, involving continuities and discontinuities in the move from 'old times' to 'new times' (see Chapter 1), have not been fully acknowledged in current research on the formation of this 'ethnically distinct' people (Solinger, 1999b) located within the current historical juncture.

Conclusion

This chapter has critically examined the public gaze and the cultural production of masculinities during the transformation of particular historical contexts. It historically traces the discursive formation of peasant workers from the pre-reform to the post-Mao reform period. It explores shifting and contradictory

representations of Chinese (male) peasant workers within public narratives – government, media and art – in order to problematize their portrayal that circulate across public arenas. Such representations are important in contextualizing rural–urban migrating masculinities projected as gendered others. Within this context of dominant public representations, the chapter also addresses urban residents' perspectives of male peasant workers. Importantly, the chapter explores this public gaze from various sources, highlighting the need to address the unequal power relations operating upon the rural men within their urban encounters. There is a focus on the intersectionality of categories, including gender, class and ethnicity, that enables us to examine the feminization and racialization of migrant working-class men. At the same time, it examines how dominant public understandings of these men contribute to their social stratification, including their social positioning in terms of what the peasant workers are perceived to lack within the dominant discourse of post-Mao modernization.

Alongside this, there are other economic and cultural issues that problematize the official policy on integration. Recent reports can be seen as examples illustrating the complexity of an integration strategy launched by the government, providing evidence that not every peasant worker wishes to obtain urban citizenship.[23] Evidence also reveals some of them have returned home[24] or intend to return home instead of staying on in cities (Murphy, 2002; Ma, 2001). This evidence suggests that the institutional ideology in terms of integrating migrant workers into the urban space does not correspond to their needs. Economic materialist accounts, which fail to address the question of peasant workers' subjectivities are unable to explain why this government policy which appears to be in their economic and social self-interest is resisted by many peasant workers. Therefore, it is important to empirically investigate how and why they position themselves within the discourse of modernization and development, in response to the state's policy of integration. More specifically, it is important to explore whether they can identify with and make sense of modernization and positioning themselves in contemporary Chinese society, as *xiang xia ren* (rural resident) or *cheng li ren* (urbanite), peasant or worker, or an in-between status.

Within the dominant discourse of neoliberal modernization and development, the Chinese government aims to narrow the gap economically between rural and urban citizens, in order to enhance the quality of life of the rural population. Of particular importance in achieving this is the need to address problems of discrimination of rural–urban labour migrants, who are considered to be marginalized in current economic development, by improving the household registration system, housing and social insurance system. However, Zhang (2001:29) criticizes current research on Chinese rural–urban labour migration for being 'obsessed with the question of how to improve the government's techniques to regulate rural migrants'. Her criticism of this dominant positivist research tradition raises the issue of the need to address peasant workers' subjectivities and their meanings in order to understand their responses and how they make sense of themselves in modern urban spaces, located within a rapidly changing contemporary Chinese society. More recently, the question of subjectivity and

identity in the process of rural–urban migration has also emerged in social research with a focus on female subjectivities and identity formation, such as Pun's (2005) work on Chinese *dagong mei* (working girls), addressing their agency and individual self formation in modern Chinese urban space, Yan's (2008) ethnographic study of female rural domestic workers (*baomu*) in Beijing and Jacka's (2006) ethnographic study of rural women in urban China.

3 Leaving home and being a 'filial son'

Freedom is
Running from my door
on a dark night
Pounding through the streets
in the lamplight
Striding in a wind
on the green hill
Trading secret paths
through the wild flowers
Fears falling fast
far behind me.

[...]

...This freedom is
Impossible
You are not allowed
Nor allow yourself.
Running?
Standing so free?
Imagine!

R. Johnson (1996:95)

Introduction

Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) acknowledges the problem of the conceptualization of gender in the current literature on gender and migration:

> While the immigration literature underscores the importance of these social networks, insofar as they provide important resources and connections, most of the literature either ignores the gender-based character of these networks or assumes that male-dominated immigrant networks are natural and do not need further inquiry.
>
> (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994:7).

This is still a dominant assumption in current literature on gender and rural–urban labour migration in China, with the emphasis on women and femininity and accounts of men and masculinity absent. Willis and Yeoh (2000: xv) maintain that gender relations can be renegotiated in new contextual spaces provided by a new location of migration. Such renegotiation of gender relations is of importance in rethinking contemporary patriarchal society. Current research in this field of analysis, deploying structuralist accounts of patriarchy, continues to be of central importance in a contemporary Chinese context. However, an unintended effect of such research may be that by 'emphasizing wider social structures of oppression that determine the position of men, these accounts tend to marginalize men's subjectivities' (Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, 2003:11).

Although mainstream gender and migration studies criticize current migration studies as 'gender blind' and 'male dominated' (Wright, 1995; Chant, 1992), research on Chinese male migrants is absent from current literature on Chinese rural–urban labour migration. Most work in this field adopts a structuralist and statistical perspective, attempting to capture the 'reality' of a post-Mao class-based society. However, recent analysis of female migrant workers has provided important accounts of gender experience through the lens of feminism. The latter work focusing on Chinese female peasant workers' experiences highlights the dynamics of gender inequality within contemporary society, emphasizing women's vulnerable social economic position as well as the (re)construction of female subjectivities in the process of internal migration. However, even though these scholars locate their projects within a poststructural position, they do not escape the theoretical and political influence of second-wave feminists' standpoint epistemology of the general subordination of women by men in a patriarchal society.

In the above work, male peasant workers, although not explicitly addressed in gender terms, tend be seen as occupying a relatively more powerful gender position in Chinese patriarchal society. This reflects conventional thinking in China, with the concept of gender assumed to be associated with women, while men are not perceived to be gendered. In other words, men's narratives, especially rural men's accounts of their experiences of internal migration have been taken for granted and their voices have been absent in mainstream studies of gender and migration. Hence, there is only one dimension of men's lives highlighted in the process of rural–urban labour migration, which, according to the logic of current research, is that of gender privilege. However, as Kimmel (1987) argues, gender is socially constructed within a historical context of gender relations, with definitions of masculinity responding relationally to changing definitions of femininity. The (re)construction of masculinities among Chinese male peasant workers is influenced by the (re)construction of Chinese female migrant workers' femininities. Therefore, men's subjectivities also become unstable with changes in women's experiences at a time of social and cultural transformations. Mac an Ghaill and Haywood (2007) maintain the importance of studying men and masculinity in gender studies, which challenges the conventional perspective of only marking women as gender beings. They argue that:'Analysing men as a politically gendered

category removes it from its normative location as transparent, neutral and disembodied' (Mac an Ghaill and Haywood, 2007:29).

Although current literature on female migrant workers cannot provide a comprehensive explanation of male peasant workers' lives, it has provided a productive analytical framework to critically explore men's experiences in this process, particularly in relation to their family connections and workplace social relations and their response to material-based social stratification within contemporary Chinese society. However, what remains absent is a systematic exploration of Chinese male peasant workers located within the current transitional era of rapid global change, of a state communist party and a market economy-oriented modernization, alongside men's own accounts of their experiences and understandings of their relocated lives in cities.

Chinese government officials and academics have shown increasing concern about the current and future status of migrating peasant workers. However, we know little about migrating male peasant workers' own responses to current state-sponsored rapid socio-economic changes. There are tensions between what they are expected to do by the state as 'modern' political subjects and how they manage to live out their new identity, as they are also living within a traditional familial society, where men's duties are explicitly defined. In other words, there is a tension between the two structures of 'old times' and 'new times', as well as a tension between social expectations outlined by the state and how this is lived out at a local level, within specific households and workplaces. I argue that there is a gap in the current literature that is failing to address these tensions, which I believe is important to critically investigate in order to develop a more sophisticated understanding of this new social category in contemporary China. In order to understand their self positioning in society, we need to examine the lives of peasant workers at both a structural level, emphasizing the society's modernization project (more specifically the transition from Mao's socialist modernization to post-Mao socialist modernization), and at an individual level, how peasant workers accommodate themselves within this process of modernization, mediated through their local experiences of rapid global change. Willis (2000[1977]:173) suggests that 'cultural forms provide the materials towards, and the immediate context of, the construction of subjectivities and the confirmation of identity'. In this study, a structural account of rural–urban labour migration is complemented by an examination of cultural practices, emphasizing a *constrained* individual and collective agency lived out by *creative* migrating male peasant workers.

Migration, freedom and gender responsibilities

In Chapter 2, I presented contemporary public representations of male peasant workers that portrayed them in highly negative images as 'modernization losers'. A main aim of the later chapters is to explore the men's self-representations. There is a tendency in the literature on migration to focus on the public world of peasant workers' lives, for example, in relation to workplace, housing and civil

society. I follow a similar pattern in Chapter 4 that explores the participation and identity formation of male peasant workers within urban workplaces. However, this emphasis on public domains in the literature on migration serves to capture spaces that are traditionally ascribed to men's lives. What are excluded in this masculinizing process are the ascribed feminine domains of 'private spaces'. In response, this chapter investigates masculine identity formation in relation to their family lives. Their narratives allow access to a more intimate world of male peasant workers' experience of rural–urban labour migration, such as their emotional connection with their families. I suggest that traditional gender values associated with the patriarchal family, in terms of gender roles and responsibilities are lived out by these men in modern Chinese society even though migration has changed the family structure. More specifically, a central argument of the chapter is that reworked familial practices and traditional gender values have become important resources in the construction of the men's identities that serve to sustain their families in new and difficult material conditions. The men's sense of dislocation in the city is most visibly expressed in relation to their separation from their rural-based families. The chapter specifically focuses upon the gendering of this dislocation, in terms of the men's need to reinvent their relational gendered selves, as husbands/partners, fathers and sons. This critical perspective captures the major limitations of public representations that reductively position these men as 'modernization losers'.

Jacka's (1997, 2005, 2006) anthropological work on Chinese rural migrant women, while claiming the importance of recognizing rural women's agency, suggests that their experience in modern space through rural–urban labour migration may 'cement the bonds of kinship and reinforce tradition' (Jacka, 1997:139). In other words, traditional gender roles are reinscribed in the construction of these women's subjectivities. In her later research on rural women in urban China, Jacka (2006) provides an ethnographic study with a dynamic account of rural migrant women's urban lived experience as well as changing gender relations in this process. She explores their identity formation through the narratives of their lived experiences, in terms of responding to the new positions and values opened up by this geographical relocation from the rural to the urban, associated with the transformation from tradition to modernity.

Jacka maintains that 'explicit identification based on gender plays a very minor role in migrant women's representation of their identities and experience' (Jacka, 2006:223). Rather, in their narratives, the process of their identification is primarily through their relations with other people. I would argue that these social relations are explicitly gendered, if we locate them in a Chinese context, acknowledging the centrality of familial relations involving motherhood, sisterhood, being a wife/partner, and so on. In her discussion, she argues that rural women are absorbing new values in modern spaces, however, their responses to these changing values is 'not a shift from rural to urban, but a furthering of rural values' (ibid.:249), as traditional gender values as mothers, wives and daughter-in-laws are orienting their decisions and behaviour. She observes that these migrant women continue to maintain close contact with their rural families even though

they are against the traditional patriarchal culture in their rural village. Jacka (2005) also suggests that

> ... men may be more inclined to view migration as a way of fulfilling their obligations as a family breadwinner, whereas young women may feel those obligations less strongly and may therefore be relatively 'free' to pursue more individually oriented goals.
>
> (Jacka, 2005:61)

Her comment is of particular importance in understanding changing gender relations in the process of modernization and rural–urban migration. In migrating to cities, working-class men found that they were physically dislocated from their rural environments, where gender roles and responsibilities were precisely prescribed, to a modern urban space, where gender practices and responsibilities had to be negotiated without the physical presence of one's partner and family. For these men, rural–urban labour migration was a process of moving from a place where their gendered familial identity entitled them to a position of power, to a modern space where their domestic masculine identities were unstable. This instability in family life was one of the main issues raised by male peasant workers about the impact of migration on their everyday lives. For some men it was a path that enabled them to escape traditional gender obligations and responsibilities. However, as an integral part of society, especially in a traditional society such as China, the family continued to be seen as a central element of their habitus in all of the men's lives (Skeggs, 1997).

Within a Chinese context, female peasant workers have challenged the configuration of gender relations both inside and outside their rural families, as has been illustrated by Jacka (1997). More generally, for feminist research, a key change, resulting from a global modernity-based labour migration to find work in urban settings has been to empower women to challenge pre-existing gender relations in patriarchal Chinese society (see Davin, 1996; Murphy, 2004). In the literature, the discussion of gender equality and potential benefits for women has become central in relation to internal labour migration and family relations. However, what tends to be absent is that social relations within the family for male peasant workers are also changing, primarily due to their absence from their rural families. Hence, gender relations from a male perspective are also under challenge and require renegotiation. To what extent working-class men and masculinities within the context of traditional rural families have been challenged and (re)constructed in the process of rural–urban labour migration and how this process of movement reconstitutes familial gender relations is what I investigate in this chapter.

Western literature on gender and the family, such as Morgan (1996, 2001), argues that family is a set of social interactions that take place between gendered individuals. Within these interactions, individual subjects are constituted within the family, while at the same time social relations are performed through gender relations in family practices. Smart and Neale (1999:21) comment on Morgan's (1996) notion of 'family practice', claiming that it emphasizes fluidity of family

relationships which 'allow us to conceptualize how family "practices" overlap with other social practices (e.g., gendering practices, economic practices and so on)'. Of importance, such emphasis on practice can provide a critical understanding of meanings of masculinity and femininity in family relations.

Located within a Chinese context, family is a key analytical area of inquiry within the literature on gender and migration (Li, 2001; Yao, 2001; Gaetano and Jacka, 2004). The high rate of rural–urban labour migration does not only result in high mobility of the rural population and a mass relocation of rural families, but also the dislocation of gender roles and practices, as indicated by emerging social issues involving the absence of fathers, husbands/partners and sons. Meanwhile, some studies have shown evidence that gender relations are becoming more equal in the process of rural–urban labour migration. For example, Gaetano and Jacka (2004) maintain that internal labour migration empowers rural women by providing autonomy from a patriarchal familial culture. However, men's absence from rural families means their masculinities emanating from their family relations are being relocated from the spaces where their male responsibilities are possibly (dis)located, to new urban spaces where they need to (re)construct their masculinities to adjust to emerging new social relations. During my research I found that although peasant workers were away from their rural households, in their narratives about their experience in the process of migration, they constantly referred to connections to their family, to which they were still strongly attached and which they claimed helped them to maintain and reshape their identities in the city. Family has become a key institution of (re)constituting migrating masculinities for Chinese male peasant workers regardless of geographical origins and age differences. Life changing experiences were reported by nearly all the male peasant workers I interviewed, either negatively, in terms of losing their authority by being absent from their rural family, or positively, by providing opportunities to construct more open and mobile masculinities for young male peasant workers. In response to these narratives, the chapter seeks to investigate a key absence in the literature, the relation between family and the (re)construction of male subjectivities in the process of migration.

Through the analysis of the data from the fieldwork, this chapter explores the gendered and classed habitus (i.e. relational gender identities), emanating from their family lives in their current material locations, which constituted one of the major themes in my interviews with them (Skeggs, 1997; Krais, 2006). It sets out to explore how working-class masculinities have been (re)constructed and how the meanings of practices have been redefined, given the changing family structure accompanying migration. I will critically explore the dynamics in the social and cultural formations of masculinities, in relation to the male peasant workers' narratives about how they negotiate and (re)construct their domestic masculine identities in new urban spaces. It also aims to illustrate diverse accounts in terms of masculine identity formation from different age groups. By the end of the chapter, I hope to have illustrated through their narratives a highly complex process (economic, cultural, as well as psychological) of the constitution of their migrating masculine identities.

Men, rural families and the dislocation of gender practices during migration

Family, in Chinese translation – *jia*, is the basic social group in rural China, as acknowledged by anthropologists and sociologists (see Fei, 2008). Fei (2008) defines the family in rural China as 'an expanded family':

> A *Chia* [same as *jia*] is essentially a family but it sometimes includes children even when they have grown and married. Sometimes it also includes some relatively remote patrilineal kinsmen.
>
> (Fei, 2008:27)

According to Fei (2008), the 'parent–child' and the 'husband–wife' relationships are the two axes in the Chinese family marked by patriarchy based on the Confucian gender order. Within the *jia*, men's practices in terms of their domestic gender role plays an integral element in the construction of masculine subjectivities, which were acknowledged by nearly all the male peasant workers I interviewed. For example, they began their life histories by talking about their obligations as 'the pillar of the house' or 'the master of the home' to their families. This was understood as the primary motivation for moving to work in the city, in order to support their rural family who often experienced poverty. In contrast, more recently, research from women's accounts on gender in rural Chinese families has been predominantly concerned with unequal gender relations (Jacka, 1997; Matthews and Nee, 2000), highlighting the privileged domination of men's roles and the rigid gender norms operating within the family, marked by patriarchy, filial responsibility and patrimonialism, according to Confucian tradition.

Traditionally, patriarchy is primarily represented by men's roles as fathers, and particularly the oldest man of the family, which is of central importance in contextualizing the meaning of masculinities for migrating men (Chu, 1961). The father is seen as a dominant authority figure with highly prescribed paternal practices in relation to other family members. Men's social practices, in terms of their familial gender roles and responsibilities form an integral element in the construction of masculine subjectivities, which were acknowledged by nearly all the migrant men I interviewed. Such gender power relations resonate with Connell's (2005:77) concept of 'hegemonic masculinity', which is understood as 'the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women' (also see Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). However, as Mac an Ghaill (1996:122) notes, different masculinities are constructed in the 'complex interconnections of different sets of power relations in the production of sex/gender subjectivities'.

Filial piety has been a central cultural norm in understanding the patriarchal power relations and extended gendered relations within Chinese families. Hwang (1999:169) understands that 'the Confucian idea of filial piety is constructed on the simple fact that one's body exists solely because of one's parents. In fact, Confucians conceptualized family members as one body'. He maintains that 'in addition to the authoritarian moralism of respecting the superior, filial piety also consists of an affective component emphasizing the intimacy between parents and children' (Hwang, 1999:179). Research on filial piety has also suggested that the concept has developed and modified, as a result of socio-economic changes in an East-Asian context that have impacted upon education, employment and shifting family structures. Hwang (1999) referring to Yang's (1988) review of 'Chinese Familism', suggests that the culture of the family remains unchanged despite the changing power relations within the four aspects of the family: 'the father/son axis, hierarchical power structure, mutual dependence, and dominance of family interaction' (Hwang, 1999:179). Furthermore, in the context of a rapidly changing society, the Chinese government urges people to adopt a modern understanding and practice of filial piety,[1] and to 'show suitable gratitude and respect to their mothers and fathers' (Branigan, 2012:20). Meanwhile, such suggested changing practices of filial piety is also impacting upon other gendered practices within familial relations in modern Chinese families, of being a father, son, mother and daughter.

I argue in this book that alongside the changing role of women in Chinese society in the past 20 years owing to economic reform, men, as the other gender group, are also encountering significant change during this transformation period. Michael Kimmel (1996) notes, 'by gender I mean the sets of cultural meanings and prescriptions that each culture attaches to one's biological sex' (Kimmel, 1996:2). Family in traditional Chinese culture has tended to be highly gendered with clearly prescribed meanings and prescriptions for women and men. A focus on migrating working-class men and masculinities in relation to the private domain of the family may serve to support feminist research in further denaturalizing the taken-for-granted assumptions about current gendered divisions in the changing rural household.

Gendered work and responsibility within the rural family

The traditional model of a Chinese rural family is 'man for the field and woman for the needle' or 'men plough, women weave' (Jacka, 1997:25 男耕女织). Representing men's work in terms of the plough with its associated meaning of outdoors and masculinity cannot exist without its opposite, women's work represented as weaving and its association with indoors and femininity. Jacka (1997) captures the gender divisions of labour in rural China as a structured series of binaries: 'inside'/'outside', 'private'/'public' and 'light'/'heavy'. She notes that 'the Confucian ideal of women being confined to the "inside" sphere of family and home contributed to a division of labour, such that domestic work was largely done by the women of the family, or in households of the gentry, by female servants' (ibid.:22). Therefore, men in this context were associated with public labour (outside), while women occupied the opposite domain. Being a man in rural China

was about responsibility and the ability to carry out such responsibility. Such responsibility was relational to the needs of women and to other family members. In turn, it has privileged men's position within the traditional family structure.

Alongside men's key role in the family as financial provider and 'pillar of the house', which has been seen as privileging them in the familial gender structure, they also have the responsibility of passing on the family name and taking care of parents when they are old – as a 'filial son'. This domestic responsibility is accompanied by a cultural assumption of men's supremacy within the traditional gender order. This is reflected through the preference for a son rather than a daughter, as exemplified in the saying, 'more sons, more fortune' (多子多福) or 'to bring up a son for the purpose of being looked after in old age' (养儿防老), which exemplifies the traditional familial gender ideology in China. Men's role in the family is highly prescribed within Chinese society. Arnold and Liu (1986:226) point out that 'traditionally, sons in China were considered advantageous for two economic reasons: support for their parents in old age and the provision of labour for the farm or family business'. The preference for a son rather than a daughter suggests the cultural expectation of the responsibility that men must take in the family. The responsibility of being a privileged gender in the family is legitimated primarily through their ascribed need to act as the 'financial supplier' of the family; a gender obligation that is culturally authorized on the grounds of ensuring social and gender order. That is, there are cultural as well as economic reasons that men occupy a relatively advantaged position in the family from which dominant meanings of masculinity and femininity can be identified.

The relational gender order within the rural family

The working-class men I interviewed have grown up believing that women were responsible for taking care of their wives/partners, children and parents-in-law. 'Marry a cockerel and follow a cockerel, marry a dog and follow a dog – throw in one's lot with one's husband' (嫁鸡随鸡, 嫁狗随狗) spelt out the gender order in traditional Chinese culture, with women dependent on their fathers before their marriage, on their husbands after marriage and on their sons when they are old. The peasant workers inhabited a social world where until recently there was a rigid gender order within traditional Chinese culture, as indicated above, where men and women were assigned to their relational gendered positions within family relations. Ideals of masculinity and femininity are located within Confucian social relations of the family and other social institutions, within which men's position is generally projected over that of women (Louie, 2002:10). This resonates with Connell's (1993: 601) understanding of masculinity as men's places and practices in gender relations that 'are symbolically represented and constructed in men's life course'.

At the same time, studies on gender and migration, such as Jacka's (1997), argue that gender relations in terms of power are not a pre-given phenomenon within specific places and are not fixed within a Chinese context. As she maintains, rather than accepting the presumption of a single meaning offered by a structuralist approach, researchers need to draw on post-structuralism and to 'ask *how*, that is through what social processes and relations of power, meanings and values are acquired in specific societies at specific times, and how those meanings and values change' (ibid.: 18). In other words, she believes familial gender divisions are open to change within different historical periods and places. Indeed, contemporary experience of rural–urban labour migration provides opportunities for women to challenge pre-existing gender norms, as feminist studies have illustrated. In turn, this challenge to pre-existing gender norms within rural areas also affects men, who face complex changes and challenges within this process, in terms of the formation of their working-class masculinity and a shifting male role (Savage, 2005).

With reference to men and the family, the notion of 'father–son' relations in China, which is influenced by traditional Confucian philosophy, is of key importance in understanding Chinese familial gender relations and gender hierarchy and it is particularly important in defining Chinese familial masculinities (the gendered habitus). For example, 'father–son' relations have a great impact upon gender relations in traditional Chinese culture in terms of social hierarchy. Such a metaphor is applied extensively to broader social and gender hierarchies within society. Zhao (2007:2) theorizes the privileged position of men in the family from a Confucian perspective, within which gender norms in relation to kinship contributes to the patriarchal gender relations within China that have been criticized by feminist analysis. However, Zhao (ibid.) also notes the central material and symbolic significance of 'father–son' relations within Chinese kinship to the wider society:

> In Confucian society, the kinship family is the cornerstone of society because, in the traditional Confucian mind, society is itself an enlarged family and the family is in turn a miniature society. Therefore, the ruler and the father are endowed with the same function; the king in his country and the father in his home hold the same position.
>
> (Zhao, 2007:2)

Meanwhile, Fei (1992) argues that in traditional agricultural societies, such as China, collective needs are important to the survival of individuals, represented by the central role of the family in people's lives. Given this specific cultural meaning, men's privileged position in terms of relational gender roles in the family is also subject to potential change, when people are faced with the collective benefit of the survival of the family, which is currently experienced by the peasant workers in the context of the modernization project and its accompanying rapid socio-economic and cultural changes. This essential value associated with the welfare of the family within Chinese culture is of importance for individuals to make sense of themselves in relational terms. Later in the chapter I explore the impact of the modernization project as played out in terms of the rural–urban migration in transforming men's relational role and position in the family and ask

whether it serves to challenge stereotypical gender roles and meanings within traditional Chinese familial culture.

In summary, the issue of rural–urban labour migration is conventionally understood primarily as an economically motivated behaviour, resulting in male peasant workers migrating to work in local cities; while at the same time public representations of these men's roles in the family are projected as having been dislocated within this process of geographical movement. The working-class men's self-representations, captured in my recorded life histories alongside participant observation, presented more complex, multi-layered accounts. I found that the men maintained strong links with their rural families, as they had internalized the traditional cultural expectation that 'the man of the house' should support the economic welfare of their families. At the same time, social practices in relation to their family life as a central element of their habitus had become a major resource in the construction of their urban masculine identities, associated with the dislocation of their rural-based pre-migration masculinities (Lawler, 2008; Krais and William, 2000). Such geographical relocation has led to potential changes, as well as a series of conflicts and contradictions that challenged the (re)construction of rural men's survival masculinities in urban spaces.

Familial relations and migrating working-class masculine identities

Classical 'push–pull' economic theories of migration are no longer sufficient in making sense of Chinese male peasant workers' motivations and experiences. Earlier during my fieldwork in China, as indicated above, I found that the male peasant workers were conscious about their gendered responsibilities and practices in relation to family life, which served as a centrally important cultural resource in their masculine identity formation. In this section I categorize their narratives into two main themes – 'male peasant workers and their migrating urban families' and 'male peasant workers and their "left-behind" rural families'. The narratives were analysed in terms of their family-related relational gender roles, with reference to being husbands/partners, fathers, sons, and brothers and across different generations, in order to map out the complex performance and enactment of masculine identity formation within family life. More specifically, this section aims to capture the complex interplay between continuities and discontinuities of familial gender relations in the formation of male peasant workers' experiences of dislocated urban masculinities (McNay, 2008).

Male peasant workers and their migrating urban families

I start by focusing on male peasant workers' identity formation through an investigation of familial gender practices within their new constituted urban families. This will provide a more comprehensive and critical understanding of the changing gender order and accompanying gender relations with reference to emerging working-class domestic masculinities.

Family reunification: reconstructing the gender order

Connell (1987:98–9) defines gender order as 'a historically constructed pattern of power relations between men and women and definitions of femininity and masculinity'. Research has suggested the 'agriculturalization of females' (Gao, 1994) or 'agricultural feminization' (Song and Zhang, 2004), as a result of outgoing male peasant workers resulting in 'female-dominated' villages. Feminist accounts of 'rural women being left behind' have argued that it has the potential to be an empowering process that provides opportunities for women to be independent from their families. This structurally-based social and gendered change within rural families has intensified with the rapid increase in migrant women. In my research I found that as more rural women went to work in the city, some of their 'left-behind' husbands and partners (male peasant workers) followed in their wives' footsteps to join them in the city.

Once they marry, women tend to join their husbands in the city. This is seen as maintaining the traditional gender order within Chinese society, illustrating women's dependence on men. However, as the practice of migration among rural women increases, feminist research suggests that a more complex gender dynamics is emerging, in terms of family practices, with rural women being away from their fathers, husbands/partners (see Jacka, 1997; Whyte, 1992). This new social phenomenon resonates with western feminist research on changes in the household and familial gender relations. For example, Walby (1990) argues that:

> Women are no longer necessarily bound to an individual husband who expropriates their labour till death does them part . . . Women spend a smaller proportion of their life-time's labour under patriarchal relations of production, although while they are full-time housewives they spend many hours on this labour as did women many decades earlier.
>
> (Walby, 1990:89).

Such changes of gender relations with reference to women also impact on men. The data I collected reveals that rural men in contemporary Chinese society were willing to make compromises within a traditional gender order in exchange for the opportunity to unite the family unit, which appeared to them as extremely dysfunctional when they lived away from their rural-based families. For example, some of them have challenged the existing gender order by following their wives to work and live in the city. In this process, they have had to renegotiate the meanings of traditional gender norms in response to existing material conditions, involving both familial formation and an economic rationale.

Lao Tang (48 years old) was a domestic household cleaner. Three years ago, he gave up his relatively well-paid job in the construction sector to work with his

family in Shantou. While discussing the reason for coming to work here, he also suggested how he felt he had to compromise his masculinity status in relation to his family and (re)construct his masculine identity in the urban space.

INTERVIEWER: Why did you decide to move to Shantou?

LAO TANG: (I came here for) my wife and my daughter ... My daughter was the first person who came here, then my wife. I am the last person who came here ... They said it was easy to make money here. And I think it would be better being together with your family. They said it is good to work here ... I am getting old ... and I don't think I can do building work anymore soon.

INTERVIEWER: But you couldn't earn much money...

LAO TANG: No, I couldn't find a job here at the beginning, so I started to work with my wife and daughter ... People think it is 'mei chu xi' [good for nothing, not promising] staying with your wife when I was at the old home.

INTERVIEWER: Why?

LAO TANG: It is not like a family if the 'yi jia zhi zhu' (master of the family) is not around so I decided to move in with my family. It is hard to be a father and husband when you are working away from home. You need to earn money.

A number of male peasant workers' narratives resonated with Lao Tang's account. Economic conditions have been a central element in changing the conventional gender order within peasant workers' families. Lao Tang gave up his relatively high-waged job to move to live with his family in order to sustain his wife's and daughter's good jobs in Shantou. In so doing, he inverted the traditional social practice of women moving to the location where men were working. His comments revealed his subordinated status within an emerging neoliberal market economy, with a real sense that the traditional understanding of masculinity has been dislocated and marginalized within the dominant modernization discourse of economic progress. In this case, men such as Lao Tang appear not to be in control of their families, as would have been normal for their fathers' generation. The patriarchal gender order in terms of female dependence on men became less visible within the male peasant workers' narratives with similar experiences to Lao Tang.

Meanwhile, the city provides a space in which new gendered conditions are deployed as a major resource to (re)construct their masculine identities, as husbands/partners and fathers, and in this process reassert a patriarchal stance. For example, for Lao Tang, as a new arrival without any contacts, he could not find a job in the city. Without social contacts, in other words, social capital, which is much needed by peasant workers for networking, he had to rely on his wife's and daughter's networking skills to introduce him to potential employers. This resulted in his working with his wife and daughter as a domestic house cleaner. In other words, they became the centre of his networking and a resource for (re) constructing his self identity in their life together in the city. Therefore, Lao Tang had to negotiate his masculine identity by moving from his rural home and accompanying extended family to live with his wife and daughter, as well as

accommodating himself within the urban workplace, while being conscious of a sense of failure for being dependent on his wife and working in a traditional female-dominated occupation. (I will discuss this further in relation to work and masculinity in the next chapter, exploring how he negotiated and constructed his identity in a non-traditional male job as a domestic cleaner.) More broadly, his life-history account raises questions about the emergence of an unstable patriarchal gender regime, operating during the process of internal migration within a contemporary 'modern' urban-based China. For men like Lao Tang the major paradox was that their work relied on the networking of their female family members, as they became the 'followers' and 'dependants' in the family unit, while at the same time this enabled them culturally and symbolically to remain the 'master' of the family. The male peasant workers' narratives highlight the complexity of such processes of (re)constructing masculine identities that help them to deal with the contemporary situation in which the traditional gender order has rapidly changed in the process of migration.

It is important to note also that the continuity of tradition within a context of changing social practices, in terms of men fulfilling their relational gender roles as husbands/partners and fathers in urban social contexts, is important in maintaining family life, which as pointed out above continues to be of central significance in the gendered habitus of the day-to-day lives of Chinese people (Lawler, 2008). Urban family life for male peasant workers, both female and male, challenges the traditional notion of the rural family. The emergence of female peasant workers has empowered women to take the lead in the maintenance and reproduction of the family. As the men in my study claim: 'men now follow in their wives' footsteps to work in the city', in order to maintain the harmony and unity of families and develop better futures for their children. The men commented on how housework was no longer a gendered task partly because of the demands of their families' relatively high-paced life-style. Men were no longer the only economic 'bread winner'; however, symbolically, the cultural stereotype of being the head of the family for the sake of the welfare of the family was still in place. Hence, they reported the need to sacrifice their culturally inherited traditional male dignity by moving with their families and working in undesirable jobs, as a result of both economic and cultural demands. I will discuss this further in the next chapter, focusing on masculinities and work.

(Re)constituting 'relational men' through new family work

Most of the work on gender and migration has focused on women's experiences. Theoretically, this is partly a result of the significance of feminist research in addressing contemporary gender issues (Pun, 2005; Jacka, 2006; Yan, 2008). Politically, this work is of major importance given the gendered exploitation of female peasant workers in Chinese patriarchal society. An unintended effect of this focus is not only that men and masculinity have been under-researched. Equally important, the gendering of family dynamics also tends to be under-theorized

within the literature. More specifically, the complexity of shifting interpersonal and inter-generational gendered relations needs to be addressed.

Lao Tang's account above also illustrates the adjustment of inter-personal relations among migrating family members in the city. Many male peasant workers revealed that they needed to adopt new familial roles and gender practices that contested the traditional rural binary division that associated men with work outside (in the field) and women with work inside (the home). These new familial roles served as important resources in the (re)construction of their relational gender identity. Such practices which broke with tradition were located within the specific material conditions operating within the process of migration. For example, the men claimed that as a result of both husbands/partners and wives needing to work outside the home, they had to do a greater share of domestic work that used to be allocated to women. However, it did not seem like an obligation and responsibility, but rather new gender meanings were developed and lived out through new domestic practices, through which they made sense of their relational masculine identities as husband/partner, son and father in the material location of modern urban spaces.

Of importance, for example, for a younger generation, such as Xiao Cai (20 years old), who worked with his parents in Shantou was that his new domestic responsibilities had given him a sense of his position within the family as a sensible son. He and his parents did not work at the same place as some other families did. He worked during normal hours from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. at a chemical factory. However, his parents worked different shifts. His father, as a security guard, needed to work nights. His mother worked in a garment factory where she finished at eight in the evening. Hence, as a member of a working-class family who could not afford to employ a domestic, Xiao Cai took responsibility for cooking the dinner after his paid work and collected his mother from work at night.

XIAO CAI: My father's work is like 24 hours, sometimes he just stays there at night. I don't usually need to cook for him ... Everyday I go to the market after work to get some food and to cook the dinner. And then I pick up my mother from the factory by bike.

INTERVIEWER: Why do you need to pick up your mum?

XIAO CAI: Because it is too late at night, it is not safe for her to come home alone. My father does it (pick up my mother) when he does not need to work.

INTERVIEWER: Do you do all the house work?

XIAO CAI: Most of it during the week. My mum does it at the weekend when she is off work.

INTERVIEWER: How do you feel doing all this?

XIAO CAI: There must be someone doing the cooking and housework if your family are all at work ... my working hours allow me to help my parents.

INTERVIEWER: Do you give your wages to your parents?

XIAO CAI: Yes, I give some to my mum. The rest is spent on family needs, like water, electricity, food sometimes ... We all work very hard to earn money. As a son, you should be 'dongshi' [sensible] and help your family. We cannot hire a 'baomu'[2] like many urban residents do.

For younger male peasant workers there had been a fundamental shift in the Chinese highly prescribed gender-specific domestic habitus (Krais, 2006:121), within which their parents operated and within which their peers in rural areas continued to operate. Within traditional tightly bounded gendered classifications and codes, sons hold a relatively privileged position, which is reflected in the preference for sons over daughters. Such preference is based on the economic rationale that sons will provide future labour for the farm or business and therefore be able to support older parents. Currently, in contrast to the western discussion on a 'crisis of masculinity' (McDowell, 2000) among young working-class men in the context of socio-economic change, younger male migrant workers, such as Xiao Cai, find themselves having a major responsibility for the home, traditionally the space of the female, and with economic and social responsibility for their parents, traditionally the role of the father and mother. For male migrant workers, family-related gender practices (i.e. as a son in Xiao Cai's case) are of importance for them to identify themselves as a (relational) man in the family. Xiao Cai made sense of his domestic practices as evidence of acting as a sensible son, which resonated with the traditional notion of a 'filial son', that is, taking care of one's elderly parents. More generally, these modified familial gender roles as son, husband/partner and father have become a fundamental resource in the formation of their identities, serving to make sense of their position in the process of modernization. In this process of familial practices, traditional gender roles have been reworked. In so doing, rather than modernization and the accompanying geographical movement displacing the need for traditional familial ideology, the reworked gendered interplay of domestic roles, duties and responsibilities between the generations enables a strong family unit to re-establish itself within the city. In other words, the process of modernization is drawn upon to ensure the cultural continuity of the family, as the basic traditional social group in contemporary China. At the same time, their reworked gendered habitus is shaped by gender familial practices that are developed within subordinated class-based material conditions compared to established urban dwellers (Skeggs, 1997; Reay, 2005).

Male peasant workers and their 'left-behind' rural families

Alongside the male peasant workers who moved from the rural areas with family members to work together in the city, many of the male peasant workers I interviewed lived alone in the city, being apart from their families. Feminist theorists argue that although traditional Confucian ethics in terms of gender and family relations is now criticized within the context of China's pursuit of modernization, to a large extent the rural family still maintains traditional ways of life in terms of gender norms, marked by patriarchy. For example, research on Chinese rural female peasant workers has highlighted that rural women still cannot escape the control of the rural patriarchal family (Jacka, 2006), within which the authority of the father and its associated cultural norms continue to control their lives, even though they are away from home living in cities. Chu Tung-tsu's (1961) study of

Law and Society in Traditional China stresses the domination and the authoritarianism of the figure of the father in the family:

> The Chinese family was patriarchal. The grandfather or father was the ruling head and had authority over all the members of the family, including his wife and concubines, his sons and grandsons, their wives and children, his unmarried daughters, his collateral relatives who were junior to him and who shared his domicile, his slaves and servants. His control of the family economy and his power to make financial decisions strengthened his authority. In addition, since the concept of ancestor worship was central to the perpetuation and solidarity of the family, the authority of the family head, who was also the family priest, was further enhanced. Finally, his authority was recognized and supported by the law.
>
> (Chu, 1961:20)

In my research, the men's narratives provide evidence of structural change within peasant workers' families owing to the physical absence of being a son, father and husband/partner. In other words, rural–urban labour migration is a practice that is troubling the visibility of being a man through their missing roles in the family household. In turn, these narratives highlight the fact that men's migration from rural areas to the city has resulted in the dislocation of men's familial gender practices.

'Filial son' living away from home

As suggested above, securing family life is one of the key motivations for contemporary internal migration. The men did not abandon their rural families in the process of labour migration because of the Chinese cultural tradition of seeing family as a central part of life. Working in the cities means that Chinese male peasant workers had the opportunity to provide a better life for their families through increasing the family's finances. While they were experiencing a new life in urban China, their responsibilities to their rural families became intensified in their daily work and domestic practices. In my empirical work an important manifestation of the urgency and immediacy of maintaining familial connections was expressed in their narratives about being a son. More specifically, the men spoke of the shifting meanings around filial responsibilities.

(1) CHANGING PRACTICE AS A 'FILIAL SON'

Traditional gender practices associated with filial responsibilities are being challenged with the emerging economic development in urban China, providing material opportunities for Chinese rural men to support their rural families. Most significantly, the symbolic meaning of filial piety has been transformed from social practices *within* the family to social practices *away from* the family.

JIAN XIAOPING (38 YEARS OLD): My home is in the mountain area. My parents are peasants. They sell some produce at the town market ... But we live far from town, our income is low.

... I am the oldest son in the family, after completing my military duty and leaving the army (当兵复员), I left home to work in the city, leaving my parents, a younger brother and a younger sister at home... I have the responsibility to take care of my parents and my brother and sister. Although I can't be with my family, I have the responsibility to earn money and be filial to my parents.

HUI YING (33 YEARS OLD): I can't say I am a filial son as I am away from home ...They are getting older and sometimes getting ill because of their age. Nothing serious, but a lot of small diseases, like sometimes there is something wrong with the nose and joints when the season changes, high blood pressure ... I have the will but don't have the ability to take good care of my parents (because I am away) ... I call them every week and ask them to take good care of themselves ... Really I hope nothing serious happens to them ... But I must say I am definitely a filial son. I have to work to earn money.

'Respecting and caring for the aged' is a traditional Chinese moral ethic. Such a traditional ethic played an important role for the Chinese male peasant workers, such as Jian and Hui, in making sense of their relational gendered identity as a filial son. As I suggested above, being a young man in the family means you will take care of your parents when they are old. Fei's (2008:29) anthropological research on peasant life in China acknowledges an essential characteristic of the family is that 'married sons do not always leave their parents, especially when either father or mother is dead'. This is also why Chinese people have a son-preference culture, which is perceived as a life insurance for the future, while daughters will become family members of their husbands' family. However, rural–urban labour migration is challenging this gender norm of what it means 'to be a son' and 'to be a man for the family' within conditions of widespread separation of male family members from rural households. From a contemporary western perspective, produced by late modernity 'do-it-yourself' biographies (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1994), it is difficult to make sense of the ethical claims that an older generation makes on a younger generation within China. This ethic of responsibility is a traditional imperative for young men, for whom filial responsibility is codified in highly prescribed ways. It is performed and enacted within the everyday dynamics of extended family life. Within the context of rural multi-generational families, one of the most significant cultural apprenticeships is that of the 'passing on' of filial duties and obligations from father to son as central to the formation of the domestic habitus. These duties and obligations form part of an intricate pattern of parental expectations underpinned by the immediate physical contact of young men's close geographical location to their parents and grandparents.

The peasant workers suggested that their current experience, involving negative and positive elements, have forced them to rework the traditional values of filial piety that they inherited. Being able to provide better financial and material

support as part of the modernizing project has become one of the key components of being a good son. For example, many male peasant workers, such as Wang Hai, who have parents in rural areas, have found such alternative ways to practise their filial piety as an absent son. In turn, through these practices, they have found alternative ways to express their sense of masculine identity characterized by combining *independence from* their parents with *responsibility to* their parents.

WANG HAI (32 YEARS OLD): When I first went back home for the new year, I bought two new clothes using the money I earned, one for my father, one for my mother. It was just a small thing, but I felt I was independent and can provide a good life for my family ... It felt so good when you saw how happy they were when they received the clothes. I remember when I was a child, my parents were working from dawn until dark for my tuition fees, now I can earn money, being independent and can buy something to show the fulfilment of the duty as a son to them.

More broadly, for many male peasant workers sending money home to provide a better material life for their rural family has become an important practice in demonstrating their relational masculine identity as a filial son, a responsible husband/partner and a caring father. I will further discuss this later in the chapter.

INTERVIEWER: Did you do the same thing when you were at home?
YANG HUI (45 YEARS OLD): Now my brother and me give money to my parents. But when I was at home working on the farm, I did not give money to my parents because our life was hard and we had no money to give my parents. But after I went out to work in the city, I send money back home once a month with two hundred yuan to them and my children.

One example that emerged in the men's narratives of the opportunity opened up by migration was their ability to build a house for their rural family, although for some of them, there was no intention to return home. Sending back money to build a house in their rural homeland appeared to have become a highly visible symbolic sign of masculine behaviour – being the master of the family by providing a better life for their families. For example, when Cai Wu, a 30-year-old worker in an electric factory spoke about his life in Shantou, he revealed that his major ambition was to build a new family home.

CAI WU (30 YEARS OLD): I work and live here. I like it here. Shantou is a good place. But my family is in Sichuang. My parents, my wife and children are there. I don't feel I am a Shantou person if my family is not here.
INTERVIEWER: Will you go back to Sichuang?
CAI WU: I don't know. I will either go back to my hometown or bring my family here. Next month, my wife will come to work in Shantou with me. I hope I can bring my children with me soon to make a family here. But a lot of difficulties ... education, housing ... cost much money. I will work hard and make this happen, family is important to me ... I will give them the best life as possible as I can ... the house at home is under construction now ... they will live in the new house soon.
INTERVIEWER: Where do you get the money to build the house?
CAI WU: Some of the money is my savings in last 5 years ... some is borrowed from my friend.
INTERVIEWER: Why do you borrow money to build the house?
CAI WU: My saving is still not enough ... but I have been working outside for several years. The other men who went out with me at the same time are building or have built their new houses back in the village ... (I think) it is time to build the new house for my family to show my heart of 'xiao' to my parents, otherwise I will let them down and I don't know where I can hide my face when I go home (embarrassed). I don't want to be in the same situation as my cousin. He hasn't sent money home to build a house for his family, all the relatives are mourning about him. I don't want people to say I am useless behind my back.

Initially, when analysing the data, I had assumed that there would be major generational differences among the male peasant workers. I discuss some of these differences but I realized that in my earlier analysis I was underplaying the generational continuities in terms of values, obligations and responsibilities. The younger generation from an early age had different expectations of rural–urban labour migration and currently had a different generational encounter with urban life. This included a more individualized sensibility and accompanying modern values. However, at the same time, their narratives about family responsibilities exemplified a maturity that I had not expected. This may partly be explained in terms of the interplay between material effects of social stratification, family responsibility and the practice of migration. There is a Chinese saying that resonated with my younger interviewees: 'Children of poor families are more likely to take on their responsibilities for their families early' (穷人的孩子早当家). These working class young men might have had more freedom and personal choices than their fathers' generation to develop their lives 'without the traditional burden of feeding the family', as one older male peasant worker suggested. However, the inheritance of traditional gender norms was reconstructed in their urban practices in relation to their families. In this process, they are reworking what it means to be a working-class 'man' in the city (Savage, 2005). While staying at home and taking care of one's parents, as a traditional symbol of being a filial son is no longer a viable option for them, leaving home to work in the city to ensure a better future for the family is now understood as a central means of masculine responsibility. In so doing, the men highlight the continuing significance of demonstrating 'filial piety' to their parents. As Chow (2009) maintains,

> ... the meaning of filial piety is much broader than simply showing respect. It was recorded in the Book of Rites that the highest level that children

should aim to attain in *xiao* was to bring honour to their parents, next was not to bring them disgrace and the least that they could do was to provide them with decent living.

(Chow, 2009:320)

Importantly, such a central familial tradition is creatively reworked and lived out within the interaction with their families.

Ah Fu is a 19-year-old male peasant worker, who came to work in Shantou a year after he graduated from middle school. As a machine operator, he was one of the few people in the category of peasant worker who had attained secondary level education. As one of the latest generation of peasant workers, unlike the older generation I interviewed, he felt at home in the city and was actively engaged in his urban life-style. However, he suggested that he never forgot his 'mission' for working in the city.

AH FU: They (parents) ask me not to blow money away and should save the money for my marriage in the future.
INTERVIEWER: Do you send your salary to your parents?
AH FU: I keep 200 yuan for daily expenses and send the rest of the money to my parents.
INTERVIEWER: Are you happy sending the money to your parents?
AH FU: My family is poor. I give what I can give. They (my parents) asked me not to send money home as they said it's expensive to live outside. They said they will save the money for my marriage ... I am happy that I can send money back home because they have been supporting me for nearly 20 years. It is time for me to repay them ... If I were them, I should have got married and have a child and let them enjoy 'Tian Lun Zi Le' [天伦之乐, family happiness with extended generations living together].
INTERVIEWER: Do you a have brother or sister?
AH FU: I have an older brother. He works in Shenzhen with my uncle.
INTERVIEWER: Does he send money home?
AH FU: Yes. Our family is poor. It is our responsibility to feed our family.
INTERVIEWER: Is 200 yuan enough for you? You don't do shopping?
AH FU: Seldom ... nothing I can buy. I live and eat in the factory. Things are expensive here. Like clothes, you don't have chance to put it on. I have uniform. You don't wear your nice clothes to work.

For some of the younger male peasant workers, leaving their families was the first time to be away from home 'in the outside world'. For them, the practice of sending home money had a symbolic meaning, marking a transition to maturity. This resonates with Osella and Osella's (2000) anthropological research on young migrant men. They understand migration as a process for these young migrants that enables them to grow up and develop as mature men, while displaying financial success as evidence of gender-related progress. More specifically for the young Chinese peasant workers I interviewed, as indicated above, it was

a transition that enabled the reworking of the meaning of being a 'filial' son (Chow, 2009). Furthermore, when located within the context of post-Mao modernization, the reinvention of being a 'filial son' entailed an historical specificity of progress and development.

The young men were aware that their need to reinvent the meaning of what it means to be a 'good son' was breaking a long tradition, which they had witnessed in their early lives being lived out by their fathers, uncles and grandfathers. Their gender identities were constructed in the process of such daily interactions within familial relations. For example, it was significant for them to be a financial provider for the family, as exemplified by Ah Fu, as a symbolic practice of being a filial son, aiming to have a happy family with extended generations in a traditional Chinese family way. Furthermore, their break with the past is accompanied by the continuity of inter-generational gendered practices (Ho, 1994). As he reported, Ah Fu's parents were worried about whether he would have enough money for his future marriage. Hence, they saved the money Ah Fu sent to them to enable him to marry, so that he could carry out the traditional obligation as 'the man in the family' to pass on the family name. Such a family practice in terms of a son sending money home and the parents saving the money for his future marriage becomes meaningful within a contemporary context of spatial and social changes. As Jamieson (1999:489) maintains: 'The significant dimension of intimacy in many parent–child relationships may not be being close by 'knowing' and talking to each other. A sense of unconditional love, trust and acceptance may be sustained with caring actions and relatively few words'.

In the negotiation of traditional gender values, such as a son's role and responsibility, marriage was reinforced and lived out in this mutual reflexive process between Ah Fu and his family, in the material conditions of modernization and development. In other words, the young men knew their duties and expectations in relation to their families, which were articulated through daily practices and interactions, such as sending money home.

SONG SHAN (20 YEARS OLD, FACTORY WORKER): My sister is still at school. She is going out to work too when she has finished middle school. Before that, it is my little wish and responsibility to send home some money to share the care with my parents.
LAO DING (36 YEARS OLD, FACTORY WORKER): 'The more relatives you have, the more cost it will be. Once anything happens, for example, my cousin was getting married, I needed to send some money for his marriage ... you need to send as much as you can as people (family members) were comparing and competing. My parents would have 'mianzi'[3] in front of our relatives if I have given the most.

For people, such as Song Shan and Lao Ding, sending home money to support other (extended) family members was also a channel to demonstrate their 'filial piety', including sharing the responsibility for siblings with their parents, as well as giving pride to their parents. Hence, traditional familial values continued to

play an important role in the young male migrants' construction of their developing subjectivities of the changing meaning of being a capable man within a modern urban context. Wang Tao was a 22-year-old factory worker. He recalled his father's advice about his son's career and marriage, locating the traditional obligation 'to feed your family' within contemporary material conditions and opportunities.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have a girlfriend?
WANG TAO: No, I am still young.
INTERVIEWER: You would have married, would you, if you were are at home?
WANG TAO: Yes, I think my father married my mum when he was 20. I am too young. My father said man ... should have career first ... then you have the ability to feed your family ...
INTERVIEWER: Why?
WANG TAO: Now everything is about money. You can't do anything if you don't have money.
INTERVIEWER: Do you always listen to your father?
WANG TAO: Sometimes, he is the master of the family, of course I have to listen to what he said. But unlike he always do whatever my grandfather tells him to do, I don't do everything he want me to do ... Just listen ... but sometimes what old people say is right ... But he is too guban [old-fashioned, inflexible].

Western literature on family and intimacy in post-traditional society suggests that there is lack of intimate personal relations between family members, accompanying an intensified individualization (Beck 1992, 1994; Giddens, 1991). For example, Jamieson (1998), acknowledging Parsons' understanding of family relations in terms of parent–child relationships in the mid-twentieth century, claims that there is a loss of intimate relations between parents and children in the transition from the pre-modern to modern period and that young people need to be self-directed to cope with contemporary rapid social change. A similar approach to research on the Chinese family and intimacy can be found in Y. Yan's (2003) work. She suggests a number of characteristics of the family in contemporary rural China, including 'an increase in youth autonomy, a decline of parental power, and a rise of young women as active agents in family politics' (Yan, 2003:8) that is enabling young people in China to make choices according to personal aspirations, in an attempt to improve their standard of living. In some research, rural–urban labour migration is reported as providing a generational opportunity for young peasant workers to adopt this more individualized lifestyle. However, in the narratives of the young men that I interviewed, I found little evidence to suggest that this is a universal phenomenon. Further research may address the issue of social class and critically explore whether these individualized biographies tend to be found among sectors of middle-class young people. Interestingly, within a British context, MacDonald *et al.* (2005) suggest such an explanation: that local networks of family and friends as aspects of

cultural inheritance become important social capital in shaping working-class youth practices that tend not to adopt individualized biographies.

Migration from rural areas to cities has not weakened the young men's gendered familial responsibility, as some research (Mhyte, 2003) has suggested that urban culture strengthens individualism and weakens traditional familial obligations. Rather, the young men showed remarkable social identification and emotional attachment to their families of origin. The weight and level of responsibilities taken by the young men varied depending on the gender structure of their families. For example, if you were the older son of the family, it meant you had more responsibilities compared with your brother or sister. Alternatively, if you were the only son of the family, the pressure would be greater than for those people who had brothers to share their responsibilities. For example, most importantly, the duty of taking care of parents when they were old, alongside the expectations that a younger generation should support their wider extended family.

(2) OTHER FILIAL RESPONSIBILITY

In the previous section the emphasis in the men's narratives was on the renegotiation of gendered practices. However, there were also some traditional gender norms that were harder to find alternative ways to fulfil. One such issue was getting married and having a child, particularly having a baby boy, in order to carry on the family name.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have children?
GUO TIANHAI (32 YEARS OLD): No.
INTERVIEWER: Do you want to have a baby?
GUO TIANHAI: Yes, of course. We have been married for about 2 years. I know if I were in the rural area. I would have been expected to get married and then have children. But I think it'd be better if you have children later than earlier ... Sometimes it might become a burden if you have a child.
INTERVIEWER: Why?
GUO TIANHAI: Look at the news saying the children of peasant workers cannot live with their parents ... they cannot go to the local school (because of household registration [*hukou*]) ... My relatives always say we should have a baby earlier that when you become old, your child can take care of you. But the reality doesn't allow me to have a baby early. [For example], you need to take your baby with you when you go to work. [Or] if your income becomes less, then you have difficulty to raise the baby.
INTERVIEWER: Why do your relatives ask you to have a baby early?
GUO TIANHAI: I don't know, they care about us, maybe the issue of Chuang Zhong Jie dai [Carry on the family name]. They might have being guessing I don't have the ability [he is laughing].
INTERVIEWER: Does it bother you?
GUO TIANHAI: Sometimes, you care about what people are gossiping about you (that you still don't have a baby). Of course I don't feel very well. But you

have to think about the difficulties that face you if you have a baby ... We want a baby when the conditions allow.

INTERVIEWER: What conditions?

GUO TIANHAI: We cannot afford a baby. We have no money.

Guo Tianhai revealed a tension between familial gender responsibilities, in terms of practising the traditional duties of being a man within the family, and material conditions within modern urban spaces. In traditional Chinese ideology, the worst offence against filial duty is not having any progeny (不孝有三, 无后为大), according to Confucianism (Fei, 2008). In some cases, family expectations, such as carrying on the family name had become a burden for Chinese male peasant workers, when they encountered the difficulty of living and working in the city because of their subordinated class position. Such traditional ideology also affected unmarried young male peasant workers, on whom their parents and extended families placed great pressure to get married as soon as possible when they reached their late twenties.

A major theme in the men's narratives was the multiple dilemmas and difficulties that arose from the intense surveillance from traditional patriarchal familial obligations that seemed to have little connection to their lived day-to-day realities within a modern urban environment. One of my interviewees was Liu Hai (35 years old). He had been a technician at a local electronics factory for ten years, since he first left his rural home. In recounting his life history, he expressed the specific dynamics of the impact of pressure from his rural family who had little sense of the demands of his urban life-style. He was the only son of his family, with three older sisters, so he carried the burden of familial expectations to reproduce the family name by having a baby boy.

LIU HAI (35 YEARS OLD): My first and the second child are girls, and the last one is a boy. To be honest, I did not want to give birth to another two children after the first one. You know man and woman are the same ... It is not in the old society that you have to have a boy to make your life better. Now girls also can earn money for the family ... [But] to my parents, I am their only son. It is my duty to have a son to carry on the family name. They always phoned me and asked me why I didn't want another child. I told them I can't afford to have another child; it costs a lot to raise a child here in the city, everything including education in particular ... They could not understand me. They said when they were young, they also had several children, some families even had eight girls before they had a boy. They said they came through the difficulty of raising me and my sisters ... All my family members urged me to have another child in case it's a boy. But my second child was a girl too. I was so embarrassed. I started to feel I preferred a boy to girl at that time when I was told it's a girl. I knew it was not good. My family asked me to give the girl away to other people. But I said no matter how difficult it is, it is my duty to raise her up even though I have to collect rubbish for a living. In the end, I had a boy at last and fulfilled their will two years ago.

INTERVIEWER: Do you prefer a boy to a girl?

LIU HAI: I don't. It is my family that confused me. It is them.

INTERVIEWER: Why?

LIU HAI: Boys and girls are the same to me. But parents always told me and make me embarrassed (if you do not give birth to a boy). My father said in very strong language that our family might end in my generation. It means my family is over. Ok, I fulfilled your will and I work hard. It is my parents' order.

INTERVIEWER: How did you feel when you had your boy?

LIU HAI: I was very happy, to be honest. I held banquets here and in hometown with friends and family members. Very happy, I fulfilled my parents' willingness. After all, family members are watching you.

Migration provides a potential path to move away from the federal system within rural areas for some Chinese male and female peasant workers, as reported in the literature (Pun, 2005; Jacka, 2005, 2006). This was not the case for most of the older peasant workers that I interviewed. However difficult it was to maintain the welfare of the family in a high-cost city life, this did not lead them to abandon their familial responsibilities as defined by their parents. These responsibilities were not only surveyed and policed by one's parents, but also by an extended familial network (i.e. relatives and friends close to the family), as both Guo Tianhai's and Liu Hai's narratives illustrate. For these male peasant workers, family traditions were facing major challenges in terms of the impact of the existing gender order on their lives. This resulted in new generationally-specific material and psychological pressures that were frequently expressed by the male peasant workers. For example, Liu Hai felt embarrassed when his parents urged him to have a boy. His embarrassment or shame[4] of not being able to carry on the family name illustrates that such a cultural heritage, in terms of gender responsibility continued to play a vital role in the formation of his daily practices. It also illustrates the power of the hegemony of patriarchy upon some male peasant workers, such as Liu Hai, who has encountered both economic difficulties of living an urban life, as well as the Chinese government advocating gender equality in practising its one child policy. Sayer (2005:954) maintains, 'the stronger the commonality of values, the greater the possibilities for shaming'. In Liu Hai's case, as he had internalized these values as part of his gendered habitus, he felt embarrassed because he could not achieve what was the most important traditional expectation of a filial son. Liu Hai's account opens up discussion of our understanding of the formation of subordinated masculinities. The notion of multiple masculinities is helpful here in enabling us to capture a more complex picture (Brittan, 1989; Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, 2003), while other research has emphasized the need to examine the socio-historical constitution of masculinity in late modernity (Mac an Ghaill and Haywood 2007). Middleton (1989)

suggests it is important to go beyond the standpoint of oppression and domination, highlighted by western second-wave feminists and other pro-feminist scholars, and to focus on the dimension of subjective meanings in different social relations emanating from subjects' experience and practice.

In summary, rural–urban labour migration and urban experience challenged traditional gender familial obligations for the male peasant workers I interviewed. They revealed that they could not simply dissociate from traditional images of the family man from within the context of the city, in which they often experienced material constraints. However, familial relationships continued to be lived out through reflexive negotiation of alternative gender practices. This negotiation meant that familial issues, such as parenting were not taken for granted as they were by an earlier generation. For example, familial gender roles, such as being a son (examined above) or being a father (examined below) were being challenged within the process of migration.

Parenting, fatherhood and migration

As I show above, meanings of rural–urban labour migration for the men were constituted through a complex interplay of new and old gendered practices, in relation to the maintenance of the family and the rural household. More specifically, rural–urban labour migration constituted a unique situation for the construction of fathering for the Chinese male peasant workers. In traditional rural China, the father's influence on his children increases as the child is growing up (Fei, 2008). In particular, in the case of boys, according to Fei (2008:37), the father is 'the source of discipline', who is characterized as a figure of authority and power within the traditional patriarchal Chinese family. More recently, in the context of rural–urban labour migration, media representations of '*liushou ertong*' ('left-behind children': children whose parents work in the city, while they are left behind in rural areas with their relatives) are deployed to portray male peasant workers as 'failed fathers'. The concepts of father and fatherhood are currently central to the debate on masculinity and the family. Contemporary western research has presented the formation and the transformation of fatherhood with diverse fathering practices emerging in relation to different cultural and social contexts, such as work and family relations (Morgan, 1996; Brandth and Kvande, 1998, 2002; Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, 2003; Dermott, 2008). For example, the notion of 'new father' who contributes to child-care responsibility and domestic work has emerged in western literature (see Ranson, 2001; Yeung *et al.* 2001). Meanwhile, changing fatherhood has been captured by western sociologists (Morgan, 1996; LaRossa, 1997; Lupton and Barclay, 1997; Brandth and Kvande, 2002; Dermott, 2008), who have illustrated the transformation of fathering in the context of social and economic changes reflected through different working conditions. For example, Connell (1998) refers to the phenomenon of trans-national businessmen (and masculinity), for whom work commitments deprive them of the time and space for fathering and other emotional involvement with the family. My research highlighted that rural–urban labour migration constituted a significant context for the construction of Chinese masculinity associated with fathering and fatherhood. What interests me is whether and how fatherhood has changed in the context of Chinese rural–urban labour migration. Unlike their fathers' generation, in which men acted as the only master in the family maintaining control of all familial functions, social and economic change associated with rural–urban labour migration has had a major impact on fatherhood among Chinese male peasant workers, who have left their children in their rural homes, while they are working in the city. This raises a number of questions. How does this change challenge or reconstruct their masculine identities in relation to fatherhood and fathering practices? More specifically, how do such practices of fathering influence the men's subjective understanding of rural–urban labour migration?

(I) CHANGING EXPECTATIONS FROM MIGRANT FATHERS: 'I DON'T EXPECT MY SON TO LOOK AFTER ME'.

Within traditional Chinese family culture, a man's responsibility is being a provider for his children and family until he is supported and looked after by his children when he is old. However, such tradition was given new meanings in the narratives of some male peasant workers. Huang Ping (44 years old) was one of the interviewees, whose children were not with him while he worked outside his rural home. He was from Jiangxi, where his two children, a son (20 years old) and a daughter (14 years old), lived and went to school. Huang Ping had been working in a chemical factory with his wife for about ten years. He wished he could return home when he retired. But at the moment, he needed to work hard to provide for his family.

HUANG PING: My father was around to keep an eye on me when I was young because we were working together in the field ... [but] now I am away from my children, I cannot keep an eye on them. But they are very obedient that they always listen to me. Sometimes, I was just thinking how good it would have been together with your children like my father did. Both of them are quite grown up now. My son should have got married when I was in his age ... I told him to work hard at school. I will support his education as long as he wants to. I am quite satisfied now that he can go to university.

INTERVIEWER: What do you wish to do when you retire?

HUANG PING: I don't have such thinking [about retirement] at the moment. To be honest, I can still work for another few years. I will be happy if my son can get a proper job after university. If he can't ... he can't earn much money. He also needs to marry and buy a house to live. It means I need to help him. I am happy if he can show filial duty to me like I do to my parents. But I don't expect my son to look after me as long as he can look after himself and his wife and children ... and my daughter, she also needs me ... she is still young, but she will get married in a few years and she also

needs money. Nowadays, you can't say marrying a daughter to the other family is like 'throwing the water out'. I don't have time being with them now. Nowadays, everything needs money. I can't just think about the present; I have to think about what they need in the future.

From a western perspective, it is difficult to capture the fundamental change that this generation of peasant workers are experiencing around fathering, compared with the images of paternal obligation and interpersonal interaction that they inherited from their own fathers and grandfathers. In turn, the interviews as a methodological technique were not able to capture the mixture of emotions felt by these migrant men that included: a sense of loss, confusion and dislocation in terms of what is the central role in their lives – being a father – as Chinese men. For Huang Ping, working in the city was experienced primarily in terms of being able to fulfil his parental duty. This included attempting to combine maintaining his authority at home, while being away working to ensure support for his children's present and future material needs. Like other men in his situation, Huang Ping was actively negotiating his way of being a good father for his children. Traditional Chinese familial ethics, as I explored above, emphasizes the importance of 'filial piety', for children to respect and take care of their parents when they are old. In the male peasant workers' narratives they revealed that they were inverting this traditional arrangement by working hard to ensure that their children were not expected 'to feed them when they are old'. In some cases, the men spoke of turning their absence from the rural home into a positive experience. For example, in their absence they encouraged their sons to act in a more mature way to take on domestic responsibilities, thus initiating a kind of domestic apprenticeship, in encouraging them at an early stage in preparation for being a man for the family. The men's narratives suggested that the way of fathering, in terms of changing social practices, may have been transformed while the meaning of fatherhood in terms of values and obligations remained the same for male peasant workers in contemporary Chinese society. In other words, they continue to live 'a life for others' rather than 'a life of one's own' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1996). Thus, the family as central to the gendered habitus of their life in the city continued to have major significance to how they lived their lives, while at the same time being a central resource for the construction of the men's subjectivities.

(2) GOOD FATHER OR BAD FATHER?

The male peasant workers often raised the issue of the difficulties of being an 'absent father'. They discussed a range of reasons for leaving their children in rural areas. They were particularly concerned about the misunderstandings and arguments arising from their children being located within the rural home, while they worked in the city. Guo Jintian (44 years old) was a married peasant worker who lived and worked with his wife at a chemical factory. They left their 11-year-old daughter in their rural home with her aunt. During vacation time, their

daughter came to live with them in the city but they were separated during term time as she attended the school in the local village. When he was talking about his relationship with his daughter, he expressed his dilemma of what he should do as a father and his disappointment about his daughter's misunderstanding of their living arrangements.

GUO JINTIAN: We (me and my wife) want her to stay with us like the other children in the city. But I don't want my daughter to go to the 'School for Peasant Workers' Children'. She can have better education in the village ... So I didn't allow her to come to stay with us ... She doesn't understand me ... She told her mother on the phone that we didn't want her ... I don't know what I should do ... People say daughter is close to her father ... but I guess she doesn't understand what I do is good for her even though I don't want to [shaking his head]. I want her to have good education like the other children, but she can't have it if she lives with us.

INTERVIEWER: Why don't you explain to her?

GUO JINTIAN: It is not necessary. Children should listen to adults. We do everything for her goodness.

Contemporary material conditions within the modernization project enabled Guo Jintian to provide what he considered as a good education for his daughter. At the same time, such material conditions prevented migrant children from attending local schools in the city as their *hukou* status did not belong to this area. As the head of the family, he had to make what he thought was the right decision for his daughter, while at the same time such a decision from his daughter's perspective blurred his image as a good father. Many men in my research struggled with the dilemma between emotional attachments and material conditions in terms of fathering, when their children were left in their rural home. In response, the fathers attempted to maintain their emotional connection with their children through telephoning them and bringing them to live with them during holiday time, while materially supporting them by working hard to send money home for the children's daily expenses. The dilemma pointed to wider class questions about the rural/urban division, education and social welfare in a rapidly changing Chinese society (Harvey, 2005; Wang, 2003; Nee, 1991, 1996).

The meaning of being a father has been challenged within the process of rural–urban labour migration, albeit the authority of fatherhood remains. In my research, fatherhood was of particular importance in the construction of male peasant workers' masculinities for those who have children, whether they were living with them or not. The way of fathering is changing owing to current material circumstances. However, being a father still meant that they carried the traditional authority and responsibility in relation to their children. For some of the male peasant workers being away from their children strengthened their emotional attachment as traditional duties of fatherhood needed to be made explicit. Fatherhood for my interviewees was about responsibility in relation to one's children and the rest of the family, though it was played out differently among

different men. At the same time, Guo's case also resonates with Hobson and Morgan's (2002:18) acknowledgement of poor and minority men's construction of fatherhood, that 'not all men derive benefit from the scripted cultural ideals of masculinities that connect men's economic power to their authority in the family'.

Classing the self: constructing emotional migrating masculinities

Throughout this chapter I have argued that family as a gendered institution is of central importance in exploring gender meanings for these working-class rural men. However, the transformation of working conditions from rural to urban China has redefined what it means to be husbands/partners, fathers and sons. Moving away from the rural family to the city might suggest an opportunity of leaving behind traditional family constraints in terms of responsibilities. However, in the process of rural–urban labour migration, these traditional familial gender practices have become an important resource that directs the men's social practices and makes sense of their masculine subjective identity within their lives in the city. The Chinese male peasant workers did not see themselves primarily as individual subjects. Rather, it was through their familial social relations, in terms of playing out their roles as fathers, husbands/partners and sons that they made sense of who they were, what they wanted, as well as what they could do within an extended familial social context in post-Mao society. There is evidence in my interviewees' narratives that an understanding of domestic power for the male peasant workers has changed through their experience of migration by recasting their roles and practices as fathers, sons and husbands/partners in their families that used to regulate their behaviour and responsibility as a man. As indicated above, there were diverse responses to these new material conditions. However, a major theme in many of the men's narratives was that uniting their families in the city was more important than making money or demonstrating their power within the family.

The meaning of their decisions, such as that of Lao Tang, who moved to work and live with his wife and daughter, can be interpreted in different ways. A traditional feminist account may suggest that the move serves to naturalize and strengthen men's role in the family, reproducing male domination and superiority. Such an analysis might acknowledge continuities and changes in terms of familial gender norms but that the structured change within the rural family does not fundamentally alter men's traditional power and authoritarianism within a patriarchal system. However, the notion of patriarchy, which has been theoretically criticized within Chinese society, particularly within rural spaces, by poststructuralist feminists, is seen as being under continuous negotiation as both rural men and women are living a 'new' life as migrants in the city. In many cases I have illustrated, the effect of modernization ideology and material living conditions have challenged gender practices within the patriarchal system, resulting in men occupying a relatively ambiguous position in terms of domestic power relations. They were struggling to maintain a sense of masculinity in relation to their

role in the family, while experiencing very difficult class-based material conditions in terms of a low economic, social and political status in post-Mao Chinese society. In other words, in order to capture the complexity of the 'new' power relations operating among migrant men and women, we need to address the interconnection of social categories, including class, gender, generation and region (Skeggs, 1997; Reay, 1998).

These complex and unstable conditions produced specific emotions among my participants. Such emotions were based on their developing subjectivities within the context of being away from their rural homes of origin and their positioning in modern urban space. Traditional familial gender norms were lived out in their daily interactions with their families and have become a central resource in the construction of their migrating masculinities. In their narratives they disclosed a wide range of feelings in terms of 'emotion', 'embarrassment' or 'shame' with reference to diverse concerns, including feeling they had failed to show paternal responsibility to their children not living with them; fears of failing to demonstrate their filial piety, such as 'passing on the family name'; and failure to 'build a house for the family' back in their home villages. Huang Ping illustrates the complex emotional world that the male peasant workers occupied.

INTERVIEWER: How do you feel about working away from your family?

HUANG PING: I am happy when sometimes I think my parents are still alive, my son is studying in the university. I feel gratified when I think about these. [He starts crying.] Then I think my son will become better than me. I didn't read many books. He is different, he is educated, he will surely not do labour work like me. Better than me. I feel grateful whenever I think my son has a better life than me. [He cries again.] He is studying IT. I hope he can have a good job in the future.

Such emotional insights reflected their material subordination in urban spaces, which are of importance in understanding their identity as urban working-class migrants. Unlike the emerging urban new middle class (Tomba, 2004) or new rich (Goodman, 2008), with their consumer-oriented life-style, who are reported to have major emotional investment in dogs as pets (see Tomba, 2004), the Chinese male peasant workers were constantly worrying about the welfare of their families within the context of their limited economic capital and class-based cultural responsibilities. At the same time, such emotions (Barbalet, 2002; Sayer, 2005) or emotional capital (Reay, 2004) are historically specific, emerging within conditions in which the traditional cultural responsibilities of being a man within the family have to be played out in the context of the urban modern discourse of progress and development in terms of 'getting rich'. In other words, these working-class men must live out their familial masculine subjective identities within current material and discursive conditions that operate against them in an increasingly unequal society.

However, in many cases, as I illustrate above, the men found it difficult to disclose their emotional feelings to family members as it would have damaged

their masculine identities within the family as sons, husbands/partners and fathers. Some of them told me that they had never been emotional in front of other people. The concealment of emotional feelings in their daily interaction with their families may be read as a reflection of the dominant gender ideology that 'real men' are marked by (masculine) rationality rather than (feminine) emotionality (Seidler, 1997). However, there was an intensification of the emotional loss these men as working-class migrants away from their home were experiencing reminiscent of postcolonial research on external migration, settlement and integration (Mac an Ghaill and Haywood, 2011). In contrast to the reductive public representation of these men, in terms of sexual repression, I found them to be emotionally mature. Within extreme material circumstances, in which they were projected in the media as 'pathological others' in urban spaces, they were remarkably creative in developing strategies to address the multiple emotional needs of their wives/partners, fathers, mothers and their children. In short, they were highly successful in creating an appropriate gendered habitus of emotional capital that made sense of their position in modern space.

Hence, they did not see themselves as victims as they are portrayed in public discourses. They were satisfied with what they had achieved, even though they were suffering great pressure both from their rural families and within their urban material conditions. In so doing, they believed that they were fulfilling their relational gender roles, which played a vital part in the construction and living out of their masculine identities. Future research may further address the question of the *classed self*, locating emotional well-being and living 'a life for others' within multiple categories of social inequality and cultural difference (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1996; Reay, 1998).

Conclusion: family practices and migrating masculine identities

This chapter explores how Chinese male peasant workers constructed masculine identities through their gendered practices in relation to their families. Traditional familial gender practices have been challenged and dislocated in male peasant workers' lives owing to the absence from their families. However, in their narratives they revealed that connections with their rural families were of central importance in constructing their masculine identities. This chapter has explored a dynamic picture of gendered practices among Chinese male peasant workers and their families. It offers a critical understanding of gender norms within the men's rural families, through the investigation of changing and diverse gendered practices in the process of rural–urban labour migration. More specifically, these gendered practices in relation to traditional relational roles as sons, fathers and husbands/partners, have become important resources in the construction of their masculine identity as male peasant workers, through the interpretation of the negotiation of their gendered practices. This resonates with Morgan's (1996) notion of 'family practices' that convey an active ordinary everyday life with culturally and historically embedded regularity, as well as a sense of fluidity

within meaningful and multiple ways. In addition, Skeggs (2004b: 22) refers to Bourdieu's notion of the function of the family as capital, where 'normalcy and the ability to constitute oneself as the universal' operates. As she continues, 'this enables normalcy to be both a kind of capital within the field of the family and a form of symbolic capital that represents accumulated privilege in other fields' (ibid.). As my research reveals, there is a continuity of family-related gender practices in the field of the urban workplace, where male peasant workers are located. I investigate this in Chapter 4.

4 'Father–son' relations and/or becoming urban working-class

Masculinity and identity formation of the urban working-class

Western literatures have emphasized how identity is deeply embedded in social and cultural contexts (Adams, 2003, 2007; Lawler, 2008). Lawler (2008:8), for example, maintains that identity should be understood 'not as belonging "within" the individual person, but as produced between persons and within social relations'. In his work *Self and Social Change*, Adams (2007) criticizes 'extended reflexive modernists' for their tendency to universalize the constitution of the self and its relation with social change, without considering the positioning of social groups and individuals relative to social structures. He (2003:224–5) maintains that 'if reflexivity is a product of a particular culture, then clearly our knowledgeability is shaped and compromised by the 'limits' of that culture'. Adams (2007:163) concludes that 'the self is constructed according to established patterns, set by the cultural norms, traditions and sanctions in which one's self-development takes place'. What he tries to maintain is the continuity of patterns in terms of social practices that are lived out in the process of social change.

As I have outlined in earlier chapters, relational gender practices that the male peasant workers carried out as fathers, sons and husbands/partners were of particular importance in constituting their masculine identities in urban spaces, in terms of the motivation and the purpose of migration. Such migrant working-class masculine identities were (re)worked to make sense of their position, when their familial masculinities were dislocated, as an effect of their geographical relocation within the changing material conditions of post-Mao modernization. One of the key features of rural–urban migration is the transformation of work from an agricultural sector in a rural setting to a non-agricultural sector in the city. This chapter focuses on male peasant workers' experience of working in urban spaces, as another major constitutive element in the formation of their identity. Given the highly negative and reductive public portrayal of these men that I explored in Chapter 2, as a result of the dominant discourse of modernization, in response this chapter focuses on the men's individual and collective self-representations of life in the city.

Throughout the research, gender is conceptualized as an analytical term to understand social relations within contextually-based multiple masculinities and

femininities (Connell, 1987, 2005; Donaldson, 1993; Bradley, 1996; Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, 2003, 2007), which resonates with the male peasant workers' experiences in relation to their families. They constructed their relational gender identities in different social contexts to make sense of their dislocated masculine identities. Rural–urban labour migration in China, as outlined in the last chapter, has challenged and redefined the meaning of gender relations within the family with 'new' complex gendered domestic practices emerging. More generally, this chapter aims to understand how rural men accommodated themselves within urban workplaces. More specifically, it critically examines the strategies they deployed within female-concentrated, non-conventional male occupations.

It is commonly understood that work outside of home is a meaningful social practice that has played an important role in constructing and maintaining men's masculinity in rural China. This resonates with Morgan's (1992) understanding of work as an integral element in men's lives in shaping their masculinities. Western literature has produced a range of accounts of men working and the dynamics of masculinities within the workplace (Morgan, 1992; Alvesson, 1998; Jackson, 2001; Lupton, 2000; McDowell, 2003; Simpson, 2004; Nixon, 2009; Batnitzky *et al.*, 2009). Within these texts, masculinity is culturally constructed within social relations among individuals within particular historically based contexts, such as the family and the workplace. It is important to stress here that throughout the book I use western concepts and theories within a non-western context. More specifically, I am building on contemporary feminist Chinese scholarship that has adopted and adapted such western concepts as femininity and masculinity within contemporary Chinese society, marked by rapid economic and social change associated with global modernity (Dirlik, 2003, 2004).

Gendered work for rural men: from the rural to the urban

A key argument of western feminist and pro-feminist research has been to emphasize the social construction of gender, with the workplace seen as of central importance in producing an understanding of masculinity and femininity (Acker, 1990; Connell, 1987, 1998). For Connell (1998:5) masculinities 'do not exist prior to social interaction, but come into existence as people act'. More specifically, research on gender and the workplace, for example, Collinson and Hearn (1994), argues that it is particularly important to have a critical understanding of men and masculinities within the workplace, as an understanding of them often remains hidden and taken for granted. They (ibid.:3) maintain that: 'men in organizations often seem preoccupied with the creation and maintenance of various masculine identities and with the expression of gendered power and status in the workplace'.

Privileged gendered work for men in rural China

As I stated in the previous chapter, the gender division of work in rural China is based on the household. Work is allocated within highly demarcated categories

associated with public and private domains. Men occupy the public domain, while women 'take care' of the private domestic domain. This oppositional logic is marked by traditional gender norms in China: 'men rule outside, women rule inside' (Harrell 2000; Jacka, 1997) that shapes the gendered habitus of everyday life. Given this patriarchal familial structure, gendered work for rural men and women tends to be culturally shaped by a series of dichotomies 'inside/outside', 'light/heavy' and other binary forms (Jacka, 1997:26). More specifically, men's work is also seen as highly skilled in contrast to women's work; an ideal female position within Confucianism is that 'for a woman to be without ability is a virtue' (Judd, 1996:1). Traditionally women have been restricted to domestic spaces, carrying out domestic-related work, such as housekeeping and sewing. Highly segregated images of gender identity formation in relation to work have been produced out of the meanings of such dichotomies. Such a gendered division of work within the Chinese context resonates with the western notion of gender symbolism (Morgan, 1992), which serves to establish the value of gendered work and acts as the measurement of masculinity for rural men. Within the Maoist period with the promotion of gender equality, the communist Chinese government advocated gender erasure in terms of work, as I explore in Chapter 2, in terms of the masculinization of women. For example, gender representation of peasants during that period encouraged women's participation in agricultural work with such slogans as: 'Women hold up half of the sky' and 'Things men can do, women also can do' (Honig, 2000). However, according to Jacka (1997:190), a traditional gender-occupational pattern in terms of 'men rule outside, women rule inside' materially and symbolically remained in place during that era.

At the same time, such a closed gender division of work is associated with traditional familial gender norms, even after the post-Mao economic reform when the Chinese government shifted its rural policy from a 'collective-based' to a 'family-based contract responsibility system' or 'household responsibility system' (see Brandt *et al.*, 2002). Within such family-oriented agricultural production activities, the gender division of work, on the one hand, subordinated women's social position; while on the other hand it maintained a traditional male hegemonic and authoritarian masculine identity. For example, Jacka (1997) uses the following example to illustrate the unequal power relations between men and women in agricultural work. As she notes, 'if a woman went near a well that was being dug, no water, or only bad water, would be found, and if a menstruating women walked through a paddy field she would cause the rice shoots to shrivel' (Jacka, 1997:23).

Men's hegemonic position within rural work has been maintained through these traditional gender ideologies and practices, generally in relation to outdoor heavier work. Both patriarchal based gendered work and the Confucian gender hierarchy have secured rural men's masculinity within village life that has been criticized by feminists in terms of their power to subordinate women. Furthermore, to critically understand the hegemonic masculine position of men within agricultural work, it is necessary to address the specific interrelations of a traditional familial gender order, in which a father has power over his son, an older brother

over a younger brother, etc. In other words, there is a need to understand the dynamic of power relations among men in such family-oriented agricultural work, marked by generation and age differences that are based on traditional Confucian ethics.

Relocation of work in modern space

In most cases, men's participation in urban work has been seen as an important practice that is compatible with traditional male gender roles, with men pursuing the role of 'bread winner' and demonstrating the ideology of men's work as taking place 'outside' the home. However, with the increasing number of out-migrating family members and especially with the increasing number of female peasant workers from the rural areas, the traditional gender division of labour has been challenged. The dominant cultural meanings of masculinity and femininity associated with occupations have also been changing, with empirical studies suggesting the 'feminization of agriculture' in rural China (Gao, 1994; Zuo, 2004; Song and Zhang, 2004), as out-migrating men leave women to do agricultural work, alongside the increasing number of female peasant workers entering the urban labour force.[1]

Being outside: migration as constituting masculine identity

Rural–urban migration has had a specific impact on reconstituting work-based masculinities. On the one hand, migration has provided opportunities for male peasant workers to enact their traditional gender roles by earning 'big money' that serves to demonstrate their masculinity as the 'breadwinner' providing material support to the family (Savage, 2005). On the other hand, it has also provided space for them to (re)construct their masculinities in order to accommodate themselves to the 'new' urban locations, within which the symbols of 'money' and 'knowledge' have generated new signs of masculinity, within a specific historical context of modernization. Asking my interviewees about the difference between working in the field at home and working in the city, Huang Ping (44 years old), who worked in a chemistry factory suggested the following.

INTERVIEWER: What do you think the difference is working here in the factory and working at home on the farm?

HUANG PING: Of course different. Besides the income, the pressure of working on the farm is much higher than working in the factory. If the weather and everything is fine, then it is ok but it would have been bad if some natural disaster happened. It is more secure working outside. You have a family to feed. Now children need money to go to university.

There is a certain continuity in this response with that of their fathers' generation of implementing the central male obligation towards protecting the family.

Although the men often referred to the negative aspects of their working lives, they were also grateful for the sustained and potential increased financial security of urban work. For many male peasant workers, especially for a younger generation, the historical specificity of their self-representations of their current occupational lives included deep investments in modern work outside their hometown. These investments included self-development, as advocated by the Chinese modernization project, in terms of better wages and opportunities in the city. Ah Fu and Zhu Yanhui recalled their rationale for moving out from rural areas to work in the city:

AH FU (19 YEARS OLD): There is no opportunity working at home ... everyone is leaving to work in the south ... there is no future and it is useless staying at home

[...]

ZHU YANHUI (23 YEARS OLD): I just didn't want to stay at home. It is not good to stay at home for good. All the young people in the hometown go to work outside. There are just old people and children around.

INTERVIEWER: What happens to you if you don't work outside?

ZHU YANHUI: I don't know ... staying at home perhaps. But it is too boring staying at home alone since all your friends have gone out to work. Young people need to go out to 'jian shi mian' [see the world].

Many of the young male peasant workers I interviewed conveyed an intense desire for the social world outside their local villages. In this imaginary shift from the local to the global, the gendered notion of the outside appeared to be conceptually expanded (Marchand and Runyan, 2000). There was an active reworking of the traditional gender ideology of men's work practices being located outside in the public space. For a younger generation, such as Ah Fu and Zhu Yanhui, this expansion of the notion of the outside from the private world of the home and now the village to the public world of the city served to recalibrate the cultural hierarchy of masculinities. For example, at this time, in their transition to adulthood, as Zhu Yanhui claimed, there appeared to be only old people and children left behind in the village. This can be read in terms of the projection of an ascribed low-status masculinity to those young men who stayed in the village, who are represented as 'useless' and having 'no future' that could not be associated with adult men. Importantly, it had become a trend for rural youth, such as Ah Fu and Zhu Yanhui, to move to the city to look for work as soon as they could, immediately after completing middle school. Some of them also expressed that it was returned peasant workers that opened up their imagination and desire for the outside world. Wang Hai (32 years old) spoke about how he felt when he saw returned workers:

> My friends were all heading out to look for work in the South. We thought there must be a lot of opportunities to make big money in Guangdong. Some people send money back home and started to build a house for their family. Our eyes were red (We were very jealous.) when we saw our neighbour had a big house. I thought I couldn't stay at home for life. I had to explore the outside world for a career and earn big money for my family.

However, most of these men, owing to their low educational and occupational qualifications, could not access the high status urban jobs that they desired. As diverse literatures on emigrants and internal migrants have testified across different societies, the social imaginary operates as a major motivation that impels men and women to leave their homelands in search of a better life (Boehm, 2004; Cohen, 2006). However, as this generation of Chinese male peasant workers was discovering, the reality for most of them was highly dislocated lives, in which they had to re-invent new identities of survival in the city.

Gendered migrant work and the construction of 'masculine' work

Until recently, within public narratives work was discursively represented within highly rigid gendered codes. For example, ascribed jobs for women included: domestic cleaning, taking care of people and labour-intensive factory work. Fan (2004:288–9) points out how peasant workers are positioned within highly bounded gender classifications. She notes that: 'factory work targets young, single migrant women because they are constructed to be detailed, able to handle delicate work, and easy to control, while migrant men are channeled into heavy work such as construction'. However, such dominant categorizations of gendered work do not fully constrain the potential fluidity of more diverse meanings of masculinity and femininity, which I address later in the chapter. Western literature on gender and the workplace in industrial societies suggests that socially constructed notions of gendered labour and gender segregation in the labour market are of importance in shaping western capitalist economies in relation to social class (McDowell, 1999). For example, the symbolic meanings of men's involvement in physical demanding work maintain the dominant notion of masculine qualities within work, which are highlighted in Willis's (2000 [1977]) study of the formation of working-class men:

> Manual labour is suffused with masculine qualities ... The toughness and awkwardness of physical work and effort – for itself and in the division of labour and for its strictly capitalist logic quite without intrinsic heroism and grandeur – takes on masculine lights and depths and assumes a significance beyond itself. Whatever the specific problems, so to speak, of the difficult task they are always essentially masculine problems. It takes masculine capacities to deal with them ... The brutality of the working situation is partially re-interpreted into a heroic exercise of manly confrontation with *the task*. Difficult, uncomfortable or dangerous conditions are seen, not for themselves, but for their appropriateness to a masculine readiness and hardiness.
>
> (Willis, 2000: 150)

Willis (ibid.) highlights that it is not just masculine qualities that are expressed through working-class men's jobs, but also that such qualities secure gender power and their privileged position in carrying out such heroic exercises.

Occupational choice and gender practice is a central site for the construction of masculine identity (Morgan, 1992). West and Zimmerman (1987) in their study of 'doing gender' within the workplace critically engaged with patriarchal gender norms and men's hegemonic position, highlighting the different types of work to which women and men are allocated with accompanying forms of power. More recently, Kelan (2010:177) argues in her critical exploration of doing and undoing gender in organizations:'Studies of doing gender in organizations tend to focus on how gender differentiation, hierarchy and asymmetry are maintained. In this way, the focus has generally been on how the gender binary is maintained in the realm of work' (Kelan, 2010:177).

Such an approach to examining gender in organizations has been criticized for not addressing the potential dynamic fluidity in actual gender practices within different workplaces (Martin, 2001). When I began to interview male peasant workers, the logic of such accounts that assume a simple patriarchal work structure did not make sense of the men's lives. More specifically, an assumed simple oppositional logic of male domination and female subordination within the workplace was not able to capture the complexity of the male peasant workers' lives, who often worked in non-traditional, female-concentrated occupations. Methodologically, at this early stage of the research I found that critical empirical data collection within a Chinese context could be used to interrogate established western epistemologies of gender oppression.

(1) SOCIAL CONTACTS AND THE FORMATION OF GENDERED AND CLASSED LABOUR

In the Introduction, I referred to the productive deployment of adapting new feminist accounts, working within a British Cultural Studies tradition, that address the intersectionality of categories, including gender, class and ethnicity, enabling us to examine male peasant workers' cultural formation, identity and subjectivity (Skeggs, 1997; Reay, 1998). In order to critically understand the complexity of the interconnecting gender and class meanings of migrant jobs for male peasant workers, it is important to consider the notion of capital as a resource in the formation of their labour. Within current dominant discourses of neoliberal modernization with accompanying connotations of development and progress, the men's lack of social, cultural and economic capitals served to exclude them from access to high-status jobs in the modern urban workplace (Bourdieu, 1989). This had a specific impact on the complex dynamics of gendered-classed work in the context of the men's cultural habitus (or relational self). The formation of gendered-classed jobs and the occupational division of labour among peasant workers (Fan, 2004) needs to be critically understood as the result of the social contacts they had formed. In other words, their social capital was of importance in the formation of the 'gendering' of their classed

occupations. For example, male peasants working in the construction sector, who migrated at an earlier period, provided contacts for job opportunities (social capital) for later male peasant workers:

> I was working on a building site when I first went out of my hometown. At that time, *most of my laoxiang* [native-place fellows] were working on building sites. So we introduce to each other if we got any job information.
>
> (Lao Tang, 48 years old) (My emphasis)

> I didn't know what I should do at the beginning. I don't have any qualifications ... I know nothing about working outside. I used to work on a building site. *My friend* introduced me to it. Those people who worked outside the hometown before us told us wherever they need people to work ... I knew nothing about the outside. So I just went out to work on a building site together with *my other laoxiang.*
>
> (Xiao Zhang, 30 years old) (My emphasis)

> When you have been working outside for a while, *people from your hometown* are expecting you to introduce a job for them.
>
> (Wang Hai, 32 years old)(My emphasis)

Fan (2003) maintains that 'migrants are expected to be directed to specific jobs rather than having open access to the entire array of jobs' (Fan, 2003:27). This pattern is partly shaped by access to social contacts, most importantly through their family network, as well as other external factors such as economic status and educational qualifications rather than just their personal will. For example, some of the ex-construction workers I interviewed informed me that their experience of finding work in the construction sector resulted from having a contact among fellow villagers, who informed them of the job vacancy. For them, choice of jobs was not based on personal preferences but rather positively resulted from such social contacts, and more negatively as working-class men, as a result of their lack of qualifications, which prevented them from access to higher-skilled occupations.

Within western literature on gender and work, there tends to be a predictable gendered list of occupations that are rigidly classified as women's and men's jobs in industrial societies. More recently, poststructuralist-based studies of the workplace have suggested a shift from a structurally fixed meaning of gendered work to a more fluid and flexible notion. Such a notion of gendered work has been represented by recent studies of new men and men's involvement in female-concentrated work (see Lupton, 2000; Simpson, 2004; Nixon, 2009). For the Chinese male peasant workers, a non-traditional gendered classificatory system was in place. Rather than working in the construction sector being a demonstration of involvement in a working-class masculine practice, for the male peasant workers moving outside of the rural area to work in the city to provide a better life for their families constituted a new way of being a man, who fulfilled his

central domestic obligations. Within this context rather than the job itself being seen as intrinsically associated with masculinity, as for the first generation of male peasant workers located within the construction sector, gender meanings for the men I interviewed were located within the male bonding attached to social contacts and looking after their *laoxiang*[2] (native-place fellows) that served to demonstrate their working-class masculine identity.

The men's narratives make clear the need to see beyond dominant government, media and academic representations of men and gender identity formation within the workplace, that tend to over-emphasize a structuralist-based approach, focusing upon the social positioning of male peasant workers within a fixed gender system. This approach underplays the question of men's subjectivity and agency (Knights, 1990). The male peasant workers' narratives provide a more complex picture of their own individual and collective agency in reconstructing their working-class masculine identity. However, as they illustrate in these self-representations, this is not simply informed by a 'do-it-yourself biography', as suggested by western late modernity theorists (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992, 1994). Rather, it is within the historically specific material conditions of the current Chinese modernization project that underlies their internal migration, enabling them to operationalize social contacts between their future employer and their family, wider kin and local people from their villages. In so doing, they extend the central traditional gendered obligation of men to provide for one's family.

This chapter endorses McDowell's (1997:25) understanding of 'women workers', in which she refers to Scott's (1988:47) argument for the need to address the historical formation of women workers:

> If we write the history of women's work by gathering data that describe the activities, needs, interests, and culture of 'women workers', we leave in place the naturalised contrast and reify a fixed categorical difference between men and women. We start the story, in other words, too late, by uncritically accepting a gendered category (the 'woman worker') that itself needs investigation because its meaning is relative to its history.

Equally, there is a need to understand the male peasant workers' gendered and classed meanings, as part of their habitus relative to their history. In so doing, the study seeks to denaturalize the gendered assumptions of the Chinese modernization project that has associated them with heavy labour-demanding jobs, such as building, mining and factory work. These officially projected images of working-class men are also spatially located, with heavy industrial jobs tending to be located within the north of China. My research was carried out in the south of China, where more light industry tends to be located. Within this location, the male peasant workers' self-representations of their working lives provide alternative accounts that emphasize their active making of masculine working-class occupationally-based identities, thus serving to challenge existing work in this field of inquiry.

(2) SYMBOLISM AND 'PRESTIGE-RELATED' GENDERED WORK

In relation to gender and the workplace, Lupton and Barclay (1997:2) maintain that men 'are encouraged to construct their self-identities as masculine subjects through their work role'. Alongside the modern gendering process within urban workplaces, issues of stratification have played an important role in understanding the meaning of urban work in China. Liang and Chen (2004:424) have identified a range of elements that impact upon the stratification of male peasant workers' lives. An important element is the urban *hukou*, which acts as a prerequisite for specific occupations and limits opportunities for peasant workers. Li (2004a) has produced a ranking of occupational prestige in China, and used statistics to show that within a hundred occupations, most of those listed at the bottom were associated with peasant workers (see Table 4.1)

His research also shows that there is no substantial gender difference in the population who are migrating, with 51.8 per cent of men and 48.2 per cent of women in a total number of over 48.3 thousand people in his survey.[4] Because of the location of my fieldwork, many of my participants were involved within the service industry and light industrial work rather than construction and other heavy industry sectors. Issues of social stratification or more specifically occupational prestige are of importance in the (re)construction of masculine identity, which in western literature is particularly associated with social class and the production of diverse class-based masculinities (Connell, 1991; Pyke, 1996).

Early work in the western literature on men and the workplace privileged class as a central category of explanation (Tolson, 1977). This was challenged by new social movement theory, including feminism and anti-racism, which was theoretically important in developing a vocabulary that identified gender and ethnicity as of equal importance to class in understanding the institution of the workplace (Bradley and Healy, 2008). In turn, more recently poststructuralist analysis has criticized new social movement theory for producing an additive model of oppression, in which each category makes claims about being 'the most oppressed' (Skeggs, 1997, 2004a). In response, poststructuralist theorists have

Table 4.1 Ranking of occupational prestige[3]

Ranking	*Occupation*	*Prestige index*	*Ranking*	*Occupation*	*Prestige index*
83	Miner	47.34	95	Logistics worker	41.22
86	Construction worker	46.88	96	Maid/Household cleaner	38.80
88	Store shop owner	46.03	97	Chief-labour contractor	37.63
92	Self-employed peasant in town	42.21	98	Bin recycle workers/ collector	36.61
93	Unit security guard	42.20	99	Tricycle rider	36.51
94	Immigrant peasant worker	41.71	100	Receptionist	36.37

suggested the need to address the complex intersectionality of multiple categories and an accompanying complex view of power, in terms of how these social categories are played out in specific spatial and temporal contexts.

This theoretical framework is productive when exploring the working lives of Chinese male peasant workers. The men's narratives provide evidence of their misrepresentation in dominant government, media and academic representations. Of specific significance in understanding the social positioning of the men is the interplay between gender, class and urban/rural divisions. Existing work on gender and migration has been carried out by feminist scholars (Pun, 2005; Yan, 2008). This work has been important in identifying the social stratification and accompanying exploitation of female peasant workers. However, an unintended effect of deploying a framework of patriarchy is that male peasant workers are assumed to have high gendered status, as part of the patriarchal privilege that is accrued to all men. I argue that, within the context of the workplace, the male peasant workers' lives cannot simply be read in terms of a high status stratification position. Their gender identities are cross-cut with a social class and a rural regional status. Current economic conditions have helped re-define understandings of gendered occupations, as Fan (2003, 2004) maintains. Rural men's urban jobs and attendant male subjectivities are generally subordinated within a post-Mao China, with its dominant discourse of modernization advocating development and progress. One of my interviewees, Pan Peifeng, illustrates the complexity of the men's marginalized social status, which is marked by a certain ambiguity within official meanings attached to peasant workers.

Pan Peifeng (34 years old) is a security guard working in a local residential area. When I saw him both on and off duty, he always wore his security uniform. He told me that it was compulsory to wear it while at work but he chose to wear it while off duty. He described a range of reasons for this, including not having many clothes with him and that it gave him a sense of responsibility.

PAN PEIFENG: I like wearing the security uniform. It is my job. I feel a responsibility upon me, to ensure the safety of the people in this building and taking note of who comes in and goes out.

Western literature has highlighted the importance of the uniform in the formation of a worker's identity (see Du Gay, 1996; Morgan, 1992) that is compatible with Pan's account. Pan was very proud of wearing his uniform and was aware that it connoted a respectable public masculine status. However, he also revealed that his uniform carried other meanings owing to the urban/rural dichotomy in contemporary China, with the former operating to dominate the latter. In relation to his urban encounters, he felt that his masculine status was subordinated within the hierarchy of this rural/urban dichotomy.

PAN PEIFENG: People who live in this building are nice to you ... but not all the people treat us well. Sometimes they shout at me: 'Bao'an (security guard), open the gate!' like shouting at a servant ... I have to take their car

registers (people from outside) and the room number they visit. Sometimes they just ignore you and drive in ... if you stop them they will show very bad manners ... But I still trace them in the garden, asking them to pay the parking.

The uniform for Pan Peifeng had a range of gender meanings. The uniform as a signifier of a job in security provided him, in gender terms, with a sense of responsibility that enabled him to symbolically project a positive masculine status. At the same time, in class terms, his uniform was associated with a low-status job with relatively little prestige. There were further ambiguities attached to his wearing of the uniform. On the one hand, for some people he gained respect as someone in a security job that was protecting them and their property. On the other hand, with the restratification of jobs as part of the modernization project, security jobs were reclassified as being associated with rural peasant workers, who were treated with extreme disrespect. Pan Peifeng's account was echoed in number of the peasant workers' narratives, serving to illustrate that their masculine status within public spaces was temporary, fragile, fragmented and relational.

Social relations and masculine identities within the urban workplace

Alongside seeing the urban workplace as a gendered organization (Acker, 1990), where Chinese male peasant workers are socially positioned, examined above, I also wish to explore how male peasant workers are gendering the workplace and the emergence of new gender meanings in terms of masculine identity formation. Within the historical context of modernization, working in the city to make money to support their families was the key motivation for Chinese male peasant workers to carry out their obligation as 'the man of the family', which fulfils the demands of tradition. At the same time, they reported a strong sense of dislocation as male subjects, in the move from their rural villages, manifest in the highly subordinated position they occupied in terms of the social hierarchy of the workplace. The tensions for them as male subjects between being 'man of the home', their occupational experience and the public designated images of migrating masculinities created a space for them to reflect on and reconstruct their gendered positions. In western literature, theorists have suggested the need to make a conceptual shift from a singular notion of masculinity to a notion of multiple masculinities, in order to capture the contextual complexity of how men live their lives within conditions of late modernity (Mac an Ghaill and Haywood, 2007). A notion of multiple migrating masculinities is useful in exploring the constitution of masculine identities within the urban space of the modern workplace.

As outlined in Chapter 2, the dominant public representation of male peasant workers associated them with working within heavy industrial occupations. In contrast, the men in my study worked in small manufacturing factories and family businesses, such as electronics, toy and chemical factories, most of which are self-owned by local entrepreneurs. More importantly, some male peasant workers were

self-employed, working with their families in some small businesses, including being domestic cleaners, market merchants or tricycle riders. This chapter particularly focuses on how the men accommodated themselves within such workplaces and the impact on their masculine identity formation within female-concentrated occupations, for example, as domestic cleaners and electronics and toy factory workers. This enables alternative accounts to those of the stereotypical projected images of male peasant workers' 'tough masculinities' as construction workers and miners. Given the material conditions of these men's working lives, including the location of the research and the type of occupations with which they were involved, conventional ideas on the formation of masculinity and its dominant position within the workplace needs to be rethought (Collinson, 1988; Bradley 1993).

The change of 'gendered' work and the gendering of work

As I have argued above, the male peasant workers' masculinities in the workplace, generated within a shifting gendered division of labour, were not pre-given or stable but rather historically, socially and culturally constructed. On the one hand, as a result of the process of working in urban settings, they were impelled to actively (re)construct their masculinities through new occupational practices. However, on the other hand, they were constrained in defining their masculine identities through their gendered social positioning, associated with the assumptions of what constituted masculine work. As indicated above, male peasant workers in southern China, where my research was located, tended to work in light manufacturing factories or with their families as household cleaners or other self-employed occupations. A major reason for this was their low educational and occupational qualifications that made it hard for them to access modern skilled occupations (which have significant symbolic meaning for modern Chinese masculinities). However, a key argument here is that whatever kind of job they carried out, they were actively gendering their occupations through their social practices. This had specific implications within an area such as Shantou, with its predominance of service and light manufacturing industries, where for peasant workers, gender boundaries were less clear than in the other places. More specifically, the men were working in occupations traditionally associated with female peasant workers in the modern stereotypical gender ideology of the workplace currently circulating within Chinese society.

In several places of this study I have suggested the concept of feminization operating within a discourse of modernization, as an element of the dislocation of male peasant workers' masculinity, in the process of moving from rural to the urban areas. Western theorists, such as McDowell (1991), developed the concept of feminization from a simple conceptualization of an increasing number of women's participation within the labour market (resonant with rural women's increasing participation within agriculture and women's participation in rural–urban labour migration), to an expanding concept which captures the interplay between new ways of working, particularly with the increase in service sector work. In the previous chapter, I indicated that some male peasant workers worked

as household cleaners with their wives, as a result of moving to unite the family, or were working in light manufacturing factories, where the majority of labourers were female. Western empirical research on men working in traditional feminine occupations (Simpson, 2004; Lupton, 2000) has found evidence that men use different strategies to accommodate themselves in these jobs. For Whitehead (2002), 'the identity work of the masculine subject requires them to learn, assimilate and perform that which is fundamentally illusory, but which ultimately rests on the approving-disapproving gaze of the Other' (Whitehead, 2002: 219).

Accompanying the economic development of the last 30 years, there is an increasing number of businesses within the service industry in urban China, alongside increasing job opportunities in this service sector (Hale and Hale, 2003) for people such as peasant workers, who have few educational credentials. Lao Tang was part of the increasing number of men working in the service sector, within which traditional gender roles in terms of practices in relation to familial work has become an important resource for him to accommodate himself within his predominantly 'female' job. He was a 48-year-old man from Sichuang Province, working as a male household cleaner in the city with his wife and his daughter. As noted earlier, he gave up his job in a rural village to move to live with his family. Connell (2005) has argued that different forms of work, marked as manual and cerebral, have been of key significance in differentiating between men, thus producing a hierarchical classification of multiple masculinities. I found similar accounts of job-related gender hierarchy in my data collection. Within this context, Lao Tang found his own way to accommodate himself within a predominantly 'female' job, after working in the construction industry, by appealing to assumed natural masculine attributes.

LAO TANG: It is relatively easier for women to find a household cleaning job. Men need to work in the house for a few times before they hire you ... I knew they came into the room to look at what I was doing regularly in case I was stealing something ... People hire you because they can ask you to climb high up to clean the windows. It is too dangerous for women to do it. People don't worry about you if you are a man. Besides, they ask you to move some heavy stuff.

INTERVIEWER: Are the wages the same between men and women?

LAO TANG: The same, it depends on the size of the house.

INTERVIEWER: Do you mind people seeing your job as a woman's job?

LAO TANG: Both men and women can do it. Here, if your wife is a household cleaner, the husband is as well. And man is stronger than woman ... It is difficult to get a job now. It is not bad that you can earn money to 'feed' the family.

Bradley (1993) argues that it might be easier for women to work in traditional male-dominated jobs than men in 'women's jobs'. The predominant gender division of labour that has developed within the modernization process is accompanied by a relatively higher percentage of women than men working in the service sector, with particular implications for male peasant workers. My empirical

work, as indicated above, suggests that male peasants working in non-conventional men's jobs redefined modern 'feminine' work as 'masculine' work that required physical demanding attributes. Ridgeway and Correll (2004) suggest that gender is a background identity that functions as the core structure of cultural beliefs that are not easy to erode, although changing socio-economic conditions and personal and collective resistance can gradually modify the beliefs, as indicated by these working-class men in my research.

Located within the dominant modernization discourse of development and progress, for the male peasant workers positioned as 'modernization losers', cultural traditions in terms of familial related gender practices have become a key resource for them to survive in their urban job. As Seidler (1997:201) suggests: 'history leaves a moral legacy and the ways we grow up to inherit masculinities as men reflect the powers men have traditionally exercised in families'. Such a moral legacy in terms of gender norms is part of our cultural formed unconsciousness that directs our daily actions before we have sufficient capital for pursuing our reflexive consciousness. For example, Lao Tang, working with his family brought the gendered role operating within his rural home to the urban workplace. Rural men in female-centred occupations did not place themselves in a disadvantaged position to other men in conventional male-centred occupations (Lupton, 2000). They engendered the 'feminine' job through practising their relational gender role. Their lack of occupational skills and qualifications and the highly competitive labour market compelled them to project a 'masculine' image within their 'non-masculine' jobs. Thus, they hoped that the visibility of their masculine practices would gradually change the perception of the modern gendered job in the urban setting. Working as a domestic cleaner, for example, according to Lao Tang, had now become a family business rather than a single sex occupation, where men and women have their relationally gender-defined duties. For example, as he claimed: 'you can climb high up to clean the windows. It is too dangerous for women to do it'. Such evidence of men's involvement in labour-demanding and dangerous tasks could also be found in electronics and toy factories, as local employers have gendered expectations of male workers' involvement in 'heavy tasks', such as loading and unloading material. For example, when I was in a local electronics factory, sometimes the leader of the assembling line would call out some male workers to carry out heavy tasks, such as loading materials onto lorries for distribution. Sister Yang (42 years old, female, workshop leader) made the following observation about some of the male workers in her workshop: 'They all want to be the first to do the heavy work once they are needed. Such as Song Shan and Xiao Wu are most vigorous. Every time we need someone to do some other work such as loading the material, they are always the first' (at HW electronic factory, 22 July 2007) .

In a later interview with Song Shan, a 20-year-old male worker, in an electronics factory, he commented:

INTERVIEWER: Sister Yang told me you are always the first one to do help loading the material.

SONG SHAN (20 YEARS OLD): I am not the only one. We all try to have good behaviour and impression in front of her ... Honestly it is nothing. It was much more tiring to help my father move vegetables to sell in the market. I needed to ride a trolley full of vegetables to the market every morning. It is nothing to move stuff.

Lao Tang and Song Shan spoke of their awareness of their subordinated social position within the urban gendered workplace, because of the connotation of their social inferiority, given the nature of the work in post-Mao modern society. At the same time, they also suggested the importance of their traditional familial gendered practices as the strategies they constantly deployed in their work that to some extent served to balance the inferiority of working with women and the superiority of being a man in urban female-concentrated occupations, from which they make sense of their position within the workplace. Their gender practices in terms of carrying out tasks associated with a man's role within rural agricultural work in the context of an urban female-concentrated occupation resonates with Batnitzky *et al.*'s (2009) research on migrant men in a London female-concentrated workplace. They use the notion of the men's 'flexible strategic masculinities' in order to fulfil their economic expectations, as their masculine practices from their country of origin have been challenged owing to their limited access to traditional jobs that can maintain their masculine identities. Meanwhile, as Osella and Osella (2000:128) argue: 'what helps male migration particularly relevant to masculinity is an enhanced relationship with money, a detachable form of masculine potency and means of exerting agency at a distance'. Such an argument is particularly relevant to the Chinese male peasant workers, especially located within the current dominant discourse of progress, projected by the government modernization project. They constructed their masculine identity by perceiving themselves as subjects, who have been enabled to pursue traditional male responsibilities in relation to their rural families. The men's gendering of urban jobs can be understood in terms of their 'strategic' action to accommodate themselves within the urban workplace. At the same time, their enhanced relationship with money in this context results from their marginalized working-class status, which is marked by a lack of urban social capital. Most significantly, for these working-class men, as Lao Tang indicates above, even though they were working as domestic cleaners, they were still content that they were earning money to feed their families, through which their masculine identities were maintained. In other words, to be able to work outside rural areas and support their families back home was the key element in the formation of their masculine identity. For younger people such as Song Shan, to practise their familial masculinity at work also provided an opportunity for them to impress their employer, thus enabling their promotion.

SONG SHAN: At the end of the day, I need the manager to recognize my performance. But sometimes I think no matter how hard you try to 'biaoxian' in

front of the manager, working on the shop floor does not have many chances to showcase my 'nengli' [能力, competence, capability] ... I wish one day I will get an opportunity of promotion to become a 'lingban' [领班, supervisor], and possibly manager in the future.

Liu (2007) in her study of women in urban workplaces illustrates the role of the discourse of *biaoxian* in urban workplaces. The term *biaoxian* is literally translated as 'performance'. It was a discourse within which the employer evaluated the performance of the employees. In my research, the young men's narratives of '*biaoxian*' were also illustrated by what they referred to as *nengli* or *benshi*, as markers of masculinities.

The construction of non-kin familial social relations at work

The relational gender ideology operating within the division of work in traditional Chinese culture has continuity from the rural environment to the urban workplace for Chinese male peasant workers, operating through qualifications (cultural capital) and social contacts and relations within work (social capital). Family, in this research project, acts as a major resource for Chinese male peasant workers to construct their working-class masculine identity. The symbolic meanings of carrying out familial gendered work played an important part in the formation of their masculine identities. Equally important, in the fieldwork, I found that the male peasant workers' identities were not simply about the work they were doing, but also how they dealt with social relations within the workplace (Hsu, 1971). During interviews with the men, I identified a continuity of familial gender relations within the urban workplace in terms of Confucian gender relations/hierarchy based on binary power relations between two structured relational members of society. According to Chinese tradition, the Five Cardinal Relationships are the most important interpersonal relations: 'between ruler and minister, between father and son, between husband and wife, between brothers, and between friends' (Ho, 1998:13). I conceptualized the interpersonal relationships within the urban workplace in terms of Zhao's (2007) notion of extended 'father–son relations'[5] (F–S relations) in Confucianism, which also has an impact on other gendered interpersonal relations, such as those between ruler and minster, husband and wife, brother and sister, and brother and brother, which I will illustrate through the men's narratives in the following section.

Work mates as families

Familial relational gender role practices have become a major resource in constructing the identity of Chinese male peasant workers, as I have indicated above. More significantly, the interplay between the reconstruction of gender relations and work practices in the urban workplace helped forge their masculine identity. For the male peasant workers, the workplace was not just a place of work, it was also a 'second home'. They often saw their *lao xiang*, those who came to the city

from the same home town with them, as their 'new' family and constructed specific roles within the context of the men's new 'family' relations.

When I first noticed in my fieldwork within a local electronics assembly factory that peasant workers were constructing 'new' family relations with their workmates, I realized that such newly formed 'family relations' contributed to the potential expansion of their limited social capital while living in the city. This included supporting and taking care of each other in many aspects of their lives. They were building up intimate relations with close workmates, many of them from the same home town or areas close by, who mostly spoke the same dialect. For example, Zhao Ting was a 35-year-old worker in an electronics factory. In his life course of working as a peasant worker in the city, he had a few jobs in the past ten years. Before the current job he was working in an engineering factory as a turner, to which he was introduced by a *lao xiang*. Zhao Ting informed me that he was working under a guy, whom he addressed as *Shifu* (master, mentor who teaches you skills in the factory when you are still an apprentice; it literally translates as 'teacher, father' in Chinese).

INTERVIEWER: Tell me about you and your Shifu.

ZHAO TING: He is from a town not far from mine, so we got on very well from the beginning. He taught me those terminologies and skills and some issues I have to be careful when I operate the machine.

For Zhao Ting, *Shifu* was a person who acted more as a father figure than a leader at work, with whom he identified in his interpersonal relations in the workplace. As he recalled:

ZHAO TING: I always went to his home for dinner for a change (as they see it as a treat having dinner with a few more dishes than usual). His wife always brought some special local food from the village. He and his wife treated me very well. His home almost became my home as his son and daughter were working in the other cities so they always asked me to have dinner at their home. I remember once I went back home for the new year, he bought me some dry mushrooms and squid for me to take home for my family. He is a good guy. So I always listen to him ... His father was very ill, so he and his wife left the factory to open a small store in his village to look after his father ... I left the factory too as he told me the factory had a big deficit and asked me to find another job.

After working as a turner for a few years, Zhao Ting got another job in an electronics factory and soon was promoted as workshop leader. There were 15 female workers and five male workers in his workshop. As a senior figure at this factory, Zhao Ting's job was to carry out quality control of the products as leader of the workshop. For the people in the workshop, Zhao Ting acted like a big brother or father figure that they obeyed. Zhao Ting also had a good relationship with his colleagues outside the workshop. At lunch time with them one day in the staff

canteen, Zhao Ting and three other workers were talking about preparing for a barbecue picnic at the weekend.

DU WEN (25-YEAR-OLD MALE WORKER): There must be a lot of people going to Queshi [the place for the barbecue] this Sunday. My older brother Lao Cai said it is always packed at holiday time. Do you still think we should go on that day?
XIAO FAN (24-YEAR-OLD FEMALE WORKER): Of course we go! We all decided the other day. Xiao Ling and me are preparing the chicken legs and wings, Ting Ge [brother, the name they call Zhao Ting].
ZHAO TING: We can go earlier to occupy the place.
XIAO LING (28-YEAR-OLD FEMALE WORKER): Shall we go at 8 to catch the early ferry?
ZHAO TING: 9 o'clock will be fine. No one goes that early. By the way, Xiao Fan, do you need me to get any soft drinks. I can ask Lao Wu for the wholesale price. He got a *laoxiang* [person from the same home town] working in the wholesale market.
XIAO LING: Du Wen's sister knows him. Let Du Wen do it.
INTERVIEWER: Is your sister here too, Du Wen?
DU WEN: No, she is my *laoxiang*.

In their conversation, they highlighted the emergence of new extended 'family relations' with their workmates based on their 'real' familial gender relations. They treated each other as family members, respecting the old and taking care of the young and females. In the process of working in the city, they were establishing non-kin family relationships within the workplace and practising their familial gender roles in their daily lives. They spent most of their time working together, so that their relations appeared to be similar to that between brother and brother, brother and sister, and father and son. This was accompanied by a traditional gendered familial hierarchy, based on and developed from the extended 'father–son' relationship operating within their rural homes. In this situation, male peasant workers were formulating their male subjectivities in a similar way to that operating within their rural families. For example, when Zhao Ting was working as an apprentice turner with his *shifu*, he was playing out a role of 'son' by being obedient and loyal. While as the oldest man in the workshop led by him, Zhao Ting acted as a father figure, who was expected to make decisions and to give orders to 'their family'.

At the same time, within a female-concentrated labour-intensive manual factory, male peasant workers formulated their familial masculine subjectivities through traditional relational gender practices, such as making decisions and carrying out heavy 'work', while female workers were more involved in domestic tasks, as Xiao Fan and Xiao Ling illustrated by preparing food. In the men's narratives, in the context of social relations within the workplace, extended 'father–son' relations were enacted and performed in terms of their behaving in a protective brotherly way. For example, Li Yong revealed his sense of acting as a man through his response to his work colleagues.

LI YONG (20 YEARS OLD): I remember last year when I was in a factory in Guangzhou, some people bullied a close friend of mine [because] he is little ... You depend on your parents when you are home, while you depend on your friends while you are away from home ... I just helped him a bit to get rid of those people ... It was that time that I felt I could protect him and felt like a big brother ... I don't usually fight with other people, but I cannot let my brother be bullied by those people ... am I right?

Such extended 'father–son' relations and their ideology of gendered hierarchy were also displayed in interpersonal relations between older men and younger women and older women and younger men. These relations have their origin in local villages, as early studies on Chinese peasants suggest (see Potter and Potter, 1990:8), male peasants of the same generation within a given lineage extended their family to consider themselves as brothers to each other and all women saw themselves as sisters. The men's narratives made clear the legacy of traditional familial gender relations. In a contemporary context, they make sense of their gender identity through practising these relational roles. Some of them were developing heterosexual relationships within these 'familial' relations. For example, Ah Wu (male, 22 years old) and Xiao Xin (female, 20 years old) came from the same village near the factory. They called each other 'brother' and 'sister' in public but people knew they were developing a love relationship.

INTERVIEWER: Is she your girlfriend?
AH WU (22 YEARS OLD): I don't know, she is my sister.
INTERVIEWER: Do you like her?
AH WU: ... she is very nice, she always goes to buy 'liang cha' [herbal drink sold by local people] for me ... She is also alone here. We are laoxiang ... need to take care of each other.

The workplace has become an alternative cultural institution where male peasant workers construct their relational familial masculinities as practised in their rural families. The family network was extended to the workplace, where a new established 'family network without kin' was taking place. When Ryan (2004:368) researched Irish female migrants in Britain, she suggested that 'familial networks may operate in highly gendered ways. Such networks may offer support and enable migrants to cope with hostile and adverse social environments'. Such a finding is compatible with the experience of Chinese male peasant workers and their non-related and extended family relations in urban spaces.

A main argument of this study is that the combination of the dearth of research on male peasant workers and the public misrepresentations of their lives in the city has led to reductive stereotypes of these men. In response, their self-representations illustrate a more comprehensive picture. In gendered terms, there was a general sense of the migrating men operating within the structural constraints that produced dislocated masculinities and an accompanying lack of stability, with reference to being a husband or partner, father and son. However, the men's narratives

clearly illustrated their individual and collective agency in reinventing themselves in an urban space (Fraser, 1997). Most significantly, this is achieved through the continuity of the development of familial gender relations in the workplace, within which non-kinship familial relations were formed. Such social relations between the male peasant workers and their workmates can be captured by the conceptualization of family social relations in Confucianism, as part of one body characterized by intimacy and loyalty.[6] As I have illustrated, such extended father–son relations and non-kin family relations are important compensatory resources that served to challenge their sense of dislocation and the marginalization of their masculine identities, as they adjusted to occupations marked by low skills, low pay and little respect in the public domain.

'Class consciousness' and/or 'father–son' relationship at work

In this chapter I argue that the formation of male peasants' working masculinities is of key importance in understanding their social position in a modernizing urban society. Haywood and Mac an Ghaill (2003:39) acknowledge that 'studies on masculinity and class might be more fruitful if they moved away from privileging workplace practices as defining men to broader cultural practices that men take up'. In my field work, I found broader cultural practices were being taken up by the men in the workplace. Through new occupational socialization, the deployment of a traditional extended 'father–son' relationship had become an important resource for them to make sense of their social position within the workplace, where they were positioned at the base of the social hierarchy in relation to their employers.

JIANG XIAOPING (38 YEARS OLD): When I was in the army, I was an automobile soldier. I don't need to learn how to drive in the factory, but I have learnt how to be a person in the society.... I am 'chi ku nai lao' [stoic, working hard]. Sometimes some leader of the workshop would like to use a car and asked me to drive. Last month, Lao Chen asked me to give a lift for his parents to go back to the village. They were not supposed to use the factory car for their private matters ... I am ok with it as long as the managing director doesn't know. In the end they [leaders of workshop] are leaders, it'd be better not to offend them. They know I am a 'lao shi ren' [honest and humble] and trust me. It's better not to establish an enemy when you work in the city.

SONG SHAN (20 YEARS OLD): They like my personality ... I talk a lot to our manager, having jokes with her ... I am very guai [obedient] in front of them ... you are alone at work, you need to deal well with the relations with the boss so that they will take care of you.

The notion of 'how to be a person' (*zen yang zuo ren*) is of importance in constructing male peasant workers' masculine subjectivities. As they stated in their narratives, being *lao shi* (honest and humble) and *chi ku nai lao* (working hard and suffering difficulties), *guai* (being obedient) and *gao hao guan xi* (dealing well in social relations) illustrated the key masculine characteristics that they needed to display, in order to integrate themselves into the social relations of the factory. One reading of the men's accounts is that these characteristics reveal that they were aware of their marginal social and economic position as peasant workers in the city. The practice of 'how to be a person' was developed within an urban context of their survival and making sense of their new social position, which secured their place within the factory, while generating their consciousness of class subordination. This is compatible with Willis's (2000/[1977]) description of working-class shop-floor culture and its associated masculinity for working-class young men's personal survival and production of a subordinated class consciousness. In Willis's (2000/ [1977]) work, there is a strong sense of intergenerational class consciousness among his male participants. This is based on a regionally based collective understanding of class domination and struggle. In contrast, the concept of class in contemporary China is theoretically underdeveloped. Within this context, some of my participants' accounts appeared to show little visible class resistance.

JIANG XI (21 YEARS OLD): I learnt a lot during my work in the factory, I learnt how to bear the supervisor's criticism of my work. When I face difficulty, I have to learn to be jianqiang [tough], to be lenjing [calm]. You can't do anything when they've got the power. We are all here to make money, as long as they give you money, you should always listen to them.

Jiang Xi's comment, which was common among the peasant workers, suggests a strategy of accommodation rather than resistance to the factory management. As illustrated in Chapter 2, a radical form of resistance was developed when the terms of accommodation between the men and the management broke down. As Jiang Xi indicated above, these terms centred around their wages that enabled them to maintain their masculine identity, as a respectable and responsible man in relation to their rural families. As Collinson (1992: 45–6) maintains in analysing workers' subjectivities within the workplace, 'by emphasizing the various options, cultural resources and strategic agencies available to and deployed by workers in organizations, it is therefore more accurate to refer to resistance'.

HUANG LIXING (32 YEARS OLD): Personal relationships are very complicated to deal with working in the factory ... They give you money and you obey their orders. Sometimes they require us to work overtime to get the order done quicker before the wage release date. I have to do what I have been told and trust them to release the wages on time.

INTERVIEWER. What if they don't release the wages?

HUANG LIXING: People strike. I certainly will do. But they [the boss] should know that it [the wages] is our sweat and blood. Some people threaten to jump out of the building ... [commit suicide if they don't receive their wages]. It is all over the newspapers.

[...]

DU WEN (25 YEARS OLD): They [my parents] told me not to be taichong [too blunt] working outside. You have to bear their [the managers'] attitudes. What else can you do, unless you don't want to work here any longer? Sometimes I have been thinking to find another one. [But] to be honest, you have some emotional attachment to the place where you have been working. And they pay us on time. It is not a solution to be yiqiyongshi [be led away by some anger].

A second reading of their narratives suggests that the positions of accommodation that the men inhabited at work were perceived as appropriate with reference to a wider traditional social ethic. For example, in the existing social order the logic of this position suggested that there was a cultural imperative to locate themselves in a subordinate position in the dominant institutional social hierarchy, in which a Confucian ideology of father–son relations was played out. This enabled rural men to secure the protection of the management in terms of their paternal responsibilities. As indicated in Chapter 3, such relations in Chinese kinship is of central material and symbolic significance to the wider society. As Zhao (2007:2) explains:

> In Confucian society, the kinship family is the cornerstone of society because, in the traditional Confucian mind, society is itself an enlarged family and the family is in turn a miniature society. Therefore, the ruler and the father are endowed with the same function; the king in his country and the father in his home hold the same position.

From this perspective, notions of accommodation or resistance are not able to capture the complexity of the male peasant workers' responses to their experience of the new urban workplace. On the one hand, the men appeared to adopt a submissive position in relation to the factory management. For example, this was expressed in terms of obedience and taking orders from those in authority and being hard working, humble and even suffering in their social interactions with their employers. They realized that working in the city was not just materially about working hard to make money for their families; it was also about symbolically accommodating themselves within the urban space where they were subordinated within the post-Mao modernization project. On the other hand, the 'father–son' relations according to Confucian tradition meant that they would receive the protection of the management in terms of their 'paternal' responsibilities. The above indicated to me the cultural specificity of using western notions of class, class consciousness and class struggle within a non-western context (Koo, 2001). This is not to suggest that class analysis is inappropriate in contemporary China. Rather, future research might develop the culturally based intersectionality between gender, class and other social categories in contemporary China to provide multi-layered insights into the post-reform modernization period (Nonini, 2008; Barrett and Phillips, 1992). At the same time, the above can be read as an example of my critique of western late modernity theorists' assumption that modernity naturally displaces tradition. The male

peasant workers provided a more complex picture in which they deployed traditional cultural practices to make sense of their 'modern' masculine identity within the workplace.

Critical understanding of the new 'familial' men at work

Earlier western literature suggests that men tend to socialize with other male colleagues more than female colleagues in the workplace (Cockburn, 1991; Roper, 1994). However, such gender divisions in terms of socialization were overshadowed by the extended family relations in the case of Chinese peasant workers on the shop-floor, especially when they were located in female-concentrated factories. Living out familial gender relations within the urban workplace, on the one hand, sustained harmonious social relations, reconstructing and maintaining the men's masculine subjective identities. On the other hand, such practices also generated other critical meanings in response to Chinese modernization, within which power relations operated between new forms of non-kin families, as illustrated in the last section. However, ethnographic observation suggested that extended 'father–son' relations were temporary; challenged by a range of different elements, such as job hierarchy and the male peasant workers' place of origin.

Importantly, power within the urban workplace was diversely operationalized. For example, there were power relations operating among male peasant workers themselves, and between male and female peasant workers. The following narrative from Song Shan illustrates how some peasant workers occupied more powerful positions at work. While acknowledging the general 'harmonious' style of masculinities within the workplace, some participants revealed there were also negative power relations operating among male peasant workers themselves. For example, Song Shan revealed that he was bullied by his male supervisor:

> People such as us from other provinces are different from those who are from the local surrounding village ... They [supervisors] always look after people from their home town. I have been blamed by my manager of the workshop quite a lot ... he always criticizes my work for not reaching the standard. So I have to do it again. But my salary relies on how many products I assemble ... sometimes I earn very little money for a day.
>
> (Song Shan, 20 years old)

Individual male peasant workers were able to develop a dominant masculinity from within their general subordinated position by deploying a traditional authoritarian male gender role. I argued above, within specific contexts, the newly formulated migrating masculinities were not dominating but harmonious. Their male identities were demonstrated not through conventional masculinity in the patriarchal system but through masculinities formulated within the workplace by adopting family values in traditional Chinese culture. However, Song Shan's account challenges such harmony, as there were other factors operating, such as

different places of origin, that made visible the negative power relations among the peasant workers within the workplace. The men felt it was easier to get on with each other and pursue harmonious gender relations with people from the same place.

The conversation between Song Shan, Jiang Xi and myself illustrated another factor, that of geographical hierarchy, which impacted upon the power relations operating among the peasant workers within the workplace.

SONG SHAN: He [Jiang Xi] is very popular with the girls, they all like him ... When he plays basketball with the other workshop, they (the girls) all cheer around him...

JIANG XI: Never, don't be joking, ask your Chaozhou Mei [Song Shan's girlfriend from nearby city] to introduce her friend to me ... Don't listen to him [he told me]. I always stay around with my Laoxiang ... We have common language ... Unlike those people from the surrounding local village ... they can't speak good mandarin, sometimes they don't understand what I say, sometimes I don't understand what they say ... Those 'Chaozhou Mei' don't talk to us.

INTERVIEWER: why?

JIANG XI: I don't know, they only talk to their people.

This geographical hierarchy was complex and shifting. As a researcher, it was not possible to capture this complexity through discussions with the peasant workers. It appeared as intuitive knowledge that was locally lived out rather than explicitly expressed in everyday conversations. For example, people from local southern rural areas were seen to be more privileged in terms of language and location than the people from other provinces. Also, with the expansion of Chinese modernization and urbanization, some rural areas have become an integral part of urban economic development, providing job opportunities for local peasants (Liang *et al.* 2002). This has resulted in a barrier developing between the local peasant workers and migrating peasant workers.

As I have illustrated, the male peasant workers in urban workplaces maintained relatively harmonious gender relationships in relation to their rural colleagues and urban employers within the existing social hierarchy. Meanwhile, such social relations within workplaces have also generated different types of masculine subjective identities given their self positioning in these social relations. However, I also noted that there were diverse complex sets of power relations operating in different social contexts.

At the same time, their low status as subordinated working-class men in the city can be contrasted with the high status that they received when they returned home. For example, Wang Hai recalled:

WANG HAI: I went back home last year to move into the house I built for my family and the family and relatives were very pleased to see me back. They thought I had a successful business here in the city. Of course I wouldn't tell them how tiring and difficult it is. People tell the happiness but never mention the worries (报喜不报忧). Some people asked me through my father to introduce their children to jobs in the city ...people respect you when you come home from the city.

In Wang Hai's narrative about his changing status from urban working-class migrant to high prestige rural returnee, he suggested that his shifting identity was based on his being able to demonstrate his filial piety by bringing honour to his parents by supporting his extended family, thus fulfilling his duty as a Chinese man.

Conclusion

Reay (1998:272) maintains that 'class is a complicated mixture of the material, the discursive, psychological predispositions and sociological dispositions that quantitative work on class location and class identity cannot hope to capture'. In response to the recreation of class in a post-Mao Chinese society (explored in Chapters 1 and 2) and current literature portraying Chinese rural–urban migrant workers as a new working class, it is of particular importance to capture an understanding of male rural–urban migrant workers' position in society through their subjectivities, meanings and creative agency, that goes beyond the economic determinist accounts of earlier studies of stratification of migration. This chapter has explored how the male peasant workers negotiated and constructed their masculine identities within the public domain of the urban workplace. There was a specific examination of non-conventional male occupations, such as service and light industrial work, on account of the geographical location of the research. This is important in enabling alternative self-representations to the conventional public images of migrant men in traditional working-class occupations, such as construction and mining. At the same time, a critical examination of their occupational habitus reveals the creative strategies (agency) they deploy within constrained circumstances (structure). Importantly, it is argued that symbolically and materially Confucian 'father–son' relations are an important resource for the male peasant workers to creatively engage with the social relations of the urban workplace and to (re)construct their masculine identity through social interaction at work. This is relevant to Adkins' (2000) argument that women may be reflexivity losers, depending on their capability to access information and communication structures. In other words, they can be reflexivity winners only after they have obtained access to such structures. With reference to the location of rural migrants in the material conditions of post-Mao modernization, the latter argument of Adkins' Bourdieusian analysis is of particular importance in addressing the issue of gender and class formation in contemporary China, which earlier research fails to acknowledge. In addressing the issue of agency and subjectivity in late modernity, Adkins (2004:191) acknowledges that 'there is a lack of fit between habitus and field in certain public spheres of action via an increasing transposition or movement of the feminine habitus from private to public

spheres'. Adkins (1999) elsewhere analyses the retraditionalization of gender and suggests that 'tradition may be part of or be invoked by the modern: women may be "traditional" in relation to new economies, but in this they are not simply being non-modern ... but rather being precisely modern' (Adkins, 1999:135). The interpretivist methdological position I adopted in carrying out the empirical work allowed a specific focus on understanding how the migrant men made sense of their new working lives through the construction of occupationally-based non-kin traditional familial relations.

5 Conclusion

Becoming a 'modern' man

A critical element of contemporary China as a rising power is its dependence on internal rural–urban migration. A major achievement of feminism is to establish gender as a central analytical category. In this context the study of male migrant workers seeks to highlight the under-researched notion of internal migrant men as a gendered category, making a contribution to current studies of gender and rural–urban migration in China (Jacka, 2006; Pun, 2005). This study has documented Chinese male migrant workers' lived experience of migration and their identification of becoming a 'modern' man through their narratives of family and work. Perhaps the main conclusion revolves around the several shifts that I have made in the process of carrying out this study. At a theoretical, methodological and personal level, the main shift has been from what I assumed to be a *simple* question at the beginning of the research that was in fact *highly* complex. In other words, I needed to *make* rather than *take* the research question (Young, 1971; Seeley, 1966) in addressing the male peasant workers' rural–urban migration.

In retrospect, when I began this study, I had a highly simplistic view of methodology, as the deployment of methods that would strategically deliver my findings based on my theoretical framework. This reductive approach was challenged by the theoretical position I was developing. But of equal importance was my experience in the field. At an early stage of my fieldwork, I came to develop a wider research stance in terms of life histories and an ethnographic approach. In this process, marked by a developing understanding of the centrality of reflexivity, I began to appreciate the absence of peasant workers' self-representation in work on internal migration. This resulted in my epistemologically privileging the men's narratives. This had the effect of opening up the research and directed me to systematically address issues I had not considered when I began this study.

The study has been successful in achieving a primary purpose of the research, to address the absence of men as gendered subjects in contemporary migration to cities in China. The four main bodies of work with which this study has engaged – Chinese rural–urban labour migration, Chinese feminist scholarship on female peasant workers, research on men and masculinities and new British feminist cultural studies scholarship on identity, enabled me to develop a theoretical framework in making sense of male migrant workers' identity formation. These different literatures have helped me to develop a theoretical framework that

informs my empirical work. The framework enabled me to address the research objectives: to develop a critical understanding of the current Chinese social order, as a result of the transformation from a Maoist to post-Mao era; to critically engage with Chinese male peasant workers' narratives located within the family and the workplace; to contribute to an understanding of the impact of gender and class formation on peasant workers; to critically investigate public representations of male peasant workers and to contribute to current intellectual debates about Chinese modernization. This framework provided a basis on which to explore Chinese feminist scholarship that addresses the absence of gendering in studies on internal migration. In turn, western scholarship enabled me to complement Chinese feminist research on the formation of *dagong mei* (working girls or young female migrant workers). Most importantly, a British feminist theoretical position, with its central focus on culturally-based class/gender dynamics in women's lives, pointed to the need for me to move away from the narrow structuralist questions of the social stratification of peasant workers that tends to close off investigation, to critically explore male peasant workers' identity formation, while examining the complex interrelation between gender and class. The combination of new theoretical work with which I engaged and working in the field listening to the men's narratives led me to see the overly structuralist assumptions of sociological theories of stratification, with which I began the study. The shift to an interpretivist position enabled a more systematic exploration of the men's identity formation and understanding of their complex subjectivities within the process of rural–urban migration. In turn, this highlighted the need to investigate the interplay between structure and agency as it impacted on their private and public lives (Chapters 3 and 4).

Given the absence of men from the literature on gender and migration in China, at an early stage of the research it seemed sufficient to provide a 'voice' for the male peasant workers to tell their story of social marginalization and discrimination. I proceeded to systematically explore the current dominant discourse of the modernization project and the formation of class that impact upon the formation of the men's migrant identities. In turn, the men's narratives made problematic the taken-for-granted dominant national understandings of modernity and modernization (Chapter 1). The study has suggested the need to locate an exploration of the gendering of these men in the productive tension that emerges from bringing together materialist and poststructuralist accounts of gender relations. In so doing, the book addresses a major problematic of social sciences, that of the structure– agency dualism. For example, a critical examination of their occupational habitus reveals the creative strategies (agency) that they deployed within the constrained circumstances of limited capitals in the field of urban occupations (structure) (Bourdieu, 2004). More specifically, I examined how male peasant workers accommodated themselves within urban spaces with an emphasis on the interplay of a number of factors – shifting family lives, familial and occupational kinship relations, rural and occupational peer networks, and gendered social relations within urban spaces. These institutional spaces – the family and the workplace – provide filters through which meanings of migration

are culturally produced and reproduced in their daily interaction and practices in the construction of their masculine identities.

Contesting the notions of modernization and modernity suggested that public narratives – particularly those of government and media – are central mechanisms that frame the general population's understanding of Chinese rural–urban labour migration (Chapter 2). This raised the need critically to engage with a socio-historical analysis of the public gaze and its impact on the cultural production of masculinities. Discourse analysis of the secondary data traced the shifting discursive formation of peasant workers from the pre-reform to the post-Mao reform period. These contradictory dominant public representations were of significance in illustrating the projection of gendered urban selves (local residents) and rural 'others' (male peasant workers). The focus on urban residents' adoption of these public representations emphasized the need to address the unequal power relations operating upon the rural men within their urban encounters. At the same time, we saw how dominant public understandings of these men contributed to their social stratification. Most importantly, this included their social positioning in terms of what the peasant workers were perceived to lack, the cultural capital associated with the emergence of the dominant discourse of post-Mao modernization.

In short, my engagement with the theoretical and methodological literature, alongside my early working in the field, made clear the advantages of adopting a reflexive interplay between theory, methods and data collection. This directed me to thoroughly question my own assumptions, based on the cultural habitus inherited from my early years, growing up in urban China that informed the simple theoretical and methodological frameworks with which I began the study. The adoption of a more complex perspective, outlined above, enabled me to successfully achieve the research aim and objectives set out in the Introduction.

The Significance of the Study

As the first qualitative study of Chinese male peasant workers, the book makes a number of contributions to the field of analysis. These include the following:

A shifting Chinese 'self' and identities

'Peasant worker' is an identity discursively constructed and allocated by the state and other public narratives. Within the current dominant discourse of modernization, the term 'peasant worker' entails connotations of backwardness, in contrast to the progress of the modernization project. How peasant workers make sense of their allocated positions and relocate themselves from the rural to the urban space is of importance in understanding their identities. Living within the conditions in which the Chinese government's dominant public narrative of neoliberal modernization is advocating a market economy and getting rich, this particular group of people face institutional barriers that prevent them from achieving a

future to which they are directed, thus creating a major tension. Current government policies are in conflict with those operating in a pre-reform period. These tensions have created a particular cultural environment within which male peasant workers' identities are constructed through a series of negotiations and complex repositionings. Hall (1996a:16) argues that

> ... the theorization of identity is a matter of considerable political significance, and is only likely to be advanced when both the necessity and the 'impossibility' of identities, and the suturing of the psychi and the discursive in their constitution, are fully and unambiguously acknowledged.

For Weeks (1990:88),

> ... identity is about belonging, about what you have in common with some people and what differentiates you from others. At its most basic it gives you a sense of personal location, the stable core of your individuality. But it is also about social relationships, your complex involvement with others.

In other words, identity is not just about sameness and difference that is represented within dominant discourses. Identity includes the issue of identification (Lawler, 2008:2). It is about who I am and how I position myself in response to the external social environment and social relations. It is a process about identification and positioning within social structures rather than an ascribed collective entity. Lawler (ibid.) illustrates the complexity of identification:

> I may identify as a woman at the same time as dis-identifying from certain features of being a "woman" that I find unattractive or unpalatable. I may identify myself as a woman but be identified by others as something else – as a man, perhaps, or a girl.
>
> (Lawler, 2008:2)

Tam (1995), while problematizing the relation between Chinese and western modernity, refers to the traditional Chinese self as a relational role self, summed up in Confucian thought[1] that a person is an individual, who lives to fulfil the duty expected of him or her, which is expressed in familial and social relationships as son/daughter, brother/sister, husband/wife/partner and father/mother, rather than a person as an independent individual self (Tam, 1995; Gao, 1996). Within a Chinese context, the formation of self identity depends on the fulfilment of ascribed social roles within social relations. This can be illustrated through the translation of sex and gender in the Chinese language. For example, in order to distinguish 'sex' and 'gender' in Chinese, 'gender' is translated as 'social gender' (*shehui xingbie*: literally means 'social sex difference'), with an emphasis on its social and relational characteristics. Brownell and Wasserstrom (2002:25–6) acknowledge Li's (1999) understanding of Chinese gender that 'it would be redundant to introduce the notion of gender (社会性别) [literally, social sex difference] to the Chinese language, since nü [woman/female] and nan [man/male] are already understood as social, not natural, beings'.

My research seeks to make a valuable contribution about Chinese men and masculinities to studies on global masculinities. It moves beyond, while building on, western theories of masculinity, including sex role, pro-feminist and cultural analytical approaches, locating the investigation of Chinese masculinity through grounded local narratives and experiences. The analysis of the men's life histories provides insights into their self identity formation, contributing to a broader understanding of self and identity formation in a globally-based Chinese society. Importantly, it also attempts to bridge the western concept of *habitus* with the Chinese notion of a *relational self*, in order to capture the men's reinvention of their selves, with reference to substantive issues of class and gender relations within urban spaces.

Feminist accounts claim that 'habitus' produces a more dynamic embodiment than Foucault's notion of the self (McNay, 1999) in exploring identity making. The latter has been deployed by some Chinese scholars in analysing the experience of Chinese female peasant workers (Pun, 2005). McNay (1999:95) argues against Foucault's 'technologies of self' in that it 'fails to think the materiality of the body and thus vacillates between determinism and voluntarism'. The consideration of materiality is captured in Bourdieu's analysis and the Chinese notion of the self as relational.

Furthermore, the Chinese relational role self also operates through internalizing cultural values (e.g. Confucian father–son relations, see Zhao, 2007), but it never restrains creativity and possibility in different social contexts. Its compatibility with Bourdieu's concept of habitus highlights its difference to the concept of role in sex role theory. According to Krais and William (2000):

> Unlike the concept of the role, the concept of the habitus is aimed at an incorporated structure; it is not conceived of as a 'social imposition' – behavioural expectations imposed from outside, like expectations, values and norms – in the medium of the 'pure mind'. A further difference from the role concept is that the habitus, as a component of a living organism, works as a living system – according to a systemic and not a mechanistic logic. Thus, it is by no means a 'program of action' in the sense of an internalized, finite number of fixed rules or 'values'.
>
> (Krais and William, 2000:57)

As a relational concept, habitus is lived out in different 'fields' (McNay, 1999). It resonates with Song's (2006) understanding of the dynamics of *yin/yang* and China's relational role self. For instance, Song (2006) uses an example to illustrate the fluidity and relativity of *yin/yang*: a minister is characterized as *yin* in front of the king. But a minister is also *yang* to his wife at home (Song, 2006:163). In this case, social relations in located contexts are of importance in the formation of the gendered self, which is established through external relations not internal predispositions, as *yin* or *yang* cannot exist outside social relations.

Therefore, the Chinese concept of gender does not necessarily reinforce notions of domination and oppression between the two genders; rather it is embedded with the relativity and fluidity associated with the notion of *yin/yang*. It is important to emphasize these social interactions and social relations that are lived out by an 'embodied habitus' or 'relational role self' within different social fields, such as the family and the workplace, and what enables their positioning in social actions and the meaning and the construction of their relational role self identity. I systematically discussed Chinese male peasant workers' identity formation in relation to these social interactions and social relations – see Chapters 3 and 4.

Critical understanding of the Chinese urban 'working class'

The importance of understanding self identity also impacts on how we understand the emerging Chinese urban working class. Parker's (1995) study on young Chinese people in Britain argues for the importance of acknowledging the interrelation of structure and culture:

> Rather than bifurcating issues of structure and culture, we should see structural influences as working in and through the cultural domain, which both constitutes and reproduces the very structures that constrain it. A genuinely interdisciplinary cultural studies should provide the basis for keeping the complex interactions of the cultural, economic and historical realms in tension throughout the study of a specific group of people.
>
> (Parker, 1995:16)

Reflecting this theoretical position, my study seeks to critically contribute to the current literature developed by social stratification studies and feminist studies on Chinese rural–urban labour migration. This will enable a contribution to a multi-layered understanding (drawing on historical, economic and cultural aspects) of identity formation of gender and social class through an exploration of rural–urban migrants' narratives. The mobility of migrant labour is creating a new 'class system' that has not yet been officially recognized by the Chinese government and remains under-theorized. This book makes a contribution to this field of inquiry. In response to the recreation of class in a post-Mao Chinese society and current literature portraying Chinese rural–urban migrant workers as a new working class, my research illustrates the importance of capturing an understanding of male rural–urban migrant workers' position in society through their subjectivities, meanings and creative agency that goes beyond the economic determinist accounts of earlier studies of class stratification of migration. It achieves this by addressing the interconnections between gender, class and other social categories, within contemporary China to provide insights into the post-reform modernization period. At the same time, as indicated above, this provides valuable insights into a classic sociological problem, the relation between structure and agency. My discussion also makes a contribution to the field by indicating

the cultural specificity of using western notions of class, class consciousness and class struggle within a non-western context.

Krais (2006) highlights the importance of Bourdieu's concept of habitus in terms of reflexivity within conditions of social change. Within this context, she also argues:

> Bourdieu's construction of habitus also leaves room for increasing consciousness of doxa: given that the habitus is the embodiment of the agent's life history – and given the contradictions in the agent's experiences with the social world – the habitus should be seen as a place where conflicting experiences and classifications come together.
>
> (Krais, 2006:130)

As 'the socially made body' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:127), habitus is also characterized as relational. For Lawler (2008:131), habitus '"makes sense" only in the context of a specific local context or "fields" ... [habitus] exists in relation to each other'. Bourdieu (1988:782–3) uses the term – 'feel for the game', to argue that social action has nothing to do with rational choice, it relies on our unconscious feeling of habitus to operate. Unlike role theory, which has been criticized as essentializing gender practices, habitus in the field of gender indicates that gender behaviour is not simply imposed from an external structural stance through gender expectations, values or norms. Rather, habitus works within social interaction through practising internalized rules and values (see Krais and William, 2000:57). I understand Bourdieu's notion of habitus as conceptualizing embodied individual social practice without constraining possibility and creativity.

This study has addressed the interconnection between gender and class in understanding the Chinese male migrant workers' identity formation and their creative practices in becoming 'modern' men. Against the background of rather reductionist sociological accounts of the rural men as working class, the research has recorded the rural men's own accounts from the private and public domains of their lives, illustrating their active engagement and negotiation as migrant workers and their understanding of becoming 'modern' men.

'Modern' man: Chineseness and masculinities

Current research on global masculinities has advocated the importance of exploring them in their localized context (see Connell, 1998; Louie and Low, 2003; Jones, 2006), while at the same time highlighting the importance of examining Confucian gender ideology (see also Louie, 2002), characterized as *wen* and *wu*; *yin* and *yang* (see Louie, 2002; Song, 2004, 2006). Some anthropological studies on the Chinese community have also examined specific Chinese masculinities through local experiences (see Dautcher, 2009[2]).

Connell (1998) has provided a valuable analytical guideline to studies of local men and masculinities in a global framework. She maintains that characteristics

of masculinities are various in different parts of the world (1998:17–18). For example, she notes, that Confucianism in East Asia is associated with the characteristics of 'hierarchy and social consensus', while in Christian North America, masculinities are associated with the characteristics of 'modern hedonism and individualism and greater tolerance for social conflict'. Studies on men and masculinities also suggest that a contemporary understanding of masculinity should be located within a framework of globalization that crosses national borders and cultures (Sweetman, 1997; Mac an Ghaill and Haywood, 2007). This study has provided important empirical evidence to understand masculinities in a local context in China. It has contributed to research on global men and masculinities (Connell, 1998), moving beyond early pro-feminist studies on masculinity as gender oppression, which highlighted the central role of patriarchy in the formation of gender relations (Hearn, 1987; Walby, 1990). In terms of studying men's experience, Hearn (1996) is sceptical about the usefulness of the concept of 'masculinities', while advocating the need to shift the study of masculinities to the study of men. In response, Connell (2000:18–17) acknowledges the difficulties of defining and studying masculinity. However, she defends the legitimacy of the use of masculinities that enables us to capture diverse male behaviour, particularly at times of social and cultural change. This is an important insight in understanding the meaning of male peasant workers' practices in the current historical period of post-Mao socialist modernization.

This study of rural men and masculinity also makes an important contribution to understanding contemporary definitions of Chineseness that have been suppressed in the context of neoliberal modernization and development, which assumes that modernity will or must displace tradition. The men's narratives suggested a more complex picture. They highlighted the central role of Confucian gender relations, represented by male friendship and bonding, extended kin relations, filial responsibility and emotional development that served as important resources in the formation of their 'modern' masculine identities in the process of rural–urban labour migration. For example, the men illustrate how Confucian 'father–son' relations and their extended forms of gender relations and practices (albeit reworked) enabled them to creatively reconstruct the social relations of the workplace to establish important support networks. These findings resonate with Dirlik's (1996) suggestion of 'alternative modernities'. He describes 'the identification of alternative modernities, not in terms of reified cultures, but in terms of alternative historical trajectories that have been suppressed by the hegemony of capitalist modernity' (Dirlik, 1996:118).

In short, the research project provides evidence of an alternative narrative of the future of China and its citizens that challenges the reductive account of the modernization project with its aim of 'catching up with the west'. It argues for further work to decouple the *economic* (technology, science, market) from the *social*, *cultural* and *political*, as illustrated in the rural peasant workers' creative responses to the constraints and opportunities of life in the city.

It was further argued that male peasant workers' engagement with the modernization project is of central importance to current intellectual debates about

modernity and modernization. With reference to the men's narratives, it is suggested that traditional interpersonal relations such as those based on being a filial son, the Confucian father–son relationship, understood as 'the core idea of Confucian ethics for ordinary people' (Hwang, 1999:163), has become a main resource in the construction of Chinese male peasant workers' masculine identities. Such a socio-cultural account is also of importance in understanding these men's identities through the intersectionality of their fragmented classed and gendered experiences. In this context, these gender practices also have become major signifiers in the formation of a new social class (Pun, 2005; Skeggs, 1997; Willis, 2000[1977]) within a transitional Chinese society that requires further investigation.

Implications

There is also a need to address the limitations of the study and future research themes. The location of the research led to a focus on male peasant workers in small-scale manual and service sector industries. However, it did not include those men who work in the heavy industry sectors, such as construction, mining and large scale manufacturing. Future research within these occupations may provide the opportunity to further explore the impact of gender/class dynamics on men's working lives. At the same time, it could empirically illustrate the multiplicity of masculinities. Schrock and Schwalbe (2009) maintain that the multiple masculinities concept 'has been helpful for seeing how various groups of men, using the material and symbolic resources available to them, are able to emphasize different aspects of the hegemonic ideal as means to construct effective manhood acts' (Schrock and Schwalbe, 2009:284). Acknowledging multiple masculinities also enables the study of male migrant workers to move from an oppressive approach to a critical approach, as explored in this study.

It is also important to stress that the Chinese male peasant workers within southern China that were the focus of my research did not constitute a homogeneous group. The men's narratives about their lives referred to diverse variables, including marriage status, family structure, type of work and so on, which help shape the performance and enactment of their masculinities. This study suggests the need for additional empirical work to explore further the complexity of the different trajectories of the migrant men's lives. For example, the meanings regarding their masculinity as a son were different regarding the dynamics of family structure; whether they were from a family with brothers, the only son or with sisters. However, because of the research objectives and the theoretical frame adopted some of these variables received too little consideration. A further shortcoming of the study was that less attention was paid to male migrant workers who came from local surrounding rural villages. With the expansion of urbanization, some surrounding rural villages have been urbanized, with local people becoming less visible than those from other places. The former with their geographical closeness to their home town, as well as their use of a local

language and cultural practices, may have a different experience from those people from other provinces, which future research might productively focus on.

The study explored cultural practices in relation to the family and the workplace. Further research might consider a wider range of spaces, as recorded in the male peasant workers' narratives with reference to their hobbies and accessing public spaces. There needs to be a more systematic analysis of diverse life-styles, consumption and new technologies, which complements a class analysis focusing on the family and working life of the migrant men.

Policy making and rural–urban migration

During the research process, addressing theoretical and methodological questions while participating in the men's lives, I asked myself what was the purpose of my study? It seeks to contribute to government policy making, as well as future academic research. Given the current historical context of modernization and development in China, public (mis)representations (government, media and the academy) are projecting rural–urban labour migration as a major social problem and highly reductionist accounts of male peasant workers as 'modernization losers'. This leads to government policy makers adopting over-simplified solutions to social stratification and integration within cities. This study based on the men's life histories of relocating from rural villages to cities revealed a more complex picture, in which they did not passively accept the structural constraints of migration, nor display dysfunctional social lives or pathological masculinities. They spoke of severe structural material constraints in terms of access to work, housing and education but in response they were constructing complex and diverse cultural practices. The study suggests that government policy makers need to engage with these men's narratives. Importantly, this theory-led empirical study proposes that male peasant workers constitute an important social *issue* rather than *problem*. In order to work with this proposition, government policy makers need to rethink the conceptual assumptions that they are making about these men, life in urban spaces and the modernization project that is currently central to the cultural production of images of Chinese (male) peasant workers.

Gender inequality

A major focus of current research on gender and rural–urban labour is the issue of a multi-layered gender inequality, emphasizing female migrants' unequal gender status and 'bitter' experience in social contexts both within their rural home villages and in urban spaces (Huang, 2001; Liang and Chen, 2004). Such research seeks politically to challenge existing gender discrimination against and marginalization of women by illustrating their dominated status and the 'reality' of their day-to-day lived experience in China. This book also raises an important issue for government policy makers in relation to gender inequality. First, policy makers need to accept the conceptual expansion of the term gender, as illustrated in this study, and include men as gendered subjects. Second, there is a need to

acknowledge a notion of multiple masculinities. Gender equality within the government's objective of building a 'harmonious society' needs to address how the intersectionality of categories plays out in people's lives within different contexts, producing a complex range of power relations.

Migrating masculinities

Research on men and migration, such as that of Boehm (2008) and Cohen (2006) on Latin American male migrants to the US and Filippo Osella and Caroline Osella's (2000) study on male migration in Kerala, illustrates the significance of studying men's accounts of migration (also see Donaldson *et al.*, 2009; Batnitzky *et al.*, 2009). Such studies have moved away from an economic determinist to a cultural anthropological approach. Hence, migration is seen as 'a primary stage on which expressions of male subjectivities are performed' (Boehm, 2008:21). Studies on masculinities of overseas Chinese migrants (Da, 2004; Hibbins, 2005) have illustrated the cultural distinction of Chinese masculinities. For example, in Hibbins' (2005:173) study on Chinese male skilled immigrants in Australia, he maintains that 'Chineseness' is centrally marked by 'responsibility for family as sole provider, guardian and protector; an emphasis on hard work and education; respect for older people and hierarchy, as well as other family members; non-expression of feelings and emotions and a de-emphasis on sport and recreation' in the formation of his informants' gender identity. His research has highlighted the cultural specificity of Chinese men as a gendered category in migration studies and the centrality of familial cultural meanings to their identity formation as migrant workers.

This book raises theoretical and methodological questions about possible cultural continuities between migrating masculinities (see Batnitzky *et al.*, 2009; Hibbins, 2003a, 2003b, 2005) as lived out by Chinese male peasant workers and Chinese transnational male migrants, such as university students. It also suggests that in-depth examination of male migrants' everyday practices through life-history narratives can produce a counter-stereotypical picture of migrants. At the same time, the thesis engages with debates about changing notions of Chineseness within the modernization project. Such debates may become increasingly important as China continues its emergence as a major global power and western societies come to focus on such questions as: Who do they think they are? Transnational Chinese migrants living in the west may become increasingly visible within this shifting economic and political context. The findings within my thesis on how rural men migrating to the cities have constructed identities may provide important insights for Chinese transnational migrants within western societies.

6 Postscript

Youth, aspirations and masculinities

A new generation of male migrant workers

This book has addressed Chinese rural men's identity formation in both the private and public domains of their lives. A key theme has been the generational continuities with reference to gender relations. However, there is an emerging concern regarding a new generation of migrant workers within public discourse in recent years. A national survey published by China's National Bureau of Statistics,[1] revealed that among a population of 230 million migrant workers, over 61.6 per cent of them are below the age of 30. More specifically, 41.6 per cent of the total population of migrant workers are aged between 16 and 25. Recent research has also been carried out regarding generational differences between the older and the new generation of migrant workers,[2] revealing that the latter are developing different meanings about work, including that they are more eager to learn new skills for self development. Importantly, their motivation for work has changed. For an earlier generation, their primary reason for migration was to improve their living standards to provide for their families. For a younger generation of male migrant workers, their primary reason for moving to the city is to 'enrich their experience'. Building on the previous chapters, in this postscript I would like particularly to focus on young male migrants with reference to their aspirations, which emerged as a key theme from my empirical research. This may provide key insights in helping us to understand the local production of their emerging identities, thus suggesting future trends in rural–urban migration in China.

Western youth studies highlight the ambiguous and unstable meanings surrounding young people in response to changing societies, cultures and places marked by individualization, fragmentation of identities and globalization (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; Mcdonald, 2001). In China, the issue of youth is particularly salient after the past 30 years of the modernization project during which time rapid social, cultural and economic transformations have taken place. The impact of these transformations on young migrants resonates with those experienced by global youth on the move (Jeffery and McDowell, 2004). Chinese young people in my study report unprecedented change occurring at every level of their life course, through education, work and other socio-cultural and economic activities, such as consumption and leisure activities.

Discussion about the well-being of the younger generation of migrant workers has become increasingly visible across public and political arenas. In June 2010, the 'All-China Federation of Trade Unions' published a research report,[3] emphasizing the importance of a new generation of peasant workers, as they encounter a more complex urban environment with different experiences and expectations compared with an early generation of peasant workers, as a result of social economic changes. The younger generation of migrant workers currently has a high public profile owing to a series of suicides and attempted suicides in southern China, at the well-known 'Apple' products assembling plant in Guangdong province. From January to May 2010, 13 attempted or successful suicides involved young people aged 17–25 and nine of them were men. The news has raised public awareness and overwhelming media coverage regarding the well-being as well as the working conditions of young migrant workers, such as the military-style administrative system within 'Foxconn', where these suicidal incidents took place. In response, the government and elite commentators inside and outside the country are attempting to identify the specific causes of this series of suicides, such as urging the manufacturing industry to improve young people's working conditions and to increase their wages. However, what is absent is a more complex account of the 'bigger picture' of rural young people's experience of migration to work in urban spaces.

Importantly, part of this 'bigger picture' includes that *zhao gong nan* (招工难, difficulty of recruitment), *mingong huan*(民工荒, shortage of migrant workers) or 'labour shortage' (Chan, 2010), has become a major public concern, particularly in the manufacturing industries in the second- and third-tier cities. It is producing a profound social and economic impact, leading political economic commentators to suggest that we are witnessing 'the end of surplus labour' (Kroeber, 2010). Economists and politicians are highlighting the major problem of the economic competiveness of China as the 'world factory', at a time of global economic restructuring. More specifically, the shortage of migrant workers in manufacturing factories is seen as partly resulting from the reluctance among a younger generation to participate in this kind of work. Pun, in an article in the *China Daily* on the younger generation of migrant workers notes that, 'characteristic of the new generation's ways of life were a greater disposition toward individualism, a further proclivity for urban consumer culture, less economic burden and greater personal pursuit of development and freedom, higher job turnover and less loyalty to their work, and a greater level of spontaneous labour actions at the workplace' (Pun, 2012:7). For Jeffery and McDowell (2004:131), 'the sheer speed of neoliberal economic and social reform in many parts of the globe has effected profound changes in young people's experiences'. This is reflected in Chinese business owners' difficulties in retaining a sufficient workforce. One of the business owners in my research raised the concern about labour shortage in his factory. He illustrated a trend of the transformation of employment during the last three decades, especially after the Chinese New Year's break, when migrant workers return from their homes in rural villages to work in the city. He claimed: 'During the 1980s, there was a long queue for jobs; during the 1990s, there was a

queue for better jobs; now, there is no queue at all. It is also difficult to keep the workers too. It is becoming more and more serious'. His comment captures the transformation of the labour market since economic reform and the opening up of the market in the late 1970s. Such changes in terms of supply and demand have caused substantial concerns about local economic development and prosperity for long-term development within second- and third-tier Chinese cities.

Most of the political and media commentary during the current transitional period of modernization adopts an economic perspective, that is, focusing on a younger generation of migrant workers taking over their parents' positions as the new labour force in the Chinese labour market. However, research on young male migrants has also suggested moving beyond this economic reductionist approach and conceptualizing migration as a means of transformation to adulthood. For example, Osella and Osella's (2000) research illustrates that young men migrate to the Gulf area not only to escape from unemployment – the economic rationale for migration. But, as they maintain, migration 'is also a move away from payyanhood (young immature status) towards full adult status as a householder, defined by the combination of marriage, fatherhood and showing ability as a "provider" ' (Osella and Osella, 2000:120–2).

Aspirations and identities

In exploring the young men's gender identity formation, a focus on aspirations is not only important to capture psychological aspects of their lives, but also to reflect on the relation between the self and the social. Burke (2006: 720–4) maintains that aspirations 'are discursively fashioned through gendered power relations and identifications . . . and closely tied in with structural differences and inequalities'. The formation of aspirations is facilitated by and reflects various structural constraints. For example, the young men in this study claimed that their aspirations were linked to their moving into adulthood and the accompanying adaptations and modifications in their gender interactions. I have addressed this in previous chapters, exploring their shifting gender practices in relation to their changing families. What emerges from the young men's narratives is that their aspirations can be seen to be central to the making of their modern masculine identities (see Mac an Ghaill 1994; McDowell, 2000).

Learning to labour: to have benshi (本事) and nengli (能力)

Burke (2006:731) maintains that 'aspirations are not constructed exclusively at the individual level but are tied in with complex structural, cultural and discursive relations and practices'. For the younger male migrant workers, their masculine identity formation was embedded in the new commodity economy operating within the discourse of modernization. In Chapter 1, I addressed the projected notions of progress and development in light of modernization. The young men in the study were actively engaged with this discourse in urban places through a process of self identification (with the urban) and dis-identification

(from the rural), thus helping shape their socio-economic identities as working-class men. For Burke (2006:720): 'Discourses constrain and create the kinds of spaces we live in and the ways we give meaning to our experiences. They shape our aspirations and world views and are interlinked with competing sets of cultural practices'.

Within Western literature 'learning to labour' has been a critical concept for a number of decades (Willis, 2000 [1977]; Mac an Ghaill, 1994), which has been accompanied by the notion of the 'crisis of masculinity' among working-class men in post-industrial or late modern societies (McDowell, 2004) because of socio-economic transformations involving the decline of industrial occupations. Young working-class men, in particular, have been portrayed as facing tough challenges, resulting in a sense of dislocation, with the shift from traditional (masculine) shop-floor manufacturing jobs to various (feminine) service-based workplaces and businesses. Such structural changes have challenged their masculine identities that were embedded within these declining traditional industrial occupations. Thus, the concept of learning to labour has had a critical purchase in enabling us to understand shifting identity formations among young working-class men, and an accompanying sense of loss, fragmentation and dislocation.

Interestingly, within a Chinese context, a sense of crisis among young male peasant workers has emerged not from a location of de-industrialization but rather from a generationally-specific response to industrialization within developing urban spaces. The young men in my research compared their lives to that of their parents, who continued to see themselves as peasants, with a strong connection and commitment to agricultural activities. For example, the older male migrant workers grew up as part of a generation for whom agricultural activities were a major economic activity in their early lives, and in their adult lives they frequently revisited rural areas to work on the farm. This was common in their experience of migration, and was significant in helping them to make sense of their masculine identities, with its emphasis on reworking traditional gender relations as absent husbands/partners, fathers and sons, in the move from rural to urban spaces. However, for the young men, working on the farm and the familial expectation of them to take over responsibility from their parents as agricultural workers was no longer seen as a path to become a 'man in the family'. Rather, their sense of identity in becoming a modern man was centred on their experiences of and activities in the cities. This has been illustrated by some national surveys. For example, in a survey released by the State Council's Development Research Center,[4] 91.2 per cent of young migrant workers said they preferred to settle down in towns or cities. Unlike the older generation, the younger migrant workers show no commitment to seasonal agricultural activities.

As indicated above, for the older generation of workers, migration to work in urban spaces was primarily motivated by the desire to obtain an improved material life, in order to support their rural households, as a response to rural poverty. This economic motivation as a major push factor and the urban demand for a workforce for the construction of modernization as a pull factor, while presenting challenges to the older generation, enabled them as rural men to fulfil and rework

their masculine identities as responsible husbands/partners, fathers and sons. However, for the younger male migrant workers, though the economic rationale remains a dominant factor for their mobility, that is, their commitment to continue to support their families, both in rural and urban areas, it is more complex. As illustrated in their life-history narratives, this complexity involved diverse desires and aspirations for the future, as modern urban subjects. Of particular significance the market-oriented economic modernization and its accompanying social, cultural and geographical transformations are having a profound impact on people's lives. This impact is most visible in its effect on young people's emerging subjectivities and their sense of future achievement as 'modern young men'.

Within the context of the public discourse of modernization, the rural–urban division has been re-coded in terms of an oppositional dualism of geographical inferiority and superiority. Such a hierarchy has been embedded in the daily practices within contemporary rural communities, making a generationally-specific impact on how a rurally-based younger generation are now imagining and planning for their futures. Importantly, their active engagement with modern urban culture and values has provided them with new aspirations to work for and fulfil, as indicated in the following comments.

INTERVIEWER: What was your dream when you were at school?

AH WU: I wanted to travel to see the outside world. We didn't have the motivation to stay at school when it was nearly graduation from middle school. I didn't want to stay at home for the rest of my life. I didn't want to be a 'frog of the well' [井底之蛙, means: short sighted] in the village. I would like to enrich my experience in the outside world.

XU ZHENG: All the young people in my village had gone out to Da Gong [work, labouring] ... It wasn't in my thought about whether or not going to work in the city. It's about where to go. I just followed the flow as my friends did. There is no prospect staying at home. I just wanted to go out to work in the city as soon as possible.

The young men's narratives illustrated a cultural transformation in terms of rural people's changing perceptions of migration, their motivations for moving and their perceptions of 'other' places. More specifically, for a younger generation this has led to a dis-identification with the rural home place and a strong identification with urban spaces. The young men suggested that the idea of becoming urban workers had been implanted at early stages of their lives. As indicated above, while economic demands remained a major reason for migration, motivation for moving to the city had become an ordinary trajectory of their lives. For the young men, migration was a path they should take as part of their life course, as well as a right thing to do. It was seen as an opportunity for them to have a better future in light of their imagined differentiation between the rural and the urban, marked by the economic and social hierarchy between the two places projected within the modernization project in China. Meanwhile, their generationally-specific aspirations had developed in the process of migration, regarding

their occupation, the need for skills training as well as life-style consumption. Importantly, the young men's narratives highlight that these aspirations, which serve to make sense of their masculinities in a new age, are gendered and classed.

INTERVIEWER: What you do want to do in the future?

JIANG XI: I wish I can run my own business.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of business?

JIANG XI: I haven't thought about it. Working in the factory does not have much 'benshi' [本事, capability]. We just do the same job again and again for other people, like part of the machine. They can fire you anytime. Doing business is more 'you chuxi' [有出息, promising] ... I wish I could make a lot of money.

[...]

AH WU: I am saving money for a motorbike, but I am hoping I can buy a car in the future.

INTERVIEWER: Any reason?

AH WU: No girl would have married you if you didn't have chezi [car] and fangzi [house] nowadays. I wish I have certain economic 'nengli' [能力, capability] and to have a girlfriend and get married, otherwise it is so 'mei mianzi' [shameful, disgraceful].

The attributes *benshi* (or *nengli* in some accounts) and *you chuxi* were of central importance to the young men, as illustrated in earlier chapters, in their accounts with reference to their families and work. In previous chapters it has been suggested that the migrant men's lack of socio-economic capital has resulted in their low social status in urban society. The younger generation of men were highly aware of this ascribed position that was closely associated with the kind of work with which earlier generations of migrants were involved. In response, some of the young men spoke passionately about not being satisfied with working on the shop-floor, which they saw as inferior compared with other workplaces, such as working in a marketing or sales department. They explained how they were prepared to take the risks involved in relocating to different places to take up 'better' jobs. Here we see a younger generation of mobile men, who were planning their futures in terms of being able to perform the attributes of *benshi* and *nengli*. Futhermore, in terms of constructing young urban masculinities, they were conscious of the multi-layered associated symbolic meanings of owning high profile consumer commodities. For people such as Ah Wu, to own a property, such as a house, a car or a motorbike, was not just a symbolic social representation demonstrating their achievement of upward mobility. Simultaneously, it entailed important gender meanings for them to demonstrate their masculinity, as part of their projection of being heterosexual adult modern men. However, in terms of achieving upward social mobility, their location within the new commodity economy had complex contradictory effects.

Acknowledging the complexity of identity formation for rural women in the process of rural–urban labour migration in a post-Mao modernization period,

Yan's (2008) study on female rural domestic workers (*baomu*) in urban Beijing illustrates their difficulties in constructing their 'personhood' within a social context marked by development, growth, modernity, *suzhi* and consumption. In her research, Yan raises a key issue of the imaginary of the rural/urban difference, within which rural female migrants locate themselves. As she maintains:

> What is at issue here is not simply how bad rural life is for young women and how much better urban life is. What is critical is how the ideological and material rise of the city and the emaciation of the rural reorganize how rural youth imagine the future and modernity.
>
> (Yan, 2008:45)

Yan (2008) illustrates the contradictory experiences that urban modernity offers young women and the disconnection between them and urban modernity:

> In the context of post-Mao development the very condition enabling. . .women's entrance into the city, the centre of the new commodity economy, is that they themselves be disposable commodities of migrant labour power. Thus, the very condition enabling their entry and existence in the city fundamentally forecloses the possibility of attaining the modern personhood for which they have struggled.
>
> (Yan, 2008:51)

Yan (2008) argues that this group of migrant young women experience extreme exploitation in the neoliberal market economy while, at the same time, they are offered a mirage of success and progression as they migrate from rural areas to the cities. She maintains that there is a wide disconnection between the rural women's imagining migration as a journey in search of a new identity, thus fulfilling their expectation of 'accumulating *suzhi* (human quality)' in the modern space, and their material lived experiences of working in the city. As she argues, they are 'trapped as modern subjects in a space in, but not of, the culture of modernity' (Yan, 2008:46).

Yan's account resonates with the young men's narratives in my study and their experience as urban working-class subjects. Paul Willis in *Learning to labour* (Willis, 2004) identified what he called a 'systematic relationship' between schooling and the working-class lads to capture their lived experience in terms of choice making and opportunities of work. His study illustrates that within a changing industrial society, the school as an institution created a culture for the lads in which they came to accept a limited future of disappearing low-skilled manual jobs. The lads' accounts are of particular relevance in understanding the young male migrant workers' identity formation, located within the context of China at a time of rapid socio-economic transformations. The external environment of economic development, the demand for labour and the cultural project of modernization and progress have had a major impact on the whole society. More specifically, the young men's lives were shaped by the discourse of modernization,

which projected a notion of the imagined community of the future, to which they should aspire. However, within the young men's narratives, alongside their talk of hopes for the future that they began to construct in their rural homes, life in the cities was a hard journey of negotiation with risks, uncertainties and a sense of loss. Recent youth studies within western literatures have suggested a notion of the 'Entrepreneurial Self' (Kelly, 2006), to critically address 'youth at risk', in which uncertainties of employment, gender relations and other forms of relations have constituted challenges in their transition from youth to adulthood. For the young migrant men, their relocation within urban spaces as an emerging sector of the working class was marked by a wide range of risks due to their limited social, economic and cultural capitals. However, in response, they were developing creative strategies to attain their aspirations around the attributes of *benshi* and *nengli*. What is distinctive from their fathers' generation in the young men's narratives is their aspirations of being a 'modern man' with different life-styles, cultural meanings and desires, while at the same time, their struggle and negotiation to achieve such 'modern' aspirations shows a certain continuity with older migrants' experiences. Returning to the question of young people's well-being outlined at the start of the Postscript, I hope that this book contributes to a more complex understanding of their lives that in turn will support young migrant men and women in urban spaces in China.

Appendix
Research participants

Interviewees	*Age*	*Sex*	*Occupation at interview*	*Hukou*
Xu Zheng	17	M	Waiter	Agricultural/A
Ah Fu	19	M	Factory worker	A
Xiao Cai	20	M	Factory worker	A
Li Yong	20	M	Factory worker	A
Song Shan	20	M	Factory worker	A
Jiang Xi	21	M	Factory worker	A
Wang Tao	22	M	Factory worker	A
Ah Wu	22	M	Factory worker	A
Zhu Yanhui	23	M	Factory worker	A
Du Wen	25	M	Factory worker	A
Xiao Zhang	30	M	Factory worker	A
Cai Wu	30	M	Technician	A
Wang Hai	32	M	Fruit seller/Self-employed	A
Huang Lixing	32	M	Factory worker	A
Chen Wu	32	M	Security guard	A
Guo Tianhai	32	M	Factory worker	A
Hui Ying	33	M	Factory worker	A
Pan Peifeng	34	M	Security guard	A
Liu Hai	35	M	Technician	A
Liu Xiong	35	M	Tricycle rider	A
Zhao Ting	35	M	Factory worker	A
Lao Ding	36	M	Factory worker	A
Jiang Xiaoping	38	M	Factory lorry driver	A
Gao Xing	43	M	Factory worker	A
Huang Ping	44	M	Factory worker	A
Guo Jintian	44	M	Factory worker	A
Yang Hui	45	M	Factory worker	A
Lao Tang	48	M	House cleaner/Self-employed	A

Notes

1 Introduction

1 Shantou city is located on the eastern coast of Guangdong province. It consists mainly of manufacturing and light industries, such as textiles, garments, chemicals, toys and handicraft and other service sectors, according to official statistics in the Shantou Statistics Yearbook (Statistical Bureau of Shantou, 2008).

2 The Chinese government initiated the proposal of a 'harmonious society' to address the social problems resulting from economic growth and modernization. Thus enabling social equality for all the people in China. Source: http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200506/27/eng20050627_192495.html (accessed on 28 February 2010).

3 Within such social conditions, the main connotation of peasant worker is similar to that of immigrant in Britain after the recent election, with Labour politicians claiming that a major reason that they did not win was because they did not address 'ordinary' people's fears about immigrants. In response, Umunna and Nandy (2010:29) have suggested: 'Several candidates are already talking about immigration, an issue that was a smokescreen for some of our biggest failures in government – the failure to get to grips with the housing crisis and the failure to address the race to the bottom in wages and conditions for a great bulk of the workforce'. I argue that presently in China, blaming peasant workers or maintaining that peasant workers are a major social problem is similarly a smokescreen in relation to the government's 'sustainable development' policy.

4 The three mountains on the backs of Chinese people included 'imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucratic-capitalism' (Renwick and Cao, 1999:122).

5 Yao (1999:1366–7) notes six causal factors of China's famine in 1959 to 1961: poor weather, wrong policies, low production incentives, the near absence of a statistical and monitoring system, the inability to import grain and international isolation.

6 Deng proposed four elements of modernization: agriculture, industry, education, and science and defence (Harvey, 2005:120).

7 The discourse of modernity is a historical and cultural product associated with the western project of the 'enlightenment'. Partly due to the development of colonialism and imperialism by European countries, modernity has been universally dispersed and has had a profound impact locally on a wide range of societies across the world. Giddens (1990:1) defines 'modernity' as referring 'to modes of social life or organization which emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards and which subsequently became more or less worldwide in their influence'. It is a landmark opposed to 'tradition' that signifies the transformation from superstition and backwardness to a scientific approach and progression.

8 Zheng (1999:48) maintains that 'it is hard to say whether China's modernization in the post-Mao era was characterized by westernization. As a matter of fact, "westernization" has been a cultural construct created by Chinese nationalists in their efforts to search for a new cultural and national identity'.

9 Harvey (2005:2) defines neoliberalism as a theory of political economic practice, which 'proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade'.
10 Deng's 'South Tour' in early 1992 was seen as a major response to criticism of his market economy reform (Zhao, 1993).
11 http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90002/92169/92191/6274237.html (accessed on 29 August 2009).
12 *Guanxi* (Nonini, 2008; Yan, 1996; Yang, 1994) is defined as a personal relationship or network, which is built on pre-existing social connections and contacts in terms of friendship, classmates and relatives. It is preserved and renewed by giving gifts, favours and banquets.
13 Ong (1997:172–3) maintains that 'alternative visions of modernity may exist within a single country or a single region of the world; their configurations are to a large extent conditioned by geopolitics and the dynamism of global capitalism'.
14 In China, they call this monitoring and control system the 'household registration system', known as *hukou* in Chinese (see Christiansen, 1990; Cheng & Selden, 1994; Chan & Zhang, 1999), which was established in the 1950s, both in the city and in rural areas with two statuses: non-agricultural and agricultural *hukou* or urban/rural. It is criticized by some people as an obstacle to people's mobility and their access to social welfare, such as housing, health services and education after migration, and is seen as one of the factors of social stratification in China.
15 Second-wave feminists tend to focus on sexual politics, patriarchy, as well as division of labour by different sexes, emphasizing men's patriarchal power over women and women's subordination domestically and publicly at work (Walby 1990, 1997).
16 Social capital, cultural capital, economic capital and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1989).

2 Representing 'peasant workers'

1 Alternative, as Ong (1997:194) defines it is 'to refer to a dynamic that is oppositional to existing hegemonies, a counterforce arising from other sites that are not without their own particular mix of expansive and repressive technologies'.
2 *Xiaokang* is a slogan proposed by Deng, which foresees 'an ideal society that provides well being for all its citizens'. (Harvey, 2005:120).
3 According to Li's (2004b) i) definition, 'social transition' refers to the transformation from a traditional society to a modern society, including shifting from an agricultural society to an industrial society, from a closed society to an open society. Located specifically in contemporary China, it is a transformation from a planned economy society to market economy society. Such a social transition is an important representation of China's modernization.
4 National Bureau of Statistics of China (2009) *Research Report on Monitoring Peasant Workers 2009*. http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjfx/fxbg/t20100319_402628281.htm (accessed on 21 June 2010).
5 To get rich is the ultimate aim of Chinese modernization, moving away from poverty under the old socialist economy, see Chan and Senser (1997).
6 China has a population of nearly 1.3 billion people, within which 36.09 per cent are urban residents and 63.91 per cent are rural residents, according to the fifth national survey in 2000. Source: http://www.stats.gov.cn/TJGB/RKPCGB/qgrkpcgb/t20020331_15434.htm.
7 Or in Li's (2004a) notion, the 'informal sector' in the city.
8 Owing to social and economic reforms in China, the restriction of mobility between rural and urban areas has become less tight. However, problems associated with *hukou*, for example, such as housing, education and other social welfare issues still exist. See Mao (2003).

9 Chinese State Council (2006a) *Some Opinions on Resolving the Problems Faced by Migrant Workers* (国务院关于解决农民工问题的若干意见), issued by the Chinese State Council on 31 January 2006, available at http://www.gov.cn/jrzg/2006-03/27/content_237644.htm (accessed on 25 November 2006).
10 Chinese State Council (2006b) *Research Report on Chinese Migrant Workers* (*Zhongguo Nonmingong Diaoyan* Baogao 国农民工调研报告). Beijing: Shiyan Publisher. In this report, it shows that male peasant workers comprise 66.3 per cent of the total number of peasant workers.
11 Guo, B. (2007) Let the peasant worker participate in the political life of the country. *Workers' Daily*, 25 November 2007.
12 Liu, Z. and Zhou, Y. (2007) The nation resolved peasant workers' delayed salary 43.32 billion yuan. *Workers' Daily*, 27 December 2007.
13 Yin, X. (2007) Life, walking on the grateful road. *Workers' Daily*. 22 December 2007.
14 Gong, G. (2007) Why can't the new recruited peasant worker be promoted? *Workers' Daily*. 1 November 2007.
15 Feng, X. (2008) Her dream is to become a famous prostitute: criminal situation of new generation of peasant workers worries people. *Yangcheng Evening*. 16 April 08.
16 Source: http://news.163.com/08/0722/19/4HFU884400011229.html.
17 *Er nai* is a term to refer to a 'second wife' or a woman in an unlawful affair with a man who is still married (Lang and Smart, 2002).
18 Source: http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2003-11/07/content_1165759.htm)
19 Che, H. (2007) Why peasant workers become the focus group to prevent/diagnose HIV/AIDS? *Workers' Daily*, 1 December 2007.
20 Feng, X. *et al.* (2007) Representatives urge concern about marriage and family issues of peasant workers. *Yangcheng Evening*, 14 March 2007.
21 Guangdong is the biggest province in China with more than 26.2 million peasant workers in the province, among which 19 million are from outside Guangdong, according to the *Yangcheng Evening*, the leading newspaper in the Guangdong province (*Yangcheng Evening*, 15 January 2008).
22 On 27 January 2005, the Development Research Centre of the State Council released a new research report, suggesting that China needs to promote the reform of the household registration system, in order to create an institutional environment to change peasant workers into stable urban industrial workers. Source: http://www.china.com.cn/chinese/news/1167429.htm.
23 There is a new policy in some provinces that outstanding peasant workers can switch their rural *hukou* to an urban *hukou*. In the Jiangsu province, for example, there are around 20,000 peasant workers who are qualified to become urban citizens as a result of the new policy launched in October 2008. However, by July 2009, only six people registered to become urban citizens, suggesting that peasant workers are not enthusiastic towards the new policy. Source: http://finance.sina.com.cn/roll/20090809/21256591611.shtml (accessed on 2 October 2009).
24 Murphy (2002:2) notes that around one-third of the floating migrant population has returned to their native hometown since 1995.

3 Leaving home and being a 'filial son'

1 All China Women's Federation and the China National Committee on Aging urges Chinese people 'to ensure their parents have sufficient health insurance, to take them for medical checks and to give them enough spending money ... to listen to their parents' reminiscences and take them to see old movies, support their hobbies and call them at least once a week. They should not oppose the remarriage of divorced or widowed parents ... to make their parents feel included spending festivals with them, inviting them to visit workplaces and teaching them to use the internet (Branigan, 2012:20).
2 See Yan (2008) in Chapter 2.

3 *Mianzi*: literally translated as face, which means self-esteem, pride and respect in this context. It can be defined as 'the respectability and/or deference which a person can claim for himself from others' (Ho, 1976:883).
4 Sayer (2005:953–4) defines shame as an emotion which 'is evoked by failure of an individual or group to live according to their values or commitments, especially ones concerning their relation to others and goods which others also value'.

4 'Father–son' relations and/or becoming urban working-class

1 According to the 1990 China Population Census, migrant women account for 46 per cent of intraprovincial migrants and 42 per cent of interprovincial migrants in China. The most recent data from the 2000 Chinese census showed that 52 per cent of migrants are women (Population Census Office, 2002).
2 *Laoxiang* or native-place fellows, according to Ma and Xiang (1998:560), are important in the social network of migrant workers. They normally share common experiences, identical home dialect and a similar sense of fate that 'engender an intimate camaraderie that binds them together'.
3 Source: Q. Li (2004a).
4 Ibid.:19.
5 Zhao (2007:85) conceptualizes the Confucian father and son relation, where she also extends the 'father–son' relation to six social gender types of father and son (F–S) relationship: 'natural F–S (flesh created, material support and spiritual guidance), fictive F–S (stepfather and stepson), kinship F–S (uncle–nephew, elder–younger brother), social analogical F–S (elder to younger, senior–junior, patron–client, master–slave), political analogical F–S (official–citizen, ruler–subject), spiritual guidance F–S (teacher–student, sage-common people, universal way and individual)'.
6 Hwang, K. K. (1999:169) refers to Confucian Rites, which conceptualize family members as one body: 'Father and son are one body; husband and wife, brother, are all one body. The relationship between father and son is like that between head and feet. Husband and wife are a combination of two separate parts of one body; brothers are the four limbs' (Confucian Rites: chapter on Mourning Dress).

5 Conclusion: Becoming a 'modern' man

1 Tam (1995:58) refers to Confucian Analects: 'Let the ruler be ruler, the minister, minister, the father, father, and the son, son'.
2 See Dautcher's (2009) anthropological study on identity and masculinity in a Uyghur community in Xinjiang, China. He examines how people in this community perform and enact a local understanding of community, gendered social relations, personality, prosperity and piety, with a focus on local Muslim men's experience.

6 Postscript: Youth, aspirations and masculinities

1 China's National Bureau of Statistics (2010) *Monitoring survey of migrant workers in 2009* (in Chinese): http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjfx/fxbg/t20100319_402628281.htm (accessed on 25 August 2012).
2 China Youth and Children Research Center (2007) Research report on development conditions and generational differences of the new-generation Chinese migrant workers (in Chinese): http://www.cycs.org/Article.asp?Category=1&Column=389&ID=7879 (accessed on 25 August 2012).
3 All China Federation of Trade Union (2010) *Research Report on Peasant Workers of the New Generation*: http://www.acftu.org/template/10004/file.jsp?cid=222&aid=83614 (accessed on 21 June 2010).
4 Source: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/indepth/2011-10/31/c_131222528.htm.

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