

# Getting by in Urban China

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Sociality, gender and political identity among  
migrant petty entrepreneurs

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National  
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Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own original work.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Liang Chen', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Liang Chen

March 29, 2016

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# Places and Institutions

Sunglow District	A suburb district in Nanjing City, Jiang Su Province, China.
Sub-district	Government level above Community ( <i>shequ</i> ) and below district government.
Y sub-district	A sub-district of Sunglow District. Its jurisdiction includes several work units, relocated Communities and commercial residential Communities.
No.2 Road	A six-lane street the night market is facing.
Back street	A business street planned by Community A.
Community A	The relocated Community ( <i>shequ</i> ) to which the night market is affiliated.
Community B	The Community ( <i>shequ</i> ) to which the night market is to be relocated in 2012.
EMO	Entrepreneurship Management Office, a regulatory institution of the night market which collects a sanitary fee monthly.
CALE	City Appearance and Law Enforcement.
RMC	Realty Management Company.
Demolition Office	An office responsible for demolishing houses and relocation in urban transformation.

# Glossary

**diaosi**, *n.*, 屌丝. Literally penis hair. It refers to low status men. Since *diaosi* cannot afford either car or property which is considered necessary for marriage, they cannot find a girlfriend and are marginalised in the urban marriage market. The term is derogatory but sometimes used as a form of self-deriding modesty.

**beijing**, *n.*, 背景. Background. If a person has *beijing* he is connected to powerful people particularly from the government.

**huonaogui**, *n.*, 活闹鬼. In local setting the term literally means living rowdy ghost. The term is used by vendors or ordinary people to refer to different strands of rascals, street loiterers or social bandits who pose a threat to their personal and business safety.

**hun**, *v.*, 混. Mix; scam; get by or muddle through. *Hun* can mean doing something without making it explicit; to spend one's life aimlessly; or obtain resources in an opportunistic manner. *Hun* is often associated with achieving status and wealth without making means explicit to others.

**jianghu**, *n.*, 江湖. Literally rivers and lakes, *Jianghu* refers to “a realm of freedom, where the laws of family, society and state no longer apply” (Shahar, 2001:380). As Boertz (2011:35) argues, it is imagined rather than practical. I suggest *Jianghu* be understood as “beyond the pale”. A *lao Jianghu*, literally veteran rivers and lakes, is a sophisticated man who knows how to avoid risks and pitfalls in his outbound life.

**shehui**, *n.*, 社会. Society. As I shall explain in the introduction, the Chinese society carries very different meanings from the English society. *Shehui* is written as the capital, italic *Society* throughout this thesis.

**shili**, n., 势力. Scope of influence. *Shili* often refers to a localised group which uses violence to defend or secure its members' interests. It can also mean the personal possession of ties to such a group.

**yiqi**, n., 义气. Spirit of honour. A man having *yiqi* can sacrifice his own interests to save others from danger or plight particularly in urgent times.

# Abstract

This thesis examines the social lives and subjectivity of domestic migrant vendors at a night market located at the urban rim of Nanjing city, China. The thesis asks what kinds of social connections (*guanxi*) are produced when migrant vendors try to adapt to city lives. The effective cultivation of *guanxi* is vital for migrant vendors, or household-based producers (*getihu*) to get a foothold and profit in the local market, particularly when general environs and local conditions brought about by contemporary urban transformations are unfavourable for these non-local petty entrepreneurs. By exploring the ways vendors (mainly men) make connections with local hooligans, grassroots government/local institutions as well as amongst themselves and with the other gender, this thesis argues that local terms such as *hun* (literally to get by, to scam or to muddle through) in *Society* (in Chinese *shehui*) precisely capture the subjectivity and sociality of these self-employed entrepreneurs. *Society* represents the fluid, complex social tapestry which entails riskiness and uncertainties rendered by migration, local conditions and business competitions. *Hun* entails a variety of tactics, ethics and masculinities and bears rich performative meanings when subjects are adapting to *Society*. Both *hun* and *Society* are crucial for understanding the subjectivity, gender and political identity of the self-employed rural migrants in contemporary China.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

One night in September 2011, when the warm, humid weather began to cool down with the evening breeze, I was strolling along a night market in the outskirts of Nanjing. My attention was grabbed by a street restaurant *boss* and *hostess* (as commonly addressed by customers), who I later came to know as Han and his wife Rui. They were roughly my age. While Han was standing facing the street cooking, Rui was serving customers under the canopies of the restaurant. Next to the cooking stand was an old man barbequing fish over an oven and an old lady preparing and garnishing foods. The four people looked like a Chinese family of two generations. The sign on the front of their stand indicated this family was from Sichuan, a hinterland province of China. The strategic location of their stand and the high turn-over of customers showed that this family must have had achieved some success in the host society. I walked into their stand and ordered a barbequed fish and two bottles of beer. In the next hour I ate and drank slowly, and kept an eye on the activities of my potential informants and wondered about how to start a conversation.



Figure 1.1: A street restaurant in the 800-metre long night market.

When I paid for the meal, I asked the hostess (the wife) if I could work for her family for research purposes. Unprepared for my request, the hostess asked me to sit for a while and turned to her husband, who then stopped his cooking and started a talk with me. Having checked my ID card with my (former) university's address and major on it, the husband remained quite suspicious of my purpose for studying people as "insignificant as them". Still, he agreed on my proposed "internship". I began my job wiping tables, catering to customers and washing plates the next day. The reward was free dinners, and sometimes free lunches.

So far so good. However, in a couple of days, the old father also wanted to interview me. Encumbered by a language barrier, he could not make himself understood. I could only speak Mandarin and Nanjing dialect. But the old man found a way to communicate with me. He borrowed a carton case of cigarettes from a nearby stand and we began to chat by

writing down our intended words on the outside of the case. The dialogue read:

Old man: Who are you? Why are you here?

Me: I am Liang, a student from Peking University.<sup>1</sup> I would like to do some research here.

Old man: I am a member of the CCP (China Communist Party).

Me: I am a member of the Youth League. But my father is a CCP member.

It was a weird dialogue for me, but the old guy seemed to be happy with my answer. His neck hardened and his eyes narrowed as if two underground party members had just exchanged a secret code as often happens in novels about China's revolution.

"[People in] today's *Society (shehui)* don't believe in the Communist Party. Do you believe in it or not?" he asked seriously.

"I don't believe in today's CCP", I wrote.

Annoyed by my political stand, the old man yelled at me in his incomprehensible accent. Nonetheless, by repeating it slowly he made his points clear: the Nationalist Party, the old enemy of the CCP, was merely a "looting party" (whereas today's CCP is not). "Didn't you know, university graduate?!" he tried to give me a lecture on Chinese history.

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<sup>1</sup> I had graduated from Peking University and was now at ANU. But as Peking University was well known in China I saved the detailed explanation for later.

To clarify, I underlined “today’s” and added a clause after my statement “because of the corruption”.

He pondered over my remarks, looking me up and down for a few more seconds. Then he grasped the pen and wrote:

*The stand on the right has connections (guanxi) with the Public Security Bureau (Police). So they took over the stand on the left.*

I looked around and was about to ask who was running the right-hand stand and who was running the left-hand stand when his son, Han, returned from his conversation with another street restaurant boss. Han picked up the case pack, read it word for word, and then threw it back onto the table.

“Don’t listen to my father. He has a mental illness and can’t understand today’s *Society* anyway,” Han remarked on his father’s comments about the neighbourhood.

Infuriated by his son’s attitude, the father scolded his son, who just left. I reached out to the cigarette case pack on the table, hoping to collect it as ethnographic evidence. But the old man snatched it away and crumpled it into a ball. An hour later, I saw it was still in his hand when he escorted his two grandsons back home. As he told me several months later, his intent was to keep the dialogue confidential and keep me safe as he realised that I was not an investigative journalist, but only a university student.

This scenario introduces some of my research questions. Why did Han, a migrant vendor, think his father did not understand today's *Society*? What did Han and his cranky father mean by *Society* (*shehui*)? And why had Han jibed his father and told me to ignore the neighbourhood situation?

This dissertation asks what, how, and why complex social connections are produced, performed and improvised by migrant vendors in urban situations. My field site is a night market in a suburban area where some 300 migrant vendors produce and sell food or small commodities. Central to my analysis and cultural interpretation are a few local terms used by migrants. These include *Society* as a pervasive yet inhospitable social context which a migrant is exploring; and "*hun*" (a concept roughly translated as juggling [life's expectations] or getting by) which describes the way in which vendors make and use connections. This thesis shows that *hun* practices in *Society* reflect the lived experience of rural-urban migration for petty entrepreneurs in contemporary China.

I distinguish the Chinese word *shehui* from English society. *Shehui* lies at the very core of migrants' subjectivity and experience. In English, society can mean "companionship or association with one's fellows" (2015a), "the aggregate of people living together in a more or less ordered community" (2015b), or "the community of people living in a particular country or region and having shared customs, laws, and organizations" (2015c). However, the Chinese 'society', when it comes to relations, is somewhat different. The nuance of the Chinese term that I translate as

capitalised *Society* (*shehui*) is very often opposed to the family where people's relationships are secure and where there is love, warmth and safety. In contrast, *Society* is a place of risk and where everything is unclear and unstable.

Furthermore, *Society* is also opposed to the fundamental socialist institutions and morality of China. Formal Chinese state-led social units include urban *danwei* (work units) and rural communes. These units were designed partly to transform the whole population into a productive labour force and to realise full employment starting in the 1950s. Then and now *Society* refers to the social context that had not been absorbed by work units and communes. According to Xiaobo Lu and Elizabeth Perry (1997, 11), people "speak of events as occurring 'out in Society' (*shehui shang*), as if their own *danwei* were entirely separate from the wider social environment." In light of such socialist demarcation of space, the unemployed and dropout students are called people of *Society* and youth of *Society* respectively (*shehui ren yuan* and *shehui qingnian*). Although work units have been gradually giving way to ever-expanding private sectors, and communes were abandoned in the 1980s, the pejorative connotation of *Society* carries into today's vernacular Chinese, not only among rural migrants but also urbanites.

In spite of its negative connotations, however, *Society* is the very place where migrant vendors exist, because *Society* also includes markets which grew outside of *danwei* and communes in post-socialist China. If one is self-employed, away from his home village, and does not belong to any

institution, he is necessarily in *Society*. And it is in *Society* and through trial and error that one develops his interpersonal skills with people from different spheres and gains *Society* experience (*shehui jingyan*), a laudable 'expertise' that distinguishes a veteran from a novice.

*Society* also entails mobility and endless associations and disassociations with other people on the move. Caroline Brettell (2008) reminds us that the movements of migrants cannot be defined exclusively as one-way and definitive, for there are sojourners whose initial movements are intended to be temporary, or situations where migrants leave a destination either because the site does not live up to their expectations, or because economic or political circumstances in the host society have changed. Indeed, migration in China is often a prolonged and intermittent process; spatially, migrants travel not only to and fro between the cities where they find work and their home towns and villages<sup>2</sup>, but from one city to another. Moreover, the primary way to obtain urban citizenship under the current *hukou*<sup>3</sup> system is through buying property. I observe that although a few of my informants have achieved getting a *hukou*, many more can only afford to buy (or have bought) residences in their native towns or in county-level cities, and continue to work outside their new homes. Thus the night market in Nanjing's outskirts is a working

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<sup>2</sup> Note that both towns and villages have been categorised as rural households (*hukou*), though township residence has gradually been reckoned as urban household.

<sup>3</sup> Dating back to 1958, the *hukou*, or the family register system, was officially promulgated by the Chinese government to control the movement of people between urban and rural areas. People were broadly categorised as a "rural" or "urban" household in rural communes or in urban work units, respectively. The policy initially served as a tool of social engineering to extract agricultural surplus to feed the development of socialist industries in cities (Naughton 1996) and has resulted in an ever-expanding urban-rural divide. Another way to obtain urban *hukou* is through receiving higher education in universities in cities.

place but not a home for most of the vendors. Figure 1.2 shows the places of origin of vendors in the night market (in most cases their places of origin overlap with their *hukou* status). In this thesis, I use “migrants” mainly to refer to these non-local vendors whose places of origin are out of Nanjing.

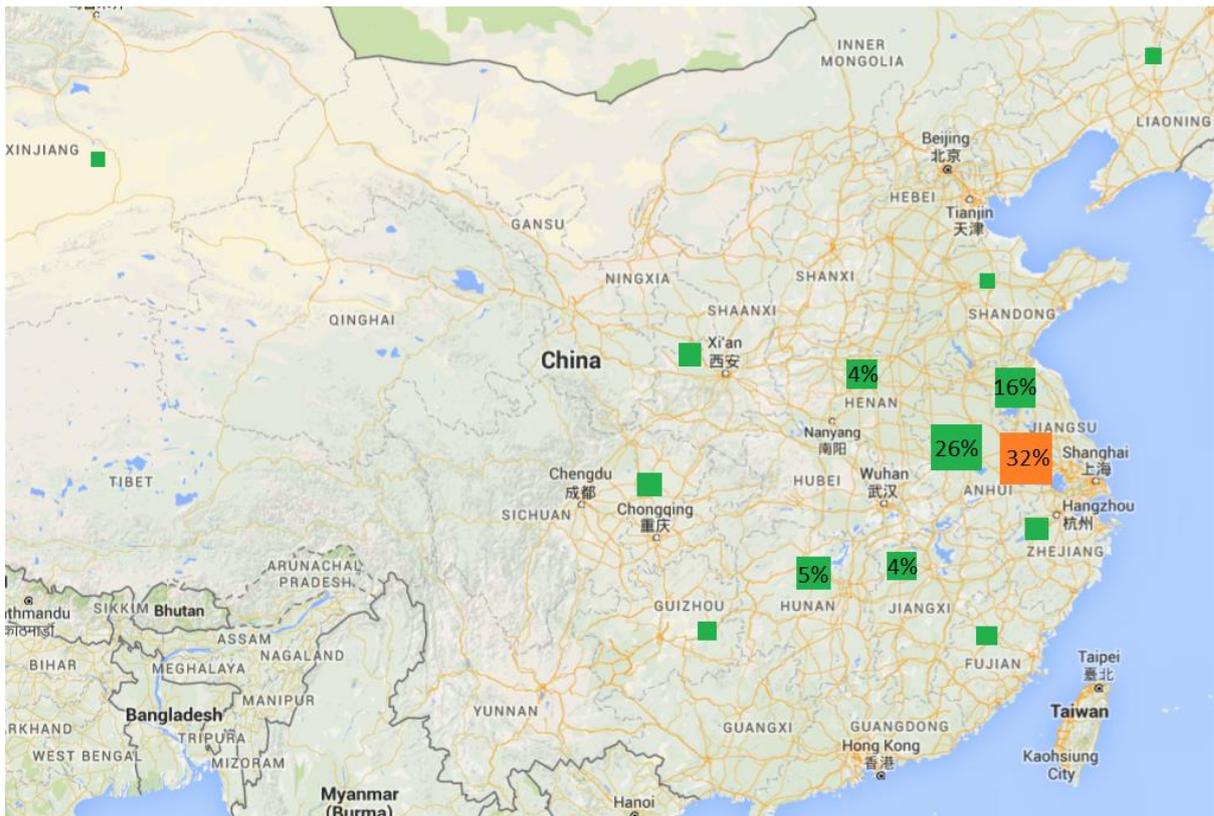


Figure 1.2: Places of origin of the migrant vendors.

Generally, domestic migrants flow from hinterland to coastal provinces. Among the 187 households that I surveyed in the night market, one third (32%) are Nanjing locals, and large groups came from north Jiangsu province (16%), and Anhui province (26%).

Rural migrants in many cases cannot stay put in cities also because, although the unfolding market economy has allowed them to break the constraints of the *hukou* system and to exploit the huge potential of the urban consumer market, most of them are subject to pervasive injustice and periodic evictions in the city so that they have to move from place to

place. An illuminating example is depicted in the ethnography by Zhang Li (2001) in which Wenzhou entrepreneur migrants obtained power through construction of fortress-like communities in Beijing, which were only to be destroyed by local government. The vendors in the night market are similar. In 2011 and 2012, the local grassroots government attempted twice to close or to relocate the night market. As a result, many vendors left this region.

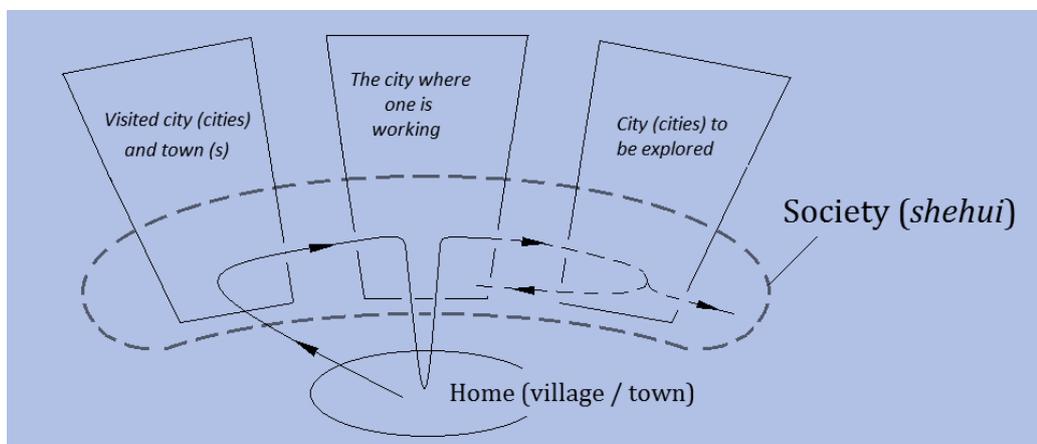


Figure 1.3: Home, *Society (shehui)*, cities and movements.

Despite such typical oppression and expulsion that cause migrants to wander, Li Zhang (2001) also notes that the meaning of “floating” (*liudong*) in official discourse of “floating population” (*liudong renkou*) of migrants is subverted by the floating population themselves. In mainstream official Chinese ideology, grounded as it is on territorial-based governance and earth-bound sentiments that derive from agricultural culture and Confucianism, the word floating carries connotations of rootlessness, instability and danger. However, Wenzhou migrants “link their spatial movement to a series of positive qualities such as vitality, bravery,

flexibility and being market-oriented”, thus subverting “xenophobic urban attitudes” (Zhang 2001, 33-39).

I suggest that such movements of individuals, voluntarily or involuntarily enacted, raise important questions about the complex yet fleeting way migrants make connections and their agency. I offer an illustration to show the typical trajectory of a single migrant vendor in *Society* and in cities (see Figure 1.3). The complexity is derived from the “meshwork”—to adopt Tim Ingold’s term (2011) — of people’s connections in *Society*. The meshwork is a mesh of lines, “with each line representing a person’s trajectory of life movement” (Ingold 2011, 145-155). From the lens of this heuristic device, the night market is a temporary aggregate of vendors with various kinds of life experiences. We can make things even more complex, because each person does not only preserve existing connections but also creates new connections and may or may not break localised connections when he leaves the site. Such a meshwork features endless associations and dissociations, and sets off *Society* and the night market as separate from sedentary societies in which people are bounded by preordained, relatively unchanged relationships. Though sedentary society can be complex, too, the complexity is another kind.

Herein *Society* should be recognised in a dual sense: while migrant vendors see opportunities and freedom in *Society*, they experience uncertainties and threats of *Society* as well, because the people with whom they connect are complex and the conduct of making connections (in

Chinese *da jiaodao*, literally *crossroad*) is full of uncertainties. I argue that such complexity forces the vendors to reformulate their ways of making connections in it. In this thesis I explore the kinds of people with whom they are connecting, and the ways in which they make connections.

The ways of making connections have performative meanings. As a result of frequent associations and dissociations, interactions amongst strangers necessarily features indeterminacy; conclusive information of others is always lacking to direct one's own activities. Such indeterminate and fleeting interactions form the context for vendors' presentation of self. Erving Goffman described various motivations for different types of self-presentation:

[a man] may wish [others] to think highly of him, or to think that he thinks highly of them, or to perceive how in fact he feels toward them, or to obtain no clear-cut impression; he may wish to ensure sufficient harmony so that the interaction can be sustained, or to defraud, get rid of, confuse, mislead, antagonise, or insult them. Regardless of the particular objective which the individual has in mind and of his motive for having this objective, it will be in his interests to control the conduct of the others, especially their responsive treatment of him. This control is achieved largely by influencing the definition of the *situation* which the others come to formulate, and he can influence this definition by expressing himself in such a way as

to give them the kind of impression that will lead them to act voluntarily in accordance with his own plan (Goffman 1959, 2).

In viewing the open space of the night market as a theatre, then vendors can either be players or spectators. It is thus crucial to understand how actors define or manipulate a specific situation and how audiences interpret the situation.

Among all the people who have been leading a life outside their homes and in *Society*, the experienced ones are called “veteran of Rivers and Lakes Society” (*lao jianghu*). In light of Goffman’s theory, I argue that they can be defined as masters of situations or those who bear clairvoyance of various kinds of situations, just like an experienced boatman navigates unforeseen underwater rocks in “rivers and lakes”. They may gain their understanding and mastery of situations not in a specific place, but through their dwelling in *Society* for years and even decades. Even if they are new to a place, they *know* it already by drawing on past experiences from elsewhere they had travelled.

Theories of urban transformation in contemporary China help delineate the local urban context in which the vendors operate. In the past decades, fuelled by rapid government-led development and redevelopment, China’s urban geography, demography, and urban governance have undergone profound transformations. These transformations include the creation of Special Economic Zones as spaces of political exception in response to globalisation (Ong 2004), the expansion of metropolitan core areas and establishment of university

towns and real estate projects (Hsing 2010), and the use of administrative power by local governments to appropriate farmlands in the vicinity of cities, turning farmers to urban citizens and causing social unrest (Hsing 2010, Lin, Hao, and Geertman 2015, O'Brien, J, and Li 2003). Since the night market is located in an outlying district or the so-called urban-rural-transitional belt (Zhang 2001, 64), it has undergone several of the aforementioned transformations. In which way does the transforming urban political economy give rise to the night market, periodically absorbing and expelling vendors, and continuously shape the ways migrants are making connections?

As I will show, local urban transformations have brought about both opportunities and hazards for the vendors. On the one hand, hundreds of thousands of migrant workers from nearby prospering industrial parks and the existing urban population provide a strong customer base for migrant vendors (some of whom used to be migrant workers). On the other hand, the administrative structures of governance are weak and segmented in this area. This has allowed for a “chaotic” condition to exist in the eyes of migrant vendors.

The night marketplace in this outskirt district was initially a spontaneous spatial agglomeration of migrant vendors. It was later subjected to the regulation of city police and then by a local Community<sup>4</sup> (*shequ*) of resettled farmers in this area. I will frequently refer to a number of institutions which these vendors directly or indirectly deal with, and it

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<sup>4</sup> Community (*shequ*) is an administrative unit under subdistrict (*jiedao*).

is important to differentiate these institutions by administrative level. Figure 1.4 serves as a point of reference. The two institutions that I shall frequently refer to are CALE (City Appearance and Law Enforcement, known as the *chengguan* in Chinese) and the EMO (Entrepreneurship Management Office) which is set up by the resettled Community A.

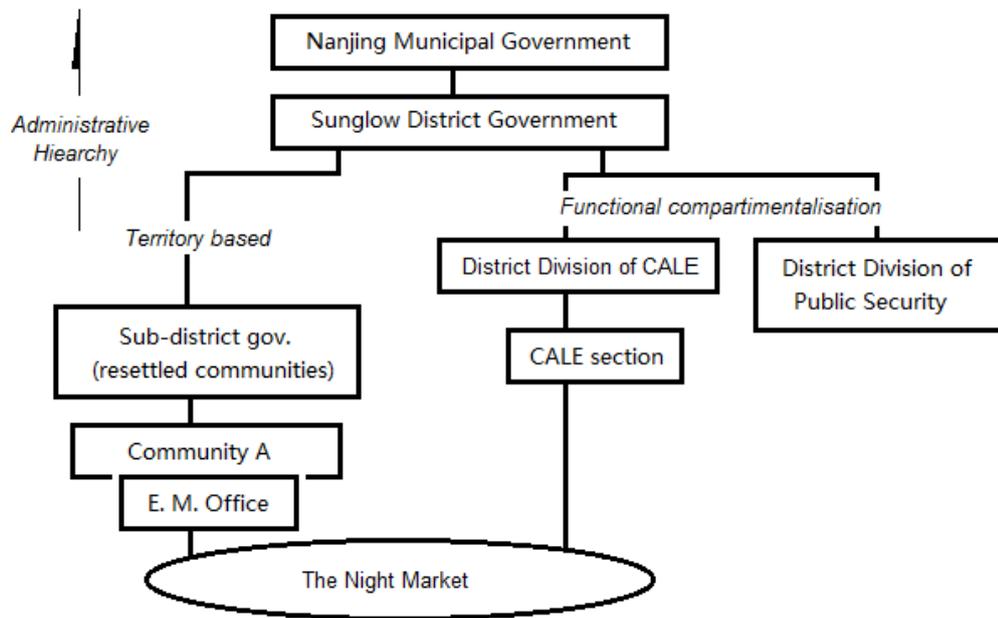


Figure 1.4: The administrative structure above the night market.

I explore the ways vendors connect to these two institutions in everyday life and in time of crisis, namely when the grassroots government attempted to evict vendors or relocate the night market. How do the vendors get a foothold in the city by creating connections with local authorities, and how have they collectively survived government expulsions through open protest or through individual strategies?

As far as the “chaotic” situation is concerned, I show that not only market regulators and city police but also the informal power of “ghosts” (hooligans) of different backgrounds (some of them migrants!) execute

power on migrant vendors. The sources of their powers are diversified and sometimes unidentifiable for any newcomer. How do these groups of people derive and exercise power? How are migrant vendors exploited and coerced by such powers, and how do migrants improvise connections with these people so as to resist, moderate and even transform such inimical forces for their own use?

This study focuses on self-employed (*getihu*, individual household) migrants rather than on migrant workers (*nongmingong*). The major difference is that the former possess property for production while the latter is wage labour. While some scholars analyse rural migrants in factory settings through Marxist perspectives (for instance Lee 2007, Ngai 2005) or portray them as segmented working classes in their formation (Shen 2006), my informants, the self-employed *getihu*, are close to Li Zhang's migrant entrepreneurs.

According to Phillip C. C. Huang (2009), self-employed *getihu* belong to the "petty bourgeoisie", a class standing between the capitalists and the proletariat, which is obscured by both Marxist and neoclassical economic/sociological theories. The petty bourgeoisie refer originally to artisans and small shopkeepers in the writings of Marx and Weber (Huang 2009). A history of petite bourgeoisie in 1780-1914's Europe (Crossick and Haupt 2013) also illuminates the lives of vendors in Nanjing. According to Crossick and Haupt, the petite bourgeoisie are mainly from the countryside (ibid, 64), and their "family and labour are bounded together in a world of honest effort and close personal relations, where

paternal authority in the family was reflected in the patriarchal nature of the business "(ibid, 109). They often resist heavy tax burdens imposed by local elites (ibid, 140). But they are less politically organised, because "organisations represented better capitalised and more stable small enterprises", and "only in occasional crises did associations appear for marginal businesses, and they were generally short-lived" (ibid, 156). In social movements they have "an ideology of modest resources, hard work, and independence, one whose enemies were injustice and subordination"(ibid, 148).

According to Huang (2009), the petite bourgeoisie existed pervasively in China before 1949<sup>5</sup> and have returned on a massive scale in the reform era, making up a major proportion of the self-employed *getihu* of today. National statistics and those who analyse them fail to distinguish self-employed rural migrants from rural migrants who become blue or pink collar workers (see for example, Huang 2009). My work is an ethnography of the self-employed, rural population or petty bourgeoisie in contemporary China.

Although the away-from-home population consists of both men and women, I focus my research on men and the masculinities that are forged in the urban setting and in nebulous *Society*. The focus on men herein has

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<sup>5</sup> According to some archive documents I collected from Shanghai Municipal Archive, the socialist transformation (*shehuizhuyi gaizao*) of street vendors and self-employed people from other service sectors started from 1951 and peaked in 1955-1961 in Shanghai.

Amongst these documents, a *Working summary of the development of socialist transformation of small merchants and vendors* (draft, 1959), 148,099 vendors participated in the "rectification movement" (*zhengfeng yundong*) in Shanghai. The transformed population was either enrolled to urban co-operatives and factories or sent down to outskirts farmlands. The rest of them returned to their home villages and some were "politically cleansed" (*zhengzhi qingli*).

been prioritised for the following two reasons. First, although many illuminating works have been done on migrant women (for instance Jacka 2015, Ngai 2005, Yan 2008), less has been said specifically about men and migrant masculinities. Thus, one of the aims of this thesis is to enrich our understanding of the migration process through the purviews of men. Second, a culture of man-to-man relationships and almost misogynistic masculinity, which is the subject matter of this thesis, requires the researcher to distance himself from women<sup>6</sup>. Nonetheless, this methodological bias is partially addressed by interviewing as many women or hostesses (wives) as possible. It turns out that accounts from women are often at odds with those from men.

I inquire into two types of masculinity developed in *Society* through looking at the social relationships of men. The first is between men who call each other “brother”. I examine how they perform bromance on many different occasions. The second is romantic relationships. I examine how single men develop intimacy with the other gender and how married men sustain their marital ties in urban settings. How have companionship and intimate relationships changed men in *Society*? Is a good brother necessarily a good husband? What new subjects are generated from making, performing and “juggling” these relationships? Through

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<sup>6</sup> Everyday activities in the night market feature a strong gendered division of labour, with men working as chef and their wives catering to customers and doing errands. When people have meals together, men often dominate conversations while women often put down their chopsticks and bowls in response to the needs of customers. After-hour activities are also gender divided. Women are assumed to be carers of their children, while men have more time to socialise with their peers, either visiting each other for casual conversation, playing mah-jong at home or gambling in the night market, etc. Speaking to other’s wives seems to be a social taboo, albeit only loosely observed.

developing brotherhood and intimate relationships, have men transformed an inhospitable *Society* into a home?

## **Connections, *Guanxi* and “*Hun*”**

Since the 1990s, many scholars (Gold, Guthrie, and Wank 2002, Kipnis 1997, Yang 1994) have investigated *guanxi* practices, the social connections and conducts of connecting in China. *Guanxi* practices can be seen as the Chinese version of gift exchange as analysed by Marcel Mauss (1970). *Guanxi* involves endless obligatory paying, receiving and repaying, and such reciprocity is accompanied by human sentiments (*ganqing*) (Kipnis 1997). Based on his research in rural China, Andrew Kipnis (1997) argues that *guanxi* practice originated from and is fermented by kinship ties. It originates in circles of family (*benjiaren*), relatives (*qinqi*) and friends and manifests in many ritualised occasions such as banquets, weddings and funerals (Kipnis 1997). It is through the practices of production and re-production of *guanxi* that one forms his or her subjectivity (Kipnis 1997, 8).

In the 1990s, in Chinese socialist cities and work units where housing, foodstuffs, education, marriage and transportation were controlled by the state (Whyte and Parish 1985, Lu and Perry 1997), *guanxi* practices and discourses also prevailed. Nevertheless, in what Mayfair Yang (1994) describes as “*guanxixue*”, the knowledge of *guanxi* or the art of *guanxi*, only certain aspects of traditional kinship are preserved in urban settings. In her words, *guanxixue* or the art of *guanxi* “dispenses

with genealogical tracings, descent and inheritance, marriage and affinal ties” but retains “the notions of connectedness, familiarity, obligation, reciprocity, mutual assistance, generosity, and indebtedness” (Yang 1994, 305). Drawing upon Karl Polanyi’s (1944) tripod typology of redistributive, reciprocal and household economic systems, Yang (1994) further argues that both *guanxi* practices and knowledge can be understood as everyday resistance against the impersonal, redistributive socialist state.

For this project which focuses on rural migrants, *guanxi* practices should be contextualised in four further points. First, the redistribute socialist state that was central to *guanxi* practices and *guanxixue* in Yang’s analysis has undergone profound transformations. The rise of the market economy for more than three decades has shaken the ideologies fundamental to socialism, but the state has also managed to incorporate market institution for its own sake through what Anna Kruger called “unproductive rent-seeking activities” (Krueger 1974). Such incorporation can lead to monetised patron-client ties. Li Zhang (2001) has identified multiple layers of agents who mediate between individual migrants and formal state power among Wenzhou migrants in Beijing. “Courtyard bosses” (*dayuan laoban*) in the Wenzhou migrant community create informal clientist ties with local officials and pay high prices to obtain water, electricity and other services for the compounds they constructed. They then lease out working space and residences to other Wenzhou migrants and become “patrons” of the latter (Zhang 2001, 75-84). In the enclosed cottage-like households within the compounds, Wenzhou

migrant tenants appropriate the labour of their wives and exploit migrant workers from other provinces (Zhang 2001, 115-136). When it comes to the urban fringe of Nanjing city, are the local conditions similar to the Wenzhou village in Beijing? Would the urban transformation in recent years generate similar clientist ties between locals and migrants?

Given the absence of strong kinship ties and short-livedness of connections caused by mobility, what type of *guanxi* connections do vendors develop in relation to strangers who share similar background? Early urban theorists from George Simmel onwards have proposed that owing to the quantitative intensification of the money economy and the growing network of corporations in cities, individuals may develop blasé, cosmopolitan attitudes in urban areas (Wirth 1938, Simmel 1971). As I have already mentioned, some male migrants foster companionship with other men and call each other “brothers”. How can we account for the rise of such companionship? Does this type of connections dispense with sentiments but retain only the practicality of *guanxi* connections? We may also examine this dimension of *guanxi* from another perspective. If we see the night market as a stage, then in Erving Goffman’s sense of self-presentation in everyday life (Goffman 1959), how do migrants perform brotherhood when they socialise, corporate and even confront with each in the night market and in *Society*?

Scholarly writings about *guanxi* tend to assign to it communal values such as reciprocity, friendship, decorum and appropriateness in both urban and rural settings (Yang 1994, Kipnis 1997). The literature

sometimes gives an impression that *guanxi* practices are devoid of tension and conflicts. If there is antagonism, it is found in the crevices between egalitarian village identity and the CCP rhetoric (Kipnis 1997) , or between *guanxi* knowledge/practices and the state's effort to manipulate *guanxi* and to monopolise distribution of resources (Walder 1988, Yang 1994). In the same vein, in the Melanesian context, Marilyn Strathern contrasts relation, a self-organising mechanism, to the systematic thinking which has been brought by technological and scientific dominance (Strathern 1995). However, latent conflict within *guanxi* networks can manifest on many occasions, particularly when resources become scarce and when interests within a confined space are segmented, such as when local government's decisions reduce business opportunities and thus intensify competition amongst vendors, when the non-local migrants are bullied by equally marginalised locals, and when external social and economic pressures convert to domestic conflicts. All of these mishaps take place when migrants are outside their homes and in *Society*. Latent antagonisms may vent out in the form of open protest against local authorities, fights among "brothers", and quarrels between husbands and wives. Therefore, how can we account for such conflicts or breakage of *guanxi* ties and network, and how do vendors solve, moderate, avoid or suffer from such negative elements of *guanxi* in urban settings?

Finally, if making *guanxi* connections creates a *guanxi* subject (Kipnis 1997), then we may ask what kind of migrant subject is being formed in *Society*. Perhaps no other Chinese words capture the content of

*guanxi* subject in mobile and fleeting lives in *Society* than “*hun*” (混) does. When asked to evaluate their lives and the lives of others, vendors often replied that they are “*hun’ ing well*” (*hundehao*) or “*hun’ ing not well*” (*hunde buhao*). To *hun* literally means to mix; to scam and disguise; and to muddle through or to get by. A little “*hunhun*” (混混) is a rascal who gets by on the margins of *Society*.

I argue that *hun* practices can be understood as tactics in Michel de Certeau’s sense (1984). Such practices are also improvisations of *guanxi* practices in the urban situations. Pierre Bourdieu saw improvisation as arising from *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable dispositions (Bourdieu 1978, 72). He specified the relations between *habitus* and improvisation to fit a new situation as follows:

The habitus, the durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations, produces practices which tend to reproduce the regularities immanent in the objective conditions of the production of their generative principle, while adjusting to the demands inscribed as objective potentialities in the situation, as defined by the cognitive and motivating structures making up the habitus ... These practices can be accounted for only by relating the objective structure defining the social conditions of the production of the habitus which engendered them to the conditions in which this habitus is operating, that is, to the conjuncture which, short of a radical

transformation, represents a particular state of this structure (Bourdieu 1978, 78).

For Bourdieu, the situation is “the cognitive and motivating structures making up the habitus”, “a particular state of this structure” and the conjuncture which is “short of a radical transformation” (ibid). Even if there is improvisation or witticisms, they are from “the buried possibility”, and “subjects do not, strictly speaking, know what they are doing that what they do has more meaning than they know” (Bourdieu 1978, 79).

Criticising Bourdieu, Michael de Certeau (1984, 58) postulates that societies which have “all the characteristics that define the *habitus*: coherence, stability, unconsciousness, [and] territoriality”. He said that territories and *habitus* lead to strategies. He used “tactics” to refer to temporal practices, particularly those of the memory that evade strategies. The relations between memory and situation (occasion) is redefined so that

the occasion is taken advantage of, not created. It is furnished by the conjunction, that is, by external circumstances in which a sharp eye can see the new and favourable ensemble they will constitute... The memory is thus mobilised relative to what happens, something unexpected that it is clever enough to transform into an opportunity. It inserts itself into something encountered by chance, on the other's ground (de Certeau 1984, 86).

I agree with de Certeau. I will show that to *hun* in *Society* requires a sharp eye, not only from a spectator's position in Goffman's dramaturgical performances, but also from the vantage point of a practitioner. By integrating *guanxi* to the *hun* practices, I will show that vendors form connections with many different spheres of people; that they boast of their connections or pretend not to have connections for different purposes, and that they are "hun-ing" in and beyond the night market. Ideally, through improvising their connections vendors manage to adjust to situations, thereby achieving success; otherwise they lose prestige and honour, and can only muddle through or endure their urban life. I will examine the relations between *Society* and local society, the conditions of existence, and vendors' practices. I will also elaborate the repertoire of *hun* practices by examining the ways they make connections in different regards.

## **Exploring the night market: Access and methodology**

The night market hosts three hundred-odd stalls of migrant and local vendors. It is located at Y sub-district (*jiedao*) of Sun glow district (pseudonym), an outskirt district of Nanjing city. The surrounding area is a typical urban-rural-transition belt (*chengxiang jiehebu*). The Y sub-district used to be Y town until 2000, and it was named after a city gate at the outer ring of the imperial city of Nanjing, though the city gate no longer exists. In the 1960s, some large-scale petroleum and refinery factories (work units) were established by railway soldiers and migrants from northern China in Sun glow district. Nevertheless, the district hasn't been

fully industrialised, as some villages and farmlands remained. As part of folk culture, Y town was famous for a temple fair held very close to the current night market. There, farmers and vendors sold farm produce, tools and everyday commodities, until the district government closed the fair in 2005. The vanishing of such township liveliness was perhaps a sign of a new wave of urban development and redevelopment projects, which have profoundly changed the landscape of this area since the 2000s.

My family lives in a downtown district of Nanjing. In September, 2011, I came back home and asked my relatives, school mates and acquaintances about any night markets where migrants were likely to cluster. Unfortunately, their suggestions proved to be either invalid or outdated. The sites they visited a few years ago had either been transformed into indoor restaurants or been removed by authorities in the name of urban gentrification or because of the upcoming Nanjing 2014 Youth Olympics.

So I hired taxi drivers, the “eyes and ears” of the city, to drive me to many other night markets, but these markets were either small or did not have many migrants. The drivers took me farther and farther away from downtown. The last one took me to a lit up street at the urban rim. He was surprised that the night market he knew had also disappeared. He then suggested that we had a last try at the “biggest one in Nanjing”. After another ten-minute drive we arrived at the site. It was already midnight, but the market was lit up. Canopies of street restaurants lined up along the long street, with each cooking stand facing the street. Above each stand

hung a light bulb, whose halos formed a bright, glamorous river which stretched nearly half a mile. Steam and flavours diffused in the air and tickled my senses. I decided to begin my eleven-month fieldwork there.

Having no connections with any of my informants, I began my research journey using what Buroway (1998) calls the extended method. Buroway (1998) describes this approach as an inchoate tradition in community studies, but one which combines positive and reflexive science. According to him, the extended method should

start out from dialogue, virtual or real, between observer and participant, embedding such dialogue within a second dialogue between local processes and extralocal forces that in turn can only be comprehended through a third, expanding dialogue of theory with itself (Buroway 1998).

Accordingly, I began my research scope from my own interactions with several vendors, and then traced their network in the night market and in the wider society, and then reflected upon the *Society* they dwell in order to explore extralocal factors that have influenced vendors' interactions at microscopic levels.

In the beginning, I worked as a kitchen hand and waiter for Han's restaurant for a month. Then I chose several other vendors to do the same job in the next a couple of months. During my spare time I carried out informal and formal interviews. I also used surveys. By so doing I managed to map out several vendors' family members and kinship ties (sometimes

as detailed as three generations), their past working experiences as well as the way they started their businesses in the night market. I familiarised myself with family members of some migrant families as well as some single men so as to understand their relationships with the other gender.

Later on, I included many more vendors in my research through snowballing. Sometimes I was referred to my informants' friends; in other cases I took the initiative to expand my network, and exchanged my research findings with my acquaintances. However, the more people I investigated, the more I felt that I was "trapped" by the network I had established. For example, I met my second key informant, Master Jin, at Han's stand. But he refused my self-referral to be his kitchen hand. It turned out that recruiting assistants from another boss was unethical or even "offensive" to the ex-employer, even though Jin and Han had made acquaintance with each other and called each other brothers. Fat Man, another key informant and one of my "gurus" in the field, was unhappy at my "hanging around" with Pebble Zhang, his business competitor who "stole" his secret receipt of barbeque fish. Some other vendors kindly advised me not to study "ghosts" (so-called hooligans) for safety considerations. Despite these "stop signs", however, over time, I became more aware of who got along well with whom and the reasons behind their connections. The knowledge of people's networks also sheds light on their behaviours when they ubiquitously faced external pressures such as the market relocation (chapter 4).

In this stage, I participated in a variety of daily (nocturnal) activities including serving customers and doing other errands, deploying and collecting equipment, visiting wholesale centres with some small commodity vendors, joining drinking banquets, playing mah-jong and chess, distributing beers for a “ghost”, tutoring vendors’ children, and sometimes mediating quarrels and conflicts among vendors and so forth.

Interviewing about one’s connections has many obstacles. On the part of informants, exposing their connections to a third party can bring unwanted troubles or is simply unnecessary. In some cases, my own experience echoes that of Sudhir Venkatesh (2013) when he asked the whereabouts of an evasive informant from another informant. The reply is worth quoting in full:

It is very important that the rest of us don’t know anything—that we don’t talk or say anything. Our ignorance is what can save us, and keep us in this country. And for you, I would also suggest that you not ask too many questions. That is not a safe way to be (Venkatesh 2013, 91).

Oftentimes, the obstacle is because the informant had a very unpleasant experience with the person concerned, or he has to get along with that person so he feels a need to keep the secrets or unethical behaviours of that person private.

In contrast, participant observation proved to be more useful than mere interviews, not only because one obtains embodied experiences, but

because ongoing life dramas are unfold. Indeed, the ways people “perform” their connections are perhaps more crucial to the understanding of social interactions than interviews. Still, I had to rely on several experienced vendors to fully understand the world of connections. These vendors—Fat Zhao, Fat Man, Old Wang, Master Jin and JR Cui (all pseudonyms)—will repeatedly appear in following chapters.

In the third stage, I explored the ways migrants make connections with government agents and with powerful locals in their everyday lives and in response to the market relocation. By so doing I tried to associate migrants’ connections at the microscopic level to the local political economy. I collected data such as government registers, debates on the Internet, media coverage concerning the relocation, and contracts signed between migrants and market regulators and so on.

In March 2012, with the help of EMO staff, I contacted local city police (CALE) in their office. There, I obtained a register of all the stalls (households) presented by the EMO to CALE in preparation for the market relocation. The register has facilitated my interviews with almost two thirds of the vendors in the night market. However, the registered households did not match my own data. Upon scrutiny, the discrepancy allowed me to understand the power relations between individual vendors, CALE and EMO (see chapters 2 and 4).

At that time, the market was threatened with relocation and the vendors had divided opinions over what to do about it. While many vendors were afraid that the relocation was inevitable, a few thought

otherwise because there had been a successful protest against an eviction of non-local vendors by CALE and EMO in 2011. I traced the event and conducted an in-depth interview with the organiser of the protest, and his narratives not only enriched my understanding of political connections of vendors, but also shed light on the subsequent interactions among vendors, local government and powerful locals before and after the market relocation in June 2012. Two months later, when the aftermath of relocation seemed to subside, I left my field.

## **Chapter Outline**

With this ethnography I hope to illustrate how vendors make different kinds of connections in their urban lives. Each chapter has its own thematic focus. The individuals, groups or institutions with which individual vendors are connected and which have impacts on their lives range from local rentiers and hooligans, grassroots government officials and policemen, as well as vendors themselves and the other gender as far as men are concerned. As I shall show, each type of connection bear more or less performative meanings of *hun* practices. Thus we can see vendors perform gratitude and compliance to market regulatory personnel when they aim to obtain stands in the night market, feign brotherly friendship when they deal with local hooligans, disguise themselves as apolitical when they resisted government decision to relocate the night market, and perform masculine, ritualistic gestures among themselves to ensure business success and personal safety, and actively construct their images as able men in relation to the other gender. While chapters 3 and 4

explore more about vendors' networking, chapters 5 and 6 see vendors' performances more as presentations of their socially sanctioned selves: what is a good man among his 'brothers', and what is a good man in relation to a woman?

Chapter 2, *Vendors and the marketplace*, provides vendors' narratives of their past mobile lives and how they connect to locals to start their businesses. I also give an account of the creation of the night market as an aperture to the local political economy. In chapter 3, *Trapping ghosts*, I explore a sphere of so-called "ghosts" who pose threats to vendors' personal safety and businesses, and analyse the ways vendors deal with these "ghosts".

Chapter 4, *To protest or to comply*, describes the successful open protest by vendors against an expulsion by the local government in 2011, as well as vendors' responses to the market relocation in 2012. My focus is the leadership and political mobilisation of the first event and individual tactics in the second event, as well as conditions that generate the two modes of political connections. The market relocation also accounts for the mobility of my informants, so this chapter shares similar concerns with chapter 2.

In Chapter 5, *Masculinities among men*, I select several social settings such as street fighting and drinking to characterise three types of masculinities used by men to survive the capricious commercial and social environs and to develop companionship with other men. Chapter 6, *Conjugal masculinity*, deals with the relations between men and women by

exploring identities of unmarried and married male migrants. This chapter can be read in conjunction with chapter 5, because men are often caught between their connections with friends and with the other gender.

The conclusion assesses the overall status quo of the migrant vendors. Through a synthesis of the themes discussed in previous chapters, it examines the implications of this study for rethinking power, class, migration and subject on the edge of Chinese society.

## Chapter 2

# Vendors and marketplace

The night market has been around for years. Every evening, a few hours before the sun goes down, the No. 2 Road becomes a confluence of beeping vehicles. Buses, trucks and cars push their way through the traffic as best as they can. From various lanes that run off the No. 2 Road, a strand of motor trikes and minivans join this current, and the drivers pull over along the 12-metre pavement on the north side of the No. 2 Road, awaiting the opening of the night market. Around 5:00 p.m., these vendors unload all their goods from the vehicles in a highly synchronised manner, establishing two linear arrays of clothes, small merchandise and food stands in about half an hour, and leaving only a very narrow lane for the pedestrians. The outdoor restaurants on the outer array of the night market often extrude into the No.2 road, occupying one fourth of the roadway. With the emergence of colourful articles and the rise of food aromas that tickle the senses, the exuberance of life begins along this 800-metre long street market.

Who are the vendors? Where do they come from? How does one start a business here? The answers can appear to be very simple at first sight. For a food vendor, he needs to set up a food cart (Figure 2.1, left) with cooking equipment and a canopy to receive customers. For a small merchandise vendor, who wholesales clothing or scarves and lays them on

a blanket on the ground (Figure 2.1, right). Yet the answers can be a bit complicated if we look into their life trajectories, and ponder over why they chose to employ themselves in this way. In this chapter, I highlight the historical and social institutions as well as personal ambitions that are conducive to such transformation of people from farmers, and migrant workers to vendors.

The market as a site, on the other hand, is a confluence of people in a confined space. But how was the space created in the host society? How do we understand the market as a place that grows out of the local political economy in a place where urbanisation precedes rapidly? How do vendors access the market to start their businesses and what is the nature of the ties they form with the local society?

## **Vendors: out of village and factories**



Figure 2.1: Business beginners. 1) JR Liu is cooking at his stand. He sets his stand across from Pebble Zhang's stand, and unfolds his canopy to receive customers behind him. 2) A young woman lays a cloth on the ground and displays scarves and hats on it.

## ***Two cases: Old and young***

Two personal narratives of vendors, one each from elder and younger generations, serve as a starting point. Old Shi was born in 1962 and is one of the oldest outdoor restaurant bosses at the street market. According to him,

I am from L County, H city,<sup>7</sup> north Jiangsu province.<sup>8</sup> L County is an economically backward region. However this region is famous for its education—that is why many rich businessmen send their children to the county high school. We are also very proud of our countrymen Premier Zhou En Lai<sup>9</sup> as well as Li Yuan Chao, a member of the standing committee of the CCP.

When I was 25 (1986), I went to Suzhou and worked in a factory for one year. I bought a Mazda<sup>10</sup> and stayed in Suzhou for 15 years. During Suzhou's transition into a tourist city, Mazdas were forbidden so I went back home. I built a three-storey house, and cultivated farm land. I also engaged in some

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<sup>7</sup> In terms of administrative hierarchy, the Chinese county is a jurisdictional and territorial division of a city. For example, Nanjing city has ten urban districts and five counties.

<sup>8</sup> Jiangsu province is divided into two regions, north Jiangsu and south Jiangsu. *Jiang* means big river and it refers specifically to the Yangtze River. North Jiangsu (*subei*) is north of the Yangtze River and is economically backward compared to south Jiangsu where several mega cities are located. The Yangtze River is not only a geographical divider of China but also an economic and cultural watershed. The South Yangtze River region (*jiangnan*) has been known for its prosperity for centuries, even before industrialisation and urbanisation, so it has been the destination of migration from the upper Yangtze basin and north China for hundreds of years.

<sup>9</sup> Zhou was the first Premier (office term 1949-1976) of PRC.

<sup>10</sup> *Mazda* is a vernacular for motor trike which was introduced to China by Mazda Company, hence their name: all motors with three wheels are called Mazda in Nanjing. Mazdas are very common in newly developed counties and cities all over China. They are operated by private drivers as taxis and are convenient for short trips. But they are forbidden in downtown Nanjing because of their pollution and low speed that may interfere with automobile traffic.

other agricultural activities such as raising fish, ducks and silkworms. I raised pigs for one year. I also raised cows, but it was not profitable—if I were successful I would be a millionaire now.

My mother does not take care of my three kids so they have to come with me to work.

*“What?” His wife interrupted the interview. “You take care of the kids? Don’t listen to him, he is eating, drinking, flirting with girls and gambling<sup>11</sup> all the time every day! He has many mistresses.”*

With a timid grin, Old Shi dismisses his wife’s utterance, and continues.

Then one day my relatives phoned me to tell me they could not run the business on their own, so I came here to help them.

Another food vendor, JR Liu, recounts his story which is typical of his generation. JR Liu was born in 1991, thirteen years after Opening up and Reform, and has just started his business here. *“Do you know how many cities I’ve lived in since leaving home at the age of fifteen?”* He asked me, and answered himself, “Six”.

I looked for short-term work in Hangzhou, Taizhou, Wuxi, Guangzhou, Jiangmen, Suzhou, before returning to my hometown S County in Shandong Province. After the spring festival in 2007, I moved out with my younger brother to

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<sup>11</sup> *Chihepiaodu*(吃喝嫖赌), an idiom characterising amoral idling life, usually relates to man.

Suzhou where I worked as a salesman. Then I worked at an automobile beautification<sup>12</sup> workshop. I was asked to clean vehicles with chemicals. The constant exposure to corrosive liquids damaged my hands which were left cracked and bleeding. So I quit the job for a while. In the 2010 spring festival, I couldn't stand to stay at home until the fifteenth of the first Lunar Month,<sup>13</sup> so I went out on the fifth day to an electronic factory in Wujiang city, Suzhou, and worked as a post-sale representative in Nanjing. [In my spare time] I set up a milk tea stand with my friend in front of a factory. However, the guard of the factory prevented us from selling our goods there.”

I quit my job, and ran a business selling cold noodles from April to July 2011, but the business was not prosperous. So I decided to sell mutton soup using the equipment I used to make milk tea—you see, these aluminium buckets—according to Pebble Zhang's (another vendor) suggestion. I help Pebble Zhang with his business and we eat together every day. Business is not very good! I still have half a bucket of mutton soup unsold.

From the above two sketchy cases we can see that vendors are leading a highly mobile life. Many vendors have held several jobs before working in the night market—the younger the more so. For example, JR Liu has lived in six cities in the past seven years, working at various jobs

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<sup>12</sup> An euphemism for car washing workshop.

<sup>13</sup> In rural areas, the holiday of spring festival lasts until the 15<sup>th</sup> of the first Lunar month.

including factory work, sales representative, automobile “beauty master”, and finally a milk tea and mutton soup vendor. The two generations also differ in that while the elder generation may have some agricultural experiences, the younger generation have not, but generally quit their jobs in factories before they run their own businesses. Why do both groups refuse to continue their original lives in their villages or in factories, and why do they choose to become private businessmen instead?

### ***Out of villages***

Several push and pull factors including political and economic changes, familial relations and personal willingness shape the working and life trajectories of migrant vendors. For the elder generation, their migratory lives in their earlier years have to be situated in the gradual breakdown of the commune system and work-points institution on the one hand, and burgeoning commercial activities that outgrew the planned economy in towns and cities on the other hand. The incentives created by these trends were so great that some vendors have fond memories of their first earnings. Fat Man, a famous outdoor restaurant boss in the night market, recalls,

When my cousin introduced me to work in that grain distribution centre<sup>14</sup> in the town, hey, you couldn't imagine

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<sup>14</sup> Grain distribution centres are institutions of the socialist planned economy. Since November 1953 the state monopolised national grain purchasing and marketing, and totally controlled grain's produce, purchase, transport and consumption. In 1985 the state monopoly of purchase and marketing was formally abolished, and the prices of grain were subject to market fluctuation since then. To buffer the impact of reform, a dual track system was adopted in which the grain stations can process the grain they purchased surplus to the production quota stipulated by the state, and sell them to customers at a higher market price

how energetic I was, could you? The hostess (of the distribution centre) prepared many delicious foods. They made snow-white steam buns like this big! They also provided pickled chicken claws and pork, but I just eat the buns and the pork because chewing chicken claws was so time-consuming. I operated the oil press machine for days and nights, and got my share. You know how much have I earned? I could press out 3.5 Chinese pounds (*Jin*, 500 grams) of oil in an hour, each Chinese kilo is 3 *yuan* in the market, and the [fixed] oil price at that time was 0.62 *yuan* per Chinese kilo!<sup>15</sup> You didn't know how exhausted was I after that—I fell asleep on my cousin's shoulder when we were coming back to our village on the tractor. ("It was showering when you came back." Aunt Zhang, Fat man' wife reminds her husband) I was sleeping as if dead; nobody could wake me up for two days. So I got to know that money is easier to earn outside, which is why I went to cities."

He tried a variety of businesses afterwards.

I then earned money by selling ginger and chilli peppers in Nanjing for four years. Then I came back home and married.

When I was 26 (1993), I went out to the Giant Factory District,

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than the state purchase fixed price. The state employee could thus profit from such market-oriented business, which also benefited Fat Man. Such activities were seen as illegal sometimes, depending on the unstable policies. The economic incentive was so significant that 40 million rural people flowed to cities in 1994 once the formal ration system was officially abolished.

<sup>15</sup> To make sense of how much Fat Man earned, assuming 500 ml sesame oil is now worth 15 AUD in Australia, so Fat Man's hour rate would be the equivalent of AUD 52.5, five times what he could earn in the command economy system.

Nanjing, and shifted to other businesses. The business was not easy so I became a truck driver for many years. My lower back hurt badly due to long distance driving, so I moved to this district. I made and sold candied rice puffs in the beginning, and later shifted to barbeque fish.

In addition to economic incentives, some migrants mention rebelling against or escaping from patriarchal institutions as another factor in their outmigration. Old Shi told me,

I graduated from high school in 1980. After graduation I worked as a maths teacher for two semesters. In 1982, I saw the movie Shaolin temple (one of the earliest commercial Hong Kong movies broadcast in mainland China), so I decided to learn some martial arts in that temple (in Henan province, central China). But I went to Yellow Mountain instead with my friend's sister (implying a romantic affair with the latter). I didn't say goodbye to my parents. They looked for me but didn't find me for a while.

Fat Zhao (b. 1968), another outdoor restaurant boss and friend of Fat Man, told me:

When I was young I'd like to get by with my "brothers" in the "Society". At that time I kept my hair as long as this (long hair is a symbol of anti-conservatism). We fought in the street and my parents could not harness me. But my father beat me badly

when I came back home. I dared not to fight back. However, when he arranged a marriage for me, I smashed tens of sealed jars of yellow wine (part of bride price) and escaped my village.”

He then started to run a restaurant in town, and returned to his parents with another fiancé. Later on, he made himself a “ten- thousand-*yuan* household”<sup>16</sup> (*wanyuan hu*) in the 1990s, but lost it all and moved to the cities again because of debt. The debt, according to him, resulted from another milestone reform: the 1998 rural fee-to-tax reform which had drained the financial resources of grassroots government. Consequently the IOUs used by the government to pay for services became worthless and Fat Zhao went bankrupt. He went to Nanjing and started from scratch by working at a garbage processing station. He demonstrated determination and endurance—which he was very proud of—when he “held his breath” and shovelled stinking garbage onto trucks for three months before he could accumulate the capital for his new outdoor restaurant business.

Not all the siblings of a family are equally likely to out-migrate for a living. It depends on the birth order. According to many vendors, it is customary for the eldest son to stay with parents after his marriage and to assume major responsibility in taking care of the elders.<sup>17</sup> Other sons are more likely to move out of their places of origin to earn a new living.

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<sup>16</sup> Ten-thousand-*yuan* household is a term designating the first batch of rich self-employed *getihu* who emerged after land contract reform in the 1980s.

<sup>17</sup> The pattern of endowment may differ from region to region; in some places this responsibility falls to the youngest son and wife or a daughter and son-in-law if the daughter is the only child.

Daughters normally marry out to places far away from their homes and are expected to have fewer economic ties with their natal families. But these dormant kinship ties can be reactivated when time is appropriate.

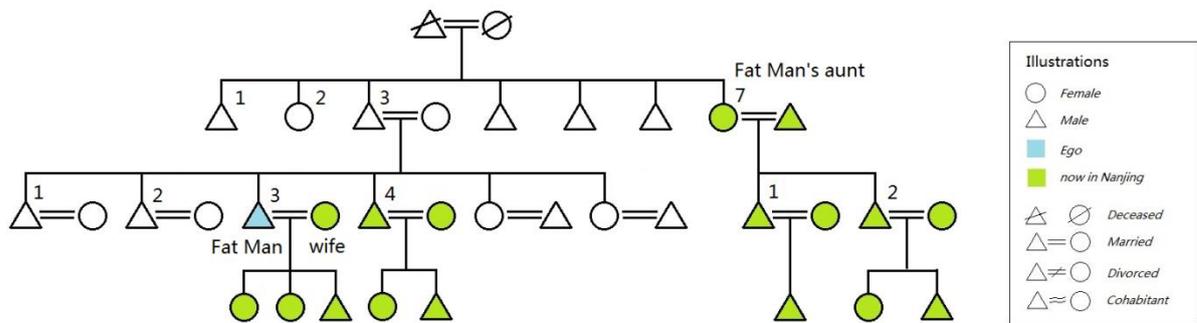


Figure 2.2: A vendor’s extended family and its geographical distribution. Fat Man is the third Child among his six siblings. One of Fat Man’s aunts (the seventh child of Fat Man’s grandparents) married and went to Nanjing city decades ago. With the help of his aunt, Fat Man started his business in the city without a *hukou* in the 1990s.

The geographically distributed kinship network resulting from marriage is utilised in migration across the urban-rural boundaries. For example, Fat Man, when he went out of his village at the age of sixteen, relied on his youngest aunt who had married out to Nanjing decades ago. Later on, he found a job and took care of one of his younger brothers (fourth brother, see Figure 2.2). Fat Man visits his aunt every spring festival, more frequently than he visits other relatives in his home village. Reliance on kinship in migration even extends to the next generation. When Fat Man’s eldest daughter graduated from high school, he came up with the idea to find a job for her in the company in Zhejiang province where his fifth brother worked. In general, kinship ties serve as a foundation for an “internal” job market which encompasses generations and space.

## ***Out of factories***

Many young people in their twenties or thirties also employ themselves. Yet they follow a path different from the elder generation, first working in urban factories and then in the market. While their enrolment into urban factories is facilitated by the state and capital, their entrance into the market can be seen as deviance from such arrangements.

The expanding vocational education system and zoning technologies typified by Economic Development zones in cities play vital roles in the rural-urban migration of young men. Many vendors are from nearby factories in the Economic Development zone after they graduated from vocational schools in counties and towns. Kipnis (2011) points out that students from vocational schools enjoy high employability, though choosing to study at vocational schools is the last choice for Chinese parents who desire academic excellence for their children. The Zoning technologies, to quote Aihwa Ong (2004), “provide the mechanisms for creating or accommodating islands of distinct governing regimes within the broader landscape of normalised rule”. The nearby Economic Development Zone exemplifies this very technology. It covers an area of 100 square kilometres, hosting a workforce of more than one million migrant workers.

Zoning technologies create exceptional space where socialist planning and neoliberal logic marry. Indeed, such technologies also harbour a post-Fordist employment system in which the term of contract

is dramatically minimised, resulting in a “fluid modernity” (Bauman 2000) in which

capital has become exterritorial, light, disencumbered and disembedded to an unprecedented extent [and] a government dedicated to the well-being of its constituency has little choice but to implore and cajole.

In the Economic Development Zone, the minimum contract terms in Korean and Japanese factories, for example, are only three months as stipulated by Chinese Labour Law. However, in practice, the term can be as short as one month as I learned from many job agencies and my informants. Furthermore, workers themselves voluntarily terminate their contracts and quit jobs, primarily because the chances of getting promoted are slim and the working hours are prolonged and monotonic. Such sterile factory lives often bore these young workers “in only three days”, as many vendors tell me about their previous working experiences. As a consequence, some of them move to other small but working-hour-flexible companies that are equally salaried, and start their own business after working hours. After all, casual, flexible jobs are not far from running a small business in terms of autonomy over time; the only difference is that the latter kind of employment entails more risk.

These institutional factors explain JR Liu’s career history. However, this is not the whole story. To run one’s business requires some guts. Among his factory friends who were still discussing options of self-employed businesses, JR Liu took the first step. He tells me that he was not

the type of person “who can endure being told to do everything every day”. Instead of finding another job in the city after the spring festival in 2011, he decided to run a private business.

### ***Women’s decisions***

Young women tell stories similar to those of young men. They feel similar boredom when they work in factories. Nonetheless, their movements often involve an additional factor: the life choices of their partners. For example, Rui, Brother Han’s young wife, told me,

I am from Ning Xia province (northwest China), when it was time to go out—you know it’s common for girls— out I went. First I went to Fujian Province to work in a shoe factory with my girlfriends from school, and then I went to Beijing where I met him (Han) when I was working in a meat processing company. You know the skewer mutton? I was stringing meat to bamboo skewers every day. I worked hard and was promoted to a position supervising other workers, but I was still like a machine. You eat, sleep, and wake up to work, get tired and sleep. Your head is dizzy every day. It was absolutely a waste of time.

Rui later married Han, a chef of Sichuan origin and who was in a Beijing suburb district then. After she gave birth to their second children at Han’s home village, Han moved to Nanjing city to start his own business with the help of his sister who married a Nanjing local. As it was hard to

run a restaurant with a single person, Rui joined Han's business instead of working in nearby factories. This pattern of household economy, however, is largely confined to outdoor restaurants. For shoe or clothes sellers in the night market, a single woman or a man can manage the business, unless she or he makes more money than her or his partner does in factories.

## **From street to sidewalk: a spatio-political economy**

Originally, the street market was formed spontaneously, and the first vendors spread their stalls along No. 2 Road. But now the 800-metre night market has a clear boundary, occupying a 12-metre sidewalk that circles a relocated Community (the relocated Community A, see Figure 2.3) which is nested in an urbanising suburban district. Though the shift from street to sidewalks was only a few steps, the process involved a convoluted spatio-politics that has shaped the contour of the night market.

From a satellite view of the vicinity of the market (see Figure 2.3), the building blocks surrounding it are from different periods. There are work units from the 1960s, hospital and schools affiliated to these work units and farmer's houses dating back to even earlier period, all of which formed a mixed landscape typical to a socialist suburban area. From 1990s and onwards, new commodity residences were developed on the state-owned lands of these work units; mounds and hills were bulldozed for new residential projects. Existing residents and numerous migrant workers from the nearby Economic Development Zone have become local consumers of the night market. Besides, truck drivers find it easy to park their trucks on the straight and wide streets named after numbers from No. 1 road to No. 9 road in this region. They often have dinner at outdoor restaurants, spending 20 *yuan* for a sauna bath in nearby bathhouses before they resume their long journeys the next early morning. Even late at night, taxi drivers, drunken men and prostitutes can still grab some food from these outdoor restaurants.

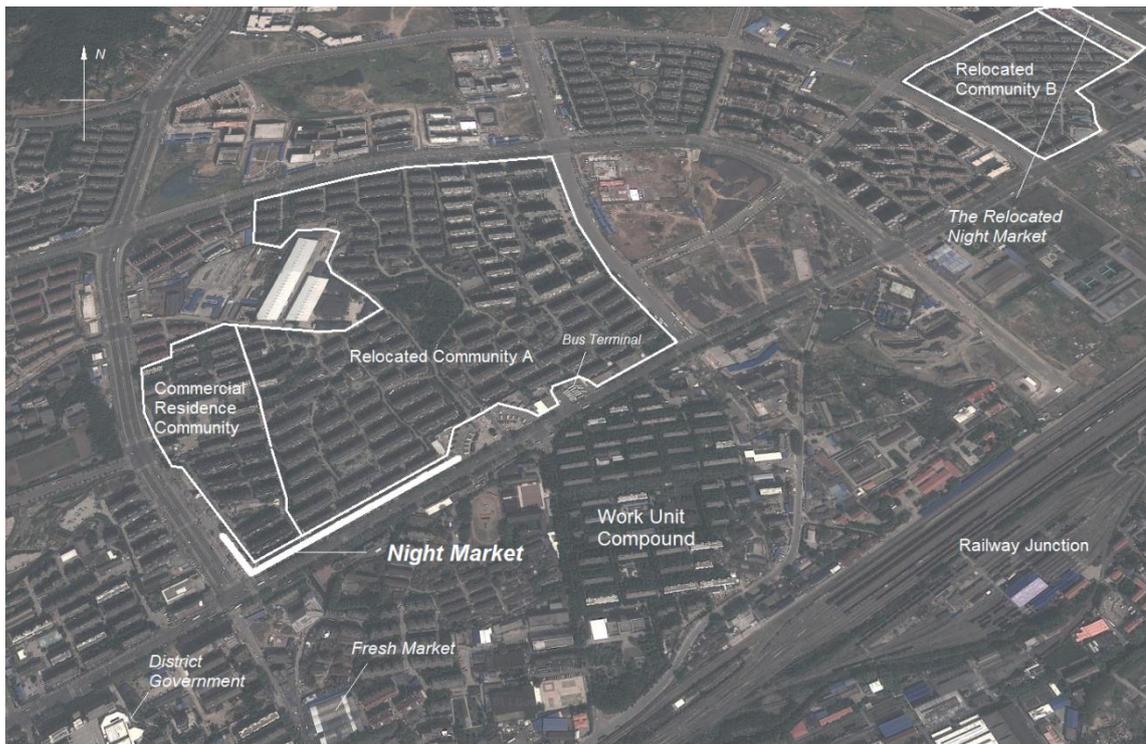


Figure 2.3: **Tilted Google view of the region.** The L-shaped night market was strategically located at the sidewalk of the relocated Community, and was surrounded by residential buildings from different periods.

There are additional geographical advantages for vendors to run their business here. The L-shaped night market is not far from an “old street” where vendors buy cooking materials from a privatised fresh market (Figure 2.3). South of the night market, a compound of uniform apartment buildings host tens of thousands staff of a work unit. Westward, several blocks of residences of other smaller work units are dotted with peasants’ flat houses and verdant vegetable gardens. These places provide cheap residences for the vendors with a rate at only a few hundred *yuan* a month. The market is also not far from the political centre, the district government to its southwest and the public security bureau, which provide a minimum sense of security to the vendors in this sometimes vandalised venue.

Yet this is not the whole story. Over the past 10 years there have actually been three markets, each corresponding to a type of political economy: an earlier spontaneous one which was regulated by the city police, a planned one embedded in and regulated by the relocated community, and the current one which grows out of both spontaneity and planning.

As I have stressed, the business spontaneity of the earliest market is based on the abovementioned geographic and demographic advantages. For the outdoor restaurants, these benefits include the population of potential consumers, ready accessibility to raw cooking materials, cheap accommodation and safe business environs. Where these elements are available, there is profit; the market is thus the spatial aggregate of people seeking such profit.

But state and capital are important in shaping the space of the market in its later development. According to Harvey (2008), the creation of urban space is driven by the hegemonic command of capital and state to absorb surplus capital, which is implemented to the detriment of dispossessed farmers, debt-encumbered homeowners and marginalised rural migrants, continuously giving rise to new forms of oppositions across time and space instead of class struggle. In analysing China's current urbanisation, Hsing (2010) highlights the struggle over territoriality, and argues that conflicts over physical and discursive space among various state and society actors underlie the grand power transformation. In what she calls the "urban fringe", urban and rural

governments compete over land for conversion to industrial-commercial projects and commodity housing, and at what she calls the “rural fringe” the struggle is between the township government and villages.

### ***The relocated Communities and the EMO***

The theories of Harvey and Hsing illuminate the transformation of the area surrounding the market. The recent urbanisation, readily visible as high rise commodity buildings, Economic Development zones, university towns as well as newly bulldozed mounds and hills, is driven by the local state at the municipal and district levels. From 2000 onwards, about 100,000 farmers from a nearby region were relocated by the district government, and the residents were granted urban *hukou* by the government. In the meantime, a university town and real estate projects mushroomed in the vacated places.

The prolonged relocation process has generated a wide array of social problems. The compensation from the district government for an average farmer included apartments in the relocated communities, social welfare, and working opportunities in nearby factories. In the beginning, each family member was allocated 20 square metres of residential space. The social welfare cash was 18,000 *yuan* for every woman and 30,000 for each man above 50 years old. And men and women under 50 were promised jobs by the government. However, the government played a sleight of hand by transferring the cash compensation in the form of reemployment funds to factories and companies in the development zones. The companies trained the land-losing farmers, charging them a training

fee by deducting it from the funds, but laid off these workers very soon and hired cheap migrant labours instead. Moreover, the compensation *lump sum* was eroded by inflation. As a result, many families even could not afford pork, a staple meat which symbolises a decent life. Suffering from unemployment, these newly transformed urbanites appealed to the government of the relocated Community or protested through official channels, and were then assigned low-paid jobs such as cleaners or guards in state-owned enterprises. However, many of them were sacked again. Learning from the pathetic lessons of their predecessors, groups that were later relocated often staged strong protests, bargaining for higher compensation or larger residences. Such protests have gradually subsided in the past years with the completion of the relocation, though there are still sporadic sit-ins by elders in front of the municipal government.<sup>18</sup>

The relocated Communities found a way to earn money by leasing their property. But the most profitable business venues, the ground floors of the residential building facing the street, were allocated to state-owned banks, supermarkets, and pharmacies with state background, and the rest were subcontracted by the sub-district government to property realty companies (*wuye guanli gongsi*) in which the Community had no share. What was left to the Community was a planned business street situated on the ground floor of the second row of residential buildings that was hidden from the No. 2 Road (the “back business street”, see Figure 2.4). An office,

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<sup>18</sup> That the majority of sit-ins are elders is strategic. They become a headache of government because they have plenty of time, enjoy free transportation and would be easily injured during confrontation which is detrimental to government’s reputation.

the Entrepreneurship Management Office (EMO, see Figure 2.4), was set up by the community to regulate these stores.

The name and the regulation scheme posted on the EMO wall bears a formal overtone that mixes market liberalism (entrepreneurship) and socialist ideology. It stipulates that the office should

Strictly implement laws, regulations and agreements with regards to reemployment; facilitate employment for those who are laid off but who seek self-employment and entrepreneurship.

And the stores are leased out to Community residents.

However, at the same time, the spontaneous night market was expanding. From 2003, several migrant vendors began to prepare and sell wontons, dumplings, and take-away lunch boxes on the sidewalks centring on the cross roads of No. 2 Road, the Old Street and Park East Road north of it (Figure 2.4). Fat Zhao and Master Jin were among the first batch of these vendors. Master Jin, even though he just ran a small wonton stand, could profit from hard work by staying open from dusk to dawn.

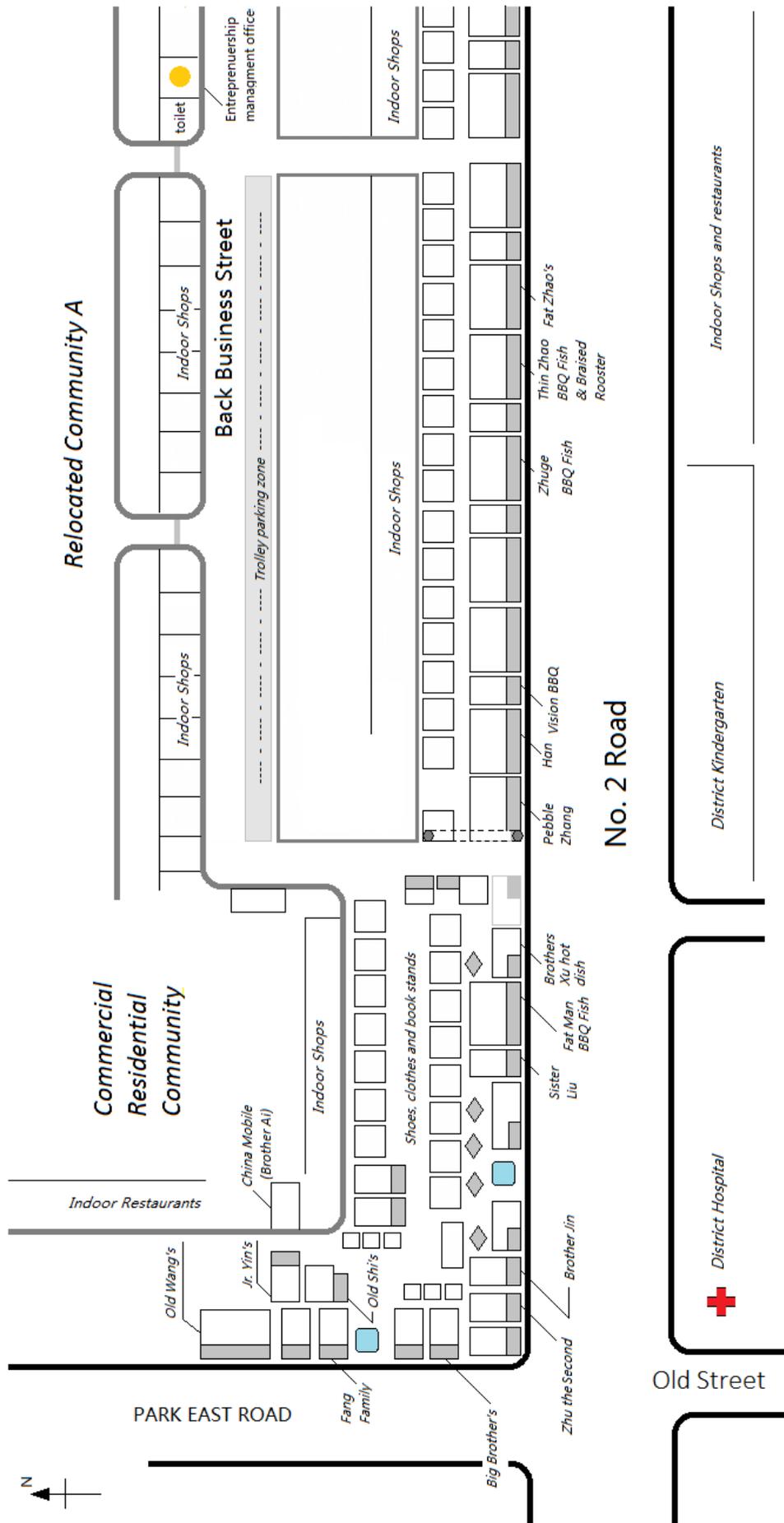


Figure 2.4: The west part of the night market where the majority of outdoor restaurants were located

### ***The CALE, city police***

The City Appearance and Law Enforcement department, division or section (hereby referred as CALE) is known in China by their short name city management police (*cheng guan*). The CALE was firstly introduced in April 1997 in Beijing. Later on, the institution was adopted by all major cities in mainland China to improve municipal governance, partly because cities had become more crowded with the inflow of migration, partly as an effort to reformulate redundant functional urban agencies. Institutionally, it integrates law enforcement functions from a number of government agencies including construction, gardening, transportation, public health and even demolition, with a focus on the maintenance of the tidy appearance of streets. As a law enforcement agency, it is often subordinate to public security (police), and the uniforms of CALE are often similar to the police.

However, CALE officers often abuse their legal power by driving away migrants in brutal ways for the purpose of keeping streets “tidy”. Their unrestrained violence often provokes the sympathy of ordinary people. Meanwhile, CALE as an institution has to finance itself using its disciplinary power because it is a semi-formal state agency and underfunded. At the night market they charge vendors 50-100 *yuan* sanitary fees, and hire cleaners to clear the food waste. Individual CALE policeman often extort vendors by threatening to confiscate their cooking equipment.

In March 2008, the Nanjing municipal government issued a “red-titled document”<sup>19</sup> (*hongtou wenjian*) addressing business activities that obstruct traffic, pollute the environment of Communities and cause parking problems. In China, Red-titled documents are laws, rules, regulations and policies that are drafted, issued and implemented down the administrative hierarchy (Shaw 1996). According to this decree, the spontaneous night market which was then regulated by the CALE should be closed. However, the relocated Community A expressed its interest in the ever-expanding night market which had already hundreds of vendors and businessmen. The proposal by Community A was approved by the district government, probably as a way to ameliorate the tension between the district government and the Community since the relocation. Therefore, in October 2008, the CALE and the relocated Community A reached an agreement that Community A would take charge of the night market and move it to its own territory, the 12-metre sidewalk. The Regulatory Scheme of the night market stated that

...according to regulations made by supervising government, [the night market] should be closed. However, upon comprehensive considerations and extended planning and negotiation, [we] won the support from sub-district and municipal governments....and drafted this regulation scheme

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<sup>19</sup> According to Shaw (1996), the format features “a capitalised, red-inked document title underlined by thick red lines broken in the middle by five-pointed red stars”, hence its public nickname “red-titled document”.

The responsibility, particularly the maintaining of street tidiness, of the CALE was shifted to the Community. Nevertheless, on paper the CALE was in charge. As part of the agreement, the night market should be hidden from supervision or examination by officials from higher levels so that the political performance of CALE would not be affected. The scheme stipulated:

The opening hours will be from 17:30 p.m. to 3:00 a.m. In order to meet regulatory requirements stipulated by the Community and upper-level government divisions.

The guiding principles were drafted in an elusive manner as if they were designed to improve the welfare of the residents of Community A:

Guiding principles: addressing difficulties of unemployed residents concretely; increasing revenue of residents; promoting citizens' consumption level, and supervising a legal and hygiene business operation...

It seemed a win-win between CALE and the relocated Community. The monthly revenue of the latter in the form of sanitary fee collected from the four hundred households in this night market was around 80,000 *yuan* per month, or a million *yuan* annually. The night market thus became a piece of "savvy meat" for Community A.

CALE continued to fulfil their designed function to maintain city appearance by patrolling the night market around 5 p.m., making sure that the outdoor restaurants did not intrude too much space into the side lane

of the six-lane No. 2 Road. However, its staff could no longer benefit from the confiscation of the goods of vendors. Furthermore, CALE as a fiscal unit also suffered from the withdrawal because its political performance was getting worse without its forceful regulation over the night market. In 2011, this region ranked last in city-wide hygiene and sanitary appraisal, and local CALE workers did not get the annual bonus based on the appraisal. To make up this loss, the CALE fined the relocated Community more than 100,000 *yuan* for the “illegal” use of a municipal fire hydrant by the latter to flush away smears on the pavement before a sanitation inspection.

In short, since 2000s business spontaneity, urban governance and the post-socialist urban transformation interacted to shape the contour of the night market. The creation and re-formation of the market was power-laden. The power relations mentioned above continued to influence the future of the vendors who are the primary focus of this ethnography.

## ***Hukou* and working rights**

As I have stressed, kinship bridges migration to cities for some migrants. But kinship itself is neither necessary nor sufficient to account for how a vendor establishes his/her business in this night market. For one thing, the majority of vendors don't have any relatives in this region; for another, they have to sign up with the regulatory agency, the Entrepreneurship Management Office (EMO), in order to legitimately run their business in the night market. This pivotal process of registration

provides a window as to how vendors articulate their relations with the night market. In the following I will use a survey of 80 vendor households to set forth typologies of existing connections. I argue that the common factor underlying such articulation is the right to work, and vendors obtained their working rights using either their connections or monetarised gifts to circumvent the *hukou* barrier.

Table 2.1: Types of vendors' connections to the night market

Type	Numbers	Hukou status	Relatives in this region	Registered name
A	14	They obtained urban <i>hukou</i> after they moved to this region through relocation.	Their kinship networks are strong in the relocated communities.	Their own names
B	5	Non-locals. Two of them gained hukou after they purchased apartments in the city.	They are relatives of the staff from nearby work units.	Their own names
C	2	Non-locals	Their relatives have local influence.	Their own names
D	6	Non-locals	Their relatives are from rural areas but later gained urban <i>hukou</i> .	Their relatives' names
E	9	<b>Non-locals</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>local residents' names</b>
F	44	Non-locals	No	Their own names
Total	80			

I sort these 80 households between those with local urban *hukou* and those without it in the third column, and list the hukou status of their relatives in the fourth column (Table 2.1). I also include a fifth column as to whether their names appeared in the register of EMO. There are six types. A) Fourteen households are residents of the relocated Communities. These former farmers automatically obtained

their urban *hukou* after the relocation; B) Five migrant households have relations with nearby work units' employees, and two of them have gained residency / *hukou* of Nanjing by buying apartments; C) Two migrant households have relatives who are influential local figures, and they register in their own names; D) Six migrant households have rural relatives who bought apartments in the relocated Community, and they register in the names of their relatives; E) Nine households are registered by the EMO as local residents whom these households have never met; F) The majority of 44 households have no kinship relations with locals, and are registered using their own names.

The acquisition of a place in the night market in many types (types A, B, C, D and E) is dependent on the *hukou* that can be gained legally by birth, through government-led relocation from rural to urban areas or through purchasing an apartment. Nonetheless, the *de facto* right to work is not *directly* associated with house ownership, but with one's personal connections to those who have *hukou* in this region (types D and E). Among those whose rights to work rely upon their relations to local residents, type E is noteworthy in that the connections are very fragile, and such fragility originated from the local conditions as I will show below. With the passage of time, the connections become more transactable. Type F includes vendors who do not have any personal connections to local residents, so their entry into the market is a matter of money, yet the monetary transaction has to be glossed over by gift exchange or *guanxi* sentiments.

The importance of *hukou* in gaining a place in the night market derives from the policy designed to address the unemployment and poverty caused by the resettlement. The direct beneficiaries are some locals whose livelihoods have deteriorated. They fall into type A, and their working rights are actually a type of entitlement. A typical case is an old couple who lost land and suffered from capricious policies in the past decades. Type B is similar to Type A in that the five households are relatives of former or current nearby work unit staff who received state privilege to obtain a stand. They used their own names instead of their relatives' names to register with the EMO, presumably because they can be easily regulated.

With the passage of time, many local vendors withdrew from the night market because they found the work load unbearable. When asked about their impressions of "outsiders" (*waidi ren*), many elders from the relocated Community who had worked in farmland told me that outsiders can "eat more bitterness" (*chi ku*, endure hardship) than locals. The locals' withdrawal was also because they could profit from transferring their stands to outsiders, and by so doing they became rentiers rather than labourers. The transfer fees varied from 4,000 to 12,000 *yuan*, depending on the size of the stand and mutual bargaining between locals and migrant vendors, and should be paid *lump sum*.

Yet not all the transactions took place between local individuals and migrants. In many cases, the EMO mediated or monopolised the transactions by utilising its administrative power. For instance, as with

**type C**, the EMO allocated places to migrants who had connections with local influential figures, such as the two leading households Han and Pebble Zhang, because the former had his sister married to a local hooligan (*huonaogui* or living rowdy ghosts in local terms, see chapter 3), and the latter was backed by another hooligan JR Lee, a “disciple” of a formal village head of one of the resettled Communities. Though the two households did not have urban *hukou*, they used their real names on the register, and they had the premium business positions in the night market. Type E is actually an official fraud by the EMO. The registered names are titular ones of the officials’ friends and relatives so that EMO staff can profit from selling these positions to outsiders. For example, Fat Man registered under the name of an EMO official’s classmate, and five other households were registered as brother or uncle of Director Zhang, deputy director of the EMO. However, the concerned vendors may not even know of their fictitious patrons, nor did they care about the manipulations. As long as the EMO collected monthly fees from these vendors, they would perceive their rights to run businesses as secure and guaranteed.

In **type D**, some migrants use the names of their relatives with urban *hukou*, because the policy was favourable for local residents who would not be charged extra transfer fees. Nevertheless, the relatives of these migrant vendors have to present gifts or “red envelopes” (*hongbao*, monetary bribes) to the EMO to obtain positions in the market. As a consequence, the two households would keep their transactions as secrets from other vendors, not only because disclosure of such connections

would cause unnecessary jealousy from others vendors, but also because they saw such connections as loopholes which had better be kept private.

The importance of personal connections to the household institution in obtaining working rights is eroded by the use of money. This trend not only manifests in the form of transaction fee itself, but also in standardisation of gifts, which is typical to vendors who fall into type F.

A Maussian concept of gift would have money and calculability set in opposition to solidarity, inalienability of human value and spiritual links between people and things (Mauss 1970). In *guanxi* practices, gifts and banquets symbolise personal connections and sentiments (Kipnis 1997). Nonetheless, in *guanxi* practices there are manipulations in which a gift is presented or favour is delivered in exchange for economic gains. In a similar vein, Webb Keane (2010) highlights the slippage of meanings between the two poles in Sumbanese society in Indonesia. He argues that symbolic tokens, though used in seemingly discrete social domain, can be gauged by the alternative value regimes of either exchange value or social status. Status is implicitly claimed in gift exchange, and the lower rank is associated with cleverness in calculation and lack of a sense of honour.

Drawing upon from the abovementioned theories, I have noted that gifts presented to the staff of EMO have two features: they take standard forms, but at the same time are hierarchical in themselves. The typical gifts are luxury cigarettes. They are always presented along with the enveloped transfer fees. Cigarettes and the envelope which “seals” the money prevent the receiver from seeing them as merely instrumental, so that the gift giver

glosses the gifts with personal sentiments and he or she can legitimately expect the EMO to “look after” his or her business in the future. On the other hand, the gifts presented are universal rather than embodying a particular relationship in that, first, the gifts will no longer represent particular ties once they are received by the receiver; second, before he gives the gift, a vendor may ask other people what is the appropriate form of the gifts so the gifts can be presented by the receiver to other people. The luxury cigarettes fit the requirement, because they can be used as gifts by the receivers in other ceremonies (for instance, birthday party of elders) or be presented to officials and other VIPs. Therefore, the gift cigarettes become a particular type of currency or a universal equivalent. As a consequence, in China’s cities, industries have been created when their products such as luxury cigarettes, tonic medicines, luxury goods and state-sponsored medical insurance cards became universal gifts “recycled” in the cities. According to a cigarette and wine shopkeeper, she “recycles” cigarettes at 70% of their retail prices, and resells them at original price to customers or to KTVs, bars, and hotels.

But there is another layer of meanings to these cigarettes: different brands function as status markers, and such status is stamped with a state imprint. In my field site, there were three major brands corresponding to the administrative hierarchy. They were a “Chinese” (national) brand priced at 68 *yuan* per pack, a “Jiangsu” (province) brand priced at 48 *yuan* per pack and a “Nanjing” (capital city of Jiangsu) brand priced at 12 *yuan* per pack. It was considered appropriate to present “Chinese” brand to

officials, “Jiangsu” brand on important occasions such as weddings, and the Nanjing brand when vendors and ordinary people exchanged cigarettes.

The monetization in obtaining working rights is also contingent on the growth of the market. As said, the transferring of stands from locals to vendors was mediated by EMO. However, with the expansion of the night market, the management was overloaded by the growing number of vendors and particularly by the fact that small merchandise vendors were hard to register because of their high mobility. Vendors themselves began to transfer their stands. A vendor may notify his friends or relatives of a vacancy he discovered in the market and mediate between the prospective leaser and the tenant, thereby creating a secondary market in which locals and vendors sublet their positions to newcomers. Therefore, it becomes more practical for the EMO office to collect fees based on place than on people. The place-based tax also applied to some vendors whose stands were situated beyond the formal territory demarcated by both the community and CALE. In 2011, some vendors obtained their positions in the night market, but were squeezed out during the rearrangement of the night market. A few of them appealed to the local bureau of Letters and Visits, but their requests were turned back to the Community, who then compromised with these vendors by reducing the monthly rent from 400 *yuan* to 200 *yuan*. In other words, while personal connections, sentiments and status performance are necessary for the gift exchange or the

presentation of enveloped money, initiating such *guanxi* connection or not follows market principles.

The extent to which the connections are monetised also depends on business modes. Not all the vendors stay put in the night market. Rather, some vendors whom I call “peddlers” have to move frequently from market to market. A typical peddler may have a wide network or a yellow-page-like brochure through which he is able to follow fairs held in certain places or during certain periods, such as spring festival fair, temple fair and other fairs organised by county or township governments elsewhere. For instance, a vendor was running an amusement park (with rides for children) based in an area even further from downtown. He came to this night market before National Holiday (October 1<sup>st</sup>–7<sup>th</sup>), asking many vendors whether they had any connections with the Community. He offered to pay whoever made such connections two packs of luxury cigarettes. Some pettier peddlers come from nearby factories and occupy empty spaces in the market. They often hide for a few days when EMO staff collect fees and return to the market afterwards.

Those who sell quick foods such as cold rice noodles are also more likely to adopt a mobile life to increase their revenues. In contrast, outdoor restaurant bosses are less likely to travel because of their cumbersome cooking equipment. However, some outdoor restaurant bosses speculate about where they can earn even more money. For example, Brother Xu theorises the profitability of a place in terms of “consumer level” (*xiaofei shuiping*) or “consumer capability” (*Xiaofei nengli*). According to him, high

dish prices and brands of cars parking in front of restaurants and KTVs are good indicators of “consumer level”.

Note some of the connections in type E prove to be fragile. The fragility is latent in the tenancy between locals and non-locals in type E is bound by strong ties such as kinship. In type E, vendors are registered in the name of some local residents without knowing who their nominal leasers are. In type F, vendors contact their leasers via the EMO and register in the EMO’s book with their own names. Such tenancy contracts are always oral, and they are made in a way as if the EMO is doing a favour for vendors. The leasers are either friends or kin of EMO staff, or they are poor residents from the relocated Community. However, some nominal leasers turn out to be social bandits. In other cases, leasers who are local poor residents use social bandits to extort their tenants. In other words, the misery caused by poverty and social decay amongst the unjustly resettled is transferred to the migrant vendors through the exploitation of informal tenancy.

For example, Vision Barbeque (the stall’s name is often used to refer to its operator) was run by a young couple who arrived in this region around March 2011 when there was not so much space in the night market. The husband looked for a local household from whom he might obtain a post in the market. With the “guidance” of the EMO office, he found a leaser, a local resident who did not actually ran the business. Vision Barbeque gave the resident several thousand *yuan* as lump sum transfer fee, treated him to a meal and presented him with several packs of

luxury cigarettes. Throughout the first year, the patron and his relatives and friends ate many times in Vision Barbecue's stand. Out of gratitude, Vision Barbeque did not charge them. However, the patron borrowed several thousand *yuan* from Vision Barbeque without returning the money to him, which, according to Vision Barbeque, was "*taking a yard when you already gave him an inch*" (*decun jinchi*). Even worse, at the end of that lunar year, the leaser asked Vision Barbeque for another 10,000 *yuan* to renew the "contract". In another words, the lump sum transfer fee was regarded by the leaser as the annual rent only. The son of the leaser, a gambler in big debt, even threatened Vision Barbeque with his pals in public that they would smash the stand. Vision Barbeque and wife were helpless; the wife told the husband to stay at the stand, and she walked into the dark back street, looking for the former staff of EMO for arbitration. As a result of the "arbitration", the amount reduced to 5,000 *yuan* but it should be paid in a month; otherwise the term of the contract should end. Disgruntled at the injustice, Vision Barbeque and wife stopped their business for a while, hoping that they would obtain a new post in the new market<sup>20</sup> and therefore get rid of the leaser. They were lucky in the end.

Another example was the Zhuge barbeque, an outdoor restaurant that is said to have the "highest attendance rate". The owners registered in the name of the uncle of Director Zhang. Thanks to their industrious work for many years, they bought an apartment for 170,000 *yuan* in a nearby

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<sup>20</sup> It was in May 2012 and there had been gossip that the night market would probably be relocated to a new place. See chapter 4.

suburb and gained urban household identity. However, this registration was not in the local district so they had to pay a sponsor. One midnight (after business hours) when the husband was away, an intoxicated patron extorted the wife by threatening to reclaim the stand immediately. The wife could only bend over the table sobbing. To settle the issue, Zhuge's family had to treat the nominal patron to a banquet afterwards to pacify his anger. However, capricious as such connections are, such pitiful experience seems to reinforce a belief that making more money is everything, because only money can settle the disputes. According to several business neighbours, the Zhuge family and her relatives are a bit eccentric or selfish; they never reach out a hand to others but only work for themselves.

Fat Zhao has a story of different kind. As far as I know, he is registered in the name of Director Zhang's uncle. But he wasn't hampered by the informality of his registration since he gets along well with the EMO, and he understands well the internal relations of the EMO and the political structure in which they are embedded. Such understanding owes to his past experience dealing with officialdom in his home. He even managed to avoid his monthly stand fee, and obtained an indoor space in the back street for his son's dental clinic. His successful appropriation of power made him an exception in type E<sup>21</sup> and in the night market.

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<sup>21</sup> Fat Zhao stands out in that he assimilated himself into the political structure because of his educational background, life trajectory, as well as his cunning and bold character.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I elaborated on the origin of the vendors at the night market, the creation of the market, and ways in which vendors connect to the market. Old and young generations enter into the night market from villages and factories owing to various institutional factors as well as personal motivations.

I went on to analyse the spatio-political economy of the night market. I argued that the creation of the night market be contextualised in the contemporary urban transformation. Starting to meet the demands of the growing population that comprised urban residents and migrant workers, the night market was soon controlled and regulated by urban grassroots government and then by the resettled Community as a tax base. The consequences of the power structure will be discussed in following chapters (particularly in chapters 3 and 4).

Vendors adopted a number of ways to enter the night market. Although monetization of the connections has become trendy, the importance of *hukou* remained, because the night market was created as a social remedy for the resettled, jobless farmers. In order to obtain the rights to work, non-local vendors built up connections to the regulatory office by presenting cash and gifts in standardised and universal forms. However, such connections embodied risks for vendors, just because of the contradiction between policy and reality. I argued that the risks are

from the informality of the tenancy and can be viewed as a side effect of current urban transformation that has impacted the migrant population.

Besides the abovementioned risks, the night market was also vandalised by other social bandits or “ghosts” in local terms. I will discuss the ways vendors cope with those ghosts to ensure their business and personal safety in the next chapter.

## Chapter 3

# Trapping ghosts

In the previous chapter I mentioned Fat Zhao, a self-made outdoor restaurant boss in his forties. Fat Zhao seems to know everything. I recall at the end of my first interview with him, an old customer of his walked into his stand and asked candidly if Fat Zhao used “ditch oil” (*digouyou*, recycled cooking oil) which is often associated with outdoor restaurants. Fat Zhao did not answer the insolent question directly, but shrugged off it. “*It’s Communists’ oil anyway*”, he said.

Another assertion of his was about the transfer of power from CALE to the resettled Community. “*Communists need dark society (criminal world or hooligans), as they want to keep their own hands clean*”. And as far as the consequences of the transfer were concerned, “*policemen (city police) take charge during the day time, and ghosts (local hooligans) during the night time*”, said Fat Zhao.

Despite being cynical about many other issues, Fat Zhao’s comments were often realistic. The dual-domination by policemen and ghosts makes a lot of sense. This chapter will elucidate the logic of these statements.

Who are the ghosts? Why are they dominating the night market? This issue is not only of research interest, but also matters for most vendors, for one would “lose his life in vain before he could spend his earnings (*you*

*qian zheng, mei ming hua*)” without a local knowledge of the ghosts.

“Ghost” is a local term which is borrowed by vendors to refer to those who harass vendors’ businesses or who commit street crimes. Ghosts have been rampant in recent years, and are an indispensable part of the *Society*, the interstitial, mobile and chaotic realm where migrants earn their living. In this chapter, following the thread provided by Fat Zhao, I investigate the origin of various kinds of ghosts in this increasingly urbanised region as well their impact on the night market. Furthermore, I look at how vendors take countermeasures against these ghosts to avoid financial losses or personal hazards.

## **Migration, criminality and urban context**

In accounting for the rise of crimes in modern societies, classic modernisation theorists from Durkheim (1951) onward suggest widespread *anomie* caused by social disintegration during industrialisation is likely to lead to crime and deviance. In a cross-national study in the Third World and socialist countries, modernisation was found to be predictable and have relatively uniform effects on the patterns of crime (Shelley 1981). On the other hand, rational choice theory suggests that crime takes place when opportunities are appropriate or when the benefit of theft and crime outweighs the risks (Nisbett and Cohen 1996). Combining the two lines of thought, LaFree and Kick (1985) point out that the opportunities brought forward by urbanisation are two-fold: urbanisation reduces inter-familial violence as these ties become less

important, and the development accompanying urbanisation also paves the way for theft and other property crimes. These illegal activities are further compounded by the process of migration. Louis Shelley (1981) argues that property crimes caused by social inequality can lead to violence when newly arrived migrants bring with them the traditions of violence, followed by a decline as rural migrants become adjusted to urban life.

As modernisation theories would suggest, with the dissolution of socialism and the embrace of a vibrant market economy in China, the total crime rate rose dramatically from 56 crimes per 100,000 people in 1978 to 163 in 1998 (Liu and Messner 2001) and around 360 in 2005 (Bakken 2005). As far as migration is concerned, offenses committed by migrants are said to be four times more than offences committed by urban populations (Ma 2001) from 1990-95 in Beijing city.

These data, though informative, sometimes contradict ethnographies of migrant communities. For instance, in a recent work based on large-scale surveys, Roderic Broadhurst et al. (2011) compares crimes against businessmen in four cities (HK, Shenzhen, Xi'an, and Shanghai) and examines the crimes businessmen face. They find that the migrants are often the victims, and note that many cases involving migrants as victims are dismissed as "internal affairs" rather than matters for police investigation. Li Zhang (2001) discovered that migrants in Wenzhou village in Beijing are similarly the primary targets of theft and robbery. Furthermore, although migrants in Wenzhou village use a measurable

amount of wealth accumulated to survive a punitive political and social environment, they are at the same time victimised by city governments for being a perceived drain on local resources and the primary cause of criminality (Zhang 2001). Since both Broadhurst and Zhang focus on businessman or migrant entrepreneurs, their observations have more comparative values than general migrant studies.

Indeed, I have witnessed intoxication, gang-fighting, vandalism, injury, racketeering, extortion and the beating of others in the night market, most of which are carried out by local hooligans—the “ghosts”; the selling of obscene books, gambling on a relatively large sum of stakes and bribery have involved some vendors. Nonetheless, it is fair to say that in most cases it is migrants who are victimised by crime.

Resorting to police assistance is an option to address the market evils that threaten vendors’ safety and property, but is less effective. The criminals are often nocturnal, and the night market which runs from dusk to dawn has become their front stage, simply because transgressors can flee into the night before policemen arrive at the scene. The most severe case before my arrival was a young man chased by a group of his enemies. He tried to hide in the bottom of a truck across the street, but was pulled out, mutilated, and left half-dead in a remote suburb north of the Yangtze River. Another example was a customer who was pushed to the ground at Master Jin’s stand and was struck by twenty beer bottles on his head by another customer, who then fled. There are also fierce turf wars. The overall situation is aggravated by insufficient police numbers in the area.

According to a policeman, the numbers of police lags far behind the increasingly mobile population in this urbanising region.

Thus the challenge of coping with ghosts is left to vendors themselves. Severe crimes like those mentioned above, are out of the control of vendors, but they have agency in dealing with other less severe situations. To explore such agency, it is necessary to expand the meanings of law and criminality from being merely about codified laws, transgressions and punishment. Indeed, in legal anthropology, law is seen as a mechanism through which conflicts are solved and orders are maintained (Roberts 1979). Norms and world views are often involved. Clifford Geertz (1973) notes that while the legal practices in western societies are ways of rendering facts so that “*lawyers can plead it, judges can hear it, and juries can settle it*”, they essentially follow an “if-then” grammar where law sees things, and a “therefore” grammar where law solves disputes in a larger frame of signification. In this regard, he argues that *ḥaqq*, *dharma* and *adat* are such significations in Islamic, Indic and Indonesian societies, respectively (Geertz 1973).

Building upon these theoretical insights, my approach in analysing how vendors tackle ghosts is eclectic. I examine processes whereby disputes get solved and violence occurs, but my emphasis is to contextualise the processes in large-scale social changes which have caused a variety of vices. The *Society* is arguably seen as the pretext for these conflicts and malfeasant behaviours. Nonetheless, I do not see social norms as pre-given or long lasting; nor do I see order as resulting from

negotiations between parties of equal power. On the contrary, consensus or equilibrium is reached on an unequal basis. Furthermore, while I highlight the precepts through which conflicts and wrongdoings make sense culturally, I see the vendor's perception of crime in *Society* as pragmatic and a learned experience through a process of adaptation.

In the following, I present a typology of criminal activities, individuals and groups. I also explore their association with the formative *Society*. Given the complexity of the so-called ghosts, I provide a simplified scheme through which ghosts are recognised by vendors. Lastly, I try to identify strategies used by vendors to avoid property loss and personal hazard.

## **The Rise of “Shameless Rowdy Ghosts”**

The local term for people who are disposed to crimes is *shameless rowdy ghosts* (*huo nao gui*),<sup>22</sup> and these groups or individuals are potentially or practically harmful to vendors and their businesses and to the public. Sometimes they are referred to as ‘dark way’ (*heidao*) or members of ‘dark society’<sup>23</sup> (*hei she hui*) by informants.

‘Dark way’ and ‘white way’ are terms widely used in Chinese societies whereas “ghost” is local. White ways and dark ways refer to

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<sup>22</sup> The compound word *shameless rowdy ghost* is only found in Nanjing vicinity. *Huo* (活) in Nanjing dialect means something unexpected, particularly in expressing one's shame for his own or others' misbehaviours, for example *Huo Chou* (活丑) means unexpected (morally) ugliness.

<sup>23</sup> Since I begin with the local term “shamelessly rowdy ghosts”, I tend not to use synonymous terms such as dark society members.

“gangsters and government staff, or illegal and legal activities respectively” (Boretz 2011), both of which relate to the notion of the Rivers and Lakes Society. The Rivers and Lakes Society is well known throughout China through the classic novel *Water Margin*, a compilation of folkloric stories dating back to the 12th century when a prosperous urban economy and urbanisation provided conditions for the circulation of legendary, heroic stories amongst a large population which had moved away from rural communities and drifted around cities and towns, trying to make a living (Wang 1999). Other historical sources for the concept of “ways” include the White Lotus, Triad, and other secret societies that were organised religiously, fraternally, or patriarchally in the form of sworn brotherhood (*hui*), cults (*dao*) and factions (*men*) (Low, Koh, and Lim 2002).

These societies, however, were extinguished by Communists after 1949 in consecutive political movements, as they were seen as having supported the defeated Nationalists who fled to Taiwan. However, the reform era has witnessed a revival of secret societies and organised criminal groups. Since the 1980s, the terms white way and dark way were brought back from HongKong and Taiwan to the mainland and revived not only culturally through movies and popular errant-knight novels, but also organisationally (Paoli 2002). Shenzhen, a southern China city which neighbours Hong Kong, has become a new base for Triad activities since the 1990s. Taiwanese influence (Li 2005) is also mentioned. According to Boretz (2011), who did research on underground societies in both mainland and Taiwan in the 1990s, a black way or “dark path” existed in

both sites, meaning “a hard-core underworld of professional criminals, organised rackets, shady businesses and crooked politicians”. Huang Hai (2010) describes the rise of *hunhun*, or street loiterers and hooligans, in a township setting where *hunhun* as a new social identity is arguably fostered by village and township government after the withdrawal of the totalitarian state. These local governments wanted violent young men to help them enforce local government rule. He also points out that while *hunhun* are inimical to society, they nonetheless share values with wider society.

An examination of the etymology of the term ‘ghost’ shows that *shameless rowdy ghost* has become widely known in this region since recent urbanisation. From 1993 to 1995, I attended a junior high school affiliated with a work unit not far from the night market. People used “evil heads” (*xie tou*) or “street loiterers” (*hunhun*) to refer to juvenile delinquents or unemployed adults who were involved or related to criminal activities such as racketeering and bullying. *Shameless rowdy ghosts*, on the other hand, had a different connotation. A veteran policeman told me that the term developed in rural areas surrounding Nanjing city. In Chinese, ghost (*gui*) not only means hideous spirit, but also refers to unfilial children in the eyes of their parents. For instance, ‘creditor ghost’ (*tao zhai gui*) is a term used to describe a child who constantly exhorts money from his parents. If a child dies young he is also thought of as a reincarnation of a creditor. In fact, *shameless rowdy ghost* has both connotations: they are seen as delinquents within the family or

community to which they belong, and are hideous to the public.

Generally, ghosts have become more active in this urbanising region. The term has moved from family usage into common usage in the wider public sphere. Their presence in street fights, extortion, and racketeering is only the tip of the iceberg. Facing vandalism and violence, some outdoor restaurant bosses have even developed a type of stoic attitude towards them; yet an air of terror does exist and it is intimidating, especially for women.

Ghosts are more scattered than a single, unified criminal group. They cannot easily be defined as a “criminal organisation” according to the criminal code. Indeed, most scholars are sceptical about the existence of organised crime or “mafia-style organisations” defined in Chinese Laws (Xia 2008). In the field, members of small gangs generally know each other, but their relationships seem to be founded more on separation or competition rather than collusion.

In this regard, *Society (shehui)* where ghosts are found is better viewed as multi-centric rather than uni-centric. I borrow the notion of multi-centric society from Barkun (1968, pp. 14-35) in his study of new African states established on top of tribes. He uses the term to refer to acephalous or segmental societies which differ from hierarchically constructed institutions such as the state. In these societies, when disputes arise between members of different lineage groups, each party may resort to their closet members to settle the dispute, and conflict can potentially

escalate into feuds and wars. Barkun argues that the dynamic of conflict resolution and order establishment in segmental societies somewhat resembles the dynamic in the international arena where no effective law enforcement institutions exist. His points of view ring true with regard to the *Society*. This is probably why novels such as *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*—a classic full of plots, personal and military battles, intrigues, and struggles between the states—have a wider audience in Chinese societies.

I argue that this multi-centric nature of Chinese *Society* results from post-socialist transformation and segmentation. In the past, *Society* in socialist China was only a residual space outside of the communes and work units, and was considered as unfavourable because it hosted unemployed or idling people. Nonetheless, over the past three decades *Society* has been dramatically expanded. Rapid urbanisation has not only witnessed a large migrant population, but also the continual shattering and remoulding of the social and political landscapes in which the stiff boundaries between rural communes and urban work units have been largely dissolved, resulting in new types of connections among the people. As I have indicated in chapter 2, *Society* absorbs a wide array of urbanising yet marginalised groups consists of former peasants and *danwei* (work unit) workers, migrants, sojourners, and petty vendors from different parts of China. It is often described as chaotic (*luan*) or unsafe, partly because of the lack of an effective police force as I have stressed. However, people in this *Society* haven't yet been thoroughly disembedded from the

institutions to which they were affiliated. As far as the ghosts are concerned, they can be analysed in terms of their different origins and *modi operandi*. I classify them as parasitic landlords, local tax farmers, business patrons and street loiterers. All of the “ghosts” are indexed in the end of this chapter.

### ***Ghosts from resettled Community: Parasitic landlords and Tax farmers***

As I have already indicated in chapter 2, the majority of ghosts who bully vendors are from the recently urbanised resettled Communities. The tensions between migrants and locals cannot be understood in a simple rural-urban divide. Rather, they take place between people of similar background, and the major difference is their respective trajectories of urbanisation. On the one hand there are land-losing farmers who are resettled as a group to relatively nearby new Communities (*shequ*); on the other hand there are migrants who leave their homelands and villages. For the former group, the terrestrial closeness and the remaining village administrative body holds kinship networks intact despite the vagaries of their livelihood, whereas the kinship and political cohesiveness are absent among the migrants. This difference between outsiders and locals helps us to understand their interpersonal encounters.

The leasing of stands by locals to outsiders is one such encounter. For example, when a local resident transferred his stand to Vision Barbeque, he extorted another 10,000 *yuan* on top of the upfront payment; another night, he had his nephew, a gambler, threaten to smash the

vendor's stand. In the same token, some local fruit vendors used force to gradually push out several non-locals from the night market area. The exclusion was not an overnight change, but was carried out step by step. Among the four local stands, two of them were brothers with their father setting up an air gun balloon shooting stand, and the other two were from another two families. The father set up his stand first, and then introduced his sons setting up stands next to the non-locals' fruit stands which were in front of a supermarket. The locals learned business skills from those non-locals, but then used their authority to officially ban the businesses of non-locals during the market rearrangement in 2011. In the meantime, they also introduced two more friends including Mr "Big Wave" (Mohegan hairstyle), a delinquent gambler of their community, to set up a stand next to theirs. With large debts and no "proper" way of making a living, Big Wave took over the non-locals' original space and forced them out even further from the centre of the night market. The space Big Wave took over was close to a supermarket and could attract more customers. The non-locals thus could only sell their fruits on the roadside, and were subject to the regulation of the city police so they could only begin their business after 5:30 in the afternoon.

The second type of ghost from the resettled Community are tax farmers, who are recruited as management functionaries in the EMO. For example, Brother Strong, who was convicted of negligent homicide when he was a teenager, assists in collecting monthly sanitary fees from the vendors. "Tax farmer" ghosts are institutionally indispensable to the fee

collection apparatus, because they can effectively address fee evasion practices by vendors through violence. The formal head of the entrepreneurship office, Guang, was said to never restrain himself from using force when even slight resistance was met. In contrast, Brother Strong enjoys a good reputation among some vendors, for he sometimes is more lenient. But his good reputation is still based on his potential to use force.

I call both the parasitic landlords and tax farmers “social bandits” because these men only act as ghosts when they are out of their community, and their harshness towards outsiders serves to fulfil their obligations to their own communal ties. In other words, there are not individualistic crimes as some modernisation theories suggest. One day I encountered Brother Strong, his mistress and Brother Guang in an outdoor restaurant. They were planning a birthday banquet (which are important occasions for kin to get together) for village elders, and they discussed how to pool the brand cigarettes (predominately China®, a brand typically consumed by government officials) they collected from vendors as presents for the elders. Such behaviour is rewarded by their community. Brother Strong receives government subsidies entitled only to laid-off workers in their forties to fifties. Brother Guang, though sacked by the sub-district after the 2011 resistance (see chapter 4), secured a position as a staff member in the political consultation office to the Community Party committee. He participates in endless banquets to build business liaisons on behalf of the community; he is so busy with banquets that I could

hardly make an appointment with him. When I met him incidentally in his office, he was showing off his luxurious watch and immaculate suits to his fellow colleagues, indicating that his well-being hadn't been affected by his removal from office.

### ***Ghosts from work units***

Ghosts of this type are young men who graduated from junior high schools that are affiliated to nearby work units. These schools, though not ranking high in the municipal ranking system, are considered elite locally. They provide some academically qualified students to key high schools in the city, but the majority of students go to technical high schools and become the labour force of those work units. However, since the 1990s, reforms of these work units cut off many employees, and the students are less likely to be employed. A small group of boys, particularly those with poor academic performance, are thus gradually marginalised by the educational system, and became street loiterers. A few of them commit felonies so the chances are even less likely for them to find "proper" jobs in the work units or other companies. But such denial of chances has opened a new window for them. In comparison to their peers who might seek stable career development in work units or in private companies after graduation, they start their own businesses at earlier ages and accumulate experience in market competition.

The association or fraternity among these young men since their

school time are strong. For example, Brother Hua,<sup>24</sup> Little Yi (as in *yiqi*) and Brother Courage are informally sworn brothers, though they engage in different businesses. Brother Hua collects fees from amusement arcades and other shady businesses, while Little Yi and his fellows collect debts. Brother Courage and his followers have recently set up a company leasing minibuses and cars in addition to their supplying wine and beer to the night market. He even has a plan to set up an old persons' home as he sees opportunities in entering this industry due to favourable state policies.

These businessmen-cum-ghosts, particularly Brother Courage, do not apply direct violence to vendors, mainly because their stable business renders violence unnecessary. They also learned from their past. Brother Courage was hidden by his father after he committed a felony, and he felt deeply guilty when he had to leave his father to go to prison. He also has an eye on the behaviour of his little brothers, and has a specific managerial style. When he is drinking with his little brothers, Brother Courage behaves like an authoritative yet lenient patriarch. He drinks penalty drinks for his little brothers so they do not get too drunk. At the same time, he warns his little brothers to stay away from street brawls.

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<sup>24</sup> His nickname is Hua zai in which zai (仔) is from Cantonese and it means boy(s). Other compound words using zai are ma zai (*goons*, 马仔) and dagong zai (*working boys*, 打工仔).

### ***Patron ghost: Brother Dragon***

Brother Dragon, another beer supplier, is neither from the resettled communities nor has any ties with the work units. But according to Fat Man, he has ties with a more organised syndicate based somewhere else, and has participated in forceful housing demolition and relocation. He graduated from an institute of physical education and has been “getting by” (*hun*, 混) in this area for more than ten years. He used to be a hired thug of a nearby fresh market, and got a foothold in the wine business in the night market as it grew bigger. He now monopolises two thirds of the beer businesses and also controls fish supply in the night market, “commissioning” two *yuan* per kilo, roughly one sixth of the fish purchase price. Every day he loads beer onto a truck with an employee and distributes them when the night market starts. Afterwards, he returns to his beer warehouse, has his dinner, and then patrols the night market on his motor bike checking if the quantity of fish reported by fish wholesalers agrees with the total sum reported by outdoor restaurant bosses. Later, he goes with his friends to play mah-jong or to drink.

### ***Ghosts with government background***

In contrast to the locals whose powers stem from their kinship ties to the local community, the third type of ghosts has direct connections to grassroots officials. They typically function as informal law enforcement in construction projects. For example, Little Lee, Pebble Zhang’s (an outdoor restaurant boss) brother-in-law, is an apprentice of General Manager

Wang, who was the former village head of a nearby resettled Community (Community B). With a formal title of construction supervisor printed on his name card, Little Lee actually acts as a head of thugs, threatening or beating migrant construction workers who dare to claim their delayed salaries. He was put in prison for one year (reason unknown). Another example is the legendary ghost, Brother Bright, who was said to be first-tier ghost in this region. According to an ex-official of the district government, Bright managed to organise a battle against a hundred policemen when he was wanted for arrest in the 2000s. He lost the battle and was finally imprisoned. Later, he was released and recruited by the sub-district government as deputy director of the Demolition Office (*chai qian ban*), and is said to be one of the three major stakeholders of the road expansion project that led to the relocation of the night market (see chapter 4). Both Little Lee and Bright's cases show how ghosts have become an essential part of governance at different levels. I will get back to them later.

## **Perceptions of ghosts: *shili* and *beijing***

Given the presence of ghosts and their diversified origins and activities in the night market, it would be oversimplified to set vendors as antagonists with ghosts. In fact, a vendor is not an abstract *natural person* enjoying a bundle of rights, but a person in a web of connections. Not all vendors are against the ghosts, particularly those who have kinship ties with ghosts, like Han and Pebble Zhang: Han is the brother-in-law of Brother Hua, head of a gang; and Pebble Zhang is the brother-in-law of

Little Lee, a ghost of government background. Since it was through their ties that the two vendors secured the premium positions in the night market, there is no reason that Han and Zhang would take sides with the majority of vendors when their interests were violated such as during the relocation in 2012. On the contrary, other vendors see the two as powerful and cultivate connections with them. Eighty Thousand, after being raided by a mob, gave his cooking material to Han. This gift was an effort by an ordinary vendor such as Eighty Thousand to consolidate his ties with Han, and use Han to connect to a third person.

In this regard, vendors see others through the lens of their networks rather than as individuals, and they take actions based on this perception. I argue that people's connections are categorised as having *shili* (influence) or *beijing* (background), which are social capital of different kinds. Both Han and Pebble Zhang are said to have *shili* (influence), and the brother-in-law of Pebble Zhang and Bright is said to have *beijing*<sup>25</sup> (background). The nature of *shili* and *beijing* will be discussed as below.

### ***Shili, scope of influence***

*Shili* (势力) means a localised group which uses violence to defend or secure its members' interests. It can also mean the personal possession of ties to such a group. A gang can be said to be *shili* or having *shili*. A local resident has *shili* because his kinship network can be readily turned into a force to defend his interests. In rural areas, families that have several male

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<sup>25</sup> A word play would have *beijing* as the capital city of PRC. Indeed, people from Beijing are often seen as having background.

adults naturally bear *shili*. So does a fraternal group. Moreover, *shili* is measurable simply by the number of people a group can amass. It follows that members of the resettled Community have more *shili* than non-locals because of the geographical accessibility of their ties once conflict take place. The non-locals, with less kinship network readily accessible, have less or no *shili*. Fraternal groups or gangs also have more or less *shili*, depending on their size, though they differ from kinship networks in that the *yiqi* (see chapter 5) among its members has replaced blood ties in binding brothers together. As *shi* means potential, the violence that endorses the power does not have to be applied, but only needs to be seen or performed. For instance, hosting a banquet for many guests in public contributes to such a perception by others. *Shili* can also be feigned by claiming connections to influential people or group who might not exist.

*Shili* also connotes a meaning of being local, and there can be many *shili* groups in a region. As I have previously noted, the field is multi-centred. But such multi-centric nature does not enter the language of vendors. They only see *Society* as chaotic (*luan*) or complex. In this regard, *shili*, as it is derived from rural lives, serves as a useful conceptual tool to make sense of the chaotic world. By comparing *shili* and how much *shili* the self and the other possess, one is able to gauge the potential for action. In this regard, migrants are always less powerful than the ghosts—that's why they refer themselves as "no money and no *shili*" (*mei qian mei shi*) — unless they form strong ties or their own *shili*. Indeed, there was once a "Fuyang gang" named after the place of origin of vendors who had

monopolised fresh market business. But this gang was shut down in 1990s “hard strike” (*yanda*) movement by the police.

However, *shili* or *shili* groups do not endure. The instability of *shili* can be explained by at least four reasons. First, when violence or threats are used in profit-making activities, resistance or cunning negligence by vendors often occurs. Brother Xu, an outdoor restaurant vendor, tells me that he buys only one gas cylinder provided by a group of young delinquents, but he actually uses another one in the cooking cartridge, and justifies not purchasing them on a regular basis by stating that his business is not good enough. Second, some ghosts get caught in gambling or other illegal activities, and are subject to violence from other ghosts, thus they cannot ensure their regular presence in the night market. Third, monopolising a business line, particularly profitable ones such as beer distribution, may attract sniffing noses of other street loiters or *shili* groups. Thus turf wars are inevitable especially in times when a new market is established or relocated. The following case shows the caprice of *shili*.

June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2011 was the date on which the night market should have been relocated. Only three days in advance did the local government notify vendors. But ghosts seemed so sensitive to



Figure 3.1: Yang, a new patron in the newly relocated market.

market signals that they stepped in even before government took action. A month prior to the relocation, a young man with a bandage wrapped around his hands as if he had just had a fight was followed by several of his men. They walked the street from one end to another, telling all the outdoor restaurant bosses that they should use the gas tanks provided by them. Shortly after the relocation, the gang members showed up again one night in the newly relocated night market, this time led by their head Yang, a young man aged about twenty (Figure 3.1). They rushed out from a minibus, each with a knife used for cutting watermelons,<sup>26</sup> and fought with another group led by Brother Dragon, the old beer distributor. According to Fat Zhao, both parties had agreed on not calling police for rescue beforehand, for imprisonment was the least desired result for both gangs. The fight lasted only several minutes, ending up with a young man's wrist tendon cut, and Brother Dragon's gang was defeated. In the following days, the winners began their promotion of a new brand of beer. The defeated Brother Dragon could only stand next to heaps of his beer boxes stacked at the corner of the new night market, cursing the new patron.

The vendors then had to remake their connections with the new patron. But the outcomes were dependent on the *shili* one has. Knowing nothing about the quality of the new beer, the wife of a boss refused the offer (her husband was away home then). So she was publicly reviled as dumbass by the half-drunk Yang and one of his fellows. The two young men also smashed a box of beer in the wife's stand, forcing her to accept

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<sup>26</sup> They chose watermelon knives because the knives are not prohibited by law.

the offer.

Yang also met resistance from several other bosses such as Han and Fat Man, so he smashed their beers as well. Fat Man told me in private that he was not scared of the “kids” as he would be able to claim what had been damaged, “you will see”, he said. But his remarks seemed to be at best a boost of his ego since he did not specify how.

Unlike Fat Man, Brother Han managed to settle the issue by resorting to his brother-in-law Brother Hua. In a reconciliation banquet I witnessed, it turned out that Yang was the sworn son (*gan erzi*) of Director<sup>27</sup> Zhang, the one who had lost his grip of the night market because of the relocation, so Yang’s gaining a foothold was very likely to be supported by Director Zhang. Since Brother Hua and Director Zhang were equally influential in this region, they were able to reach a compromise, and Yang was persuaded by Director Zhang to make an apology to Han in the banquet. “*Now you are elder brother, and I am the younger one*”. Yang and Han toasted each other, symbolising an agreement that Yang should not forcibly promote his beers to Han. Han was thus able to continue to purchase beers from Brother Courage, the man of Brother Hua, as he did before.

Later on, I heard Brother Dragon’s followers were also disbanded because he could no longer provide “salary” for them. When I rang him, he told me he was busy with a new business elsewhere, but he did not

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<sup>27</sup> Director here does not mean he is staff of the government. It is only the way vendors address the head of the entrepreneurship office. Depending on the closeness to him, he can be addressed as director Zhang, Old Zhang or Brother Ming (Ming is his first name).

specify whereabouts. The only thing I could validate was that his beer warehouse was situated in a dilapidated factory that had been locked up since the relocation.

### ***Beijing (背景): legitimate and endurable background***

The *beijing* of a ghost (or a person in general) is also a type of connection but it differs with *shili* in that it entails the endorsement of government. Little Lee is said to have *Beijing*; so does Bright, the appointed deputy director of the Demolition Office. Simply put, their businesses are ratified by government papers, regulations etc., and they profit directly from government-initiated projects. In comparison to *shili* groups, people with *beijing* use force or threaten to use force, but the force is semi-legitimatised (though rarely technically legal) as an integral part of the administrative power. This means that any appeal against their misconduct to government will be futile.



Figure 3.2: A small merchandise vendor complains that her canopy was cut by a ghost who forcefully promotes his canopies to all vendors after the relocation.

After the relocation of the night market in 2012, vendors suffered from dramatic downturns in their businesses. However, Little Lee seized the opportunity to promote his canvases (used by stall holders to make stall canopies) to more than 200 households. The shrinkage of the business area, a factor contributing to the business losses, meant that vendors needed to replace their canopies with new ones. There was also aesthetics—an aesthetics being uniform and trim that is appreciated by officials<sup>28</sup>—that rendered the program necessary. According to a government official who inspected the new market, the new market should take on a brand new and uniform look. He added that *“We will also introduce appraisal system, and the tidiest stands will be accredited five stars just like the hotel system!”* But what Little Lee cared about was the money. The canvases he promoted were priced at CNY 350 each, far exceeding the online purchase price of only CNY 180, so the difference was enough to “stuff his own pocket”. Several vendors were reluctant to purchase new canvases, but they found the old ones had already been cut by scissors when they started their businesses one afternoon (Figure 3.2), so the purchase became urgent because the broken ones could no longer provide shelter from the rain. Everyone knew that it must have been done by Little Lee and his buddies, but there was nowhere to lodge their complaint, because Little Lee had an “official” position in the managerial body of the new night market.

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<sup>28</sup> Such tastes, however, contradict vendors’ practical thinking. It is the food and quality that hold old customers, rather than the brand new look. Customers are also searching for the signs of good food, and messiness can be an indicator of good business, so vendors would not encourage me to sweep the ground from time to time when I worked as a waiter for them.

Officials also rely on ghosts for their own interests. General Manager Wang is a case in point. He was the village head of Community B before the relocation, and was then appointed as the general manager of the Realty Management Company of all the relocated Communities. Little Lee, his disciple, told me impudently that all the officials are “stuffing their pockets with public funds” (*Zhongbao si’nan*) in contract construction projects, such as Wang did with the infrastructure projects of the business street. Wang also had several other disciples. The second one, Little Six, did some auxiliary work in exchange for business banquet meals. Like Little Lee, he also helped his relatives to secure a stand in the night market. He even snitched on my research and seemed to have disclosed that to his superior. The third one, *Ling*, who has good interpersonal skills, was appointed as a member of the fee-collecting team before the relocation, and later as the *de facto* manager of the new night market on behalf of General Wang. As he once complained to me, he could only earn a salary of 1,400 *yuan* a month from Wang, but he had to talk to vendors, design the new night market, and handle disputes. However, what he did not tell me was that once he took control of the post-2012 night market, he would be able to profit from subcontracting the transferring of opening stands to new business households<sup>29</sup> (for details about the relocation see chapter 4).

Incorporating ghosts into the formal administration benefits both the

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<sup>29</sup> After the relocation, nearly one third of vendors left the night market. But it is expected that the market will thrive in a short time. Then the managing body can lease out the openings to new vendors at a higher price. Considering the overall construction costs are 200,000 *yuan* (according to *Ling*), the overall revenue of leasing out of 100 stands each with 2,000 *yuan* to 4,000 *yuan* would amount to 200,000 to 400,000 *yuan*, excluding monthly fees from vendors.

officials and ghosts. The relationship is reciprocal for them but unethical for outsiders. The officials decentralise their law enforcement power to hooligans in order to facilitate their lucrative projects, while the hooligans get a share from the projects. Acting as if a law enforcement apparatus, ghosts function more effectively than formal police whose actions are more limited by the law. Brother Bright's recruitment by the district government is an example. But these ghosts are best kept at an arm's length by officials. They can be easily sacked so their supervisors can be exonerated from any blame. This echoes the statement of Fat Zhao quoted at the beginning of this chapter that even though Communists need ghosts, they would like to keep their hands clean.

Despite the fact that ghosts with *beijing* can be easily sacked by their supervisors or masters, *beijing* refers to the government, which is a mystical, estranged and enduring existence in the eyes of vendors. A person having *beijing* is believed to be powerful. There are several reasons underpinning such a perception. For the elder generation who have experienced political movements, the government appears to apply violence to safeguard its interests. Old Wang would have it as "*a territory (Jiangshan, literally river and mountain) as firm as an iron bucket surrounded by the iron hoop*" where the *jiangshan* is tinged with a colour of dynastical or heavenly mandate. Master Chow, another vendor in his forties, told me that "*Even if you can move earth and heaven, never fight with Communists*". Second, in terms of its administrative level, the local district government is comparable to a county government, which is

beyond the everyday experience of vendors who come from villages and towns. Third, staff members of government are often reckoned as literate, while most of the vendors are illiterate or less-educated. Lacking ability to read and write, vendors could not even sign contracts or understand regulations properly. “*We have eyes, but we are blind*”, one vendor told me, when he categorised government staff as “literati” who “sit in the air-conditioned office”.

### **Crime prevention: Streetwise, Sympathy or Symbiosis?**

This section discusses how vendors avoid losses or personal hazard in coping with ghosts. Though violence is an indispensable means for ghosts’ livelihood, in the eyes of vendors, it is often characterised as “unreasonable” (*bujiang daoli*), for ghosts can be easily provoked and are hard to pacify. For instance, two ghosts—God knows where they were from—struck a barbecue vendor Bald Man on his head when he asked them to pay 350 *yuan* for a meal. Bald Man had originally cut the price by 50 *yuan* according to their initial request, but then they proposed paying only 200 *yuan* and threatened to leave without any payment. Bald Man tried to argue with them, but one of them grabbed a beer bottle and hit him on the back of his head, causing cerebral concussion of the unfortunate boss.

Similar cases are many. While erratic violence substantiates ghosts’ power, the unreasonableness of their offending can be partially redressed

if one has local knowledge. In this regard, knowing ghosts in person and whether they have *beijing* or *shili* is crucial for self-protection for vendors. Cultural logics, like those of *yiqi* and family relatedness can also be used to negotiate with ghosts.

### ***Familiarising with local situations***

An awareness of local malicious power is a prioritised form of knowledge for a vendor, so that one will not “lose his life in vain before he could spend his earnings (*you qian zheng, mei ming hua*)”. Such knowledge includes recognition of big and small, visible and invisible *shili* groups in the host society, their ties to particular people and ghosts’ personal biographies and characters. The occasions for circulating such information include business intervals, casual talks when men exchange cigarettes, as well as when they dine together or hold private banquets. Some vendors are less adroit in socialising and are prone to isolate themselves from a larger community. The more isolated they are, the more likely to get bullied. In contrast, some vendors are more active. For instance, by inviting Master Hu for dinner several times either at his stand or at his apartment, Brother Xu the younger quickly made it clear who had the most *shili* in this region. Another vendor, Brother Fei, took the initiative to invite several “big households” (*dahu*) to his stand for a dinner as soon as he started his business, and he asked his neighbours to “take care” of his business in the banquet. According to Brother Fei, the banquet is a routine for him whenever he starts his business in a new place. Through all of this socialising, vendors gradually make sense of the big picture, getting to

know who cannot be offended because of their *shili*, and who has less *shili* and can be fended off.

Knowledge is power. Not all ghosts are intimidating if vendors know well about them. Tang, a 22 year-old street loiterer from the resettled Community is said to have caused a fatal car accident and was jailed for a year or two. After he was released, he engaged in shady businesses such as selling fake cigarettes, as well as racketeering; but he had a quite limited repertoire of tricks. He would implore new vendors to lend him 100 *yuan* by pawning his feather jacket, his mobile phone, his identity card or whatever he could take out of his pocket, and promised that he would redeem the pawns very soon after he won some money from an amusement arcade. He would also mention other famous ghosts' names to boost his bargaining power. Perplexed by the *shili* he claimed to possess, vendors often "lent" him the money without taking his items. However, his manoeuvrings were circulated among vendors, and one of them said that Tang was once chased by his creditor along the street. Tang managed to get rid of the debtor like a slippery eel, thanks to his familiarity with the local geography. But his running away indicated that he was merely a coward. Besides, he also seemed untrustworthy to other ghosts so he did not really have any *shili*. Later on, a tough vendor threatened Tang that he will "*make a roof window*" on Tang's head when the latter threatened to smash the vendor's stand for money. After gazing with anger at the vendor for a few seconds, Tang walked away.

Given the fickleness of *shili* in the night market and beyond,

particularly during times of power reshuffling, vendors worry more about who will be taking charge rather than expecting an unrealistic removal of all ghosts. *“After all, this is their territory”*, said one vendor. Before the relocation in 2012 (see chapter 4), Thin Zhao told me that he does not care about whether the night market will be relocated or not; his concern is whether General Wang or Director Zhang will take charge of the new night market, so he can present “red envelopes” (bribery) to the right person to secure a premium stand in the new market. Otherwise his money will be wasted.

### ***Streetwise: Coping with street loiterers***

As one will never be able to know every ghost in this region, one has to rely on judgment to dodge through many instant risks, particularly those idling ghosts who want to have a free meal (known as hegemonic meal, *bawangcan*) at vendors’ stands. Old Wang, a veteran outdoor restaurant boss (who also organised the resistance in 2011), would identify the head of a small group of people who don’t look like “good people” at first sight. According to Old Wang, it is quite often that the free meal is a process of initiation by which the head of the gang tests the guts of his “little brothers”. As a pre-emptive countermeasure, Old Wang would initiate a polite yet confident greeting to the head of the gang. He would behave as if they are normal customers, lighting a cigarette for the head, and encouraging him visit his stand in the future, even though old Wang would not assume that they would pay this time. Once the head feels he is respected, he and his followers will be less aggressive and will probably

pay for the meal according to their real purchasing capacity. In addition, pleasing the little brothers is less important because they are eager to show their braveness in front of their big brother, according to Old Wang.

Reasoning with *yiqi* can also work. Old Wang explained once to me. “Don’t you know—if you treat ghosts well, they will treat you well in return; they are all *yiqi* men.” Contextually, the *yiqi* in their encounters means the boss would assume that the ghosts are not that malicious, and that they would not harass nor harm the boss once they are fed and treated well. Such an assumption entails a subtle de-stigmatisation or restoration of personhood to these men; they are not ghosts but are likely to be *reasonable* men. The ghosts, in return, would reckon the boss as having *yiqi* because they are respected as men so they are likely to pay as men should do. In a word, the appropriate question here is not something factual—whether the malicious customers *are* ghosts or not, but faith—whether you *believe* they are ghosts or not. By engaging the ghosts as if an encounter between two *yiqi* men, Old Wang successfully alters the definition of the situation and reduces the risk.

### ***Familial Sympathy: Story of Little Three***

The story between Fat Man and one of his hooligan customers, Little Three, shows a matrix of relationships in which meanings are slipped towards a positive end. The relationships discussed here are three-layered, namely the vendor–customer relationship, the familial relationship and victim–ghost relationship. The shifting involves what I call the familial

sympathy or an affectual agency.

Normally the vendors are called bosses by customers. The relationship between bosses and customers are not only contractual or monetary, but also include reciprocity (or *guanxi*) which nurtures sentiments: bosses provide food and make discounts for customers, and customers “take care” of their bosses’ businesses by revisiting the same stand. The first encounter between a boss and a customer may be random, but such bonding intensifies with the passage of time. The boss will know the exact need of the customer, and adjust his way of cooking a bit to satisfy the customers’ palate; customers invite the boss to have a beer or a glass of wine to express their recognition of such bonding. And both parties will have a tacit agreement on how to make a discount in a decent and generous manner—the boss is likely to give discounts to the customer, but is met by the customer’s generosity of not taking the discount. In this regard the boss-vendor relationship resembles that between family members: one cooks for the other, and both parties play down the monetary dimension of their relationship. But how does such slippage of meaning apply to the victim-ghost relationship?

I met Little Three on a drizzling night around 11.p.m. when he was urged by Fat Man to finish his solo banquet by drinking a last cup of beer or by eating a bowl of rice. He had already ordered a smoked fish and twelve bottles of beer. He tried to order a chicken pot but was turned away by the wife as he seemed not be able to pay for all of them. I approached and seated myself next to him so that I could have a closer observation.

Some customers at the next table had just finished their dinner. They asked Fat Man to settle the bill; otherwise they would leave without paying. Upon hearing their joke, however, Little Three menaced that he would knock off the heads of those customers with the beer bottle in his hand, since he is a "younger brother" of Fat Man.

This was harassment to Fat Man's customers. In response, Fat Man moved another bench, sat his body squarely on it and hugged Little Three on his back so that his stout body could block Little Three from other customers, and continued persuading Little Three to go home. Little Three then shifted his attention to me and asked who I was. Fat Man explained that I was the tutor of his son. The young man then threatened again that he would beat me if his "brother", Fat Man, left the table, and he reached his hand to another beer bottle. Fat Man continued coaxing Little Three for another half an hour, and finally succeeded by hugging him firmly and dragging him away across the street for a pee. At that time, the wife and her daughters who were assisting the business looked angry and helpless, yet they had to wear a smile to serve the remaining customers.

I watched as the two silhouettes of Fat Man and Little Three united, hugged, and pushed back and forth under the dim light of the road lamp. Then both of them peed on a pile of rubbish before they moved back to this side of the street, walking into Pebble Zhang's restaurant where several men were collecting. Through the curtain of the rain I saw many more silhouettes of men and women joined to push Little Three back and forth as though he was a ball on a billiard table.

When I revisited Fat Man the next day and discussed the unhappy encounter, it turns out that Fat Man had known Litter Three for quite a while, and he was sympathetic to him even though the latter did not pay for the meal.

Take it easy, he will return the money to me sooner or later. He's been here for a while, and we have gotten to know each other for almost three years. He did not borrow money except once when he was also drunk. 'Fat Man, lend me some money, I will pay you back soon. I don't have money now and I can't lose face. Ok, then how much do you need? [said Fat Man] 'Two hundred yuan' [said Little Three]. Then he sent the money back in person in some twenty days.

But in fact Little Three was a real ghost according to several other vendors. When I asked why Little Three was said to be among several men who had chopped another young man half-dead, Fat Man remarked,

He is just that kind of person; you can't reformulate his character, can you? If you ask him whether he knows the consequence or why did he did so, he knows, but...

And Fat Man even denied that Little Three was a real ghost.

...No he is not a ghost; he is only a KID. Suppose you offend me today, and you say that you will make me sorry in a couple of days, and someone else does the job, then you are a GHOST. If

you revenge me by yourself, then you are not a ghost—but only someone without capability [of putting someone up]. If you smile at me after we fight each other, then I know that I will be unlucky in three days, [in that case] you are a ghost. I have seen heaps of people like that!

The assumption of fatherly role, which Fei (1992) would call paternalism, manifests in Fat Man's sympathy. While paternalism derives its authority from seniority and experience, Fat Man's sympathy seems to derive from a sense of common fate by which he identifies his earlier life to that of Little Three, and from a wish to rectify his wrong doing. Fat Man has alluded that he was taken care of by his "big brother" when he was young and *poor*. But when the "big brother" asked him to do something which risked imprisonment, he refused and left, and began to live on his own. He told me on another occasion,

Frankly speaking, my big brother is now 'getting by' pretty well (*hun*, meaning economically better off via one's wide connections). Those whom I used to look down upon also get by well. But can I rely on them? My big brother wouldn't have treated me well if I hadn't done something for him, would he? My big brother would take care of me and give me money, but what if I go without his money? What should I do if he asks me to be a soldier for him?

Even though Little Three did harm to others, his wrong doing is seen

as having *yiqi* for his brothers, therefore somewhat forgivable and rectifiable if he becomes mature. In a word, Fat Man's sympathy is based on an imagination of familism through which the crimes are seen as youthful errors which can be rectified by the restoration of family values. The sympathy was also mixed with an elder-brother-cum-younger-brother relationship or a sense of common fate in final analysis. Furthermore, getting back to the three-layered relationships between Fat Man and Little Three, the redefining of their relationships arguably maintains the customer-boss relationship in that the owed money can be returned one day, a condition to sustain their ongoing interactions. In the meantime, the ghost-victim relationship almost vanished, and so has the negative consequence that stems from such a relationship.

### ***Symbiosis: Fat Man's secret patrons***

As I mentioned earlier, Brother Dragon monopolised the beer supply as well as fish supply business. However, he did not necessarily use violence directly on vendors. Rather, his battlefield was somewhere else where he fights with other ghosts to defend his territory just as he did with Yang after the relocation in 2012. Nonetheless, some vendors were not content with his monopoly. Egged on by some vendors in a banquet, Brother Dragon got drunk and peed in public. Nobody stopped him from such misbehaviour; on the contrary, they circulated the story and stressed that he peed before women customers, which was socially awkward for a man. But Fat Man befriended him and escorted him home to avoid further sabotage of his public image.

Interestingly, it was also Fat Man who introduced him to the profitable fish monopoly business, though Fat Man warned me not to tell anybody else about the deal, because it would apparently cause discontent from the other vendors as well as the fish supplier. By so doing Fat Man could always ensure a fish supply on time, which is crucial for his business success. Gift exchange also consolidates their friendship. Fat Man later got a semi-wolf (dog) "little tiger" from Brother Dragon because the latter saw the dog as cowardly, a spirit that dampens the spirit of a valorous ghost. But Fat Man liked the dog very much, fed it well with rice and chicken, and walked it every night along the street.



Figure 3.3 Brother Dragon, a “ghost” who monopolises the beer and fish business, is having a conversation with Fat Man, with the dog he presented to Fat Man sitting between them.

The case of Ning shows how a non-local vendor assimilates a local to be his own *shili*. Ning is a local who set up a stand selling beverages and

cigarettes in the night market. He also ran a restaurant nearby. However, due to his carelessness in management, his restaurant was soon closed. Ning also hangs out with many other ghosts, and he brags about his conduct as a violent and reckless man.

Fat Man befriended him. Sometimes he even rejects payment when Ning has dinners at his stand. He even advised Ning on how to run his business more properly. In exchange, Fat Man asked Ning to hold his place during the market rearrangement in 2011. Though Fat Man lost his premium place to Pebble Zhang, he managed to secure a second-rate place with a sizable business area where he got by with his business at break-even level throughout 2011.

## **Conclusion**

Crimes by ghosts are largely due to the dislocation of people and disintegration of socialist institutions in the past decades. They pose many uncontrollable risks for vendors. Contrary to modernisation theory, crimes are not individualised behaviours, but are interwoven in the social and political networks of an urbanising site. Local ghosts are utilised by the resettled Community and its residents for their economic gains. Patrons take market opportunities and use violence as means to secure their market share. Ghosts with government background also get a foothold in the political economy which has co-opted them as an essential part of governance at different administrative levels.

I elaborated on two types of connections, *beijing* and *shili*, in designating how vendors perceive the powers of ghosts. The ways to prevent crimes are registered in such perceptions. As *shili* entails violence, kinship or brotherhood, the crimes pertaining to *shili* can be reduced by vendors who tackle or sympathise with ghosts with shared cultural reasoning. A few vendors even transform ghosts to their own *shili*. In comparison, vendors are often helpless when the wrongdoings are made by ghosts with *beijing*.

Whatever the cultural tools used by vendors, migrants as a whole are victims of violence and crimes. I have also encountered a few cases where vendors considered hiring ghosts to solve business conflicts among them. In this regard, placing hope on either vendors themselves or the police would be insufficient to cope with the deterioration of public security. The remedy must be somewhere else.

Appendix 3-1 local *shameless rowdy ghosts* known to vendors

<b>N</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Place of Origin</b>	<b>Relationship to vendors</b>	<b>Contact</b>	<b>When they use violence</b>	<b>Nature of power</b>	<b>Derive power from</b>	<b>Influence</b>
1	Brother Dragon	Nearby rural area	Supply beer and fish	Direct	Turf war with other gangs	Informal	His own force and affiliation to mafia organisation	Small
2	Brother Hua	Work units	Patron of a vendor	Indirect	In other illegal activities	Informal-formal		Medium
3	Brother Bright	Work units		Indirect	Forceful demolition; Stakeholder of relocation program	Formal-informal	His own influence and legal power from sub-district	Big
4	Guang and Brother Strong	Resettled Community	Collect fees	Direct	On vendors who evade fees	Formal-informal	Staff of resettled Community	Medium

5	Unknown local resident	Resettled Community	Landlord	Direct	Threaten to use violence to extort money	Informal	Residents of resettled Community; kinship	Small
6	Yang	Resettled Community	Supply beer	Direct	On those who refuse to buy his beers	Informal	His own force and personal affiliation to resettled Community	Small
7	Big Wave	Resettled Community	Business competitor	Direct	To encroach premium positions in the market	Informal	His own force and personal affiliation to resettled Community	Small
8	Little Lee	Other province	Patron of a vendor	Indirect	On migrant construction workers	Informal-formal	His own force and personal connection to head of resettled Community	Small

9	Little Three	Other province	Patron			Informal		Small
10	Tang Bo	Resettled Community	Petty extortion	Direct	Verbal threatening	Informal	Himself and fake connection with local ghosts	Very small
11	Ning	Resettled Community	Patron of a vendor	—	Flaunting his strength	Informal	Himself and his “brothers”	Very small

*"Hence his victories bring him neither reputation*

*for wisdom nor credit for courage"*

-- Sun Tzu

## Chapter 4

# To protest or to comply

In the spotlessly clean office building of City Appearance & Law Enforcement department (CALE hereafter), a CALE official said that the night market is notoriously “dirty, disorderly and bad”, blaming vendors for occupying the roadside and jamming traffic. He grumbled that it was next to impossible to maintain the “city appearance”, citing another example of a nearby fresh market on the pavements of which local farmers amassed and sold their farm products. It had been forcefully closed down by CALE, but farmers had flocked in again. The cat-and-mouse game between the regulator and the regulated, according to the official, was a paradox. *“Once regulations are implemented, the market will die; however, if [we] let it go, things will get messy quickly,”*<sup>30</sup> he said.

Given the government’s distaste for disorder, vendors in the night market had plenty of reasons to worry about market removal or relocation. They staged a protest against an attempt by CALE to close part of the market in March, 2011. Hundreds of migrants raised banners with slogans such as *“We need to eat! We (our kids) need to go to school!”* CALE and

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<sup>30</sup> The phrase ( *yi fang jiu luan, yi guan jiu si* ) was first proposed by Chen Yun, a major party leader and conservative economic planner against Dengist marketization in 1980s.

public security policemen led by the deputy head of the district Public Security Bureau came to the scene. The deputy head then convened a meeting with five vendor representatives. Fortunately, vendors were allowed to continue their businesses in place.

But the night market was still a pain in the neck of CALE. In September 2011, shortly after I arrived at the night market, I heard rumours that the market was about to be relocated because of the Youth Olympics 2014 that required the widening and greening of the main streets for foreign athletes and guests. The exact date of relocation remained undecided, and vendors' anxieties perpetuated until June of 2012, when the official relocation order finally reached the market. No open resistance by vendors was staged this time, except for an unsuccessful demonstration by several local fruit vendors. As a consequence, the night market was relocated to a place 2.5 kilometres away from the original one. One third of the vendors left after the relocation. The rest suffered sharp falls in business volumes.

How did most vendors survive the eviction? Why did vendors resist and succeed in the first case but seemed to be passive in the second one, given that their livelihood and businesses were put at risk in both cases? How do they make connections in response to grassroots policies?

In this chapter, I examine the ways in which vendors connected in response to government decisions that affect them. I divide it into two parts. Each part begins with an analysis of the government decision, followed by vendors' responses to the decision in question. I analyse the

factors that led to the success of the open resistance against the first government decision in 2011, then go on to present a different mode of action of vendors in response to the second government decision in 2012.

## **Market rearrangement in 2011**

China is by no means a unitary state and its policy-making institutions are diversified. A useful perspective to understand this diversity is the “fragmented authoritarianism” framework in which “policy made at the centre becomes increasingly malleable to the parochial organisational and political goals of the various agencies and regions charged with enforcing that policy” (Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988). My research scope is low, seated at grassroots levels that encompass two types of formal institutions, each with its own administrative history. The first type includes two administrative levels of Sunghow suburb district, and the other type includes the sub-district government (*jiedao*) and the community (*shequ*) that have recently been integrated into the district administration since the 2000s because of the quick urbanisation of this region. As described in Chapter two, management of the night market was divided.

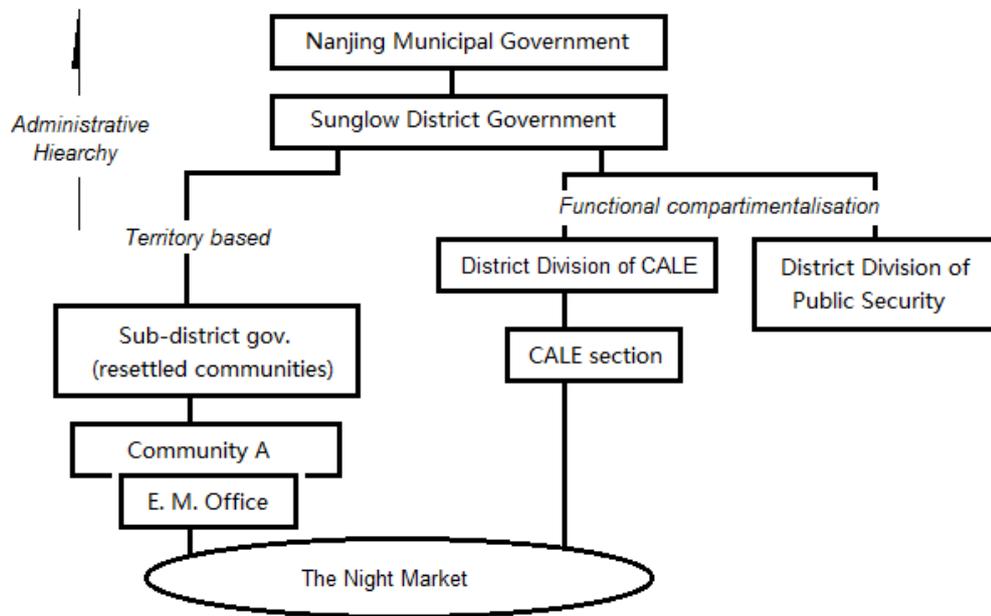


Figure 4.1: The administrative structure above the night market.

The above figure shows the administration structure above the night market. Under the district government, the administrative hierarchy was structured in a way that mixed territory-based governance and government compartmentalisation to absorb the relocated rural population since the 2000s (for a brief history see chapter 2). On the one hand, the sub-district government was established in the early 2000s by the district government to regulate five relocated communities who were formerly five brigades (*dadui*, or rural communes). Of the five relocated communities, Community A set up the EMO office to regulate the night market and to collect the managerial fees as its own off-the-book fiscal revenue.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, the district division of CALE, originally

<sup>31</sup> When I interviewed the head of the sub-district government, he said that the EMO has nothing to do with the sub-district government, meaning that Community A is economically autonomous. The budget and expenditure of the sub-district published on its website shows that it only receives a subsidy from district government but does not have any income from its own businesses, so it looks like a government agency. However, it has many businesses such as the

supervised by the District Public Security division, has gradually gained independence and finally separated from the Public Security division as both its tasks and jurisdiction expanded in pace with the urbanisation. CALE has even constructed its own new office building. The CALE section under the CALE division covers the territories of the five relocated communities in its jurisdiction but is not limited to them.

The government decision discussed here features a kind of contemporary urban politics. Hsing (2010) argues that a power transformation is substantiated by conflicts over physical and discursive space among various state and society actors in China's cities. Lin et al. (2015) highlight space-related policy as a feature of governance in urban context, particularly in the development and reconstruction of urban villages where "social, economic and spatial dynamics as well as financial resources influence government arrangements" (Chung and Zhou 2011). As far as this government decision is concerned, it involved interests input from three institutions, namely CALE, the relocated Community A and another commercial residence Community.

The CALE section (*ke*) was a quasi-legal enforcement unit established mainly to maintain the tidy appearance of the emergent urbanised area, and its jurisdiction covered the streets and roads that surrounded work units and residential compounds. While CALE officials loved to blame the market for the pollution and noises vendors made at

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management of parking places on the roads of its jurisdiction, which does not appear on the website. The monthly fiscal statement of the sub-district see: [http://qx.njycj.gov.cn/www/jwxm/1007/100710/cwggk2\\_mb\\_a39120714259175.htm](http://qx.njycj.gov.cn/www/jwxm/1007/100710/cwggk2_mb_a39120714259175.htm), access date: 24/07/2015.

night, low-rank associate staff (casual employees) worried more about their incomes, and blamed the vendors for the cancellation of their annual bonuses which hinged on the sanitary conditions of the region they inspect. But noise and pollution were not the reasons for moving the night market.

The more proximate cause of the decision was that the night market had expanded beyond its delineated boundary into an adjacent commercial residence community (*shangpinfang xiaoqu*), an expansion which was opposed by CALE. The map (see Figure 4.2) shows the west boundary of the market “proper” demarcated by the district government in 2008. The extension of the night market, where some fifty stalls were established, invaded the public space that surrounded the commercial residence Community. The expansion was initially tolerated by the realty management company of the commercial residence Community, on the condition that the groundskeeping was outsourced to another realty management company (which I shall discuss later). However, an increasing number of residents complained about pollution and noise and reported to CALE. Judging from messages from an online community where these residents could lodge complaints, they were company employees who were less dependent on the night market for meals, and they despised the low quality of the commodities in the market. In addition, these residents seemed to have strong bargaining power vis-à-vis government agencies, and they were able to make their voices heard through newspapers, the citizen hotline to CALE and the Internet (they even established their own online community). The moderator of the

online community was a resident who worked in the sub-district government, so these online opinions could easily reach CALE. Indeed CALE staff mentioned these online complaints when I interviewed them.

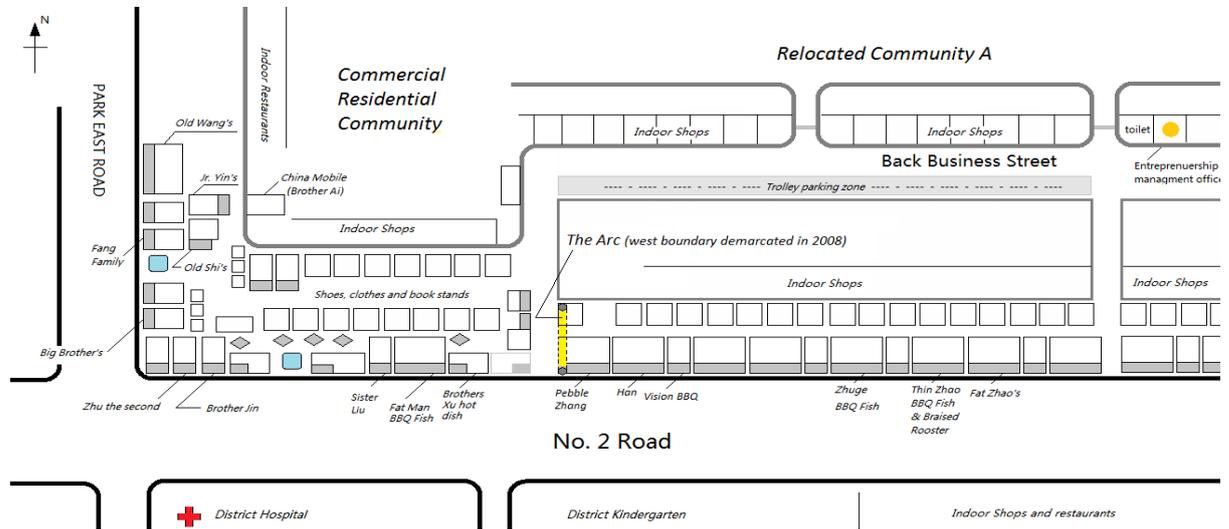


Figure 4.2: Market extension (west to the arc) and “market proper”.

The closure of the market extension, however, had an unexpected effect on the whole night market. The decision was actually comprised of two coordinated tasks, namely “cleaning up” (*qingli*) the illegal part of the market by CALE; and “rearrangement” (*zhengdun*) by the EMO within the legal territory. While CALE was mainly responsible for the “cleaning” of the west part and inspection after the cleaning, thereby fulfilling their duties of maintaining the tidy look of the city, the EMO managed the east part, and demanded that all the vendors to stop their businesses so that they could more easily be allocated new places. In addition, the EMO planned to squeeze stall size from 3×6 square metres to 3×3 square metres to create more vacancies for lease in the future. However, instead of allocating these vacancies to households (mostly non-local ones) from the truncated section, the EMO staff granted them to a new batch of local

residents, their relatives and friends, allowing the latter groups to sublet these stands at their own discretion. Thus, the shrinkage of the area of the night market did not harm the interests of EMO and residents of Community A; it rather allowed them to make a fast buck, because a dispossessed vendor from the west part of the market had to pay not only an equal amount of monthly fee and sanitary fee as before (for only a half-sized place), but an extra *lump sum* transfer fee to the new landlords.

The EMO discriminated against migrant vendors in many ways. First, the head of the EMO claimed that all the non-locals, regardless of whether they held a place in the original market, would not be allowed to continue their businesses in the market. The measure would not be taken against the non-locals. According to Fat Zhao, a vendor who befriended staff members of the EMO, the purpose was to reduce the supply of places and thus be more likely to be able to demand bribe. Similarly, many new stall landlords (locals) hoarded their places for profiteering, or demanded very high transfer fees. Second, the rearrangement policy further complicated the situation. In the east market, non-local vendors and local residents (often poor and unemployed) competed and even fought with each other. They were eager to occupy a premium *terra nullius* in the period of power vacuum during market rearrangement, waiting for *post hoc* recognition by the EMO (because the EMO collected monthly fees per stall rather than per capita, so the names on the roster often did not match the persons who were actually running their businesses). In a word, the anarchic situation

made it even harder for those who were evicted to get a foothold in the area east of the arc.

On the whole, CALE's action to "clean up and rearrange the night market" led to even more problems. The exploitative measures of the EMO further victimised vendors in the market extension, most of whom were non-locals.

## **Resistance by non-locals in 2011**

How did the non-locals effectively organise a protest against a decision made by local grassroots government? Migrants are often marginalised in urban settings. In the case of Wenzhou migrants in Beijing, even though they shared economic interests with grassroots government staff, it was hard for them to organise formal protest against local grassroots government when they were banished from their working and residential compounds in the city (Zhang 2001). Then, how could vendors act together, protest in public and even succeed in this case? How did they organise the protest?

My analysis relies mainly on the recollection of the main organiser, Old Wang, an outdoor restaurant boss who ran his business with his family on the west end of the night market. He is referred to by other vendors as an awesome and cool-minded man. His story not only articulates his choice and action but also provides a window as to how other vendors behaved. After I present his accounts, I will use two

complementary frameworks, namely the resource mobilisation and consensus mobilisation to address the above questions.

It was hard to get hold of Old Wang, though. My difficulties in contacting him reflect the oppressive aura under which talking about the protest was a taboo, even though it had taken place long ago. The first protestor I met was Fat Man, who inadvertently mentioned to me the protest but suddenly changed the subject when his wife nudged him with her elbow. Upon my persistent request, Fat Man did not elaborate on the story, but suggested that I interview Old Wang, the organiser. Fat Man also requested that I don't mention his name. The next day, I found Old Wang's stand in the night market. Unfortunately, Old Wang was away in his home village, and his son politely declined my request to contact his father. Then I told his son that I was planning a journey to a university in their home province, and I would be very happy if I could drop by his father at his convenience. A few days after, I jumped onto a train, arrived in the capital city of Old Wang's home province, and rang his son to try my luck. This time I managed to get Old Wang's phone number, and Old Wang kindly invited me to pay a visit to his house as I rang him.

His home village was another one-day bus journey from the capital city and only ten kilometres from the birth places of several founding fathers of the PRC including Mao Tze Tung. People here have a reputation for inheriting the rebellious spirits of the revolutionaries. I was welcomed by Old Wang in his three-storied house. After I handed Old Wang my gift of a bottle of rice wine, he treated me to lunch. Then we started an interview

upstairs in his guest room. He spoke very little in the beginning, allowing me to go as far as I could in introducing myself until he felt safe to talk about his story. *“Let us get it straight, and I will give you a satisfactory reply,”* He paused. *“But first of all, let us NOT talk about politics.”*

His accounts of the “cleaning up and rearrangement” by CALE and EMO’s manoeuvre were similar to other vendors. To my surprise, he mentioned that Fat Man himself had bribed the EMO office with 10,000 *yuan*, which Fat Man had not told me. Old Wang went on to described the situation caused by the decision,

So we [vendors] just had spent spring festival [in our home villages], and many people were in debt. Some had their children enrolled at school, while others had taken their two-or-three year old kids to the night market. Besides, we had just paid our rents for six months term or for a year. If [the EMO] prevent us from doing business, could we have our rents refunded? Of course the landlords would say ‘no’ as the contracts have already been signed. The tuition fee [school transfer fee for migrants’ children] which amounted to tens of thousands *yuan* [per student] was also a problem. We were not happy [about the decision], because it mattered to the survival of hundreds of people.

When others stopped their businesses [according to the notice], I did not because I started my business late at six in the afternoon [so I did not receive the notice]. Many bosses had

nothing to do at all, so they came to my stall, watching me doing business. They were just like kids without parents.

Sympathetic to other vendors, Old Wang decided to take some action. His initial plan was to assemble a multitude to protest on the street, which he had witnessed in many other places. However, he had worries.

If I were to do something, the first thing I thought of was that the protest should not be political. Of course, under the leadership of the Communist Party, not everything is perfect. However, since the Opening up and the Reform of China, I am very happy about the economic development of our country. Therefore, I have nothing to complain about our country. After all, I had nothing in the past, now I have [my business]. As long as you work hard, you can earn some money, even if it is not big money. Then, why should I involve myself in this issue? I was very reluctant and had considered it for several days. I realised that it could be raised as an issue for those who had just paid tuition fee and rents. It could be even harder for them to find a new place in such short notice. [However,] I consulted a few people, but they were reluctant to take any action.

Then he visited Zhu the Second, another vendor whose advice helped in shaping Old Wang's action plan.

[Zhu the Second] is in his forties and has two sons, and had served as village head [deputy village head as I found later] in

his home village. I thought he should have known the Party's policy better than me. So I placed my hope in him. Do you know what his reply was? He said 'no way'. He said that it is absolutely impossible to rebel [against the government]. He said that the Yao Gate [the vernacular name of the place] is almost a county; The Yao gate district government [Sunglow district government actually] is a county government.<sup>32</sup> He said that you are an outsider. Whatever you try, they [the government] won't buy it. Their words count, not yours. You'd better not do it.

Secondly, Zhu also asked me how to control the mass if they were agitated? Thirdly, what if the government arrests some vendors? The consequence could be serious if protestors were "GIVEN A CAP" (*dai maozi*, a political metaphor used to frame those who challenge political authority with a rebellious label) by the government.

I was rather disappointed with Zhu the Second, because he had served as the village head but refused to get involved. I involved myself not for my own sake, but for the sake of everyone, didn't I? After all, he had served as party secretary of his village. But when I thought about it twice, I realised that Zhu the Second was smart. You can't make it, because GIVEN A CAP

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<sup>32</sup> According to the administrative division of China, provincial level is above prefectural level, followed by county level, followed by township (*xiang* or *zhen*) level, and followed by village level. In Chinese cities, the district level is on par with the county level, followed by sub-district (*jiedao*) at township level, and followed by community (*shequ*) at the village level.

of whatever kind is so easy for the Communists. Then I came up some ideas. I went to the publishing house and printed out thirty leaflets titled “Yao Gate night market CONSULTATIVE MEETING”.

And I asked several acquaintances to distribute the leaflets to each household. I spent my own money to print these leaflets. When I distributed them to each household, I weighed the outcomes once more: Even if I succeed, I still won't personally benefit. [After all,] I can go anywhere else and set up my business — you know I am accustomed more to being outside than staying put. If I cannot stay at Yao Gate, I can choose to live anywhere else. But those people are outside of their homes. They don't have much power. What if I screw it up and get involved in politics? Then nobody would bear the pressure of the [political] cap.

Upon my request, Old Wang explained the consequences of amassing people, how to control the protest and to protect himself.

Once you assemble people and give them voice, whichever dynasty you were in and whichever administration party is governing, you will displease the government. It's ok if you go against the government on your own. But now we are a group. We have two hundred people. And many more would be involved if it is covered by the media. Think about a couple

fighting on the street. They will be crowded by many onlookers.  
But we have several hundreds!

I had a lot of pressure because it would be my responsibility if anything goes wrong. Even if I leave aside my own worries, I have to consider many things. First, the more people, the harder it is to control. Some of them have low cultural qualities [meaning some vendors are crude]. What if they abuse or fight with others? What if they block the traffic? What if you lose control of them? You have to think about the consequences. It is not a small village but a city. It won't do anyone good if the upper level government know this. The event itself is a small issue, but it can easily get out of hand. It is not a very big issue, but its impact can also be minimised. Given that the news can spread very fast, what if the International press report the event? Would it be reported as a riot in Nanjing? Then how would you wind up everything?

I am not taking a side [for or against the Communist Party]. The territory (*Jiangshan*, literally river and mountain) controlled by the Communist Party is as strong as an iron bucket surrounded by an iron hoop. Can Mr Wang overthrow it? Impossible. But I have to consider all the consequences, which must NOT go beyond the scope of Nanjing city. Besides, for instance, what if you are arrested by police? And your utensils

are confiscated by CALE? If you protest without any restraints, I would arrest you if I were the local authority.

As far as I am concerned, they [the authority] will definitely find the leader or the commander behind the protest. So I have to take care of myself. I had prepared myself when I distributed the leaflets. I would not say that my life currently is unsustainable — after all, I have been outside of home [and earning a living] for decades. If I could solve the problem for them [other vendors], then it may or equally may not be recognised as a good deed (*shanshi*<sup>33</sup>) [by the other vendors]. Anyway, I also have personal interests, because I am a member of the group, am not I? Speaking of *yiqi* (honour of spirit), I am doing things for other people's sake. Therefore, as long as I can solve the problem, I am ready for it [to be identified as the leader]. But I will keep clear of politics. Therefore, we wrote “discrimination against outsiders is not allowed” and “we want a bowl of rice, we want to go to school” on the banners. We are outsiders, we want a bowl of rice, and we want to go to school, we are pitiful.

Then, Old Wang convened a meeting at his residence. According to his recollection, after all the participants expressed their various difficulties, he said,

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<sup>33</sup> The “good deeds” can be understood as out of good heart. It also have a Buddhist connotation. If someone does some good deeds for others, according to Buddhist theory, they will be rewarded after this life.

Now that you have expressed your opinions, you have to be ready and make an estimate [of your risks] if you really want to continue [your business here]. Let me give you a suggestion—and the only viable one—is that you unite collectively and make a semblance of multitude but keep clear of politics. This is point one. Point two: each stall shall give me two hundred yuan. Point three: you have to pledge never to abuse or fight with others. We each have a mobile phone. If you are abused, you can record it; if you are beaten, you can videotape it. But we should never fight back. Whoever breaks this rule will account for his own behaviour. This is my last point.

I asked: why did you collect 200 *yuan* from each stall?

Why do I have to collect two hundred yuan from each stall? If anyone is caught by police, he will need to eat and drink [in a detention centre]. We're going to dispatch someone to send him food and drink. If anyone is beaten and injured, we have to treat him. If anyone's utensils are confiscated, we will send a comrade to redeem them, and the redemption is two hundred *yuan*. If the funds are not enough, we will collect more money. However, if we can spare the money, then I will return to you every cent that I collected from you.

We are...COMRADES, BROTHERS and SISTERS, how can you just run away, leaving others imprisoned? How can we leave anyone alone? But if you have considered all the

possibilities and let them know beforehand, they will feel rest assured. It is just like battle or playing chess. You should be able not only to advance but also to withdraw. You have to solve the problems in the rear [future problems]. If you just charge the enemy without any back-up, you will be unable to succeed.

So far I have presented Old Wang's accounts for his planning of the protest. In the following I will analyse the protest through two complementary frameworks, namely the resource mobilisation and consensus mobilisation frameworks. I will demonstrate that though Old Wang was in a precarious position and that he had to make quick decisions, the way he mobilised his followers and his strategies were highly contingent on the political context and the features of the constituency.

The first framework is resource mobilisation which stresses "the process of creating *movement structures* and preparing and carrying out protest activities which are visible movement 'products' addressed to actors and publics outside the movement" (Rucht 1996, 188). Not only people and money but knowledge, frames, skills, and technical tools are all required to process and distribute information and to influence people (Rucht 1996, 186). The key categories include context structure, movement structure, strategies, mobilisation, protest activities and outcome (Rucht 1996, 202-04). As I will demonstrate, the organiser's

grasp of context structure was vital for his designing effective strategies that led to the success of the protest.

### ***Context structure: Put on a cap***

The questions raised by Zhu the Second provide a window as to the “context structure”. According to Rucht (1996), it is the access to the decision-making system, the policy implementation capacity,<sup>34</sup> the alliance from the local setting, and the conflict structure. By conflict structure Rucht means “the capacity (of the opponents) to limit, undermine, or repress social movement mobilisation” (Rucht 1996). It is clear that as “outsiders”, vendors had less access to local government decision-making bodies. Furthermore, the politically alienated outsiders perceived themselves as vulnerable to risks of being labelled with a political cap and subsequent oppression by local authorities such as imprisonment.

“Putting on a cap” as a way of political labelling and persecution originated during the Yan’an Rectification Movement (1942-1944) when Mao Tze Tung categorised his rivals *ad hominem* to break up the alliance of his opponents so as to monopolise political power (Gao 2000). After the founding of the PRC 1949, Mao repeatedly used this method, for instance during the 1957 anti-rightist movement (Schurmann 1971) and in the Cultural Revolution (Lu 2004). Although CCP governance through political movement and purging has given way to the maintenance of social stability (*weihu shehui wending* or *weiwen*) by local governments using

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<sup>34</sup> It is defined as “the power of authorities to implement adopted policies, regardless of internal or external resistance.” (Rucht, 1996)

police to repress disruptive unrests since the 2000s (Cai 2009, 178, Li 2014, 220), “putting on a cap” as a way to discipline citizens continues to occur and fear of a cap reflects an ingrained fear of the capriciousness of government rule. In fact, I was also labelled as “anti-revolutionary” and “agitating the mass” when I spoke on behalf of vendors in the meeting held by CALE in 2012.

Furthermore, given that Old Wang is an “outsider”, the context structure he perceived has less to do with specific, local conditions than CCP rule in general. Upon scrutiny, Old Wang’s understanding of power is based on three popularly accepted elements of CCP rule: the CCP’s rule is strong and consolidated; it is historically justified and violent; and legitimised by its economic performance. He sees the power of the Communist rulers as a monolithic force rather than a fragmented and multilayered one. He told me once that “*the territory (Jiangshan, literally river and mountain) controlled by the Communist Party is as strong as an iron bucket surrounded by the iron hoop.*” Such perception was shared by other vendors. Big Brother, another participant, told me that “*even if you can challenge Heaven and Earth, you’d never challenge the Communist Party*”, indicating that the Communists were in the same breath with Heaven (*tian*),<sup>35</sup> and were perhaps a formidable and omnipotent mandate

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<sup>35</sup> The cosmological notion of *tian* (天), the Chinese Heaven, is associated to the Communists and government. The ambivalence of *tian* lies in that while it legitimates the ruling, it can also justify resistance. The association of government to the notion of *tian* is close to what Perry describes as “rule consciousness” brought about by the idea of Mandate of Heaven (Perry 2010). In criticising a recently developed theory of contemporary Chinese contentious politics, namely the rightful resistance paradigm, she observes that that participants “usually go to great lengths to demonstrate their loyalty to central policies and leaders” with “breathless enthusiasm”, and Chinese protesters have shown a consistent tendency to “play by the rules” from pre-PRC to post-reform times (ibid.). In my view, the rule consciousness or “*tian*” in

of Heaven. Second, it is historically justified, which is why Old Wang drew an association between the “administration party” and dynastic rule. Third, CCP power is inseparable from enormous violence in its history. Old Wang told me his family history in a casual talk. Despite the fact that his father, a Nationalist Major, was executed by the Communists in the 1950s, Old Wang had no hatred for the Communists. His attitude was explained by his reference to the fourth element of CCP rule: as long as the sustenance is guaranteed and even bettered since the Opening and Reform, there is no point to run against the rule of the Communists.

### ***Movement Structure and consensus mobilisation***

Given the CCP’s capacity to repress public protest and few chances for an outsider to influence decision-making through forming alliance, how was the *movement structure* modelled? A *movement structure*, according to Rucht, is “the organizational base and the mechanisms serving to collect and use the movement's resources” (Rucht 1996). He suggests that the movement structure is highly dependent on or is the function of the structure of the context (ibid.). A “weak alliance” context structure forces a movement to compensate by developing its own organisational base to support quick political intervention; and a strong structure of conflict encourages the building of strong *movement*

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question are in line with the Confucian notion (or that of Mencius) of the “Mandate of Heaven” (*tian ming*).

On the other hand, there is a tradition in which charismatic leaders create cosmologies to justify revolutions, for instance Taiping Heavenly Kingdom leaders mixed eschatological Christianity and indigenous folk religions (Spence 1998). Millenarianism cosmologies, exemplified by White Lotus cults and contemporary Fa Lun Gong, can instigate resurrections against secular authorities if followers are made to foresee the advent of Maitreya Buddha at hand (Penny 2002, Haar 1992). Secret societies such as the Triads also culturally legitimise their rebellion using *tian* (Haar 1998).

*organizations*, which allows for immediate and strategically oriented responses (ibid.). In this case, since the evicted vendors were newcomers to the market, they were less likely to have strong patrons in the local setting, let alone anyone from the district government. In fact, Old Wang told me that another vendor had tried to contact the municipal television station. A journalist showed up at the site during the protest, but he did not report the event. Nonetheless, the boundary of potential followers seemed clear-cut because the vendors affected by the government's decision were mainly non-locals. Without strong alliance, in Rucht's theory, the organisational base is likely to become a self-help group that supplies resources on its own. This was indeed the case. For instance, the funds were collected from vendors themselves.

But unlike Rucht predicted, in spite of the strong conflict structure, it was clear that there was no point for the protesters to form a strong, long-term movement organisation, because their aim was immediate and simple—to be allowed to continue their businesses. More importantly, any formation of formal organisation is prohibited in an authoritarian context. This explains why Old Wang used “consultative” (*xieshang*) to denote the meeting, which meant only to exchange ideas among participants.

I use a second framework, consensus mobilisation, to analyse the way Old Wang mobilised his followers in the meeting. Bert Klandermans (1992, 77) asserts that “the resource mobilisation approach did not take into account mediating processes through which people attribute meaning to events and interpret situations”. He proposes that consensus

mobilisation, defined as a “deliberate attempt by a social actor to create consensus among a subset of the population”, is key to understanding the constructed meaning of protest (ibid.). In fact, unlike what its title suggested, the “consultative meeting” held at Old Wang’s place was a typical process of consensus mobilisation rather than merely pooling minds. It is also the process by which meanings are attached to the protest. Then, what kind of consensus was achieved? How was it achieved?

Clearly, the ultimate aim of the mobilisation was to encourage participation in the protest against eviction while avoiding retribution by the local government. It was a dilemma, because vendors’ unwillingness to participate was just because of their fear of punishment by government. In other words, they had low expectations of success or “political efficacy” in Klandermans’ terms (Klandermans 1992). But Old Wang successfully transformed the consciousness of his potential followers.

First, he defined the protest as a safer one so that was “clear of politics”. He did so through three ways. 1) The protest was framed as discrimination towards outsiders and an economic demand for education and livelihood. 2) By applying disciplines to participants, insisting they were not allowed to abuse or fight back, participants would be less likely to be imprisoned as threatening the public order. 3) Although the risks of being punished by the government could not be totally eliminated, these risks were moderated and spread. Vendors as a group were revamped by Old Wang as if it was a joint-venture, which was able to share the danger of imprisonment, injury and monetary loss. In a second interview with Old

Wang, he told me that he actually held a run-up meeting with four vendors he trusted (which seems to me that he was cautious not to disclose other key members to me in my first interview of him), and he reckoned the third measure as the most crucial step to mobilise participation.

Second, Old Wang seemed to have successfully raised a collective consciousness. He used *yiqi* (spirit of honour), brothers and sisters and comrades to refer to the group. Klandermans (1992, 83-90) argues that collective beliefs tend to be stable and durable but that the transformations of collective beliefs requisite for social protest are difficult to achieve. The success of a persuasive communication thus depends on the extent to which an actor can appeal to the collective beliefs of target groups in a given timespan. From Old Wang's recollection we can see that he used three types of existing collective identities. Of the three appellations, while the "comrade" seemed obsolete for vendors, the expressions of *yiqi* and brothers and sisters are quite regularly used by vendors. Particularly, having *yiqi* means to rescue others in times of emergency, as I will cover when I discuss the relationships among men (chapter 5).

Besides, Old Wang repeatedly referred to "Heavenly time, Earthly advantages and the solidarity of the People (*tianshi, dili and renhe*)" to account for the success in 2011 and to analyse situations before the relocation of the market in 2012. Old Wang borrowed the formula from *The Water Margin* and *The Romance of Three Kingdoms*, two Chinese

vernacular novels with wide influence in Chinese and East Asian folklore.<sup>36</sup> The formula can also be found in Sun Tzu's *Art of War* which requires one to take action only when three conditions are ready, namely the timing (Heaven), the geographical advantages or circumstances (Earth), and the solidarity and discipline of the army (solidarity). I am not suggesting that Old Wang took the formula and strategies literally from these novels and texts; rather, he seemed to fit his strategies into the three categories, which in turn reinforced his belief in them.

In particular, he used the notion of heavenly time (*tianshi*) to enhance the political efficacy of vendors. He set the time of the protest at 13:00 on Sunday when the traffic was busiest in order to attract spectators. More importantly, he chose the second day of the second lunar month because according to the Chinese lunar calendar, "the dragon will raise its head on that day".<sup>37</sup> The dragon, essentially a rain deity in Chinese tradition, wakes up from hibernation when worshipped and provides appropriate rainfall for a future harvest. Thus, the date when dragon

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<sup>36</sup> The anti-Confucian, rebellious nature of these novels and their influence in the folk society are perhaps best exemplified by the comments of Mao Tze Tung when he was interviewed by Edgar Snow,

"I knew the [Confucian] Classics, but disliked them. What I enjoyed were the romances of old China, and especially stories of rebellions. I read the Yue Fei Zhuan (the Yue Fei Chronicles), Shui Hu Zhuan (The Water Margin), Fan Tang (Revolt Against the Tang Dynasty), San Guo (Romance of the Three Kingdoms), and Xi You (Journey to the West, aka Monkey), while still very young, and despite the vigilance of my old teacher, who hated these outlawed books and called them wicked... We [Mao and his schoolmates] learned many of the stories almost by heart, and discussed and re-discussed them many times. We knew more of them than the old men of the village, who also loved them and used to exchange stories with us. I believe that the perhaps I was much influenced by such books, read at an impressionable age." See *Introduction to Water of Margin* by Edwin Lowe in *Water of Margin* translated by J. H. Jackson (Shi 2008).

<sup>37</sup> That day was actually *Jingzhe* (awakening insects), the third solar term in the Chinese lunar calendar. Traditional Chinese folklore has it that during *Jingzhe*, thunderstorms will wake up hibernating insects as the weather is getting warmer. The awakening of the dragon is another version of the symbolism.

raises its head symbolises a masculine, conquering spirit and leadership, which could have boosted the morale of vendors.

Furthermore, Old Wang appeared to be doing something for everyone, while at the same time did not want to be seen as altruistic. In his recollection, Old Wang referred to the outdoor restaurant bosses as kids without parents. By so doing he metaphorically extended the ethical scope to those who were essentially strangers. He also repeatedly expressed that he did not expect rewards through organising the protest. However, even though altruism or compassion could have been a trigger for action, it was not a normative principle, because a self-interested person (other vendors) would interpret altruism as either hot-headed or hypocritical.

Last, the way he mobilised vendors had an element of manipulation, albeit harmlessly executed. It was a “tactic”—to adopt Michael de Certeau’s (1984) terms—by which minimal force can generate maximum effect. Old Wang explained the vendors’ situation with a warfare analogy: if an army is in a position where there is no escape, desperate soldiers will lose the sense of fear, stand firm and fight harder.<sup>38</sup> The vendors were in a similar situation: they were abruptly prohibited from running their businesses and having no chances to obtain a stand in the market rearrangement. In this situation they could be led into “battle”. If they had not been starved and still had maintained some hope, the protest would probably fail (this was why Old Wang did not protest in 2012 when the

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<sup>38</sup> Perry shows how a similar strategy was used by the Communists in mobilising miners in the revolutionary era (Perry 2013, 65).

new policy appeared less disastrous as I show in the second section). Again, Old Wang categorises this tactic into the notion of “heavenly time”.

### ***Strategic framing and action strategies***

In resource mobilisation theory, frames are the specific metaphors, symbolic representations and cognitive cues used to render or cast behavior and events in an evaluative mode and to suggest alternative modes of action (Zald 1996). According to scholars writing about “rightful resistance” in contemporary China, aggrieved citizens not only actively seek allies from within the state, but also use state laws, policies or political rhetoric when framing their protests and legitimising their causes (O'Brien, J, and Li 2003). Through appropriate framing, resisters can strategically reduce risks than protest through entirely unauthorised uprisings, and achieve more positive results than everyday resistance (O'Brien, J, and Li 2003).

Following John Kingdon, Mertha (2008) suggests that “policy entrepreneurs” are masters of framings in the policy process in his discussion of anti-hydropower protests. By policy entrepreneurs he means “advocates for proposals or for the prominence of an idea”. They include disgruntled officials, NGO members and media, who can interpret events using existing ideas in a new way to convince potential supporters through “articulation” and “amplification” (Mertha 2008, 6-7). Through articulation the policy entrepreneur “links up and assembles events in order to establish a natural and persuasive narrative”, and through “amplification” he “boils down the core component of the narrative in order to carry the

frame from one set of individuals to another” in the form of catchphrases or slogans. I show that Old Wang and his followers used similar skills, though he was not a policy entrepreneur in strict sense.<sup>39</sup>

Vendors shouted two main slogans: “*give non-locals a mouthful of cooked rice*” and “*we want to go to school; we want to read books*”. Each connected to existing government narratives. The first referred to the way the Chinese government legitimatises itself by prioritising socio-economic rights over political rights, a prioritisation which Perry suggests (2008) as having a “moral economy” flavour. By demanding “cooked rice”, protesters were calling for a condescending rescue by the government as much as a beggar would do to elicit public sympathy. By being humble, vendors prescribed their problems as “remediable” and reasonable.

In addition, the emphatic “non-locals” was articulated in a way that it was less an identity of its own right vis-à-vis the local people, but a willingness to be incorporated into the local economy. In fact, the expression was made in line with state rhetoric of economic development in which the “non-locals” were an indispensable component. As Old Wang articulated,

Under the leadership of the Communist Party and since the open and reform, non-locals have been investing in and constructing the cities. Migrant workers are needed everywhere and in every walk of life. Whatever they do, they

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<sup>39</sup> Mertha argues that the absence of policy entrepreneurs explains the failure of the protest against Pudukou dam. He seems to have excluded protest leaders as policy entrepreneurs in that case (Mertha 2008, 88-93).

have contributed much to the local economy and development.

It would be only lip service for officials to say so, if they then don't take into consideration our requests.

The second framed issue was the schooling of migrant children. Old Wang was inspired to underscore the issue by two university students, and vendors later agreed to use this slogan. Lack of schooling was a problem for both the vendors who had children with them<sup>40</sup> and those who left their children behind in their home villages and towns. Though only one of many problems for the vendors, the education issue was highlighted because by so doing vendors could win the sympathy of a wider society and connect the protest with existing government rhetoric.

Old Wang also used an implicit frame to disarm the local government. After the protest, he included a Uyghur barbecue operator in the delegation of five representatives of vendors to meet officially with the head of the public security division (district level). According to Cai (2010, 9-10), in collective resistance, an alternative to seeking alliance from within the administrative hierarchy is to apply "issue connection" to pin down local officials' misconducts which are not acceptable by upper-level authorities. According to Old Wang, the tactic was inspired by his

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<sup>40</sup> There were two public schools near the night market. The transfer fee for a child who was not in the schooling precinct was about 9,000 yuan per six years, though such transfer fee was forbidden by regulations issued by the municipal bureau of education. There was another school for migrant children and they did not require a transfer fee, but its educational quality was inferior to the two public schools. To attend the two schools required *guanxi*, because the transaction must be carried out under the table and through an intermediary trusted by the school and the parents so that the transaction would not be disclosed. Anyhow, vendors with their children enrolled in these primary schools had to pay a similar amount of transfer fee again through new connections, should they move to another place to run their businesses.

experience from other provinces where he saw local policemen dare not to use force on ethnic vendors than on the majority Han ethnicity. In fact, the issue raised therein has less to do with any official's misconduct than administrative agency slack, and Old Wang's experience was echoed in my interview with some supervisors of CALE division from another city on my way to Old Wang's home. According to them, civil disputes that arise between the Han majority and minorities or religious people—Muslims, Tibetans and Uyghurs in particular—will be arbitrated by ethnic affairs commissions (*minzu weiyuanhui*) stationed at municipal or even provincial levels, if these conflicts are not properly solved at grassroots levels. In this regard, Old Wang's inclusion of the Uyghur vendor proved to be effective political leverage. It added complexity to the issue for the local government, for there was no point in dragging the issue further for the local police. Interestingly, Old Wang justified his action by Three Principles<sup>41</sup> of the People which he held as creed, presumably because his father was a Nationalist.<sup>42</sup>

As said, lacking support from within the administrative hierarchy had made the commitment or solidarity among vendors themselves an even more compelling issue. The mobilised participants, including vendors' families, already totalled some two hundred. However, a pitfall of amassing many people was that the crowd can be perceived by the

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<sup>41</sup> The Three Principles of the People are nationalism (*minzu*), democracy (*minquan*) and people's livelihood (*minsheng*). According to the China-nationalism, the first principle (*minzu*) advocates that all of the ethnicities of China, mainly the five major groups of Han, Mongols, Tibetans, Manchus, and the Muslims (including the Uyghur) should be united.

<sup>42</sup> In a second telephone interview of Old Wang, he denied that he had mentioned the Three Principles of the People, stressing that we should be "clear of politics".

government as threatening or disruptive (Cai 2010). Therefore, Old Wang reminded everyone to avoid any physical confrontation with CALE officials or policemen. *“You either record or videotape everything with your mobiles, but altercation and fights are not allowed”*. Furthermore, women should encircle men to shield the latter from the police, and they can “lay into the ground” and cry if confrontations occur, for such behaviours can easily elicit sympathy from passers-by.

### ***Outcome of the protest***

Vendors staged the protest on March 3<sup>rd</sup>. CALE staff were caught unprepared, and so was the EMO office. Brother Strong, a staff member of the EMO, tore off a banner hanging between two trees by vendors as requested by the sub-district government. The CALE staff arrived at the scene, but they quickly withdrew to a nearby square, waiting for a decision from their supervisors. The deputy district governor and head of public security division soon arrived and suggested a negotiation with vendors in the late afternoon. According to Old Wang, during the negotiation the head of public security admitted that the policy against non-locals was not appropriate. The five representatives spoke after him, and Old Wang provided a summary. The head of public security made some concluding remarks. A day later, all the non-locals were allowed to continue their business in place. But the district government needed a scapegoat for what had happened. Therefore, the head of the EMO, Guang, was removed from his post.

To sum up, in terms of resources these migrants had limited capacity to mobilise locals, and could not rely on alliances with local government. They are also mostly uneducated and have limited knowledge of laws, regulations and local political circumstances. They mobilised because of the growing pressure on their livelihood. Yet their framing of the movement considered carefully what language to use so as not to upset local officials, and their staging of the protest was forceful and controlled. The organiser, Old Wang mobilised others with his experience, charisma and the use of cultural references that were easily understandable.

## Market relocation in 2012

The local government, however, succeeded in a second attempt to relocate the night market in June, 2012. Although vendors had expected substantial losses from the relocation, they did not openly resist the policy this time. What were the differences between the two incidents? Why wasn't there any protest? How did vendors cope with the government's decision this time?

I witnessed the 2012 relocation and thus use on-site observations and interviews / interactions with many more informants, including not only vendors but also other stakeholders of the night market. Such interactions allow me to draw a broader picture of the power relations and *guanxi* network. There are two major differences between the two incidents. First, since relocation this time targeted the whole market, it involved some 200 stalls of both non-locals and local vendors. Second, authorities and institutions that were officially involved had moved upward to sub-district and district levels. Third, vendors reacted to rumours rather than to publicised government decision, which was announced only three days before the so-called "mobilisation assembly" (*dongyuan hui*) held by the district government on 9 June and five days before the forceful relocation in 11 June, 2012. Nonetheless, rumours and gossip had been circulating in the night market since at least September 2011 when I first arrived there. As I will demonstrate, these rumours and the spread of gossip are important elements of the political culture of the vendors.

In the following I will first introduce the background of the new decision and stakeholders. Then I will describe how vendors developed connections with powerful people in their everyday businesses. Afterwards, I will show how vendors circulated and responded to rumours and gossip before and during the market relocation.

### ***The new decision: background, stakeholders and scheme***

The 2011 protest achieved three immediate consequences. First, vendors were allowed to continue their businesses. Second, Guang, the head of the EMO and who made the discriminate policy against the non-locals was removed from office. Third, as the political stakes became much higher, decision-making on the night market moved to district level institutions and involved many more actors, though such upgrading and the decision-making process were unclear to most of the vendors.

The protest had a profound impact in shaping the 2012 decision. After all, district government represented by the head of the Public Security division learned their lesson that a forceful closure of the night market was not viable. But how to dispose of the market had become a political impasse for the district government and its CALE division. A local powerful man, General Manager Wang, head of a local realty management company, showed some interest and coordinated with district government to offer a solution (for his position see Figure 4.4).

The realty management company (*wuye guanli gongsi*, RMC hereafter) was a new institution deriving from the housing marketization and urban

reconstruction. In the field, five former brigades (*dadui* or commune) formed the sub-district government after these brigades were resettled in this region during the 2000s (see chapter 2). The RMC was set up to operate closely with the sub-district government as if a built-in enterprise, managing the environment of the public spaces as well as fulfilling other municipal functions of the sub-district government<sup>43</sup>. I heard from a local vendor that Manager Wang was the former village head of one of the five resettled communities (Community B hereafter, see Figure 2.3, chapter 2). He then served as a subordinate of a vice deputy district governor who was in charge of the establishment of a nearby development zone (industrial park), and perhaps had developed his expertise in projects as well as his personal ties to the district government. According to the vendor from Wang's brigade, Wang was not very successful in his official path since he did not get promoted after he served as deputy district head. Rather, he was relegated to the head of the property management company instead. However, such a position is considered as a *gravy train* (in Chinese *youshui zu*, full of fat and oil) because the incumbent official can easily subcontract urban infrastructure projects from local government.

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<sup>43</sup> According to the law promulgated by State Council in 2007, each residential community ought to have an owner's congress (*yezhu weiyuanhui*), and the businesses of a RMC are entrusted on contractual basis by the owner's congress. Since the owner's congresses of the relocated communities had been subsumed by the sub-district government, the RMC was affiliated with sub-district government in this case.

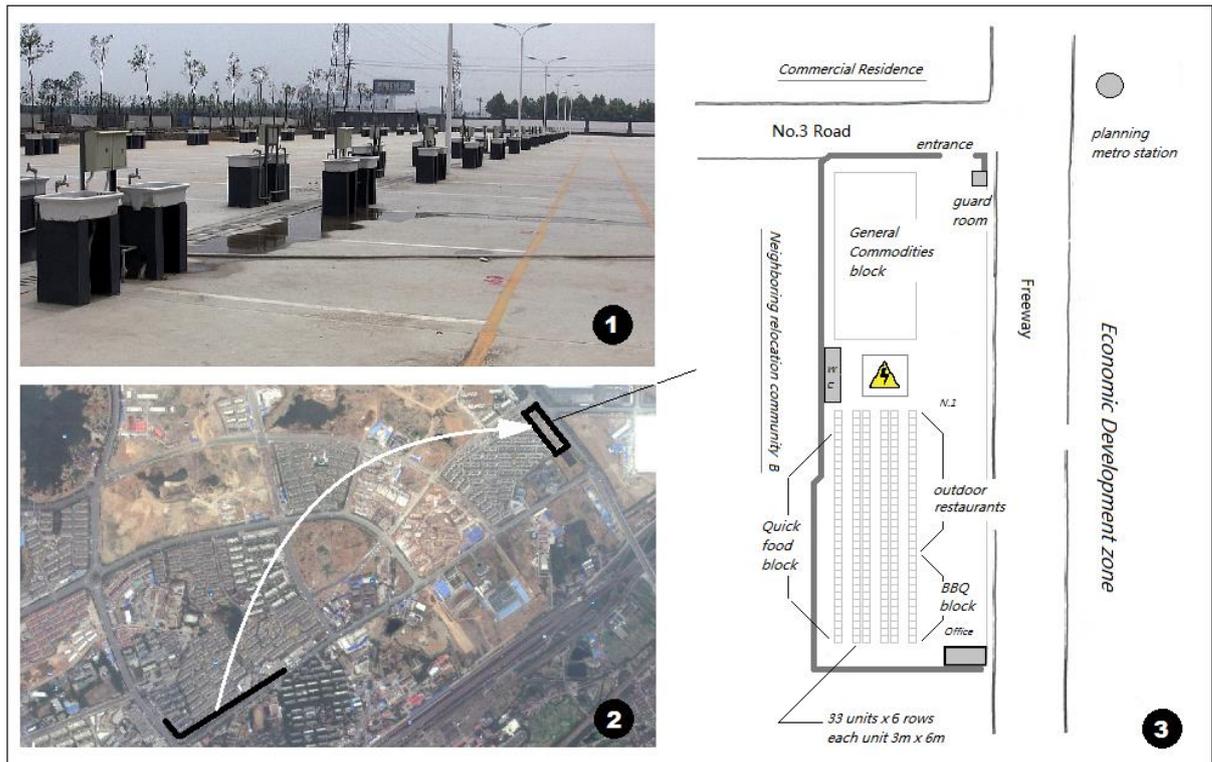


Figure 4.3: The scheme of the relocation of the night market and layout of the new site. ① Outlook of outdoor restaurants (including BBQ) with water and electrical supply; note the overhead power line; ② Google satellite map: the market was relocated from centrally located area to a relatively remote region with less customer base; ③ layout of the new site. Note the new, rectangular market has only one entrance.

The site Manager Wang wanted to relocate the night market to was an “idle land” (*xianzhi tudi*) 2.5 kilometres away from the old site. It was just between Community B and the Industrial Park (Figure 4.3). In many Chinese cities, it has become common for construction to be delayed on land that has been granted for construction and thereby let the land lie “idle”. Labelled formally as “national land reserve”, this inconspicuous (and of low land value) piece of land was leased to the RMC with the term of use of only three years. Besides, Manager Wang originally planned to build a multi-storeyed “gourmet city”, but was not allowed to have multi-

storeyed buildings on “idle land” according to urban planning regulations. Given that the rental agreement was said to be a contract without an official seal<sup>44</sup> and that the formal name of the new market was “resettlement of street stalls”,<sup>45</sup> the acquisition of the land by Manager Wang seemed to leverage a policy loophole.<sup>46</sup> But from a purely economic view, three years seemed enough to recoup the total investment, even if twelve months had already been spent in paving the cement ground and installing facilities before the relocation and another six months would be free of charge for existing vendors from the night market.<sup>47</sup>

The relocation, however, was only a concerted move of a grander project—the expansion and greening of No. 2 Road which was undertaken in the name of the Youth Olympic 2014. The Olympic Games were at best a justification of the road project, for it turned out that none of the sports events took place in this area. The road project had three stakeholders (see Figure 4.4) including General Manager Wang, a manager of a nearby

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<sup>44</sup> This piece of news was from a non-local vendor whose uncle was a subcontractor of the infrastructure of the new market. The vendor knew the details from his uncle when the latter had dinner with General Manager Wang.

<sup>45</sup> The fact that the relocation was implemented by CALE, and that the relocation was termed as “resettling of street stalls” indicated that the relocation was an administrative conduct, thereby obfuscating its commercial purposes.

<sup>46</sup> This piece of land was *assigned* (*xieyi churang*) to the RMC and its *de facto* commerce use contradicted the article 4.3 of the *Notice of the Ministry of Land and Resources on Issuing the Rules on the Assignment of State-owned Land Use Right by Bidding, Auction and Quotation (for Trial Implementation)* and the *Rules on the Assignment of State-owned Land Use Right by Agreement*, which stipulated that “scope of the assignment of the State-owned land use right by means of bid tendering, auction and quotation (*zhao pai gua*)” applies to the “operational land for commerce, tourism, entertainment and commercial residence as well as the industrial land requiring competition.” Yet the practices of assigning idle land to companies by local governments are common, even though the transfer fee is much lower than that through bid tendering, auction and quotation.

<sup>47</sup> According to Lin, disciple of General Manager Wang, the initial investment on infrastructure was about CNY 2 million. There were about 300 stall places, and the total revenue for 18 months (three years deducted by one year and a six-month exemption of rents) was estimated to be CNY 21.6 million (300 stalls × CNY 400 per stalls on average × 18 months). Interestingly, the investment was announced to the public at only CNY 3.5 million.

food market, and a deputy head of the Demolition Office of the district government, according to an ex-official from district government and Mr Wu, the cousin of the food market manager. The third stakeholder, Brother Bright, was known as the most “prestigious” ghost (local hooligan) in this region (see chapter 3). According to the ex-official, with an initial bidding price at 200 million *yuan*, these contractors finally increased the fiscal budget to 450 million using so-called “fishing” technique.<sup>48</sup> Inasmuch as such huge capital was involved, the official said, it was understandable that it involved not only CALE section but also the division of Public Security at district level to ensure the smooth relocation of the night market. The third stakeholder Brother Bright probably functioned as an auxiliary, quasi-legal enforce.

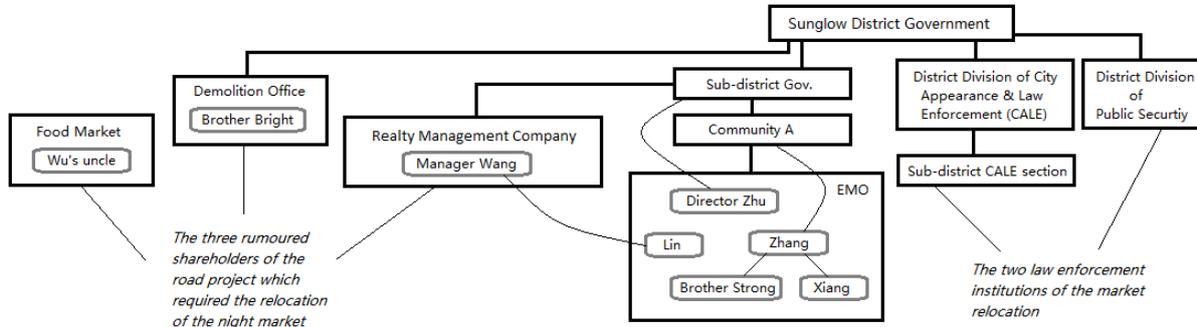


Figure 4.4: The power structure behind the relocation in 2012.

<sup>48</sup> “Fishing” (*diaoyu*) technique has long been practiced in the Chinese bureaucracy. A fishing project (*diaoyu Gongcheng*) is used to describe a project based on a low bidding price by a low-level government, which then demands additional investment from upper level government (contractee) by stressing the sunk cost. Hsing (2010) and Zhou (2005) discuss “fishing projects” in the new wave of urban sprawl. Zhou depicts it as a widespread government behavior (particularly after decentralisation in 1990s) of low level government to disregard the fixed budget constraint imposed from above by mobilising and extracting resources from its subordinate agencies, firms and individuals within its precincts for political achievement.

EMO staff disliked the relocation scheme. The night market had been a cash cow of EMO and Community A. The PMC and sub-district government which endorsed the scheme thus became contenders with EMO. As a result of the power struggle between the two institutions, EMO was restructured and given an even less advantageous position. After the protest in 2011, Guang, the former head of EMO, was removed from office. Though there was no indication as to whether the decision was made by sub-district government or by the district government, he obtained another job in the political consultative office in the sub-district government and his work was mainly to attract investments on behalf of the sub-district. Zhang, a former quarry manager of Community A who lost his job after the resettlement of his community, was appointed as the new deputy head of the EMO, and the way he treated vendors was much more lenient than Guang, according to some vendors. However, though Zhang held the substantial power in regulating the night market, he was formally led by Mr Zhu, the director of the office, who was appointed by the district government. Later, the powers of both Mr Zhu and Zhang were undermined by a third person, Lin, a disciple of Manager Wang (see Figure 4.4). Lin became quite active in the night market in early 2012 in preparation for the relocation. He not only collected household information from vendors but also help design the layout of the new site.

On June 5<sup>th</sup>, EMO staff notified the relocation scheme to all the vendors. According to the notice, all the vendors should participate in the “mobilisation assembly” presided over by the district government on June

8 and 9. They each should draw a lot to decide their places in the new site. On the morning of the first day, I was allowed to enter the meeting by Mr Zhang, and seated myself in the first row. On the podium were seated Director Zhu, head of EMO; head of Yao Gate Public security section; directors of CALE section and a staff member from the notary public office whose job was to authenticate the fairness and transparency of the lot-drawing procedure. Manager Wang and his disciples were also present, seating themselves at the back row. Two lawyers and journalists also joined the meeting.

With the presence of all the restaurateurs and barbeque operators, Director Zhu announced the procedure and asked if there were any questions from the audience. I presented two issues that vendors worried about most. The first point was about the reduction of the size from 6x6 to only 3x6 per each stand, and the second question was how much deposit should one pay to the office. Unfortunately, I was brutally stopped by Little Lee, the disciple of Manager Wang, and two other CALE staff. They dragged me out of the meeting room and escorted me to the public security office. Later, a director of CALE conducted an investigation on me. He suspected me of “agitating the masses” (*Shandong qunzhong*), but released me later with a warning. I heard from some vendors that I was labelled as “anti-revolutionary” by one of the lawyers, and in the days to follow, I was harassed and threatened by a few people whom I didn’t know in the new market.

I have so far examined people and institutions involved in the decision-making and execution of the relocation of the night market. Then, how do we understand the new decision? To adopt the terms of Lin, Hao, and Geertman (2015), I argue that a public-collective-private governance was formed in this urbanising area. By public-collective-private governance Lin et al. mean the cooperation between private companies, collective urban villages and government in the redevelopment of urban villages. The urban villages are those villages in the urban vicinity that are swallowed by rapid urban developments. The public-collective-private governance is formed when the redevelopment of urban villages requires financial resources. External developers are attracted by potential profits, but they are confronted with uncertainty and the difficulties associated with negotiations and site clearance (ibid.).

In the same vein, driven by the profits from the night market, the PMC resorted to the power of government, particularly the legal enforcement function of the latter to relocate the night market to the place where it can exercise direct control. On the part of CALE and public security, they could also benefit from considerable revenue streams from above board and under the table. For instance, I heard two CALE staff discussing their own participation in drawing the lots before they walked into the assembly hall, which means that they would become the rentiers of the stalls in the new site using their administrative power. Another immediate benefit was that CALE would improve its performance for good

without the presence of the night market along the street and the pollution it produced.

### ***The patronage network***

Vendors' attitudes towards the new policy and their respective actions were at least homogeneous. Their behaviours were quite dependent on their positions in what I call the patronage network, which was developed around the local powerful people and institutions. In this section I take a detour to map out the network vendors developed around the centre of power, then I analyse how rumours and gossip have mediated vendors' responses.

Figure 4.5 (below) shows that some vendors' networks developed around the hierarchy laid out in Figure 4.4. I categorise these connections as "ascribed" ones and "made" ones. Vendors with ascribed connections are those who had powerful connections prior to their acquisition of stands in the night market. In comparison, the made connections are ties strengthened between vendors and powerful people after the former obtained stands in the market. These two types of network extended to include not only vendors, but also residents, local influential people, and even local hooligans. The connections are made through kinship ties, claimed brotherhood, master-disciple ties, and landlord-tenant ties and so on. Besides, being connected to those with powerful connections can be advantageous as well. Furthermore, vendors were not only nodes in such *guanxi* network; they also tended to postulate each other as being more or less embedded in such patronage. We can imagine that vendors in the

market are connected vertically to powerful people and horizontally to each other through more egalitarian ties such as business partners, neighbours or competitors.

At best, the linkages reaching from night market vendors to officials, and the stakeholders of the road projects, have two levels above vendors. For example, Pebble Zhang's brother-in-law, Little Lee, was a disciple of General Manager Wang, head of the realty management company.<sup>49</sup> Han's brother-in-law, Brother Hua, had wide connections with many construction contractors of government-led projects; Brother Hua himself was a local "ghost" and he was further connected to the legendary "ghost" Brother Bright. Though the two vendors (Han and Pebble Zhang) were non-locals, their connections were considered strong because of the presence of the kinship.

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<sup>49</sup> According to Fat Man and several other vendors, Little Lee was a thug of General Manger Wang who used force on migrant construction workers if they protested for their delayed salaries. According to Lee, he was involved in the building of the arcs of the night market as early as 2008. But he was put in prison for one year afterwards for unknown reasons. See chapter 3 for more of his stories.

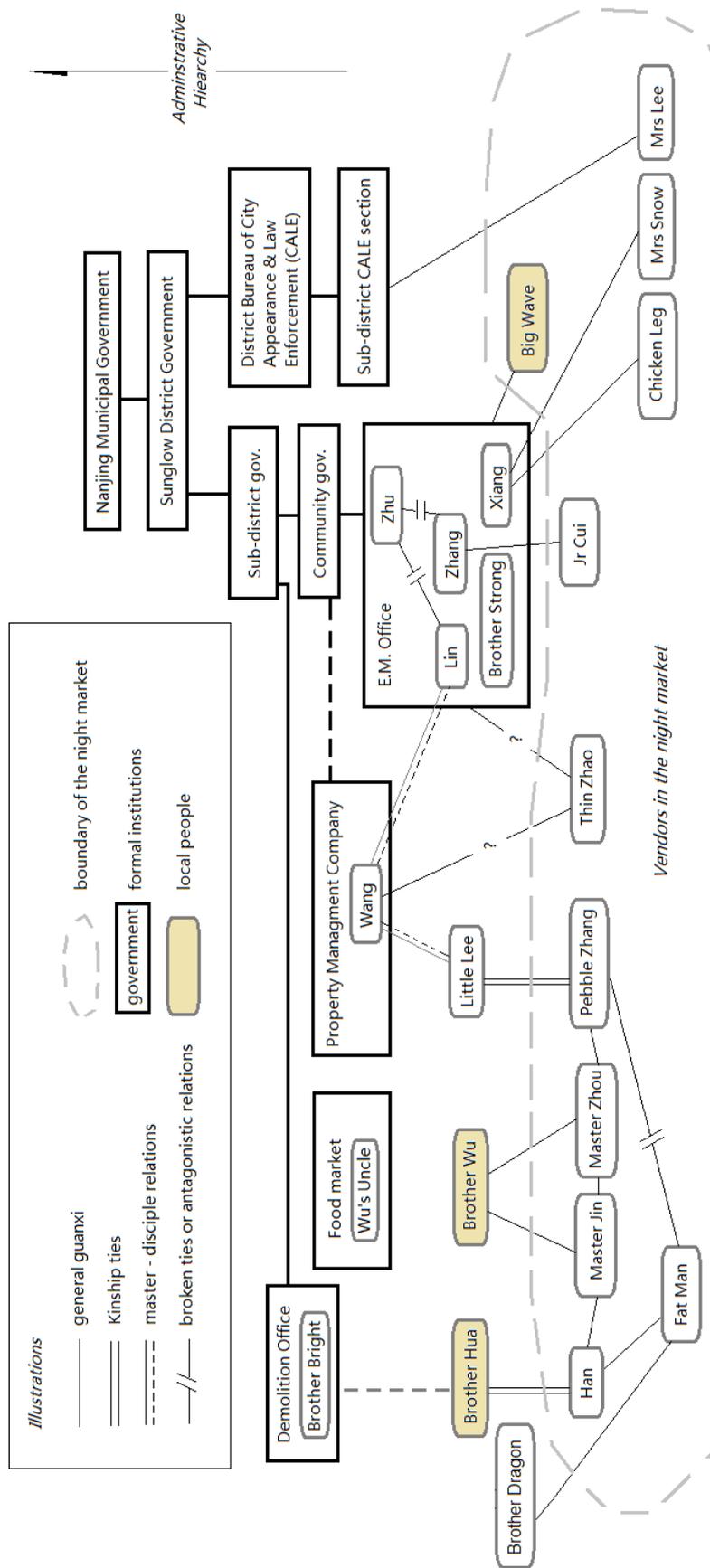


Figure 4.5: Connections made around the administrative hierarchy

Master Jin and Master Zhou's connections to powerful people were mediated through their connecting to Brother Wu, who transferred his stand to Master Zhou and who was the nephew of the boss of the food market, another stakeholder in the road project. The four people swore brotherhood in a playful manner, addressing each other from Master Zhou as the Big brother, followed by Brother Ai as the second brother and then Master Jin as the third and Brother Wu as the fourth. Han and Pebble Zhang joined this group later, and the six people used to play mah-jong and drink together. For the non-locals, the connections to locals helped, for example when Master Jin's cart was confiscated by CALE, Brother Wu gave Master Jin a name card of a CALE staff member and asked Master Jin to ring the officer to retrieve the cart for no penalty. Of course, such connections are asymmetrical. It seemed to me that Master Jin and Master Zhou depended more on the circle than the other brothers depended on them. And the stakes of mah-jong prevented them from reaching more local circles. Brother Ai and Brother Wu sometimes invite Master Jin and Master Chow to play with other locals at a 2 *yuan*/tile stake, but the latter would rather play with Pebble Zhang and Han with a lower stake (1 *yuan* or 0.5 *yuan* / tile).

Other patronage ties bridged only one level, such as the connections between the EMO office staff and several vendors including Fat Zhao, Thin Zhao and JR Cui. These vendors' access to powerful people has economic benefits as can be readily judged by their premium or spacious places: they are hence known as "big households" (*dahu*). Conversely, those with

weaker connections or no connections were called “small households” (*xiaohu*).

There are a number of ways in which vendors produce and consolidate their connections with powerful people. One of the crucial ingredients is gifts, or money in the form of gifts, and the money is often presented in disguise (for forms of gifts see discussion in chapter 2). For instance, purposefully losing money while gambling is said to be very common between project contractors and officials who hold discretionary power to subcontract government projects. Pebble Zhang often plays mah-jong with General Manager Wang upon the invitation of Little Lee (his brother-in-law), and he always loses money.

Another key ingredient is sentiment. As Kipnis (1997) notes, sentiment legitimises connections. “Naked” instrumentality never works; it must be glossed over with sentiment. To the extent that the losing money was termed by Pebble Zhang as “filial piety” (*xiaojing*) to his brother-in-law’s patron, the spiritual kinship was introduced to this patronage. In addition, it follows that the more sentiment and less instrumentality is involved in *guanxi*, the more solid the relation appears to be. For instance, a young small commodities vendor, JR Cui, treated Director Zhang when he was looking for a position in the already crowded night market and presented the latter with a “red envelope” (enveloped money). Having secured a premium position, he continued to treat Director Zhang many more times to maintain their relationship so that the initial instrumentality became glazed with sentiment.

Compassion towards the weak was another form of sympathy sometimes expressed in these relationships. Mrs Lee ran a fried chicken stand with her husband and one of her legs was crippled. Her husband was over sixty. Out of sympathy for the husband's old age and Mrs Lee's disability, the EMO arranged a place for her for free and charged her less for the monthly sanitary fee. But the patronage by definition requires loyalty of the patronised. In exchange for the provision of favour by the EMO, Mrs Lee constantly expressed her gratitude to Director Zhang to others to build his good reputation.

Banquets are seen as important occasions to construct *guanxi* efficiently (Osburg 2013, Kipnis 1997). An anecdote of my own experience is illustrative to show how banquets work. During my fieldwork, I built connections with EMO members so as to reduce unwanted suspicion from them. After I retrieved a draft document of the original plan of the night market from the Community office from Guang, the former head, with the help of Mr Strong, a subordinate of Director Zhang, I invited both Zhang and Mr Strong for a meal. Considering me as a poor "university student", Director Zhang suggested a cheaper restaurant or a dinner at an outdoor restaurant. But I insisted on the restaurant Mr Strong mentioned earlier as I reckoned it as more formal and proper. They agreed. To my surprise, Mr Strong invited his mistress, and Director Zhang invited an escort who then invited her girlfriend, another escort, to the banquet. Thanks to the endless mutual toasts among us as well as skilful toasts from the two

escorts that enlivened our spirits, Director Zhang promised that I could rely on him in this region should any difficulty occur to me.

However, my guests ordered more brand rice wine, the price of which was beyond my budget. I slipped out of the banquet room and told the hostess that I would fetch more money after the banquet, and she had better not tell it to my guests. I did so after the banquet. But when I was about to have a rest in my apartment I received many phone calls from one of the escorts, who coquettishly and persistently “invited” me to a karaoke bar. I realised that I was being treated as an ATM, but still I went. Later, when I shared my experience with JR Cui, he told me that the prices of the dishes in the banquet were set higher than elsewhere, and that the surcharges would be shared between the hostess and the EMO. In short, like purposefully losing at gambling, the banquet became an opportunity to give cash to my patrons, though I did not initially want to do so.

The banquet and the unwanted expenditure worked, though. Mr Strong, in his forties and two generations higher than director Zhang (they are far relatives), asked me to address him as *Brother Strong*. He also told me to refer to his name when I ring CALE for an appointment for an interview with its head. His name turned out to be a valid passport to CALE, much more effective than the official channels which had rejected me many times.

As I have demonstrated, no matter how such relations are established—be they based on kinship, bribery, sympathy or business favour—these connections serve as conduits for the powerful to extract

resources. As Aafke Komter (2005) describes, gift exchange can exacerbate inequality as those at the bottom of the hierarchy rarely receive gifts. The “rule of reciprocity” tends to “disadvantage those who are already in the weakest social position” (Komter 2005). I have also observed that not everyone inclines to produce such *guanxi*, owing to the expenses that are involved in maintaining relations with powerful people. For instance, many vendors avoid interactions with EMO members once they have obtained their stands, so that the weight of sentiment does not grow. It follows that the *guanxi* network manifested here is less a kind of agency against the power than a manifestation of power relations, and vendors’ dependency on this institution denies genuine resistance against it, though a certain amount of discontent and complaints exist. According to my observation, compared to those with “ascribed” connections or the “big households”, the antagonism was stronger among those whose requests for premium places were denied because of the meagre size of their gifts.

### ***Rumours and “path-like” messages***

Along with gifts, information also flows through patronage ties. In this case orally transmitted information related to the relocation took the form of rumours and gossip. Rumours and gossip had it that the night market would definitely be relocated because of the Youth Olympics. Some others said that the relocation, even if carried out successfully, would not be effective in the long run because any policy of the government was perceived to be like pissing in the wind. It was also rumoured that the market would be relocated at the end of 2011, but then the date was said

to be after the Spring Festival of 2012, then in March, and finally in April. I even heard a rumour that I was affiliated with the provincial government and my research report was the real cause of the relocation.

While rumours are “unsubstantiated information, true or untrue, that passes by word of mouth” (Stewart & Strathern 2004), gossip “takes place mutually among people in networks or groups” (ibid.). I argue that such networks and groups involved the spread of rumours and gossip can be hierarchical. In the following I distinguish “insiders” from those with moderate connections and those with weaker or no connections to the powerful people. I then show how different types of rumours and gossip transmitted among vendors, and I argue that such transmission reflects the power relations embedded in the existing patronage network.

The term for rumours and gossip in Chinese is “small path messages” (*xiaodao xiaoxi*). Such messages are opposed to official announcements. The term implies that people who are not on the right path will not get the message and so it is important to have access to the right paths for information. If the scale of transmission is bigger, then it is called “avenue-like message” (*dalu xiaoxi*), which refers to well-known yet unverified news, for example the news that the Youth Olympics is the cause of the relocation. If the information is from the decision-making agency and is too esoteric to be known to others, it is called “insider news” (*neibu xiaoxi*); and a piece of insider news can become hearsay or path-like message if it is heard inadvertently by a third person and proceeds to a wider circuit. The last type of rumour or gossip includes smear, slander or vilification of

others. All of these path-like messages constitute the communicative space of vendors. Building upon the patronage network I have outlined, I show how the details of the new project seemed to have permeated down through the gradient of power relations, starting from bureaucratic decision-making bodies and personnel, to those who have connections with them in the night market, and finally to ordinary, anxious vendors who in turn develop more reliance on their patrons.

Among the vendors, Pebble Zhang and Han were the ones with ascribed connections and were also the earliest non-local vendors to know the details of the cause of the relocation and most importantly, who was in charge. Pebble Zhang knew it from his brother-in-law, the disciple of Manger Wang. Han knew it from his brother-in-law, who befriended many local construction contractors and Brother Bright, the stakeholder. The news was spread and pooled within a small circle of the six people, the boundary of which overlapped by the membership of the mah-jong game. But Han wasn't worried about the relocation even when his wife urged him to have their brother-in-law talk to Director Zhang. The wife was refuted by Han as ignorant, because Zhang would not be the right person to be connected to acquire a premium place. In fact, with the help of his brother-in-law, Han managed to get a premium place six months after the relocation. Pebble Zhang had another plan. While he was pessimistic for the business in the new site, he settled on indoor shops of a nearby commercial residence community which was developed by Brother Wu's

uncle, and he encouraged Master Jin and Zhou to pool money to rent shops for future speculation.

To be connected to the people who are connected to powerful people, or connections by a second order, does not guarantee more benefits unless one takes action in advance. Master Jin and Master Zhou, for example, did not have much capital to invest in the indoor shops but still took action. Master Jin managed to sublet half an indoor breakfast shop in the old street, hoping that he could continue his business immediately after the relocation. He even had his brand-new sign set up in May. But his sublet contract was overturned by the landlord, another powerful patron in this area. Han voluntarily mediated the issue, thinking highly of himself as somebody on par with the patron. But the mediation turned out to be unsuccessful, and Master Jin had to unload the brand-new shop sign and abandon his plan. Master Zhou handed over his stand to his brother-in-law and left for Beijing, seeking business opportunities there. He returned two months after the relocation, because everything was even harder in Beijing. It is worth noting that the “insiders” involved only a few vendors, and the news they shared did not reach other vendors. To some extent their circle is closed to others.

Of many other vendors with “made” connections to the EMO office, some were vigilant to take measures. Their reliance on patronage ties was less than people like Master Jin. Patronage should not be understood as static or unchanging. Niobe Thompson has discussed how patrons “seal off” their defensive territories by excluding competitors or foreigners so that it

is possible to maintain monopoly positions (Thompson 2009, 100-102). Conversely, there are always other choices available outside of a given territory, which allows some freedom for the patronised (Mintz and Bois 2002)(Mintz and Bois 2002) (ibid.). For instance, having known from EMO that the market would possibly be relocated, JR Cui searched out the place and estimated the customer base around the new market by consulting security guards nearby residential communities. He also reasoned that Director Zhang might give up resistance to the relocation, because the latter had other businesses in Community A. In other word, JR Cui saw Director Zhang less as an absolute patron than as a broker in multi-layered local politics. Indeed, it turned out that Director Zhang managed to extend his power in the new market through his brother-in-law in the new office and his godson Yang, who then monopolised the beer business after the relocation (for details see chapter 3). Another example was Zhu the Second, an ex-village head. He planned to find an indoor place somewhere else to continue his business. He reasoned that the political performance of CALE and the district government mattered more than the Youth Olympics, because the night market was close to the district government and therefore very visible to superior government officials if they came to inspect the region. Thin Zhao, another outdoor restaurant boss, did not know much of the powers in contests at community, sub-district or district levels, nor did he have any interest in them. What he was interested in was who would take charge in the new

market so that he could obtain a premium position without paying the “red envelope” twice. The three cases show how wider webs of connection and thus more knowledge enable vendors to escape the traps.

However, a lot more vendors either ignored signs that foretold the change of power or had a wishful belief in the endurance of existing patronage ties; they spread rumours that the market would not be relocated. When Lin, the disciple of General Wang, carried out the registration and took pictures of vendors, most vendors were unenthusiastic, despite the fact that some vendors already knew the new site was under construction. According to Old Shi,

This market won't be relocated unless they finish the project. If they haven't finished it, the night market cannot be relocated. I don't know when. They did not say about it. And no one asked about it. [Why you didn't ask?] Who knows their plan exactly? No one asked, neither did I. According to my knowledge, this market had been closed down twice, but it is still here.

These vendors passivity can be explained by two reasons. First, the two contesting fractions in EMO withheld information. Stewart and Strathern propose that gossip can be manipulated by the powerful (2004). Drawing upon Thompson's theory of the “sealing off” technique adopted by patrons (2009), I suggest that the manipulation derives from a need of patrons to compete for their clients. A few vendors asked why Lin took photos of them, and the latter replied simply that it was good for them

without telling the vendors the time and procedure of relocation as well as the short-term use of the “idle land”. In the meantime, Director Zhang and his fellows disseminated the news that the new site was quite dangerous, because there were high voltage lines hanging above the site which might cause casualties when it rained.

Second, the signs of relocation were taken as another false alarm, because attempts by government had failed twice, once in 2008 (see chapter 2) and another in 2011. Therefore, there was a blind hope that the EMO wouldn't let the night market go. Even if the relocation took place, these vendors said the EMO should “take care” of them because the EMO had charged them monthly fees for several years. Such rumours reflected the dependency of vendors on the EMO.

Some participants of the 2011 protest ironically felt indebted to the government. They tended to see the prolonged life of the night market less as a result of their own resistance than as a favour given by the government. Their feelings of anxiety and hope damped rebellious spirits. Mr Chang, a fruit vendor, claimed that the ordinary people would have the final say in the market relocation. “Even if one is beheaded, it's nothing but a scar as big as a bowl”, he quoted the famous heroic utterance usually said by those sentenced to death in knight-errant novels and communist propaganda literature, showing that he had no fear of repression. He then invited several vendors to his house for a consultation. But none of the vendors he invited showed up the next day.

In May 2012, the cement floor at the new market site was paved, the numbers painted in each place and the facilities and toilet installed, indicating that the relocation was inevitable. At this point scapegoating and scandal emerged, targeting at “the other” vendors, the outsider, the single woman and the “big household” with made connections. Mr Du, a bookseller, blamed the outdoor restaurant bosses for the relocation because they polluted the environment, calling for strict regulation from the government. I also became a threat to the already alerted EMO. I heard from JR Cui that Brother Strong told him that I was actually affiliated with provincial government, and my research report was the cause of the relocation. No wonder that when I interviewed a non-local vendor that I knew for the first time, I was warned by the latter that there were “hidden dragons and crouching tigers” in “the mass”, so I better not do something against their interests.

Women could be scandalised during their participation in the patronage process. In the karaoke bar, when I was half-drunk and lying on the sofa, I overheard that Director Zhang promise the escort that he would grant a place for her husband if she treated him “nicely”. JR Cui told me that his neighbour, Mr Chicken Leg (a vendor who fried chicken legs and thighs), had a good-looking wife who had affairs with a member from the EMO. Therefore, Mr Chicken Leg put on a mouth mask, excusing himself by saying that he had rhinitis and thereby sending a sign of “no comment”. After the relocation, Ms Snow, a single, good-looking woman, set up a stand selling cigarettes and beverage, and was also believed to have affairs

with the staff of the new office. Regardless of the genuineness of these scandals, they reflect a common anxiety of men in the lower stratum of society where both wealth and women were monopolised by the powerful people.

Stewart and Strathern (2004, 198) write,

In all of these contexts, again, it is in the interpretations of situations and events that people most influenced outcomes. Rumour and gossip are prime vehicles of interpretation. It is not at all that they simply pass on news. Rather, they give it narrative shape and meaning, stimulating action. It is this, rather than the question of whether the rumour exactly reproduces “facts,” that gives rumour and gossip their power. Rumours define and create worlds just as much as “facts” do. They constitute realities *pro tempore*, until they are themselves superseded.

I suggest that rumours and gossip not only “constitute realities *pro tempore*” but also stimulate action. For example, a few vendors gossiped that Thin Zhao, a “big household”, had already given tens of thousands of *yuan* to the EMO to secure the best position at the new site. I asked the gossipers whether Thin Zhao’s action was fair play. The wife of his neighbour’s stand, who was investigating the new site under torch light after her work, told me that “it is because you don’t have such capability”, meaning she would do the same as Thin Zhao if she had the money and

good connections with the EMO or the right person. Another vendor drew an analogy to show that one can earn money regardless of means: suppose there was a big fish in the pond, then who catches the fish will be the hero and the rest would suffer.

### ***Patronage as legitimised by violence***

The schemata of patronage internalised by vendors was also projected onto other social relationships at the peak time of the relocation. I suggest that violence was an indispensable, or even a defining feature of the patronage schemata. Since “might makes right”, the mightier become legitimate patrons. The logic manifests when vendors commented on the conflict between CALE and some local fruit vendors during the forceful relocation.

In April, EMO increased the rent collected from vendors arbitrarily by 30%, which was a strong signal to all the vendors that the market would be relocated. According to a vendor, the EMO wanted to harvest the last batch of crops before rain. On June 5<sup>th</sup>, a notice of the closing night market from CALE finally arrived at the night market. According to the notice, all of the vendors had to draw a lot for their places in the new site on June 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>. Some vendors saw the decision as capricious and interpreted it as another inspection by the upper level of government, expecting that the night market would finally return to the original place afterwards. They could also stealthily go back to the original site at night time and “fight like a guerrilla” (*dayouji*) when the CALE was not on duty.

By so doing other vendors may follow suit and the night market would reappear in the original place in the long run.

A touchstone of all the future possibilities was a few local fruit vendors backed by EMO and community A. On June 11<sup>th</sup>, an open resistance took place between the relocated community on one hand, and CALE, public security and armed police on the other. Two days before, vendors had already drawn the lot for their location on 8<sup>th</sup> June, but most of them adopted a wait-and-see attitude and did not start their businesses at once. Many of them became the audience of the resistance.



Figure 4.6: Demolition of the last fruit stand.

*Left: in the afternoon, many vendors crowded around a few local fruit stands which were surrounded by CALE, and the night market had already been blocked from the main road by an iron plate wall. Right: Escorted by armed police, CALE tears down the last fruit stand at midnight.*

In the sultry afternoon of June 11<sup>th</sup>, red banners with white inscriptions reading “stalls in the night market will be relocated to place xxx on 12th June” were hanging up along the No. 2 Road. A series of tin plates had already been erected to block the long sidewalk from the main street so that vendors could not continue businesses in place. It was only several hours before the deadline of relocation announced by CALE, but

there were still three fruit stalls. They were encircled by CALE staff and surrounded by vendors sitting on the stages in front of indoor shops and many passers-by (Figure 4.6, left).

The whole scenario was a drama, and various tactics were deployed by the two contending parties, Community A and CALE. In the beginning, CALE found an elder had set up his stand to sell sleeping sheets. It was very likely to be an improvisation plotted by Community A, because the old man had never run a business in the night market. When he was implored to go home by a CALE senior staff, he asked the latter to pity his hard life which was caused by the resettlement years ago. His speech seemed to win the sympathy of many spectators including many local residents. The CALE senior official then rang the head of the sub-district government. Pressed by the head of the sub-district over the phone, the elder rolled up his sheets and left.

Then CALE tightened the encirclement, and pressed onto the three fruit stands to prevent them from running their businesses. Time whittled away people's composure, and a wife of a vendor sprinkled some water onto the fruits, spilling as if carelessly over a young CALE staff member. The latter got angry, but a senior officer stopped him from arguing with the wife. In the meantime, all of the scenarios were videotaped by CALE in order to vindicate that they "enforce the law in a civilised way" (*wenming zhifa*).

Later, many policemen of public security arrived, blocking a segment of No.2 road with two police cars. A van full of armed police with helmets

and glass shields also arrived, pulling over on the other side of the road. Two fruit vendors were then convinced to go home by a Community worker (who was said to be Director Zhang's brother-in-law). They loaded their fruits onto their own trucks, leaving only the last fruit stand run by the local hooligan "Big Wave".

Spectator vendors derogated the contests between the fruit vendors and the police as "a big dog fucking a small dog". Dogs are looked down upon by ordinary Chinese for their servitude towards their rich masters and snobbishness towards the poor. The CALE in the eyes of several vendors was thus rendered as a dog of the Communist Party. Big Wave was another dog but a smaller one. According to a local fruit vendor, Big Wave recently beat a woman customer when the latter argued with him on his fraudulent scaling of fruits. I also know that two years ago, he forcefully took the place of a few non-locals' fruit stands. But many vendors placed their last hope on his foolhardiness and bravery.

Big Wave walked around his stand restlessly, using crass words, and none of the CALE policemen dared to approach him. His mother joined him, seated herself squarely in a rattan chair, condemning all CALEs and policemen as Kuomintang<sup>50</sup> members who were said to rob ordinary people's assets as they wished. Still, all the scenes were recorded by CALE. Later, another local hooligan arrived, and he was identified by several vendors as a more powerful hooligan. With his black purse under his armpit (which is a characteristic of hooligans), he strutted along the

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<sup>50</sup> The Chinese Nationalist Party had dominated China prior to 1949 but withdrew to Taiwan after China's civil war from 1945-49.

stands and cursed loudly, giving moral support to Big Wave. An officer of the public security then rang another hooligan to implore the former to “go home”.

Fat Zhao was among the audience, and he whispered to me that the confrontation had yet to end, because Brother Bright had not shown up. According to Fat Zhao, whether Brother Bright took sides with the Public Security or with the relocated Community would be decisive to the fate of the night market. In other words, he believed that the contending forces on the street were merely a veneer of “real” politics; they were only pawns used by even more powerful people.

Unfortunately for him, Big Wave was ruthlessly pressed down by CALE. It was late at night when the site became less crowded. The neighbourhood was dark except for the light bulb of the fruit stand, flashing lights of police cars and reflections from the helmets of a phalanx of armed policemen. Many outdoor restaurant bosses had already started their businesses at the new market and returned home at that time. They pulled over their trikes, observing from far away. Then, in a sudden burst, a few locals (perhaps Big Wave’s relatives) began to fight with CALE staff and policemen. They tussled and tackled each other and formed a crowd. A scream by a woman came out of the crowd because CALE grabbed her mobile phone when she tried to videotape everything. “CALE are beating citizens!” cried the remaining local people, and they quickly flocked towards the ring. In an instant, several men were handcuffed by the public security, and CALE responded swiftly by establishing a police guide line,

warning away the crowd with a loudspeaker. A dozen CALE officers joined hands, circling the last fruit stand, while other CALE staff removed the fruits onto a truck and then collectively tore down Big Wave's canopies. A truck drove onto the scene in time, carrying away the torn down canopies and rubbish.

Several days after, these torn canopy canvases and the bent iron tubes were dumped by CALE to a corner of the new night market. Mr Big Wave moved to the new market. He still took a premium position. But he put on a cap that covered his macho hairstyle as if a frustrated dog had its tail tucked between its legs. At that time, about two thirds of the vendors had already moved to the new site.

To sum up, rumours and gossip that concerned the relocation took various forms before the relocation. We can see that "insider news", "path-like message", "avenue-like message" and scandals have different scales and contents. Furthermore, they were the products of the patronage network. While those with connections with the stakeholders of the new project gossiped within their small circles and took action earlier, the majority of the vendors in the night market were kept uninformed of the relocation policy by the contending patrons. Among them, some vendors with "made" connections to the EMO office, if resourceful and reflexive enough, were able to advance their own interests by leaving the night market as early as possible. In contrast, many more vendors were trapped by patronage ties, looking away from the signs of the relocation because there was something that they didn't wish to lose. The rumours and gossip

circulated among them did not form much solidarity against the relocation scheme but rather reinforced their hope upon the continuation of the existing patronage, even though the power of their patron, the EMO of the community, had already been compromised.

### ***Compliance, Imitation, and Resistance***

In a critique of Scott's (1985) everyday resistance developed from Southeast Asian contexts, Hollander and Einwohner (2004) argue that individuals can be simultaneously positioned as powerful and powerless within complex systems. Scott (1985, 6) himself has also acknowledged that the peasantry "has no monopoly on these weapons [of the weak], as anyone who has observed officials and landlords resisting and disrupting state policies which are to their disadvantage can easily attest". Kerkvliet (2009) suggests that focusing on everyday resistance elides other forms of politics in peasant societies. By politics he refers to Lasswell's definition (1958), politics being the process of resource distribution that specifies who get what, when and how. According to Kerkvliet's typologies, politics in peasant societies covers a wide range of forms from support, compliance, modifications and resistance (table 4.1). Compliance is the maintenance of the relationship, for instance, between landowners and tenants or between ordinary people and government authorities, and the modifications lie between resistance and compliance, conveying "*indifference to the rules and processes*" and they are "*typically things*

people do while trying to 'cut corners' so as to get by". Modifications<sup>51</sup> sometimes were carried out at the cost of other vulnerable people in the same boat (Kerkvliet 2009).

Table 4.1 Kerkvliet's typology of everyday politics

		Support	Compliance	Modification	Resistance
Intentional	Endorse authority's expectation	support			
	Within the line of authority		compliance		
	Indifference or apathy to rules and authority			modification	
	Against authority but taking disguised forms				everyday resistance
Consequential	Against authority's interests			modifications by cutting corners	
	Against interests of the people in the same boat			modifications on basis of distrust	

Kerkvliet's expansion of everyday resistance to everyday politics and his typology is based more on intention than on consequences. I fit Scott's everyday resistance to his typology, and distinguish two types of modifications according to their consequences. The cells with grey colour indicate possible categorisation of vendors' behaviours. They could be everyday resistance, since they were intentionally opposed to the

<sup>51</sup> Stellan Vinthagen and Anna Johansson (2013), however, argue that the modification or 'cutting corners' are resistance because they run against the interest of the powerful people. Vinthagen & Johansson and Kerkvliet thus seem to differ with regard to the definition of resistance by intention or by consequences. But it seems to me that this redefinition of compliance pulls back to the dichotomy of domination and resistance, thereby reducing the complexity of real lives.

relocation. They could also be modifications since each was trying to maximise his gains regardless of other vendors' interests.

I suggest that although the notions of compliance and modification are developed from peasant societies, they nevertheless shed light on the behaviours of vendors in the course of the relocation in 2012. Who among the vendors complied and who resisted?

Before the government's decision was announced, I observed that while the "insiders" aligned themselves to the powerful people, the marginalised people blindly placed hopes on the continuation of patronage ties to people who were no longer powerful. Therefore, both groups *complied* with the relationship.

After the government's decision was announced, almost all the vendors participated in drawing lots. However, after the relocation, not all the vendors moved to the new site. Only those who moved to the new site complied with the new policy. The difference can be explained by the fact that the government's order was implemented in two steps. The first step was the forceful relocation and the lot drawing procedure. Even though vendors expected business losses, they attended the meeting in the hope that they could obtain the best places by luck. This measure by government indeed saved a few vendors from their previous precarious situations. For instance, Vision Barbeque had been forced out of the old market because of extortion by his greedy landlord. He was grateful for the new government decision because his condition would be bettered regardless of which place he could obtain.

The second measure was the exemption of rents for six months before the new office signed contracts with vendors in December, 2012. The measure reflected a new relationship between vendors and the new stakeholders. While new market stakeholders, namely the sub-district government and the PMC, took direct control of the night market, turning it to their own tax base, they were unable to stop vendors leaving the market. Instead, they had to face reality: one third of vendors left the new market after the relocation, and the remaining two thirds had their incomes dropped by 70% for small commodity vendors and by 20% - 60% for outdoor restaurant bosses in the first month. Should they collect the rents, the remaining vendors would definitely leave the market or protest against them. To offset the low morale of vendors, in the first few days, the CALE, PMC staff and public security policemen consumed at the outdoor restaurant stands, and each person used a 50 *yuan* coupon from the PMC to encourage vendors to stay in place (Thin Zhao made a record amount the first night). Later, the new office did not charge vendors a *lump sum* deposit as initially planned, but waived the rents for two months, which then extended to six months until the market prospered again. This measure more or less prevented some vendors from leaving. Nonetheless, while these measures were made on the grounds of market principles, we should not dismiss the fact that the government forcefully delineated the space of the night market—vendors were not allowed to go back to the original site. Thus, vendors' compliance discussed here was induced by both the market principles and government's coercion.

When it comes to the time immediately after the government announced its decision, a closer examination reveals that there was a mode of compliance which was not made with the patrons but with the more powerful vendors, who were believed to have close ties with even more powerful people. This “imitation” strategy was adopted by some marginalised vendors, who settled on two groups of people to calibrate their own actions. One group was some “big households”; the other was vendors from the local community. Fat Man told me that he would do whatever Pebble Zhang does during the relocation, even though Pebble Zhang was his business enemy because the latter had taken Fat Man’s premium position. By the same token, Thin Zhao’s neighbours followed whatever Thin Zhao did. Thin Zhao was the first outdoor restaurant boss to start his business in the new market, who sold 90 fish dishes the first night because he was the only food vendor there. His legend spread quickly and other outdoor restaurant bosses followed suit. In both cases, the imitators’ theory was that the “big households” possess stronger connections, and such strong connections can ensure access to “insider news” which leads to prompt, reasonable actions. In addition, it is better to observe what “big households” do rather than what they say, because they normally would not disclose their secrets to outsiders.

There was also open resistance by some vendors who were allocated disadvantageous places owing to the new measures by the government and the PMC. Their marginalisation was because of authority’s ignorance of the “local knowledge” of the market. According to the design, the blocks

of the barbecue stands and quick food section were located at the far end of the new market (see Figure 4.3). Had barbecue stands mixed with outdoor restaurants as in the previous market, their businesses could have been bettered, because customers prefer to order different kinds of food from adjacent stands. On the other hand, having stands of same kind cluster together would only exacerbate fierce competition among vendors. Just as Scott has suggested (Scott 1999), the neat design of the new market made it easier to manage, but the local knowledge and experience was brushed aside. On an August midnight, when a typhoon struck Nanjing, I saw a few quick food stalls in the last row were still lit, while lightening was tearing open the dark sky and the torrential rain was drumming on their canopies.

A few days before the typhoon, Old Wang and several other barbecue vendors staged another open resistance, because their daily incomes plummeted. The mobilisation was easy because those vendors were already desperate. For instance, Sister Sun had only made twenty *yuan* the night before. These vendors pulled their barbecue equipment to the open place of the new market, intentionally breaking the management rules in order to meet the person in charge. Director Zhu arrived at the scene and promised a negotiation on a coming Sunday morning. However, he did not show up. He was said to be attending a meeting held by the district government to draw a lot for apartments assigned only to government staff.

The rest of the vendors' spirits were initially enlivened by Thin Zhao's new record. However, they soon realised that revenues were decreasing. Some vendors even began to fight with each other. For instance, both Mrs Lee and another vendor moved their carts to the mouth of the night market and fought for that place, and they resorted to an office guard for arbitration. A barbeque vendor secretly moved his stand closer to the first row of the planned zone for outdoor restaurants, and he was reported to the new office by another indignant vendor. A local barbeque vendor smashed his neighbour's fridge screen, because the fridge of the latter blocked the view of his potential customers. Little Yin, whose new stand was at the far end of the new market, placed a basket of oysters to claim a empty stall next to Old Feng, who also intended to use that space. Old Feng's son pushed the basket out of the canopy shade, and the oysters died very soon under the sun. Little Yin took this chance to claim unreasonable compensation, unless his neighbour made space for him. When indignant Old Feng and his wife consulted me, they even had the thought of using blood money to take revenge on Yin, who used to be their good neighbour. On the whole, these cases show that the overall drop of customer flow in the new market had created an air charged with commotion and tension as a new, arbitrarily made neighbourhood replaced that of the previous night market. It remained to be seen whether these individuals would seek new patrons or form new connections to protect their interests in the long run.

To sum up, vendors adopted various tactics in response to the government's decision. They complied with the government's decision partly because the contents were favourable for them, and partly because the decision had a coercive element that limited their choices. There were also competition among them when the overall resources were reduced by the relocation. A few vendors openly protested the new policy because they were marginalised by both the relocation and the poor design, owing to authority's ignorance of their lived business experiences.

Given the indeterminacy of local politics caused by the competition among patrons, some marginalised vendors were able to cope without knowing too much about the underlying force. They held a wait-and-see attitude and imitated the behaviour of those who were more advantageous in the patronage network. Such strategy reflects a risk-averse propensity developed through experience in *Society*.

## **Conclusion**

So far I have discussed the two attempts to relocate the night market by local government and vendors' responses to these attempts. The two attempts produced different outcomes, one leading to an open resistance and the other to partial compliance.

Counterintuitively, these two responses are not completely incompatible. From an individual vendor's perspective, resistance and compliance are both crucial to ensure livelihood in the urban context.

Resistance ensures survival in the local setting against inimical grassroots politics while compliance with patrons ensures both survival and profit.

To connect to a patron is an easier way to advance one's own interests, particularly when the premium resources are controlled by a few powerful people such as officials in the EMO office or the new stakeholders of the market. Nonetheless, patronage networks are also unequal because they extract resources from vendors. Such patronage networks are driven by principles of asymmetrical gift exchange and glossed by sentiments. However, the patronage networks are fragmented. Patrons also use violence to contest resources, for example, during the confrontation between the EMO and CALE in the 2012 market relocation. This adds a layer of complexity and indeterminacy to the environs of vendors.

Resistance, on the other hand, takes place when people are affected by both an unfavourable government decision and by a lack of patronage ties. In 2011, the protestors were vendors from the illegal night market extension and who had less connections with EMO. In 2012, the barbecue vendors who protested were those who were marginalised by the relocation decision and the poor design. In contrast, there was rarely resistance against the government's decision in 2012; rather, a willingness to continue the patronage was obvious. However, political marginalisation and absence of powerful connections do not necessarily lead to successful protest. As I have shown in the case in 2011, open resistance requires skilful mobilisation of resources and cultural tools to achieve its goals in

an authoritarian context. Vendors' identity as marginalised businessmen with rural background makes their mode of protest distinct in contemporary China's contentious politics.

Apart from collective resistance and compliance to patronage, there were other minor but equally important types of practice that ensured survival or profit. Those include imitation and forging connections in a wider commercial world.

Last but not least, through the analysis of the two attempts of the government to regulate, remove or control the night market, I show how the urban government managed to take the tax base of the market from the relocated community. While the case bears striking semblance to the Wenzhou migrants in Beijing in that the clientelist ties are superseded by the state (Zhang 2001), I have two further observations. First, the new way of governing adopts coercion and market principles to regulate migrant vendors. Second, the open resistance in 2011 did improve the conditions of vendors, even though its achievement seems less recognised by vendors themselves.

## Chapter 5

# Masculinities among men

In previous chapters I have laid out migrant vendors' networks and the ways they build their networks in response to external life pressures such as harassment by local hooligans or local government's decision to relocate the night market. But the vendors also establish relationships with each other and with their wives and these also affect their business and personhood. As I focus on male vendors in this thesis (partly due to a strong gender segregation in their lives), I will examine manhood in the following two chapters by examining how the migrant vendor men relate to each other and to the other gender, with an emphasis on how men ritualise their masculinities.

This chapter will focus on men's relations with each other and the masculinities (in plural) manifested in such relations in a wider context of contemporary urbanising China. To avoid essentialising such masculinities, I embrace the notion that masculinities are situated in and must be analysed in social relations (Connell 2005). To illustrate, I pick several settings including street fighting, drinking and other everyday activities in which men engage each other. It is from these activities an array of masculinities are imagined, practiced and weaved into lived experiences.

Inasmuch as the masculinities are not from a *tabula rasa*, I will go on situate them in contemporary migration and urbanisation.

The scope of research in this chapter is largely limited to men, although the practices of women are of equal importance. Admittedly, masculinity has to be understood in relation to another sex or gender and is not inextricably tied to biological sex (Connell 2005). Furthermore, masculinities are further articulated in production processes (for example, labour market) or in relations to the state and to other institutions (Connell 2005). However, I focus solely on men's connections in this chapter and set aside their relations to the state and to women to other chapters (Chapter 4 and 6 respectively). Connell's theories of masculinity still apply as certain aspects of masculinity essentially involve power relations, domination and hierarchy which apply to both men and women.

The questions I ask in this chapter are both theoretical and existential. Theoretically, I ask how to characterise masculinities and what are the underlying factors that inform such masculinities? Existentially, I was puzzled by the ways my "brothers" treat me and how they treat each other: men can be as close as family members but also as distinct as enemies. Why can they be nice to some but cruel to others? How to situate such paradoxical relations in the so-called *Rivers and Lakes* society?

Drawing on my ethnography of marketplace relations, I suggest that three dimensions of masculinity can be detected, namely bodily, discursive and relational. I try to situate such manhood as being cultivated from processes of urbanisation and socialisation, socialisation in *Society*.

## Characterising masculinities

The region of the night market is said to be “chaotic” (*luan*, 乱). Chaos not only refers to its noisiness and heavy traffic, and deteriorating environment, but also designates a feeling of insecurity because of the presence of street violence. Indeed, violence was common and sometimes severe when I was there. Whilst some informants, according to their past travel experience, consider this region much safer than newly bourgeoned county and town centres elsewhere in China, and while the number of fierce street crimes has gone down in recent years, violence is still rampant, carried out by local gangs, street toughs and even among vendors.

Instances of conflict reveal much about the local *Society*. They are occasions where values are tested and where norms are generated. In the following, I introduce a violent altercation between a customer named Liu and an outdoor restaurant boss named Little Yin. It also involved many other vendors who acted as onlookers, moral supporters, physical supporters or judges. Noticeably, though the conflict took place between customer and a boss, it did not fall completely into the relation between a service provider and recipient on a contract basis as one would commonly assume; rather, they used a language of brotherhood, respect and disrespect reflective of a certain view of *Society*.

The customer Liu was a conductor on the trains shuttling from Xuzhou to Nanjing, and was an old customer to Han. Whenever the train would stop in Nanjing, he would always have a banquet with his brothers

(who were, more properly, his colleagues), so he got to know Han for a couple of years to the point where he called him “Brother”. Little Yin was another outdoor restaurant boss, who also brothered Han, but their relationship seemed closer.

One night, I was playing chess with Master Zhou and Master Jin (outdoor restaurant bosses) who happened to have a day off. They were accompanied by a local man called Brother Ai. They had already consumed some beer, and were in the mood to have a second round when a quarrel was heard from Han’s stand five metres away, and an air of hostility seemed about to explode. It was Liu and Little Yin. When I approached, Little Yin was breathing heavily, his breath smelt of alcohol, and Han and his wife Rui tried to pull them apart. Yin threatened Liu:

Stay here; do not leave, if you have the balls. If I don’t chop you tonight, I won’t have the face to get by in this street anymore.

Liu was held back by another two vendors, arguing something, and he seemed unafraid of the threat. Han asked Little Yin to save his face, which I inferred was a veiled warning that they had better not make trouble in his stand. Close to the venue of dispute, other vendors did not intervene. Master Jin was sitting at a table at Pebble Zhang’s, watching the scenario callously, while Big Brother was intoxicated, waving his head as if seeing double. Upon hearing the threats, my curiosity drove me to approach the quarrel, and I tried to stop Liu by pushing him away in order to avoid serious harm. They finally separated, albeit only temporarily.

When Liu calmed down and sat down, Han and I managed to drag Little Yin out of the stand. Little Yin recounted the story to Brother Ai, the local who has his store across from Yin's stand and who was standing nearby. According to Yin, he had just passed Han's stand and saw Liu, upon which he toasted a cup of beer to Liu. However, Yin was turned down by Liu who threw his beer to the ground, an action which was a grave insult to Little Yin. Moreover, Liu apparently remarked that "*You always will be beneath me!*"

*"What does he mean by saying that I am always beneath him?"*

Little Yin asked Brother Ai rhetorically, "*His dick?*"

*"Beat that pussy"*, echoed Brother Ai, supporting Little Yin, and Yin left the scene to his own stand.

I then went to Master Jin and asked Liu to join me, hoping to clarify Liu's version of the event and hear from Master Jin. After an exchange of greetings, Liu learnt that Master Jin is about forty, so Liu changed the appellation to Uncle, and offered his explanation. According to Liu, he was Han's old customer and he knew Brother Han very well. But recently he went to Little Yin's stand to enjoy barbecue seafood. Several days ago, he invited two of his supervisors and several colleagues. When he paid the bill, he thought Little Yin charged him an extra 200 *yuan* on something he did not order, so he asked Little Yin to check the bill, but Little Yin rejected his complaint and stated that the money was correct. The dispute did not reach a conclusion, and Liu did not get the supposed surcharged money

back. He then decided that he would never go to Little Yin's. That is why he rejected Yin's toast intended for reconciliation at Han's stand.

Upon listening to Liu's account, Master Jin suggested he not suffer from loss without making his argument explicit for appeasement or harmony; rather, he should make it clear before the audience, despite any unfavourable consequences that may occur to him. In Master Jin's lexicon, "*explicit loss is better than implicit loss*" (*ning chi mingkui, bu chi ankui*). Liu agreed, and he toasted Master Jin and claimed that "*if any misfortune occurs to you, then your nephew [Liu himself] would definitely be able to share your worries*". Brother Ai was also there, and upon hearing the dialogue between Master Jin and Little Yin, he frowned again to show his impatience, "*That does it! We are all brothers, there is no need to fight!*" and he left the site to drink elsewhere.

However, Little Yin came back very soon, and people crowded into Han's stand again. Their argument shifted back to the disputed 200 yuan. Liu set up his defence: since he earns more than 5,000 yuan a month, he would not have been motivated to eat without pay. "*The Communist Party gives me only a small salary, but as I can earn 5,000 yuan a month, I don't care about such a small amount of money.*"

Irritated, Little Yin exclaimed "*Don't you think that earning such a large amount of money makes you a dick (diao, 屌, literally penis, means think highly of oneself)? We are small bosses, but we are living on our own*", he continued to exaggerate the insult he had, "*what do you mean by saying that I will be always be beneath you? I have been big brother and younger*

*brother [I've been both head and member of gang]; I still have more than ten brothers inside [the prison] and I send them money monthly, what do you mean by saying I am beneath you forever?"*

Little Yin also involved Han in his speech, stating that in order to save Han's face, he would not chop Liu tonight if Liu would make an apology; otherwise, Little Yin would definitely use knife on Liu, since he could not "get by" in this region if his face was gone. In response, Liu argued that he would just withdraw, which was not a sign of weakness because he could also "*mobilise one hundred staff from the railway work unit*" to fight for him. He further implied that Little Yin had cheated him and was not trust-worthy.

Then something dramatic took place before the audience: Little Yin raised a bottle of beer and struck his own head. "*Bang!*" the glass broke and down flew the yellowish liquid with white foam from his forehead. Little Yin's wife and two outdoor restaurant bosses arrived at the scene in time, and having witnessed Yin's self-mutilation, they were agitated, causing another round of pushing and hassling. Han dragged Liu away from his stand to the opposite side of the street, followed by Yin and his pals. Han, another vendor and me tried to block them out from each other. Han shooed away the two young men, as did Little Yin to his wife.

After another half an hour the fight came to its end. Han managed to have both parties seated at his stand with three bottles of beer placed before Han, Little Yin and Liu. Han asked Liu to fill the cup, toast Little Yin first, and apologise for insulting him. Then he ordered Little Yin to fill the

empty plastic cup for Liu, and they should drink the beers simultaneously and pledge that each one had no malicious intention towards each other. Whilst the resentment could be felt from both Yin and Liu, the two followed Han's instruction. When it was Liu's turn to fill the cup of Little Yin, he made sentimental expressions, stating that it would be the last banquet he had in this night market.

“Brother Han, I didn't tell you that we are leaving next Monday, and perhaps not coming back. You know our train guys are just like soldiers,<sup>52</sup> ‘While the barracks are solid as iron, the soldiers are as fluid as water (*Tieda de yingpan Liushui de bing*, 铁打的营盘流水的兵),’ and we may not see each other again,” he continued, turning to Little Yin, “I come from the North, you are also from the North (Xuzhou). Why do we leave our hometowns? It is only for a good fortune. I don't want to argue with you anymore, for one knows himself better than anyone else. Let me toast you.”

He drank the full cup in one go and thanked Han for his care during the past two years. He then left the table, and Little Yin did not stop him.

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<sup>52</sup> Railway soldier was an arm of service in the People's Liberation Army. In 1983 some 148,000 railway soldiers were disarmed and incorporated into the Ministry of Railways during the reduction of the size of the military. Such reduction continued to the 1990s and 2000s. In the meantime, a throng of military staff were transferred and assigned jobs as grassroots officials (for example staff of sub-districts), or became individual entrepreneurs while remaining in close contact with their former comrades-in-arms. The tough military lifestyle is thus diffused to the society, and is arguably contributing to the construction of masculinity. In my field, several vendors and grassroots officials have themselves served in the army, or have their family members who served in the army. For example, in another conflict, Little Yin called for his friends (also his countrymen) to the site, and his elder friends, now contractors and bosses, had served in the army. Nevertheless, since the cases are quite sporadic, military influence on masculinities is not my major concern.

What did the fight tell us? A thorough examination of its crescendo and decrescendo will reveal to us something more than the use of violence itself. The ways they quarrelled and performed in addressing the meddlesome issue illuminates three interrelated facets of masculinities: the discursive one, the bodily one and the relational one. Specifically, the discursive one defines proper expression in public; expression should be sentimental and sincere but not instrumental; the bodily one epitomises martial valour and encourages the use of force; and the relational one that seeks real or fictional alliance in time of crisis; this ethos also extends to everyday interactions among men.

### ***Discursive masculinity***

By discursive masculinity I mean public expressions that are considered manly in the eyes of society. Two subject matters, namely sincerity and *face*, were repeated in their quarrel. The discursive aspect of masculinity is not confined to the content of this specific event, but represents socially appropriate ways for a man to negotiate.

As the case revealed, both parties strove to prove their own sincerity while reproaching each other as lacking such sincerity. Although the conflict was initially over money, both parties did not seek evidence so as to reach a practical solution; instead, they made great efforts to defend their honesty. Furthermore, the case ended with the recognition of the sincerity of both parties by a mediator.

It is noteworthy that such sincerity or honesty is associated with a sense of being generous and looking down upon money. In fact, even though Liu was reminded by Master Jin to make the case explicit, he instead stressed his capability for making money, a capability which justified his contempt of money.

Throughout the event, many ways of expressing sincerity emerged. Apart from the nullification of money, sincerity was also recapitulated through sentimental speech and self-sacrifice by each party. Liu expressed sentimentality by using a melancholic overtone. Although moving from place to place is common for vendors and people in *Society* at large, departure is often an occasion for reinforcing existing ties by expressing lament. By emphasising that he would leave the night market and his brothers soon and won't be back, Liu actually meant that he couldn't have been fraudulent. In response to Liu's speech, as if to show a greater extent of sincerity, Little Yin hit his head with the beer bottle. The meaning of the self-harm was that Little Yin was in no way pursuing monetary interests since he was even willing to harm to his own body.

Meanwhile, and contrary to the expression of sincerity, their FACES had to be safeguarded by putting each other down, and the contest over face was contingent to the use of violence.<sup>53</sup> In other words, face discourse

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<sup>53</sup> A contradiction lies in the tension between face and sincerity: combativeness and mateship co-exists. Nevertheless, I would only like to highlight the difference between them in this context. Having face or not is a zero-sum game between both parties. The direct consequence of losing face is one could not "get by" in this region if he was not able to beat his opponent. In this sense, vying for face contradicts the logic that underlies sincerity, for demonstration of sincerity could pave the way for compromise or repair of the relationship. The demand made by Han in settling the conflict illuminated this point: he requested both parties to state that they had no fraudulent

was essentially competition for status, and using force was the last option. Face discourse is masculine, because face was consistently paired with metaphors of genital organs—“having balls”, “being a dick”, “beating that pussy”, not “to be beneath him”. Furthermore, the competition was limited to men as Yin chided away his wife, because women were not supposed to get involved and their participation would only corrupt the valour which is considered exclusive to men.

Apart from the face that was contested between Liu and Little Yin, there was another type of face. Han also quoted “face” when requesting that Liu and Yin stop fighting upon “*looking at his face*”. Why did the first type of face matter so much that it had to be defended by means of fist? Why did the second type of face function to dampen the anger?

It is thus necessary to distinguish two Chinese terms *mianzi* (面子) and *lian* (脸), both of which are translated as *face* in English, but each carries quite different meanings<sup>54</sup>. *Mianzi* and *lian* by themselves mean surface and the physical front of one’s head, respectively. As discussed by Hu Hsien Chin (1944), while *mianzi* “stands for a reputation achieved through getting on in life, through success and ostentation, *lian* is “the respect of the group for a man with a good reputation” and it “represents the confidence of society in the integrity of ego’s moral character”. In his discussion of *mianzi*, favour and personal network, Zhai (1994) sees favour and personal network as derivative of *mianzi*. He defines *mianzi* as

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intentions towards each other, so the fight was able to be terminated. In another words, sincerity was forged by an external authority.

<sup>54</sup> Note not all of Chinese dialects have division between *lian* and *mian* (such as in Fujian and Guangdong the dialects there do have word of *lian*).

the “public image of the self being formed through evaluations on attributes that matter to the self by relevant others” (Zhai 1994, 47). Andrew Kipnis (1995) further differentiates *mianzi* and *lian* in terms of orders of visibility. While *lian* is directly visible in social interaction,<sup>55</sup> *mianzi*, literally the surface of the *lian*, bears a second-order visibility. A person’s *mianzi* may not be directly apprehended. Rather, it is necessary to observe how other people look at the ego, so the *mianzi* interactions require at least three people or a third party. While Hu argued that *lian* is conceived of as being maintained or lost as a whole, Kipnis points out that *mianzi* can be more or less, large or small because it is “extendable through third parties not immediately present”.

Such perspectives, both the all-or-none nature of *lian* and extendibility of *mianzi*, as well as their order of visibilities, shed light on the abovementioned talk of face. When Little Yin stated that he would lose “face” if he did not use force on Liu, he used *lian*. Little Yin’s *lian*, bearing the coupled meanings of business reputation and self-integrity, had to be safeguarded just because losing *lian* would disable his proper functioning both as a man and a businessman in this Y region. In comparison, Han prevented both parties from fighting by requesting them to “look at his *mianzi*.” As a response to Han, Yin stated that he would definitely chop Liu if he did not “look at Brother Han’s *mianzi*”, in which Han’s *mianzi* is bigger than those of Liu and Little Yin, and thus needs to be deferred. That Han

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<sup>55</sup> In this regard Hsu differed from Kipnis in that she emphasised *lian* as internalised sanction which can function without the presence of others. This contradicts Kipnis’ interpretation that *lian* is largely felt in social interactions. While it is hard to choose between the two theories, one may argue that the ego feels having no *lian* is still based on the imagined presence of the society even when he is alone.

has a bigger face that the others need to “look at” will be further discussed in relational masculinity.

The visibility of both *mianzi* and *lian* has everything to do with the gaze from the crowd. Indeed, such gaze could even transform a *mianzi* issue to a matter of *lian*. The more people witnessing, the less likely for both parties to calm down, since the extendable *mianzi* at stake grew proportionally to the increasing number of the audience. Thus, rather than any active intervention, withdrawal of the audience could effectively subdue the anger of the fighters. That was why some vendors such as Master Jin took a laissez-faire standing. Pushing both parties beyond the gaze of the audience reduces the stakes invoked. Otherwise the escalation from *mianzi* to *lian* would leave no space for compromise: the world just was not big enough to hold both of them. One had to go.

According to my observation, the significance of *mianzi* differs among individuals according to their age and social experience. “*They will keep fighting until they know who is ‘elder brother’ and who is ‘younger brother’*”, remarked one of the audience, “*so it is no use to stop them*”. Several others recalled that when they were young, fighting for them was “*as frequent as having meals*”. In this regard, *mianzi* is age-sensitive. But upon scrutiny, age is virtually a metaphor of power relations.

Guoguang Huang and Hu Hsien Chin (Huang and Hu 2004) further study *mianzi* practices in power games in both interactional and institutional contexts. They show that *mianzi* work that mixes instrumentality and sentiments is widely applied among acquaintance

than primary groups and strangers. In fact, the efficacy of Han's *mianzi* when he stopped the fighting rested on the recognition by both Liu and Yin that Han was more powerful than them, because Han's brother-in-law was a powerful local hooligan. By giving *mianzi* to Han, Liu and Little Yin strengthen their symbolic subordination to their Elder Brother Han. Thus, age as a criteria for the establishment of order, which is typical in rural areas, gives way to the local / non-local discernment and the power of force in this setting.

That people call each other elder brother and younger brother as a way to establish order and express their power relations can also be seen in the following case between Han and Yang, a young local hooligan who intended to gain a foothold in the beer business after the relocation in 2012 (see also chapter 4). In order to flaunt his force, Yang and his men smashed several boxes of beers of some vendors including Han. However, with the mediation of Director Zhang, his adopted father, Yang apologised by admitting that he is "younger brother" to Han, and pledged that he would not forcefully promote his beers to Han's stand.

In summary, the language used among men has two features: sincerity and combativeness (as manifested in face discourse). While sincerity is expressed to deny the instrumentality of the vendors' orientations (despite the fact that they are businessmen), it enables the rebuilding of community. In contrast, the spirit of combativeness sets them apart.

## ***Bodily masculinity***

By bodily masculinity I do not mean mere bodily strength, but a spirit of aggression, the courage to fight or defend respect. In addition, I do not situate such masculinity in any particular relationships but in the dialogue between individual and *Society*, thereby reflecting upon vendors' migratory lives and the amorphous nature of *Society*.

Visual clues to such masculinity are many, such as those from hairstyle, dress, tattoos, etc. For example, Pebble Zhang likes to put on a black tight underwaist and camouflage pants, indicating his identification with military culture. Fat Zhao and many other vendors have tattoos on their wrists. They can be as simple as a crooked cross or several vein-coloured dots.<sup>56</sup> Though shaded by their tan skin, these symbols allude to their youthful delinquency and the ability in fighting they gained through this delinquency. Brother Jin is a man of moderate temper, but he likes to wear a belt with a dragon head buckle (dragon head means big brother and the dragon in Chinese culture symbolises strong masculinity), and has a tattoo character “forbearance<sup>57</sup>” on his wrist, and practices body building nearly every day at home. But “showing muscle” is never considered as appropriate in customer relations, for it would only frighten away these customers. Therefore JR Liu (see chapter 1), assistant to Pebble Zhang, changed his “bullet head” hairstyle to a normal one when he

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<sup>56</sup> According to the boss of a tattoo shop, dots on the wrist can be either a sign of gang members or a wish to remove ill-fortune especially after having suffered from a disease. In comparison, tattoos on biceps or deltoid are more indicative of membership of a gang.

<sup>57</sup> “Forbearance” or “refrain” (忍, *ren*) can be understood as ability to endure pain; it can also be understood as “don’t offend me; otherwise I will not refrain myself from using force”.

started his own business. However, these bodily practices nonetheless signify an identity of manhood that co-exists with business ethos.

Expressed obliquely through such bodily features, a kind of aggressiveness seems to lie at the core of such masculinity. I will mainly examine the aggression, valiance or worship of force in man-to-man relations as well as the social, political forces that inform them. Such aggressiveness is not always implicit; sometimes it can be made explicit, such as when Brother Ai encouraged Little Yin to beat Liu in the first place. Brother Han also embraces a spirit of dauntlessness which defines manhood. According to him, *“A soft-tempered man gives way to a tough man; a tough man gives way to a high-handed man; a high-handed man gives way to those who do not care about his life,<sup>58</sup>”* therefore, *“how can a man have his knees bent in fighting? I won’t retract even when I am facing one hundred men”*.

Such masculinity differs from that which arises within household life. Though the latter masculinity also entails being strong and tough, it is of a different kind. That kind of masculinity can be seen as a working class one, particularly for outdoor restaurant bosses. A tough and durable body helps ensure subsistence and business successes, as vendors have to sustain heavy labour and prolonged working hours. According to Yan (2003), within the prevalent corporate family, the significance of the

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<sup>58</sup> In Chinese *“Ruande pa yingde, yingde pa hengde, hengde pa buyaoming de(软的怕硬的, 硬的怕横的, 横的怕不要命的)”*.

endurable body of men also applies to marital and family lives.<sup>59</sup> For outdoor restaurant bosses, the ability to “bear bitterness” (literally to eat bitterness, *chi ku*) is valued as essential to being a qualified man and husband. That is why when Rui, Han’s wife, cried out in public and scolded Han for mistreating her, her neighbour tried to stop Rui. “*His life is not easy! Think about his shaking the wok for more than ten hours a day!*” The neighbour implied that Rui should not have cursed her husband so long as he was the breadwinner of the family. If there is any association between endurance and the bodily masculinity I discuss here, it is the endurance of physical pains after fighting with each other.

Appearing to be aggressive, like Brother Ai and Han, has its own utility. It acts as a pre-emptive measure to forestall potential harm. In this regard, I share Bourdieu’s insight into masculinity in societies which he called “cultures of honour”. According to Bourdieu (2001), in such societies, a quick retaliation for honour is highly valued in contrast with cultures of law. Such cultures of honour are typical to nomadic peoples and herdsmen who carry their most valuable property with them and risk having it stolen, but without having recourse to law enforcement or to government. That being said, inspiring fear forms a better strategy than promoting friendship in protecting themselves and their properties. The culture of honour also is common among criminal underworlds and gangs whose members carry large amounts of cash and who cannot seek legal

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<sup>59</sup> Yan (2003) argues that “being able to labour” has been replaced by “being able to talk” as new criteria in choosing partner in rural areas since the 1990s. Yet in my field, his distinction seems less significant along the lines of age or generation than that of occupations. Physical strength is still valued more than intelligence or interpersonal skills by outdoor restaurant bosses.

redress if the cash is stolen (Nisbett and Cohen 1996); or in modern inner-city slums where three conditions apply, that is, 1) a lack of resources, b) the benefit of theft and crime outweighs the risks, and 3) a lack of sufficient law enforcement (ibid.).

Both Bourdieu and Nisbett associated culture of honor with the protection of one's fortune. In this regard, the logics of using of body as in production and safeguarding their production are unified. Nonetheless, an explanation of utility does not suffice to explain the fact that most of the vendors are the victims of crime or extortions rather than members of gangs. Ironically, having suffered harm, they sometimes inflict harm on each other. Moreover, Bourdieu and Nisbett's argument does not explain the dis-utility that occurs when perpetrators suffer after they administer verbal or physical force on others.

Nonetheless, one factor identified by Nisbett is still quite important—the lack of justice or arbitration or rule of law. Indeed, many disputes arise when people are vying for business spaces which no authority regulates, as will be illustrated in the case I observed between Little Xia and an old lady. Without legal justice, aggression becomes the only viable way to safeguard one's interests, often imperilling the weak. Furthermore, without justice, a man often has to justify his violence afterwards, thereby covering up his vulnerability.

Little Xia was a migrant worker from nearby factory. With the introduction of his countryman who is neighbour to Han, he worked after hours as assistant to Han's outdoor restaurant for a month, but he left

soon because he wanted to start his business selling watches with another young man. As all the places had been allocated to vendors, and he did not want to hand in a monthly stand fee, he moved his stand to wherever there was space. One day he arrived earlier at the night market, and took a “terra nullius”, which was however a place already taken by an old lady for a couple of days. When the old lady arrived, they broke into a quarrel. The old lady said she would resort to the management office for arbitration, even though either of them had registered at the EMO. Then she warned Little Xia that her son was a member of “the way,”<sup>60</sup> to which Little Xia replied, “*Go for him, I will wait here*”. The dispute finally drew the attention of the manager of the medical store right behind their stands. Instead of arbitrating the issue as both party would have hoped, the manager drove away both of them with a displeased impatience, because both of the vendors blocked the way of his store. “*Get away from here*”, said the manager. Both Little Xia and the old lady then nudged a bit to the side of the door. The quarrel continued. Yet the young man occupied the premium position, leaving little space for the old lady, and continued his bargaining with customers as if his poor neighbour was nothing but air. Cornered in a very awkward space and sitting almost shoulder to shoulder to Little Xia, the old lady finally collected her stuff and walked away helplessly. Little Xia won the quarrel. When I suggested that he should pity the old, he became angry. His anger seemed to derive from having just been told off by the manager or a continuation of the hostility he had for the old lady.

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<sup>60</sup> A man of “the way” (道上的) means that he is affiliated with mafia-like societies.

But he had reasons. He retorted that I had sympathy for the old, but knew nothing about his own condition.

Later I found the old lady elsewhere in the night market and asked if she really had an outlaw son. She said it was only a story to secure her space for a living. Then I turned to Brother Du, a book seller, who had witnessed the event. He kindly reminded me that such quarrels happened every day, and there was no need for me to bother about it (*duoguan xianshi*, 多管闲事).

In this case the logic of ensuring one's survival overruns modesty and tolerance of each other. "Survival of the fittest" has become the motto when the vendors are looked down upon by powerful people and dismissed by the public gaze from which they had expected justice. Indeed, understandably, the "public" is no longer an organic community. It is merely an agglomeration of self-interested persons. The disdainful attitude held by the store manager and the nonchalant stand of other vendors resulted in the shift of the loci of justice to the parties in disputes. Thus, without justice from a third party, a "might makes right" logic prevails. Had a third party acted as a reference of authority or even concerned neutrality, Little Xia could have been more embarrassed and probably given way to the old lady. In the following days, Little Xia stayed at that position. When I passed him, he seemed to have triumphant defiance in his eyes, which almost made me believe that I should not have asked him about the morality of his action. I had better forget it, for bothering about it as if my own business was really unnecessary.

Besides the absence of informal justice, formal justice is also lacking in many occasions. The insufficiency of the latter kind, which should have been provided by police or grassroots agencies, has resulted in grievance or even resentment on the part of vendors. Even vendors who were seen as “street toughs” (such as Han) are no exception. The following anecdote illustrates this effect. It also shows that the lack of formal justice can lead to a defiant attitude towards *Society*.

Han told me his story when I helped fix his trolley one midnight. He mentioned that he had another glass food-display cart parked on the other side of the alley across from his residence. A minibus parked next to it crushed its glass. The minibus owner turned out to be a construction foreman working on a project at the district hospital. Han asked for compensation from the foreman by stating that both parties should adhere to “*the order of arrival*”, meaning the one who arrives first at the public space has the privilege of usage (*Xianlai houdao*). “*Even if you lay gold bullion and I lay a piece of straw, I should have it (the place) if I arrived first*”, Han recounted the story. The foreman disagreed, so they reported to police for arbitration. The police requested both parties to show their ID cards first. But the police quickly prevaricated and “*kicked the ball back*”<sup>61</sup> to both parties. As a result, Han did not get the compensation he had expected. The attitude of the police, according to Han, was simply because his ID card revealed his non-local identity. As the police are seen as representing the Communist Party or government in general, and construction contractors are seen as more or less having connections with

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<sup>61</sup> In Chinese *ti piqiu* (踢皮球), or shirk one’s responsibility.

the government, Han concluded that it was a “bullying society”.<sup>62</sup> He further inferred that “Communists are just like a mafia organisation. All of them (the powerful) are connected”.

It is fair to say that disputes in business and in other aspects of life are inevitable. The absence of both formal and informal justice has reinforced the use of aggressive display in two ways. First, the anger will not disappear after the temporary settlement of a dispute, but will turn into a feud, particularly on the side of the loser. Second, an overall lack of resources exacerbates the situations, as occurred in the process of relocation (see chapters 4). After the relocation of the night market, incidents of disputes and fights amongst vendors rose dramatically.

Bodily masculinity has developed as a hostile stance to the environs of *Society*. If *Society* is inimical in this regard, it is because it is inherently flawed and unjust. An understanding of such aggression at individual levels helps us comprehend what I dub as relational masculinity.

### ***Relational masculinity***

I call the third aspect of masculinity which surfaced during the conflict relational masculinity. Drawing upon *guanxi* (connections) theories, I see such masculinity as a cultural product from adapting to the fickle urban environment. *Guanxi* practices (Kipnis 1997) (particularly in rural China) are derived from blood ties, and they invoke sentiments and the constant exchange of favours / gifts to extend personal connections

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<sup>62</sup> In Han’s word *qiangquan shehui* (强权社会).

beyond kinship ties. Relational masculinity among the vendors is modelled after the kinship ties, but it is more fluid. As I show below, relational masculinity is constructed and manifested via pseudo-kinship appellations (particularly “brothers”), and rituals such as drinking as well as acts of mutual aid in extraordinary situations. It overlaps with discursive masculinity, but involves interactional, dyadic or group dynamics rather than a kind of social norm. While bodily masculinity bears the imprint of *Society* on individuals, relational masculinity reassembles and reunites the atomised individuals.

### *Appellations*

Relational masculinity features colloquial use of “brothers” and other agnatic terms in addressing strangers. The saying that a man “*depends upon his parents at home and upon his friends abroad*”<sup>63</sup> illustrates this logic. In this sense, calling each other brothers serves to establish rapport at short notice, precisely because of its power in evoking emotional bonds and obligations among family members. Men often address others of similar age as *xiongdì* (literally elder brother and younger brother) even when they meet for the first time. When the age gap is apparent, the elder one would call the younger “little brother” (小兄弟, *xiao xiongdì*) or his surname with a prefix “Little” such as “Little Chen”. This is not a hostile put-down. Rather, the speaker extends his friendship even while asserting superiority, whether in age, status or knowing experience. In response, the “little brother” would address the elder by the surname plus “elder

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<sup>63</sup> In Chinese *zaijia kao fumu, chumen kao pengyou* (在家靠父母, 出门靠朋友).

brother” (哥, *Ge*), for example Master<sup>64</sup> Jin is called *Jin Ge*. The wife of the “elder brother” is then called “sister-in-law”(sao, 嫂 or saozǐ, 嫂子), modelling after patrilineal extended families.

The relational masculinity, however, can be an impromptu or a performance of *guanxi*. For instance, during the interval of the fight, Liu pulled *guanxi* to Master Jin by calling the latter *shu* (paternal uncle). Fictional allies are also strategically invoked and they are also referred to as brothers. While Little Yin called for his “con buddies”, Liu invoked his “at least one hundred brothers (his colleagues)”.

The widespread use of such fictive kinship terms has a “*River and Lake Society*” flavour. A “veteran member of *Rivers and Lakes*” (*lao jianghu*) uses such appellation to familiarise himself with others at short notice, to elicit others’ favour for his own sake, to cast doubt or distrust or to persuade others with an improvised aura of intimacy. But the very same person can also turn down requests from his newly made brothers, or disappear without notifying the latter of his new phone number or any other method of contact. After all, many of them have been leading a mobile life so there is no use to keep commitment to others unless necessary.

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<sup>64</sup> I learned from TV and earlier experience that I should address vendors or a working class man as Master. However, I now consider *Ge* (哥) as a more appropriate way.

## *Drinking*

The second milieu to observe the relational masculinity is during drinking. Drinking is a dynamic way of socialising among men. It is also a window as to how relational masculinity is imagined and practiced.

I note that tolerance of alcohol is a laudable masculine virtue and a common topic among vendors. Brother Dragon, the beer distributor, once told me that one can drink a box of beer (12 bottles of 600 ml) at outdoor restaurants but only a few bottles at indoor restaurants. Even though he might have exaggerated a bit, the estimation is not far from the truth. Not only customers, but also vendors themselves are good drinkers, perhaps even better ones. Instead of “having dinner” together, outdoor restaurant bosses invite each other to “drink a cup or two”, often ending up with consumption of far more than that amount if they are in a good mood. After all, the ample supply and cheap prices of beers in summer (3-5 *yuan* per bottle) and wines in winter ensures such hospitability and development of tolerance. But why do vendors show off their big tolerance so often?

The anthropology of drinking differs from medical and sociological approaches. Dwight Heath (1975) argues that the non-anthropological disciplines exaggerate the problems of drinking, either by expressing a strong bias of western culture, or basing their assumptions and methods on pathology. However, to what extent drunkenness can be defined as “problem drinking” is in doubt as many cultures recognise drinking as a social act (Douglas 1987). According to Mary Douglas, the common

assumption that alcohol leads to anomie is also challenged by anthropologists who are more satisfied with the notion that it is rather the state of anomie that leads to alcoholism. Anthropologists also found drunkenness allows a relaxation of cultural constraints, which is a learned comportment (ibid.).

Douglas (1987) further suggests that drinking constructs the world as it is, either by separating leisure from work, by exclusion and inclusion and by channelling competition within communities. It also constructs a world as an ideal either by transcending emotions and enhancing a consciousness of belonging to a larger society, or by momentarily denying a harsh eternal world. Whichever type of world it constructs, Douglas argues, the understanding of a culture of drinking “depends on appropriate abstractions and counting and calculating techniques of drinking habits”. In the following, I will present the forms, patterns and etiquettes of drinking in order to grasp how men flip-flop between the two worlds by performing their relational masculinity.

The atmosphere of drinking varies from recreationally moderate to intense, depending on the context and the alcohol consumed. Generally, individual drinking and reciprocal drinking are moderate, but collective or ritualised drinking is intense.

As for individual drinking, there are times when bosses drink iced beers on their dinner tables, especially after they have been exposed to the scorching cooking fire for hours in summer. In winter they habitually

drink wine and put their feet around a tray of burning charcoals so as to resist the chilly wind.

Drinking is often a way to express gratitude in banquet. The host will try his best to create a cordial atmosphere by providing palatable dishes, enough beers or wines, frequent toasts and compliments to make the guest happy. For example, Fat Man helped Han's relative to find a job as a welder in Fat Man's brother-in-law's factory, so Han treated Fat Man and his brother-in-law to a meal, and paid the accommodation fee for the latter. On such occasions, vendors will stop drinking when they get tipsy and feel good. They may drink more, but that is often limited to business slack seasons or on rainy days when vendors don't have to get up early the next morning.

People consume more beer or wine particularly when they make acquaintance with each other. On such occasions, drinking can either excite men or depress them. But alcohol is not the only source of excitement or depression as physiologists would suggest. Rather, the bipolarisation of people's emotions depends on their modes of interactions.

I use Turner's concept of "ritual as a process" by which structure moves to "communitas" (Turner 1974) to illustrate how alcohol mediates drinkers' behaviours in different phases. I observe that drinking often begins with a subtle construction of hierarchy through reciprocity and competition, which always leads to a state of "communitas" where men are likely to reach a sense of common fate and camaraderie. This may not

necessarily be accomplished in one banquet but in consecutive parties. Nonetheless, such a sequence is apparent.

In such a collective setting, to drink by oneself is never appropriate; one should either make others drink by toasting them (*jingjiu*, 敬酒) or by penalty drinking (*fajiu*, 罚酒). The drinking allows a grade of hierarchy to be built by either proposals or penalties. Through proposals one extends one's respect to the person being proposed. As a general rule, one should lower his cup if he considers that the person toasted is senior in age, experience or has done the toaster a favour. For people who have met but haven't got to know each other very well, the positioning of oneself in the group can be quickly established only through one round of mutual toasting and receiving toasts. Such positioning is reflected in one's calling the other as big brother (*dage*), elder brother (*ge*), or his name.<sup>65</sup> Their knowledge of each other derives from not only self-presentation, but also from mutual-representations. A principle of reciprocity underlies the mutual-representation. Mutual-representation is a way to "give face" to each other, allowing one to increase the other's prestige in front of other people even using hyperbolic or sycophantic words. Status differences are also reflected in the amount of beer consumed, with the person of higher status drinking in sips while the person of lower status drinks in gulps. On the receiving side, drinking up upon the toast means respecting the good will of the proposer, whereas refusing to drink means not "giving face" or not acting brotherly.

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<sup>65</sup> Little brother is rarely called because calling another his name already indicates the speaker assumes that he is superior in age, experience or power.

The execution of penalty drinking requires a sound understanding of social etiquettes and rules. It often becomes a game between the experienced and novice. One who utters inappropriate statements during the drinking, even if inadvertently, will be detected immediately by others and asked to have a penalty drink. The ability to pick out such inappropriateness demonstrates one's knowledge of the social norms, adding to one's authority among all the participants.

Brother Ai, a local, has a good command of such knowledge and practices of toasting and applying penalties. He would ask the novice (always young men) participants to toast everyone on the table (*dayiquan*, 打一圈) when the young just raised his cup, or ask the latter to drink twice if the young man does not address a person properly. Brother Ai also stops the "little brother" from drinking too fast, showing care to him. When he is toasted but he would not like to drink at that point, he would claim that they are not competing for drinking so the proposer should slow down the pace. The reason for the penalty can also be a touch of humour. For example, once Big Brother comments on girl, but Brother Ai immediately goes too far in asserting that Big Brother would think of the girl instead of his wife, so big brother has to drink two cups if he would like Brother Ai to keep the "secret".

In most cases, people toast each other at the beginning of a banquet. They soon give way to penalty drinking because it is funnier, more competitive and more intimate. After all, too many toasts are seen as too formal a behaviour among brothers. In the meantime, people play various

games to quicken the consumption of beer or wine. The general rule is the loser would be punished for drinking a whole plastic cup (150 ml, or  $\frac{1}{4}$  of a bottle) in one go. They may play traditional games, such as finger-guessing<sup>66</sup> or rod-tiger-hen-worm<sup>67</sup> which requires a quick response, so the unfortunate one with prolonged response time will always be penalised—the more he consumes, the slower the response he has until he is completely drunk. If all get drunk but are in a mood to continue, they may simply swirl a chopstick over a plate, and the person at which the chopstick points will drink. The combativeness manifests when men even stop each other from going to the toilet, and the one who wets himself will lose the game. There are also new games presumably from school or company team-building activities, for example *counting seven*.<sup>68</sup> However, this game is considered boring because it is reckoned as competition of “intelligence” among school boys and is less physically intense. In a vendor’s words, it is not “forthright (豪爽, *haoshuang*)”.

Precisely, being forthright is less a kind of frankness than a frank acknowledgement of obligation, and it lies at the heart of the relational masculinity. A forthright man will never refuse to drink if he is penalised in the drinking game. This is actually a metaphor of a kind of commitment, for everybody knows that to drink a cup in one go is a rather unpleasant

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<sup>66</sup> Guessing five is a simplified version of Guessing numbers. Guessing numbers requires each person to present a number from 1-10 by gesturing simultaneously and uttering a digit from 0-9. The one whose uttered digit coincides with the single-digit number of the sum wins and the loser will be penalised by drinking. For example, if A presents 6 and speaks 0 and B presents 9 and speaks 5, then B wins because 5 is the single digit of  $15=6+9$ . In guessing five, each part has only to present a gesture of zero or five, and speak five or ten to decide who will win and who will drink.

<sup>67</sup> A game in which rod beats tiger, tiger eats hen, hen pecks worm and worm erodes rod.

<sup>68</sup> A game in which multiples of seven or numbers containing “7” digits are avoided when people are counting numbers clockwise or counter clockwise.

experience (though people never make it explicit). When one pours a cup of rice wine or beer down his throat, he feels that he is “burning his heart” (*shaoxin*, 烧心, physiological pain from oesophagus or stomach). Yet the symbolic meaning of such behaviour rests in the very uneasiness: it shows a willingness to sacrifice for one’s brothers, and it is further associated with the *yiqi*, the spirit of honour, which I will discuss later.

Usually, having consumed a certain amount of beer or wine, the toasting becomes more casual and less structured and a rule of equality begins to apply, reaching a phase of “*communitas*” as Turner (1974) would call it. As he put it, “during the liminal phase in a ritual performance all are treated equally, deprived of all distinguishing characteristics of social structure, constituting ‘a community or comity of comrades and not a structure of hierarchically arrayed positions’” (Turner 1974). In this phase, each should tune up with every other man in consuming equal quantity of beer or wine, and they may count the number of empty bottles next to the feet of their opponent in case the latter has urged them to drink too much. In addition, having had endless toasts and penalties, each is happy to be recognised by each other, a recognition they can rarely find on other occasions. Meanwhile, as the willingness to compete is diluted in such camaraderie, the macho masks men wear during everyday life are stripped away, giving way to complaints, cheap shots and lamentation. A sense of being common—commonly experiencing hard lives and suffering—surfaces in this stage.

Getting back to Douglas' distinction of the world as it is and the world as ideal, the *communitas* that features equality, common fate and mutual recognition is ideal in two regards, and each world has meanings only in relation to each other. First, the world constructed is ideal as opposed to the cold, indifferent reality facing individuals. Secondly, if we see drinking as a prelude for men's relationship, the masculinity (particularly the self-forthrightness) and mutual commitment are subject to future tests and trials. On the one hand, keeping promises on basis of their sense of common fate allows vendors to initiate many other interactions, such as introducing jobs to each other, bargaining collectively against vegetable and fish providers, helping each other in everyday business and protecting each other's fortune in an emergency. On the other, there are occasions when such promises are betrayed and when relationships are broken. Then people would think the drinking as merely ideal, if illusionary, from a hindsight perspective.

The extent to which one can reflect upon the relations between the two worlds distinguishes two types of men, one being immature, thoughtless and daredevil, and the other being mature and sophisticated. If one takes the *communitas* formed during drinking as absolute and long-lasting, or he is somehow "intoxicated" by the ego boosted by mutual-recognition, promises, compliments and unconditional sharing, he is fixated by the pleasure from drinking unless he realises that his brothers are merely "friends of wine and meat" (*jiurou pengyou*). After the relocation in 2012, Little Zhang, a young man and neighbour to Little Yin,

complained to me that although he had brothered Little Yin, the latter still managed to invade his business space by treacherous means. “*I won’t believe him anymore*”, remarked Little Zhang, “*he is not reliable at critical moments*”. Upon hearing his complaint, Fat Man suggested that Little Zhang learn from experience, because Little Yin was only a “*friend of wine and meat*” to Little Zhang.

Local terms reveal the transition from a gullible relational masculinity to a more conservative and sophisticated one. In local terms, a man grows from a “*little rod (xiao ganzi in which ganzi hints at penis)*” to “*old rod (lao ganzi)*” or from someone who is “*tender (nen)*” to a veteran in the so-called *Rivers and Lakes Society (lao jianghu)*. A veteran in rivers and lakes is double-minded. While he is able to enjoy the warmth and brotherhood brought by drinking, he sees into the instrumental relationship among people. After all, vendors are businessmen, not brothers. In this train of thought, wine and banquet is a tool to develop business ties, and men are never overwhelmed by the chemical effect of the wine.

Consider the case of the transfer of cooking technique from Han to Little Yin. Little Yin would like to learn how to barbeque fish from Han, who had learned from Master Hu and wife. However, although Yin and Han are brothers, they are also potential business competitors. Everyday sayings suggest that “*two of a trade never agree*” (*Tonghang shi yuanjia, 同行是冤家*) and “*once an apprentice masters techniques, his Master will be starved (jiaosi tudi, e si shifu, 教死徒弟饿死师傅)*”. Thus, Han tactically

refused Little Yin's request, claiming that "I should teach you (as we are brothers), but the tuition fee I would charge is too high to be affordable". Little Yin then consults Brother Ai and Master Jin, who suggest that Yin treat Han a banquet with expensive liquors. In the end, Han still charges Little Yin some "tuition fee", but it is much less than the original amount.

Brother Lei, a former soldier and a small merchandise vendor, told me how to drink with a potential business partner and befriend brothers in the *Rivers and Lakes Society*. He said I should propose a toast in the first round of drinking by stating that I had heard about his would-be business partner for a long time, and he feels "predestined" (*yuanfen*, 缘分 or karma, a Buddhist expression) to see him in person. In the second proposal, I should state that we should have met long ago because we share many things in common, and he should look ahead into the future. In the third round, or after they have discussed business plans, I should propose a third toast that we will cooperate well so as to make big money. While the first proposal is merely a polite formula, the second and the third toasts help bring both parties closer together so that they can call each other brothers, ritualising a relationship which is conducive to business trust and commitment.

Relational masculinity for vendors also entails appropriateness in maintaining relationships among men. Unlike their fiery, daredevil young counterparts, a *veteran rivers and lakes* is less likely to offend others, in Fat man's language, by "leaving a space" (*liu yudi*) between people. Little Tian, employee of Brother Dragon (the beer distributor), once requested Fat

Man drink in one go just because he had drank the same amount after he toasted Fat Man, and he insisted so even when Fat Man refused by claiming that he had high blood pressure; otherwise the latter was not “giving face” or respecting him, said Little Tian. Infuriated, Fat Man threw away the plastic cup showing his anger (recalling what Liu did for Little Yin), for he considered Little Tian way too pushy and arrogant just because he was the beer provider. Fat Man then talked to Brother Dragon and made Little Tian apologise to him the next day. According to Fat Man, Little Tian was good by nature, but he needed to learn to respect others and “leave some space” so as not to trap himself between a rock and a hard place. *“Only if you leave space to people, will you be welcomed again once you come back to this night market (in case you leave the night market). Everyone would treat you a meal or invite you for a drink”*, said Fat Man to me.

### *Mutual-aid and Yiqi, the spirit of honour*

The third milieu where relational masculinity manifests itself is emergent situations in which unconditional mutual-aid is badly needed. The helper is regarded as having *yiqi*. A person with *yiqi* is never a “friend of wine and meat”. *Yiqi*, or having *yiqi*, is a touchstone against which brotherhood is tested. In this sense, being forthright can be seen as rehearsal of *yiqi*, which is expected in real lives.

*Yiqi* is translated as spirit of honour by Boertz (2011). He observes that “brothers” should always be generous towards each other by

adhering to *yiqi* that trumps profit. It is a defining characteristic of *River and Lake* <sup>69</sup>(江湖, *Jiang Hu*) culture, as Boretz puts it:

*Yiqi*, which can be glossed as “honour” or “righteous spirit,” implies a measure of manly courage and generally indicates acts of (or a spirit of) selfless generosity. An act is deemed honourable and righteous only if there is no ulterior motive or expectation attached. It is not the repayment of a favour, nor is it intended to incur an obligation or counter-favour. Honour entails self-limitation; sacrifice; and a postponement of personal interest, need, or desire. Honour here trumps profit (Boretz 2011, 35).

His definition of *yiqi* includes self-limitation over profit, a principle illustrated in situations where money is shown contempt and where fortunes are shared among brothers regardless of rich or poor. I will advance his argument in two directions. First, while I endorse his notion that *yiqi* manifests itself in generous behaviours, I argue that being generous is not the defining character of *yiqi*; rather, timely generosity is. In other words, *yiqi* has a temporal dimension. Being generous, in my field site, was more associated with forthrightness. Second, I will associate the construction of *yiqi* to the environment to which vendors adapt. I argue

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<sup>69</sup> We need to address the sociological aspects of *River and Lake* here. According to Shahar (2001:380), *River and Lake* is “a realm of freedom, where the laws of family, society and state no longer apply”. As Boertz (2011:35) argues, it is imagined rather than practical. Note Chinese elites also use *River and Lake*, by which they refer to a social domain far away from the imperial court or from the centre of state power. For them, river and lake, the society of ordinary people, are only places of temporary resort away from power and heavy official duties.

that the calling for *yiqi* reflects the risks that randomly occur to individuals in the urban settings. Boretz insightfully depicts *yiqi* as not the repayment of favour. More precisely, I would suggest that there is a continuum between face-related practices and *yiqi*-related practices, which I will illustrate below.

Take borrowing rice for example. Vendors cook rice beforehand, but there are often shortages of rice when one stand has many customers, which makes borrowing rice from neighbours unavoidable. Borrowing fish and other raw cooking materials is similar and perhaps matters even more. However, the neighbour can choose to give or not to give, depending on his/her relationship with the borrower. After all, the act of borrowing means the borrower is having good business so that the lender has to suppress the instinct of jealousy, unless he expects that the borrower would help him out when he is running out of cooking materials next time. Such reciprocity is phrased as giving *mianzi* to each other; a neighbour who does not “give face” to the borrower will be rejected next time.

In comparison, lending money entails similar logic but entails *yiqi* rather than *mianzi*, because it causes a high level of risk to the supplier. Helping out in fights to prevent bodily harm is a practice of *yiqi* of a higher level, for it is not only badly needed by the receiver, but also may cause a greater extent of risk to the helper. The following case exemplifies the *yiqi* of the latter kind.

It was May 2012 when I was walking eastward along the night market, and people told me that there was a fight in Eighty Thousand’s

stand. A customer said that his phone was lost in Eighty Thousand's stand, and demanded compensation. It could be extortion. One of Eighty Thousand's friends beat the customer, who then retreated to the stand of Zhuge barbeque fish, a neighbouring stand to Eighty Thousand's. I found this young man, drunk, sitting on the filthy pavement. His voice was mixed howling and sobbing, calling for assistance because he could not stand on his own feet. Zhuge's wife advised that he'd better leave, but he begged her to lift him to the rim of the pavement. The crying boy then made a phone call. "I am Little Four! I was bullied by the boss of a restaurant, come to beat them!" He then announced the location, and advised the number of people should be "as many as possible!" He then rang another number, telling the receiver that he has "deployed"<sup>70</sup> some forty gang members to the site (which was obviously an exaggeration) and requested the latter to "deploy at least ten people to the site." After the phone calls, Little Four sat at the same place waiting for his brothers, despite Zhuge's wife's complaining and urging him to leave.

In only five minutes his men arrived, headed by a stout guy with a club-style object, followed by some ten men wearing plain clothes, all rushing into the stand. Another strand of people came from the other side so that no one could escape. They identified Eighty Thousand and his family with the guidance of Mr Little Four. All the customers were frightened and left their tables. The club and fists of the mob then rained down on Eighty Thousand, on his wife, and on Eighty Thousand's father.

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<sup>70</sup> Note "deploy" (调, *diao*) is actually a military terminology as in "move a troop". It is much more exaggerated or pretentious than "call" (叫, *jiao*).

Tables were lifted over, plates slipped down and smashed onto the ground with dishes and gravy splitting everywhere. Benches, beer bottles and frying pans were grasped at hand as weapons for attack or defence by the attackers and Eighty Thousand's family members. Then, before one could utter a word, Fat Zhao, Eighty Thousand's neighbour, joined the melee with his two sons. Fat Zhao was a man of forty, chubby yet amazingly agile. He grabbed a bench and hit the tallest and strongest guy on his back (which could be fatal) so ruthlessly that one could hardly associate him with someone who had just discussed with me on how to "cultivate oneself" (*xiuyang*, 修养), a concept central to Confucian peaceful personhood. The battle lasted only a minute or two before the group withdrew to the other side of the street, with a last member slipping down onto the greasy ground but quickly got up and ran away. The raid by Little Four's fellows was successful because they smashed the stand and had the boss's family beaten. Eighty Thousand and wife disappeared, with the father moaning on the ground. However, unprepared for Fat Zhao's outflank on their back, the attackers also suffered.

In this case, not only was *yiqi* embodied by Fat Zhao, it is also an accepted social norm according to witnesses' comments. After those attackers (who the vendors called "peasant workers" and who were later proven to be migrant workers from a nearby construction site) fled to the opposite side of the street, Fat Zhao's elder son followed them alone with a bench in his hand, aiming to catch one of those thugs but lost his target. In contrast, Fat Zhao's second son later told me and several of the audience

that he slipped on the ground so he did not join the fight. However, when I reviewed the story with the audience, they thought it was merely a subtle excuse: the second son was actually less courageous than his father and elder brother.<sup>71</sup>

Without the ready action of the wife and the help of Fat Zhao, Eighty Thousand's family would have suffered. Not only were cooking equipment smashed, but the wife was badly injured so the whole family had to stop working for two weeks.

Fat Zhao was thought of as righteous or having *yiqi* by many because he helped Eighty Thousand in an emergency unconditionally. Yet he alluded to me that Eighty Thousand did not give the residual vegetables and meats to him (Eighty Thousand stopped working for two weeks afterwards so the raw materials would go off in a few days); instead Eighty Thousand gave them to Han, a person not involved in this event. As I have analysed, this was an effort to build connections with people with powerful connections. Nevertheless, Fat Zhao's complaint shows that even *yiqi* people are caught between calculations and altruism.

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<sup>71</sup> Ironically, whilst women are largely excluded from public displays of virility and courageous which are considered manly, their bravery excelled men's. Eighty Thousand fled to an alley across the street, but his wife had bitten one man's hand, scratched another man's face and captured a suspect before the police arrived at the scene. People said that she protected his restaurant as if a hen protects her chicken. Indeed, when I saw her at the scene, she was short-breathed, grabbed the man firmly, with blood shedding from her forehead that obscured her eyesight and stained a large bloc of her T-shirt above her chest. The man's shirt was twisted by her so firmly that it was nearly taken off from his torso. He claimed himself to be innocent and was just a passer-by, but the wife insisted that he was at the same table with the young man (Little Four) and conspired by calling people and left quickly before the raid. She was right.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have characterised masculinities from three angles, the discursive, the bodily and the relational. They are not independent of each other but weave into an intricacy of life streams of extraordinary (such as fighting and drinking) and ordinary (such as business activities). In this regard, such categorisation is somewhat arbitrary and thus only has analytical value.

In summary, men advocate sincerity and look down upon instrumentality, even when they fight for their interests; they strive for *mianzi*, the status and prestige and defend their *lian* using force when dishonoured. Such prioritising of using force, as I argued with regard to bodily masculinity, can be seen as internalised aggression in adapting to the fickle business and living environment that is lacking of proper arbitration, justice or moral gaze. Therefore, a “might makes right” rule permeates *Society*, feeding on and even intensifying the riskiness of the environs, particularly when the overall resources become scarce (for instance during relocation). The environs have dual impact on individuals in shaping their connections. On the one hand, people seek brotherhood, belonging and warmth (as seen in drinking); they also long for an ethos of *yiqi* and friends with *yiqi*. On the other hand, their friends and friendship are continuously subject to trials appertaining to practical considerations. In this regard, individuals of *Society* dwell in a pendulous state between trusting and distrusting others, navigating between an idealised and a practical world in their outbound journey.

## Chapter 6

# Conjugal masculinity: Inadequacy and excess

In this chapter, I ask what constitutes the conjugal masculinity of the migrant vendors in their urban lives. By conjugal masculinity I mean manhood manifested in men's connections to the other gender at both performative and practical levels. Drawing on my observations and voices from both unmarried and married men, I take up the question in several spheres: peer's circle, the context of emerging digital information and communication technologies (ICTs), and the stage of street business lives.

My point of departure is scholarly writings on contemporary Chinese families and romance in both rural and urban settings. Yan Yunxiang (2003), for instance, has noticed significant transformations that deviate from patrilineal institutions. In his *Private Life under Socialism*, he proposes that the conjugal relationship has replaced the patriarchal relationship as the central axis of the Chinese family (Yan 2003, 109). Happiness in family life largely depends on the conjugal relationship, and Chinese villagers frequently express their feelings and love using their own words (Yan 2003). Yan (2009) also observes that in rural areas the emphasis of kinship ties has been expanded from agnatic to bilateral, which he attributes to the rise of the market and migration.

However, in reviewing Yan's work, Li Zhang (2005) reminds us that the "triumph of conjugal power" could not be generalised to other areas of China and to migrants. Indeed, *getihu*, the self-employed population with urban or rural *hukou*, has particular difficulties as far as gender relations are concerned. According to John Osburg (2013, 6), self-employed entrepreneurs were looked down upon by most urban Chinese with suspicion and disdain up until the early 1990s regardless of their urban or rural identities. Carolyn Hsu (2006) observes that the stigma continues to disadvantage the urban self-employed group in the marriage market in Harbin, a northern China city in the 2000s. While entrepreneurs are considered to be most attractive bachelors, self-employed *getihu* are seen as uncultured, lacking *suzhi* or even conflated with ex-felons (Hsu 2006).

Economically speaking, household production requires coordination of a couple. Li Zhang (2001) focuses on the labour division of Wenzhou migrant private entrepreneurs. Even though she observes exploitation of wives by their husbands through discursive spatial segregation, which confines wives and female migrant workers to the household (Zhang 2001, 115-136), she does not indicate that husbands and wives can run their businesses independently. Historical analysis of petite bourgeoisie in nineteenth century Europe, though distant in space and time, provides other points of reference. According to Geoffrey Crossick and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt (2013), the centrality of family was the defining character of petit-bourgeois families because the family embraced a wide range of functions and dimensions (*ibid.*, 87-111). The working space and domestic

space overlapped amongst shopkeepers and artisans (ibid., 90-93). The household structure was also flexible to incorporate servants, children and apprentices when more labour was needed (ibid., 99-107). And the shopkeepers and artisans tended to marry earlier than other occupational groups. However, despite socio-economic imperatives that made the family the centrepiece of petite bourgeoisie lifestyle and a moral frontier, shopkeepers and artisans maintained wide connections with the outside world. Besides, the intensity of their workload did not guarantee a warm family life. The home was at best a venue of “protective domesticity” (ibid., 108).

Drawing upon the above literature, this chapter examines the interactional and dramaturgical aspects of the conjugal masculinity. It also aims to postulate the form of conjugal masculinity regardless of age differences, marital status and contingencies of performances. In other words, I seek the ideal against which most of my informants measure up and perform their gender connections. I argue that on the one hand unmarried men experience an intense inadequacy in their gender relationships. This inadequacy finds expression through a piece of Internet slang *diaosi* (literally penis hair), which carries a sense of erotic frustration and inadequacy, because they lack the necessary capital in the marriage market in the urban settings. On the other hand, married men speak of their marriage as if they are bound in chains, and some of them bear a nonchalant or even misogynistic attitude towards their wives. But such downplaying and exclusion of women arguably serves a dramaturgical

purpose to perform when maintaining masculinity in petite bourgeoisie worlds.

This chapter is divided into two parts, focusing on unmarried migrant men and married ones respectively. In the first part, I present the notion of *diaosi*, trace its word origins and its spread over the Internet, and then examine how ICTs (Internet Computing Technologies) enact and contribute to the development of intimate relations of young male migrants as well as how they eventually find their partners. In the second part, I examine the way married vendors perform their conjugal masculinity. Taking the two groups together, I argue that although desire for partnership by the unmarried and seeing marriage as excessive by the married men seems contradictory, both groups present themselves as self-reliant, autonomous and as a source of economic value to the other gender. This conjugal masculinity underlies their displays in different spheres.

### **The *diaosi* discourse:**

#### **Internet, sexuality and consumerism**

The first group I investigate are single young vendors in the night market. In chapter 2 I discussed how some youth move from their hometowns to factories or service sectors in the cities. They venture into the business world either because of their ambitions or because self-employment serves as an alternative to factory lives. If they gain stable revenue, they may settle in the night market and become full-time businessmen.

Wen and his fellows are such young men. They were in their early twenties, from different places and had travelled and worked in many

places as factory workers, construction workers, direct sale agents, and automobile technicians. Four of them worked in a nearby café during day time, and the fifth in a nearby factory. They sold some electric toys when they were off work, displaying them on a cloth laid on the ground. What captured my attention was that they derided themselves as *diaosi* when I asked about their earnings. The term indicated their relatively meagre income in that context, but it literally meant *penis hair*. Why did they use this erotic, derogatory term to refer to their economic condition?



Figure 6.1: Prototype of *diaosi*

The Chinese reads: I love Internet games and DOTA<sup>72</sup>; I love web surfing, but love lewd ideas (YY, or Korean jokes) even more; I do not have much money, nor do I have a sense of existence; I do not have a girlfriend; I am a superb player in video games but have nothing in reality; I am a video game player and I am a *diaosi*.

*Diaosi* is actually Internet slang, and the *diaosi* identity is a youth subculture shaped by Internet and media influence. The term explicitly expresses undisguised sexual desire, the lack of means to realise it, and the concomitant class antagonism.

Initially, *diaosi* was coined in an online forum of fans of a former soccer player Yi (Figure 6.1) in 2010. Yi's fans, many of them Internet

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<sup>72</sup> DOTA is abbreviation for Defense of the Ancients (DotA), a multiplayer online battle arena mod video game.

users, called themselves *Yi-si* (毅丝), with the word *si* as part of the transliteration of *fans*. In a dispute with another online video game community, Yi's membership were disparaged as *diao-si* (屌丝) in which the *diao*, literally penis, meant little worth or arrogance (similar to "cocky" in English). However, Yi's membership incorporated the term and identified with it. The compound word *diaosi* was soon rendered as *penis hair* by many more Internet users, because the polysemic character *si* (丝) can also mean hair-like object.

When the word spread over the Internet, netizens created even more vocabulary associated with the word *diaosi*, attaching connotations of sex and class to it. The *diaosi* is personified as any young man who is "short, poor and ugly" (*ai, qiong and cuo, 矮穷挫*). When a *diaosi* communicates with a "goddess" (*nvshen, 女神*), a socially desirable woman who is "white, rich and beautiful" (*Bai, fu and mei, 白富美*), he behaves clumsily, knowing that the goddess belongs with the ideal man who is "tall, rich and handsome" (*gao, fu and shuai, 高富帅*). According to these abbreviations, the possession of wealth (*fu*, rich) is associated with gendered bodily features of men (tall and handsome) and women (white and beautiful) of a higher class, while *diaosi* with less money and bodily attractiveness lie at the lower end of the dating market. *Diaosi* is deemed a pitiful onlooker when the "tall, rich and handsome" is having sex with the "white rich and beautiful"; he is a loser and suffers from sexual exclusion.

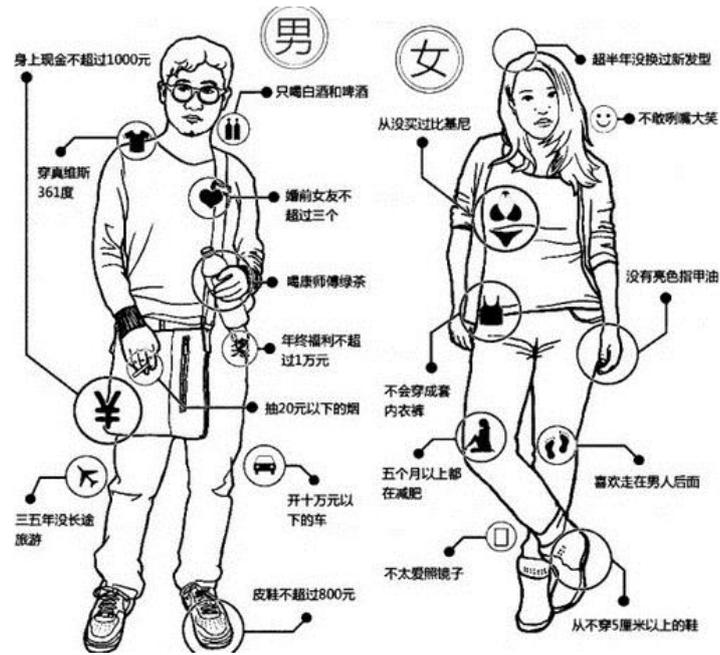


Figure 6.2: Criteria for male/female *diaosi*.

Then the word was widely spread by Internet media. Lisa Rofel (2007) has argued that “consumption is about embodiment, embodying a new self” in the post socialist China, and “a properly cosmopolitan self is supposed to be desirous and this desire is supposed to be open and unconstrained” with regard to “sex, consumption of various sorts” (Rofel 2007, 118). If the *diaosi* has sexual and class meanings, the prototypes of *diaosi* (Figure 6.2) on a major portal website<sup>73</sup> show that it has encoded consumerism in its later development. The description reads:

1) Man (labels counter clockwise): he carries less than 1000 yuan in his purse; wears jeanswest® or 361®.<sup>74</sup> He has not travelled in the past 3-5 years. He wears shoes worth less than 800 yuan. His car is less than 100,000 yuan. The cigarettes he

<sup>73</sup> The website ([www.qq.com](http://www.qq.com)) ranks second in China and 8<sup>th</sup> globally in 2015 according to Alexa ranking.

<sup>74</sup> A second-tier sportswear brand.

smokes are less than 20 yuan a pack. His annual bonus is less than 10,000 yuan. He drinks MasterKong® bottled green tea.<sup>75</sup> He has less than three girlfriends before marriage, and he only drinks rice wine or beer. 2) Woman (counter clockwise): she never wears bikini or set underwear. She has been losing weight for more than five months and seldom looks at herself in the mirror. She never wears shoes with heels higher than 5 cm, and tends to fall behind males when walking together. She doesn't wear nail polish and dares not to grin broadly. Her hairstyle hasn't changed for more than six months.

The iconography reveals the effects of a capitalist modernity which homogenises male and female consumers while simultaneously producing changes and differences within each gender (Lo 2010). Here, *diaosi* links gender relations with consumption patterns of both men and women though each gender is assigned with different types of commodity goods, that is, the number of girlfriends one could have is juxtaposed with the brands he consumes and women's criteria are associated with body weight and clothes that mark femininity. The iconography further reflects a sense of lack or inferiority in terms of consumption.

Notably, the inferior social status conveyed by *diaosi* seems to have replaced the discourse of *suzhi* of young rural migrants. *Suzhi*, literally human quality, has referred to the innate and nurtured physical, psychological, intellectual, moral, and ideological qualities of human

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<sup>75</sup> A very common brand.

bodies and their conduct since the 1980s (Jacka 2009). Andrew Kipnis (2006) argues that those of "high" *suzhi* are seen as deserving more income, power and status than those of "low" *suzhi*. Ann Anagnost (2004) suggests that the nascent middle class learns to consume appropriately to "participate in a highly coded realm of social distinctions" that construct their bodies, while migrant girls pursue commodities that can mark them as city girls (Anagnost 2004).

Unlike *suzhi* discourse, the state plays no role in discussion of *diaosi*. In fact, the epithet met strong criticism in the *People's Daily*, a mainstream and party-endorsed newspaper<sup>76</sup> in November 2012, demonstrated the term's unofficial origins. Chronologically, the denouncing of *diaosi* by *People's Daily* came immediately after the screening of a comedy series "Diors man" (i.e., *diaosi man* with a bourgeois transliteration) modelled after its German counterpart *Knallerfrauen* (which was referred to as "Diors lady" in Chinese) on another portal website in October 2012. In the editorial of *People's Daily*, "*diaosi mentality*" was listed along with other social evils such as "*anxieties with regard to wealth distribution (rich-poor gap) and environment deterioration, competition of family background, extreme events (disruptive protests) and collective resistance in a 'sensitive era'*". However, considering the fact that the term *diaosi* had been widely known by 2012, *People's Daily* has had little impact in deterring its popularisation. On the one hand, the anonymity of web users allows naked sexual desire to be expressed without social sanctions or a sense of shame

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<sup>76</sup> See <http://cpc.people.com.cn/18/n/2012/1103/c351073-19483801.html>. Access date: 6 April, 2015.

(Giese 2003). On the other hand, the introduction of Internet technologies, especially web 2.0,<sup>77</sup> has facilitated the formation of identities and the creation of neologisms to make these identities. Therefore, it seems that the Internet as a fast-paced technological innovation outruns authoritarian control. One of the corollaries is that a young migrant is less likely to admit that he lacks *suzhi* or human quality; but he is likely to acknowledge that he is a *diaosi*.

### ***ICTs consumption and romance expression***

A clarification has to be made, though. Now the term *diaosi* on the Internet refer to two groups: urban young white-collars such as IT technicians and young migrants from villages and towns. The descriptions of the man and woman (Figure 6.2) seem to better represent the first group comparing themselves to people much richer than themselves rather than my informants whose incomes and expenditures are much lower.<sup>78</sup> However, since my informants have identified with *diaosi*, it is necessary to understand how consumerism impacts their lives and gender identities.

The consumption of ICTs has expanded their repertoire of romantic desire while intensifying their sense of inadequacy. *Diaosi* bore an imprint

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<sup>77</sup> Web 2.0 describes web sites that use technology beyond the static pages of earlier web sites. Websites using web 2.0 include social networking sites, blogs, wikis, folksonomies, video sharing sites, hosted services, web applications, etc. See Wikipedia term.

<sup>78</sup> The internet business may have popularised the eye-catching term through Internet Marketing. Indeed, there has already market differentiation targeting at the *diaosi* group. To the extent that the criteria are much higher than these of my informant, for instance my informants do not have cars, nor do they wear a pair of shoes more than 800 yuan, my informants cannot even be counted as a *diaosi*. Furthermore, *diaosi* has evolved to a self-deriding label of the middle class or even rich people, pop stars or opinion leaders, who use the label to narrow the social distance between them and lower class audiences.

of consumerism already, for it is invented by online game players. However, while the Internet provides an image of *diaosi* or a heuristic device for our understanding of unmarried young men, there are surely discrepancies between subject positions and experiences. Jacka (2015, 11-16) argues that subjects can eschew certain subject positions that are invidious to them, or choose from other subject positions that are advantageous to them; only those who are caught in a situation where every subject position available is marginalised identify with negative labels. How do my informants internalise, resist, appropriate, or counter-signify the invidious meaning *diaosi* carries in certain life tasks, particularly in courtship? In the following I will explore three major domains where ICTs are consumed: the internet café, internet mobile phone, and social network software and instant messengers including QQ and Wechat.

If one walks into an Internet café in this region or elsewhere in towns and cities, one will find that it is dominated by teens and young migrant men who play video games just as the prototypical *diaosi* (Figure 6.1) depicts. My young friends are no exception. The most often played games are *League of Legends*, a multiplayer online battle video game and *Counter-strike*, a shooter game that requires corporation between players. The online games they played were actually pirate versions with the servers installed by the internet cafés to attract those who cannot afford playing online games on official servers. Unlike official versions, the rules of these pirate games are reset in a way that one's hero can upgrade more rapidly

and get more precious artefacts when the hero kills monsters, thereby providing more instant gratification to the player. By combining better graphics and more realistic characters, these games produce a psychological addiction. According to the “hostess” (manager) of the Internet café, a young man would only give up playing online games when he gets a girlfriend. Nevertheless, she has witnessed a few couples break up just because of the boyfriend’s addiction to video games.

Rangswamy and Cutrell (2012) observe that Indian low-income youth take enthusiastically to the mobile Internet but restrict their use to the realm of entertainment. My informants show great interest in upgrading the functions of their Internet mobiles, downloading free games, and putting more expensive items such as laptops in their future shopping plans. They do learn skills when they surf the internet, and one of them has almost become a technical guru, avidly teaching his friends how to block potential adware once they have downloaded free games. Nevertheless, the expertise does not necessarily empower them in developing intimate relationships with women.

However, despite the condition of *diaosi* caused by addiction to online video games, ICTs provides a technical solution to offset this inadequacy. Almost every young man has instant messengers such as QQ<sup>79</sup> and Wechat installed on his internet mobile. Both the QQ and Wechat have

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<sup>79</sup> QQ is based on ICQ (which means *I seek you*) technique invented by four Israeli youths in 1996. The technique spread to China in 1998 and was localised by a company in Shenzhen. By 2013 QQ claims an active user population of 500 million, that is, nearly every web user had a QQ account. With the popularising of mobile access to the web, QQ became a major application in smart phones. For the internet and web mobile phone development in China, see the annual report by CINIC (China Internet Network Information centre ) <http://www.cnnic.cn/gywm/xwzx/rdxx/rdxx/201307/W020130717431425500791.pdf>

built-in blogs where users can display their photos or write personal diaries and allow comments, functioning as social network software. And many items they post are about romance. In this regard, the Internet does expand the public sphere of intimacy among young men and women. As early as the 1990s, Yan observed that young rural women desired young men with the ability to “talk”, by which they meant both a general willingness to talk in public and in private occasions in flirting and speaking romance (Yan 2003). If talking forms a starting point of romance, then the popularisation of mobile Internet devices has made possible the expression of romance in a larger scale.

Anne McLaren (2007) observes that in online marriage games people may develop emotional ties even when they haven’t met. The participants in web interactions can be deeply emotionally involved, although they may assume few responsibilities. Yet she says little about the forms of romance expression. The personal QQ blogs of my informants and their instant status<sup>80</sup> show that both genders, and particularly women, tend to post articles lamenting or addressing the topic of relationships with refined sentiments as well as various tips or strategies to win another’s love. These articles are followed by comments from their friends or by a simple “agree” mark, implying the Internet is an active space to learn and share how to express love. However, these articles are often not personal expressions, but rather copied and circulated from other websites. Thus, the platform offered by QQ space more resembles a classroom where

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<sup>80</sup> “Instant status” is a functional module of QQ. It is comparable to “what’s in your mind” dialogue box of facebook. One may update his or her status instantly by inputting, for example, “I am get bored” or personal tenets such as “life is too short to be serious”.

“textbooks” about romance are learned by young Internet users collectively.

In Chinese culture, there are many ideological structures that define one’s personhood as in relation to others but not in one’s own right. They are arguably revamped in the consumption of the Internet and ICTs. As far as the contents on QQ blogs are concerned, a mood of self-pity or loneliness dominates. Confucianism has some influence in that it defines one’s identity in relations; that is, the individual is and should be always a part of a whole, whether the whole is the family, kinship ties or friends. As a consequence, when young men leave home behind and are leading a drifting life, the status of being alone turns to a kind of nostalgia or even trauma-like sentiment that needs to be cured by regaining personhood through relationships. This may explain why lovers today still call each other “elder brother” and “younger sister”. The appellations are expressions of those who seek to restore a feeling of family warmth.

Not only Confucian influence, but Buddhist concepts such Karma (*yuan fen*, 缘分) or predestined lot also justifies bonds between lovers. Originally, karma refers to the primary and auxiliary factors that explain people’s connections in an *ad hoc* manner, but it gains different connotations in love affairs. When lovers feel a liking to each other, they often claim that the attraction stems from years of relationship in their previous lives. When they are about to terminate a relationship, it is because the karma accumulated through cultivation has been used up.

I argue that this cognitive approach to relationships fits a social milieu in which one is less dependent on the introduction by a third party (such as a matchmaker) to seek a partner as commonly practiced in rural settings. There is less certainty when love is sought among strangers. Why it is me that is chosen? Why is it you that I choose? Why do we break up? The notion of Karma has been revamped not only as kind of cultural attribution but also an aesthetic problematic in this regard. By the same token, exotic, modern or pseudo-scientific measurements such as compatibility of blood types, star signs and personality are also popular on QQ blogs, all of which serve as means of self-divination through which certitude is sought. The visual aspect of the social network applications may have amplified the sentiment as well. For instance, the start-up image of Wechat is a person who stands on the horizon and faces the enormous “blue marble” of the earth (see Figure 6.3). Hanging on the night sky and tangent to the horizon, the gigantic area of the earth creates an ambivalence in which it is simultaneously near and far, contrasting to the infinitesimal silhouette of the person. It is evocative of loneliness and a desire to be connected in this world.



Figure 6.3: Wechat start-up image

Then, to what extent have ICT technologies empowered young men in building their intimate relationships? Certainly, the technology has partially replaced the roles of parents and that of matchmakers, granting more autonomy to users. Many young men search for girls according to a certain age or sex criteria via QQ. The function of Wechat is even powerful. When the GPS location is enabled, one can search and add strangers of geographical proximity (within two kilometres, for example) using a “people nearby” function of Wechat. Nonetheless, the gender ratio in the searched result is disproportional with men far outnumbering women, meaning men are more active using this technique.

However, among the young migrants I met during fieldwork, most find their partners through face-to-face encounters rather than through ICTs. For instance, a young restaurateur, JR Liu, met his girlfriend when

he was invited by his former colleagues for a meal at the canteen of a Korean company in the development zone. He was queuing in the line and noticed the girl. It happened that she spoke the same dialect of his home county, which served as a good excuse for JR Liu to invite her to join the meal. They exchanged their QQ and phone numbers, and she finally became his girlfriend. JR Zou, a shoe vendor, met her boyfriend, now her husband, when she was a beer salesperson and he was her customer. The reason she chose him was because she saw him fight dauntlessly. She thought she could be protected by him.

I suggest that the difference of efficacy between online and offline means of courtship is explained by women's criteria. I discover that a "sense of security" (*anquan gan*) is crucial to girls when they decide whether to accept or refuse a potential relationship. Their sense of security derives from geographical closeness of native place, such as in the case of JR Liu and her girlfriend; it also reflects the need for protection of young women in tough urban settings. It can also mean trustworthiness. Hui, a small commodity vendor, met her first boyfriend online who is from a near native place. However, they broke up because she knew from the cousin of her boyfriend that her boyfriend had never told his parents that he was in a relationship. Internet romance does not bring any sense of security to women. According to several migrant women, using "people nearby" function only reflects a man's desire for romantic adventure. Some young men also acknowledge this, referring to the usage of the function as simply "for fun".

Yan (2003) observed that pre-marital sex is tolerated in rural settings. Nevertheless, he argues that it was “the commitment to marriage, together with the social charter of the engagement ritual that legitimises the young couple's sexual intimacy” (Yan 2003, 72). This rule applies to migrant men in the cities as well.

The economic basis for marriage is increasingly gauged by car and property ownership. In a conversation among the five young men who sold small merchandise, the one who had been to Zhejiang province told me he could never make sense of some young people, that is, typical “tall-rich-handsome” guys, owning brand cars as expensive as 17 million (he knows the exact price), which may take him several lives to earn. Another man seriously discussed with me about the feasibility of obtaining a Maserati. Although worth several million dollars, he perceived it as “common” in some coastal cities.

Lisa Rofel argues that consumption enables a more cosmopolitan person because by embracing consumerism, one can make claims about transcendence of place (Rofel 2007, 29). As I have argued in chapter 2, young men move and change workplaces and even occupations. These shifts are often involuntary, but the movement is often rendered by the subject as a voluntary adventure. In the same way, the places to which one travels marks one’s prestige among peers. The flashier world one has seen the more one feels superior to his peers.

Contrary to the sense of inadequacy expressed on private Wechat blogs, young men perform their virility in the peer group. In another

conversation, the five vendors compared the age at which they lost their virginity, the earlier the better. One man in this group was reluctant to tell his friends so he was derided by the others, who doubted if he had ever had sex. They encouraged him to do so by “getting drunk and firing it out”, that is, to experience sex by visiting a brothel or sauna room.

But the consumption of sex also leads to a sense of insignificance and nihilism. The young man told me that he often asked himself “*Am I seeking pleasure for just a few seconds trembling after hard work? Is such life worth living?*” This remark, once again, echoes a *diaosi* identity of inadequacy as he lacks a serious relationship.

### ***Blind date, an end to inadequacy***

Jacka, Kipnis, and Sargeson (2013) argue that proper employment or clear work positions in young men and women’s lives continue to be important and a conservative criteria for getting married. When both conditions are lacking, blind dates arranged by their left-behind parents regain popularity among many of my informants after they have roamed the city for some time.

Many young men tell me that they will go back to their home villages and marry a girl by arranged marriage with the help of their parents, simply because they could not afford an apartment on their own in cities. After all, according to my estimate based on a wedding party I attended in a village in 2012, the construction of a new house costs around 150,000

*yuan* and gifts for the bride another 50,000 *yuan*, totalling 200,000 *yuan*.<sup>81</sup> As vendors' jobs are not seen as proper jobs or stable employment, house ownership continues to be a requirement for these men to get married. However, some married vendors joked that the younger generation become increasingly picky because they benchmark their candidates against urban standards. The nick name "squad leader" or "platoon leader" is given to young men who have had blind dates arranged with as many girls as the number of soldiers in a squad (10) or in a platoon (30).

There are very few cases where men choose to lead a single life. Brother Du, a book vendor in his forties, remained single and led a carefree life. He often went hiking by himself to a nearby mountain on weekends—but he was the only one in the night market to do so. According to him, he had a vagrant life when he was a teenager. He once loved a girl in his native village, but she was too young (16 years old) and he was poor, so he was warned off by her parents before he left the village for a better life. He now keeps dating women via QQ and has had sex with several of them. He does not have a plan for saving for a future marriage, but he assists one of his nephews with university tuition fees, hoping that

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<sup>81</sup> It is 200 times an estimated monthly saving of 1,000 *yuan*, which has to be earned in 16 years by a single young man who could earn 3,000 *yuan* a month working in a factory. Therefore, it is very common for the young men to rely on their parents finally.

To make sense of the barrier of *hukou*, it is useful to calculate the affordability of an apartment in this region. According to advertisements provided by real estate agencies, apartments with limited property rights (*xiao chanquan fang*, 小产权房) with a size of about 60 square meters are priced around 520,000 *yuan*. On basis of a loan amount 70%, that is, one has to pay 150,000 *yuan* for the down payment, while his monthly payment is 2,700 *yuan* and 4,100 *yuan* based on a 10-year or 20-year loan term. As said, the outdoor restaurant run by a couple has revenue of some 6,000 – 9,000 *yuan*, that is, 3,000 – 4,500 *yuan*/person which is a bit higher than the factory salary of 3000 *yuan*/person. Based on this calculation, the barrier to overcome for an urban household is still very high for a young couple, and the situation can be more tenuous if expenditure on their perspective children is included.

his nephew would take care of him when he gets old. Brother Du justified his lack of desire for a permanent partner as follows: if a man was to live 80 years, the one who spends first 60 years working hard would enjoy his last 20 years endowed by his offspring. He would rather enjoy life for the first 60 years and live in solitude for the last 20 years. According to such calculation, remaining single and carefree was not a bad deal.

Getting married defines a complete manhood and maturity, implying that a man is no longer “immature”. This rite of passage introduces abrupt discontinuations of men’s behavior. Playing video games after marriage is thus considered immature. JR Cui, a small commodity vendor, tells me that he deleted all the female contacts in his QQ when he married.

## **Performing conjugal ties**

Paradoxically, I observe that men no longer desire women after they get married. Instead they refer to their marriages as chains that limited their freedom. In extreme cases, husbands and wives bicker and even fight with each other, usually ending up with the husband posing a nonchalant attitude towards his cursing wife. When I hang out with outdoor restaurant bosses, many of them lectured me that the marital life is not desirable at all. “*You will understand one day*”, they often ended the dialogues this way. I argue that many of men’s words and their conduct can be described as misogynistic, and they must be understood in terms of performance of the conjugal masculinity by husbands in the “street theatre”.

## ***The proud husband***

One night, Han's wife Rui came to Fat Man's wife during a business interval and told the latter that she was just abused by Han in front of their customers. Feeling wronged by her husband and in anguish, Rui raised her voice, "*Did I treat you mother [Han's mother] badly? Did I serve her with only rice porridge? Did you catch me with another man in bed? Why treat me badly?*" Her sentimental remarks were echoed by Fat Man's wife, Aunt Zhang, who exchanged her recent experience. When Aunt Zhang charged five *yuan* on a box of take-away rice as requested by an old customer, her husband chided her, "*You have shit in your brain, don't you?*"

David Gilmore's notion of misogyny is illuminating for our understanding of the conjugal masculinity in question. In his discussion of women-hating in his *Misogyny: The Male Malady*, Gilmore (2009, 99) attributes misogyny to the tenuous positions that men occupy within the social structure. In patrilineal and patrilocal arrangements, men wish to keep the agnates together in place and through time to augment sentimental solidarity and to maintain both genealogical continuity and material corporacy. In-marrying wives are alien to the agnate ties, are easily distrusted and scapegoated by men because they represent the interests of their natal families and their own children.

Nevertheless, having noticed that the most misogynic men are those who desire and lavish attention on women, and that Victorian nuclear families and other-worldly Buddhists also exhibit similar misogyny though not living in patrilocal societies (for instance Melanesia and Amazon

societies), Gilmore (ibid., 202-218) goes on to argue that the misogyny is a fundamental psychodynamic phenomenon which cannot be explained by socio-political factors nor by simple hatred or wish to dominate. Rather, men experience a tension-ridden state. They desire women because women provide not only sexual pleasure but also food, tenderness, nurturing and heirs; they nonetheless have to repress such needs or their internal “femininity” to maintain a manly self-image. Men actually suffer from this repression and blame their sufferings on women.

While I do not intend to follow Gilmore’s psychodynamic reading of misogynistic behaviour, I take his structural approach. I argue that conjugal masculinity should be understood in the conjuncture of working place and domestic domain. The public working place is the “front region” in which the husband performs conjugal masculinity and his wife is expected to play a supporting role with other men or customers as audience, using Erving Goffman’s (1959) terms. In other cases, the husband and his male friends are performers and the wife is an “outsider”. By region Goffman (1959, 66) means “any place that is bounded to some degree by barriers to perception”, and by “front region” he refers to the place where the performance is given (ibid., 66). Disputes between husbands and wives are disruptive to the performance delivered by men as it indicates his failure of him in keeping his wife as a team-mate. And the domestic domain and men’s circle where the events are mulled over constitutes the back regions of the said performance. By back region or backstage Goffman means “a place, relative to a given performance, where

the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course” (Goffman 1959, 69).

As I have demonstrated in the previous chapter (chapter 5), patrilineal kin groups are replaced by quasi-agnate ties among outdoor restaurant bosses. Such ties are created from ritualistic occasions such as drinking. Yet the solidarity is put to the test in subsequent interactions amongst men. The morality men extolls is *yiqi*, literally spirit of honour, which guarantees mutual safety in street lives and helps reduce business risks against market fluctuation. Fighting for each other glorifies *yiqi*. Borrowing and lending money among men is another common practice that embodies *yiqi*.

Such fraternal ties are so pervasive and strong that they arguably shape the relationship between husbands and wives. For instance, men often kept their borrowing and lending secret from their wives, for wives who are responsible for other domestic expenditures such as that on their children may feel unhappy if a man lends money to his friend. In this regard, being taciturn is a kind of silent performance by husbands in front of their wives. Men are often caught between the household expenditure and their brotherly ties, and the stringent economic conditions make them more vulnerable to pressures from both sides. In order to maintain an image of able resource provider in domestic lives, the husbands tend to form teams with each other. Another reason is that wives are excluded or not interested in joining the drinking activities with men so that they know less about men’s relationships that mix reciprocity and patronage,

and husbands do not bother to let their wives know the situations. This ignorance on the side of the wives leads to the following type of disruption among husband and wife.

Brother Xu and his wife run an outdoor restaurant with his cousin, JR Xu and his wife. Brother Xu and his wife left the night market for Hangzhou (a city not far from Nanjing) in March, 2012 to join the business of his native brother. Unfortunately, his native brother pre-paid a large amount of rent to his landlord, which was embezzled by the landlord, who fled with the money. Brother Xu's bankrupted native brother could no longer support Brother Xu so Brother Xu returned to the night market, taking over the stand of his cousin JR Xu who had moved to another province after the relocation of the night market in June 2012.

Starting almost from scratch, Brother Xu and wife resorted to their old friend Fat Man, who kindly gave the couple a used oven and cooking utensils. And with the help of his friend, Fat Man found a storehouse as small as a pigeon hole but for free in the nearby food market for Brother Xu and his wife. As a tacit form of reciprocity, Brother Xu recommended the barbecue fish produced by Fat Man to their own customers. Later on, his wife planned to cook crayfish when she saw that the dish sold well in other outdoor restaurants. But the wife's initiative was denied by Brother Xu. A squabble broke out between the couple, and Brother Xu's wife felt wronged by his husband who unreasonably abused her as too simple-minded.

In this story, Brother Xu could not explicitly discuss the exchange of interests between Brother Xu and Fat Man, because it would remove the glamour of sentiments of the brotherhood, reducing it to only a matter of money. In the domestic domain, to disclose his economic reliance on another man would damage a man's status (*mianzi*) and self-dignity (*lian*) in front of his wife. Men are obliged to protect each other's self-dignity, thus making Brother Xu's wife a confused outsider. That Brother Xu called her simple-minded can be seen as an ingrained cultural attribution to account for the disruption but also his defensive measure to reiterate his loyalty to Fat Man.

Another way for husbands to perform their conjugal masculinity involves customers as audience or supporting roles. The husband of a household is called a "boss" (*laoban*) by his customers. Since the word boss implies an autonomous, rich and generous person, husbands have plenty of reason to perform the role. In most cases a boss's reputation is that of his wife and family. For instance, Fat Man was famous for his introduction of barbeque fish to the night market which outcompeted the once popular fish fillet with pickled vegetable soup, and he made a big fortune owing to this "revolutionary" technique. However, as Aunt Zhang (his wife) told me in private, it was actually she who learned the skills of barbeque fish and taught it to Fat Man. That she did not make it public, according to Aunt Zhang, was to maintain Fat Man's face (*mianzi*) in line with the social normalcy by which men are more clever than women. In addition, more than half of the outdoor restaurants use husbands'

surnames, names, nicknames or native places in their store signs, for instance *Fat Man's* and *Little Sichuan's* of Han's family (Han is from Sichuan province), there is no store sign that specifically uses the wife's name, surname, or native place.

Face (*mianzi*) can be also earned through showing generosity to others. However, being generous requires giving economic resources to others. I argue that the *mianzi* or respect a man can earn is necessarily constrained by his economic capacities. Furthermore, wives may refuse to act as a team-mate to maintain her husband's *mianzi* when her contribution to the household economy is not recognised by her husband or the family.

The case of Han and Rui illustrates this dynamic. Like other couples, they work almost seven days a week. In the morning, Rui or Han buy raw materials in the nearby market around 10:00 a.m. Then Rui prepares the raw materials and sorts them in dish plates or into foam boxes. Then they load everything onto the vehicles and have breakfast around 2:00 p.m. Around 4:30 p.m., the couple drag the trolley out of the back street, and unload gas cylinders, cooking utensils, seasonings, dishes for display, a water bucket, another bucket full of washed bowls and other equipment. They then set up canopies, hang the light bulbs under the canopies and arrange wires to reach the extension cord nailed down to pavement trees (which can be very dangerous especially in summer showers, but no one cares). Then Rui takes out dish plates covered by plastic wraps and stretches the wraps tightly so that the dishes shine on the display board.

Meanwhile, Han begins some preparation such as oil frying peanuts and other common appetisers, and waiting for the first wave of customers.



Figure 6.4: Household production.

Having had laid out the outdoor restaurant together, the husband is moving a water bucket with his wife. They wake up around 12:00 p.m. and collect their stands from 2:00 a.m. to 8 a.m., depending on their daily turnover.

Throughout his working time, Han holds a scorching frying wok and shakes it to heat the raw materials evenly, and keeps an eye on the road traffic and greets some old customers passing by. Even though he is confined in a space no more than one square metre, he does not stand still but has to move to and fro very frequently. The bottoms of his shoes are soaked in the greasy and filthy waste water. Therefore, small commodity vendors avoid selling shoes to outdoor restaurant bosses. JR Zhou, a shoe vendor, tells me that outdoor restaurant bosses often blame them for providing shoes of inferior quality and ask for more discounts. Her business wisdom attests to the heavy workload of a boss.

The wife's work is no less light than her husband. When Han is cooking, Rui introduces the guests to tables, laying chopsticks and bowls

and taking note of the ordered dishes. She has to cut raw materials during intervals if the stored quantity is insufficient, while responding in time to impatient customers. After customers finish their meals, she settles the bills, cleans the tables, washes dish plates and stacks them into the bowl bucket. During business intervals or when there are only one or two tables of customers, the couple may have a second meal together, and Han often leaves his stand to chat with his friends elsewhere, leaving the wife catering to the remaining customers. At midnight or in the early morning, Rui and Han collect all the equipment in the hour before they go home. Sometimes they end their work as late as 8 a.m., just before city police begin to patrol on the street.

As I have depicted above, the hostess's workload is actually on par with the boss's. In this type of household economy, she functions as a restaurant manager and waitress at the same time, though her work is still deemed auxiliary. While Han often takes pride in his being able to "*fry a thousand dishes in one night*", his wife's catering of a thousand customers is less credited though equally important to the household production. Husbands are seen as being in charge of the business, which is in line with the traditional notion that men work outside and take charge while women work "inside" and are responsible for domestic issues (*nan zhu wai, nü zhu nei*). Thus, even though the spatial order has reversed in the outdoor restaurant—now the husband is confined to the open kitchen and the wife is catering for customers—the husband is nevertheless deemed to be in charge.

When catering for customers, Rui often does them a favour by knocking off the odd shillings in the hope that they would choose her restaurant next time or “take care” (*zhaogu*) of her business. Some customers take advantages of the reciprocal formula, requesting more discount by stressing that they had taken care of the restaurateurs many times; and they would not return to the restaurant should they not be granted more discount. Often times, by insisting that she is doing “*small capital business*” (*xiaoben shengyi*), Rui is able to turn down the customer without offending him. If the customer persists, she may offer him a smaller discount. However, Han is prompt to show his generosity by asking the wife to knock it off, thereby earning his own *face*. As a result, Rui feels not only deprived of autonomy in decision-making, particularly when she has already made a concession, but also that her husband’s intervention implicitly derogates her as parsimonious. It also makes her lose confidence when bargaining with customers. Rui finally burst out into a quarrel with Han when they were doing business, and came to Fat Man’s wife for comfort just as I introduced in the beginning of this section. According to Rui, Han should have endorsed her position, for instance, by promising to add more food in the dishes next time or by simply presenting a cigarette to the customer. But he had never done so.

Sometimes the men and women collectively define the role of husbands as master and main contributor. Another night, I heard Rui shout at Han and curse him in front of their customers. To pacify Rui, their neighbours Eighty Thousand’s wife and Aunt Zhang pull Rui to the dark

side across the street so as not to disturb the customers. In other words, they leave the “front stage” where Rui’s behaviour was considered inappropriate. I follow them. The wife of Eighty Thousand, to my surprise, does not take side with Rui but rather defends Han. “*Think about his holding the frying wok for hours – without him you could not do the business*”. Later, Han’s friend Ning came across the street to appease Rui. “*It’s ok. Stop crying! Don’t cry in front of the guests. Harmony brings fortune. It is not good for your businesses.*” At the stand, Han’s customers comfort Han in a different manner. “*It’s ok, women are just like that. They are just irrational.*”

Men control several forms of backstage. The first backstage is the men’s circle. It seems that the more a man conforms inwardly to his pals, the more he shows contempt for women. Their socialising is not necessarily for economic imperatives but for recognition or sympathy from each other. Drinking or playing mah-jong together serves as asylum for men escaping from life pressure and women’s garrulity. To be sure, a few of them even quote the saying that “*Brothers are hands and women are clothes*” (*xiongdi ru shouzu, nüren ru yifu*), meaning the women are dispensable. But no one would divorce his wife for a blind belief in the epithet. Although we may argue that having a wife provides the fundamental sense of stability and the completeness of manhood, as Gilmore would suggest, no man would express it publicly, because such expression impairs conjugal masculinity.

But men also take advantage of women's lower status. Since a proud man is less likely to be parsimonious than a woman in public, if a customer owes Fat Man for example, some money, he would ask his wife Aunt Zhang to bargain with the customer. And he shared this "secret" with me. *"Don't you know? These Niangmen'er (a slightly derogative term of women) can be useful when they speak."*

Another factor that shapes men's attitudes is the reconstituted patrilocality that often occurs in cities. I came across two common types of families, namely the nuclear family and stem family. A couple may start their business in a city and leave their children behind. If their economic conditions permit, they will next take their children with them and have them enrolled in nearby schools. Still, for most restaurateurs, they cannot perform day-to-day care of their children, as school hours differ from working hours. There are also safety concerns. Many parents report that their kids have to cross No.2 road to have dinner at their stalls, and the road is notorious for car accidents. So they often ask the husband's parents to live with them in the city and help with the children.

Such help can cause problems, however. The tension between the in-marrying wife and her mother-in-law is structural. Father-in-law and daughter-in-law do not have much conflict because they tend to avoid each other in daily lives. A common sense held by ordinary people is that both the mother and the wife are competing for the loyalty and attention of the son-cum-husband. While the mother demands filial piety from his son, the

wife calls for conjugal satisfaction from her husband. The conflicts between the wife and the mother are thus inevitable.

Not all the patrilocal families have such confrontations. It depends on the roles a man assumes and whether he has wisdom to moderate potential conflicts. Advisedly, a man had better perfunctorily listen to complaints from his mother and his wife without passing the messages to each other, according to JR Xu. His mother often complains that his wife, cute and small, is not ideal labour in the family. But if he takes side with his mother, JR Xu says, his wife would be marginalised in the family.

Different to JR Xu, Han's attitude towards his wife is influenced by both his brothers and mother. When I pay a visit to Han's residence, Han's mother complains that she does the housecleaning which she assumes to be the responsibility of her daughter-in-law, who gets up very late (the young couple work very late till early morning, though). She could have enjoyed her remaining years in comfort or taking care of her grandsons as she would expect, but she is now working hard for her son's family. In a banquet held at Han's place, the old lady repeats this complaint to Brother Ai when Rui is absent. Her complaint is immediately endorsed by Brother Ai, who is a smart fence sitter in social occasions such as banquets. He tells the old lady that she is not doing an easy job, because she has also to take care of her two grandchildren for Rui. "*I've never seen mother-in-law [as industrious] as you!*" says Brother Ai. While the mother is pleased by Brother Ai's compliment, Han is awkwardly silent. A few days later, Han beats Rui at home.

Some women invite their natal family members to the city to actively change the composition of backstage. Whyte (1979) suggests that women may use affinal kin or the natal family to win disputes in their marriage, thus counterbalancing the gender inequality brought by patrilocal institutions. Yan (2009) observed that in rural areas the emphasis of kinship ties has been expanded from agnatic to bilateral, and he attributes it to the rise of the market. Yet his conclusion is made with those who come back from cities, rather than a direct observation of the migratory lives in the city. I argue that sometimes the strengthening of affinal ties has less to do with marketization *per se* than with balancing power relations in patrilocality restored in cities.

Before the 2012 spring festival, Rui insisted to go back to her natal village in Ningxia province (northwest China). She hadn't been back to her parents for five years since the birth of her second son. She pleaded to her husband Han, but Han was not interested in her plan. She then tried to buy a ticket through the online ticket system. However, her limited IT skills prevented her from doing so. She then went to the railway station but the tickets had all been sold out. Finally, she resorted to one of Han's powerful friend who had connections to the ticket office and succeeded. After the spring festival, she returned to Nanjing with her brother and sister-in-law and rented a place for their short stay and urged them to find a job. With the help of Fat Man, her brother found a job as a welder and his wife was enrolled in a nearby factory. They also helped with the business when they

were off work, and took care of Han and Rui's two kids, which used to be part of the job of Han's parents.

This triggered another crisis when the brother and his wife stayed one night at Han's place when Han and Rui were away. The mother-in-law complained that one "*would rather host a coffin inside one's hall than hosting a young couple (ning ting sang, bu ting shuang)*", a proverb underpinned by principle of residential segregation. The reason seemed farfetched and led to another round of quarrel between Han and Rui, ending up with Rui renting a new apartment for her and Han, and subletting one room to her brother and sister-in-law. Rui thus finally got rid of the "suffocating atmosphere" where she lived with her mother-in-law.

### ***Public display of sexuality***

Another element of an ideal man involves his sexuality. Sexuality is no longer a taboo in public talk in the night market. It finds expressions through the foods vendors promote to customers as aphrodisiacs. They include barbeque mutton, mutton soup, and mutton kidney in particular because kidney is believed to be the seed of the body's *Yin* and *Yang*, that is, the seed of energy for organs, which include sexual function according to traditional Chinese medicine. Notably the Chinese word for aphrodisiac, namely Yang-invigorating substance (*Zhuang yang*), does not carry an association with Yin, the female and the recessive, and there is no food sold in the night market specifically promoted as good for women.

Likewise, conjugal contentment is often reduced to conjugal sexuality, and the conjugal sexuality of men is depicted as aggressive and dominant. For instance, when a vendor complains that his wife nags too much, Pebble Zhang suggests that he “discipline” his wife when the vendor goes home. The “discipline” does not mean sadomasochism; it rather implies that men see women desire sex but are less likely to express it. Although women can nag for different reasons, nagging as kind of “pathology” can be treated using sex as a panacea.

The same logic applies when men often joke, even in front of their wives, by proposing to visit a brothel together. Such expression can be a way to construct brotherhood through sexuality. As a popular proverb reveals, brotherhood is tested through “*shouldering guns, dividing spoils, and visiting brothels together.*”<sup>82</sup> In other words, visiting a brothel means both parties are witnessing each other being morally low, so that they can trip up each other, thus they must be loyal to each other. On the other hand, such expression also reflects a desire for wealth, as Brother Xu jokes by proposing that he and I pay a visit to a nearby Dignified Hot Spring Commerce Chamber to enjoy the most expensive sex service.

Of course wives can take such jokes as performance that they are never realised. However, it is perhaps men’s ongoing reference to escorts for various reasons that trigger suspicions in their wives. Fat Man used to be a truck driver, and his wife refers to truck drivers as the most morally decadent job because they stop in small towns where it is easy to sauna

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<sup>82</sup> In Chinese *Yiqi kang guo qiang, yiqi fenguo zang, yiqi piaoguo chang* (一起扛过枪，一起分过赃，一起嫖过娼).

rooms or prostitutes. To prevent Fat Man becoming such a morally corrupt man, she put their baby son in the passenger seat when Fat Men went out, so he was unable to leave his son. One day they had a quarrel. Fat Man asked for some money from his wife but did not return home until late. Upset and feeling sad, his wife told me that she is all fine with Fat Man visiting a brothel, as long as he pays the tuition fee for their children. Fortunately the husband came back home and told his wife that he was settling bill with a fish supplier and just had some beer with him.

## **Conclusion**

The conjugal masculinity of migrant men has undergone transformation in the process of migration. My major findings are three.

First, both married and unmarried men exhibit reliance on peers, and such reliance has both economic and affective meanings which impact on the conjugal masculinity being performed. For the unmarried men, the brotherly ties encourage transgressions such as visiting prostitutes. The married men rely heavily on other men who provide not only economic support but also mutual recognition of each other as autonomous, self-reliant and resource provider in conjugal relationships.

Second, migration is the primary force that remoulds and amplifies conjugal masculinity. It puts constraints on both unmarried single men and husbands. For the unmarried young men, the drifting life and low economic conditions do not equip them with a “sense of security” to find potential partners, but rather intensify their sense of inadequacy. For the

married vendors, the efforts required to sustain the household economy, such as the maintenance of customer relations and stem family, cause disruptions among husbands and wives when men are trying to maintain their conjugal masculinity in front of their brothers and customers.

Third, the city as site of consumption has a dual impact. While young men consume ICTs for entertainment purposes, they also try to expand their chances in looking for a partner. However, mobile SNS and instant messengers do not contribute concretely to their successes, but only amplify the sense of loneliness which looms large in their migratory lives. Suffering from extended periods of loneliness, a few young men try commercial sex, which in turn aggravates their erotic frustration and sense of being unfulfilled. Married men refer to consuming prostitute only for fun, performing their virility and aspirations to be rich in front of their audience.

To sum up, the conjugal masculinity described in this chapter embodies men's aspiration to be autonomous and able husbands in their conjugal relationship. Such idealised roles in their marital lives are at stake, because their low socio-economic statuses continuously dampen their hopes and cause the disruptions of their performances.

## Chapter 7

# Conclusions: A migrant petite bourgeoisie subject and sociality?

In December 2014, I paid another short visit to the new night market and met many of my old friends. The four lanes of restaurants were roofed with tin-plate as if they had become indoor restaurants. When asked about their businesses after the relocation in 2012, Fat Man told me that the turnover was still lower than that before the relocation, even though his place was very close to the entrance of the new market. Han's business was good, and he bought a new apartment and posted piles of RMB on his wechat blog when signing the property contract, as if showing his achievement. Sister Sun's business was poor because her stand was at the end of the night market, and she did not have strong connections to move her stands closer to the market entrance as a few other vendors did. However, many close informants had left, and they did not leave phone numbers with those who had stayed. If everything went well, Brother Xu had plans to open a lottery / gambling station or Karaoke house in Yunnan province where he married his second wife. JR Liu was said to return to a factory in the nearby development zone (industrial park). Old Wang and I kept in touch from time to time, but he was abroad in Hanoi, Vietnam because his stand was also at the end of the night market. He was

investigating the local seafood market and planning to establish a seafood processing workshop even though he does not speak English or Vietnamese.

That night Fat Man treated me to a banquet and several other vendors joined. Afterwards, I noted a new, spacious restaurant seated in front of Fat Man's. Fat Man told me that it was run by someone who had connections with the nearby resettled Community (*shequ*), and that the owner had a fight with the new beer patron, Yang, the god-son of Director Zhang from the ex-EMO (see chapter 3). After the blood-shed, Yang was arrested by the public security and was still in prison. Overall, the new night market was less prosperous but safer than before, according to Fat Man.

These new pieces of information did not radically alter my conclusions regarding the formation of migrant vendors and their business environs. I have shown the regional heterogeneity and different institutional origins of migrant vendors and have demonstrated that they were from late-socialist villages and towns or laid off workers from the reformed urban industry system (chapter 2). Their occupational trajectories sometimes involved shifts in class identity such as JR Liu's returning to factory life and Wen (chapter 6) becoming a white-collar worker when market turnover fell. Furthermore, subjects in their prime ages expected their children to seek white-collar careers so as to avoid market risks and instability. But few of the children I knew were able to satisfy their parents' ambitions. Vendors are also characterised by

geographical mobility and the night market is a semi-open space to the floating population. The blurring boundaries of class, geography and heterogeneous social formation, however, are typical of the petite bourgeoisie according to Geoffrey Crossick and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt (2013, 8).

What distinguishes my subjects from the working class with rural background or migrant workers, according to a Weberian definition, is their self-employment and access to the market. Another Weberian scholar has found the influence of the petite bourgeoisie was “too weak for them to be able to impose themselves politically in the face of powerful urban elites and bureaucratic states” (Crossick and Haupt 2013, 220). Similarly, I have analysed the weak positions of migrant vendors in the market within the power structure of contemporary urban politics. This structure reflects the “urban transformation” depicted by You-tien Hsing (2010) and the process Li Zhang (2010) has termed “accumulation by displacement”. I have examined these processes as part of the forces behind the relocations in 2011 and 2012 respectively. While the urban transformation has conferred opportunities for the migrant vendors to accumulate wealth through hard work, exploiting the values created by the migrant vendors, it has also caused instabilities and risks to vendors particularly when they were expelled or when the night market was relocated by local government (chapter 4). The displacement that accompanies urban development was made at the cost of marginalised groups, and the vendors in the night market were no exception as they

were forcibly to be relocated to places of low land value. In everyday business lives, different strands of local hooligans who emerged as a result of urban transformation have posed threats to these “outsiders”, too, blatantly threatening vendors’ survival in the market which these hooligans patronise.

The external threats on migrant vendors have shaped the sociality of migrant vendors in two ways. On the one hand, I have observed individualisation manifested in their standing vis-à-vis the inhospitable environ or *Society (shehui)*, ingrained distrust towards strangers and bad-mouthing of competitors’ products. Squabbles and even fights amongst vendors stand on this extreme. On the other hand, the external economic pressures and isolation felt by vendors pushed them to build various connections within neighbourhood in the form of business reciprocity, valorisation of “*yiqi*” (spirits of honour) among men vendors as well as solidarity among marginalised vendors against the government’s unfair decisions. Thus, unlike historical accounts of petite bourgeoisie in which shopkeepers and craftsmen are labelled as autonomous producers who embraced frugality, hard work and family values, all of the abovementioned connections of my informants at different levels go beyond family and kinship domain and played important roles in their survival and business successes. The cohesions with varying degrees and of different kinds can be categorised into three levels, namely everyday/interpersonal level, masculine level and political level, each featuring distinct scales, temporality and *modus operandi*. There is also a

fourth type of sociality, namely familial relations or gendered connections, which are less “social” at first glance but have performative meanings. Since I have depicted the four layers of sociality and dynamics in previous chapters, I will offer a synthesis in the following.

The political cohesion is noteworthy in that politics could accentuate the identity of migrant vendors as a unity when external attention is bestowed upon them. Nevertheless, vendors’ open protest against CALE and the EMO (chapter 4) was cautiously framed by participants as a protest by “disadvantaged outsiders” who were unable to be incorporated into the local, urban economy rather than advancing their own claims forthrightly as a class. Apparently, the framing was made out of strategic considerations and a fear of government retribution. Nonetheless, although vendors achieved their goals, the leader and core members had to hide their knowledge and tactics, making them ineluctable and vague to the others. Therefore, the vendors remained amorphous in structure and vague in terms of their political identity. Furthermore, they rarely referred to their political cohesion as *guanxi*. Rather, the rebellious spirit against social injustice was personified or attributed to personal charisma. As many participants told me, the leader in this first protest was an “awesome (*lihai*) old *Rivers and Lakes Society*” (*laojianghu*), indicating that the hero’s experience, clairvoyance and merits counted rather than vendors’ own capability of self-organisation.

Aside from such critical moments when the solidarity of migrant vendors flashes, at the level of everyday sociality, *guanxi* or relational

thinking is pervasive amongst migrant vendors in the chaotic *Society*. *Guanxi* practices are produced in a number of settings, annexing individual vendors to customers, their neighbours, other vendors, and to their patrons in the local community and even to local hooligans (or “ghosts” in local terms). If *guanxi* connections in rural settings can create a *guanxi* subject (Kipnis 1997), what kind of subject can be created from making such connections in the night market? In reviewing Kipnis’ work, Yunxiang Yan (2000) argues that a person “can hardly construct his or her self/subjectivity by engaging in instrumental exchanges of gifts and favours,” because “in urban settings during recent decades, *guanxi* often evolves into a network of short-term, instrumental connections”. While Yan rightly pointed out the mobile bedrock of the *guanxi* network in the urban setting, the subject making of migrant vendors calls for careful examination.

Following the dramaturgical approach of Erving Goffman (1959), *guanxi* practices can be defined as performances on “front stages”. In my case the front stage performances include presenting gifts and money to the local powerful people, socialising with other vendors, and constructing *guanxi* with local hooligans. These three types of *guanxi* have to be understood through performative meanings, and one thing in common is the legitimation of *guanxi* by human sentiments (*ganqing*). Such legitimation of *ganqing* was carefully manipulated by the performer in front of an audience including the powerful people (chapter 2 and chapter 4), and the “ghosts” (chapter 3) and other vendors (chapter 5) so that the

performers can obtain premium stands, avoid risk and gain mutual-aid. The performances in this regard are instrumental to the individual's goals. The negative side, however, is that some performances are regarded as scam, extortion and manipulations.

But the performers are not a fixed "cast". In a network which consists of familiar strangers, an individual vendor takes turns acting as performer, audience and outsider. He and his performances are subject to interpretations and judgment by others. For instance, an EMO officer or powerful person is discussed by ordinary people, and a vendor who claims *yiqi* is judged by other vendors if he really possesses *yiqi*. In light of this, when taking Goffman's notion of "region" to analyse ongoing *guanxi* practices, the opposite side to front stage or front region is not a clear-cut "back stage" defined as "a place, relative to a given performance, where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course" (Goffman 1959, 69), but a stage with a different audience where a performance of *guanxi* is referred to and made sense of by a third person. Oftentimes, performances that are glossed over by *ganqing* (human sentiments) when delivered are interpreted by others as lack of authentic *ganqing*. To offset the negative consequences which disrupt one's performance, performers have to invest more effort in long-term interactions on the front stage to prove their authenticity. As a consequence, a world of strangers is humanised by *ganqing*. And a performer can obtain a sense of community, in vendors' own word, turning a strange place full of strangers (*rensheng di bushu*) to a familiar

world. Long-term efforts invested in relationship can transform a vicious ghost to a friend (for instance the case of Fat Man and Ning in chapter 3), or a patron to an information provider who reduces business risks for the client (for instance the case of JR Cui in chapter 4), and through long-term observation one can identify a self-claimed *yiqi* person as an imposter (for instance the case of JR Yin in chapter 5). As far as masculinity is concerned, the anxiety to claim the authenticity of brotherhood has to stand the test of reality. As far as customer relationships are concerned, an experienced vendor persuades another one to give up an idea to make fake seasonings, for the latter would lose his reputation in the long run. The saying “time reveals a person’s heart” (*rijiu jian renxin*) reveals the logic that underlies the transformation from a strangers’ society to a community in all regards.

Nevertheless, the external environs are not controlled by marginalised vendors and a real community can hardly be achieved, given the fluidity of its composition and their positions in the urban politics. Returning to the polysemic word “*hun*” (to mix, to scam, to get by or to muddle through) vendors use to refer to their existence, when one cannot prove his authenticity in a short time span and when he cannot judge the authenticity of others, the opportunistic facet of *guanxi* practices surfaces. I have analysed *having shili* (influence) and *having beijing* (background, particularly official background) as two important attributes of others on the basis of which one takes action (chapter 3), not only in front of local hooligans, but also when one performs brotherhood. To *hun* well is to be in making such discernments when one builds connections. One also has

to build connections with both good guys and “bad guys”, “laying eggs in different baskets.” Consequently one’s repertoire of *guanxi* connections can hardly bear any moral certitude. When Fat Man used tricks to reduce his competitor’s power by teaching barbeque fish techniques to the latter’s rival, he built connections with the beer distributor, another “ghost”, to strengthen his power in the market. One may argue that he was “scamming”. Nevertheless, his tactics must be seen as a necessary expediency because of the plight caused by his competitors. Therefore, if the temporality of external power structure or urban politics has any impact on the subject-making, the connotations of “*hun*” cannot be easily dismissed.

We can find many correspondences of *hun* practices to those of so-called new rich and their elite masculinity (Osburg 2013). According to John Osburg, along with government officials, the new rich “constitute an elite network whose power cannot be rooted in either the state or the market” (Osburg 2013, 59). Instead of using “entrepreneur masculinity” proposed by Li Zhang (Zhang 2001), elite masculinity captures “the convergence of the practices and ideologies of entrepreneurs and government officials”. Furthermore, the new rich also have connections with *heishehui*, mafia-like brotherhoods (Osburg 2013). *Hun* practices, performances and logic bear semblance in this regard as vendors told me that one was better to have connections to both *white ways*, the government officials or police and *dark ways*, the “ghosts” who engage in shady businesses and patronage via violence. Thus we may call such

masculinity and their belief in *guanxi* subaltern masculinity, and the only difference to the masculinity of the new rich is the less advantageous positions my informants have in *Society* and a lack of the symbols of elite masculinity such as mistresses, imported cars, and luxury brand clothing and accessories.

The family and inward family values are defining features of the petite bourgeoisie (Crossick and Haupt 2013), and the principle is true with my informants, who rest their everyday businesses on household production. I have shown that unmarried men have a sense of inadequacy, an anxiety caused by the dual forces of both family values and their marginalised status in the marriage market (see chapter 6). The women-hating attitude of married men seems to contradict the values of conjugal masculinity, but again such attitudes have to be understood in a dramaturgical sense. The conjugal masculinity husbands performed in front of customers and peers in fact reflects their reliance on these two groups and their ego-centric sense of being autonomous, self-reliant and perhaps a source provider within the domain of family. Furthermore, the husband and wife may continue their quarrels / fights when they come back to their residence, where they may reach reconciliation because the household production has to be sustained and the conjugal ties have to be maintained for the sake of their children. In comparison to other short-lived social relationships, conjugal ties endure despite difficulties. Therefore, the gendered power relations in this regard cannot be reduced

to male domination, but rather reflect a common difficult situation both men and women face as small business units in the market and in *Society*.

This study has left many questions to future studies. Methodologically speaking, this research is restricted to men, and women's roles and perspectives are less discussed. Furthermore, speaking of petite bourgeoisie sociality and subaltern masculinity here, this research is short of cross-cultural comparisons and historical insight into the history of the People's Republic of China, a history dating back to the 1950s to 1960s when small merchants and vendors were eliminated from cities through socialist transformation movement (*shehuizhuyi gaizao*). Such historical studies may illuminate the boundary-making of the socialist state throughout time. Given the ever-increasing mobility of contemporary China and the world, a final question I would like to explore in the future regards the new forms such household production will take.

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## Appendix: Chronology of the night market

The arrangement of chapters is not congruent with the timeline of events which occurred in my research. For example, Chapter four is largely based on ethnography of contentious politics in year 2012 which took place at the end of my field stay. To eliminate confusion, I list major events occurred to the night market and milestone activities of some vendors below.

2000-2010	Sunglow district government continuously relocates hundreds of thousands farmers to Y region.
2003	Several migrant vendors start their business on the No. 2 Road.
2005, second half	Eight vendors were regulated by the CALE, the city police. Fat Zhao and Master Jin were two of the eight vendors.
2008, October	More vendors agglomerated in this region. Community A took over from the CALE and delineated the business street.
2010, March	Fat Man arrived at the night market and soon started his barbecue fish business. He achieved big success in that year.
2011, March	As notified by the district government, the night market should be removed. However, Old Wang led a successful protest. The former head of EMO was removed from office by district government. In the chaotic market rearrangement, Fat Man lost his premium position to Pebble Zhang. Then rumours began to circulate among

the vendors that the night market would be relocated, owing to the 2014 Nanjing Youth Olympics.

2012, June 6 Official decision reached night market via the EMO, which requested that all the vendors attend a mobilisation assembly held by district government on 8<sup>th</sup> June.

2012, June 8-11 The relocation assembly was held by CALE and Bureau of public security on 8 June. Fat Man obtained the best place in the night market through drawing a lot. Many others were not fortunate and their businesses dropped afterwards. At midnight of June 11<sup>th</sup>, some local vendors from Community A resisted the relocation but were suppressed by the CALE.

2012, September The relocated vendors and the Realty Management Company signed contracts with a term of one year. Before that, a few vendors protested in the hope that their places could be rearranged. Unfortunately, their protest was neglected by the new market regulatory office.

2014, April Old Wang travelled to Bangkok and carried out business investigation there.