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CURATING VALUE: THE POLITICS OF LANGUAGE AND LEISURE IN HUANGSHAN, CHINA

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This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my father, Erik Ingebretson.

Table of Contents

List of Figures v

List of Tables vii

Acknowledgements viii

Abstract xii

Introduction 1

Chapter 1. Farming Under the Highrise: Mapping Huangshan 24

Chapter 2. Curating the City: Huizhou Culture and the Huizhou Woman 55

Chapter 3. W(h)ither *Huizhouhua:* Erasing Language from Culture 86

Chapter 4. "I Can't Even Read One Word:"

The (un)making of the Chinese Peasant Class 118

Chapter 5. "She Has Two Sons:" Reproducing State Discourses in Rural China 159

Chapter 6. Of Publics and Privates: the Qualia of "Quality" in a Chinese Yoga Studio 191

Conclusion 233

Appendix A: Labeled Map of Tunxi District 239

Appendix B: Images of Huangshan from "Huangshan Dialects" Documentary 240

Works Cited 242

List of Figures

Figure 1: Wall in the County Seat of She County 9

Figure 2: Anhui Province 27

Figure 3: Huangshan City 27

Figure 4: Levels of Government 28

Figure 5: Mr. O in Village with L-Villager 41

Figure 6: Map of Tunxi District 43

Figure 7: Modern Huizhou Village 66

Figure 8: Relatively Subdued Village Houses in Zhejiang 66

Figure 9: Traditional Huizhou Architecture with Horse-Head Roof 70

Figure 10: Modern Huizhou-Style Architecture 70

Figure 11: Left: The TV Hosts; Right: City Preservation Plaque on Jihong Alley No. 7 87

Figure 12: Left: Xiao Xi with Master Zhang; Center & Right: Making Month Chicken 89

Figure 13: Left: Xiao Xi with Master Zhang; Right: Month Chicken 91

Figure 14: Left: Xiao Xi photographing a traditional internal courtyard; Right: A traditional Huizhou alter with a mirror on the left, a vase on the right, and a clock in the middle 92

Figure 15: Huizhou Dialect Map 98

Figure 16: “Anhui, Xiuning, Lantian” 127

Figure 17: Lantian Village 129

Figure 18: Dialect Elicitation by Mr. Jiang 130

Figure 19: Documentary Narration with Imagery I. 135

Figure 20: Documentary Narration with Imagery II. 137

Figure 21: Socialist Core Values 152

Figure 22: Lei Feng Posters with English Translation 153

Figure 23: “Daughters are also descendants” 166

Figure 24: “Care about girls’ growth, establish a new civilizing wind”.....166

Figure 25: Labeled Map of Tunxi District.....239

Figure 26: Documentary Images.....240

List of Tables

Table 1: *Aipai* Transcript I.....87

Table 2: *Aipai* Transcript II.....88

Table 3: *Apai* Transcript III 90

Table 4: Wu's Speech 228

Table 5: Teacher Yuan's Speech 228

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[1] Names have been changed to protect identities

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates the semiotics of state power in rural China through an ethnographic and linguistic examination of state influence in the daily lives of rural Chinese women in Huangshan, Anhui Province, China. I examine how large-scale processes like urbanization, globalization, and economic development are reshaping the political economy of rural China and, by extension, altering social class and gender roles. Rapid social transformation has created a perceived crisis of values, particularly for rural women who feel that their place in society is increasingly devalued. My research shows how dialect-speaking rural Chinese seek to create and define new regimes of value vis-à-vis the state through what I term projects of "curation." Twenty-two months of fieldwork has allowed me to trace sites of value curation through seemingly unconnected and multi-scalar community and individual projects such as government tourism projects, Mandarin language promotion programs, prenatal health campaigns, and women's leisure activities. I show that it is through such projects that the state mediates daily life by redefining the conceptual and linguistic apparatuses by which people construct new value systems. It is also through such projects that ordinary Chinese work through the politics and histories of the recent past, and, by extension, negotiate visions of the future.

My work contributes to studies of language variation and change, language ideologies, and the social significance of semiotic systems more generally. How regimes of value are mobilized "on the ground"—that is, how value is made legible to oneself and others through daily life—is notoriously hard to study. By bringing the methodological toolkit of sociolinguistic analysis to the ethnographic study of rural China, I show how abstract sociological categories such as social class, regional identity, political orientation, and gender are indexed in speech, behavior, and comportment, taking on local meaning and significance often at odds with

scholarly or national assumptions. Secondly, identities are generally not static but vary with social context. By paying attention to individuals' language modulation and others' linguistic judgments in different contexts, I examine how people attempt to curate their presentation of self in the everyday, especially in domestic, putatively feminine domains that are thought to be outside the purview of the state. Finally, I show that women frequently deploy state slogans in informal conversation. This analysis of linguistic circulation and uptake allows us to move past analytic frameworks of resistance or acquiescence to show, contrary to scholarly assumptions, that the Chinese state is still deeply influential in how people construct value systems.

Introduction

To introduce this dissertation, I will take a "keyword" approach, walking the reader through my choice of each term in the title. Through unpacking each term in my title, I hope that the general concepts, theoretical approaches, and main framework of my dissertation will become clear.

Value

My dissertation starts with the phrase, "curating value." What is value, and what does it mean to curate it? I choose the term "value" precisely for its polysemy: value defines a broad spectrum of human activity and meaning, including the economic, social, moral/ethical, historical, aesthetic, and so forth. These different kinds of value cannot necessarily be completely collapsed into each other, yet I take it as a central point in my dissertation that these systems of value are not easily separated. Indeed, "it is in its slipperiness—its ability to be articulated with, and 'as', other kinds of value—that any particular form of value is socially efficacious" (Nakassis & Searle, 2013, 171). In my dissertation, I thus look at how different types of value bleed into, coarticulate, or transform into each other. For example, I show how one's moral values may be taken as indicative of one's social worth in the context of the One-Child policy; how economic value does or doesn't 'translate' into social value among women in a yoga studio; or how local officials undertake projects to turn aesthetic and cultural value into economic value.

The 'slipperiness' of value draws attention to another key quality of value that I highlight in my dissertation. While anthropologists of value have long noted that value is not reducible simply to economic exchange or exchange value (see e.g. Bohannan 1959, Eiss & Pedersen 2002, Munn 1986, Nakassis 2013, Weiner 1980), I do think that the notion of "exchange,"

broadly writ as the concept of commensuration, is fundamental to the concept of value. Value, value systems, and processes of evaluation are always inherently relational, in that they are always acts of making potentially different "things" relatable to each other. This is true in the most concrete realm of "commensurating" sheep to wheat, or sheep to money, but it is also true, as Nakassis & Searle note, in acts of making different types of value apparent 'as' other types of value. Throughout my dissertation, but particularly in chapters one and six, I show how the acts of making things "like" or "unlike" each other all must rest on processes of commensuration, as bringing things (I use 'thing' in the loosest sense, to refer to material objects but also to behaviors, demeanors, attitudes, people, and of course systems of value) onto the same plane is necessary in order to meaningfully compare them. That is, there is a difference between things being dissimilar and incommensurable. The idea of value as gaining meaning through relational difference was of course a key concept of structural linguist Ferdinand Saussure (1959). While my work is not structuralist, I draw from Saussure and others not simply the idea that value must be defined relationally, but also, on a deeper level, that the contrast between values is constitutive of meaning-making. That is, "meaning" never exists *sui generis* but is always differentially constructed and always under construction.

I draw from Saussure and Derrida also the notion that meaning is always contrastive with that which it is not, that is, meaning is found in what is absent as well as what is present. Central to Saussure's concept of meaning is the concept of paradigmatic choice: in the linguistic realm, any choice one makes (to utter a certain sound, a certain word) is always contrastive to the potential alternatives not uttered. Derrida's concept of différance too builds on this fundamental insight, that within any form of signification lies a "trace" of that which it is not (1982). This applies to regimes of value and value-making, where I show 'values' often get their particular

meaning, i.e., their social efficaciousness or salience, through the implicit present of what they are not or what else they might be. Again, while this is a general theme throughout my dissertation, this is most apparent in chapters four and five, where the paradigmatic choices in ethical value systems crystallize in opposition to other absent potentials. This contrastive notion—the idea that there are always potential alternatives, always paths not taken, will be developed further in my discussion of "politics."

A consequence of thinking about value in such a sense is that we can see that an examination of 'value' gives us fundamental insight into how people in a particular social context construct relations of similarity or difference or significance and insignificance. That is, it tells us what they find meaningful and important. It therefore also shows us how people prioritize, hierarchize, and choose. Here, we can see that "value is born out of negotiation and contestation. There is an inherently emergent and contingent quality to value" (Nakassis & Searle 172). It is these acts of negotiation and contestation that my dissertation centers in its analysis of life in rural China, as it is in these tensions that the social and political stakes are laid bare.

In their introduction to *Hau*'s 2013 special issue on value, Ton Otto and Rane Willerslev discuss two main conceptual strains of "value" present in the field of anthropology. The first shows how value is produced through exchange and is incorporated into systems of exchange, reciprocity, hierarchy and inequality. The second strain uses value as shorthand for cultural systems or worldviews. In my dissertation, I bring these two strands together, using the concept of value to show how worldviews and cultural systems become "valued" or "devalued" in an economic system of development. Willerslev writes that anthropologists rely on value as a shorthand for cultural systems or worldviews, which allows them to "compare the

incomparable." This sort of analytical and conceptual work is not simply the province of scholars. In my fieldsite, my informants were occupied with doing the same thing: figuring out how to "compare the incomparable." For the relatively undeveloped area of rural China where I conducted my fieldwork, citizens thought of as lacking in social and economic "value" (similar to the Bourdieuian social and economic capital) argued that what they saw as their rich moral and cultural values could be turned into economic value. That is, moral and cultural value could be made to be exchangeable with broadly acknowledged economic and social value.

Within the particular context of China, there are two senses of "value" that are culturally and socially specific, and a greater understanding of the particular context is necessary to understand my thesis.

First, "value" in the sense of moral values or value system in Chinese can be translated as *jiazhiguan*. In the current national Chinese discourse, there is a wide sense that China is facing a "crisis of values." As the narrative goes, Chinese society has undergone several massive upheavals since 1949. First, Maoism replaced traditional "Confucian" values that had underpinned society for several millennia with socialist values based on collectivism and equality. After the Reform and Opening movement beginning in the late 1970s, these socialist values were replaced not with a coherent ethical value system but with a practical aim of pursuing national and personal wealth. The result is that, according to the narrative, Chinese people no longer have coherent moral or ethical value systems to which society adheres. This pervasive sense of lack is coupled with increasing dissatisfaction with widespread corruption, in which political and economic elites are seen as enriching themselves at the expense of everyone else, as well as a general sense of breakdown of social trust that is magnified by a series of widely-publicized scandals, from counterfeit goods to contaminated food. In 2012, President Xi

Jinping introduced a new state campaign to promote "socialist core values" (*shehuizhuyi hexin jiazhiguan*). This campaign has several purposes. First, it is designed to combat growing discontent with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which was widely suspected of corrupt and uninterested in the general welfare. Secondly, the campaign re-centers the CCP as providing a moral vanguard, much as it was thought to have done during the Maoist period in the popular imagination. The campaign also marked a return to large-scale nation-building projects which has re-placed the Party at the center of projects to shape the lives of ordinary Chinese citizens in ways large and small (Day 2013).

An Chinese term in wide use, closely related to value, that is central to my dissertation is *suzhi*. *Suzhi*, a term which translates loosely to the English "quality," has been written about extensively in the anthropological literature in China (see: Anagnost 2004, Kipnis 2006, 2007, Yan 2003). Originally a somewhat obscure term used in contrast with *suyang* to indicate a person's natural qualities as opposed to cultivated qualities in philosophical discussions of nature vs. nurture, the meaning of *suzhi* underwent a radical transformation in the last 30 years of the 20th century, when *suzhi* became a key concept in Chinese family planning policies in the late 1970s (Anagnost 2004, Kipnis 2006). Adopting a rhetoric of 'quality' over 'quantity,' the One-Child policy promoted limited birth as a way to raise the *suzhi* or "human quality" of the Chinese population, which through its sheer numbers was seen as excessive and disorderly (*luan*). By the mid-1980s, *suzhi*, or lack thereof, was a nebulous but ubiquitous term used to explain the shortcomings of Chinese people on an individual or national basis, and to explain, justify, but also simultaneously remedy vast inequalities between rich/poor, urban/rural, Eastern/Western China. A national concern over "quality" (*suzhi*) links anxieties over values to larger discourses on production, reproduction, and China's place in a global system of economic development.

Even Chinese who do not support state reproductive policies express concern over the *suzhi* of the Chinese populace and China's ability to compete in a world of high-value commodity production. While *suzhi* is not generally translated as "value" per se, its meaning of "high-quality" is inseparable from concerns or judgments and relative evaluation of social and economic value. Although *suzhi* is not necessarily a gendered term, concerns over *suzhi* with its explicit link to reproduction almost always take on a gendered lens. As mothers, and thus "reproducers" of the Chinese nation, women, and rural women in particular, are at the center of national anxiety over China's "low-quality" populace (Anagnost 2004, Hershatter 2007, Greenhalgh 2008). Anhui Province in particular is nationally famous for being poor and producing "low-quality" inhabitants. Given this context, concerns about *suzhi* were pervasive and acutely felt for the rural women with whom I spent most of my time.

Curation

To curate something—a city, a museum, a person, or group of people—is to cross-modally assemble and arrange "things," such as activities, demeanors, discourses, or material objects, so as to enact their value in ways legible to others. The success of a project of curation relies on mutual recognition, or the mutual legibility of value, and hence on agreement of its politics and histories. My term "project of curation" is not unrelated to Nakassis and Searle's concept of "social value projects," which they define as "social actors' reflexive attempts to inter-subjectively construct value with the aim of achieving particular goals" (171). Although fundamentally similar, my choice of 'curation' draws particular attention to the notion of legibility: Huangshanese argued that their value, in the sense of abstract worth, should be legible to outsiders, be they cosmopolitan Chinese, foreign anthropologists, or each other, through the cross-modal assemblage and display of "things," including material objects, demeanors, beliefs,

written texts, etc. Projects of curation are always undertaken aspirationally, as they are oriented towards producing a particular uptake in the imagined audience. Through the concept of curation, I bring together disparate projects across many scales, from national language standardization projects through regional tourist projects through individual leisure projects to show how these seemingly disparate projects share similar logics and require similar acts of commensuration.

Politics

Value-systems do not exist *sui generis*, but rather come attached with histories and politics. To explore projects of curation, then, is also to examine the complex political and social landscapes that ordinary Chinese must navigate in daily life. A key part of my dissertation project is to show how, by drawing on different regimes of value tied to different historical periods, peasants, particularly rural women, resist state and popular media attempts to devalue them. These processes of valuation and evaluation are therefore always implicitly or explicitly political acts, something that should become apparent in the course of my dissertation.

The current political situation of China is an inheritance of China's "long twentieth century" (Hershatter 2007). The massive social changes Chinese society has undergone within living memory carry with them legacies of complicated political discourses that exist, palimpsest-like, in contemporary China. To think about inheritance, I draw on Derrida:

> An inheritance is never gathered together, it is never one with itself. Its presumed unity, if there is one, can consist only in the injunction to reaffirm by choosing. "One must" means one must filter, Sift, criticize, one must sort out several different possibles that inhabit the same injunction. And inhabit it in a contradictory fashion around a secret. If the readability of a legacy were given, natural, transparent, univocal, if it did not call for and at the same time defy interpretation, we would never have anything to inherit from it (Derrida 1994, 18).

The metaphor of "sifting" calls to mind the sense of sorting through layers. Here, the palimpsest nature of Chinese history, where layers of political pasts and their attendant value systems only partially or semi-transparently cover each other, mean that the alternatives, the "different possibles" are 'present' or available to Chinese people in a way that is not always the case elsewhere. I do not mean to suggest that people elsewhere are not engaging in this same process, but rather in modern China the immediacy of the options and the thin unevenness of the layers give rise to a sense of "jumbledness" that makes ordering or ranking different value systems particularly challenging. The result is that histories or past value systems are not so clearly in the past, but rather appear to coexist and comingle in a way that they might not in some place where a sense of a set social or historical order has enjoyed more consensus. In my dissertation, I show that Huangshanese are actively engaging in this 'sifting' process as they negotiate or contest how to remember the past and thus, how to think about or live in the present and forge a future. This is particularly clear in chapter four, where I show how both local bureaucrats and elderly peasants contest local government policies through claims that both represent the true values of the CCP.

In Huangshan, the idea of palimpsest is particularly apropos, as layers of the Chinese past are physically present on the walls of old buildings that, unlike the rest of China, were never torn down or rebuilt. In Huangshan there still exists the physical, visible reminders of China's histories on the walls of Ming and Qing dynasty buildings, where faded pre-revolutionary agricultural calendars are still barely visible under the red paint of Revolutionary war slogans, themselves covered by Cultural Revolution slogans in a slightly brighter red. On top of these, you might even find hung a red banner with white text exhorting current inhabitants to construct a civilized village through caring for girls. Although the material presence of layers of history

quite literally laminated on top of each other does not necessarily directly translate into behaviors or beliefs, I believe that the living within a daily visible reminder of the past does little to help people forget pasts that they would like to remember.

Figure 1: Wall in the county seat of She County (photo by author)

As I show in chapter four, the presence of "different possibles," is inextricably connected with nostalgia. Nostalgia was pervasive in my fieldsite, felt by those who personally experienced the past they longed for as well as by those who hadn't. Nostalgia, as I show in chapter four, is also inherently political. Svetlana Boym writes that "[n]ostalgia is never literal, but lateral. It looks sideways…Nostalgic reconstructions are based on mimicry; the past is remade in the image of the present or a desired future, collective designs are made to resemble personal aspirations and vice versa" (2001, 416). As I observed in my fieldsite, memories of the past are

recollected to comment on the present and imagine the future. Here, if we think about nostalgia as "lateral," we might see that nostalgia is a longing for an alternate present, a "different possible" that might have come about had policy X been enacted or if policy Y had not. In this sense, nostalgia is not so much a longing for a past that happened, but a present that has not. Here I find the resonance with possible world theory of semantic modality intriguing. Semantic modality is the study of possibility and necessity, and it is the study of moral claims such as "should" or "ought." In modal logic, prepositions are thought to be true insofar as they can be mapped onto sets of possible worlds in which the preposition holds true. Modal verbs like "should" or "can" are quantifiers that select the set of possible worlds in which the proposition holds true. For example, "employees ought to wash their hands before returning to work" is true if and only if the statement holds true in every possible world for which there is such a rule. In my dissertation I am not interested in truth conditions of propositions nor in the technical details of modal logic. However, what I do think is interesting is to think about how when an elderly Chinese peasant says that officials 'ought' to behave better, she is imagining a set of possible worlds (a different possible) in which officials do behave better. Here, we can see what Boym refers to as the "virtual reality" of nostalgia. Sifting through the past, i.e., remembering and thinking through China's complex political inheritance, then, requires imagining and, for many, desiring an alternate present that would then lead to a different future.

Nostalgia, as Boym and others have pointed out, has a utopian quality to it. An imagined alternate present is not tied to the limitations of reality the way an actual lived present is. I do not want to paint an overly simple or straightforward view of this nostalgia, as it was also deeply conditioned in Huangshan by a sense of ambivalence. This ambivalence infused my experience of fieldwork and was perhaps the first thing I picked up on. In a place like Huangshan, life has

changed rapidly in even the past 15 years. Tunxi has tripled in size, infrastructural projects have radically altered the landscape and the life of those involved. At the same time, rural China has become unambiguously richer: real incomes have increased 10-fold, and the material goods such as washing machines, air conditioners and TVs once restricted to middle-class urban life are now affordable to working-class rural Chinese. People who farmed 15 years ago now work in the service industry in Tunxi, if they do not migrate to large cities. While rural Huangshanese fondly remember the 1960s and 1980s, at the same time they recognize the increasing possibilities for their children and grandchildren and the undeniable material improvement in living conditions. The result of living through such rapid social change is a deep ambivalence towards the present.

Although not precisely the same thing, this ambivalence is a corollary of what Lili Lai in *Hygiene, sociality, and culture in contemporary rural China: the uncanny new village* calls the uncanny. Lai writes about rural uncanny modernization as the hidden and "dirty" mirror image of urban modernization, as rural areas are where the undesirable byproducts of modernization, which are nevertheless necessary, are especially manifest. She chooses the Freudian concept of the uncanny,

> which, following Collins and Jervis, "suggests a fundamental indecision and obscurity or uncertainty at the heart of our ontology, our sense of time, place, and history, both personal and cultural" (2008: 2). The uncanny qualities of village life, repressed or rendered invisible in urban/modern processes, if acknowledged, would offer a challenge to consensual knowledge and experience of the rural-urban divide and urbanization/modernization in China (Lai 16).

Ambivalence too draws on a sense of indecision and uncertainty, and although my project and research focus are different from that of Lai's, I too want to draw attention to the presence of ambivalence, uncertainty, and indecision that feels pervasive in rural China even as it exists alongside strongly held explicit belief systems. I would argue too that part of this sense of

ambivalence arises from the palimpsest nature of Chinese life: as layers of pasts and their attendant value systems and "worldviews" appear to be (unevenly) simultaneously present, an ability to feel certitude about the moral and social order dissipates. For rural Chinese, Marx's statement that "all that is solid melts into air" has been their concrete lived experience as social order, kinship and village ties, modes of living, and deeply held beliefs have radically transformed multiple times since 1949. (Although as I show in my dissertation, these changes are perhaps not so complete or fundamental as they might appear). The result is not a radical jettisoning of the past but rather a continual "haunting" that underlies what I am calling the pervasive attitudes of ambivalence.

Language

In my dissertation, I approach language as an object, a site, and a method of analysis. As a formal denotational system, language was central to my study. A major component of my fieldwork was spent looking at how people used and thought about language: Mandarin promotion campaigns, including Mandarin use in institutional settings such as schools; empirical variations in language use, including code-switching between Mandarin and local Huizhou language; language ideologies; and the social significance of linguistic difference were all an explicit focus of my research. I address language as a topic most directly in my third chapter, however, my focus on language, its use and its social significance weaves its way through my dissertation more broadly. In general, I show how languages as denotational codes become valued or devalued in light of their ability to be transformed or commensurated with other forms of value. In the case of Huizhou dialects, their inability to 'translate' into economic, social, or cultural-historical value has led to their general devaluation by locals. Linguistic value also intersects with social value through the particular qualities of speech, as reflected in local

attitudes towards *tunpu*, or Tunxi-accented *Putonghua.* Rather than simply reflecting the imposition of a standard, in chapters three and six I show how local accents acquire different social meanings (positive and negative) in different social contexts, depending on a complex matrix of social qualities.

Secondly, language as communication served as a primary site of access to gaining understanding of people in my fieldsite. Speech is certainly not the only way in which people express themselves or communicate with each other, nor do I take people's speech as a transparent representation of thoughts, feelings or desires. It is, however, an extremely important mode of human expression and communication, and, importantly, it is one that I as a researcher have access to, as I cannot peer into the minds and understand the unexpressed desires of my informants. An attention to speech must of course be combined with attention to non-verbal forms of communication, such as expression, gesture, bodily orientation, and also with sensitive awareness of context. Paying close attention to what people say (or don't say) and how they say it was thus a primary method of my fieldwork. As a site of research, during my fieldwork I took many hours of field recordings. With permission, I recorded speech in natural settings. These included situations such as women's casual chatting before or after yoga classes, conversations between elderly villagers in the village where I taught English, or evening dinners with friends. I also recorded speech in more structured settings. These included formal interviews on topics of marriage, children, and general life experience that I conducted with 35 women, which lasted between twenty-five minutes to two hours; focus groups, where I asked small groups of three to ten individuals (mostly but not entirely women) collectively read and discuss *Women of China* articles written in different decades; life interviews with elderly native Huizhou-language speakers; and formal linguistic elicitation sessions such as Pear Story recordings, folktale

readings, dialect instruction sessions, and Swadesh list recordings. Only a tiny fraction of this data has made it into the dissertation in its present form, however, the vast amount of data I did collect has informed the selections on which material to present and my analysis of that material.

Finally, I employ the tools of linguistic and semiotic analysis to non-linguistic semiotic processes. Drawing on a framework of Peircean semiotic analysis, I show how regimes of value are enregistered cross-modally. Language is not apart from materiality or sensuality. The same semiotic processes that determine social significance for language and ways of speaking likewise underlie the values inhering in 'things' more generally. I demonstrate this most clearly in chapter six, where I examine how various linguistic as well as embodied and material qualities are brought together to coalesce into social types of people in the context of a yoga studio.

Leisure

If we borrow the general structuralist sense that value is tied to meaning-making (without borrowing the whole framework of binary structures organizing human thought), another way we might then think about value is through meaning-making in people's lives. In my dissertation, I take leisure to be a site where people engage in voluntary projects of meaning-making—that is, what people might colloquially refer to as giving value to their lives. Hobbies and other leisure activities are in part a way for people to give their lives a sense of purpose and themselves a sense of self-value outside of standard social hierarchies, but they also serve to reinforce these same hierarchies by positioning certain hobbies or activities as indicative of certain social types of people. Indeed, scholars of leisure have noted that leisure and consumption are inextricably linked to class and status (e.g. Bourdieu 2000, Veblen 1992). With the explosion of hobbies in rural China, I look how local class hierarchies are now being renegotiated in new spaces and in new ways with the unprecedented increase in mass leisure time. In my dissertation it becomes

clear how leisure activities or hobbies are projects of self-curation, because people undertake them not simply to "find pleasure" (*zhao le*), as my informants might say somewhat pejoratively, but in order to make and seek recognition as certain sorts of people, i.e., individuals of particular forms of social value or worth.

My interest in leisure in particular was serendipitous: I was told that the local government would assign my housing situation for the first year of my fieldwork, and the official in charge of managing my presence in Huangshan decided the best place for me to live would be in his coworker's wife's yoga studio. This cadre's decision was doubly fortuitous. Not only did it place me into an immediate network of women in the precise demographic that I wanted to study, but it drew my attention to the important role of leisure as a site where people, as individuals and groups, negotiated and performed social value. As someone very interested in "anthropology of the state" I would have never sought out a yoga studio as a site at which to conduct my fieldwork, and yet it turned out to be one of the most rich and fruitful places to examine how "the state" in subtle and explicit ways still mediated the lives of ordinary women in rural China.

Huangshan

Huangshan is a particular place that is both unique yet also representative of many of the changes happening in the area I term "ruralish" China. Ruralish China, which is typified in Tunxi District, the administrative center of Huangshan City, is a place that seems to have the characteristics of both urban and rural space. As part of a national urbanization campaign, Tunxi City is expanding outward, incorporating farmland and villages into the urban center. Displaced villagers are resettled into "new villages," suburban neighborhoods of conjoined three- or four-story houses with front courtyards that share the density of urban spaces with the size of rural houses. Over time, these villages spatially become incorporated into the city center as the city

continues to expand outward. Many of my informants lived in such "new villages," either on the outskirts or in the middle of Tunxi City. These new villages preserve the spatial and social logic of village life within the city, as villagers might grow vegetables and raise chickens in the courtyard. At the same time, the push for dense urban development means that even the townships surrounding Tunxi city are building highrises. The result is a spatial layout where high density residential and commercial zones are interspersed with farmland, including rice paddies, and farm animals like chickens and buffalo. I will expand on this much more in my first chapter, where I provide an ethnographic background on Huangshan as a place.

Huangshan, as I will develop in my dissertation, is also a place that embodies many particular contradictions: as I write in chapter two, it is an "elite backwater." It is culturally significant—Yellow Mountain has been an inspiration in Chinese art and poetry for thousands of years; Huangshan (traditionally known as Huizhou) is the ancestral homeland of famous scholars such as Zhu Xi, whose philosophy became the foundation of Chinese Confucian state orthodoxy; Huizhou merchant lineages controlled the powerful Jiangnan salt monopoly in the Ming and Qing dynasties, giving them incredible economic and political power. At the same time, the region with its mountainous terrain and lack of arable land has always been and to some extent remains a marginal backwater where most inhabitants eked out a living in grinding poverty. The result is perhaps not so much a space that was neither metropole nor periphery as a space that managed to be both: Huangshan was both center and margin at the same time. Today, local officials are grappling with a different set of contradictions. Huangshan is objectively one of the most aesthetically beautiful regions of China, where in many senses the quality of life is unparalleled: the air and water are possibly the cleanest in China;[2] the pace of life is in

[2] I was told this by a friend of mine from college who now has a PhD in ecology. He has been

comparison to urban China quite relaxed; the streets are uncrowded. At the same time, the very qualities that makes life pleasant are also signs of Huangshan's own underdevelopment according to the metrics of the Chinese state: the lack of factories or other industry to mar the pristine countryside means that wages are low and job opportunities are few; the breathtaking mountain views mean that farming is hard and strenuous. The most lucrative crop is tea, which is grown on terraced mountain slopes and requires backbreaking labor to tend to and harvest the crops. As I show in chapter two, local officials struggle to reconcile these contradictions through various acts of commensuration (i.e. value-making) to make Huangshan legible as a civilized, elite, and modern region.

My research centers on what I term "ordinary Chinese." These are people who are not particularly wealthy and powerful, nor do they live in abject poverty. Instead, they, like the vast majority of Chinese citizens, spend their time engaged in day-to-day affairs and attempt to live life as best they can. While this is not to say there were not social and class differences among the people I spent time with, nor that they were not significant in my research. Rather, one point I hope is apparent in my dissertation is that even those with some degree of local power or prestige, such as high-ranking local officials, operate in a system of constraints where they too are constantly negotiating between competing demands, desires, and aims. While certain people may have relatively more freedom to maneuver, no one is outside or above systems of social relations including kinship ties, professional obligations, material and financial limitations, or state policies. Indeed, as becomes clear in chapters one and four, those who wield power or prestige within certain hierarchies or certain systems of value in certain contexts might find

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studying air and water quality in villages in Huangshan as part of a program to introduce recycling programs to rural China. He told me that he prefers to drink boiled water from the tap in Huangshan to bottled water as it is likely cleaner.

themselves powerless in others. Mr. O and his wealthy urban friends may have had the power to paint Huangshanese as hapless rubes in national Chinese and foreign media, but they were powerless to avoid eviction by local officials. The Huangshan television station may have had the power to film local peasant customs in a remote village, but they could not prevent local village officials or unruly farmers from disrupting the envisioned end product through various forms of uncooperation. I am certainly not arguing that power hierarchies are *only* relative, nor that, say, poor peasants do not find themselves facing significantly more constraints or are in many crucial ways less powerful than wealthy officials. However, what I hope my dissertation shows is how hierarchies of value are both more complex and less deterministic than might be assumed at the outset, and that room to negotiate and maneuver (what de Certeau (1984) might call 'tactics') allow for the possibility of unpredictable results and unintended consequences.

Summary of Chapters

In my first chapter, "Farming under the Highrise: Mapping Huangshan," I give an ethnographic background on Tunxi as a city, situating it both within and against varying scales of place, from the Huizhou cultural area (roughly analogous with the boundaries of the Huangshan metropolitan region, or Huangshan), to Anhui province, to the larger "Jiangnan" (South of the [Yangtze] River) cultural area, and finally to the Chinese nation-state and beyond. Geography is as much about social imaginaries of "place-ness" and social constructions of proximity or distance as it is about physical location.

I examine how Tunxi is constructed as a particular sort of place, and how it is made to be seen as similar or different or proximate or distant from other socially meaningful places, from Hefei (the capital of Anhui) to Switzerland. I also show how different sorts of connections layer

on top of each other to create complicated social effects that cannot easily be categorized as "local" or "national" or "global."

I problematize the "rural/urban" binary that is frequently talked about in scholarly literature on Chinese urbanization. Through a spatial analysis of the city, I show how the spatial layout of Tunxi and lived experience of its inhabitants complicates ideas of urban or rural as legal categories of 'urban' and 'rural' residence permits do not map onto lifestyle or social prestige. I show that urban/rural as social categories are also complicated by things like class and gender, often in counterintuitive ways. Indeed, my main finding is that ability to maintain one's rural hukou in the midst of rapid urbanization can actually be a marker of high social class.

My second chapter, "Curating the City: Huizhou Culture and the Huizhou Woman," addresses local projects of cultural preservation and commodification through an examination of the tensions inherent in the culture-making process in a region that is both underdeveloped from the perspective of the central state and whose economy is primarily based on tourism.

First, I explore the challenges of local officials to reconcile their dual role as governing Huangshan in line with modern Socialist Scientific principles while at the same time capitalizing on Huangshan's tourist appeal as a preserved "relic" of China's Neo-Confucian past. Here officials seek to 'curate' the natural and historical beauty while demonstrating that the local inhabitants are still fully 'modern' in a developmentalist sense. They do so through mobilizing discourses of the national studies (*guoxue*) movement, arguing that it is through shared belonging to a national Chinese identity that the Neo-Confucian past is commensurate with the socialist CCP. In doing so, they also work to shift the focus away from the value of untamed natural beauty to a focus on the value of the region's long history of scholarship and 'civilization.'

I develop this further through a focus on how local (mostly male) officials attempt to curate the somewhat ambiguous legacy of gender in the region. Throughout the 20th century, Chinese and Western intellectuals and critics have used the role of women in society as a lens through which to critique particular political regimes and to advocate for certain political or social movements, primarily by framing the present as liberatory in comparison to an oppressive past. In Huangshan, this has left a discursive legacy that frames Neo-Confucian practice as highly misogynistic and incompatible with socialist feminism. In the latter half of the chapter I show how local officials both accept and themselves adopt the narrative of Neo-Confucian misogyny while at the same time attempting to reframe such practices as compatible with socialist gender equality and Chinese modernity.

In chapter three, "W(h)ither Huizhouhua? Erasing language from culture," I address the central question of, why has the unique local language been actively excluded from the Huizhou cultural heritage project? I show that this is a result of a diverse range of factors, but ultimately that the language is viewed as a hindrance to developing the region by local officials who are actively in charge of preserving the language. In this chapter I walk through the historical, geographical, political, and social factors that make language preservation a priority for no one.

I provide a brief background on the Huizhou languages and show how linguistic, historical, geographical, and regional factors have influenced the language family's marginalization in the project of preserving and commemorating local culture and history. I show how local scholarship on the Huizhou languages (to the extent that it exists) has adopted a model of 'connoisseurship,' which frames linguistic study of the language as well as language expertise as a refined hobby to be enjoyed by the discerning few rather than as an academic discipline or knowledge to be systematically spread.

I examine local language ideologies and popular attitudes towards the dialect. Despite the lack of overt stigma to speaking local dialects, I show how various orientations toward the dialects, particularly their lack of reification *as* a distinct dialect or language, has prevented grassroots language activism from developing around language preservation. Finally, I show how the association of dialect usage with male, kin-based local power structures encourages many locals to orient towards Mandarin as a more egalitarian and accessible language.

In chapter four, "I can't even speak one word: the unmaking of the Chinese peasant class," I further explore the political and economic stakes behind local governmental efforts to erase local dialects from the curatorial project by showing how dialect speaking has become tied to "the peasant," a highly undesirable category representative of a sort of 'backwardness' that local officials are anxious to erase from the Huangshan landscape. This chapter is about the stakes of the politics of urbanization and the contestation over 'the peasant' as a socially constructed type.

In the first section, I examine how local government projects, from cultural TV programming to "civilization-raising" projects, work to frame peasants as belonging to a chronotope of the 'ageless' (and thus nonpolitical) past, deictically distancing them from the 'here and now.' With different degrees of explicitness, I show how even projects such as TV programs designed to "celebrate" local language and culture attempt to prematurely eulogize the people they highlight, creating the 'traditional peasant' as a category "already disappeared" from present life.

In the second half, I show how displaced peasants assert themselves politically, pushing back against attempts to place the 'peasant' in an ahistorical past. Rather, older women assert their peasant status as a Maoist political category, locating themselves as inhabiting a particular

chronotope of the historical, recent, and highly political past. In particular, I look at how claims of illiteracy function as a gendered resistance to being made legible in certain ways. A commitment to 'peasantness' is a commitment to the values of Maoism and a rejection of Chinese Reform and Opening movement, and thus a critique from a peasant perspective of the present day from an explicitly Maoist perspective.

In my fifth chapter, "She has Two Sons: gender and Huangshan," I look at the moral economy of reproduction and its effect on women's relationships with each other.

In the first section, I show how the One-Child Policy and thirty years of state rhetoric has affected the daily lives of rural women. In particular, I show how state discourses subtly shape and are shaped by local social mores to help shape how women think about themselves as mothers and citizens. By paying attention to the circulation of women's reproductive choices through gossip networks, I show how "quantity," i.e., the number and sex of offspring, turns into "quality," that is, into judgments about a woman's moral character. Through a framework of virtue, I examine how women's family decisions are judged by different value frameworks, creating women as more or less virtuous. I examine what sorts of ideologies of value and virtue must exist for a woman with two sons to be viewed as "greedy," a woman with one daughter "modern," and a woman with multiple daughters and a son as "traditional."

In the second section, I further explore the effect of women's perceived reproductive choices on the mother-daughter relationship. In particular, I address how adult daughters understood their own mothers' decisions to have a son in excess of family planning law and how it complicated the mother-daughter bond.

In my sixth and final chapter, "Of Publics and Privates: the qualia of "quality" in a Chinese yoga studio," I analyze a yoga studio-cum-women's social club as a ritual space which distills and intensifies the various social relations I have discussed in the previous chapters.

In the first half of the chapter, I examine how the yoga studio gets constructed by different actors as various sorts of social space. First, I show for the yoga teacher (Teacher Yuan), sought to turn the yoga studio into a space of gendered self-making, seeking to mold a group of women practicing yoga into a category of "women," who identified with each solely on the basis of essential female solidarity. Secondly, I show how such a project did not ultimately succeed in large part due to the stakes other women had in the yoga project. I show how a conflict between yoga as a state project of "quality" (*suzhi*) making vs. yoga as personal leisure led to increasing tensions and ultimately a rift in the yoga studio. Through this, we can see how the yoga women are arguing over contemporary Chinese social relations, particularly as they pertain to hierarchy, value, and "quality."

In the second half, I continue my analysis of 'value' in the yoga studio by looking at ways language and the body become indicative of certain social types, and therefore, who belongs or doesn't belong in the space of the yoga studio. I look at processes of rhematization and dicentization, that is, at how certain ways of speaking become naturalized as inherent to certain social types, and also how certain natural qualities become seen as indicative of certain social types. I examine how the three yoga teachers who all speak the same non-standard variety of Mandarin are seen to have varying degrees of "marked" nonstandard Mandarin, depending on the social type of person they are seen to be.

Chapter One: Farming Under the Highrise: A social geography of Tunxi

Wang was the daughter of two high-ranking civil servants, and, over the course of my fieldwork, completed the fairly rigorous exams to be hired as a full-time music teacher in a local middle school. At 23, she had also joined the party and was considering a bright career ahead. She was also hoping to become engaged to her boyfriend, a successful pig knuckle entrepreneur. The major stumbling block, she told me, lay in a dispute over where they would live after marriage. Wang lived with her parents in Tunxi City proper and had an urban hukou (residence permit), while her boyfriend came from the neighboring township and expected Wang to move there after marriage. Wang refused to live in the township, arguing that it would be a social step down and that it was incompatible with her current lifestyle, which as part of a relatively small college-educated young elite, involved singing in upscale coffee shops and bars on weekend nights. When Wang told me this, I was surprised. Wang's parents lived in a new high-rise on the outskirts of the city, an out-of-the-way area with little commercial activity that bordered a forest. By contrast, her boyfriend's future home was in a brand-new high-rise near his bustling township center that was only a 15-minute walk from the trendiest part of the city, the new neighborhood where Wang and her friends like to hang out on weekends. In terms of physical proximity to "civilization," the boyfriend's high-rise apartment offered the same amenities as her parents' house did, and it was a stone's throw from shops and restaurants and in close proximity to the city center. Wang's parents, to my eyes, lived on the true outskirts of town, a 20-minute scooter ride to the city center in a neighborhood surrounded by nothing but forest.

In this chapter, I unpack the intricacies and subtle distinctions in valuations of what it means to be urban or rural in Huangshan, China. In so doing, I provide a class-conscious

ethnographic background of Huangshan as a place. As "placeness" is socially constructed, I explore how Huangshan is experienced as a different type of place for different people. Likewise, scholars of space have argued that notions of place are inherently constructed in relation to other places (e.g. Du 2015, Massey 1994, Oakes 2005, Wang 2005), and thus have a scalar dimension. Biao Xiang defines scale at its most conventional as the "spatial reach of actions" (2013, 284). As action is always socially embedded and reach is always constrained by social and material conditions, we can see that scale too is always socially and differentially produced. To think about scale, I draw on Erik Swyngedouw's conception of "scalar configurations as the outcome of sociospatial processes that regulate and organize social power relations" (Swyngedouw, 2008 132). Importantly, these sociospatial processes do not simply organize but also differentiate: as Tim Oakes writes, scale is the "social production of difference…the dynamic manifestation of the ordering of space through social relations" (2005, 33). All of these conceptions of scale and scale-making share the sense that scale making is a dynamic process: scales are therefore not static or preexisting "set" things in the world (even if they may appear so or be conceptualized to be so). That is, to use Xiang's language, scales are always "emergent" (2013). I find these theories of scale good to think with as I explore how people experience space, including proximity and distance, in contextually dependent and changing ways.

In this chapter, I show how locals experience and produce Huangshan as a place within a network of geographically imagined social relations across varying scales, from intra-county differences in the Huangshan region to the Chinese nation-state and beyond. This work is done in large part by producing places as similar or different from, or proximate or distant to, other places. Similarity, as Nelson Goodman reminds us (1972), is also socially constructed, as among

the infinite potential vectors of comparison, only certain ones are made salient. Like all social processes, similarity (or difference) is made, rather than merely observed. Far more than simply providing ethnographic context, situating Tunxi as a place means exploring the social processes of differentiation that occur in the contemporary PRC.

Background

Huangshan City is a prefectural-level city located in the far south of Anhui province. It consists of four counties and three districts,[1] which encompass an area of 3,800 sq. miles and a population of around 1.5 million[2] spread out across a mountainous terrain covered in bamboo forest.[3] The counties and districts are, in order of decreasing population: She County (pop. 500,000); Xiuning County (pop. 270,000); Qimen County (pop. 190,000); Huangshan Scenic Area District (pop. 163,000); Tunxi District (pop. 150,000); Huizhou District (pop. 100,000); and Yi County (pop. 90,000). The area of Huangshan is almost coterminous with the historic Huizhou region (from which the 'hui' in Anhui is derived), which was a politically, linguistically, and culturally distinct region in Pre-Revolutionary China.[4] Locally, the terms Huangshan and Huizhou are used interchangeably to refer to the region.

[1] In China city-level (*shi*) administration is higher than county-level (*xian*) administration, and might be better thought of in the American context as "municipal region" rather than "city" in the narrow context.
[2] Official population numbers do not take into account the number of migrant workers elsewhere, and so inflate the number of people presently living in the region.
[3] For clarity's sake, I will refer to the region as a whole as 'Huangshan,' Huangshan City (Tunxi district) as 'Tunxi,' and Huangshan the mountain as "Yellow Mountain," for disambiguation.
[4] The historic region of Huizhou also included Jixi county (next to but not part of the HMR) and Wuyuan county in adjacent Jiangxi province.

The administrative center of the region is located in the Tunxi district, which is a small region of 96 sq. miles consisting of a compact urban center surrounded by five townships and their affiliated villages. The urban center, formerly known as Tunxi City, was officially (and somewhat confusingly) renamed Huangshan City about ten years ago to draw attention to the city's proximity to Yellow Mountain (Huangshan), however locals uniformly still refer to the city as "Tunxi." Following local custom, I will refer to the Tunxi district urban center as Tunxi and the Huangshan area as a whole as "Huangshan" or "Huangshan city." Tunxi was the site therefore of two parallel and separate government systems, the Huangshan City government, which administered the entire region, and the Tunxi District government, which administered the Tunxi District.[5]

Figure 2: Anhui Province
(http://www.chinatourguide.com/huangshan/huangshan_map.html)

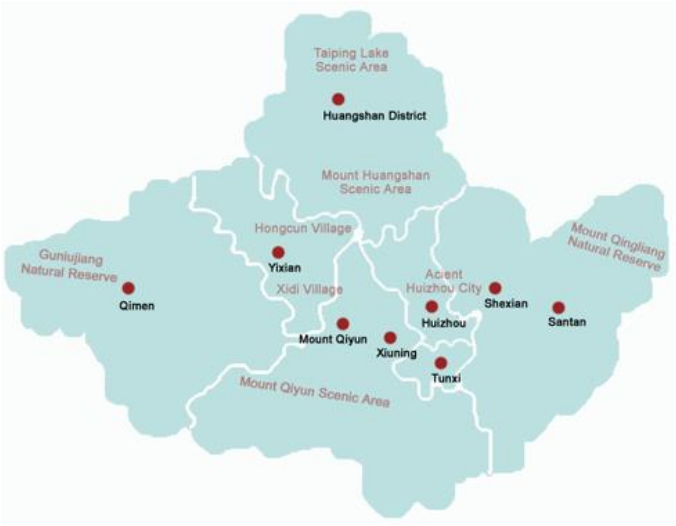

Figure 3: Huangshan City
(http://anhui.chinadaily.com.cn/travel/2010-04/25/content_9772004.htm)

[5] Somewhat confusingly, since the name change there existed two Huangshan city governments, one which governed the region, and the other which governed the urban center now known as Huangshan City which was subordinate to the Tunxi District government.

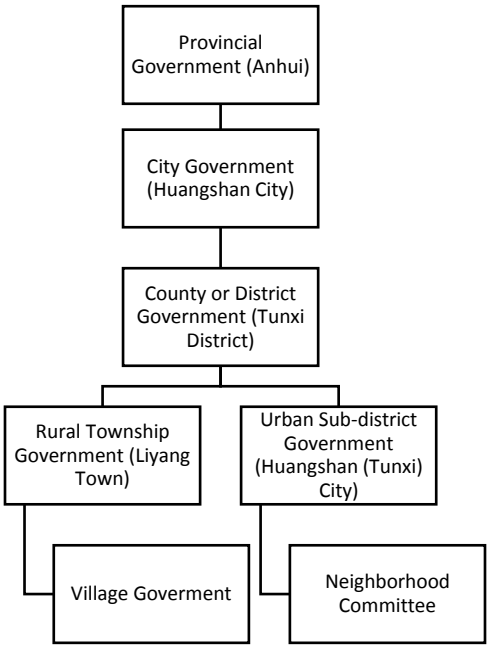

Figure 4: Levels of Government

Historically a small town in Xiuning County, Tunxi became the commercial center of the region during the Republican Era (1911-1949), and was separated into its own district relatively recently. It is bordered to the east by She county, to the North by Huizhou district (historically a part of She county), and to the South and West by Xiuning county. The total population of the district includes about 80,000 people living in the urban center and another 70,000 spread among the five townships and villages, although given large-scale out migration to cities on the Eastern seaboard the actual population in rural areas is much lower than official figures.

According to official government rankings, Huangshan ranks 15th out of 16 prefectural level cities in Anhui province in terms of development and industrialization,[6] an embarrassing fact that locals are quite aware of. The main industry of the entire region is tourism, with world

[6] At present Huangshan is now ranked 16th out of 16 prefectural cities.

UNESCO heritage sites of the Yellow Mountain in the Huangshan Scenic District, and Hongcun and Xidi villages in Yi County, as the primary tourist draws. Located about an hour by car or bus away from these major tourist sites, Tunxi primarily functions as a transportation hub for tourists seeking to climb Yellow Mountain. Cheap hotels and a preserved Old Street (*laojie*) district attract a reasonable number of tourists to Tunxi itself, albeit fewer than the local government would like. Aside from tourism, the major industries of Huangshan as a whole are tea cultivation and tofu making, as the mountainous terrain and limited arable land make more space intensive crops either impossible or unprofitable to grow. Qimen county in particular is well-known for its tea (often branded Keemun tea for the international market), which is exported nationally and internationally. Tea and tofu processing tend to be small-scale family businesses carried out in homes or workshops. Rice paddies and canola fields dominate the unforested parts of the landscape and provide sustenance and supplementary income to elderly farmers and retired migrant workers returning to farm and raise grandchildren. The lack of industrialization is both a blessing and a curse for local residents, as the clean air and lack of pollution keep quality of life high and attract tourists, but also keep local wages low. The average income of the region is just over $3,000/year, which is about half of the national average ($6,091), below the Anhui provincial average and well below that of nearby cities Hangzhou ($10,103) and Shanghai ($8,350). Villagers in the Tunxi district also grow tea and make tofu, however the primary sources of income for those living in the district are the service industry, store-front manufacturing of home goods, construction, and government bureaucracy.

The lived experience of Distance

In lived reality, distance is not measured in kilometers on a map but in time and (in)convenience it takes to get to a place. Some places quite close “as the crow flies” may be

completely inaccessible or at least extremely inconvenient to access due to physical barriers or a lack of convenient transportation. In Huangshan, distances tended to be measured in the hours it took to get somewhere. Shanghai was eight hours away by the cheap bus, six hours by the expensive bus, and four hours by car. Thus, even though (barring an extraordinary event) the physical distance between two places remains the same over time, lived experience of distance and mobility is dynamic and contingent upon changes in, say, modes of transportation and road development.

In Huangshan, the expanding availability of new forms of transportation and infrastructure was a central point in local understandings of progress. For locals, increased ease of mobility and the "shortening" of distance was both a sign of regional modernization and a consequence of it. An increase in real incomes combined with the decrease in price of electric scooters and Chinese brand cars meant that scooters were almost universally affordable and cars were starting to become affordable to the aspiring middle class. Past poverty was often humorously expressed through tropes of immobility. When I asked about life in the past, older people would tell me that they had to walk everywhere, and there were no roads. When I asked an older man in his 70s if they had ridden bicycles when he was younger, he responded with mock indignation at my naivete: "Bicycles! Who had a bicycle! Only rich people could afford a bicycle. We just walked." Mr. Jiang, a local scholar of Huizhou dialects, joked that when the first bicycle appeared in the region in the 1980s, everyone stood around gawking at the fabulous metal beast who could move tirelessly without ever needing food.

Similarly, government investment in improved infrastructure was an outward sign of Huangshan's own development. As in Papua New Guinea and Sichuan, among other places, paved roads in particular were valued as a sign of modernity and civilization (see Flower 2004,

Handman 2017, Harvey & Knox 2012). Brand new highways crisscrossed the region connecting county seats with each other. In the past five years, a major highway had been built through the mountains connecting Huangshan with Hangzhou, turning what had been a seven-hour journey on bandit-infested winding mountain roads into a 2.5-hour journey on smooth asphalt. The bandits, said Lin, a Ministry of Culture employee in her mid-40s, had been the worst part of the trip. Whole villages, she told me, made their living off of waylaying hapless travelers. Even if one could afford a car, one wouldn't dare risk driving to Hangzhou lest the car (a signal of wealth) be carjacked. By bypassing the former wild and dangerous road and the wild and dangerous people to provide a (relatively) safe and convenient path to Hangzhou, the new highway is a physical metaphor for modernity's bypassing of the dangers of underdeveloped China. In a few years, even this new highway would be obsolete, as a high-speed rail line between Hangzhou and Huangshan was slated for completion in 2017, which would bring total travel time to 45 minutes. The rail line was originally supposed to be completed in 2013, then in 2015, and finally, 2017. This continual deferral into a future moment, locals mentioned wryly, represented the overambitious and often grandiose claims of development by the local government.

Of course, lived experience of distance is not simply a technological matter of improved transportation. If we take scale as the spatialization of social power relations (cf Swyngedouw 1997, 2004 Oakes 2001), some places will never become accessible, and some places, no matter how accessible, will never be considered "nearby." Distance is of course as much about social imaginaries of affinity and alterity as it is about physical mobility.

Geographic proximity and distance can also give rise to social imaginaries of geography in counterintuitive ways. In this case, Anhui's proximity to China's wealthy Eastern Seaboard

has heightened the perceived distance between rural, poor, and "backward" Anhuinese and developed, urban, and modern East coasters. Although Anhui is not the poorest nor least developed province in China, it is nationally famous for being poor and its inhabitants are famous for being "low-quality" (*suzhi di*), even in places which are poorer than Anhui. Wanning Sun writes, "the 'Anhui maid' is seen as a metaphor for the gendered, unequal and uneven relationship between Anhui and developed places such as Shanghai, and in those terms she features prominently in both the popular cultural representations and the popular consciousness. Mobile, and plentiful and available any time, her discursive usefulness lies in her capacity to embody the enduring potency of the metaphor for poverty" (187-188). Mobility, abundance, and easy availability, the qualities which make the Anhuinese "low-quality," are all products of Anhui's relative geographic proximity to "developed" China and thus ability for relatively large numbers of people to migrate to large cities, which they did at a relatively early period as Anhui suffered famine conditions in the 1980s.[7]

As national values shifted during the Opening and Reform Movement, the Anhui migrant laborer became a symbol not just of Anhui's own backwardness, but also as a representative of all the "third-world" qualities that were hindering China's national advancement in a global scale of economic development. The ubiquity, cheapness, and easy replaceability of the Anhui maid embodied the unruly excess of China's population that the government sought to control through the One-Child Policy (see chapter five for a fuller discussion of the One-Child Policy). Moreover, through the rhetoric of the One-Child Policy, the overabundance and low-quality of

[7] Geographic proximity to the Eastern seaboard and disastrous agricultural policies in Northern Anhui and inhospitable land in Southern Anhui is the explanation for why Anhuinese were the first group of people to migrate in large numbers to find work in large cities in the early 1980s. Although it is likely Anhuinese no longer make up the majority of migrant laborers in large cities, the connection between migrant labor and Anhui has endured.

the Chinese people was directly linked to the over-abundance and low-quality of Chinese products produced by unskilled sweatshop workers. Chinese lives, like Chinese commodities, were seen by Chinese as cheap, low-quality, and easily replaceable, and of all China, Anhui lives were often depicted as among the cheapest. Indeed, "there are too many Chinese people" (*Zhongguoren tai duo le*) was a phrase I heard almost daily in response to stories of Chinese loss of life, violent or deranged behavior, or even general social dysfunction. It was generally accompanied with a shrug: in a country with so many low-quality people, what is one to expect?

On another level, perceived cultural and ethnic affinity also counterintuitively creates social distance. Anhuinese are overwhelmingly ethnically Han Chinese, and Anhui's relatively rural economy of wheat cultivation in the North and rice and tea cultivation in the South is seen to represent quintessential Northern and Southern Chinese traditional culture, respectively. This perceived cultural familiarity however, means that the poverty and rurality of Anhui cannot be romanticized in the way that much poorer Western China is, with its "exotic" ethnic minorities and colorful folkways (Chio 2014, Oakes 2005). Indeed, the assumed familiarity of Anhui to Eastern China means that where there is difference it can only be interpreted as a lack.

It was with a rather anxious awareness of their own perceived national inferiority that Tunxi locals imagined themselves as belonging to or situated within a particular place.[8] In this next section, I examine how Tunxinese construct Tunxi and Huangshan as belonging at different scales to different groupings of places. Contrary to the belief that those on the periphery always

[8] The following is an example of the internalization of the "Anhui maid" stereotype. I volunteered to teach English at a local township school in Tunxi. One third grade class was learning occupations. In their English textbooks, produced by the provincial government, they were given a list of five common occupations, one of which was "baby sitter," a somewhat euphemistic translation of *baomu* (maid; nanny).

orient towards the metropole, or that distance is imagined as a steady gradient of increasing alterity, I show how Huangshan locals define Huangshan as "belonging" to multiple eclectic networks of places which operate across different scales, and which include places as diverse as Tibet and Switzerland.

Jiangnan

The part of China Huangshan belongs to is not Anhui but Jiangnan, locals frequently informed me. Jiangnan, which means "south of the river," refers to the historically prosperous area of the Yangtze River Delta, which today encompasses most of the wealthy provinces of Jiangsu, Zhejiang, and Shanghai, and includes wealthy cities such as Suzhou, Hangzhou, Nanjing, Yangzhou, and Wenzhou, among others. The region was the cultural, economic, and often political center of dynastic China from the Song through the Ming dynasties. Jiangnan culture was and still is considered by many Han Chinese to represent the height of Han Chinese cultural refinement. Jiangnan flourished in the Song, Ming, and Qing dynasties, two of which are referred to as "native" reigns were considered to be exemplary of Han civilization. While Huangshan is economically and regionally on the periphery of the Jiangnan region today, Huangshanese assert their centrality to Jiangnan culture as the ancestral homeland of famous scholars (including Neo-Confucian philosopher Zhu Xi, whose interpretation of Confucian philosophy became state orthodoxy in the Yuan dynasty) and wealthy and powerful merchant lineages (see chapter two). Because of the perceived centrality of Huangshan to Jiangnan Culture, Huangshanese would use their past as a way to assert cultural superiority over the other parts of Jiangnan which by other logics might be considered superior. Shanghai in particular was singled out as a "nouveau-riche" upstart, as it was nothing more than a fishing village until the 19th century. I came across this attitude early on in my fieldwork through my clumsy attempts to

elicit some sort of overt language ideology. My question, somewhat laughably obtuse, about whether people wanted to speak like Shanghainese people, elicited mainly looks of incredulity. Of course, the degree to which locals focused on comparing themselves favorably to Shanghai, particularly to me as an American anthropologist, indicates an awareness that few outside Anhui would consider Huangshan to be more cultured and civilized than Shanghai in the present. The amount of attention focused also indicates an imbalance; I am quite sure that few Shanghainese give much thought to Huangshan as a region, nor would they consider the two in any way comparable. [9]

Jiangnan as a region does not map neatly on to provincial boundaries, and indeed as Anhui is bisected by the Yangtze, the northern two-thirds of the province are not strictly speaking part of the "Jiangnan" region. In Huangshan, as apartment complex names and tourist brochures indicate, being a part of "Jiangnan" is a much more salient identity than being part of Anhui is. Although the "hui" in "Anhui" comes from Huizhou, the traditional name for the historical region which roughly coincides with the present-day boundaries of Huangshan, my informants almost uniformly viewed this as an act of magnanimity on their part, that they had gifted their benighted province with the latter half of its name as an act of charity. They also noted that that the "An" came from "Anqing," a historically significant city about two hours away on the northern banks of the Yangtze river and also part of Jiangnan (though not the birthplace of Neo-Confucian culture, people were quick to point out). The province name then,

[9] Locals frequently assured me that any amenity available in Shanghai was available for less money in Tunxi. I put this to a test when a friend visiting hoped to have a suit tailored. Before his arrival, multiple people assured me the tailors of Tunxi were just as excellent as the tailors of Shanghai. Unfortunately, my friend found otherwise when he tried to have a suit made and realized the one tailor in the city qualified to produce menswear had very different ideas of what might be considered stylish and fashionable.

was a metaphor for the general value of the various parts of the province; cultured, (relatively) prosperous southern Anhui had given everything of value to the province, while poor (in all senses of the word) northern Anhui had contributed nothing except a syllable.

Huangshanese then, did not see Anhui as a meaningful category of identity, nor did they see themselves as "connected" to the rest of Anhui in any way beyond administratively. Northern Anhui, they noted, was culturally a part of the central Chinese plains, having much more in common with the "rough" and "wild" central provinces of Henan, western Shandong, and Hubei. "Northern Anhui is northern China, and southern Anhui is southern China," was a common local saying. When people traveled, they told me they identified themselves as Huangshanese rather than Anhuinese. People outside of Huangshan did not necessarily discern the same kind or degree of distinction between Huangshan and the rest of Anhui. Indeed, the first popular culture depiction of an Anhui maid was a 1981 film called "The girl from Huangshan" (*Huangshan lai de guniang*), showing that Huangshan is not thought to (nor does it) exist outside the economic realities of the migrant labor market. Nevertheless, I too noticed I received a markedly different reaction in Shanghai if I told people I lived in Huangshan vs. Anhui.[10]

Of course, Northern Anhuinese vehemently disagreed with the characterization of their part as the poor and backward part of the province. Northern Anhui is much more densely populated, industrialized and, by many metrics, more "developed" than Huangshan, so Anhuinese migrants found it ludicrous that the relatively rural part of the province should look

[10] When I told people I lived in Anhui, the initial reaction was disbelief and pity. One Shanghainese taxi driver said to me, "but you're a foreigner. You could live elsewhere," as though Anhui was the home of only those not resourceful enough to leave. When I specified Huangshan, the surprise turned to understanding. "Oh, Huangshan is beautiful." was the nearly universal reply.

down their noses at them. One college student from the far north told me that he was shocked to arrive in "Huangshan [Tunxi] City" and find it only had a population of 80,000.[11] His home village had a population bigger than that, and it wasn't considered particularly special. Complaining about the misguided snobbiness of Huangshanese was a favorite activity those from elsewhere in in Anhui could bond over. Sunny, a student in the tourism management program at Huangshan University, told me, "Huangshanese think they are like Shanghainese, but Huangshan is no Shanghai." Of course, here Sunny is also revealing that she is ranking Huangshan by a different set of metrics than locals would.

In addition to locating themselves in the heart of Jiangnan, Huangshanese saw themselves as belonging to a group of East Asian countries or territories they identified as Neo-Confucian, including South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan. Quite unusually for Mainland China given current geopolitical tensions, Huangshanese claimed that their local language sounded like Japanese, and posited that Huangshan could have been the point from which the Japanese borrowed Chinese language. People also pointed out that they were quieter and had more subdued mannerisms than in elsewhere in China, which they saw as similar to the Japanese and a sign of shared Neo-Confucian heritage.

Within China, Huangshan (Huizhou) was recognized by the state as one of the Three Great Regional Cultures (*san da diyu wenhua*) worth having its own field of studies, along with Tibetan culture and Dunhuang culture along the former Silk Road. Local officials and even ordinary people would frequently point this out as a source of pride. I found the unequivocal

[11] As mentioned above Tunxi district has a population of 150,000, however about half the district lives in the townships and surrounding villages and thus they have a rural hukou (residence permit).

embrace of this label interesting, as I had thought that being grouped in a class that included two "primitive" ethnic minority cultures in "undeveloped" Western China would make Huangshanese uneasy, as it might invite drawing equivalences between perceived states of development, or Huangshanese' role as objects, rather than subjects, of study.

Outside of the region of Asia, Huangshanese drew a connection between themselves and Switzerland. "The Switzerland of China" is emblazoned on travel promotional materials. There is a rather obvious similarity between Huangshan and Switzerland, which is that they are both picturesque mountainous regions that rely on tourism. I would argue, however, that the particular economic and political moment makes the constant allusion to Switzerland much deeper and more important.

As part of their program for national development and modernization, the Chinese government has laid out a telos of development, and provided a concrete model to work towards. This model is of a modern, technologically advanced country with a strong manufacturing base. This country makes a smaller number of high-quality, high-skill commodities requiring advanced technology rather than the vast number of low-skill, low-quality commodities that China produces now. Here, we can see a certain erasure of distance between reproduction and production, as the number and quality of manufactured goods seem to reflect on a meaningful level the quality of the people who make them. While goods made in Western countries are all thought to be of high-quality, Germany in particular is held up as a model of China's imagined future, as Germany was able to transition to a wealthy economy while still maintaining a large manufacturing sector that produces high-quality, technologically advanced goods.[12] Since

[12] The other country acknowledged as a "first world" manufacturing power house is Japan, but recent history and current tensions make Japan as a model for China's development deeply

German-made products like cars are so high-quality, the German people must be similarly high-quality. Germans, in my informants' imagination, possessed all those positive qualities that Chinese at present do not: being orderly, contained, and importantly, being (relatively speaking) few in number. The Germans' relatively low birthrate is held up as an example of their inherent quality: "They didn't even need a One-Child Policy" a friend said. When a news story broke about a German dying in an accident, my informants found it to be a particular pity. "There are so few of them, it's so sad they lost one," one yoga student noted, as if we were talking about endangered animals and not someone from Europe's most populous country. For my informants, Germany was a utopia. "Yan, German men don't cheat on their wives," they'd tell a clearly skeptical me. Auntie Hu related the tragic story of a friend's daughter who was killed by a car while studying abroad in Germany. The death was tragic, but that it happened in Germany made it that much worse. "I didn't even know things like that happened there." said one of Auntie Hu's friends.[13]

So what does this have to do with Switzerland and Huangshan? Drawing on Chen Xiaomei's concept of Occidentalism as a mirror image of Said's Orientalism (2002), I want to examine what work invoking "Germany" as an imaginary is doing in and for Huangshanese in

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uncomfortable. Nevertheless, the fact both countries were Axis Powers in WWII and later beneficiaries of US aid is not lost on many of my informants. A joke I heard was, "If China wanted to be a developed country, we should have lost WWII too."

[13] As a Westerner, I was deeply taken aback by the open admiration of Germany and Germans. The claim that Germans were higher-quality than everyone else was uncomfortably close to claims Germans have made about themselves. I begin to get outside my own initial instinct to automatically disagree by asking my informants why they thought Germans were so high-quality. The answers I got helped me rethink Chinese admiration of Germans: "Because they recycle." "Because they make Mercedes, and BMWs, and Audis." "Because they love the environment." I would ask my informants if Chinese too could be as high-quality as the Germans were. "Of course," was the answer. (Followed up in one memorable case with, "We just have to get better at recycling.")

the present moment, and what this might have to tell us about Huangshan's desire to be the "Switzerland of China." As I have explained, Germany, and particularly the German economic model of high-skill manufacturing, is set up as a model for China's desired future. Yet for rural Huangshan, being "Germany" is both unattainable and ultimately undesirable, as heavy industrialization would ruin what is considered a fundamental quality of Huangshan local character, its classic natural beauty that is its economic mainstay.

Switzerland, however, is seen as the rural counterpart to Germany. Equally modern, equally high-quality, as evidenced through things like Swiss watches or the Swiss-engineered gondolas that took tourists up Yellow Mountain, Switzerland still manages to be (for my informants) a bucolic rural alpine country deeply rooted in a traditional way of life. Switzerland, in my informants' imaginations, brought together qualities considered to be contradictory in modern China: simultaneously traditional and modern, high-quality and rustic, the Swiss had a tourist economy where they were agents of their own cultural curation rather than relics of their past. I will take this theme up in later chapters, but while the rest of China looked to "Germany" as an imagined future, Huangshanese looked to "Switzerland." To be the "Switzerland of China," then, would be to finally be recognized as fully modern and fully high-quality while still maintaining a distinctive regional character. That is, it would allow Huangshanese to finally cast off the stigma once and for all of being "Anhuinese" and be recognized by all of China as "Huizhounese."

Other Scales

Huangshan's natural beauty, seen by urban elites as unspoiled by modernity, made Huangshan the place (though not the people) part of a network of national global elites. Wealthy businessmen, some of them turning to Buddhism in their old age, would retire to grand villas in

the Huangshan countryside. Despite claiming a desire for a simple country life filled with introspection, these gentlemen frequently hosted sumptuous long weekends for a motley assortment of elite urban business people, officials, and artists, weekends where a foreign anthropologist always made a welcome addition. In a tiny village tucked into the mountainous foothills in scenic Yi County, a group of artists from Beijing and Shenzhen had founded an artists' colony explicitly modeled on those of 19th century France. Amidst the mulberry bushes, rice paddies, and dilapidated pagodas, Mr. O, a Shenzhen filmmaker, and his friends had painstakingly restored and tastefully updated old houses whose former inhabitants had been blind to the beauty and cultural heritage. Mr. O and his friends saw themselves as part of a "counter-urbanization" project (*ni-chengshihua*), a back-to-the-land celebration of nature that admired the simplicity of rural life in the abstract while, much like its 19th century European counterpart, disdaining the unculturedness of actual peasants. Although living side-by-side with the native inhabitants of L-Village, Mr. O inhabited a world connected to artists in Copenhagen and London as well as Beijing and Shanghai with whom he hosted frequent events in the village's independent bookstore with a French name.[14]

Figure 5: Mr. O with villager in L-Village (photo by author)

[14] The bookstore was actually a branch of an independent Beijing bookstore specializing in art and foreign literature.

Mr. O had organized an independent film festival, which was canceled at the last minute by local officials who, as he pointed out, did not truly appreciate the importance of such an event for establishing the village as an intellectual and artistic point of interest. The clash between urban intellectuals and local officials shows how the same space operates within very different networks. These local officials exist within a network of locally-embedded social relations, primarily within Yi county, but perhaps to an extent also Huangshan more generally. By contrast, the artists with their shallow roots in the area have little or nothing to do with those in Yi County or Huangshan outside their particular village but operate within a national or international network of intellectual elites. The bookstore had its own English facebook page, inaccessible to all Chinese who do not speak English or who do not have a government firewall-evading Virtual Private Network (VPN). L-Village and the artists' counter-urbanization movement have been written up in the Western media. In these articles, presented exclusively from the artists' point of view and told in their voices, their project to bring civilization to an otherwise backward and rustic part of China strongly echo Chinese national media's portrayal of rural Anhui.[15]

[15] https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/dec/02/chinese-artists-rural-rebellion-xi-jinping

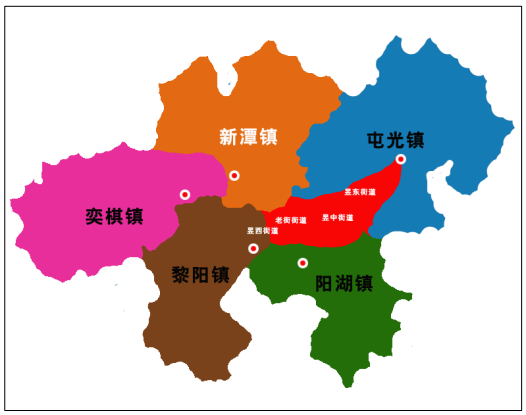

Figure 6: Map of Tunxi District. The red area is Tunxi (Huangshan) City, and the 5 surrounding areas represent the five townships

Farming and Highrises: a Micro-geography of Tunxi

In this section I turn my attention inward to examine how the physical realities of lived space shape the social geography of the Tunxi district. I interrogate the concept of "urban" and "rural" to show how this binary, predicated on the existence and maintenance of (social, political, economic, moral, physical) distance collapses on itself in a place like Tunxi, which is not-quite-urban-not-quite-rural, or what I term, "ruralish." The urban/rural categories here are intersected by class, gender, regional and linguistic identity, and affective relations of kinship and shared home village (*lao xiang*). Returning to my opening vignette, I show how the categories of "urban" and "rural" cannot be measured by any external or "objective" measure of infrastructure, spatial delineation, or lifestyle.

The ruralish nature of Tunxi means that Tunxi is simultaneously both and neither. Visitors are either struck that the city does not conform to ideas of a rural area as one might expect (at the time I left, there were three KFCs, one McDonalds, and one Pizza Hut), or to a clearly urban landscape either. With its relatively low buildings, copious green spaces, and the interspersal of farmland throughout an otherwise urban setting, Tunxi does not resemble much of urban China. Indeed, as the young man from a village near Bengbu in Northern Anhui noted, urban Tunxi managed to be much smaller and more rural than his own village. Indeed, Tunxi manages to be excessively rural in the sort of picturesque, stereotyped way of photos in a

National Geographic. A 15-minute walk from the edge of the urban center takes one past farmers in bamboo hats picking tea or farming rice paddies with water buffalo. At the same time, during the course of my fieldwork, a new upscale shopping district was constructed whole-cloth on land that administratively belongs to a township and is thus, technically, rural. Leaving "urban" Tunxi, one can stroll down the well-manicured pedestrian street, watch a new release in 3-D at the IMAX theater, take a photo in front of a life size 'potemkin' Christian church facade, and get a coffee at a Starbucks look-alike. In a place like Tunxi, urban and rural status as legally defined are not reflective of lived reality. "Urbanites" may grow corn and raise chickens and pigs in the courtyards of their multistory single-family homes, while "villagers" may live in 20 story high-rises and work office jobs in Tunxi city.

[See full-page map of Tunxi in Appendix 1]

Yet as Wang's objections to her fiancé's address show, thinking about rural and urban in these surface ways does not reflect fully how social life and social relations shape experiences. Wang's fiancé may have lived in a setting that was indistinguishable from an urban one, but it was clearly rural in a way that was meaningful to Wang. This way, I would argue, had in large part to do with the differing social networks that Wang was embedded in versus those of her fiancé and the way in which her social interactions would change by moving to a township highrise. Indeed, her anxiety over marrying a rural man may have had very little to do with where precisely she would live, but rather with how the marriage would resituate her within her various networks. In this sense, asymmetrical social relations and social connectedness still structure daily life and interaction for the vast majority of residents in the Tunxi district. Although Tunxi as a district encompasses an urban center surrounded by townships and villages, it still remains in some sense a "society of familiars" (Lai 2016, 131). Although social relations

are stretched across a larger geographic and population spread, Tunxi city functions through overlapping networks of familiars, people who have social and affective ties through kinship, village origins, work, and school. In her book on hygiene in rural China, Lili Lai argues, contra scholars like Yunxiang Yan or Xin Liu who have claimed Reform and Opening Era China changes have given rise to the "uncivil individual" in rural areas, that increasing mobility has instead "intensified and expanded" immanent village sociality rather than attenuated it (2016, 161). In my fieldwork based primarily in Tunxi city, I too noticed that increasing internal migration and the rapid expansion of its urban areas made Tunxi a place where intricate networks of social ties have a chance to develop and flourish in multiple directions, rather than give rise to a society of strangers (Simmel [1908] 2010). In this sense, Tunxi's "urbanization" resulted in what you might call an increase of the forms of "rural" sociality of densely and redundantly-overlapping social networks in which people were embedded.

I experienced this myself in the course of conducting fieldwork, as my own connections to people looped back on top of each other, such that I would be introduced to the same person multiple times through different networks. Indeed, by the end of my fieldwork it was rare to meet someone with whom I did not share at least one mutual friend or acquaintance in common, no matter how casual the contact. Thumbing a ride home on a dark December evening from the township school I volunteered at, I soon learned that those who picked me up were coworkers and neighbors of Wang's mother. Social networks that seemed to me divided by class, profession, or lifestyle also, I found out, were interconnected. Mr. Guo, the owner of an interior design and landscape architecture firm who worked closely with city government and state-owned hotels, was one such individual who I "met" multiple times throughout my fieldwork, each time through a quite different social network. I originally met him through my friend Pan, a

migrant from Northern Anhui in her early 20s who I met through the yoga studio. Pan worked at his firm, and she told me that her boss was curious to meet the young foreign scholar with an interest in local culture. Through Pan, I spent several afternoons and many dinners talking about Huizhou culture with Mr. Guo, and on occasion would accompany Mr. Guo and Pan on work fieldtrips. Later in my fieldwork, I was introduced to Ms. Xu, professor of tourism at the local college. The professor, like me, was a professional woman in her early 30s who had only recently married and had a child. We hit it off, and she let me accompany her while she undertook one of her side projects, which involved management consulting for state-owned hotels. Her business partner was, of course, Mr. Guo, who was surprised and pleased when I showed up as a friend of Professor Xu. Finally, one day I was leaving the courtyard of my friend Auntie Chu, a retired street sweeper and former peasant in her early 60s with whom I spent many afternoons at the local newsstand, which also functioned as a neighborhood hangout. Before I reached the street, I heard a middle-aged woman's voice calling my name. "Yan, what are you doing here?" I turned and saw Mr. Guo's wife standing on the doorstep. Surprised, I told her I had been visiting my friend, Auntie Chu, gesturing down the street. Mr. Hu's wife invited me in for some tea and quick chat. Mr. Guo was again surprised to see me and surprised that I might know Auntie Chu. I in turn was equally surprised to discover they were neighbors and, it turns out, co-villagers. He and Auntie Chu lived in the same "new village," a resettled group of townhouses that preserved the spatial and social logics of the original village. Although at one point it had been a suburb of Tunxi city, it was now completely incorporated into the urban center as a city block, with a row of computer repair shops on one side and new highrises on the other. The image of a village that becomes physically incorporated into a city and maintains its original social ties while at the same time fostering opportunities for new ones is an apt metaphor

for the sorts of ways that "ruralish" Tunxi functions as a place, where "immanent village sociality" is magnified and complicated without disappearing (Lai 116).

"She county people are no good"

Although in this chapter so far I referred to Huangshan and Tunxi somewhat interchangeably, it was the case that county-level identity was important in how Huangshanese conceived of themselves. As the prefectural seat, Tunxi City was the destination for migrants from other parts of Huangshan across the socioeconomic spectrum: poor villagers from Qimen County came to Tunxi to drive taxis; entrepreneurial shopkeepers from She county came to Tunxi in the hopes of attracting a higher-income tourist clientele, and university-educated young people from all over the region came for bureaucratic positions in the Huangshan metropolitan government. While such migration was on the one hand a source of Tunxi's vitality and growth, it also was regarded ambivalently by Tunxi locals, who resented the changing character of their home town. When I asked Li, Aunti Chu's daughter who was in her mid-30s, to say something to me in Tunxi dialect, she said, "*sɒ ɕiɒ jan bu xe*, do you know what that means?" Everyone around her laughed. I smiled and repeated her phrase in Mandarin as it was a sentence I had often heard before. "*shexian ren bu hao* (Shexian people are bad)." She smiled and praised my language ability. At the local level, Tunxinese defined themselves in opposition to She County people, who they saw as different types of people. Tunxi used to be part of Xiuning County, which historically vied for regional power with She County. My informants in Tunxi and Xiuning told me that She County had been the economic center of the region, producing most of the famous salt merchant lineages in the Ming and Qing dynasty. By contrast, Xiuning County had been the intellectual and cultural center of the region, producing most of the high-ranking officials and scholars.

The cultural traits inherited from this background were thought to persist in Huangshan to this day: Tunxi and Xiuning people considered themselves to have inherited the genteel unconcern with worldly matters of their literati ancestors, unlike the grasping and materialist She County inhabitants, who put earning money ahead of manners or the appreciation the finer pleasures of life. Xing, a 24-year old school teacher and Tunxi native told me that real Tunxi locals eschewed bargaining, finding it distasteful. "Who cares if you can save a few *mao* (cents) on vegetables? Shouldn't the farmers earn money too?" She told me with a shrug. This pervasive attitude, which I verified with other young Tunxinese, explained why my own early attempts to bargain for produce in the local dialect produced reactions of amusement and puzzling condescension, if not pity from sellers, who generally knocked a *mao* or two off the price for my efforts. Tunxi locals were put out by what they saw as an "invasion" of She county shopkeepers, who, they grumbled, kept long hours and offered low prices to drive sales. Tunxi locals who worked for She county employers also grumbled about the tight-fisted and time-conscious nature of their bosses. Of course, according to She county locals, the Tunxinese were simply indolent and lazy people who tried to justify it by appealing to high-mindedness. It was hardly *their* fault if a little hard work enabled them to outcompete the locals.

Of course, while stereotypes are often (or at least presented as) enduring, concepts of localness shift with context. I will address this more in chapter three, where I talk about regional accented-inflected Mandarin, but the strong county identities (at least of Xiuning and She County) combined with the melting-pot nature of Tunxi meant that who counted as "local" was never a fixed or straightforward matter. More often than not, when I asked someone if they were a local (*bendiren*), I would get a hesitation, as people thought how to calibrate their response based on the identity of the speaker. In my case, as a foreign "local expert," the answer was hard.

Few Shexianese wanted to identify as an outsider in relation to me, the ultimate outsider, yet they also figured that the distinction between Tunxi and She County might be meaningful enough to me that to identify as a Tunxi "local" would be incorrect. (By contrast, the few well-educated people from other provinces who ended up in Huangshan would often bond with me over our shared outside (*waidi*) status, collapsing the difference between urban Chinese and American in our shared relationship to the provincial nature of Tunxi.)

"Second Generation Rich"

In a ruralish place like Tunxi, not only do strict boundaries between urban and rural not exist, but I argue that normative assumptions of urban superiority and rural inferiority also do not necessarily hold. In this final section, I will explore ways in which "the rural" is valued by locals. I first present the following vignette from my fieldnotes:

I was sitting one warm fall evening at the newsstand with Lu, who in the time of my fieldwork was the third and final owner of the stand and a neighbor of the first owner's mother (Auntie Chu). Lu was a pleasant round-faced and soft-spoken woman in her early 30s. She'd grown up in Tunxi and was the mother of an 11-year-old boy. Despite the nice weather, she and I were sitting on stools inside the cramped newsstand. Lu was focused on her embroidery and I was watching her in amiable silence. A young woman in a matching lavender sweat suit and her long thick hair in a pony tail pulled up to our stand in a three-wheel delivery scooter with a plastic bag of clothes to give to Lu. Lu greeted her warmly, and invited her to cram into the newsstand with us. Ma, a 25-year-old milk delivery woman, was old friends with Lu's younger cousin.

After Ma left, Lu turned to me, telling me that Ma was a lucky woman. "She's a fu'erdai (second-generation rich)." She said to me. I was a bit surprised. I knew the term fu'erdai mainly from Chinese social media where stories circulated of drunken Lamborghini accidents and rooms filled with Cartier watches. How could "second-generation rich" apply to a milk delivery woman in a purple sweatsuit? Lu continued, telling me that Ma had a house in Yansi, a city of about 50,000 people in the neighboring district to Tunxi, a house in Xiuning County, as well as an apartment in Tunxi. I nodded, remarking that those were indeed a lot of houses, though in a region where real estate was cheap and children often inherited multiple homes from elderly relatives, I thought to myself, it was hardly a marker of unusual wealth. Perhaps my skepticism showed on my face, because Lu continued. Even though Ma lived mostly in Tunxi, she still had a rural hukou (residence permit). Having a rural residence permit meant that Ma didn't have to pay taxes and could get heavily subsidized health insurance. On top of this, she worked for her

in-laws delivering milk, and her in-laws and helped her and her husband buy their Tunxi apartment.

"She's invited me multiple times to go visit her house, but [I've] never gone," said Lu. After a brief pause, Lu emphasized, "[I] don't have time."

This vignette reveals the complex and nuanced ways that rurality and class intersect. In Ma and Lu's familiar but subtly testy relationship, we can see how local particulars do not reproduce the expected urban/rural hierarchies. There are several levels in this interaction that I want to focus on.

First, we can read the interaction as a form of fractal recursivity (Irvine & Gal 2000), where class relations manifest themselves on a local scale in forms too subtle for the foreign anthropologist to pick up. Sensing my cluelessness, Lu pointed out to me signs of Ma's relative wealth. She noted that Ma owned an iphone 5, which Lu could never afford. Also her new lavender sweatsuit, which to my undiscerning American eyes simply read as casual, to Lu signaled a trendy interest in projecting an air of youthful leisure. Indeed, my inability to pick up on subtle class markers was a source of amusement for others during my fieldwork. Quite helpfully, my bumbling cluelessness often meant, as in the case of Lu, that the implicit had to be made explicit so that even I could understand it.[16]

In this interaction, it is not simply the case of a relatively wealthy rural woman vs. a relatively poor urban woman, but the actual marker of her wealth is her rural status. Ma's rural hukou despite her urban home address is what marks her as "second-generation rich." The rural

[16] I assumed Auntie Hu, another newsstand regular, was working class because I read her lack of teeth and her shapeless mismatched (to my eyes) clothes as a sign of her lower-class status. I was surprised to discover several months in to my fieldwork that she was actually the wife of a wealthy official.

hukou is itself valued for the tangible (if often exaggerated—Lu told me that with a rural hukou, "everything you buy is subsidized") material benefits it brings to its owner, but in the case of Ma, her rural hukou is a material manifestation of the social and political capital she has access to in order to keep her hukou. In the course of our discussion the topic of hukous (residence permits) came up, and Ma, innocently or not, said to Lu, "but, don't you have a rural hukou too." Lu responded, "not anymore." Whether this was an innocent gaffe or pointed jab is unclear to me, but I would argue we can read it as a subtle instance of Ma asserting her class position over Lu. Lu very likely read it in the same way, because half an hour after Ma left, Lu used the topic of relative price of cellphones in China vs. America (a popular conversation topic) to segue into a discussion of Ma's wealth.

At the end of our conversation, Lu mentions that Ma has invited her to visit her (Ma's) new house, but Lu hasn't gone. She pauses and then provides a reason, which is that she doesn't have time. Rather than providing a "neutral" alibi for why she hasn't visited a friend's house, I would argue that we can read Lu's assertion of no free time as actually a quite cutting class critique. The first half of this statement, we see that Ma has invited Lu multiple (*jige*) times to visit her house. Lu's emphasis on the repeated nature of Ma's invitation shows that Ma's invitation is sincere. Moreover, the repeated nature borders on something like begging, upending normative power relations: Lu is not anxious to see her wealthy friend's new house, rather, her friend is anxious for Lu to see it, but Lu is in no hurry. To be hosted by a wealthy friend is a way of establishing social relationships within the normative social hierarchy: by partaking in such hospitality, one is placing oneself in minor debt and acknowledging the superior social relationship of the person hosting. In friendships between social equals, this "debt" is easily repaid through reciprocal hosting, but in an unequal status relationship, the act may be

reciprocated but the relationship is never balanced, as in the unlikely event Ma would even accept Lu's invitation, Lu can never host Ma with the same level of hospitality that Ma can. By refusing Ma, Lu is keeping social distance and refusing to place herself directly in Ma's debt, thereby refusing to acknowledge the legitimacy of Ma's superior status over her.

The second part of her utterance comes after a pause and is distinctly louder, with a long heavy emphasis on the "no," ("I have **noooo** time.") The modulation in tone takes what could be a polite deflection into an emphasis on her total lack of time. In urbanizing rural China, time is a highly sought-after commodity, to the point we might say that money is time. Lu's working-class status is not only reflected in her relatively low income, but also in the long hours she had to work. Lu ran the newsstand from 7 am to 9 pm, generally 7 days a week. While there was much downtime at the newsstand for working on needlepoint, Lu's ability to leave was constrained and her downtime was determined by the rhythm of her customers, such that she did not truly have control over it. Indeed, while being one's own boss was appealing, the long hours and low earnings were the reason why the first newsstand owner sold the stand to take a job as a shop keeper's attendant for a steady salary and nine-to-five hours.

While we know very little about Ma's delivery schedule, the nature of her job provides a built-in mobility to perhaps fit in errands throughout the day. She also has more free time than Lu, as she is able to drop by the newsstand on a semi-regular basis to chat. Around Tunxi, the flaunting of leisure time was as, if not more, prevalent than the flaunting of material goods. Yoga teacher Yuan had a day job as a cadre in the housing department, which she spent approximately five hours a week on. During the rest of the time, she drove around Tunxi and Xiuning taking photographs, doing yoga, and spending time chatting with friends. Other yoga students who worked in government quietly grumbled about Teacher Yuan's slack work ethic especially

compared to her relatively high salary, which they saw as an example of cadres' privilege over the ordinary bureaucrat and also a reflection of her husband's family's wealth.

If leisure time is as indicative of social class as material wealth, we see here that this intersects with rural lifestyle in an interesting way. Farming, as scholars such as EP Thompson have noted, does not operate on "clock time." While working rice paddies or picking tea on terraced mountain slopes is certainly in many ways harder work than working as a shopkeeper's assistant or running a newsstand, farming allows for more or at least a different sort of freedom in scheduling one's time. Indeed, the loss of free time was a common theme in nostalgia for a Maoist past. For working class people in Huangshan, the economic changes of the past thirty years and the increasing pace of capitalist competition meant they had to work harder and own more stuff, only to remain among the poorest people in China. Before they were poor, but at least they didn't have to work twelve hours a day at it.

Thus, while it is very likely the case that working in the rural economy does not indeed allow for more free time, the perception that rural people have the freedom to structure their time in a way no longer accessible to urban workers; and that leisure time in the day time is a marker of high-class status, therefore creates an interesting confluence between an imagined rural life and an imagined form of wealth, both of which happened to be embodied in Ma, the young woman with her three houses and her rural hukou who dresses in leisure clothes and who has time to stop for a 45-minute chat in the late afternoon. The perception of rural life as allowing for free time also resonates with memories of life under more orthodox socialism, when rural status was valued (at least in state rhetoric) and people felt they had more free time. While a rural hukou does indeed grant certain material benefits to its holder in comparison to an urban hukou in a small, relatively poor town like Tunxi, we might see the re-valuation of the rural as in part a

critique of present economic conditions, where decades of free-market policies have created a sense of increasing precarity, competition, and a general feeling of an increased pace of life.

Conclusion

There is much more than can be written on the multivalent nature of rurality and its various manifestations in Huangshan, however they will have to be addressed later in the dissertation or elsewhere. In conclusion of this chapter, such as it is, is that my ethnography is deeply rooted in a particular place (Huangshan) that was simultaneously embedded in various emergent cross-scalar networks. For this reason, no one perspective or one framework is adequate to fully situate Huangshan as a place.

Chapter Two: Curating the City: Huizhou Culture and the Huizhou Woman

Introduction

In this chapter, I examine local government attempts to curate the Huangshan Metropolitan Region in general, and Tunxi in particular, as a cultural region. Here I explore the various contradictions and paradoxes that local officials struggle with as they work to make Huangshan a major domestic and international tourist destination. In a region famous for its natural beauty and well-preserved historic architecture but simultaneously considered to be poor and remote, officials struggle with how to preserve this legacy without simultaneously preserving themselves as relics rather than stewards of the past. For government officials assigned the task of developing Huangshan into a prosperous and modern region governed in line with scientific socialist (*kexueshehui*) principles, how do they reconcile their dual roles of preserving China's Neo-Confucian heritage with a governing ideology (socialism) that has traditionally been considered to be overtly antithetical to this heritage?

Huizhou and Jiangnan Culture

The Huangshan metropolitan region is often colloquially referred to as "Huizhou," after the historic cultural and political region which is roughly coterminous with the modern area of Huangshan, along with Jixi county to the east in Anhui and Wuyuan county to the south in what is now Jiangxi province.[1] The local historical tradition has it that Huizhou as a region was

[1] The historic region was comprised of six counties: She, Xiuning, Qimen, Jixi, Wuyuan, and Yi county.

formed during the Northern Song (960-1127 CE), and the area maintained its local political and cultural identity through the end of the Qing Dynasty (Du 2015),and, per Chapter One, up to the present in some sense. Although the topography of Huizhou is rugged and rather remote, the region is well-known for producing numerous scholars, statesmen, and merchant lineages throughout the centuries, especially in the context of the politically and economically powerful salt industry that dominated the economy of Jiangnan during the Qing Dynasty (Finnane 2004, Guo 2005, Wu 2017).

Huizhou's reputation as a place existed primarily through the life stories of its illustrious residents who carried its reputation to the centers of wealth and power in dynastic China, primarily in the wealthy Jiangnan region but also later to the imperial court in Beijing. Huizhou was the ancestral birthplace of the Neo-Confucian philosopher Zhu Xi (1130-1200 CE), whose synthesis of classic Confucian thought with the works of earlier Song Dynasty Neo-Confucian thinkers such as Cheng Yi and Cheng Hao, known as *daoxue* (the teaching of the way) or *lixue* (the teaching of principle), shaped orthodox Neo-Confucian thought from the Yuan Dynasty onwards (Chan 1969). During the Yuan Dynasty, local literati in Huizhou established academies based on the teachings of Zhu Xi, and with the revival of imperial examination system during the Ming Dynasty, the Huizhou region produced a disproportionate number of provincial degree holders of the top-ranked *jinshi* and second-ranked *juren* levels. Although Huizhou only contained ten percent of Anhui's population, during the Ming Dynasty 37.8 percent of Anhui *jinshi* and during the Qing Dynsasty 19 percent of Anhui *jinshi* hailed from Huizhou (Guo 2005, 17).

Beginning in the Ming Dynasty, Huizhou also became known for its merchants, *huishang*, who traveled to the wealthy Yangtze River Delta to conduct trade.[2] In the major metropolises of Jiangnan of Hangzhou, Suzhou, Hankou, and Yangzhou, Huizhou merchants developed powerful multigenerational lineages that engaged in trade across all of China. During the Ming Dynasty, Huizhou merchants gained control of the very lucrative government-issued salt monopoly in Yangzhou, which during the Qing Dynasty allowed them to convert economic success into political influence with the imperial court (Wu 2017). Wealthy merchants invested heavily in their adopted cities, patronizing scholarship and arts during a period that is often considered to be a golden age of Han Chinese culture. In so doing, they further enhanced the reputation of *huishang* as those who valued culture and learning. In their ancestral home of Huizhou, merchants undertook massive construction projects, building large ancestral halls, memorial archways, lineage schools, and charitable homes for impoverished kinspeople. The lineage schools funded by wealthy salt merchants in large part contributed to the high number of degree holders from the Huizhou region, and the massive and expensive construction projects in the region helped to support local skilled craftsmen and artisans (Guo 2005).

An Elite Backwater

Qianshi bu xiu, shengzai Huizhou, shi san, si sui, wang wai yi diu

"If your ancestors were unfortunate, you were born in Huizhou. At 13 or 14, you must leave to make your fortune."

-Traditional Saying

[2] Jiangnan means "south of the river," which should strictly refer to the southern part of the river delta, however the term Jiangnan was applied to a network of wealthy cities that existed as China's economic center during the Ming and Qing periods. For example, Yangzhou was considered to be part of Jiangnan even though it is technically north of the Yangtze River (Du 2015).

Yet while the *huishang* gained economic, cultural, and political prominence in China's economic and cultural centers, the region of Huizhou itself maintained the curious status of being somewhat of a remote backwater. It was the source of successful merchant lineages, illustrious scholars, and powerful statesmen, not to mention the ancestral homeland of Neo-Confucian philosopher Zhu Xi, yet the geographical region was not itself the center of economic, cultural, or political power but rather at its remote periphery. Even at the height of the Huizhou merchants' economic and political success in the High Qing, Huizhou remained itself the home of poor relations who survived through subsistence farming, foraging, and as craftsmen. They were recipients of largess bestowed by those who had left. The region was also a potential source of young kinspeople who might distinguish themselves in the imperial exam system or through mercantile prowess and thus achieve glory for their lineage, but only on leaving the region. A shortage of arable land and a mountainous climate meant that material living conditions remains harsh. Historian Philip Kuhn, citing Wang Shido, describes it thusly:

> The scholar Wang Shih-to, who lived as a refugee in this region during the 1850s (Chi-ch'i County, part of Hui-chou Prefecture), described the area as chronically poor, overpopulated, and short of basic commodities. Despite high rates of female infanticide, population expansion was sustained by extremely early marriage, to the extent that "a man could become a grandfather at the age of thirty." The county he was describing exported tea, forest products, and (sporadically) precious metals and lead. Yet the bottom line was abject misery: "The county is everywhere mountainous, and the peasants toil upward, level by level, to plant a foot or reap an inch. If it is dry, they fear their crops will wither; if it rains, they fear they will be washed away. Though they labor ceaselessly all year, their clothing is fit only for oxen and horses, their food only for dogs and swine" (40).

Such an image of grinding poverty seems at odds with both the lavish descriptions of Huizhou produced by scholars and merchants in the Ming and Qing, as well as belied by the extensive

material infrastructure of the Ming and Qing that still exists in present-day Huangshan. In part, this may represent the relative decline of living standards from the High Qing to the late Qing, yet as the traditional saying, locally dated to the Ming Dynasty, indicates, living conditions in Huizhou have always been harsh, and merchant success was in large part a product of necessity rather than choice. I would argue that this also represents the fundamental contradiction of Huangshan/Huizhou, a region that manages to be both rich and impoverished at the same time. Huangshan is both the inheritor of an elite cultural legacy and natural resources of breathtaking beauty all while remaining a backwater. The natural beauty of Yellow Mountain, located in the north of Huizhou, likewise attracted scholars, artists, and poets from early times (and according to myth is the site where the legendary Yellow Emperor ascended into heaven), yet the same mountainous geography which inspired much Chinese artwork at the same time made living conditions challenging.

In a similar way, present-day living conditions mirror those of the past, as most Huangshanese leave the region to seek work. In the Ming Dynasty, Wang Shizhen claimed that "three-tenths of their people live in the homeland while seven-tenths are scattered throughout 'all-under-Heaven'" (Du 2015, 36). While I do not know the exact figures, young upwardly mobile Huangshanese must leave the region if they are to find white-collar positions, while able-bodied villagers tend to migrate for years at a time to work in large cities, earning far more than they would have had they remained at home to farm. Likewise, the rich historical heritage of Huangshan is in large part a product of its poverty compared to the wealthy Eastern Seaboard that encompasses the historic Jiangnan area. As Yulian Wu notes, the rapid modernization of the 1980s, which destroyed whatever material remnants of dynastic China that were not destroyed in the political turmoil of the 1960s elsewhere in China, completely passed by Huangshan, leaving

the material environment of the Ming and Qing uniquely undisturbed (5). The grand estates of Hangzhou and Suzhou have been replaced by new material forms of conspicuous wealth in areas where the nouveau riche still continue to live. In Huangshan, the homes of grand families fell into genteel dilapidation, with layers of political slogans from now defunct campaigns visible as successive layers of paint peel.

It is this conundrum at the heart of my chapter: how do local officials curate the rich natural and cultural material resources of a region where in a sense they have always been the poor relatives of a cultural elite? How do they harness the cultural legacy of Huizhou, primarily embodied in mobile persons, and root it to a place?

Culture: Material (*wuzhi*) and Nonmaterial (*feiwuzhi*)

"Land of Propriety and Righteousness"

Yongtao Du writes that beginning in the Southern Song Dynasty, Huizhounese intellectuals undertook a process of conscious curation of the region as possessing a distinctive Confucian culture (2015, 28). In the Southern Song Dynasty, literati attributed the unique character (*qi*) of Huizhou people to its mountainous topography, as the beautiful mountains and rivers predisposed its literati to introspection and its isolation "bestowed hardworking and stoic qualities on its menfolk and chastity on its womenfolk" (Du 2015, 31). During the Yuan Dynasty, local literati who were inspired by the region's status as the homeland of Zhu Xi worked to establish Huizhou as the origin and center of all Neo-Confucian thought. In 1281, literatus Fang Hui declared that "Huizhou is the Lu of our day" (Du 2015, 39), and local scholars began to refer to the the region as "Dongnan Zou Lu" (Zou and Lu of the Southeast), Zou being the birthplace of Mencius, and Lu being the birthplace of Confucius. At the same time, scholars

undertook genealogical projects to trace the ancestry of pre-Zhu Xi Neo-Confucian philosophers Cheng Yi and Cheng Hao to Huizhou, thus claiming the region as the ancestral homeland of them as well. To the local literati, Huizhou's position as the birthplace of Neo-Confucian thought meant that "Huizhou literati, as the most authentic heirs to this learning, became 'first among equals'" (Du 2015, 46).

Huizhou's self-made reputation as a model of Confucian propriety did not only apply to the elites. Local elites stated that even "peasants" adhered to Confucian codes of conduct, which were popularized through Mulian operas and the construction of large shrines, ancestral temples, and monuments such as memorial archways, which served as a way for wealthy merchants to both conspicuously display their material wealth and political connections and a pedagogical tool to educate the peasantry through physical presence of the lessons of morality, righteousness, and proper behavior (Guo 2005, Wu 2017). During the Ming Dynasty, Wu Daokun, a scholar-official originally from She County, claimed Huizhou to be a "land of propriety and righteousness" where "even in solitary villages and humble rooms" farmers "practice the sage's Way" (Guo 19). Although commerce was not something necessarily associated with Neo-Confucian values, Huizhou merchants claimed that their business success was due to their "Confucian capitalism" (*jiarujiehe*) (Zhu 2010), which brought rigorous moral codes of conduct into business practices. They also were the primary economic supporters who built up a material and social infrastructure to promote classical learning in the region.

This self-fashioning of the region as an exemplar of Confucian learning and behavior is a project that continues in the present day. In the contemporary context, Huangshan is primarily nationally famous for its stunning natural beauty, with clean air, water, and classically beautiful mountain and forest landscapes. Yet while locals too appreciated the beauty of the natural

landscape, they also felt that Huizhou's neo-Confucian legacy and history of commercial and intellectual success ought to be as famous as Yellow Mountain among tourists visiting the region. Indeed, for my informants, it was the cultural and material traces of neo-Confucian heritage that still existed in present-day Huangshan that distinguished them from the rest of China and gave the region its distinct local character.

Stately Ming and Qing-dynasty ancestral halls, merchant mansions, and memorial archways are still found in villages in the countryside, preserving a legacy of classical Chinese architecture no longer found in most other parts of China. This was likely in large part due to the particular political and economic factors of Huangshan after the 1949 Revolution. While locals claimed that the reason they did not tear down old structures during the Cultural Revolution was due to extreme poverty and the inability to rebuild, one might note that poverty did not stop people in other parts of China from eliminating their "feudal" pasts. It is possible that, after the disastrous experience of the Great Leap Forward and its associated famine, in which Anhui Province had the second highest death toll in China, local officials were reeling from the political fallout of such strict compliance to political movements or simply did not have the stomach so soon afterward to enforce a potentially unpopular policy. Whatever the reason, Huangshan was unusual in its widescale preservation of old buildings. From the 1980s onward, economic growth and exuberant new development has arguably been far more destructive to the past than any Maoist campaign. In the reform era, then, as Wu notes, the poverty and "underdevelopment" of Huangshan prevented much further destruction.

Instead of focusing on political or economic factors, local officials I talked with saw the reason for the preservation of Huangshan's material historical past as part of an imperative to represent locally unique character traits that were ultimately inherited from the neo-Confucian

legacy. In particular, the sort of discipline to put long-term cultural needs over immediate economic needs required them to preserve the "undeveloped" nature of Huangshan and demanded "propriety and righteousness" from government officials and ordinary citizens alike.

Local officials prided themselves on their adherence to contemporary state orthodoxy. Although the specific values of "scientific socialism" (*kexue shehuizhuyi*) may appear to differ quite radically from those advanced by Zhu Xi and his school of neo-Confucianism, they saw their commitment to the values of following and enforcing state policy as still reflecting a fundamental commitment to a neo-Confucian ethos of upholding order and propriety. While some of my informants would disagree, government officials told me they felt they and their colleagues were less corrupt than officials elsewhere in rural China. Instead of spending money on crass hobbies like drinking, women, and designer Western goods, many male officials told me they spent their free time cultivating refined hobbies like collecting local antiques, studying or writing poetry, and enjoying nature, much as their literati ancestors would have done. In my many meetings with government officials, we would drink tea in porcelain cups, and they would comment approvingly on the discerning taste I had demonstrated in my decision to study Huizhou culture, often telling me that they themselves were also scholars of local culture. When I banqueted or sang karaoke with wealthy officials, the food was often deliberately simple and alcohol was kept to a minimum, with most officials preferring green tea. The reasons for this are likely complex and probably inseparable from President Xi Jinping's anti-corruption austerity campaign, which began shortly before I started my fieldwork; my own presence as an outside observer; or perhaps any other number of reasons, however, it was a marked departure from my experiences at official banquets in Shandong and Heilongjiang in the mid-2000s, as well as stories that I have heard or read about from others.

A sense of refinement was not just held by elites; locals from all social classes saw themselves as being politer, less pushy, and more relaxed than people elsewhere in China, sometimes likening themselves to Japanese, Koreans, and Taiwanese, more "traditional" Asian places that they saw as having more "Confucian" cultures than mainland China. While I took these local cultural descriptions with a grain of salt, people from other parts of China living or visiting Huizhou told me that they did notice a marked difference in Huizhou residents, whom they saw as politer, more reserved, and more relaxed (or depending on point of view, aloof and snobby), which they also attributed to Huizhou's neo-Confucian heritage.

Beyond self-flattery, local elites would point out concrete manifestations of local moral rectitude. First, officials frequently told me that Huangshan had the best adherence rates in Anhui to the One-Child Policy, a fact that they saw as reflecting well on their ability to enforce an oftentimes-challenging law, as well as reflecting well on the local populace's willingness to obey the law even to their own detriment. Scholars of the One-Child policy have long noted that the policy is odds with what has been framed as a neo-Confucian cultural legacy of requiring a son to carry on the lineage name, something that they note has been a source of conflict especially in rural China (see chapter five for more on the One-Child Policy). Yet here, we can see that this same set of values can also be called upon to explain the opposite, mainly the self-discipline and rationality of people who are able to put the good of society ahead of individual desires.

Secondly, Huizhou had strict building codes, requiring all new village construction and all construction visible from the roads to be built in the characteristic Huizhou style,[3] which I will describe in the next section. The striking visual uniformity of Huizhou villages was in

[3] Huizhou style might also be called Hui style, however I have chosen to refer to it as Huizhou style to avoid confusion with the Hui, who are China's largest Muslim minority population.

marked contrast to the rather creative approach to architectural pastiche adopted by peasants in other parts of China, which my informants considered to be "messy" (*luanqibazao*) or "ugly" (*nankan*).[4] Driving from from Anhui to Zhejiang, the clearest way to tell one had crossed the border was from the style of houses on the side of the road. In wealthy Zhejiang, the brightly colored brick and tile homes decorated with a bricolage of global architectural flourishes epitomizes the exuberant style of wealthy peasant homes in the 90s.

[4] As a small illustrative exception which supports my overall point, on the outskirts of Tunxi, just over the border in the Huizhou district, a local development company was building a planned community rather imaginatively named "Narnia Town." Narnia Town was imagined as an upscale "European themed" planned community which drew on a wide variety of French, Italian, and German architectural styles, and which centered around a Howard Johnson's hotel. To comply with the law, the developers had built a row of Hui-style buildings along the road, behind from which the turrets and spires of the "European" development showed through. After months of driving past Narnia and wondering if perhaps I was the only person who found it to be an aesthetic eyesore, the topic finally came up. My one friend made a remark on the ugliness of Narnia Town, and when my second friend pointed out that they had constructed a Hui-style Chinese façade to mask the European architectural bricolage, my first friend pointed out the façade simply made it even uglier (*geng nan kan*).

Figure 7: Modern Huizhou village (http://jeffj.net/travel/China_2003.htm)

Figure 8: Relatively subdued village houses in Zhejiang (https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_1794202)

Finally, scholarship on the local dialect and customs also locates the cause of Huangshan's unique language and character in its distinctive topography, paralleling the arguments of scholars of the Southern Song. For example, in an article titled "Huizhou Dialect Words and Folk Culture," (*Huizhou Fangyan Ci yu Minsu Wenhua*) (2014), Changming Shen notes that geographic features have influenced the language and customs of the people. For example, she attributes the lack of terms for cardinal directions in Huizhou dialects to the limited field of vision caused by the high mountainous terrain as compared to the relatively flat plains elsewhere in China.

Curation of Material Culture

This emphasis on architectural preservation was not simply due to disinterested concerns with aesthetics or a "filial" reverence for the past. Local awareness of architecture as a monetizable tourist commodity only began in the early 2000s, in large part after Zhang Yimou

used the well-preserved village center of Yi County's Hongcun and the surrounding bamboo forests and misty mountain peaks to film "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" (released 2000). The film brought national and international recognition to what had been a rather sleepy backwater even in Huangshan.[5] Soon after, Zhang built his own traditional Chinese village by buying up Ming and Qing era structures from around the Huangshan area and reassembling them into a village not far from Hongcun. As a life-size village movie set, almost all mainland Chinese period pieces and TV shows are now filmed there, making Huizhou architecture and scenery synonymous with "traditional China" for the whole country. In 2000, the same year as "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon's" release, UNESCO declared Hongcun and neighboring village Xidi to be world heritage sites. With their national image as representing "traditional China," millions of Chinese tourists flock to the two villages, each paying the 135 ($20) yuan-per-village entrance fee. As a result, other county governments have also started programs to attract tourist money. She county, the historical capital of the Huizhou prefecture and the original county of most of the major merchant lineages, has started charging admission for non-locals to visit the old section of the She county seat. Additionally, county level officials have moved most of the county's memorial archways into a large park, and village officials have started to charge admission to visit the historically-restored village of Chengkou, the ancestral home of the Tang family, one of the most wealthy and powerful merchant-scholar families in Qing Dynasty Huizhou.[6] Indeed, in my extensive travels around Huizhou, my friends were frequently indignant at the number of villages now attempting to demand admission once they saw a foreigner

[5] With a population of just 90,000, Yi county is the most sparsely populated and rural county in Huangshan.

[6] While the complaints may be primarily motivated by envy, it is was often remarked to me that Huizhou is filled with dozens of well-preserved villages, many of which are more historically significant and have more impressive architecture than Hongcun and Xidi.

present. Often extensive arguing in the local dialect, or occasionally entrance through a back alley, would get me in for free, but on a few occasions we would leave, as my indignant local friends refused to let me pay for places they had visited hundreds of times for free. Residents in She and Xiuning, the traditional centers of wealth and learning in Huizhou, and thus in possession of the most significant historical sites and the most elaborate architecture, were disdainful of the popularity of Hongcun and Xidi, which they noted were not particularly remarkable or historically significant beyond being reasonably well-preserved. Nonetheless, Xiuning, She, and even Tunxi have been unable to attract even a fraction of the tourists who visit Hongcun, Xidi, and the Yellow Mountain park.

Standardization

As part of an effort to curate the region as a tourist destination, local officials have imposed a degree of standardization on local material culture and cuisine that are somewhat unique in comparison to other parts of China. This is in part to reinforce the "unique local character" of the region and also to provide tourists with a coherent travel experience throughout the region. As with all standardization projects, the act of standardization requires selecting certain traits to become iconic at the expense or erasure of others.

Although there was actually a fairly wide variety in architectural styles in older Huizhou architecture, "Huizhou style" has come to be defined by a few distinct characteristics, the presence of which was necessary for modern construction to be considered appropriately "Huizhou" to satisfy local building codes. Huizhou-style architecture consisted of white square or rectangular buildings (traditionally whitewashed stone or brick but now cement) with a distinct stepped "horse-head" style (*matou*) roof, which people said was originally a form of fire

prevention.[7] White walls, a square shape, and a horse-head style roof are the only government building requirements, but many residents also chose to add either elaborate carved-wood window screens, stone carvings above the door frame, or painted decorations near the roof, all of which are characteristics of older Huizhou buildings. The building code was strictly enforced. Both urban planning officials and peasants independently confirmed that buildings which did not meet aesthetic specifications would be torn down and had to be rebuilt at the owners' expense. Village resettlement, which was an ongoing process as the Chinese government has been promoting rapid urban expansion, involved the establishment of whole new villages, which were being done in the form of "Huizhou-style townhouses." Each village family was given a new, much smaller plot of land in the "new village" resettlement site and a set amount of money with which to build a conjoining townhouse according to a state-approved blueprint. Newer architecture built since the late-2000s building codes was thus strikingly uniform across the entire Huangshan metropolitan region, in contrast to somewhat older buildings—erected in the 1980s and 1990s before the new building codes—which tended to be more subdued than some of

[7] Houses built in the Ming or early Qing tended to not have the horse head roof, nor did buildings built in the 1960s and 70s, which also had a classic whitewashed exterior with stone or wood carving over the door.

the peasant houses in other parts of China but still reflected some personal variation in color and style.

Figure 9: Traditional Huizhou architecture with horse-head roof (http://wuming.xuefo.net/nr/10/99141.html)

Figure 10: Modern Huizhou-style architecture (photo by author)

Distinctive local architecture is, after natural beauty, the greatest tourist draw to the area. Another lucrative income source is, of course, local cuisine, as tourists cannot avoid eating on their travels. Beyond mere sustenance, local cuisine was one aspect of local culture that my informants considered to be underappreciated by tourists. Huizhou cuisine (*hui cai*) is officially listed as one of the Eight Great cuisines of China (*ba da cai ji*).[8] Huizhou cuisine is marked by its heavy use of salt and red peppers, a relative absence of vinegar, garlic, soy sauce, or other flavorings, and a reliance on gathered over farmed crops. Bamboo, mushrooms, Chinese yams (tubers and vines), and "wild vegetables" (*yecai*) form the basis of most dishes. The main protein

[8] The Eight Great Cuisine regions of China include: Cantonese cuisine, (*yue cai*), Sichuanese cusine (*chuan cai*), Jiangsu cuising (*su cai*), Zhejiang cuising (*zhe cai*), Fujian/Min cuisine (*min cai*), Hunan cuisine (*hu cai*), Huizhou cuisine (*hui cai*), and Shandong cuising (*lu cai*).

is tofu, which can be prepared in many ways, though the most common are (further) fermentation or drying. Dried tofu is one of the major exports of the region, and can either be eaten as a snack or sliced and stir fried. Meat and eggs are rarely used in local cuisine, with the exception of salty dried ham, which is used generally as a flavoring. River fish and frogs are also eaten, and chicken is a special delicacy. In general, the local cuisine reflected the region's history as a poor mountainous area relatively inhospitable to farming.

Flavor-wise, Hui cuisine is quite distinct from other regional styles, and my local informants tended to strongly prefer their own cuisine over other Chinese cuisines. Given its primary industry is tourism, there were surprisingly few non Huizhou-style restaurants in Tunxi city (and even fewer elsewhere in Huangshan). My informants tended to spend a disproportionately high percentage of their salary on food, either at restaurants or on ingredients to prepare at home. In addition, food photography as a hobby was popular with almost anyone with a smart phone, even among people who did not have a particularly strong interest in either food or photography. The relative absence of a national or international reputation for Huizhou cuisine was a concern for locals, and I was frequently asked if there were any Huizhou-style restaurants in America. When I answered in the negative, it was often suggested that I open one myself. This interest went beyond idle chatter. One day, I was surprised to see myself on the front page of the local paper, making a simple spaghetti dinner in my kitchen with two friends.[9] I was even more surprised to read that I had said with "extreme longing, 'I have taught you how to make spaghetti and steak, now it is your turn to teach me how to make barbecued stinky fish

[9] I had been cooking dinner in the yoga studio where I lived when several inquisitive yoga students asked me what I was making. I showed them how to make a simple sauce with tomatoes, garlic, mushrooms, and onion. Several students had snapped photos with their cell phones, and a chain of forwarding the photos through friends and relatives ended up with a journalist at the local paper receiving a copy.

(*chou gui yu,* a local delicacy) and barbecued pork. That way, when I return home for National Holidays,[10] I can make genuine (*zhengzong*) Huizhou cuisine to feed to my husband.'" The article continued, "not only did she like Huangshan's beautiful scenery, she also loved Hui cuisine. Because of this, in the few days before the National Holidays, she absolutely will make sure to learn a few Chinese dishes to show off when she returns home."[11]

Beyond my imaginary love for Huizhou cuisine, this newspaper article provides a good example of how as a foreigner, my simple spaghetti dinner with friends was recruited into a larger project of tourism and of value commensuration. The event becomes newsworthy not as one of cultural difference, but rather one of cultural exchange wherein Huizhou cuisine is the more valuable object. As an American scholar at a prestigious university, and therefore, a person of high-value, my desire to learn to cook Huizhou cuisine and bring it to America shows that I have the discernment to recognize its value. The newspaper is not simply reporting this "fact," it is acting to establish Huizhou cuisine as something worthy of being internationally famous.

History too becomes standardized as part of the curatorial project. In this case, Huizhou's neo-Confucian history becomes homogenized and flattened, such that "neo-Confucianism" appears to represent a static and unchanging set of values, ideas, and practices from the Southern Song through the late-Qing, erasing historical difference and change over time in official policy, doctrinal differences, and local custom.

[10] The national week-long holiday in early October to celebrate the founding of the PRC

[11] "我教你们做意大利面和牛排，现在该轮到你们教我做红烧臭鳜鱼和红烧肉了。这样，国庆节我就可以回国烤正宗徽菜给我丈夫吃了。" Yan 满是期待地说...[她]不仅喜欢上了黄山的优美风景，也爱上了徽州美食。因此，趁着国庆放假的前几天，她一定要向认识的黄山黄山主妇们学做几个拿手的中国菜，以便回国留一手。

The Huizhou woman

Fireworks exploded over the water as acrobats wrapped in silk ribbons all descended from their invisible wires to the stage, where they joined a crowd of other acrobats dressed in Qing Dynasty finery. It was the grand finale of A-Ju, an acrobatic performance narrating the life of a "virtuous widow" in Qing Dynasty Huizhou. It was the opening night, and county-level officials in remote Yi County hoped that the acrobatics show and the county's brand-new theater would draw enough tourists to be a new major source of revenue. The outdoor theater was built in the countryside, a few kilometers from Yi County's two UNESCO world heritage villages and next to a once-remote Buddhist temple. Although a devout Buddhist friend complained that the new theater spoiled the serenity of temple, the theater, like all new construction in the area, had been built to mimic the classic white stone architecture of the region so as to better blend in with the surroundings.

Like the new stadium, the performance itself spared no expense. The set was elaborate, with a large pool in the middle of the stage, a replica Qing dynasty merchant ship, and a golden bridal carriage. Each act was performed by a different acrobatics troupe, including a highly-publicized "international" troupe from Russia. The show told the story of A-Ju, an archetypal chaste or "virtuous" widow in dynastic Huizhou prefecture. After marrying her husband in an arranged marriage, she spends one night with him, the next day watching him depart down the Yangtze in a merchant ship. She is never to see her husband again as he drowns in a shipwreck, but she gives birth to a son and stays in her husband's household, taking care of his aging parents and successfully defending the family compound from bandits with her masterful kung-fu skills. As her sole reason for living, she devotes everything to her son, who in turn honors her when she dies in her virtuous old age. After death, she once again is reunited with her loving husband.

The acrobatics performance, like the stone memorial archways that dot the landscape, draws our attention to the central role of gender in Huizhou's historical and cultural legacy. It also demonstrates a conundrum for local officials, who must seek to reconcile a gendered history that for the past 100 years has been condemned as the source of Chinese backwardness by liberals and socialists, native-Chinese and foreigners alike. From the late Qing onward, intellectuals and social reformers condemned neo-Confucian state orthodoxy, imposed through classical education and the imperial exam system, as the cause of what they diagnosed as China's stagnation and relative weakness compared to dominant European and Japanese colonial powers. While condemning the whole system of imperial exams that structured the lives of elite young

men as stifling creativity and innovation, the perceived misogynistic practices attributed to neo-Confucian values came under particular condemnation by the (mostly male) reformers. The sad plight of women was highlighted in vernacular literature of the May Fourth movement in the works of authors such as Lu Xun, Ba Jin, and Mao Dun, among others, demonstrating how traditional practices such as foot binding, early marriage, concubinage, female seclusion, female infanticide, and widow chastity had retarded Chinese development by hobbling half of its population.

The Chinese Communists also saw traditional Chinese gender hierarchy as keeping China mired in feudalism. Promoting women's formal equality as necessary to achieve full socialism, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) made promoting women's literacy and reforming the marriage laws as two early priorities. *Women of China* magazine, the official mouthpiece of the party for women, prioritized educating women as to their new inheritance, property, and divorce rights and ridding women of "feudal subservient" mindsets. The failures of the CCP to implement a truly gender egalitarian system have been criticized by Anglo-American women's historians in the 1970s and 80s, who primarily critiqued the party for not truly rooting out male chauvinist traditional mindsets and habits or fully eliminating misogynist practices (see e.g. Croll 1978, Johnson 1983). Like the Marxists, May Fourth Intellectuals, and late Qing-era reformers, these historians shared the same assumptions that traditional neo-Confucian cultural orthodoxy had been patriarchal, promoting women's subordination.

While more recent scholarship on women in dynastic China has questioned the bleak modernist portrayal of women's position in traditional Chinese society, it is true that in popular discourse the idea that neo-Confucian practices and customs resulted in the subordination of women remains in present-day China. "Huizhou women's lives were hard" (*Huizhou nüren*

shenghuo ku) was a common refrain repeated to me by both men and women whenever I talked about my interest in studying women. During the many trips I took to view traditional architecture, my guide would always point out to me the women's quarters, which were on the second story and secluded from the main activity of the house. Although I have no way of verifying this, people repeatedly told me that the wooden staircases to the second story was purposely designed to be creaky such that anyone might hear if women decided to sneak out of the house. Certainly, it was true that in the heyday of Huizhou merchant culture, young men were encouraged to leave the region and seek fame and fortune elsewhere, leading to a very large number of women who were left behind to live apart from their husbands in their in-laws' households. The result was that Huizhou was home to a disproportionate number of "widows," some of whom were actually widowed after husbands lost their lives on the treacherous Yangtze, while others (as is less emphasized in official literature) lost their husbands to second families in Yangzhou or Hangzhou.

Yulian Wu argues that during the High Qing Manchu rulers were particularly interested in popularizing moral exemplars of Confucian propriety as part of their program to manage Manchu-Han interethnic relationships (2017). At the center of Manchu promotion of neo-Confucian values was an emphasis on female fidelity and widow chastity, which in the High Qing gained a level of importance far greater than it had during earlier periods. While Ming Dynasty emperors had encouraged the building of memorial archways in honor of particularly upright citizens as a way of spreading Confucian values in the countryside, Manchu rulers greatly expanded and systematized this system, creating seven categories of virtuous candidates who might be eligible to be honored with a memorial archway (Wu 2017, 164).[12] Huizhou with

[12] The seven categories included: distinguished officials and respected village scholars; filial and

its disproportionate number of widows and with Huizhou merchants' close ties to the imperial court meant that lineages in the region received permission to build a very large number of archways to chaste widows. Thus the large number of remaining archways in the region is in part because for whatever reason they were not torn down during the twentieth century and in part because Huizhou had a higher density of memorial archways than most other areas of China. These archways were built by sons and grandsons living in urban centers in Jiangnan who would fund the construction of such projects in their ancestral villages.

Huizhou's reputation as producing particularly virtuous and chaste women did not die out in the Qing. In popular contemporary Chinese culture, the "Huizhou woman" exists as a trope of an imagined ideal traditional woman, who embodied the values of chastity, propriety, feminine virtue, and who was able to bear endless suffering with grace. A TV series broadcast in 2006, titled "Huizhou women" (*Huizhou nüren*), depicted the hardships of several generations of virtuous women living in a large family compound in Qing Dynasty Huizhou, where true to form they suffered beautifully with endless patience. This trope was one that my informants also joked around with. At the yoga studio, if a woman did something she considered particularly clumsy or vulgar, such as noticeably passing gas, she might laugh and remark that she was no Huizhou woman, or someone else might make a similar comment to her. When Teacher Yuan, the yoga teacher and owner of the studio, was featured on the cover of a business magazine in Kunming, her elegant form in a graceful yoga pose was captioned simply with the phrase, "Huizhou woman."

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chaste persons, those conducting righteous activities; those who live to one hundred years; those who adopt orphans; those who have one birth with three boys; and those who voluntarily bury skeletons (Wu 164).

At the same time, being a Huizhou woman amid the locally imagined neo-Confucian gender legacy was an ambivalent one for women in Huangshan. When Wang, a music teacher and ambitious party member in her early 20s was out to dinner with a close male friend, Xu, and myself, the conversation turned to sexual experience. Wang had been teasing Xu about his new younger and particularly uptight girlfriend. Wang joked that it must be hard for a much older and more experienced man to be patient with a girl who likely wasn't willing to do anything sexual with him until marriage. Xu in turn turned the conversation back to Wang, asking her about her sexual experience with her fiancé of several years. Wang demurred a bit, and then finally admitted she had never dated before she met her fiancé, and so far had limited sexual interactions with him. Xu, who was originally from Hunan, looked surprised and blurted out, "well, I guess you're a Huizhou woman after all." Wang got mad and hit him with her purse, demanding that he take it back. To Wang, who considered herself a strong modern woman and an exemplary party member committed to gender equality (she frequently referred to herself as a "*nü hanzi*" or "female badass"[13]), the weak and demure Huizhou woman was not an identity she was willing to accept.

For local officials in charge of curating the region's past, the legacy of Confucian gender roles as embodied in stone memorial archways, secluded upstairs quarters, and popular media, was similarly ambivalent. The image of traditional Huizhou femininity on which the tourist economy capitalized was seemingly at odds with the promotion of formal gender equality as part

[13] The term is common on the Chinese internet and was originally perjorative, meaning something like "manly woman" or "tomboy." Hanzi refers to a particularly masculine Chinese man, and the term was coined by netizens to describe Chinese women who had been made overly masculine by popular culture. Among the young women I spent time with in Huangshan, *nü hanzi* was considered to be a positive term for a strong and independent woman and widely used as a self-descriptor.

of a program of scientific socialism. While scholars of gender in contemporary China have noted a general regression from formal socialist gender egalitarianism in the post Reform-and-Opening period, the party line to which officials must formally adhere is one that still promotes gender equality as a key part of its official governance. The acrobatics show presented in the opening vignette of this section represents an example to commensurate these seemingly conflicting models of femininity. In the acrobatics performance, widow chastity is reframed from a victimizing experience into an agentive one: A-Ju is not prevented from remarrying by a prevailing moral code which restricts her ability to control her life and places her in a precarious situation. Rather, she is an independent single mother who does not need a man to survive. Through her martial arts skills, she is able to encompass and transcend both traditional masculine and feminine roles, protecting the house from outside threats (masculine) while also raising a dutiful son (feminine). Her in-laws are grateful rather than abusive. As they age, we see her lovingly caring for them, which both conforms to her role as a dutiful Confucian wife but also inverts traditional power relations: A-Ju is young, healthy, and physically strong while her in-laws become old, frail, and dependent.

Legacies of Propriety

While traditional practices such as female seclusion, widow chastity, or footbinding were unanimously condemned as feudal, Huangshanese did consider their region to have maintained a sort of sexual propriety that differentiated them from other areas of Anhui. During my fieldwork, I found that locals prided themselves on their relatively conservative sexual mores, which they saw as a marker of propriety and refinement. This was often contrasted with Northern Anhui, where women's sexual profligacy represented the general vulgar and peasant nature of the region (which people also noted had one of the worst adherence rates to the One-Child Policy in the

country). While few people directly referred to women's virginity at marriage, the out-of-wedlock birthrate was noted to be much lower in Huangshan than it was in Northern Anhui. Although I have not looked at statistics, it is true that my friends from other regions of Anhui believed that premarital pregnancy was common and found the lack of such pregnancies unusual in Huangshan. Pan, a woman from Northern Anhui, told me that her sister and most of her friends from her village had gotten pregnant before marriage, often well before the legal marriage age of 20. In her village, she was a relative anomaly, marrying at 23 and not at an advanced state of pregnancy. In Huangshan, a premarital pregnancy was considered somewhat of a tragedy. Xing, a schoolteacher in her early 20s, invited me to have dinner with a former classmate of hers. The classmate was now a music teacher and was arranging her wedding to her fiancé, a wealthy and handsome man she'd met while teaching in the neighboring county seat. She was also about four months pregnant, Xing told me. When we met the friend, I congratulated her on her upcoming wedding and baby. My peppy congratulations were met with morose silence, and Xing quickly corrected me. The marriage and baby were not a happy occasion because the wedding was a shotgun one, and her friend was entering into her husband's home in disgrace. Later, I asked Xing if it was really so bad, given that her husband was from a wealthy family. "That makes it worse" said Xing, "because it means her position is even more unequal, and she has no leverage with her mother-in-law."

Migrants from Northern Anhui like Pan found the sexual naivete of her local friends somewhat baffling. She was good friends with Yang, a 28-year old professor of landscape architecture at the local college. Yang was anxiously hoping to find a husband, and she was preparing to visit a male friend and potential love interest in Beijing. Over lunch, she told us about her concerns for visiting him, as she had recently discovered he was a pervert (*biantai*).

Intrigued, Pan and I asked for more details. Lowering her voice, Yang leaned in. The last time they'd met, he had wanted to kiss her on the mouth. Pan and I tried to suppress our smiles. Gently, Pan told Yang that kissing on the mouth was a normal desire for a man in his thirties. She told her that men had needs, and a man that age wouldn't want to wait too long. Yang looked a bit incredulous and disgusted. Pan continued. It was possible that he would want to do even more than kiss, and all that would be normal too. Pan then gave Yang a birds and bees talk, walking Yang through the various steps in a sexual encounter. Yang listened, half interested and half horrified. To wrap up, Pan told Yang that it was possible that at that very moment her crush was mouth-kissing and more with women in Beijing. Yang looked to be near tears. Pan asked Yang if she'd had a boyfriend before. Yang said that she'd dated a man for two years. Pan asked if they'd ever done anything physical, and Yang admitted that at times they'd held hands. Now it was Pan's turn to look incredulous. "You dated for two years and only held hands?" she said in shock. Yang nodded.[14]

This interaction clearly reveals the different sexual expectations of Pan and Yang, which are not dissimilar from those of Xu and Wang. Pan had assumed that her older professor friend would very likely be more "worldly," much as Xu, also an outsider, had assumed similar things of his seemingly quite urbane friend Wang, who sang in Huangshan's coffee shops and nightclubs on weekend nights. Both assumed that a liberal and open (*kaifang*) demeanor would also correlate with similar sexual attitudes, which was not the case.

[14] Yang did end up visiting her crush in Beijing, but a relationship did not develop because, as Yang later told us, Pan had been right that her crush had been interested in sexual intimacy and Yang was uninterested. Several months later, Yang got engaged to a man arranged for her by her parents.

My argument is not that these sexual mores are necessarily unique to Huangshan. Rather, my point is that similar behavior might be framed in all sorts of different ways, and in Huangshan, what might be seen to some, like Pan or Xu, as small-town conservatism, rural traditionalism, or naïve un-cosmopolitanism is instead framed by locals as emblematic of a restrained propriety. Through this framing, local mores are not tied to tradition or backwardness but instead to a form of cultured eliteness, one linked to an image of the Confucian literatus, who embodies refinement and represents a highpoint of Han civilization. In this way, local Huangshanese can position themselves as more civilized than the uncouth Northern Anhuinese (who by objective measures of "development" tracked by the central government are considered far more developed), and through this they can also commensurate the civil qualities of locals with the values of the modern CCP, which repeatedly exhorts its citizens to be civilized. In other words, it is through an association with a general sense of civility that Huangshanese can frame local gender norms as compatible with modernity and the socialism of the present Chinese state.

Huizhou Studies

Beyond gender, there were other tensions between simultaneously promoting Huizhou as an extant exemplar of Neo-Confucian values while still asserting Huangshan as a fully modern, developed city. Drawing on the Bakhtinian "chronotope," or "space-time," I explore how Huizhou as a chronotope of the Confucian past has been made to be fully commensurable with the values of the modern CCP through the work of the academic and political project of "Huizhou studies," which is part of the larger "national studies" (*guoxue*) movement (see Zhang & Farquhar 2012).

In 2002, the national government declared Huizhou as one of China's "three major regional cultures" (*zhongguo san da diyu wenhua*), along with Tibetan culture and Dunhuang

culture in China's far Northwest. The official recognition as an important cultural region was accompanied by the establishment of "Huizhou studies" (*huizhouxue* or *huixue*), whose institutional base is located in the "Huizhou Culture Research Institute" (*huizhou wenhua yanjiu yuan*), housed in Huangshan University (*Huangshan Xueyuan*).[15] The institute is responsible for archiving important local documents and conducting and publishing research on Huizohu culture. Their biggest accomplishment to date appeared in 2005, when they published a 20-volume collection of scholarly research and documents on Huizhou culture.

The primary goal of Huizhou studies, I argue, is to reframe the "Huizhou spirit" so it can be seen as fully compatible with contemporary Chinese communism. This is made explicit in the following excerpt of a speech from Wang Weiguang, vice president of the Central Party School (*zhongyang dangxiao),* given at the opening ceremony for the Huizhou Culture Research Institute in 2002, and reproduced as a preface to the book *Huizhou Culture Research* (2004).

"Huizhou wenhua shi zhonghua minzu wenhua baoku zhong de guibao, shi zhonghua minzu xianjin wenhua de juti tixian xingshi. Cong "san ge daibiao" zhongyao sixiang gaodu lai kan, yanjiu huizhou wenhua, hong yang huizhou wenhua, keyi geng hao wei shehuizhuyi xiandaihua fuwu, wei huangshan shi xin de teng fei he fazhan fuwu" (2, 2004).

"Huizhou culture is a treasure in the cultural treasure house of the Chinese people, it is the concrete manifestation of the Chinese people's advanced culture. Looking at this from the important height of "Three Represents"[16] thought, researching Huizhou culture, advancing Huizhou culture, can help us to better serve the modernization of socialism, and serve Huangshan City's new take-off and development" (2, 2004).

[15] Although it is technically a college and not a university, I refer to it as Huangshan University in English as that is the official English name of the college.

[16] Three Represents thought was the official philosophy of Jiang Zemin, President of China from 1993-2003. To briefly summarize, the CCP was expected to represent the country along three avenues: 1) Representation of the advanced forces of production, 2) representation of the advanced culture, and 3) representation of the fundamental interests of the majority.

Here, we can see that Huizhou's commercial and neo-Confucian past, thought by liberal reformers of the May Fourth Movement and earlier CCP leaders alike to be completely incompatible with socialism and modernity, can be rehabilitated through the logic of nationalism to advance the project of "socialism with Chinese characteristics." If the overarching salient category of likeness is "Chineseness," then socialism and neo-Confucianism can be made alike through their shared qualities as "treasures of the Chinese people." The use of "advanced" to modify "culture" here is quite interesting. The word advanced (*xianjin*) is a compound of the characters *xian* (first) and *jin* (to move forward, to advance), and has a distinct temporal quality of progress, which is quite at odds with the timelessness of neo-Confucian ethical universalism. Advanced culture (*xianjin wenhua*) is one of Jiang Zemin's "three represents," and therefore explicitly part of the CCP's political projects (see previous footnote). Wang is thus saying, in this speech, that preserving the neo-Confucian legacy of Huangshan can be part of the CCP's political project, and its status as 'advanced culture' means that its study can benefit Huangshan's economic and political development.

This is a radical departure from earlier CCP conceptions of history, such as Mao's 1960s repudiation of the "four olds," or his "Criticize Confucius, Criticize Lin Biao" campaign. Of course, evocations of history are most fascinating for what they reveal about the present, and so I began reading *Huizhou Cultural Research* to understand in more detail how what used to be considered a completely antithetical value system might be rehabilitated. After the first chapter, "Promoting Hui merchant spirit, restoring Hui merchant glory," (*hongyan huishang jingshen, chongzheng huishang xiongfeng*), I still had no idea, as every sentence felt to me a substance-free platitude reinforcing the worthiness and necessity of the project, rather than actually undertaking it. This is very likely the point. Huizhou culture is compatible with Chinese communism in large

part because the historical and ideological particulars have been erased and replaced by the salient quality of being "Chinese." This too is a of project of standardization. The goal of this project at a national level is to bring all of Chinese history under the purview of the modern Chinese state. In this project, "socialism with Chinese characteristics," the socialism aspect fades as the "Chinese characteristics" becomes more prominent. It is therefore not so much the case then that these texts are "substance-free," as I felt while reading, but rather that their aim is not to provide a rigorous empirical study of Huizhou merchant culture and its incorporation of Confucian ethics. Rather, the goal is to tacitly approve a project of commensuration: free markets and individual enterprise, as embodied in the Huizhou merchants, are compatible with "socialism with Chinese characteristics," as enterprise is part of China's traditional culture (and perhaps innate national character.) Under the umbrella of encompassing all things Chinese, the CCP can serve as a vanguard not of the proletariat but of "Chineseness," whatever that might mean.

For the local officials in Huangshan, such a project has a different purpose. As government officials in a region that at the time of my fieldwork ranked 15th out of 16 on the development index (now ranked 16th out of 16) in a province that is already decidedly below average, developing Huangshan was of critical importance. At the same time, traditional methods of economic development, such as industrialization, would destroy the region's most valuable resource, its natural beauty, and ruin its primary industry, tourism. Thus, officials were stuck in a double bind, in which encouraging economic growth through expanding tourism held the risk of further dragging down the region's development. Although officials appreciated the intangible benefits that came from living in a historically preserved area of one of China's most aesthetically beautiful regions, the "living museum" quality of Huangshan combined with its conspicuous undeveloped nature risked making its inhabitants, including the officials,

themselves part of the display rather than the curator. Indeed, Huangshan officials worried about what we might see as a sort of "internal Orientalism," that the rich architectural legacies of past Ming and Qing grandeur might serve merely to highlight the degree to which its current residents had declined from past glory in the eyes of urban tourists. Such a fear was not unfounded, as we might see in the example of Mr. O's artist colony in chapter one. For local officials, the curatorial project was thus to make Huizhou's neo-Confucian legacy in general compatible with modern scientific socialism in a way that highlighted their own agentive role as curators of their past. This was done through projects of standardization, which flatten complexity and variation, whether it be spatial, temporal, or social, and which highlight certain elements at the expense of others. The end result is of course the construction of a particular narrative, in this case the narrative of a region that has been continuously, since the Song dynasty, an exemplar of "righteousness and propriety," a place filled with civilized gentry (officials) and peasants alike who were up to the task of being model citizens regardless of political system or structure of society.

Chapter Three: W(h)ither *Huizhouhua*? Erasing Language from Culture

In chapter two, I examined local government efforts to curate the material culture of Huangshan. In this chapter, I address the question: given the intense and wide-ranging efforts—economic, ecological, political, aesthetic—to preserve local culture, and given that the Huizhou region is home to a highly distinctive language family, why is it that language is so absent from local curation and preservation projects?

"Gourmands, look at me, photography-lovers, come here." (*chihuo, chao wo kan, ai pai, ni jiu lai*)

To begin, I start with an analysis of a short (six-minute) segment of cultural programming from local TV that illustrates the central conundrum of this chapter, which is, why is the local dialect completely excluded from cultural preservation efforts? This mini program, titled "Gourmands, look at me, photography-lovers, come here," was a section of semi-regular cultural programming called "Loving to Photograph Cuisine" (*aipai meishi*). Produced as a cooperation between the Huangshan TV station and the Huangshan restaurant association, the program was designed to bring together "gourmands" and "photographers" to eat and photograph local delicacies prepared in famous state-run restaurants or hotels. The show was broadcast as part of local evening cultural programing known as "life hotline" (*rensheng rexian*). Part food show, part travelogue, part photography lesson, and part local marketing, the show provides an excellent example of how the presentation of local culture foregrounds certain aspects (like food and architecture) while erasing language.

The show was brand new, and I took part in filming the initial two episodes. Those episodes, which for many reasons deviated from the original "script," were ultimately deemed unsuccessful and not shown on air. Instead, a much different and much shorter segment under

the same title took its place. The non-professional locals were replaced by professional TV personalities and the conceit of an audience-interactive photography competition was completely scrapped. Here I present the second episode of the show as it aired on TV. The episode opens with a young man and woman walking down a narrow alleyway off of Tunxi's Old Street (*laojie*), the historic tourist section of the town. Both of them are casually yet trendily dressed and have expensive cameras around their necks. As they walk, they introduce themselves:

Table 1 Aipai transcript I

1.	*Xiaoxi: Ta ai pai pian. Ta shi paike Yantong.*	Xiao Xi: He likes to take photos. He's photographer Yan Tong.
2.	*Yantong: Ta ai zipai, ta shi paike Xiao Xi. Xiang bu dao laojie zheyang yi tiao kansi putong de xianglong li haiyou zhenme [t͡sə mə] piaoliang de Huipai jianzhu.*	Yantong: She likes to take selfies. She's photographer Xiao Xi. I had no idea that this ordinary-looking alley off of Old Street would have such beautiful Huizhou architecture.
3.	*Xiao Xi: Piaoliang ba. Zanmen lai dao de shi laojie Jihong xiang 7 hao yuan. Ta ye bei na ru le shi zhengfu "bai cun qian zhuang" baohu xiangmu. Danshi zanmen jintian yao lai pai de bing bu shi zhege jianzhu.*	Xiao Xi: Isn't it beautiful. We've arrived at No. 7 Jihong Alley. It's part of the city government's "100 villages 1,000 buildings" preservation program. But the place we're going to photograph today isn't this architecture.

Figure 11: Left: The TV Hosts; Right: City Preservation Plaque on Jihong Alley No. 7

Although the program is ostensibly about food, we begin outdoors in a scenic alley on Tunxi's Old Street, the prime tourist attraction in the city. As the hosts approach the cooking site, we

pause for almost 20 seconds of the six-minute show to draw the viewer's attention to somewhat extraneous information about a local government architectural preservation program. Xiao Xi, who speaks with the slightly exaggerated perfect northern Standard Mandarin of a national newscaster,[1] is presented to the viewer as the local expert. On the other hand, Yan Tong, who speaks Standard Mandarin with a slight local accent, (e.g. see his use of the non-retroflex denti-alveolar affricate [t͡s] (t͡sə mə) rather than the retroflex [t͡ʂ] (t͡ʂə mə) in *zhenme* in (2)), plays the part of a tourist or at least one who could plausibly be surprised by the local architecture, to which he rather performatively calls attention.

After this aside, we cut to a scene of Xiao Xi and Yantong in a kitchen with a local chef:

Table 2: Aipai Transcript II

4.	*Xiao Xi: Qiaojian le ba! Jintian shi lai pai wo!*	Xiao Xi: Look! Today we're going to photograph me!
5.	*Zhang Shifu: Zei [t͡ʂei]*	Master Zhang: Liar/thief!
6.	*Xiao Xi: Xiang "Shanliboniang" Hui cai yanfa zhongxin de Zhang shifu, qing jiao zuo yi dao meishi zanmen didi daodao de Huizhou meishi. Zhang shifu ninhao.*	Xiao Xi: Master Zhang from "Shanliboniang" Hui Cuisine Research and Development Center, please teach us$_{inclusive}$ how to make a delicacy of our$_{inc}$ authentic Huizhou cuisine. Master Zhang, hello$_{formal}$.
7.	*Zhang Shifu: Nihao*	Master Zhang: Hello$_{informal}$
8.	*Xiao Xi: E, Zanmen jintian yao zuo yi dao shenmeyang de hui cai ne?*	Xiao Xi: What Huizhou dish are we$_{inc}$ going to make today?
9.	*Zhang Shifu: Jintian woman zuo [t͡ʂo] yi dao "yuezi [t͡ʂ] ji jiao."*[2]	Master Zhang: Today we're going to make "Month Chicken Feet."
10.	Xiao Xi: *Yuezi Ji*	Xiao Xi: Month Chicken.

[1] For a detailed analysis of the social and political significance of Standard Northern Mandarin in television broadcasting, see Qing Zhang's "Warring Standards: Contesting the Enregisterment of Cosmopolitan Mandarin" in *Language and Social Change in China* (2018).

[2] Master Zhang's speech is subtitled. He is subtitled as saying, "yuezi ji" rather than "yuezi jijiao," an indication that his term for the dish deviated from his expected response.

Table 2, Continued…

11.	*Xiao Xi: Buguo, jintian de zhujiao ye bus hi wo, ershi zhe dao waguan yuezi ji. Yuezi ji, yuezi ji, bu ming siyi, jiushi chanzi zai zuo yuezi shi chi de ji.*	However, today the star isn't me, Xiao Xi, it's the "Earthen Pot Month Chicken." Month chicken, month chicken, it's unclear. It's chicken eaten in the postpartum month-sitting period.

Figure 12: Left: Xiao Xi with Master Zhang; Center & Right: Making Month Chicken

In this scene, we meet the chef Master Zhang, an expert in Huizhou cuisine, whose thick accent marks him as a local. Like most southern Chinese languages more generally, the Huizhou languages do not have a retroflex/dental consonant distinction that is a marker of official standard Mandarin. That is, the retroflex phonemes /ʂ/, /t͡ʂ/, /t͡ʂʰ/ (pinyin *sh, zh, ch*) are pronounced like the dentals /s/, /t͡s/, / t͡sʰ/ (pinyin: *s, z, c*), respectively (Duanmu 2007).[3] Native Huizhou dialect speakers know that standard Mandarin uses retroflex consonants but do not know which words contain retroflex rather than dental consonants, so as a result when speaking standard Mandarin they either often arbitrarily alternate between the two or "hypercorrect" by defaulting to retroflex.[4] Secondly, Huizhou dialects do not have the consonant-glide (CG)

[3] /s/, /t͡s/, / t͡sʰ/ are sometimes described as alveolar or denti-alveolar consonants, but here I follow San Duanmu's classification of them as dentals (2007, 24-25).

[4] While Labov and other earlier scholars' application of hypercorrection, or the overapplication of a known prescriptive language rule in speech (1966), was problematic, the term is useful here to describe the phenomenon of southern Mandarin speakers defaulting to retroflex in all cases when making a conscious effort to speak formal standard Mandarin. No value judgment as to the "correctness" of this phenomenon is implied.

combination [ʷo],[5] and speakers find it very challenging to produce this sound when speaking standard Mandarin. In (9), we can see that Master Zhang pronounces *zuo* [t͡sʷo] (to do) as [t͡ʂo], with a retroflex initial (rather than dental) consonant that is also lacking the [w] glide as found in standard Mandarin. He also pronounces the *zi* in *yuezi* (month) with the retroflex t͡ʂ, another example of hypercorrection. In (9) he also gives us the name of the dish as "Month Chicken Feet" (*yuezi jijiao*) rather than "Month Chicken," as his subtitles say. Immediately following his introduction to the dish, Xiao Xi jumps in (10) and repeats the name of the dish with particular emphasis as "Month Chicken" (represented by bold in the transcript), correcting both his nonstandard pronunciation as well as his mislabeling of the dish. Although Xiao Xi is quick to erase these phonetic shibboleths of locally accented Mandarin, she too positions herself as a local through her use of the inclusive 'we' (*zanmen*) in (6), when she asks Master Zhang to teach 'us' 'our' local cuisine. Her use of the inclusive *zanmen* rather than the unmarked first-person plural *women* to emphasize her sense of belonging as a Huangshan native is itself quite marked, as *zanmen* is not used locally and is considered to be a lexical shibboleth of northern Mandarin speech. Like her perfect newscaster northern Mandarin accent, which is unusual even compared to other local TV personalities,[6] her frequent use of *zanmen* performatively undercuts her believability as simply a local Huangshanese.

* * *

Table 3: Aipai Transcript III

12.	Xiao Xi: Na zhe dao cai fang zai tanhuo shang kao duojiu ne?	Xiao Xi: How long do we have to cook this over the charcoal?

[5] Here I follow Duanmu's analysis of CVV syllables as CGV rather than true dipthongs because, as Duanmu following Chao (1934) notes, the consonant initial and glide constitute a single sound rather than two separate ones in Standard Chinese (2007, 25).
[6] For example, Yan Tong the "tourist" was played by a local TV presenter and popular figure in much cultural programming, who spoke with a standard local Mandarin accent common for university-educated professionals.

Table 3, Continued…

13.	Zhang Shifu: Zhishao [t͡s sau] wu ge xiaoshi [ɕau ɕi]	Master Zhang: At least five hours.
14.	Xiao Xi: wu ge xiaoshi, weishenme zhenme chang shijian?	Xiao Xi: Five hours, why such a long time?
15.	Zhang Shifu: Yinwei ta shi liangnian yishang [sa] de lao ji me, er yuezi shi chi [t͡sʰ] de me, ta yao lan [nan].	Master Zhang: Because it's an old chicken over two years, but when you eat it during your month, it has to be soft.
16.	Xiao Xi: Lan rou tang nong	Xiao Xi: Soft meat makes a thick soup.
17.	Zhang Shifu: dui dui dui [dəi dəi dəi]	Master Zhang: Right

Figure 13: Left: Xiaoxi with Master Zhang; Right: Month Chicken

Here, we can again see Xiao Xi correcting chef Zhang's nonstandard Mandarin in two interactions. First, when he reports the duration of cooking in (13), he palatizes both sibilant initials for the term "hour" (*xiaoshi*), rather than pronouncing the second as a retroflex and then adds the high front vowel /i/ after the palatal initial rather than pronouncing the word as a syllabic consonant, as it is in standard Mandarin (see Duanmu 2007, 34-35). That is, instead of the standard Mandarin pronunciation [ɕau ʂ], Master Zhang says [ɕau ɕi], a common local variation. In her response, Xiao Xi first repeats "five hours" in (14) with standard pronunciation before then asking a question. In (15), Master Zhang tells her it is important for the meat to be soft, and like most local speakers for the word "soft" (*lan*) he pronounces the liquid /l/ as the nasal /n/ in "soft," that is, he says [nan] instead of the standard [lan]. Again, Xiao Xi responds by

saying a phrase that begins by repeating “soft meat” in standard Mandarin. While her response is conversational, the pattern of her immediate repetition in standard Mandarin that Master Zhang has pronounced “incorrectly” might also reasonably read as linguistic repair. While basic audience comprehension might be one explanation for Xiao Xi’s immediate repairs of Master Zhang’s speech, his dialogue is subtitled and thus should be comprehensible to viewers unfamiliar with the local accent.

While the chicken cooks for over five hours, Xiao Xi uses the time to introduce local architecture and interior design to the viewer. At one point, there is a panning shot inside a traditional Huizhou-style house with the following female voiceover narration:

This Hui-style courtyard that is tucked away in this little alley off of Old Street is quaint and quiet. Sit in the front hall and look at the vase to the east and the mirror to the west, listen to the chime of the clock in the middle, and anyone can experience (*tihui*) the tranquil and calm spiritual world of the Huizhounese.

Figure 14: Left: Xiao Xi photographing a traditional internal courtyard; Right: A traditional Huizhou altar with a mirror on the left, a vase on the right, and a clock in the middle.

Again, we can see that although this show is ostensibly a cooking show, a significant portion of its six-minute runtime is devoted to presenting other forms of material culture to the viewer. We get multiple images of traditional interiors, including the central wooden two-story

interior courtyard or skywell (*tianjing*) that were a distinctive feature of Ming and Qing dynasty Huizhou houses (Illustration X) (Berliner 2003, Shan 2010). In the passage above the narrator calls attention to decorative elements that are considered particularly representative of local culture. Huizhou houses traditionally had an altar in the front room with a vase to the East, a mirror to the West, and a clock in the middle. This arrangement, vase on the East and mirror on the West (*dong ping, xi jing*) represented the desire for peace and calm throughout the house as the words for vase (*ping*) and mirror (*jing*) are homophonous with "peace" and "calm." The clock is placed in the center of the altar, as the word for clock (*zhong*) is homophonous with both "center" and "loyalty." Together, the arrangement represents a wish for peaceful journeys for traveling merchants and peace, calm, and loyalty from family in the household (Berliner 2003, Guo 2005). The experience of this material culture, according to the narrator, lets us (bodily) experience (*tihui*) the "spiritual world" (*jingsheng shijie*) of Huizhou culture.

This short segment of cultural programming is an exemplar of how local curation of Huizhou culture highlights elements of material culture while completely erasing local language. Cuisine, architecture, and design have been chosen as the objects of "local culture" to be commoditized as those which are available avenues through which tourists might experience the cultural uniqueness of Huizhou, as the narrator points out. By contrast, language difference is completely glossed over. First, our "local host" speaks in a highly marked standard Beijing Mandarin of a CCTV newscaster. Not only is her Mandarin a shibboleth of Beijing, and thus a not particularly desirable accent for even educated locals in southern China (Zhang 2008), but the precision of her accent is simply impossible for the vast majority of even university-educated Chinese, particularly outside of Beijing.[7] By contrast, our "tourist" speaks the unmarked

[7] CCTV newscasters are required to achieve the highest score of 1-A on the Putonghua

southern Mandarin of well-educated locals. This creates a disconnection between accent, place, and identity, as accent is unmoored from local-ness. Secondly, Xiao Xi, the local host, at numerous points repairs the chef's strong local and somewhat challenging accent. Her repair, of "hour," "soft," and the name of the chicken dish both cuts against her framing in the show as a local ingenue who is learning skills from Master Zhang, but also glosses over points at which linguistic difference could be recruited to add "local color." In many travel/cooking shows, the name of an iconic local dish in the local language or dialect is often part of the educational experience. Instead, when Master Zhang gives the "wrong" name of the dish, the novice Xiao Xi corrects him immediately by "properly" naming the dish in standard Mandarin.

One obvious argument for the absence of language as part of the project of commoditizing local cultural uniqueness is that unlike food and architecture, which are immediately "consumable" to an outsider, linguistic difference is inaccessible to someone who does not understand the language, making it a barrier of entry to a local culture. This point however, disregards the many ways language and linguistic difference as a cultural commodity can be consumed by outsiders in discrete chunks where incomprehensibility only adds to the joy of experiencing cultural difference. Scholars throughout the world have demonstrated how "language" in the form of things like poetry and music, dance, key phrases, or local names for places and foods have been packaged to tourists as part of cultural heritage projects (see e.g. Bunten 2008, Cavanaugh 2009, Coupland et al. 2005, Heller 2003, 2010, Heller et al. 2014, Rojek & Urry 1997, Thurlow & Jaworski 2010). Rather, Huizhou languages' lack of inclusion into cultural preservation projects was a combination of several factors: a local historical

Proficiency exam (*Putonghua shuiping ceshi*), something only a tiny fraction of native speakers are capable of doing.

narrative which emphasized the region's elite Confucian scholarship combined with an historical diglossic tradition of written vs. vernacular; a pressure on local officials to meet national 'development' goals; a linguistic and regional climate which discouraged language standardization; and a social climate which discouraged the development of local language prestige.

Huizhou Language: A Background

Liu yi zhi yu bu neng xiangtong, fei ruo wuren, qi fangyan da di xiang lei ye
(Huizhou Gazetteer, Ming Dynasty, Reign of Jiajing (1507-1567)).
Every six towns the language is mutually unintelligible, unlike Wu people, [whose] dialects are mostly the same.

This line from a Ming Dynasty gazette described the incredible internal language variation of Huizhou. 500 years later, this saying still primarily holds true. Indeed, the Huizhou languages are primarily famous for their mutual unintelligibility, both with Mandarin and with each other. The first clause, "every six towns the language is mutually unintelligible" (*liu yi zhi yu bu neng xiangtong*) is still today a common saying among locals, and it was generally the first thing people mentioned when I told them I was studying Huizhou languages. Unintelligibility (*buxiangtong*) and "complexity" (*fuza*) as the most salient qualities of the Huizhou languages kept returning as a theme throughout my fieldwork. Through the lens of "unintelligibility" then, I will explore why, despite their uniqueness, Huizhou languages were not considered an essential part of the 'cultural heritage.'

Huizhou languages or Huizhou dialects (*Huizhou fangyan*),[8] as they are called in official and scholarly literature, exist primarily at the level of scholarly abstraction; they are a grouping

[8] In the PRC, all Chinese languages aside from Mandarin are referred to as 'dialects' (*fangyan*)

of mostly mutually unintelligible dialects that were categorized as belonging to the same language family by the Chinese Academy of Sciences in the 1980s (Meng 2005). It is the smallest language family in China, with a listed total of 4.6 million speakers in the 2000 census, although the number is likely lower now. In interviews, local language scholars told me that the total number of speakers is closer to around two million (Jiang). Before the CAS re-classification, most linguists considered Huizhou languages to belong to the Wu family, which refers to the grouping of languages spoken in the Yangtze River delta, while some linguists grouped the languages with the Gan family, which refers to the languages spoken to the Southwest of Huangshan roughly centering on Jiangxi province. The rationale for these earlier categorizations was due primarily to the large amount of lexical borrowing in the Huizhou languages from both Wu and Gan languages. For example, in She county dialects, the first-person pronoun is pronounced [ŋo], which is likely a borrowing from Wu dialects (see modern Shanghainese first-person [ŋu]).

The Huizhou language family was relatively ignored by Chinese linguists for most of the twentieth century, although it did attract the interest of several Japanese linguists in the mid-twentieth century. I was not able to find any copies of this early scholarship, but locals told me that Japanese interest in the language was because the Huizhou dialects had preserved a large number of ancient Chinese features that were relevant to the study of Chinese influence on Old Japanese. Other people told me that today those from other parts of China think the region's dialects sound like Japanese, and this reputation attracted Japanese scholarly attention.

in official and popular speech.

Regardless of the reason, all international scholarly attention to Huizhou languages has come from Japan.

The most comprehensive survey of the Huizhou language family was undertaken in the late 1980s by the Anhui Academy of Social Sciences, who published their results, *Huizhou Dialects* (*Huizhou Fangyan*), in 2005 as part of the twenty-part series on Huizhou culture mentioned in chapter two. The work, considered to be the authority on the language family by local language scholars, was undertaken under the supervision of Meng Qinghui, who is listed as the author. Meng classifies Huizhou languages into five sub-branches, listed in descending order of number of speakers: Jishe, Xiuyi, Qide, Yanzhou, and Jingzhan. The names of each sub-family are based on the geographical area where the dialects are spoken: Jishe languages are spoken in Jixi and She counties; Xiuyi languages in Xiuning and Yi counties; Qide languages in Qimen and Dexing (west of Qimen); Yanzhou languages in Yanzhou (East of She county), and Jingzhan languages in Jingde and Zhanda (North & Northeast of She county).

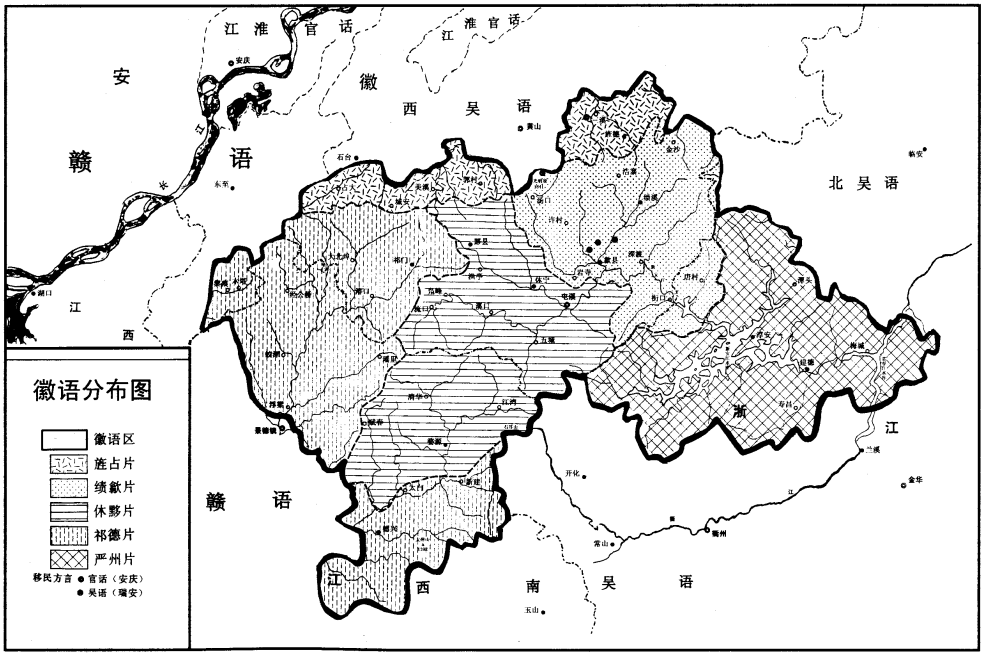

Figure 15 Huizhou Dialect Map (Meng 2005)

Despite wide internal variability, Meng lists several common features of Huizhou languages, including: 1) complete devoicing on codas, 2) dipthongized vowels, 3) final coda deletion (except for nasals), 4) contrastive voiceless consonant initial plosives and affricates, and 5) nasal suffixation. Like other Southern Chinese languages, they are known for having numerous tones, although the number and tone patterns vary widely even within dialect groupings (2005).[9]

On the ground, "Huizhou language" as a category is meaningless, as locals tend to talk about county-level or even village-level dialects or "speech" (*hua*), the colloquial way of referring to different ways of speaking as meaningful ways of distinguishing linguistic

[9] For example, the dialect spoken in Tunxi, has anywhere from six to sixteen tones (see Meng 2005, Qian 1991), which may reflect internal variability, language change, or simply a dispute over classification. Through linguistic elicitation sessions with my Tunxi dialect tutor, I was able to elicit seven tones from my informant, a woman in her early 20s from rural Tunxi: high (55), mid (33), low/low contour (11/212), low rising (13), high rising (35), high falling (53), and low falling (31). I use Chao tone numbers 1-5 to indicate tone pitch, with 1 indicating the lowest pitch and 5 the highest. Contour tones are described based on their change in pitch.

difference. The immediate problem presented by "Huizhou language" for tourism purposes is one of scale, in that linguistic variation exists at the village or sub-county level, while "Huizhou" as a tourist attraction is curated at the regional level. Of course, while the degree of variation may be extreme, internal language variation has not prevented large-scale language standardization in other places, as the "curatorial" projects of nation-making in places like Italy or Indonesia have demonstrated (see Haugen 1966, Errington 1998). Indeed, if there were a desire, there would be little to prevent the local government from establishing one dialect or variant as the standard *Huizhou fangyan*. The history of the region, in which She county and Xiuning county rivaled for cultural and political power, would make such a project politically fraught, however that has not deterred other language standardization projects.

Yet it is not simply a geographic mis-match that makes Huizhou dialects out of scale. There is also a temporal dimension to this mismatch: as described in the previous chapter, local officials highlight Huizhou's history as "the birthplace of neo-Confucianism" in order to curate Huangshan as a location that is as rich in a prestigious intellectual and cultural history as it is in natural beauty. To do so, the curation of material culture rested primarily on highlighting the economic and intellectual contributions of wealthy lineages in the region through the preservation of large mansions, grand ancestral halls, and the personal artifacts of notable members of these families. Particularly famous inhabitants such as philosopher Dai Zhen (1724-1777) or education reformer Tao Xingzhi (1891-1946) were honored through parks, statues, and pagodas, such as the large Dai Zhen park that occupied central Tunxi, or the Tao Xingzhi pagoda on Yellow Mountain.[10] The scholarly achievements of notable local residents however, were

[10] To disambiguate, I will refer to the actual mountain as "Yellow Mountain" and the region as Huangshan.

preserved in the written record in Classical or Literary Chinese (*wenyan*), the language of the written record from Spring and Autumn Period (5th century BCE) until the vernacularization movement of the early 20th century. As a written lingua franca, Classical Chinese remained remarkably stable over its two-thousand-year usage and was minimally impacted by regional shift in vernacular. This resulted in two levels of opacity: as an idiographic writing system, written Chinese only indirectly provides information on the phonetic spoken form, and as an overt diglossic system, written Chinese reveals few clues as to the extent and in which ways spoken language diverged from written. In Huizhou then, the local dialect was neither preserved in the written record[11] nor was it considered to have contributed (even indirectly) to the scholarly or literary achievements of Huizhou's most prestigious inhabitants. Thus, when local officials referred to "Huizhou Culture," they were not referring to the folkways of a people, but rather to what might be called "high culture," a society's pinnacle achievements in the cultivated arts, literature, and scholarship (see e.g. Williams 1983). The appreciation of Huizhou culture that they hoped to cultivate in tourists was one of *connoisseurship*: a discerning palate or eye that would be able to appreciate the high quality of things like local wood and stone carvings or inkstones.

To the extent that local scholars and officials did devote their attention to the local language, it was through a model of connoisseurship. Huizhou languages were to be mined for traces of earlier forms of Mandarin rather than to be studied in full in their contemporary form. Jiang Shengwan, a professor of literature at Huangshan Television School (a technical college in

[11] This is not entirely true. In the 1890s, a local scholar undertook an attempt to devise a writing system to account for special local lexicon by inventing new characters to account for the dialectal lexicon. His dictionary is preserved in the Huizhou Culture Research Center at Huangshan University (*huangshan xueyuan*), however it was regarded primarily as a curiosity and is thought to be unreadable in the present day.

the region) and the author of *Exploring the Mysteries of Huizhou Dialect (Huizhou Fangyan Tanmi*), was one such scholar. In his work, the only other book-length published text on Huizhou languages aside from Meng's *Huizhou Fangyan*, he traced the etymology of key lexical terms in order to show 1) their origin in earlier forms of Mandarin (i.e. the standard spoken register of the Chinese state) dating back to the Han, Tang, or Song dynasties, and 2) how the preservation of such an archaic term reflected the cultural conservatism of the region. His work was based on the widely accepted premise that Huangshan had been settled by waves of disgruntled officials seeking refuge in the mountains from political unrest. The first wave of officials was said to have arrived during the Han dynasty (206 BCE - 220 CE), and successive waves continued to arrive through the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368). These officials spoke various forms of Mandarin (*guoyu)*, all of which combined with the local language to create a distinct way of talking. Mr. Jiang argued that the relative isolation of Huangshan has meant that local dialects have preserved many features from middle Chinese.[12]

When I interviewed Mr. Jiang, he told me that his goal was to show that the Huizhou dialects, including Tunxi, were not merely "local vernaculars" (*tuhua*) but rather that they were the accumulation over time of preserved literary Chinese (*shumianyu*). He spent his time reading historical dictionaries and tracing sound change over time to show the preservation of archaic terms in contemporary Huizhou dialects. Like many connoisseurs, he was disdainful of what he viewed as the degradation of modern spoken Huizhou languages vs. their "purer" form, which

[12] An example of Mr. Jiang's etymological work can be seen in his etymology "butterfly," which in Huizhou dialects are pronounced [pu jo]/[ju]/[i] (depending on the dialect). This is quite distant from the modern Mandarin "hudie" [xu tje]. Mr. Jiang argues that in the Ming Dynasty, the word for bat was "fu yi"[fu ji], which through slight sound change and semantic shift [fu ji] → [pu ji] → [pu jo], and "bat" → butterfly in Huizhou. In modern Mandarin, "bat" is now "bianfu" [pjɛn fu].

existed before sustained contact with other parts of China and mass media. The purest form of Tunxi, he told me, had been spoken in Shanghai during the Cultural Revolution, as it was spoken by a tiny community completely closed off from outsiders. Mr. Jiang was himself from Wuyuan, a county in the neighboring province of Jiangxi that was not part of Huangshan but had been part of Huizhou. He had left Wuyuan as a boy and had not returned since. It was for this reason, he said, that he spoke much better Wuyuan dialect than the present inhabitants, who by now spoke a corrupted version of the dialect. As an etymologist, he saw the value of Huizhou languages as lying in their historical past, and thus the current situation of the living language was of little importance.

Mr. Jiang's attitude towards the language was admiring but it did not lend itself to supporting widespread language popularization or preservation efforts. Mr. Jiang was more interested in distilling and documenting the most "valuable" parts of the language for enjoyment by scholars or other cultured individuals rather than in preserving the existing spoken language as it existed. Like local officials engaged in the curation of material culture, Mr. Jiang did not see the value of Huizhou dialects as lying in their manifestation of the local *geist* of the people (Herder 1800, 1967, Bauman & Briggs 2000) but in their preservation of rarified knowledge. This knowledge was important not at a local scale, but in large part for its contribution to better understanding the evolution of Mandarin over time. Mandarin, a generic term for the language of the state (sometimes called 'state language' (*guoyu*), and now called 'common language' (*Putonghua*) in the PRC), has referred to the constantly changing denotational code spoken in the court of the emperor or governmental body. The current form of Mandarin, which has evolved out of the Mandarin of the Qing Dynasty, is considered by Chinese scholars to be a mixture of Manchurian, several central and northern Chinese dialects, and large-scale lexical borrowing

from Japanese (He 2005). For this reason, many Chinese, particularly those from Southern China, view the current Mandarin as not as authentically Chinese as earlier spoken forms. Mr. Jiang's project of showing that Huizhou dialects derive more directly from earlier, "more Han" forms of Mandarin can be located in a larger cultural project to assert the long cultural heritage of Southern China (especially the Jiangnan region) as more authentically Han and more representative of "Chinese" high culture than the dialects of the presently politically-dominant North. Although his work is focused on the local dialect, his project is anything but: here, Huizhou languages are recruited as a tool to demonstrate the region's tie to an elite Jiangnan culture as represented in particular by the Song, Ming, and Qing dynasties. In the past, local literati, who wrote in classical Chinese, took a similarly dismissive view of the local vernaculars. In the early 20th century, local scholars supported the vernacular (*baihua*) movement, but only insofar as they supported writing in standard Mandarin and not in local dialects.

Tunxi hua

The Huizhou dialect spoken in Tunxi is called "Tunxi speech" (*tunxi hua*). Adding "speech" to a place name to refer to the local way of speaking in a particular area was the conventional way for talking about dialects in informal speech.[13] Tunxi speech is classified as belonging to the Xiuyi (Xiuning-Yi County) language family, which reflects the district's previous status as a part of Xiuning County. The divide between Tunxi speech and Xiuning speech was thus geographical and not linguistic, as dialect spoken in Xiuning was automatically Xiuning speech, and in Tunxi was Tunxi speech. Indeed, locals told me that when Tunxi had

[13] Prosody determined whether or not "county" was included in the name for the local vernacular. Disyllabic names such as Tunxi or Xiuning took the *hua* suffix directly, whereas monosyllabic names such as Yi or She required the addition of 'county' to balance the prosody. Thus locals spoke *Tunxi hua* and *Xiuning hua* and *Shexianhua* and *Yixianhua*, but not *Shehua* or *Yihua*.

been part of Xiuning, there was no such thing as Tunxi speech, as back then it would be considered Xiuning speech. In my own experience as a language learner, I found that in the Tunxi district, people would identify me as "the Tunxi-speaking foreigner," while in Xiuning, I would be identified as the "Xiuning-speaking foreigner," with no modulation on my speech whatsoever. There was quite a lot of microvariation, however. Tunxi speech was mutually intelligible with the Xiuning speech spoken in the Xiuning County Seat, a 45-minute drive away from the center of Tunxi. By contrast, those from Xiuning County Seat and Tunxi district could not understand Xiuning speakers in the north of Xiuning county by the Yi county border. My second language tutor, a college student who had grown up in both Tunxi and Xiuning county seat, told me that the main differences between the two lay primarily in slight vowel differences, although the internal variation within Xiuning dialects was far greater than the external difference between Xiuning speech and Tunxi speech. My tutor had no trouble understanding or speaking Tunxi speech, but she could not understand Xiuning speakers from nearer to the Yi and Qimen county borders.

In contrast, She county dialects, which belong to the Jishe sub-family, are completely mutually unintelligible with Tunxi and Xiuning dialects, with the Tunxi-She County border marking a clear delineation. That is, while the geographic divisions between Tunxi and Xiuning do not reflect local linguistic divisions, the same is not true with She County.[14] This too reflects the political history of the region and maps onto the perceived characterological divide between

[14] The Huizhou district was until recently a part of She county, and despite being a separate administrative entity, locals referred to the languages spoken in Huizhou district as She County-speech (*Shexianhua*), possibly because they saw the district as still being "a part of" She county, and possibly because Huizhouhua already is a term for referring to Huizhou region dialects more generally.

Tunxinese and Xiuningese on the one hand and Shexianese on the other hand, as I discuss in chapter one.

Language Shift

Let us return to the question of why it might be that local language is so absent from the cultural preservation project. There are language-internal (high degree of microvariation) and language-external (competing regions with no clear center) factors that have contributed to a lack of standardization at the regional level that might be on par with those undertaken with architecture and cuisine. However, as I noted earlier, these factors have not prevented language standardization efforts in other parts of the world or in China in other contexts (see Mullaney 2005). Rather, I would argue that the primary reason for language's absence is due to a lack of desire to center language on the part of local officials combined with a disinterest in language preservation at the grassroots level. In the remainder of the chapter, I will discuss why this might be the case.

First, there are present-day economic, geographic, and social factors for why inhabitants of Tunxi City are shifting towards Mandarin and placing less importance on speaking or transmitting the local dialect to their children. Increasing intra- and inter-regional mobility has meant that Huangshanese were now traveling outside of their home villages to seek work, either in their County Seats, Tunxi City, or to one of the large cities on the Eastern Seaboard such as Shanghai, Hangzhou, or Wenzhou. Large scale mobility began in the 1980s with the rise of industry in special economic zones and increasing permission from government for ordinary people to move around to seek work, marked a break from what Huangshanese note were many decades of relative immobility. In the mid-20th century, Huangshanese primarily remained in or near their home villages, kept in place by poor transport infrastructure, a mountainous terrain,

and extreme poverty. Mr. Jiang pointed out to me that through the late 1980s, even bicycles were nonexistent in most areas, meaning most transportation happened on foot. A local joke went that when the first bicycle was introduced to the area in the 1980s, peasants gathered around to gawk at the amazing metal animal that didn't require food and had legs that spun around.

The extreme variation among dialects has meant that even short-distance migration, say from Qimen County or She County to Tunxi has meant that migrants rely on a lingua franca to communicate with each other and locals. Tunxi, as the administrative center of Huangshan as well as its transportation hub, is the place where most local migrants choose to seek work. As a result, Tunxi exists as a "linguistic melting pot" of regional Huizhou dialects. Although one might imagine an alternative situation where migrants would primarily assimilate to the local Tunxi dialect, given the relatively recent migration (post 1990s) and the preexisting dominance of Mandarin, the end result is that most migrants end up speaking Mandarin, as do locals who must accommodate the large number of outsiders (*waidiren*). Although they are fewer in number, Tunxi also attracts migrants from other parts of Anhui, mainly graduates of Huangshan University who decide to remain in the region and work in the tourist industry, who speak (local varieties) of Mandarin as their native language. Increased mobility and urbanization have also decreased endogamy, meaning that even within the homes more and more families speak Mandarin as the language of the house. Many of my younger informants told me they did not learn a local dialect, as their parents were from different counties in Huangshan and thus spoke mutually unintelligible Huizhou dialects.

Secondly, Mandarin promotion efforts have also been very successful. Most parents prefer to speak Mandarin to their children in the hope that it will help, or at least not handicap, their children's performance in school. With the working classes seeing education as the key to

upward social mobility, people at all social strata prefer that their children speak Mandarin before starting kindergarten. This has the practical result of meaning children do not acquire active Tunxi speech language abilities. I found that most people under 30 living in the city of Tunxi were able to understand Tunxi speech but claimed to be unable to produce it. Of course, like much language ability, "actual" abilities can differ greatly from claimed language ability. Even if young people speak more Tunxi speech than they will acknowledge, the unwillingness to speak it ultimately has the same social and practical effect: they are unable to speak it. Young parents will insist that even grandparents who primarily speak Tunxi speech at least try to speak Mandarin with their children. I noticed this with my friend, Auntie Chu, a former peasant and retired street sweeper in her late 50s. Auntie Chu had received no formal schooling and had trouble speaking Mandarin. Her highly local, relatively working-class social circle of friends and neighbors all spoke Tunxi speech. When she was watching her five-year old granddaughter and one-year old grandson, she would code-switch, chatting to her friends in Tunxi speech and switching to Mandarin to speak with her grandchildren. Only when she was extremely angry with one of them would she switch into Tunxi speech to deliver the scolding. Her granddaughter then, like most urban Tunxinese, could understand Tunxi speech but would always respond in Mandarin. Tunxi urbanites told me that Tunxi speech was still more widely spoken in villages, which I found to be the case. Younger generations of villagers, however, were switching to Mandarin among friend groups, and many villagers in their teens and early 20s told me they planned on speaking Mandarin to their own children.

Moreover, given that Mandarin is the lingua franca in the public sphere, young people now default to Mandarin when meeting new people, even if both parties speak Tunxi speech. My first Tunxi speech tutor, a rural woman in her early 20s with a middle school education, would

speak Tunxi speech with her childhood village friends, but the whole group would switch to Mandarin if a new person was present (e.g. a girlfriend or boyfriend), even if the person were a Tunxi speaker. Moreover, speakers would freely code-switch if they thought an idea was easier to express in Mandarin, or insert Mandarin words if they did not know the Tunxi version. Sometimes these words would be in Mandarin, and sometimes they would be calqued with Tunxi phonology. My second Tunxi speech tutor, a student at Huangshan University, also told me that she would feel uncomfortable speaking Tunxi speech or Xiuning speech with someone with whom she did not already have a "habit" (*xiguan*) of speaking the dialect.

Of course, as Don Kulick in his article on language shift in Papua New Guinea notes (1998), language shift is rarely about language itself, but is always tied to larger social and cultural changes. I argue that as Mandarin became the default language of the public sphere, Tunxi speech has become associated more private and intimate contexts. As I will demonstrate further below, this has repercussions for how the language is viewed and used and the stakes of its preservation.

"Huipu"

Tunxi speech is not the only socially salient language variety in Huangshan. Shepu and Tunpu are local portmanteaux for "She county Putonghua" and "Tunxi Putonghua," referring to the local regional dialects of Mandarin or Putonghua. Shepu and Tunpu did not exist as stable dialects but rather referred to Mandarin spoken by any local. As such, the qualities of Tunpu or Shepu differed depending on the age, education level, and Mandarin ability of the speaker. Tunpu and Shepu as dialects of Mandarin also differed from the local Huizhou languages.[15]

[15] Although locally-accented Mandarin varied widely depending on the speaker, locals picked

For my informants, a significant marker of Huizhou language-accented Mandarin ("Huipu") in general is that it applies Huizhou language prosody and Huizhou tone patterns to Mandarin. In addition to tonal differences, Huipu tends to be spoken at a faster speed than Standard Mandarin, and with less clear articulation around word boundaries. As my informants would tell me, "we speak much less slowly and clearly than Northern Chinese do."[16] Indeed, people not infrequently inquired if I could understand their conversations, as they were speaking Tunpu (or Shepu or Xiupu) rather than standard Mandarin. I usually said that I could, although it took some time to adjust and I never found it as easy to understand as I did "standard" Beijing Putonghua.

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out certain common features as salient markers of "Huipu," i.e. Huizhou dialect-inflected Mandarin, that were shared regardless of native-dialect.

[16] Despite the wide variation, there were nevertheless some general characteristics, some which were shared more generally with Southern Chinese Mandarin, and some which were specific to the region. Although many of my informants could tell or at least claimed to be able to distinguish speakers of Shepu and Tunpu, primarily due to the differing tone patterns and prosody, Huizhou Mandarin dialects (Huipu) did share some unique traits that were distinct from Southern Mandarin. First, Huipu does not rhotacize word finals, as is true in all Southern Chinese Mandarin dialects. Second, as in Southern Mandarin, retroflex consonants and affricates and in standard Putonghua become alveolar consonants and affricates in Huipu: so ʂ/ t͡ʂ / t͡ʂʰ —> s/ t͡s / t͡sʰ. Third, there is no distinction between alveolar (n) and velar (ŋ) nasal finals; lin/ŋ —> lin. Likewise, there is no distinction between alveolar nasal (n) and lateral approximant (l) initials lin; nin —> l/nin. Fourth systematic difference distinctive only to Huipu was the elision of the [u̯] sound at the beginning of a dipthong, such that Standard Mandarin [u̯ɔ] becomes [oo̯] or [o], and [u̯ei̯] becomes [ei]. In an attested example from a middle-aged male village head, the phrase: "end of Ming beginning of Qing" (*ming mo qing chu*) [miŋ mwo tɕiŋ tʂʰu] becomes [min mou tɕin tsʰo], almost rhyming. Fifth, a characteristic marker of Huipu is the substitution of C(+ret)ɯ or C(+ret)ɨ(ɻ) in Standard Mandarin with Ci. ʂɨ(ɻ) —> ɕi. A common political joke plays on this last change. The joke goes, in the 1960s a local cadre was asked to give a speech about the bright future of the CCP. His speech was titled, "The Chinese Communist Party is Without Disappointment." (*zhongguo gongchangdang meiyou shiwang* [ʂɨ waŋ]). When he read the speech with his local accent, he pronounced ʂɨ waŋ (disappointment) as ɕi waŋ, which is homophonous with the Mandarin word hope (*xiwang*), inadvertently claiming that the CCP was without hope. This joke was told to me several times, sometimes with the hapless cadre being from She County and other times from Xiuning County, demonstrating that the feature was not dialect-specific but emblematic of "Huipu" more generally.

The first time I heard the terms Tunpu and Shepu was at a post-yoga dinner with Wen, a yoga student in her early 30s, and Teacher Yuan about a month after my arrival. We were having "girl talk," the genre of intimate conversation carried out between female friends, generally focusing on family, relationships, love, and sex. After a while, Wen turned to me and asked if I could understand the conversation. I nodded and said that while often the details escaped me, I could get the gist of what they were saying. She looked pleased and surprised, and said, "good, since we are speaking Tunpu, I thought it might be hard for you to understand." "What's Tunpu?" I asked. Wen told me it was Tunxi-Putonghua, spoken by the inhabitants of Tunxi in casual settings. I was so happy to hear someone talk about the local Mandarin, I forgot to question what made this conversation spoken in "Tunpu", as Wen was originally from Jingde, a county immediately to the north of Huangshan and in the Jianghuai Mandarin region of Anhui, and Yuan was from She county.

"In our opinion, as long as we can understand it it's Chinese (Zhongwen)." -Xing (elementary school teacher)

Later, I would realize that Yuan and Wen's conversation reflected local language ideologies towards speech: language names or designators did not refer to the inherent qualities of the speech but solely reflected geographic assignation. Thus, "Tunpu" was the Putonghua of anyone who could plausibly claim to be a Tunxi resident. Because Yuan and Wen were both Tunxi residents, their non-standard Mandarin was "Tunpu." Likewise, Tunxi speech was simply the language spoken between Tunxi locals. Here, the distinction between *hua* (speech) and *yuyan* (language) takes significance beyond the Saussurean langue/parole dichotomy. In the Saussurian model, parole is the aural instantiation of the conceptual system of langue, the aural token to the conceptual type. By contrast, for my Tunxi-speaking informants, Tunxi speech was not imagined

as a spoken representation of any sort of linguistic system. Indeed, for most of my Tunxi-speaking informants, Tunxi speech was not thought of as a language at all, but rather as a mode of communication. My first Tunxi tutor, a young rural woman in her early 20s, kept growing impatient with me when I tried to ask her about Tunxi speech as a language (*yuyan*). "Yan, it's not a language. It's just a tool we use to communicate" (*goutong de gongju*). This point was reinforced in various ways throughout my fieldwork. Early on, I would introduce my fieldwork as "studying the local language" (*bendi yuyan*), which was generally met with confusion. "We don't have a local language" people would tell me repeatedly. "Yes you do," I would counter, and people would insist that they didn't. Thinking that perhaps I was treading on politically sensitive ground, as the PRC considers most Chinese languages to be "dialects" (*fangyan*), I would follow up with, "oh, well, I'm studying the local dialect." If anything, that elicited more confusion. If people even recognized the word, they would strenuously deny the existence of any local dialect. "Dialects? We don't have those here," an elderly street sweeper told me, switching into barely Mandarinized Tunpu from Tunxi speech so I would understand. "Yes you do! You were just speaking it." I told him. He turned to my friend, a newsstand operator in her early 30s, for help with the confusing foreigner. "She means speech (*hua*)" my friend explained. She's interested in local speech (*bendi hua*). "Oh, speech." He said. "Yeah, we speak differently here." After several more interactions along the same lines, I soon got used to introducing my project as "studying Tunxi speech (*tunxi hua*)." Indeed, this primarily pragmatic view of language is reflected in Xing's quotation at the beginning of this section, which came after a long conversation in which I asked her and her fellow teachers if dialects counted as being part of the Chinese language. Most people had never thought about the issue, nor had they thought about

"Chinese" as a particular denotational code. Instead, as Xing notes, their definition of Chinese language is a working one: if it's comprehensible, it must be the same "language."

Because Tunxi speech was not a language nor a dialect, but simply a way of talking, working class and peasant Tunxi-speaking locals did not consider it to have any inherent value beyond its usefulness as a tool of communication. This most commonly came up in conversations about teaching Tunxi speech to children, which as mentioned above, was an increasingly uncommon occurrence. For my working-class informants, this was not a very fraught idea, no matter how much prodding I did along those lines. Most people told me they speak Tunxi speech when it is useful, and Mandarin when it is not. These days, Mandarin was more useful than Tunxi speech, so they primarily used Mandarin. "Don't you worry about Tunxi speech dying out?" I'd ask, and "not really" was the most common answer. "Why would we care if Tunxi speech dies out if it's not useful?" another regular at the newsstand told me. "And besides, there will still be kids out in the villages learning Tunxi speech, so it's not going to actually die out." A different friend from the newsstand laid it out clearly to me. "Look. If you speak Mandarin, you can go anywhere in China, work anywhere. If you speak good Mandarin you can even do well in school. If you speak Tunxi speech, you can bargain for vegetables, but it's not good for anything else."

This point was made to me academically during an interview with Mr. Xiang, a self-taught linguist who wrote the section on Huizhou languages for the Tunxi District Gazette. Hoping to prompt him to talk about the value of the local dialects, I made a comment about how sad it was that in 50 years, it seemed like Tunxi speech would no longer be spoken. Mr. Xiang looked at me disdainfully, and responded, "I thought you were a linguist. Language isn't frozen in time because we want it to be that way, it evolves with the needs of the people. It's easy for us

to romanticize a language, but we're not the ones who have to speak it. And anyway, in 50 years, of course there will be Tunxi speech, because there were still be people in Tunxi, and they will still be using speech (*hua*). If people don't find the current Tunxi speech useful, they'll stop using it, but whatever they end up speaking will still be Tunxi speech." Chastened, I realized my attempt to elicit a Herderian homage to Tunxi speech as a local treasure of the people had been misguided and somewhat patronizing. Although Mr. Xiang's attitude towards Tunxi speech was very different from that of Mr. Jiang, they both shared the opinion that preserving local dialects as living, robust denotational codes was not a particularly worthy project. Given that self-trained local language experts often drive grassroots language activism, the fact that in Huangshan local language experts did not see the present dialects as "worth" saving in large part explained the lack of interest in language preservation or revitalization.

There were, however, a class of people who at least to me expressed a view of Huizhou dialects as a "local treasure of the people" (for example, see Vice President Wang's speech in chapter two). These were mainly educated outsiders (*waidiren*), who had moved to Huangshan as adults. One such person was Ms. Ma, the head of the Mandarin promotion and local language preservation bureau, which was in charge of simultaneously promoting Standard Mandarin while also preserving local languages. Her primary responsibility was to administer the Standard Mandarin exam (*putong shuiping ceshi*), a test of one's Mandarin required for certain careers in education or broadcast media (for further discussion see Zhang 2008). When I told her my project, she commended me for my excellent taste and refinement, as, she told me, most foreigners have never even heard of Huizhou. She told me that despite moving to Huangshan from elsewhere, she had managed to learn all of the main local dialects (*Yixian hua*, *Xiuning hua*, *Qimen hua*, *Tunxi hua*, *Shexian hua*, and *Wuyuan hua*), because they were local cultural

treasures and part of the local cultural heritage. When I asked her what steps she was taking to preserve the local language, however, she shifted uncomfortably, and told me she had been so busy with Mandarin promotion she hadn't yet had time to focus on language preservation. I asked if there was any local TV programming in the dialect, and she told me there wasn't, as it would be difficult to produce and "no one" would watch it, though she thanked me for my suggestion and said she would look into it. The same scenario was repeated in my interview with Mr. Yue, the official in charge of implementing the village reading room program at the Ministry of Culture. After praising my discerning ability to recognize that Huizhou was one of China's three great culture regions and worthy of international study, he told me that, despite being an outsider, he too had learned several Huizhou dialects, as they were a treasure of the local people. His job responsibilities, however, consisted in promoting literacy and "quality" (*suzhi*) raising programs in villages, including Mandarin and English-speaking competitions.

The local dialectologist at Huangshan University, a woman in her mid-30s from Shandong province, was undertaking a dictionary project of dialect terms for unique local objects such as archaic farm implements. She was working on constructing a website that would feature pictures of traditional folk objects next to the dialect term for that object. Like Mr. Jiang's etymology project, hers too seemed to be more focused on reifying a still-living dialect into a linguistic relic, a product of a previous time. She had very little interest in documenting any local dialects as they were still spoken (I will return to this in chapter four).

I would guess that the reason that relatively high-ranking government officials would tell me that local dialects were a treasure of the people worth preserving is because that is the party line. Chinese language policy, formally codified in the 2000 *Law of the Nationally Used Language and Script of the PRC*, required balancing the promotion of Mandarin with the

preservation of local dialects. Although Mandarin is to be used in all public and professional settings, and all Chinese citizens ought to be proficient Mandarin speakers, state policy recognizes that local dialects are the "treasures of the Chinese nation," and government officials have an obligation to protect and develop traditional arts such as drama, opera, or folktales based on local dialects (Guo 2004, 51-52). Regardless of personal opinion, it is the case that local officials had to tell me, a foreign scholar with connections to Beijing (I was affiliated with Renmin University), that they valued local dialects.

Local officials who did speak Tunxi speech tended to be older men who were well embedded into local social networks. These officials, most of whom had grown up together as neighbors and *tongxue* (classmates), would use Tunxi speech with each other in work settings, and speak Tunxi speech while socializing at quasi-official dinners after work. While these officials were very proud of Huizhou culture in general, few of them commended my decision to study the local dialect. Indeed, if they did see my project as having a linguistic orientation rather than a more general cultural one, they would express confusion. Tunxi speech was difficult to learn, and no one in the United States cared about it. They would suggest changing my project to study famous local scholars, architecture, classical poetry, or something of more "value." Like my working-class informants or Mr. Xiang, these officials were not particularly ashamed of Tunxi speech, but they also did not think it was worth study by outside scholars.

For these older male officials, Tunxi speech served as an index of insider-ness and of hyperlocal belonging. These men formed an "old boys' network" of local power based on kinship and village ties, where Tunxi was the language of informal intimacy and was used to reinforce masculine solidarity. This created a situation very similar to that described by Kulick in PNG, where once the local language Taiap became associated with *kroses*, the genre of women's

angry outbursts, and thus by extension with a highly-stigmatized and gendered loss of emotional control and immaturity, the community began to switch towards Tok Pisin as the language of maturity, rationality, and modernity (1998).

In Huangshan, we have a similar gendered shift, although the precise associations are reversed. In local official settings, as Tunxi speech becomes inseparably linked to traditional forms of male power and the attendant values, women, young people, and migrants, all people actively excluded from these networks, began to actively avoid speaking Tunxi speech, even in situations where from a purely linguistic perspective it would be expected. For women, younger men, and outsiders, Mandarin as the official state language in turn came to index values of modernity and meritocracy, where professional mobility was possible based on talent rather than connections. This gendered association of Tunxi speech as the language of a masculinized intimate sphere meant that local women had little interest in promoting dialect usage in work settings or any other places that might be considered "public." Indeed, in the yoga studio where I lived, women would strictly police the use of dialect, even if everyone present (aside from me) was capable of understanding. I argue this is because Tunxi dialect, in a gendered female space that while not "public" in the classic sense, was supposed to be available to all, was seen as inappropriately intimate, masculine, and exclusive. Thus as an index of hyper-local intimacy, local male officials had little interest in preserving or curating Tunxi speech for consumption by tourists. For older local male officials, they both share a sense that Tunxi speech is not a "thing," which can be reified and presented, but they also have very little incentive to promote its more widespread use, which would attenuate its ability in elite male bonding and affirmation of intimate solidarity. For others, there was no incentive to actively encourage the use of a language which functions to exclude them from social power.

Thus, while there are external structural factors as to why Tunxi speech was increasingly associated with an intimate private or home sphere, we can also see that social and cultural factors played a driving role, hastening language shift away from Tunxi speech and towards Mandarin. As Kulick writes, "language ideologies seem never to be solely about language - they are always about entangled clusters of phenomena, and they encompass and are bound up with aspects of culture like gender, and expression, and being 'civilized'" (100).

Conclusion

For many reasons, we can see that unique social, political, economic, historical, and cultural factors have created a context in Huangshan where there was little overt pressure placed on people to actively preserve or maintain local dialects. This however, is not the whole story. In the next chapter, I will show that local governmental officials were actively trying to eradicate local languages from the region.

Chapter Four: “I can't even read one word": The (un)making of the Chinese Peasant Class

“I can’t even read one word” (*wo yi ge zi dou bu renshi*). Auntie Chu informed me when I asked her if she was able to read, in the context of explaining my research on women’s literacy in rural China. We were sitting on short plastic stools on the sidewalk next to her daughter’s newsstand on a hot summer afternoon.

“But surely you know at least one word,” I pushed her: Didn’t she know her own name? What about the basic two or three-stroke characters taught to preschoolers—characters like “person” (人), or “mountain” (山)?

“Nope. I don’t know a single one” Auntie Chu stated definitively, emphatically rejecting my claims that she must recognize at least some characters. “Not a single one.” I was somewhat taken aback. First, I was surprised by Auntie Chu’s claim that she didn’t know even one word—a claim that later her daughter would contradict, telling me that her mother actually recognized a decent number of rudimentary characters, having picked them up through TV or through supervising her granddaughter’s homework. Indeed, as I got to know her better, I too watched Auntie Chu help her 5-year-old granddaughter with her kindergarten textbook every afternoon, noticing that Auntie Chu seemed to be able to read the simple directions in the book. Secondly, I was surprised at the confidence-bordering-on-pride with which Auntie Chu announced her “illiteracy.” I expected illiteracy to be, if not a shameful secret (as is often case, see Abu-Lughod 2005, Cody 2013), something that would perhaps be shared in confidence. Instead, Auntie Chu frequently and loudly announced her illiteracy with almost exactly the same phrase, “I can’t even read one word,” whenever it was even remotely tangential to the conversation. Her working class older female friends often did likewise. Self-proclaimed illiteracy, I discovered, was more

common than not in women above 60, a fact in direct contradiction to official claims about literacy in the area.

This brief vignette raises several questions—why, despite evidence to the contrary, was Auntie Chu so insistent on her complete illiteracy? Why was being illiterate—a relatively shameful phenomenon monitored but downplayed by local officials—proudly asserted by older peasant women? And perhaps most importantly, what sort of act was the assertion of illiteracy? That is, what is the social meaning of (il)literacy in the context of contemporary Huangshan, and what sort of person is the (il)literate individual?

Scholars of the ideological model of literacy (e.g. Street, Besnier, Heath, Cook-Gumperz, etc) have argued that literacy should be examined as a culturally situated set of social practices rather than as an autonomous measure of a state of knowledge. As such, literacy "cannot be studied independently of the social, political, and historical forces that shape it" (Besnier 3). As a social construction, the literate individual is then also a socially meaningful type of person, one capable of exercising "socially approved and approvable talents" (Cook-Gumperz 1), rather than simply possessing technical knowledge, e.g. "recognizing words," (*renshi zi*), to adopt Auntie Chu's phrasing. In this chapter, I unpack the greater political significance behind Auntie Chu's claims of illiteracy and the social meaning of literacy in Huangshan.

In this chapter I use (il)literacy as a trope, a practice, an alibi. As a trope, illiteracy refers to a general sense of "backwardness," regardless of reading ability. As a practice, illiteracy refers to "unruly" behaviors that resist social discipline. As an alibi, illiteracy is a tactic that defuses those conflicts that unruliness threatens to instigate.

I will return to Auntie Chu and her friends later in this chapter, but given that literacy is a "sociocultural phenomenon" (Besnier 3), in order to make sense of Auntie Chu's views we must first understand the general political and social context. In chapter two, I explored how local officials curate Huangshan as a chronotope, that is, as inhabiting a "space-time," of China's generalized neo-Confucian past. In this framing, Huangshan, as a living museum of sorts, has preserved China's "priceless cultural treasures" which were felt to be otherwise lost in the turbulent 20th century. In doing so, locals argue that Huangshan's value lies in the cultural and social heritage of its people and not simply in its unspoiled natural beauty. In that chapter, I show how through an overarching category of "Chinese national heritage," local officials are able to commensurate what they see as the neo-Confucian heritage of the region with modern "scientific socialist CCP values." This project of curation, however, is being undertaken in an undeniably rural and "underdeveloped" part of China, generally ranked low within the general context of large-scale and far-reaching national development projects that are based on an equation of development with urbanization.[1] There is therefore, considerable local anxiety that urban tourists will misrecognize the nature of this curatorial project and find Huizhou culture more quaint than "advanced." Instead of seeing Huangshan as a fully developed region whose sophisticated inhabitants have been agentive stewards of a well-preserved elite historical cultural heritage, there is the danger that tourists would see Huangshan, and by extension all of its inhabitants, as nothing more than hapless relics of a past. That is to say, the curatorial project of presenting Huangshan as a site of historical interest risks locating Huangshan itself in a chronotope of the past.

[1] At the time of my fieldwork, Huangshan ranked 15th out of 16 (and at present 16th out of 16) prefectural cities in Anhui Province, itself "below average" on the national development index (UN Development Index & Anhui Statistical Yearbook).

At the same time, local officials and white-collar residents of Tunxi share these same general worries about the "backward" (*luohou*) peasants who inhabit Huangshan's countryside, who, in a form of fractal recursivity (Irvine and Gal 2000), they saw as inhabiting a chronotope of an outdated past. Indeed, historian R. Bin Wong has noted that this "fractal quality" is a hallmark of Chinese governance, which does not delineate state from society. Instead, he argues, the social institutions and concerns were seamlessly replicated across scale, such that local governance simply replicated the agendas and institutions of the national on a smaller spatial scale. The end result was a striking degree of uniformity in governmental and elite agenda at all levels (Wong 1997, 121-122). Certainly, during my fieldwork I found that civil servants shared the same concerns over Huangshan's perception as underdeveloped. Friends repeatedly informed me that in national development indexes, Huangshan ranks 15th out of 16 among prefecture-level cities in Anhui province, which is itself ranked 24th or 25th out of 31 provinces or autonomous and administrative regions (UN Human Development Index). Local officials and white-collar workers were also quite cognizant of Huangshan's role in providing a migrant labor pool to the more industrialized cities in China, a phenomenon premised on the existence in Huangshan of a large number of "unskilled" rural bodies. For local officials and white-collar workers, achieving outside recognition of Huangshan's value as a culturally elite region of China would be in large part predicated on "civilizing" the rural peasant, who represented the wrong sort of "tradition," and whose continued presence constantly placed the whole local development project under threat.

In other words, local government projects to create Huangshan as simultaneously a modern developed region *and* a living museum of China's neo-Confucian past required an erasure of the "peasant" and the rural pathology she represents, as has been defined in the past 30

years of state developmentalist language (for an example of this see Wang & Bai 1991, for further discussion see Day 2013, Lai 2016). The curation project described in chapter two then, existed in concord with rather than in opposition to the national government's urbanization and modernization projects that make up the "Building a New Socialist Countryside" (BNSC) campaign (*jianshe shehuizhuyi xin nongcun).* The BNSC campaign, introduced by then President Hu Jintao in the mid-2000s, envisioned a major transformation of the Chinese countryside of a sort not undertaken since the nation-building projects during the Cultural Revolution (Day 2013). (Although in this case, the project was based on "rationalist" developmentalist principles rather than revolutionary Marxism.) Indeed, the ability of a rural tourist industry to improve the "quality" (*suzhi*)[2] of the rural populace was made explicit by the director of the China National Tourism Administration Shao Qiwei. In an article titled "Develop Rural Tourism, Promote Building a New Countryside," he argues that rural tourism can increase the quality and "civilization level" of peasants in five ways: providing a source of livelihood; increasing exposure to urban manners and mores; requiring knowledge of standard Mandarin; requiring better education; and providing exposure to technology (Chio, 2014).

To make Huangshan into a tourist destination, then, required the implementation of various "civilizing" campaigns in towns and villages. Government s*uzhi*-raising campaigns included a wide variety of activities. Examples included Western classical music concerts performed in villages by local music teachers; college student volunteers traveling to remote villages during summer breaks to educate peasants in technology and socialist values; and during the school year, student volunteers from Huangshan University, themselves from rural

[2] See introduction and chapter six for more thorough discussions of *suzhi* (quality) as a concept in contemporary Chinese discourse.

backgrounds, going to rural elementary schools as part of the "Cultivating and Practicing Socialist Core Values" (*peiyu he jianxing shehuizhuyi hexin jiazhiguan*) campaign, to educate children in the twelve core socialist values.[3]

Unsurprisingly, the image of "the peasant" as backward, uncivilized, and the source of China's social ills was not universally accepted, especially by rural farmers themselves. In this chapter, I examine how competing ideologies surrounding the category of "the peasant" (*nongmin*) lay at the heart of the issues I analyze. The term "peasant" (*nongmin* lit. "farming people") is as much an ideological category as it is a sociological one. In Huangshan, where urbanization projects have involved resettling "peasants" into urban areas and giving them urban residence permits, "peasant" as an identity is no longer necessarily or even primarily associated with living in a village or with farming as a source of livelihood. This chapter shows that peasant is an identity whose meaning is hotly contested, and this dispute lies at the heart of many tensions in rural China. Further exploring these tensions can allow us to make sense of how ordinary rural Chinese are grappling with policy, politics, history, and memory, that is, with the legacy of China's turbulent recent past and current rapid societal transformation.

"The Peasant"

The BNSC campaign has the goal of eliminating "the peasant" and replacing her with a skilled worker capable of helping China become a "first world" country. The developmentalist logic behind the various civilizing projects that make up the BNSC campaign rests on two necessary but unacknowledged ideological moves: The first is to create the social category of

[3] The core values are divided into three categories as follows: 1) national values: prosperity, democracy, civility, and harmony; 2) social values of freedom, equality, justice and the rule of law; and 3) individual values of patriotism, dedication, integrity and friendship.

"the peasant" as belonging to a chronotope of an ahistorical generalized past, the atavistic "simultaneity of the non-simultaneous," that is, a group of people who may be physically coeval but whose mentality is rooted in the past (Bloch [1935] 1991). The second move is then to negatively value the past that this peasant represents (see Anagnost 2004, Day 2013, Flower 2004, Kipnis 2006, 2007, Yan 2003). Like most ideologies, this one also conceals the work which goes into naturalizing Chinese peasants as an atavistic and unruly group.

In the context of the contemporary PRC, the creation of the peasant as a backward and outdated remnant requires depoliticizing the formerly revolutionary and highly political category of the peasant. While peasants and China's vast rural populace have always been central in the rhetoric of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the glorification of the peasant as a revolutionary vanguard reached its peak towards the end of the Cultural Revolution, when Mao required urban youth to be sent down to the countryside to learn from the peasants (Meisner 1999).

Yet in contemporary China, media and popular discourse portray the contemporary Chinese countryside as the site of dysfunction and immorality, managing to include both the values of "feudal backwardness" in their representations as well as pathologies that we might associate with modernity. There are reports of domestic violence, arranged marriage, female infanticide, and wife-buying (i.e. feudal backwardness), and rumors of drug use, gang violence, divorce, teen pregnancy, and general delinquency (modern ills) tied to rural areas in these pervasive discourses, often through the circulation of sensationally tragic news stories. Even in urban areas, crime is generally thought to be committed by rural migrants: as a student in Beijing in the early 2000s, I was frequently told to avoid areas where rural migrants congregated as they were highly dangerous types. As an illustrative example, a Beijing friend once crossed the street

to avoid walking by construction workers sitting near the sidewalk on their lunch break (ones who I had passed by on a daily basis without incident).

Much anthropological and sociological literature on rural Chinese has focused these negative stereotypes and their consequences by examining how rural subjects, especially those who migrate to the cities to work in low-skilled jobs, resist or contest these negative valuations as being "less than" their urban counterparts (e.g. Jacka 2005, Sun 2007, 2014, Yan 2008). In this chapter, I turn my attention to the former issue: how is the Chinese peasant made to seem "non-simultaneous" with the present? That is, how does the state re-situate the peasant in an ahistorical, apolitical past rather than the recent, political Maoist one? This issue has gotten little attention from scholars.

This chapter will consist of two parts. In the first part, I examine the work that goes into constructing peasants as belonging to a chronotope of the distant past. In the second part, I will explore how this construction is contested by peasants who instead see themselves as part of an old revolutionary vanguard. Unlike rural migrants studied by other scholars, who claim equality with urban citizens by asserting their ability to adapt to a modern globalized economy, the peasants of Huangshan often assert the superiority of their peasant status by orienting themselves to previous regimes of value, in particular, those of late Maoism. As the government is still formally socialist and still even in some respects Maoist, these peasants are then able to assert their value 1) in opposition to current state projects, but also 2) in language that is almost impossible to counter in official state discourses, because to refute the claims of peasants as a socialist revolutionary class would be to refute the *soi-disant* fundamental values of the CCP and PRC.

"A living fossil"

In this section, I turn to a close analysis of a locally-produced documentary called "Huizhou Dialects" (*Huizhou Fangyan*)[4] as an example of the sort of mass media-produced text which works to place peasants in a deictically distant ahistorical past. The 23-minute film was first aired in 2007, and it is the only official full-length documentary on the local language of the region. I first watched this documentary in July 2013, when the bureau chief of the Huangshan municipal archives showed it to me on his office computer, and after that, when I mentioned the nature of my research, other government officials would mention this documentary to me. Footage from the documentary was recycled for other cultural programming, which aired on the local TV station during the early afternoon. The documentary is a highly representative example of its genre of "cultural" or "travel" programming, adhering closely in tone, style, and format to other culture documentaries.

The documentary features a female voice-over narration speaking with a standard Northern Mandarin accent. The voice-over narration alternates with short scenes with a female reporter, also with a standard Northern Mandarin accent, traveling to various parts of Huangshan and asking locals how to say certain lexical items in the local dialect, and longer in-depth interviews with two local language experts. The first is Mr. Jin, a retired middle school teacher originally from She county who had taught and lived in Xiuning, and whose interest in the difference between She and Xiuning dialects led him to conduct historical research into the Huizhou language family. The second is Mr. Hu, a university educated employee for the Yi

[4] As I explain in earlier chapters, Huizhou is the historical name for the region, and is used interchangeably with Huangshan by locals. When discussing the area as a "cultural region" or when talking about "cultural heritage," the term Huizhou is used almost exclusively.

County Gazetteer who was in charge of surveying Yi dialects for the decennial official chronicle. (Unfortunately, Mr. Jin had passed away shortly before my arrival, otherwise, local officials would have been happy for us to collaborate on a research project.) Both experts are presented in the standard "talking head" format, Mr. Jin against the background of his book-filled office, and Mr. Hu against a blue curtain (see Appendix 1). Although, according to my interview with Ms. Ma, the head of the Mandarin Promotion and Language Preservation Bureau, the documentary counts towards local language programming, the program is explicitly aimed at non-locals. This is evident from the fairly obvious fact that the introduction to the local language family is basic enough that any local would already know all the information presented simply by living in the region, to relatively subtle cues, such as all place names are listed with the province term first,

Figure 16: "Anhui Xiuning, Lantian"

such as "Anhui province, Xiuning county, Lantian village," providing information only necessary to a non-local.

As is customary in all Chinese television media production, locals who speak less than perfect standard Mandarin receive subtitles (as does at times the on-screen reporter), while the literal "voice from nowhere"—that is, the voice-over narration—does not.

The narration is accompanied, as is common in travelogues, with long panning shots over the idyllic countryside and video montages of the local scenery. Despite the presence of several sizeable cities, the images presented are almost exclusively of scenes which emphasize the rurality and "traditionality" of Huangshan. Motor scooters, ubiquitous even on the most rural of country roads, are almost entirely absent, while horse-drawn carts and bicycles are in abundance. Despite the presence of large county seats, which range in population from 80,000 (Yi county) to almost 500,000 (She county), as well as several economic development zones and larger towns, the documentary focuses on small villages. When it does show the cities, it shows only the historical districts. Similarly, no urban dialect speakers are interviewed, beyond the two local language experts who are interviewed at length. Instead, we find abundant footage of people engaging in "rural" or "traditional" activities such as washing clothes in the river, farming in bamboo hats with water buffalo in rice paddies, poling small boats down the river, and other sorts of "rustic" activities (see appendix 1). In the few scenes where something recognizably contemporary is portrayed, it is the rundown conditions in a village. We are informed that Lantian village has nothing "attractive" about it except its unique local dialect. While the village center of Lantian does not read as necessarily belonging to a past chronotope, it does represent the rural poverty common in the region but rarely presented in travel shows.

Figure 17: Lantian Village. Lantian is representative of a poor village in the region

The words the reporter asks for likewise generally emphasize the Huizhou languages' status both as being radically different from Mandarin as well as belonging to an earlier chronotope, one in which life was organized around a natural agricultural schedule rather than a clock. Below, we see the reporter accompanying Mr. Jin on a stroll through an unidentified part of Xiuning county. Given Mr Jin's location in the Xiuning county seat and the lack of an explicit place identification, the viewer would assume it is presumably filmed nearby, as at all other points the documentary generally provides the specific place name of each place it portrays. Despite the ostensibly urban setting (Xiuning is the second largest county seat and has a population of over 200,000), the location and their inhabitants appear quite rural, with visibly old houses in the traditional architectural style, stone streets, and older shirtless men sitting on benches by the doorstep.

Note the general dress of the interviewees, including the shirtless man in the background of the picture on the right. While we cannot see what building the people are in front of, the stone material and general state of the whitewash indicate it is relatively old (at least 50 years).

Figure 18: Dialect Elicitation by Mr. Jiang

The following scene takes place entirely in Xiuning dialect (*xiuning hua*) and is subtitled:

金：（in dialect）清早吃早饭怎么讲
女农民：啊？吃天光 tɕʰie tʰiɒ kau 啊
金：吃天光
(Man's voice from off screen, also in Xiuning speech:) 吃早饭是屯溪人讲。休宁当地讲吃天光
女农民：(unsubtitled) 我们休宁人讲吃天光
金：中午怎么讲？
女农民：中午吃当头 （昼） tsan vu tɕʰie tau t'iu

Mr. Jin: How do you say, eating breakfast in the early morning?

Woman: huh? Oh, tɕʰie tʰiɒ kau (subtitled: eat day light)

Man's voice [off screen]: Eating "breakfast" [calque of standard Mandarin 早饭 *zaofan*] is what Tunxinese say. Here in Xiuning [we] say "eat daylight"[5]

Woman: Yep, we say 'eat daylight' [this is not subtitled]

Mr. Jin: How do you say, "lunch"?

Woman: Lunch? "Eat midday"

[5] In my experience this was not the case, as Tunxinese also told me they said 吃天光 (tɕʰi tʰiɛ kau)

The terms for breakfast and lunch, directly translate into Mandarin as "Eating daylight" (lit. 吃 means "to eat," 天 means "day," and 光 means "light" or "bright), and "eating midday" (当 means "at the time of" and 昼 is a somewhat archaic term for "day").[6] These were some of the first words I learned in the local dialect, and whenever I told someone about my project, they would inevitably tell me these terms, which they informed me were particularly emblematic of local cultural difference. As it was explained to me dozens, if not hundreds, of times, these words were derived from the tracking of the sun over the fields during the day. The first meal was eaten at the sight of first daylight before heading to the field, while the time for the midday meal was calculated when the sun was directly overhead. Regardless of the accuracy of this folk etymology, it is significant that these local terms have become shibboleths of local cultural difference, one which is located in, as I was frequently told, a "past way of living" (*guoqu de shenghuo fangshi*). As shibboleths of cultural difference, knowledge of these terms also stood in as a shorthand for demonstration of local cultural expertise, both linguistic and cultural. In her fieldwork guidebook, Claire Bowern notes that ideas of what counts as fluent speech vary widely by language and context, and often performance of a very particular type of linguistic expertise can get one recognized as a "speaker," or even "fluent speaker" (Bowern 2008). In my experience, being able to intelligibly produce the terms "breakfast" and "lunch" marked me as a speaker and cultural and linguistic "expert" of the local dialect. In turn, I too took part in the propagation of these terms as indexes of local "cultural particularity" when I performed them on

[6] The man actually says 当头, which means "mid head," i.e. "midday," which is the more colloquial way of saying lunch in the local dialect, however his speech is subtitled with the more formal 当昼.

TV as a foreign scholar and "expert" of the local dialect. Indeed, in this 23 minute documentary, two of the six or so elicitation segments involve peasants telling the reporter how to say the terms of breakfast and lunch.

Secondly, folk theories of the language held by experts and non-experts alike considered unique dialectal lexical items, such as 吃当昼, as the preserved remnants of ancient Chinese (*gu hanyu*). Local language scholars like Mrs. Jin, Hu, and Jiang conducted most of their research with old texts and grammars to trace the etymologies of key dialect terms. During an interview with Mr. Jiang, I asked him what his methodologies were. He said he had made it a lifelong goal to study the evolution of classical Chinese Mandarin so that he would be better able to recognize from what period of time a word would have entered Huizhou language lexicons. The direct link between lexical items and ancient Chinese is also explicitly made by Mr. Hu in the documentary:

如果要请人家给他做事，或者麻烦别人的时候，他往往要讲一个词叫"聒噪"(*guo zhao*) 我们黟县话就是"*kwo sə*"。聒噪 这个词在现代汉语里，它仅仅解释为嘈杂，声音"嘈杂"但它在古代汉语里还有"麻烦您，""对不起，""感谢"的意思。我们徽州方言当中有很多很多保留着古音的，能够体现我们古代汉语发展的语言现象。比如说，在我们屯溪话里讲，"不亦乐乎"(*bu yi le hu*), 我们这也有。比如讲我们今天很高兴或者很忙，讲 *'pu ji lə xu', 'pu jau lə xu*.' 这就是明显从《论语》出来的

If someone wanted to ask someone to do something for him, or ask someone for a favor, he would frequently use the term "guozhao," which in Yi county dialect is "kwo sə." In modern Mandarin, this term simply means "noisy," however in ancient Chinese, the term also had the meanings of "sorry to bother you," "sorry," or "thank you." Our Huizhou dialects have preserved many many ancient pronunciations, enough to embody the phenomenon of ancient Chinese language development. For example, our Tunxi dialect has [the phrase], "extremely, it's a great pleasure" (buyilehu), which we also say here. For example, today if we're really happy or busy, we'll say "pu ji lə xu," "pu jau lə xu." This is clearly directly from "The Analects."

In a sense all modern Chinese words can be traced back in one way or another to classical Chinese[7], as at present, all lexical items in spoken language are assigned or affiliated with a particular logographic representation, which is drawn from a character set that by and large was stabilized thousands of years ago in the Han Dynasty.[8] Indeed, two common and thus supposedly "modern" terms for lunch in standard Mandarin, 中饭 (lit. Mid meal) and 午餐 (lit. Noon meal), have usages that, like the "archaic" term 当昼, can be traced in the written record to the Tang dynasty. What is most interesting about these scholarly etymological projects and the folk theories of language which accompany them, is how the particular vocabulary considered unique to the Huizhou language family is imagined as representing a more direct and unspoiled link to "ancient Chinese" than standard Mandarin.

The connection between ancient Chinese and contemporary Huizhou languages is taken far beyond researching the etymologies of particular terms. As is very clearly shown in the excerpts below, Huizhou languages have preserved wholesale (i.e., "through phonetics, grammar, and lexicon") ancient Chinese language, and by extension, an ancient way of life. As the voiceover narrator tells us:

徽州方言的研究有重要的文化价值。从方言中，不仅能窥探出古代徽州人的生活面貌，今天的人们还能从语音，语法，词汇上看出(我国)古汉语的发展很近。所以，有人评价说，徽州方言是中国语言发展的活化石

Research into Huizhou dialects has important cultural value. Through the dialect, not only can we peer into the way of life of ancient Huizhounese, but through phonetics, grammar, and lexicon, people today can see that it is very close to the development of (our country's) ancient

[7] Even many contemporary Mandarin lexical items that were directly borrowed from Japanese in the early 20th century have etymologies that can be traced to early Chinese.

[8] Invention of new characters in standard Chinese written forms is exceedingly rare, except for naming chemical elements. Of course, as I hope is clear, I am not implying that the *meaning* of these characters were fixed, but rather the written logographic form, standardized in the Han dynasty, has remained remarkably stable, aside from systematic simplification in the early PRC.

Chinese. Because of this, some people have commented that Huizhou dialects are a living fossil of the development of Chinese language.

…

这些文绉绉的古代词汇在徽州方言中比例结实。在上个世纪二十年代，只有学者指出，土音就是古音，方言就是古语。世世代代，生活在这边土地上的人们一如既往地使用着源远流长的古语方言。并没有意识到，这是他们在看此平淡的言语交谈中，留声下了那些已经远去历史的声音

The proportion of this genteel ancient vocabulary in Huizhou dialects has been very durable [jieshi]. In the 1920s of the previous century, only scholars pointed out that the local accent is actually ancient pronunciation, the dialect is actually ancient language. From generation to generation, the people living in this place continue using an ancient language with a long history. They do not realize, the language they use for pedestrian talk has recorded the sounds of the already distant historical past.

These two chunks of narration very clearly (1) place Huangshan in a chronotope of the past, a "living fossil" (*huohuashi*) of a generic and timeless "ancient" (*gudai*) China, and (2) place Huangshanese themselves as guileless artifacts that make up the museum display that is Huangshan, akin to the taxidermied elk in a natural history diorama. These texts display a language ideology resembling that of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis at its most caricatured extreme, one in which there is no distance between the formal qualities of a language and the culture or "way of life" it represents.[9] In this case, as Huizhou dialects are conceived as stagnant and unchanging, Huizhou people and their "way of life" (*shenghuo mianmao*) are as well. The use of the phrase "from generation to generation" (*shishidaidai*) reinforces the sense of an unchanging, and naturalized unbroken patrilineal transmission. (One cannot help but think of the Orientalist undertones here). While only the language is explicitly identified as a "living fossil," it takes little mental work to come to the conclusion that the people are as well. Here, the images of

[9] The term *shenghuo* means "life" and *mianmao* means "outward appearance or form." I have chosen to translate the term as "way of life."

smiling gap-toothed peasants in straw hats do little to dispel the image that Huangshanese are still living some time in "the past." This past, we can note, is never located in any particular historical era or dynasty, but exists simply as "ancient times" (*gu* = ancient, *dai* = era), one which is repeatedly emphasized as "far away" (*yuanqu*, *yuan* = far and *qu* = away). What is more, Huangshanese are so fully immersed in their insular little world that they completely lack the awareness to recognize their own atavism (*meiyou* = have not *yishidao* = realize/be aware*)*. As they go about their rustic lives and engaging in pedestrian (*pingdan*) conversations,[10] completely unable to comprehend their own cultural value as "living fossils" to outside scholars and "modern" Chinese tourists.

The imagery accompanying the text reinforces the equivalence between people and material culture (in the form of architecture and stone carvings) as relics of the past:

From generation to generation, the people living in this place

continue using an ancient language with a long history.

Figure 19: Documentary Narration with Imagery I

[10] *Pingdan* can also be translated as "bland" or "boring," although without the negative connotations the term might have in English. Its usage here is to emphasize the ordinariness, or the mundanity of the conversations.

They do not realize, the language they use for pedestrian talk

Records the sound of the already distant historical past.

Figure 19, Continued…

Yet as the documentary continues, we learn that even unchanging Huangshan cannot avoid contact with modernization:

就像小巷[深处]的古老形状总是被新来复改, 流传久远的事物迟早会成为我们褪色的记忆。徽州方言在徽州依然活跃，依然是大多数的徽州人的日常交流的工具。但是随之咱们生活不断地现代化，徽州方言被外来语为同化的速度正在加快

Just as the ancient structures in (dark) alleys are always being updated, sooner or later things handed down from the distant past become faded memories. Huizhou dialects in Huizhou still survive, for a large number of Huizhounese they still remain the tools of communication in daily life. However, with the nonstop modernization of our (inc.) lives, the speed at which Huizhou dialects are becoming assimilated with outside languages has increased.

In the first sentence, the narrator starts off by making a generalization: ancient alleyways are always (*zongshi*) updated (*xinlaifugai*), and things handed down from the past sooner or later (*chizao*) fade away. Regardless of one's person opinion towards this process, we cannot help but recognize the inevitability of these processes. It is also interesting to note the passive-voice participle (*bei),* in first clause: these ancient structures or forms do not change themselves, they *are* changed by the inevitable forces of progress. This general process is directly contrasted in

the second sentence, which again points out that Huizhounese *still* (*yiran*) exist in the past. The Chinese term *yiran* translates as "still," but much more so than "still" in English, it has the connotation of actively perduring over time. It exists in direct paradigmatic competition with the much more commonly-used term for still: *hai*, and the usage of the somewhat more marked *yiran* and its repetition in both clauses places great emphasis on the act of remaining the same through long periods of time. We then cut to the only image of urban Huangshan, a shot taken on a busy street in the She county seat, which, as mentioned above, is the most populous county seat with a population of around 500,000. The images of urban Huangshan are overlaid with the next sentence, which notes that our lives are "continuously" (*buduan de*) modernizing. Again, the use of the word *buduan*, which means "continuously" or "non-stop," emphasizes the inevitability of these processes.

Just as the ancient structures in (dark) alleys are always being updated, sooner or later things handed down from the distant past become faded memories.

Huizhou dialects in Huizhou still survive, for a large number of Huizhounese they still remain the tools of communication in daily life.

Figure 20: Documentary Narration with Imagery II

However, with the nonstop modernization of our (inc.) lives,

[This appears to be She county seat (pop 500,000)]

the speed at which Huizhou dialects are becoming assimilated with outside languages has increased.

[This appears to be Tunxi (pop 100,000)]

Figure 20, Continued…

We then cut back to Mr. Hu, who talks about language loss:

方言的保存也是非常必要的。而方言流失的速度我个人认为它几乎是以十年翻一倍的速度在流失。所以我们要重视徽州方言的研究, 因为如果徽州方言都最后同化成普通话了，那么，我不可能想象了徽州文化的研究还有什么意义。也就是徽州方言的流失将会影响到徽州文化的流失

Protecting the dialect is extremely important. Yet my personal opinion is that given the speed of [current] language loss, the rate of loss will almost double within a decade. Therefore, we must prioritize Huizhou dialect research because if in the end Huizhou dialects completely assimilate into Mandarin, really, I can't imagine what meaning research into Huizhou culture will have. Also, the loss of Huizhou dialects will have an influence on the loss of Huizhou culture.

As is common among language experts of endangered languages,[11] Mr. Hu reaffirms that Huizhou languages are threatened and their protection is important. Yet rather than advocating for language revitalization measures, as we might expect from an indigenous language scholar,

[11] Whether Huizhou languages can be considered endangered is a very complex issue that is also addressed elsewhere in the dissertation.

Mr. Hu instead pushes for increased research into the dialects before they completely and inevitably die out. As a continuation of the logic in the previous excerpt, for Mr. Hu, language loss is framed as an independent process outside of the control of human or government action. This can be seen in the remarkable absence of any sort of human agents. For example, let us look more closely at this sentence: *if in the end Huizhou dialects completely assimilate into Mandarin*. The two arguments of the sentence are "Huizhou dialects," the subject, and "Mandarin," the object. We do not have people losing (or gaining) languages, we have a language which appears to autonomously assimilate into other another language. By making Huizhou language the subject which agentively assimilates, Mr. Hu's phrasing also reverses the actual power relations between Mandarin and local dialects, eliding any blame directed at Mandarin (and aggressive government Mandarin promotion policies) as a major catalyst in language loss. Moreover, unlike most indigenous language advocates, Mr. Hu's primary concern is not with the effect of language loss on local culture, but rather with the effect that language loss will have on *research* into local culture. Indeed, the influence of language loss on local culture is presented here as an afterthought. Given the strong link between culture and language established earlier in the documentary, this absence of concern is quite interesting.

To take a step back, I want to examine Mr. Hu's speech at a slightly more macro level. The Huizhou languages in total have over two million speakers, and, as noted repeatedly in this very documentary, remain the main daily language for a "vast majority" of Huangshanese. While it is the case that younger speakers in urban Tunxi are shifting away from dialect use as their primary language, it is not at all obvious that Huizhou languages are as a whole threatened or dying out, nor given the current situation, is it clear what factors would cause language loss rates to double in the next ten years. Villagers who learn Mandarin and migrate to work elsewhere in

China still tend to marry endogamously and settle in their home villages. While all young people learn Mandarin, most rural Huangshanese still speak in their local dialect in their villages outside of school and work settings, and there do not appear to be any drastic outside forces which would radically disrupt this pattern. Instead, I want to argue that Mr. Hu's rather puzzlingly bleak prognosis is an example of what I call *premature eulogization*. This move, which makes Huizhou languages (and thus the local way of life) appear far more moribund than they actually are, might be seen as subtle encouragement of the process by portraying language loss as inevitable and already well underway. Indeed, Mr. Hu's solution to language loss is a premature "salvage" operation, or a call for more resources devoted to the documentation and recording of a way of life before it disappears rather than, say, a call for language revitalization or maintenance projects, such as local language media production or schooling.

This lack of concern for the loss of local culture "on the ground," I argue, is in part because eliminating the "local culture" of Huangshan peasants imagined as belonging to an unchanging Chinese ur-past is precisely the aim at both the national and local levels of government. On the national level, developing Anhui is part of a larger program to bring China's "numbers" in-line with those of wealthy industrialized nations in the global North. At the local level, the project is about reforming Huangshan's most inconvenient or perhaps "embarrassing" residents so that the already-existing "value" of the already-civilized and the already-modern Huangshanese becomes legible to non-locals: the foreign scholar, the wealthy tourist, the white-collar migrant etc. Indeed, as national-level Chinese leaders look to the economies and general development of wealthy industrialized countries, local cadres in Huangshan also looked to wealthy Western European countries with robust tourism industries as models of fully developed societies where "modern" and "civilized" inhabitants live in a preserved historical milieu but

were not of it. As a foreign scholar who has been to Europe, I was constantly pushed by the local officials and other elites to compare Huangshan to alpine European countries, as I have discussed in more-depth in Chapter One.

Part 1a: "Stone Peaches"

A light drizzle fell around us as I pinched off a piece of sticky rice dough from the large metal bowl. "This is for making New Year's cakes" Lily, the TV host, told me. "They're made all over the region, but Yi County has a special mold for them." With the dough still in my hand, I looked at the intricately carved wooden cake molds, which were carved with auspicious designs such as fish (fish, yu, is a homonym for 'surplus', yu) or with the character for good luck, "fu." One mold was in the shape of a large peach. "In Yi County, these cakes are called 'large stone peaches,' because the round shape looks a bit like a peach, and then you can also make them in a peach shape." Lily told me. A stout middle-aged peasant woman in a coat and several sweaters stood mutely next to us. She had made the dough, and had been selected as an expert cake maker. "Ask her questions about the cakes," Lily instructed me. "Ask her basic stuff, like what the name is in Yi county, and what they're made out of." Foreign ingenue was a role I was used to playing, so I nodded knowingly. I turned to the woman and started to ask her about the cakes. Before I could finish, the director shouted "CUT." The director was a tall woman in a yellow Gore-Tex rain jacket. Although she was probably the same age as the village women next to me, she looked about 10 years younger. The rain was picking up, and the homemade tofu was almost ready. "We'll come back to the cakes" she said. I dumped my wad of dough back in the bowl and ran to the bathroom to wash the stickiness off my hands. An hour later, the rain had still not let up, so the cake making operation had been moved indoors. The peasant woman and I started in on take two. Again I picked up the dough. I stood in the middle between the peasant woman and Lily, my "tour guide." Before the cameras started rolling, Lily reiterated her previous instructions. "Yan![12] Ask some questions about what the cakes are called in Yi county." To the peasant woman, she told her to tell me they were called Stone Peaches.

"Wow, what is this?" I asked in a tone of amazement as I rolled the dough in my hands.

"New Year's cakes." The peasant woman responded phlegmatically. Lily, standing next to me, tried hard to not look annoyed.

"But don't they have another name?" she asked the woman.

"Um yeah." responded the woman.

"Isn't it 'stone peaches'?" said Lily?

"Yeah." said the peasant woman.

[12] Yan is my Chinese name.

"Wow, stone peaches. Where does that come from?" I enthusiastically chirp.

"I don't know" said the peasant woman. Lily's TV training is barely keeping the smile on her face.

"Isn't it because they look like peaches?" she follows up

"Um yeah, I guess. They can if you use the peach mold" the woman responds. Lily takes over the questioning from me.

"How old is this tradition?"

"How should I know?" says the peasant woman with a shrug.

"Say it's been passed down from generation to generation" says Lily, who is no longer trying to conceal the edge in her voice.

"If you know all the answers? Why are you asking me the questions?" responds the peasant woman, the edge in her voice matching Lily's. Lily's response is drowned out by a loud "CUT." The village mayor, who had witnessed the entire scene, comes up to smooth things over.

"She's just a simple peasant woman, with no education, and she doesn't feel like she's knowledgeable enough to answer all your questions. She's shy and embarrassed" he continues, and the woman, her expression unreadable, nods in agreement. Lily relaxes a little bit and nods.

"Auntie, I know this is a lot of pressure, but you have to help us. You know how to make these cakes, and you have to share your knowledge with the foreigner here."

A few weeks before leaving the field, I agreed to be part of a Spring Festival cultural programming television special. The premise of the show was that I would play a Chinese-speaking scholar of the local dialect who had come to learn all the special local customs of X-village, a particularly remote village in Yi County which was considered to have "preserved" local traditions that elsewhere had been lost. My interactions with the peasants would be mediated by my "tour guide," a local TV news anchor. The village was indeed remote, as it was a full three-hour drive from Tunxi mostly along narrow and treacherous dirt mountain tracks. Unfortunately for the TV station, the same day we had been invited to film, the village government had invited the Yi county photography club to photograph local customs as part of the grand opening of a local cultural center. Instead of presenting an undisturbed rural idyll, the

village center was packed with high-level county officials, mostly middle-aged men in Gore-Tex with expensive cameras. The clicking and flashes from dozens of cameras ruined several shots, and the TV crew was upset that village officials hadn't told them in advance about the presence of the photography club so that they could have rescheduled the shoot. The cultural center was being established in the village's ancestral hall, which the village government was in the midst of remodeling so that it might become a hotel/tourism center. Outside the hall was a large courtyard which was surrounded by several old farmhouses, some of which still housed the original inhabitants. The folkways I was there to learn about consisted of both special New Year's customs as well as general "traditional customs." They included: making New Year's cakes, writing door couplets (auspicious messages written on two long sheets of red paper and hung on either side of the door), making tofu, singing folk songs in the local dialect, pig slaughtering, and of course, eating the local New Year's delicacy, a hearty stew made with fresh pork, fresh and dried tofu, fish balls, mushrooms, and rice noodles.

Though I was not able to study media production as a foreign scholar, studying media production as a participant proved to be an extremely rich site for examining behind-the-scenes heteroglossia in cultural programs whose finished product appear to present a seamless "voice of the state." The local TV crew, mostly college graduates in their late 20s and early 30s, worked quite hard to faithfully carry out the various competing and often incompatible projects of the various state institutions or levels of government who were sponsoring the programming, all the while dealing with the general unpredictability and messiness of life in rural China.[13] While there is much to say about this more generally, in this section I want to focus on how media production

[13] The TV show I discuss in chapter three is the clearest example of this, as its original concept had to be entirely scrapped due in large part to the difficulty of the young female director to control the unruly participants.

provides a privileged site for observing how peasants contest their construction as organic experts of local timeless traditions.

In the vignette above, Lily is constantly pushing the "peasant woman" to portray cultural difference: in the rest of China, the cakes are "New Years' cakes" (*niangao*), but in Yi county, they are "stone peaches" (*shitao*). As in the Huizhou dialect documentary, Lily wants the village woman to root the custom, along with her knowledge of it, in the generic deep past. Using the same language as in the documentary of passing tradition down "from generation to generation," Lily was asking the woman to inhabit her role as a "living fossil" of a past way of life which is both deeply representative of "Chineseness" while at the same time being radically "other" to the urban Chinese citizen. The peasant woman's otherness was highlighted by seeing her through the eyes of a maximally different "other," the American anthropologist. These two forms of otherness were mediated by Lily, a modern Chinese woman who (literally) stood in between, "translating" between the "modern" American and the "ancient" peasant.

There is a temporal formation in this situation: the modern Chinese subject is intelligible to and finds intelligible both China's deep cultural past, with its "5,000 years of civilization," and American modernity, which is the most "advanced" in the world (as I was informed). Lily is able to navigate through representational mediation between China's past and future, bringing both together into a complete whole, a scientific "socialism with Chinese characteristics." Here too, I do not think it is entirely an accident that the mode of knowledge transmission was reversed from normal power hierarchies. In this situation, the dumb foreigner learns from the wise peasant through the knowledgeable modern Chinese subject. My own less immediately obvious "lack" had to be made clear to the audience. During filming, I was asked to display at times a level of ignorance about basic elements of Chinese culture and life to the point that one would assume I

had never set foot in so much as a Chinese restaurant, much less China. While filming me helping out with the tofu making process, I was asked to pretend that I did not know what tofu was, and that it did not exist in America.

Yet as we can see in the vignette above, the cake-making peasant woman was far less willing to be slotted into the prescribed role than I was. Rather than playing up her local difference from general Chinese culture, she downplayed it, turning our first shoot into an inadvertent comedy routine where she played the straight (wo)man to Lily's fool. Even with overt prompting by Lily, the peasant woman refused to perform, resisting affirming Lily's statement on the background of the term "stone peach" even in the face of Lily putting words in her mouth.

It is when Lily asks her to perform her status as belonging to a chronotope of an ageless past, a keeper of traditions passed down "from generation to generation," that the peasant woman loses all patience, breaking frame and completely rejecting the premise of the show, again pointing out Lily's foolishness in peppering her with questions that Lily already knew the answer to. Although the mayor smoothed things over, the peasant woman was less than entirely cooperative, and it took several more takes before we finally had one the director was grudgingly satisfied with.

As I did not interact with the village woman outside of the filming setting, I have no idea what sort of interpretation she would give to the event. During the three-hour drive back, and later over dinner and drinks, I was able to get Lily's interpretation of the event. On the way back, the TV crew mocked the peasants and their backward ways. Another reporter who had been filming for a different part of the program mentioned that all the women she met had been named "flower" (*hua*). "Oh, they're all named something like that. If it's not 'flower,' it's something

else kind of stupid," responded the director. The consensus was that the residents of X-village were unusually backward and stupid, their multiple expressions of unwillingness to conform to expectations (of which the vignette presented is just one) and the difficulties they caused were simply chalked up to the natural impossibility of getting work done with peasants. The camera man then announced that it was his first and last time visiting X-village. I told him that he couldn't be sure it was his last. "What if you do another New Year's special?" The TV crew was adamant they would not return there. Between the photographers and the difficult peasants, the whole thing had been an unpleasant nightmare. "What if you married a woman from the village?" I asked. Everyone in the car started laughing at the hilarious idea of the camera man with his rustic wife named Flower and his in-laws who lived at the end of a treacherous two-hour journey down a dirt road. The other reporter, a woman also in her mid-20s, started teasing him, telling him he could himself move to X-village and become a peasant along with his wife, and then next time they could interview him about his rustic folkways.

Lily, the cameraman, and the other members of the film crew belonged to a very small segment of Huangshanese, locals who had left Huangshan to attend good universities elsewhere in China, and had then returned to the area by getting one of the few reasonably prestigious white-collar jobs available. That evening, I went out to dinner with Lily, the cameraman, and their friend Coco, who had a degree in accounting and at the time owned a chain of successful coffee shops in Huangshan. Coco spoke English and traveled to Southeast Asia on a regular basis, where she enjoyed hanging out with Westerners. As locals who were proud of the area but who also saw Huangshan through the eyes of urban cosmopolitan Chinese, they were embarrassed by the qualities of Huangshan that they considered tended to mark it as a rural backwater. And unlike older local elites or mid-level bureaucrats who had not spent much time

elsewhere in China, they did not draw a sharp distinction between Tunxi as an urban center and X-village, instead placing both on the same spectrum of "backwardness." Coco vividly articulated this when she recounted a scene she'd encountered grabbing breakfast at the new McDonald's, which had opened with much fanfare several months before the end of my fieldwork. A foreign tourist had been inside eating breakfast, and gathered around the window was a crowd of older people watching him eat. "I've never felt more humiliated" Coco told us. "What do you think that foreigner thinks of us? That we're so backward we've never seen a foreigner before? That we don't have TVs, so we watch people eat for entertainment? Is our 'quality' (*suzhi*) really that low?" While she placed the blame almost entirely on the crowds of old people with endless free time to engage in embarrassing low-quality behavior, her use of "we" (*women*) indicates she was aware that the foreigner, and perhaps the wealthy Chinese tourist, might not so clearly distinguish between the likes of Coco and the toothless old peasant in their assessment of Huangshanese. While Coco's general attitude about most things had nothing in common with those of a middle-aged male official, they both share a deep anxiety towards the existence of "the peasant," as though her presence has the ability to undo the modernity of those around her.

While it is easy to see "state media" or "state projects" in a country like China as far removed from the personal concerns and desires of ordinary citizens, the two are often deeply intertwined. This makes sense if we see this relationship as dialectical rather than hierarchical: citizens are still immensely shaped by state mediation in ways subtle and not, so it is natural that the worries of "the State" are also those of private individuals. At the same time, the State, particularly its vast bureaucracy charged with actually implementing programs on the ground, is composed of ordinary Chinese people who are very much embedded in the society they live in,

so it is natural that the issues targeted by state policy are influenced by general larger widespread social concerns.

The Social Meaning of Illiteracy

At this point, I return to my original vignette, and to return to the social meaning of (il)literacy in the context of early 21st century Huangshan. Given the material I have presented so far, Auntie Chu's insistence of illiteracy still does not make sense: if I want to argue that peasants contest their classification as belonging to a chronotope of unchanging tradition, how is asserting one's *il*literacy a form of protest? Certainly, local officials considered "literacy" primarily in terms of a statistic which contributed to a general matrix of development indices which in turn could measure how "modern" Huangshan was. (Most crucially, it could translate Huangshan's "value" into a numerical value that was easily legible and comparable, allowing others, from provincial and national level governments to foreign NGOs or corporations to determine what sort of value Huangshan might have to them). For these people, Auntie Chu's illiteracy was already overdetermined. As an elderly landless peasant who performed menial labor and who had violated the one-child policy, Auntie Chu was already dragging down the general development index in multiple ways. Regardless of her ability to read, she was already, in a broader sense, "illiterate." And because, according to the logic of "progress" as inevitable and unstoppable, a logic which I am arguing underlies many state projects, Auntie Chu's illiteracy was simply a fact to be acknowledged and waited out until the passage of time would make the issue no longer relevant.

For Auntie Chu, however, I argue that the assertion of illiteracy was a very different sort of act and "literacy" had a very different sort of meaning. If literacy, or literacy practices are a set of "socially approved and socially approvable" behaviors (Gumperz-Cook), then claiming to

be illiterate is a form of protest, an assertion of one's own comfort or willingness to be socially "disapprovable." In *The Art of Not Being Governed,* James Scott writes about what he calls "nonliteracy," which is the strategic refusal by groups to by tied to a written record, and by extension, to a state:

> If swiddening and dispersal are subsistence strategies that impede appropriation; if social fragmentation and acephaly hinder state incorporation; then, by the same token, the absence of writing and texts provides a freedom of maneuver in history, genealogy, and legibility that frustrates state routines. If swiddening and egalitarian, mobile settlement represent elusive "jellyfish" economic and social forms, orality may be seen as a similarly fugitive jellyfish variant of culture (220-221).

While Scott is talking about group resistance to being incorporated into a state, I argue a similar principle can apply to individuals within a highly bureaucratic society. Indeed, Jacob Eyferth notes that claims of illiteracy were a relatively common form of political resistance in the early PRC, as local cadres would decline to enforce disliked policies by claiming to be incapable of reading the memos or policy briefs (personal communication). Auntie Chu's declaration of illiteracy can likewise be seen as a political act: by claiming to be illiterate, she was asserting at some level that the modern bureaucratic state with its ever-increasing amounts of paperwork were not legible to her.

Scholars speak of 'literacy practices' and literacy events' but here I want to look at 'illiteracy practices' and 'illiteracy events,' that is, ways in which people exercise or perform their inability or unwillingness to be properly interpellated "legible" subjects. The "stone peach" incident, I would argue, is a paradigmatic example of an "illiteracy event," where "illiteracy practices" are expertly performed by the peasant woman. Without refusing or explicitly expressing disapproval, the peasant woman managed to ruin the shoot and furthermore, rather subversively flip the power relations set up in the show by "inadvertently" making Lily look

stupid and ridiculous. This was done by the peasant women's refusal to properly "read" the event at hand, to recognize and adequately perform the genre of "cultural television programming." Yet, like the cadres Eyferth mentions, the commonsense conception of illiteracy as a state of ignorance provides an alibi against having one's activities read as actively insubordinate. We can see this in the resolution of the stone peach issue: the mayor, recognizing the breakdown of the television program that he likely played an active role in setting up (and which would provide much needed publicity and tourist dollars for X-village), came in to resolve the issue. He does so by pointing out the peasant woman's illiteracy: *"She's just a simple peasant woman, with no education, and she doesn't feel like she's knowledgeable enough to answer all your questions. She's shy and embarrassed" he continues, and the woman, her expression unreadable, nods in agreement.* The peasant woman is not rude, she is simply "shy" and "embarrassed," because of her own inferiority as a "simple peasant woman" "with no education."

Once rudeness is reframed as "illiteracy," Lily's attitude has to change. Whereas before Lily's tone was sharp and impatient, now it was Lily's job to mollify the peasant woman, and when she begs the peasant woman for help, her tone is entirely different. My guess is all parties involved recognized that the social interaction which occurred was not one of a "simple" peasant woman experiencing "embarrassment." Rather, "illiteracy" as both a practice and an explanation provided a social out for all involved, diffusing what could otherwise have been a hostile or even politically deleterious situation for the mayor's career. We repeated the shoot multiple times, finally ending up with a shoot that was deemed adequate, but not the one initially imagined by Lily or the director. Thus, through a virtuoso performance of "illiteracy," the village woman is able to assert quite a bit of control over a situation where she is in a structurally powerless position. In doing so, she avoided having to embody the role of the "living fossil" to the degree

initially presented to her, and she avoided having to say clunky and humiliating phrases like, "this was passed down from generation to generation." In a very minor way, we can see how illiteracy as an "unruly act," a form of resistance, allowed this woman to avoid taking active part in her own anachronization.

Elderly rural women's resistance to being anachronized can also be much more overtly political. Auntie Chu and her other friends clearly remembered their value as "poor peasants" under Mao, and frequently expressed longing for a return to such a period. Complicating the matter was the CCP's efforts shore up party support and counter increasing dissatisfaction through a return to nostalgic propaganda[14] campaigns that draw on the rhetoric and imagery of the Maoist past. The return of Cultural Revolution-era state slogans and posters thus serves as a visual reminder to Auntie Chu and her friends of a time when they were socially valuable, and it also complicates local officials' project to de-politicize the category of peasant.

Awareness of widespread corruption at all levels of leadership and a lack of trust in state institutions has led to a general disillusionment with the CCP, particularly its leaders. President Xi Jinping has tried to counter this through launching several campaigns aimed at restoring the reputation of the CCP and trust in the general leadership of China. Shortly after his appointment, he announced a sweeping anti-corruption campaign aimed at both "tigers and flies," referring to high and low-level officials, respectively. To address the sense that Chinese people under the guidance of its leaders had jettisoned their value systems in the quest for development, Xi

[14] The term for the state posters and slogans which cover rural and urban China alike is *xuanchuan*, a term that is generally translated into English as "propaganda," or, in current official CCP documents, "publicity." The term in Chinese is a compound derived from the word xuan, to declare or announce, and chuan, to transmit, and it does not carry the negative valence that the term propaganda does in English. While "publicity" is the preferred translation in official CCP documents, in this paper I will refer to xuanchuan instead as "state talk."

launched a “socialist core values” campaign, introducing twelve “core values” which are to represent socialism and the Chinese people. Socialist core values are posted around cities, and students and work units are required to memorize them.

“Socialist Core Values”
(Left to Right, Top to Bottom)

-Prosperity -Democracy -Civilization
-Harmony -Freedom -Equality
-Justice -Rule of Law -Patriotism
-Dedication -Honesty -Compassion

Figure 21 Socialist Core Values (Photo by author)

State posters, banners, and slogans are ubiquitous in both urban and rural areas in the Huangshan metropolitan region. They are posted at bus stops and on buses, above garbage cans, hung up on fences and government buildings, posted on billboards near busy thoroughfares and along highways, and posted on walls of buildings. During my fieldwork, one such poster campaign focused on Lei Feng, the young soldier who was posthumously held up during the Cultural Revolution as the model Chinese citizen. In his brief 22 years, he was a peasant, worker, and soldier, his biography encompassing all three revolutionary classes. As an emblem of China’s new revolutionary generation, he represented the earnest desire to “serve the people” (*wei renmin fuwu*). In the campaign “Learn from Lei Feng’s good example” launched in 1963,

his iconic photo was reproduced and published everywhere, and his diary, speeches, and poems became mandatory reading.

Lei Feng fell out of favor with the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1978, but his behatted image and exhortations to learn from his good example have periodically returned in state talk and state artwork. Billboards around Huangshan with the likeness of Lei Feng next to Mao's calligraphy, and accompanied by the phrase, "learn from Lei Feng, devote yourself to others, improve yourself" were posted at major intersections and other prominent locations. Without his image, this slogan was painted on blank walls or strung up on red banners around town.

"Learn from Lei Feng, see action
Be a civilized and polite She county person"
– She county Civilization Office
(February 2015)

Learn from Lei Feng, Devote yourself to others, Improve yourself. (February 2015)

Figure 22: Lei Feng posters with English translation
(Left: photo by author; Right: photo from http://www.tupian114.com/shiliangtu_905475.html)

Judith Farquhar writes that "the story of Lei Feng...represents the cultural ambition of Maoism at its height. It shows how the lives of ordinary people were cast in the ideal light of

socialist values, and its great range of influence exemplifies the scope and effectiveness of state hegemony in the 1960s and 1970s" (2002, 37). While few people are nostalgic for the difficulties of the 1960s, she notes that many older people express nostalgia for the time of Lei Feng and the values of collective service and selflessness that he represented, distanced and depoliticized from the strident Maoist politics of his day (2002, 41). For Auntie Chu and other displaced working-class former peasants, nostalgia for Lei Feng and the values he represents have not been as distanced from Maoist class politics as may be the case for Farquhar's urban informants in Beijing, nor as much as the current CCP may hope that they might be. This current evocation of Lei Feng as part of the Socialist Core Values campaign, launched in a time of growing discontent with current party leadership from wide swathes of the Chinese populace, I speculate, is purposely evoking a time when the CCP was seen, as Farquhar notes, as a moral vanguard, and when the power of the state to mediate ordinary lives was hegemonic. It is also, I claim, part of a state effort to rehabilitate a particularly fraught moment in recent Chinese history by evoking a nostalgia for the general positive values that Lei Feng represents while erasing the particular historical moment in which Lei Feng was made. This is part of a larger more general project of the state to reclaim the entirety of Chinese history as subsumed by the values of the current CCP, thus allowing the CCP leadership to legitimate their rule through appeals to nationalism, rather than Marxism. While "socialism with Chinese characteristics" is still socialism, the "Chinese characteristics" have become ever more prominent in state attempts to position its message vis a vis the general public.

In Huangshan, the Lei Feng campaign has succeeded in evoking positive memories of the Cultural Revolution and its attendant value system, but it has failed in fostering positive feelings for the current CCP leadership. Indeed, the juxtaposition of selfless, earnest, and naive Lei Feng

with current officials, who every day seem to be caught up in a public scandal more debauched then the one before, has only heightened the distinction between memories of selfless leaders of the past and the selfish leaders of today.

This discrepancy resonates in Huangshan, because contrary to memories of the Cultural Revolution in urban China, and to the official CCP and Western narratives of Chinese history which portray the Cultural Revolution as a period of unmitigated disaster, Auntie Chu and her friends already tended to have fond memories of the Cultural Revolution, which in its time had little effect on their day to day lives as poor peasants. "Those times were really fun" (*nage shihou zhen hao wan*), Auntie Hu, a neighbor of Auntie Chu, would tell me, mentioning how she and her siblings would spend their free time playing and foraging for food. Indeed, "fun" (*haowan*) was the most common descriptive term used to describe the Cultural Revolution. While some of these uses were most certainly darkly humorous or sarcastic, the "funness" of the Cultural Revolution was echoed by a general sense that it was a golden age in the recent Chinese past, before everything had gone downhill after the Reform and Opening period as material wealth and social hierarchies were creating an increasingly stratified society.

It was not simply poverty that bothered Auntie Chu but also a keen sense of being on the bottom of a newly emerging class hierarchy, which was a reversal from the Maoist class structure that held up workers, peasants, and soldiers as the three revolutionary classes, all embodied in Lei Feng. While her life was indeed hard, it had social value. Now, as China pushes urbanization and promotes "civilizing" the country through technological development, Auntie Chu's life conditions are materially better off, but she still must work hard with the knowledge that she had almost no social status. "I'm not afraid of being poor. I've been poor all my life. I know how to be poor. I don't need a refrigerator or air conditioning," she told me, referring to

the refrigerator her son had bought her. “What I want is justice.” We had been discussing the latest scandal to make the rounds of gossip. This particular case had outraged Auntie Chu. It involved an official whose family had been compensated over 600,000 RMB ($90,000) after he had died of alcohol poisoning as a result of carousing after work. By contrast, Auntie Chu’s son had received nothing after having his foot severed in an industrial accident in Hangzhou. The accident had killed his boss, so there was no one to claim compensation from. The family had gone into debt to pay for reattaching the foot, which cost 140,000 yuan, more than ten times Auntie Chu’s annual income, and the whole family was still struggling with debt. Her son was no longer able to perform relatively lucrative hard labor, and had to take an easier but lower paying job installing internet cables in Huangshan. Again, despite her claims of illiteracy, Auntie Chu had nonetheless heard the corruption story from Weibo, China’s microblogging platform.

It had been a few days since she heard about the event, and Auntie Chu was still furious. “No one asked him to get so drunk.” She continued. A friend, also a displaced peasant, tried to calm her down. She pointed out that it was the workplace’s job to compensate employee’s families for their deaths, and it had simply been back luck that her son’s boss had died in the same accident. “No it’s not. It’s injustice.” Responded Auntie Chu. “For them, the cadres, it’s like this,” she gestured with one of her hands, and for us, the normal people (*laobaixing*), it’s like that,” she gestured with her other hand, referring to enforcement of laws and state policies.

Cadres and officials who held themselves above the law was a common theme in the frequent discussion of scandal. Rarely a day went by when some official had not embezzled money or attempted to build some extravagant and self-aggrandizing structure with state funds. “Mao would never have stood for this.” Old Chen, a retired army officer and DOJ employee in his early 70s told me, after a discussion of embezzlement at the newsstand. Auntie Hu, Auntie

Chu, Old Chen, and Chu's daughter Li and I were all chatting. Auntie Hu nodded vigorously. "Mao believed in serving the people" (*wei renmin fuwu*), she said, drawing on the official slogan of the CCP. Old Chen agreed. "He would have gotten rid of all these corrupt officials. But now we don't have anyone to do this." Auntie Chu said. "We need another Mao, and we need another Cultural Revolution, and this time we need to make sure it works," referring to the fact that those most persecuted during the Cultural Revolution were yet again ensconced in power. Li, born in 1981, agreed. "Mao was selfless and he served the people."

Selflessness, serving the people, and contributing to the public good were all qualities sorely lacking in current officials, according to the consensus of my neighborhood newsstand. These values, you will notice, are precisely the ones embodied by Lei Feng, whose image once again covers Huangshan. While I cannot prove that these discourses, which are suggestively reminiscent though rarely verbatim repetition of state talk as posted in public places, constitute direct uptake of state talk, I argue that this constant reminder of an earlier period when people, particularly officials, were imagined as more altruistic, innocent, and moral serves as a discursive affordance that channels the direction of people's discontent. Indeed, we might argue that Cultural Revolution state talk & imagery is quite successful in evoking revolutionary attitudes towards class struggle. While it is impossible for me as an American anthropologist to ascertain what the CCP's "actual" goals are for the Lei Feng campaign, I feel confident in asserting it is not to foment revolutionary attitudes among the rural populace. We can see then, that there is perhaps a misrecognition, ironically, of exactly how much rural Chinese still respect Mao and still believe in the foundational values of the CCP. It is then not because rural Huangshanese are disillusioned by Maoism or the Party that they dislike the current leadership, but rather because they still believe in it.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter makes explicit the stakes of the curatorial projects undertaken by local officials in curating Huangshan as a civilized and modern tourist destination of natural beauty and historical importance. To succeed in this task, local officials seek to eradicate "ruralness" as it presently exists in Huangshan in the form of rundown villages, the bodies of the rural poor, and the sounds of local dialects, and replace it with a new rurality, one that is compatible with and legible to the urban as modern and civilized. At the same time, we can see how local peasants resist their own premature eulogization or ahistorical anachronism through an assertion of "illiteracy," an unruly practice that makes them simultaneously visible in unwanted ways (e.g. gawkers surrounding a McDonalds) while remaining illegible (one might say, resisting interpellation). This resistance to the contemporary Chinese state is a political act that is based on a deep commitment to the values of Maoism and the original ideals of the CCP rather than its rejection, creating a quandary that is deeply uncomfortable for a government that formally still claims such values.

Chapter Five: "She has two sons:" Reproducing State Discourses in Rural China

Teacher Yuan, Fan, Fan's friend, and I were on a photographic outing one pleasant Sunday. Fan was in her late 30s and a receptionist for a state-run enterprise. She was also one of Yuan's closest friends. Today, Fan had brought along another woman she had met through her work, the wife of a wealthy hotelier. The husband and wife were from Fujian but they were living temporarily in Huangshan due to business. We had traveled to the Memorial Archway park in neighboring She County to have our photos taken by Teacher Yuan in front of the stone memorial archways, elaborate stone constructions built in the Qing dynasty to commemorate virtuous widows. In the rest of China these archways had by-and-large been torn down during the Cultural Revolution, but in Huangshan they remained standing in rice paddies and fields in around the countryside. Many of them had been collected in a large park that was dotted with trees, flowers, and pagodas. To match the traditional scenery, Teacher Yuan had asked that we wear *qipao*, fitted silky dresses with a high mandarin collar, a style popular in Republican China. Fan wore a pale pink *qipao* with a pastel floral pattern. I wore an off-white one with black embroidered flowers, an old *qipao* of Fan's that she had given to me for photo shoots. Unlike our cheap polyester satin ones that resembled those worn by waitresses at restaurants, Fan's friend wore a real silk *qipao*. It was a dark gold color with black embroidery. After we complimented her on her beautiful qipao, she told us it had cost over 8,000 yuan (about $1200 USD). Fan and I gasped. "No wonder it looks so beautiful" said Fan.

After the photo shoot, we returned to our cars to drive to our second destination, a scenic creek with a bridge that Yuan liked to photograph. Fan and I got in Teacher Yuan's white Buick, and the friend returned to her black SUV. Now that we were apart, Yuan and Fan didn't hold

back in criticizing Fan's friend. Her skin was dark, she looked much older than her age, and she had a "moon face."[1] They agreed that Fujianese could have money, but it wouldn't change the fact they had big faces and dark skin. "She makes an 8,000-yuan qipao look like an 80-yuan qipao," Fan quipped. Yuan asked how rich Fan's friend was. Fan answered, "she has two sons." Yuan's eyebrows raised and her lips pursed.

In this chapter, I explore what sort of moral economy must be in place to make Fan's answer appropriate to Yuan's question. How can the number and gender of children reflect material wealth? Why is having two sons worthy of moral opprobrium? More broadly, how does family composition relate to the construction of moral personhood in rural China, and what role do state logics play in shaping these moral judgments? I will show how state discourses and logics create moral economies that are experienced in gendered ways in daily life even in the most intimate of family relations, such as those between mothers and daughters. It is not through the direct imposition of state ideology, but rather through structuring structures of daily life, through moral and linguistic categories, that the state still continues to mediate the lives of women in rural China. Here, I look at the sorts of work women undertake in order to understand their own selves as daughters and mothers. In the first half of this chapter, I examine what sorts of ideologies of value and virtue must exist for a woman with two sons to be viewed as "selfish" or even "greedy," a woman with one daughter "modern," and a woman with multiple daughters and a son as "traditional." That is, I show how archetypes of motherhood in rural China are shaped by discourses of both post-Reform era calculus as well as the legacies of Maoist morality. In the second half of this chapter, I explore how the One-Child Policy and its reshaping of moral

[1] Moon face refers to having a very round face, and is considered unattractive in contemporary China.

categories in rural China reflect the state's influence on one of the most intimate relationships for women, that between mothers and daughters.

The One-Child Policy and its gendered effects on daily life has been a focus of many anthropologists of gender in China (e.g. Greenhalgh 1994, 2008, Greenhalgh & Winckler 2005, Anagnost 1995, 1997, 2008, Eklund 2011). The vast majority of these scholars have taken a Foucaldian approach, analyzing family planning policy through a biopolitical lens, tracking the shift in governmentality in the late 1970s from a top-down statist approach of ideologically-driven mass campaigns to the scientific management of the welfare of the populations through a combination of direct and indirect means. In this chapter, I take a slightly different approach. Instead of assuming the effect of governmentality, that is, the causality between state policy and discourse and individual subjectivity, I instead seek to explore through detailed ethnographic examination exactly *how* state discourses and state policies mediate women's daily lives. Here, I eschew focusing on policy or discourse in the abstract or on the macro-level in favor of focusing on community-rooted microinteractions. In part this is due to a difference in ethnographic interest (I am interested in rural women, not policy-makers, who are the subject of Greenhalgh's 2008 work), but in part it is because, as I will show, fine-grained socially meaningful distinctions may be masked by statistics such as overall fertility rate.

Secondly, when scholars of family planning focus on women's experiences, they often do so through the framework of women's empowerment, asking the general question: how has the One-Child Policy made women's lives harder or easier? (Eklund 2011, Fong 2002, 2004, Gates 1993, Greenhalgh 1994, 2008). The overall effect of family planning policy on women's lives is complex and has been a source of scholarly debate. Here, I primarily sidestep this question and instead focus on how the One-Child policy has reshaped systems of value within a particular

community. Ultimately, lurking underneath this question is the idea of the implicit separation between state on the one hand and society on the other, such that the effect of state policy can be somehow separated and analyzed apart from all other factors. I subtly push back against this double reification of state and society by instead showing that women are enmeshed simultaneously in varying networks of social control that cannot so easily be teased apart, by the women or by the anthropologist.

In this chapter, I show that it is not simply in following or being forced to follow rules that state discourses impact people's lives, but that it is in producing institutional/structural/rhetorical frames in relation to which people evaluate their life choices and judge the choices of others that the state remains most influential. That is, governmentality is not simply a case of state logic that becomes imposed on populations (even if that is very much how it understands itself) but rather discourses that are circulated and (re)contextualized by people in particular communities, which shapes how they understand themselves and each other: just as a governmental apparatus can see itself as evaluating and acting upon individuals as members of a population, people too can 'see like a state' and evaluate each other on those terms.

The One-Child Policy

The one-child policy, officially known as the Family Planning Policy, was a policy in effect from 1980-2015 that strictly limited the number of offspring a couple was allowed have. In 2015, the One-Child Policy was formally changed to a two-child policy, after years of gradual modification that allowed for an increasing number of couples to have at least two children. [2]

[2] In 2015, the One-Child Policy was formally changed to a two-child policy, after years of gradual modification. While I was conducting my fieldwork in 2013-2015, parents with urban hukous who were both only children were allowed to have a second child, however given that

The One-Child Policy was formally adopted in 1980, after almost a decade of government promotion of family planning. Pro-natalist policies during the Cultural Revolution had led to high birthrates in 1960s China, and the economic and ecologically catastrophic effects of overpopulation had become an increasing concern of policy makers in the 1970s. After Deng Xiaoping became leader in 1978, population control became a primary focus of state policy. Although the policy has been referred to in Western media as the One-Child Policy as it aimed to limit births to one child per couple, from its inception it has allowed for exceptions for various populations, sometimes including a significant fraction of the total population. This has led some to refer to the policy as the "1.5 Child Policy" (Zhang 2017).

Like many state policies, the strictness of the Family Planning Policy varied over the course of its history and even differed between provinces and municipalities. The mid 1980s saw a general relaxation of the policy, particularly in rural areas where the policy was less popular and government means of enforcement were more limited. Although examples of forcible coercion did exist (though perhaps not to the extent that has been sensationalized in Western media), the primary mechanism for enforcing compliance with the policy was economic and social. Those employed in state enterprises faced demotion or job loss if they violated the Family Planning Policy. In rural areas and for those not employed by the state, punishment was levied in the form of a fine, which varied based on income. After 1986, enforcement tightened such that by 1990, One-Child Policies were strictly enforced even for those in rural areas. In the 1990s, this policy was again relaxed in reaction to the increasingly imbalanced sex ratio at birth, which reached as high as 138:100 in parts of the country, including Anhui. In order to prevent the

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most urban hukou-holders had had rural hukous as children, double only-child couples were very rare. Fan, a yoga student and civil servant, was one such woman, and she had had a second girl in 2013 after the change in the law.

abortion of female fetuses or the abandonment of baby girls, the government implemented the Care for Girls Campaign in the early 2000s. In addition to allowing rural residence permit-holders to have a second child if their first child was a girl, the campaign outlawed doctors from informing expectant parents of fetal sex during ultrasounds and paid the school fees for rural families with two daughters, a program made obsolete when school fees for rural children were abolished in the early 2010s.

In addition to official variations, local enforcement of the policy was also idiosyncratic, even varying widely between neighboring counties or villages. In some villages, leadership turned a blind eye to second or even third children, whereas in other places, perhaps even neighboring towns, birth quotas were strictly enforced, sometimes through draconian measures.[3] Like most nation-wide policies, the central government enforced compliance through regional quotas determined at the population level, and rewarded and punished local leadership according to their ability or willingness to meet quotas. Regional variation in enforcement was due not only to social or cultural differences between provinces but also was based on local leadership's willingness to tolerate the professional and political risks of either going over the quota or of hiding "excess" children.

The end result was that the strict "one-child policy" existed as an almost entirely urban phenomenon, as rural residents found legal and illegal ways to have more than one child. Likewise, the policy also was most strongly enforced in the prosperous Eastern provinces, with birthrates rising as one traveled to the Western hinterlands. Anagnost notes that this meant that in

[3] Although overreported in Western media, forced abortions were a tool of local governments who found that economic and social incentives were ineffective. Several of my informants told me stories of mothers forced to abort fetuses in the latter months of pregnancy, and a friend from rural Sichuan province told me that her village government would prominently display aborted late-term fetuses as a deterrent to women who were considering violating the law.

urban China adherence to the One-Child Policy became a proxy measure for "civilization level" (*wenhua shuiping*) (1995).

Having Girls is Good

"Daughters are better than sons," one middle-aged woman with a teenage daughter would frequently say during conversation at the yoga studio. She would always point out to her friends the nice things her daughter did that a son might not do. Her daughter liked to cook, and sometimes would surprise her mother by having dinner ready when she (the mother) returned from work. "A son wouldn't do that." She would tell her friends, and her friends, also middle-aged mothers, would nod in agreement. "Daughters are good. Having a daughter is good (*nü'er hao, sheng yige nü'er hao*)," she and her friends would tell each other. In the countryside, I heard "girls are good" from rural mothers of daughters as well. In a small wonton stand in the remote rural village where I taught English classes, the 23-year-old daughter of the owner sat with her 3-month-old daughter. "*Siao yi ga laim he"* she said to me in the local dialect. "Do you know what that means?"

"Having a daughter is good." I responded. She smiled.

"Your Xiuning talk is good! *Siao yi ga laim he*" she repeated again, this time at her daughter. Her mother took a break from folding wontons. "*Siao yi ga laim he*," the grandmother repeated, smiling at her granddaughter. We all nodded in agreement.

Son preference was combated through a ubiquitous slogan campaign in both rural and urban areas to promote daughters. In villages, slogans were painted in red paint on the walls of houses, while in cities they were presented in more "modern" formats, like the sign in the grass from a city park in the She county seat, pictured below. Although government slogans frequently get dismissed by scholars and locals alike as being ineffectual or even counterproductive (Eklund

2011), I found that women frequently repeated these slogans in casual conversation, such as among the women mentioned above. In particular, women who had daughters were very keen to show their enlightened attitudes. “Girls are part of the ancestral lineage too” Yu, a college-educated civil servant in her early 30s and mother of two daughters told me. Her words closely echoed the red slogan in the photo, which says that “daughters are also descendants.”

Figure 23: "Daughters are also descendants" (Photo by author)

Figure 24: Care about girls' growth, establish a new civilizing wind (Photo by author)

We can understand what sort of work is being done with the repetition of government slogans by women in casual conversation with friends and family members by seeing it as a form of nomic calibration. According to Silverstein, nomic calibration is the lamination of a separate ontic realm, be it mythical, historical, abstract, and so forth, onto a present sign-event through the use of language, making the present event appear to occur simultaneously in both realms. In doing so, nomic calibration imbues the present text event with the authority seen to be present in the second ontic realm. This calibration can be represented through tense, such as the simple present tense in English; evidential or inferential markers; or through quotative markers to

indicate the speech of others (Silverstein 1993; 52-53). Nomic calibration corresponds very closely to both Bakhtin's concept of double voicing, and by extension, his concept of authoritative discourse, like nomic calibration, authoritative discourse appears as a double-voiced object "with its authority already fused to it" (1981; 342). An important element of both of these concepts is the idea of an antecedent or otherwise distant realm from which authority is drawn. Unlike two events that are reportively calibrated, this separate ontic realm generally is not located in a specific often personally-experienced past that can be separated by deictic markers (i.e. "here" versus "there," "now" vs. "then") but rather exists always as an elusive "elsewhere," that is simultaneous to the present (Silverstein 1993; 52).

In this case, we can see how the precise syntacto-lexical repetition of the wording of the slogan, "having a daughter is good," nomically calibrates the utterance of the particular woman with the authority of the CCP and its attendant values of gender equality and modernity. Her statement is no longer simply her opinion, but rather, an assertion of a state-sanctioned viewpoint. In doing so, she is both giving authority to her speech while simultaneously reaffirming the legitimacy of the state to have such authority. Here then, we can see how the uptake of "propaganda" works in daily life outside of the reductionist *1984*-type dystopian imaginaries of political scientists of Chinese propaganda. State slogans, which come already "fused" with the values of the CCP, get recruited in micro-interactions to the interests and goals of a particular woman.

At the same time, one might argue that the constant repetition of such a refrain reflects an underlying anxiety that perhaps girls are not so good, that the desirability of girls must be constantly reaffirmed in a way that is not required for sons. Indeed, even among women who told me repeatedly that "having a daughter is good," underlying son preference as the presumed

default would come out in certain moments of inattention. For example, Pan was a young woman who had moved from northern Anhui to marry a local man. She had just given birth to a son and was dealing with a scandalously negligent mother-in-law who refused to help her "sit her month" (*zuo yuezi*), a postpartum tradition where the new mother and baby are intensively cared for by older female relatives. As Pan had no local family, the task fell solely on her mother-in-law, as was traditional. Her mother-in-law's negligence was surprising to other women, as, after all, Pan had given birth to a son. "What mother-in-law won't care for a grandson?" exclaimed the same women who repeatedly told me that "daughters are good." Here, we can see how son-preference, like so many cultural defaults, is remarked upon in its absence. Had Pan given birth to a daughter, my informants would not have found it so surprising that her mother-in-law might not be interested in helping her sit her month. Indeed, older mothers of daughters often had stories of neglect or worse at the hands of their mothers-in-law after giving birth to girls. Fan, one of two girls born in the early 1970s, was once recounting a story of her childhood in a small mountain hamlet. After a pause, she explained that the reason her parents only had two daughters was due to the frequent separations between her parents back then. No one had remarked on the number or gender of her parents' offspring, yet Fan, herself the mother of an only daughter, had found it unusual enough that her parents' lack of sons required an explanation to her audience of young, urban Tunxi women.

Yet even if they do not fully believe it, I argue that the slogans provide women, literally, with a language to express the idea of the value of girls, and by extension, women's own value as mothers and daughters, and importantly, to express or reaffirm it to each other. While women may constantly need to seek assurance that having a girl is okay, these state slogans, consciously or not, provide the framework with which they may reassure each other. Again, here we can see

how state projects unfold, on the ground, to mediate women's daily experience and to shape women's value systems. Importantly, contrary to scholars who have argued that such campaigns end up inadvertently devaluing girls (e.g. Eklund, 2011), I argue that these campaigns do real, if subtle, work to give women concrete, socially acceptable and *authoritative* language through which to express what might otherwise be inchoate thoughts. The state neither simply reinforces preexisting thought processes nor completely changes attitudes out of the blue, but subtly shapes them. Unlike double-voicing, we might see nomic calibration then as an achievement: a form of ritual success that laminates their own speech with the authority of the state. Double-voicing, by contrast, as Bakhtin notes, is always internally dialogized (1981, 324), and therefore always carries with it the possibility of "refraction," through parody, play, etc. In any context the possibility of parody always exists, and such is the case for state slogans or discourses in rural China. Indeed, as in most socialist and post-socialist societies, a rich repertoire of deadpan political humor existed in Huangshan, including among the female state employees with whom I conducted most of my fieldwork.[4] Yet what was perhaps most striking about the circulation of "girls are good" was the general earnestness with which such a phrase was repeated. While women joked frequently about gender and femininity through the use of various previous state tropes such as "iron girls" (*tienü*) or "the Huizhou woman" (see chapter two for a discussion), having daughters was never a laughing matter.

[4] A prime example of this was during Christmas Day dinner with Wen and Chen, two university-educated women in their early 30s who were employed at the city finance bureau. We were eating dinner at a popular fried chicken chain, and I was discussing my work on women's literacy. Chen mentioned that her own mother was illiterate, as she had to stay home and farm in order to support her younger brother's education (a common occurrence in Huangshan). Chen then repeated the oft-mentioned trope that while her mother and her many siblings had grown up very poor, they had been happier back then (during the 1960s), as back then everyone had been equal. "Oh yes, everyone was happier back then," deadpanned Wen. "And that's why North Korea is currently the happiest country on earth." We all laughed.

Importantly, by providing women with authoritative language through which to express themselves, the state also reinforces its own authority as an authority—that is, to be a vanguard of modernity, progress, and a mediating presence in women's lives. The verbatim repetition of state slogans also reflects a deeper commitment on the part of women to explicit state values such as modernity and civilization and, more importantly, an acceptance of the state logics which link together the number and gender of children with ethical contrasts such as modern vs. traditional, selfless vs. selfish, progressive vs. backward. These connections are the products of particular discourses that come out of a particular history surrounding state family planning policy in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Although its origins lay in ecological and economic concerns over overpopulation, in official state discourse, the One-Child Policy was framed as promoting "quality" over "quantity," claiming that fewer births per couple would result in higher-quality children as parents could invest more resources into their fewer offspring (Anagnost 1994, 1997, Greenhalgh 2008, Hershatter 2007, Jacka 2005). At a national level, a smaller, "higher-quality" populace was necessary for China to progress towards an industrialized prosperous future (and eventually, full communism). To follow the One-Child policy was to put the good of the nation over the good of the individual family, and to recognize that short-term individual sacrifice was often necessary for the long-term good of all. To properly adhere to the One-Child Policy then was to be civilized and enlightened in a socialist manner. To violate the One-Child Policy was to demonstrate oneself incapable of thinking about the good of the nation, either through ignorance (a product of a traditional mindset) or individual selfishness (a product of bourgeois capitalist thought).

The Feudal Peasant and the Bourgeois Entrepreneur

Although in many ways quite removed from Maoism, in these logics we can see the remnants of CCP's original twin evils of feudalism on the one hand and capitalism on the other. Although the feudalist and the capitalist are no longer the cartoon caricatures designed to educate a semi-literate and mostly rural female populace in the values of Communism that they were in the early 1950s, these archetypes still existed in the moral judgments of women in Huangshan, who judged the character of their friends, neighbors, and relatives through family size and composition according to these state logics. The size and composition of one's family then did not represent happenstance or personal choice, but rather, existed as a public social and political statement about what sort of woman one was. A woman with one son was a different kind of woman than one with one daughter. They in turn were different from a woman with multiple daughters and a son, who was different yet from women with multiple sons. At the level of content rather than form, state discourses did not change women's attitudes in toto nor float above the concerns of daily life. Like state slogans, state regimes of value and the logics which underpinned them provided an authoritative way for women to structure their own moral values and to justify their own behaviors in opposition to the opinions or judgments of those around them.

In Huangshan more generally, son preference was still quite marked, especially among older and rural people. To not produce a son was a form of selfishness, Auntie Chu, a woman in her late 50s told me, as it was privileging one's own wants over the needs of the larger family. She was currently embroiled in a years-long fight with her own daughter, Li, who had given birth to a daughter five years ago and refused to try for a son. Li's reasoning to her mother was that one child was plenty, and she and her husband could not afford to pay the second-child penalty on their meager salaries. To me privately, Li admitted she found being a mother hard and did not

want another child, something she wasn't able to say to her mother. Her mother, who had offered to help cover the fine, thought her daughter was being selfish and lazy and saw her daughter's contentment with only a daughter as reflecting poorly on her own parenting, thus shaming her to her in-laws. When she had given birth in the early 80s, the one-child policy was stricter than it was now, and she and her husband, both peasants, had sold everything they owned so she could have a son. She herself was the third oldest of nine children, eight daughters and one son. Being desperately poor, she and her sisters had never attended school, but instead started working as young children so her family could afford the school fees for her baby brother. Both she and Li's mother-in-law had refused to help care for their granddaughter as a small child as punishment for not trying for a second child, a quite severe sign of disapproval in a culture where grandparents are expected to provide free childcare, especially for women who have to work to support the family. For Chu then, her daughter's unwillingness to deal with the minor inconvenience of birthing a second child (who would be cared for by Chu or her daughter's mother-in-law) was inexplicably selfish.

Having a son then, was not simply an issue of personal preference. Many young women told me personally that they would prefer a daughter, but that it was not worth it given the pressure and disapproval from the in-laws. Ting, a young woman who lived in a nearby village, told me that if she did not produce a son within two years of marriage, her mother-in-law would push for a divorce. Having a son was the easiest way to keep peace in what would be a decades-long relationship. Pan, a 23-year-old woman from Northern Anhui who had married a local, gave birth about halfway through my fieldwork. While Pan was pregnant, she would get together with a friend who was the mother of a two-month old baby boy. While I played with the baby (pregnant women were not supposed to hold babies), Pan and her friend would discuss her

pregnancy and upcoming birth. Pan's personal preference was also for a girl, especially given the acute shortage of women in rural China. "I don't know if we can afford a son" Pan told her friend. "With the lack of women, not only do we have to buy him a house and probably car, but we'll also have to buy him a wife," she said, referring to the growing practice of purchasing wives from Southwest China or Southeast Asia. Pan and her friend laughed, but it was clear to me this was not simply a joke. Working-class rural men were at a distinct disadvantage when it came to marriage, and the costs of providing for an increasingly picky potential daughter-in-law was a general worry for young mothers in rural China. Men who couldn't afford a new house often had to settle for buying a wife, the cost of which was from 10,000 yuan ($1,500) upwards. In Ting's village, most of her male relatives had ended up buying wives, and very few of the "marriages" had lasted, as most women ran off after producing a child, leaving the man's parents to raise a child without the labor (productive or otherwise) of a daughter-in-law.

"Yeah, it's expensive to have a son" Pan's friend told her, "but the alternative is harder. Think of how your mother-in-law will treat you every day with a daughter." Pan agreed. Even though she wanted a daughter, it wasn't worth the daily hassle of bad relations with her in-laws, who owned the house in which she lived.

Women who lived in Tunxi city had urban hukous (residence permits),[5] and thus had to adhere to the strict one child limit. This was a source of major dissatisfaction with the government's urbanization campaign, which was buying up adjacent farmland and forcing

[5] The hukou, or residence permit, is assigned at birth and controls where one is allowed to live and to what level of social services one has access. Starting in the mid-2000s, the Central Government implemented a series of reforms that gave rural-hukou holders special benefits in their home region, including large tax breaks and health insurance. In 1985, rural hukou-holders were permitted to have a second child if their first child was a girl in order to reduce the sex ratio imbalance.

peasants into “new villages,” neighborhood subdivisions that gradually incorporated themselves into the physical urban space of the city. In a “ruralish” place like Tunxi, urban and rural hukou-holders could easily live, work, and socialize side-by-side, with little meaningful difference in lifestyle. Many newly urban residents felt that they’d had a rural hukou when being a peasant was hard, and now that possession of a rural hukou finally had some benefits thanks to drastic changes in policy in the early 2000s, the government was forcing them to have an urban hukou. While loss of farmland and the ability to grow one’s own food was the major source of dissatisfaction, having to adhere to the stricter urban One-Child Policy was not far behind. And indeed, Auntie Chu would complain nonstop about how unfair it was that she and her children had urban hukous and thus her daughter would have to pay a fine for a son.

Women with rural hukous felt less pressure to have a son the first time, and many said the family hoped for a girl the first time so that they might be allowed a second child, as a daughter and a son was in general considered a more “balanced” family. Although it is illegal for ultrasound technicians to reveal the sex of the baby before birth, second birth sex ratios indicate that the second birth is rarely left to chance (Huang et al. 2016). Indeed, women told me that to get around the law, women could bribe the ultrasound technician into letting them know if the fetus were “handsome” vs. “pretty,” but only for the second or subsequent child.

The “unmarked” or default family in Tunxi was then either a single son or an older daughter and a younger son, depending on hukou status. For an urban woman a single son and for a rural woman an older daughter and younger son indicated that one had, primarily through chance, satisfied to the best of her abilities both national law and the wishes of her husband’s family. While family composition might be identical, having a daughter and a son indicated a very different type of urban woman vs. rural woman. An urban woman with two children has

broken the law to have an "illegal" son. Such a woman has put "tradition" above rule of law, and as such represented "backwardness" (*luohou*). This sort of woman was to be pitied, as she was a victim to either an overbearing mother-in-law (it was always the mother-in-law) or to her own limited mindset. An "urban" woman with a daughter and a son was no different from a rural woman with multiple daughters and a son, except perhaps in the degree of desperation. Women who had birthed multiple daughters until having a son were a source of gossip at the yoga studio, where family size and composition was a frequent topic of conversation. Sui, a woman in her late 50s who had been a coworker of Teacher Yuan's at the pharmaceutical company, told a story of a distant relative of hers who had had five daughters before finally having a son. "She just kept having them one after another," she said, a look of disgust on her face. Other women shook their heads and murmured. "How backward" said another woman. "She's really too traditional" continued Sui. For these women, such a woman was a cautionary tale of the failure of socialist modernity to fully penetrate the feudal countryside. For women at the yoga studio, who saw themselves as modern women, the woman with five daughters and a son was grouped with a different cautionary tale, a former classmate who had committed suicide after giving birth to a girl. Although one involves the loss of life and the other the its creation, both stories represented the same sort of tragic failure of modernity.

With few exceptions, a woman with two sons in either the country or the city was a completely different type of woman. For the law-abiding women of the yoga studio, this sort of woman was not to be pitied but disliked, as she represented the greedy entrepreneur who used children as a form of conspicuous consumption. To carry on the family name, one son was sufficient. A second son was therefore excessive, a son who served no purpose and provided a large drain on the family's resources, as his parents would be responsible for providing a house

and car for the son upon marriage. A second son was also a sign that one could afford the stiff second child fine. To the poorly-paid bureaucrats and working-class people I spent time with, the greedy entrepreneur, like the corrupt official (and they were often one and the same), threatened the moral and social fabric of Chinese society. Women who broke the law to have a single son were, after all, putting their traditional duty and the needs of the family above their own personal desires. By a different moral framework, the one held by older women like Auntie Chu, these women were being selfless in their own way. Women who broke the law to have an "excess" son, however, were not in any way caught between modern and traditional duties, but purely interested in conspicuous consumption. Fan's friend, the wife of a wealthy hotelier, represented this sort of woman. Although she and her husband owned properties in Huangshan, they were not part of the local social fabric. They represented the most elite class in Huangshan, which was made up of 'outside' investors who flitted in and out from Shanghai, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, absentee landlords who were thought to parasitically suck wealth out of Huangshan and give nothing in return. We might see Yuan and Fan's harsh judgment of the Fujianese hotelier's wife as a site of cross-scalar conflict, as Yuan and Fan's local regimes of value come into contact with those of a national elite. Indeed, we might sense that the harsh moral judgment of Yuan and Fan is a form of reversing normal hierarchies, a sort of "weapon of the weak" that allows them to feels superior to a woman who is economically much more successful. At another scale or from a different perspective, one might imagine the direction of judgment to go the opposite direction.

Even among local women, to have two sons was to represent a form of selfish lawlessness that reflected little concern for others. Li, Auntie Chu's daughter and a good friend of mine, had given up her newsstand and taken a job as an assistant at a clothing store for steadier pay and better hours. She worked as the only employee in a tiny storefront in a working-

class neighborhood near the train station. Her boss, a woman also in her mid-30s, was a distant relative of Li's husband. One afternoon while I was hanging out with Li at the clothing store, her boss brought up the topic of when Li was going to have a second child. Li, who withstood her mother's daily pressure, demurred. She had an urban hukou and no money to pay the second child fine. Li's boss brushed aside her concerns as naiveté. The boss had just had her second child not too long ago, a second son. With the help of a relative in government and a well-placed bribe, she and her husband had hidden most of their assets to appear on paper much poorer than they were. As fines were calculated in proportion to income, she had paid an amount that was a minor slap on the wrist instead of a financially ruinous amount. Li and I were both shocked and horrified at both the number of crimes her boss had committed as well as the almost flippant way she mentioned them and encouraged Li to do likewise. Later, Li told me she could never defraud the government like that, as it was an "immoral" thing to do.

Finally, there was the urban woman with one daughter and the rural woman with two daughters. This woman was a woman who fully complied to the law, even to the detriment of her own family and potentially her own personal happiness. What might be framed as misfortune (i.e., to conceive daughters rather than sons) was reframed by local women such as the bureaucrats at the yoga studio or the newly urban working class like Li as an agentive act of being modern. Such women had fully embraced both the government's exhortation that daughters were equal to sons, as well as the government's exhortation to put the collective good ahead of personal gain. Lei Feng, a model worker, peasant, soldier, and a mainstay of Cultural Revolution propaganda, had returned in Huangshan on ubiquitous billboards and posters, exhorting us to "devote [ourselves] to others, and improve ourselves" (*xuexi Lei Feng, fengxian taren, tisheng ziji*). Having two daughters was a perfect example of embodying Lei Feng spirit,

as these women had sacrificed their family lineage and perhaps personal status within the family to promote the general good of evening out China's sex ratio imbalance.

These archetypes: the modern woman, the feudal traditionalist, and the bourgeois capitalist, were present in women's judgments on family size and composition but they were not reducible to them, nor were they totalizing static categories that necessarily defined all women and all families. Rather, these moral frameworks were always relational, and these categories were mobilized discursively among women in particular contexts for particular ends. Like most gossip, the worst offenders were never present but rather invoked by the speaker to create certain relations with those present in the room. When Sui disapprovingly tells of her distant relative who has god-knows-how-many daughters, she is recruiting the other women present in the yoga studio to share with her a sense of superiority over her backwards relative, inviting them to share in a sense of modern, urban condescension. Regardless of how urban or modern or even how many daughters the women present have, they might rest assured it was fewer than Sun's relative and thus that they too could share with Sui the position of judgment. These same women praised Chen, a young bureaucrat in her early thirties with a good job and a university education, for having a second daughter after the 2011 reforms that allowed only children parents to have a second child. To Chen's face, they praised her enlightened decision to have another girl and complimented her husband for being so open-minded. Yet in another context, perhaps even these same women might privately pity Chen, who took a gamble on a second child only to end up with a second daughter. Likewise, when Yuan and Fan recruited me into their judgment of the hotelier's wife or Li in her judgment of her boss, they invited me to share with them their sense of moral rectitude, condemning those that would do what was easy or profitable rather than what was "right." In this sense, my own role as an American anthropologist helped to reverse the

hierarchy: our combined judgment meant that condemnation could not simply be considered the jealousy of a poorer or socially inferior woman for her superior, but rather my cooperation reinforced the position of judgment as truly modern and civilized.

And of course, these frameworks were not universal or totalizing but rather tied to certain positionalities, in this case, mothers of daughters, bureaucrats, and other women who had a personal interest in publicly supporting the values of the state. This set of values existed alongside other evaluative frameworks that were present to greater or lesser degrees in Huangshan. Women whose behavior led others to judge them as "traditional" or "bourgeois" did not necessarily define themselves in such terms. Indeed, women like Auntie Chu saw sacrificing to have a son as a form of selfless filial piety. To not try for a son was selfish and lazy, putting ease of daily life over the lifelong consequence of breaking the ancestral line. Li's boss and I would assume Fan's Fujianese friend would see themselves as not as greedy but as clever, private individuals who had figured out how to circumvent oppressive state meddling into familial affairs. To someone like Li's boss, Li and those like her were dangerously naïve and perhaps incomprehensibly trusting in a government that had at best a complex relationship with its rural citizens. This trust was an example of a simple country mindset, a sort of "bumpkinness" that was reflective of a larger lack of the sort of savvy that was necessary to succeed in China's cutthroat economy. Although this is outside the scope of this chapter, we might see in Li's boss a common attitude that was curiously lacking in Huangshan: an idea that the market, not the state, was the driver of China's progress towards modernity.

Through this discussion, I hope it is clear that my argument is that people are neither motivated solely through self-interest nor through an unwavering commitment to an abstract moral ideology, but rather that people operated through strategies of calculated interest that were

simultaneously self-serving and genuinely motivated. For example, Li did not enjoy being a mother; she found raising her daughter with minimal family support expensive and exhausting. She did not try for a son because she didn't want a second child full stop, a desire that she could not express to her mother. Yet at the same time, she was not simply instrumentally manipulating state law as an alibi: her belief that a daughter was enough, that girls were good, was genuine, as was her horror at her boss's cavalier "greed" for cheating the system to have a second son.

Indeed, as a foreign anthropologist thought to be from a culture where gender preference was nonexistent and family size was a personal matter, I found that my interlocutors' elaborate justifications of their own preferences and decisions were as much for themselves as they were for me. While my positionality outside the local moral framework of gendered reproductive decision making was universally acknowledged, my interlocutors often attributed to me the judgments of an idealized "modern" subject that they associated with countries high on the UN development index, judgements which also happened to align with the developmentalist rhetoric of the state. In this way, women's exhortations that "having a girl is good" then are also a sort of performance for me of a certain modern and "civilized" personhood, one in which I was recruited into affirming their position as "high-quality" modern women through affirming their enlightened gender attitudes. As in chapter two, here we can see the curious effect that my validation plays in marrying the particular values of the Maoist past (i.e. condemnation of the feudal peasant and bourgeois entrepreneur) to the perhaps rather vacuous concepts of modernity and civilization promoted by the modern CCP. Although as an American I was seen to be from a "capitalist" country and assumed to be critical of Chinese "communist" state policies, my approval of women's own choices and my recruitment to join in with the judgment of others was not seen as contradictory, as the general framework of modernity and development subsumed

particular ideological differences. My judgment of women was then not as a capitalist, but as a modern and civilized subject who could share in the CCP project of condemning those who violated state policy.

In a series of extended interviews that I conducted with women about their lives, when we discussed family and children, women performed the work of showing how they were certain types of women, regardless of their own offspring. For example, a 44-year old epidemiologist named Guo was the mother of an only son. I asked her if her in-laws were happy that she had a son, and she acknowledged they were, but only because it made her father-in-law's 107-year-old grandmother happy. Her father-in-law was the oldest and favorite grandson and her husband was the oldest son, so it was natural that the grandmother, born in the nineteenth century, would want her to have a son, and it was natural that the father and son would want to please the family matriarch. Here Guo, a woman who saw herself and her husbands' relatives—all educated doctors—as modern and civilized, acknowledges son preference in her family but displaces all responsibility for such attitudes onto a literal remnant of feudalism. Son preference for her husband and in-laws is instead reframed as a more attractive virtue, filial piety or care and attentiveness. On the other hand, Lu, a receptionist for a car mechanic and in her early 30s, acknowledges that her in-laws are fine with her only daughter, but primarily because her in-laws have two other sons who have already had sons of their own. Lu, herself from a rural background, clarifies for me that her in-laws' attitude does not come from an acceptance of state-sanctioned gender norms but rather because traditional obligations have already been filled.

Your Little Brother Cannot Replace You

I was spending a long weekend with Wen, a 33-year old civil servant in the city finance department (*caizheng ju*). Like me, Wen was a single woman in her 30s, a bit of an anomaly in a

place where most women were married by 25. That weekend, her mother was visiting from Wen's hometown several hours away to cook and clean for Wen, as she did periodically. As usual, the conversation turned to Wen's mother's favorite topic, which was when would Wen get married and have a baby. After almost ten years of the same conversation, Wen was no longer interested in discussing her romantic failures with her mother. After some prolonged nagging on the topic, Wen turned to her mother and said somewhat snappishly: "Why do you care if I get married and have a kid? You have my little brother to do that for you." Wen was referring to the "illegal" little brother her mother had gone into hiding to have when Wen was ten. Wen's mother was taken aback. She paused for a moment and then said rather deliberately, "your little brother cannot replace you." (*didi bu neng tidai ni*).

In this section I look at how the Family Planning Policy and women's strategies to either obey or circumvent the law influence mother-daughter relationships in rural China. In a society where scholars have taken the mother-son relationship, or the "uterine family" as the core of Chinese family unit (Wolf 1972), the mother-daughter relationship has been relatively neglected (see Evans 2008). Mother-daughter relationships are of course complex and variable, but the One-Child Policy meant that having a son often required significant sacrifice that made a family's preference for a male child particularly tangible and acute. To daughters, now mostly in their 20s and 30s, knowing that a mother had sacrificed the family's material and financial wealth as well as often chance for a relationship with at least some of her children created complicated and often fraught relationships between mothers and daughters. For these daughters, the Family Planning policy laid bare the lengths to which a woman would go to have a son, and to some women, the extent to which they as daughters were not enough.

My young female friends were born between the early 1980s and mid-1990s, a period which encompassed the strictest enforcement of the policy and then its gradual relaxation, particularly for rural women with a daughter. For women who had met their legal limit yet still desired more children, the costs of having a second or third child were often tangibly acute: women who went into hiding to birth a son were separated from young daughters for months or years at a time, and the family's material fortunes could be drastically altered if they had to pay onerous excess child fines.

If we return to the argument between Wen and her mother, we might pay attention to the shadow conversations, that is, the "set of dialogic relations that are crucially informed by other sets—shadow conversations that surround the conversation at hand" (Irvine 1996; 152). Here, we can see that Wen and her mother are not simply talking about Wen's little brother's ability to produce a grandchild. Wen, an only child for 10 years, had been deeply hurt when her mother left the family to give birth to a son. The dynamics of son preference are complicated; as we have seen, even women's agentive choices cannot be said to be made "freely" outside of internal and external pressure. From her childhood perspective, however, Wen felt that the choice was solely her mother's, as she remembers her father as being been content with just a daughter. Wen also saw the choice as financially and socially reckless; her father worked as a bureaucrat, and had his office discovered her brother's birth, he could have lost his job or been permanently demoted, leading to potentially permanent and catastrophic financial and social consequences for the family. Wen's little brother had been raised by her paternal grandmother until age five, at which point he had moved in with her family. They had just three years together before Wen left for college, and she had made no effort to cultivate a relationship with him.

Although Wen did not frame it in such precise terms, it is not a great leap to assume that much of Wen's anger toward her mother come from feeling as though she, as a girl, was not enough in her mother's eyes. In Wen's eyes, her little brother, raised as a second only child, had in many ways "replaced" her, giving her mother the proper family she had not achieved with a daughter. In other words, Wen's little brother had given her mother a chance to redo her family, this time with a child of the proper gender. And in order to do so, Wen's mother had been prepared to sacrifice Wen's own future by risking her husband's prestigious and stable employment. As an adult, Wen was college educated, had a good job in the finance department, and lived in a nice apartment that she had bought with financial help from her parents, all things that likely would not have been possible had her father lost his job upon the birth of her brother. Although from an external perspective, Wen's mother remained a caring mother to Wen, coming by once a month to cook, clean, and do her daughter's laundry, for Wen this external demonstration of motherly care could not replace the fundamental sense that she had been replaced, and the stakes of her replacement had been high. In this conversation, we can see Wen's mother pushing back against Wen's anger and letting Wen know that she valued her as her own daughter, irreplaceable by anyone else, even a desired son. Here, a conversation about Wen's future turns into one about her past and her own fraught relationship with her mother.

While Wen was very vocal about her mother's betrayal and her own anger, other women chose to be quieter. Pan's own mother had given birth to two girls and then chose to have another child, a son. Pan was the second girl and the middle child, and she saw it as a bonding point between the two of us. "We both have a brother and a sister and we're both middle children." She'd say to me, noting that was a relative rarity amongst her cohort. While I helped Pan sit her month, the two of us would share the sorts of intimate life details that come from

being cooped up and sleep-deprived with a newborn. Toward the end of my fieldwork, Pan invited me to visit her parents' home, an invitation she hadn't extended to any of her Chinese friends in Huangshan. I met her parents, her older sister, and her younger brother. Her brother, who helped run the family plastic bag recycling factory, said to me, "I have another older sister, you know."

"Yes, I know, she collects scrap metal and lives around the corner," I said, referring to Pan's older sister.

"No, I have another older sister. Pan's younger sister. She was born just a year after Pan, and our parents gave her away to an aunt." He told me. I was taken aback. Pan, who talked about anything and everything, had never once breathed word about her other sister, the one who was given away. When I met this sister (who also happened to live around the corner), Pan introduced her to me as her "*biao mei*," or younger cousin. In China it is extremely common to informally refer to one's cousins as brother or sister (e.g. "*mei mei*" (little sister)) rather than "*biao mei*" (younger cousin)), but I noticed Pan never dropped the "*biao*" when referring to her 'cousin.' This was a highly marked form of distancing and one that seemed unique to Pan among all her family. Although Pan and I talked about everything else, I never asked Pan why she had never told me about her other sister, or why, when her brother called this sister "*mei mei*," Pan insisted on the somewhat stilted and formal "*biao mei*." I didn't ask her, although I wanted to, if Pan ever wondered if perhaps her parents had considered giving her away instead of her sister, or if her sister's fate was too uncomfortably close to hers such that acknowledging her sister would require Pan to acknowledge her own precariousness in her family. When Pan was a baby, her parents had left her with her paternal grandmother and gone into hiding with her older sister in order to have her sister and then her brother. Pan was raised by her grandmother and did not live

with her parents until she was ten. At twelve she boarded at the county middle school, so to Pan, her parents weren't really her parents. "They're more like friends than parents," she told me once over chicken wings at KFC. "They didn't really raise me, that was my grandmother. She was really more like my mom." Pan had also recounted how her family had been relatively well off before her brother was born, but after having her brother, the local cadres had taken all their furniture as punishment, including their TV, a punishment not uncommon for rural people for whom threats of demotion were irrelevant. "It was ridiculous" (*hen kexiao*), she said, somewhat enigmatically. Pan knew her parents cared for her; they welcomed her home with loving arms when the loneliness in Tunxi become too much, and they supported her financially the best they could, giving her and her husband several thousand yuan to help her buy a car. But, as Pan told me, her family was traditional, and she was just a daughter. The family needed to save money to buy an apartment on the city outskirts for her brother so that he might marry and carry on the family line, so they could ill-afford to devote much of their time, money, or energy to support their second daughter, even when she needed their help.

In *The Subject of Gender: Mothers and Daughters in Urban China*, Harriet Evans notes that state policies under Mao often led to prolonged separation of mothers and daughters as mothers were sent to work or study far away from their families during the 1950s and 60s. This physical estrangement in many cases led to emotional estrangement, as her interviewees recalled the feelings of neglect or abandonment they felt as children. In a similar way, the experiences of Wen and Pan mirror those of the baby boomer generation, giving rise to similar feelings of distance or estrangement (even if not directly framed as emotionally fraught). In this case, the seemingly voluntary nature of the separation added another layer of complexity to the relationship: the emotional effects of separation were compounded, particularly in the case of

Wen, by the idea such a separation was the mother's choice. Although a full analysis is outside the scope of this chapter, the "generational mismatch" between Evans's urban interlocutors and my rural ones point to interesting work to be done on the experience of cohort effects and ageing in rural areas in a context of rapid social change.

In my interviews as well as in daily conversation, a pattern of women expressing they felt closer to their fathers than their mothers began to emerge. [6] Guo, the epidemiologist, mentioned that she preferred her father, as she felt that her mother loved her older brother more. The father-daughter relationship was often framed in reaction to the mother-son relationship, as fathers were seen to take an interest in daughters who saw themselves as second best to sons in their mothers' eyes. Yet in this pattern (one not foreign to Western stereotypes of family dynamics) we can still see the centrality of the mother-daughter relationship. Fathers' interest in daughters is not assumed, and therefore a father's affection for his daughter is something to be remarked on and enjoyed. As a corollary, a mother's lack of emotional care for her daughter is experienced as a lack precisely because such care is assumed as a default. Likewise, women's responses of feeling as though their fathers valued them more than their mothers also points to the way that women are experienced as agents of enforcing what might be seen as traditional or patriarchal norms, something that has been noted by scholars of gender in China and other parts of the world (see e.g. Wolf 1972, Denich 1974, Kandiyoti 1988, Brown 1997). In a society which is still primarily patrilocal and patrilineal, my informants experienced or imagined the difficulties of marrying into a new family primarily through the figure of the mother-in-law. When I talked to my unmarried friends about future husbands, desires for a particular sort of mother-in-law were always mentioned along with any fantasies about the husband. Women also worried about my

[6] These are preliminary findings and may change with further data analysis.

own future as a young married childless woman in her early thirties conducting fieldwork far away from my husband.[7] While concerns that my husband might cheat on me or leave me for another woman were expressed, the vast majority of women framed their concern in terms of my mother-in-law, who they guessed was unhappy that I was conducting years of research in a faraway country instead of starting a family. More often than not, the first question would be "but what does your mother-in-law think of you living in China for so long?" Fan, who had fled an abusive marriage five years earlier, framed her husband's abuse as instigated by her mother-in-law, who as mentioned previously had also physically abused Fan. Indeed, given the ingrained cultural image of mothers as teachers and caretakers, violent men were thought to have been nurtured by equally violent or cruel mothers.

Of course, while women may be violent and cruel, and may indeed relish the act of wielding power over their subordinates, something scholars of traditional family structure in China have noted was often seen as a reward for surviving the hardships of life as a young bride and then young mother (see Wolf 1975, Gates 1993, Judd 1994), Denich and others note that it is one feature of "patriarchy" that masks underlying power relations in a way that makes women seem responsible. Here, we can see how Wen's anger at her mother as responsible for choosing to have her younger brother masks the way other larger structural power relations constrained and shaped Wen's mother's choices. Indeed, in my interviews I found that it was often only after becoming mothers themselves that women became closer to their mothers, a finding similar to that of Evans. Cai, a 32-year professor of tourism at Huangshan University, noted that after having her own child, she could better understand (*lijie*) her own mother, and understand her

[7] Although I was not technically married at the time of my fieldwork, I was in a long-term serious relationship that I described as a marriage during my fieldwork.

mother's own hardships. As mothers, women were forced to make decisions that would impact themselves and their children in ways that they recognized their own children might not understand.

In the first half of this chapter, I have shown how the One-Child Policy has created frameworks of language and moral value that structure women's decision-making in daily life as mothers. In the second half of this chapter, I have explored some of the implications of these choices for women as daughters. Choices made by women as mothers have long-term effects on their daughters. If I had had the chance to have candid conversations with Pan and Wen's mothers, I am sure that I would find they too negotiated among the competing demands of family and state policy, perhaps making different choices than their own daughters or daughters-in-law might make. The personal is political, but the political is also personal, as political policies help mold even the most intimate relationships between family members across generations.

Here, I want to return to Wen and her mother. Wen's mother was not deterred by Wen's attempt to brush off her concern. She asked Wen who would care for her in old age if she didn't marry and have children. Wen reminded her mother that she was a civil servant. She had a pension and health insurance, she didn't need a husband or family. Here we can see yet another way the state shapes opportunities for women in rural China. In her argument with her mother, Wen argues that the state can replace family support. In one sense, we might see the state as providing opportunities for women's economic independence that have created new possibilities for gendered independence. On the other hand, Wen's comment also reflects a glimmer of a much older socialist state discourse, one in which the state's care promised to replace the need for family and other traditional institutions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can see how state discourses and their circulation in everyday life in rural China afford women with avenues of discourse and culturally recognizable moral categories with which to reimagine gender and family roles in rural China. State discourses and biopolitical policies shape the interpersonal experiences of Chinese women and influence their life choices. Within this context, women make choices that are simultaneously valued and evaluated from the perspective of different discursive frameworks and the different value systems. While women's agency is by no means absolute, the multiplicity of evaluative frames offers potential justification for choices they do make, even though this often creates a double-bind through which women are judged regardless of their choice. At the same time, the existence of multiple and often competing regimes of value mean that women ultimately do have to make choices and in so doing, must make 'rational' calculations, weighing the disparate costs and benefits of each choice (does she violate the One-Child Policy to appease her husband's family and risk state fines and social opprobrium as 'backward'? Does she forego such an option and face daily censure from her mother-in-law?) Here I highlight the process of the calculus rather than the rationality of the decision making in a classical sense. As I illustrate in the final section, these choices and the process of making them have long-term repercussions for women's relationships with their mothers and daughters as well as for their conception of themselves as mothers and daughters.

Chapter Six: Of Publics and Privates: The Qualia of "Quality" in a Chinese Yoga Studio

rang women zanshi yuan yi chengshi juexiao, wangji ziji zai jiating zhong de jue se, shehuizhong de jue se, wangji shenti de suantong fanlao, women yiqi zong lian yujia, kongmie shijie.

"Let us temporally leave behind the world, forget our household roles, forget our social roles, forget our bodies' aches and pains and weariness, let us together completely practice yoga, extinguish the world."

-Teacher Yuan, yoga practice.

In this chapter, I turn my focus to a yoga studio-*cum*-women's social club. While yoga may be thought of as an act of leisure, in this chapter I show how the yoga studio as a physical, social, and metaphorical space is a site of different sorts of projects of person making. I examine how the conflicts between women in the yoga studio reflect their different commitments to different political and social projects and different systems of value(s), thus leading to competing imaginaries of what type of space the yoga studio is and what sort of person belongs there. I show that disputes over the studio as a space and yoga as an activity exist as a sort of microcosm of Chinese social relations in general, and the anxieties over value, hierarchy, and the increasing importance of gender and social class in the modern PRC. While seemingly frivolous, the yoga studio is the site of important social and political work, where women work through and struggle over what it means to be a "quality" Chinese citizen in contemporary China.

The Scene

The yoga studio was run by Teacher Yuan,[1] a woman in her late 40s whose day job was as a cadre in the housing bureau (*fangguanju*). She had converted the living room of her old home, a 3-bedroom apartment on the outskirts of the city, into a modestly sized but comfortable studio, with hard-wood floors, beige wallpaper, and floor-to-ceiling mirrors. One of the

[1] All names have been changed.

bedrooms had been turned into a changing and yoga equipment storage room, and a bathroom with a toilet and shower provided a space for women to freshen up after class. Teacher Yuan opened the studio in 2012 after teaching for seven years at other studios around Tunxi[2] and She county. When I arrived in April of 2013, her yoga studio had a total enrollment of about 40 students, most of whom had known Teacher Yuan personally, either as family friends, students at former yoga studios, or as former co-workers.[3] 3 By the time I left at the end of February 2015, the number of active enrolled students had almost doubled, and Teacher Yuan was collaborating with several professors from the local university to open up a second studio in a different part of town. Yoga class was held three times a day, six days a week. A noon class was offered from 1-2 pm during lunch siesta,[4] and two evening classes were offered, one from 6-7 pm, and one from 7:30-8:30 pm. Although Teacher Yuan theoretically worked full time at her government job, she frequently spent the afternoons at the yoga studio, offering yoga teacher training and one-on-one classes.

Memberships ranged from 240 ($40) yuan/month for monthly membership to 1680 yuan ($260) for a yearly membership. Yuan allowed students to pay yoga fees in smaller increments, meaning that women who could not afford a lump sum yearly payment could pay the lower yearly rate on a monthly basis. While the yearly membership, even paid in installments, was out of reach for the poorest citizens of Tunxi, the yoga membership fees were the lowest in the city,

[2] Tunxi town, or Tunxi, was the administrative seat of the Huangshan metropolitan region (HMR), and the base of my fieldwork.
[3] Teacher Yuan had worked as a cadre at the state-run pharmaceutical company before the company had downsized and she had been laid-off (*xia gang*).
[4] When I first arrived, the noon class was held from 2-3 pm, however this time was not as popular, as most people
had to return to work by 2:30. During the summers, the class was sometimes moved to early morning (6-7 am) to avoid the heat. Due to low attendance, Teacher Yuan also cut down the Saturday classes from three to two, offering one evening class from 7-8 pm.

making the studio affordable to women who were not middle class.[5]

Contrary to the urban, white-collar stereotype, the yoga studio attracted women from a variety of backgrounds. Most yoga students worked full-time jobs. Wealthier students were either wives of wealthy businessmen or themselves businesswomen. A plurality of students held low to mid-level government jobs, the primary white-collar employer in the region. A decent number of students were "working-class," employed in entry level unskilled positions in the service industry or state enterprises. From what I could ascertain, an average salary for a yoga student was around 2,000 yuan ($300)/month, only slightly above the regional average of 1800 yuan ($280)/month.

Women ranged in age from 16 through 60, with a majority in their mid-30s to late 40s. Most women were married with children, although several had never married, and several had been divorced or married multiple times, all situations that were uncommon for the conservative region we lived in. Education levels varied greatly with age, reflecting educational trends in China more generally. Most women over forty had a middle-school, or at most a high-school education (often from a vocational high school). Women in their 30s generally all had high school educations, and some better educated ones had university degrees. By contrast, women in their early 20s were mostly college students or university graduates, mostly from technical colleges in which the state has been heavily investing over the past five years. Almost all women had grown up in the area, either in Tunxi itself or in one of the neighboring counties and districts in the Huangshan metropolitan region. A few women had moved to the area from other parts of

[5] For working class women, time was often a bigger barrier than price to attending yoga class. Many women who owned small noodle shops or ran food carts in the neighborhood expressed interest in joining the yoga studio however they were unable to carve out time during lunch and dinner rush hours.

Anhui or neighboring provinces, and some local women had studied or worked in large cities such as Shanghai or Hangzhou in jobs ranging from unskilled migrant workers to white-collar employees.

While the primary purpose of the yoga studio was ostensibly to practice yoga, the yoga studio also functioned as a women's social club more generally, and I discovered through fieldwork and interviews that most students considered the non-yoga related social activities as the primary reason for joining this particular studio. Advertising for the studio on social media highlighted the social club aspect of this studio, and the students told me this club had a reputation for being more of a social club than a yoga studio *per se*.

The physical and social space of the studio provided an opportunity for unrelated women to gather socially outside the home. As a physical space, the studio provided a place for women to gather informally outside class time. During the afternoons, studio members and/or friends of the yoga teacher would sometimes gather to drink tea. In the evenings, small groups of students might stay after class to eat porridge and chat. While tea was the beverage of choice, for special occasions such as birthdays, students would also gather in the afternoon or evenings to drink wine, an act that seemed to foster a bit of transgressive solidarity and, given the presence of an American anthropologist, the sense of engaging in cosmopolitan "Western" drinking habits.[6] Frequently, yoga students organized non-yoga related group activities, such as singing karaoke, clothes shopping, or having coffee or dinner. The boundary between official yoga studio activities and private friend activities was somewhat blurry, as women naturally formed friend

[6] Drinking red wine for birthdays became a custom due to an early mix-up on my part. While celebrating an afternoon birthday with cake, I attempted to ask in the local dialect if anyone wanted tea ("zo"). I mistakenly pronounced the term more as "ziou," which means "wine," and so everyone assumed I was asking if they wanted to drink wine. From that point on, it became known that the "American" way to celebrate birthdays was to drink red wine and eat cake.

groups through yoga.

More formal organized activities included trips to scenic places, either to perform outdoor yoga (*huwai yujia*), or simply to enjoy nature. These outings were organized by Teacher Yuan and occurred anywhere between one and three times per week. The length and commitment ranged from short weekday morning gatherings for dawn yoga, to all-day outings to famous scenic sites in neighboring provinces. Given the relatively egalitarian nature of these outings, all expenses would be split among attendees, with costs ranging from about 50 yuan ($8) for a shorter local trip, to 200 yuan ($30) for a more involved outing requiring expensive entrance tickets and chartering a bus. Estimated costs would be calculated in advance, so students could decide ahead of time if they could afford the trip.

Most outings were to one of the numerous local scenic spots within a few hours' drive of Tunxi. They would take place all day Sunday, but often involved different activities throughout the day so yoga students could choose in how many to participate. Photography was integral to these outings, as club members enjoyed being photographed doing yoga or simply posing in front of a beautiful backdrop. As is done for wedding photography, students would bring a wide range of outfits to wear, each of which might evoke a different mood or time period. Women would bring long flowy dresses, *qipao*,[7] modern hiking clothes, and of course their yoga outfits, many of which were purchased specifically for photography outings. Teacher Yuan, the primary photographer, would bring along a bag of extra costumes and props such as hats and parasols to help women complete their outfits. Although undertaken for pleasure, these outings had wide-ranging social repercussions. Poor camera etiquette, understood as demanding disproportionate

[7] A qipao, also known as a cheongsam, is a Republican-era style of dress involving a tight-fitted dress with a high Mandarin collar, frog buttons, and a high slit on the leg.

attention from Teacher Yuan or inserting oneself into all photos, was thought to reveal grave character flaws, and longstanding friendships had ended over photography disputes.

Transcending the physical space of the studio itself or the temporal limits of yoga classes, the yoga studio made possible a space and time for women's leisure and women's socialization more generally: members could enjoy a range of activities, from karaoke, to travel, to dinner, to simply "hanging out," under the socially acceptable umbrella of "doing yoga."

Privates and Counter-privates

As I discuss more extensively in previous chapters, while physical seclusion inside the home was no longer expected, the neo-Confucian spatial logic of *nei/wai* (inner/outer) still subtly shaped women's behavior in Tunxi (see e.g. Ko 1994). Women's capacity to inhabit space and the behavior expected of them in different locations were heavily circumscribed by concerns of propriety and adherence to social role. Women, particularly married women of childbearing age, were expected to socialize primarily within kinship, classmate, or less commonly, same sex coworker networks. While women could and did visit public spaces such as parks, public squares, restaurants, and shopping malls, they carefully avoided being seen in these public spaces with inappropriate people, such as one-on-one with an unrelated man, or engaging in inappropriate activity, such as drinking to excess. Women in all life stages were concerned with managing their own reputations and those of close female relatives, as inappropriate behavior would draw negative gossip, and, in worst case scenarios, have very negative real-world consequences.[8]

[8] The cautionary tale was a common genre of gossip, always involving a friend of a friend who had suffered a great misfortune brought about by misbehavior. One memorable tale involved a woman whose husband divorced her because she had allowed herself to be freely photographed by and with numerous men.

As a women's social club then, the yoga studio is an example of a new sort of gendered social space only made possible with the increase in leisure time and disposable income. In contrast to public places, it was a space where women could engage in activities of self-fulfillment and the pursuit of pleasure outside of normative gender limitations and demands and away from the judgment of others. Indeed, Teacher Yuan envisioned the yoga studio as a space of sororal friendship where normal societal expectations were suspended and where women of different ages and social backgrounds would be brought together by a common interest in yoga. She hoped that women would form friendships based on personality, not on preexisting social roles engendered by traditional Chinese social networks, whether familial or professional. In other words, Teacher Yuan saw the studio as a space where women would interact with each other as women first and foremost, rather than as mothers, wives, daughters, workers, or employees. Rogers Brubaker writes about constructing 'groups' out of categories (2002),[9] but in the yoga studio I show the process works the other way, as Teacher Yuan's project aims to construct a category, that of "woman," out the existence of a group of like-minded, mutually interacting people who happen to also be women. She worked in several ways to make this possible.

First, she did not allow women to reserve mats for themselves or others, and she provided communal purple mats so that all students would use the same mats. In addition, she promoted the use of "web names" *(wang ming)*[10] or other nicknames among students, and discouraged the use of actual names. As a result, it was not uncommon for someone not to know the full name of

[9] He defines "group" as a "mutually interacting, mutually recognizing, mutually oriented, effectively communicating, bounded collectivity with a sense of solidarity, corporate identity and capacity for concerted action" (169).
[10] Webnames are generally account user names.

another classmate, even if they were fairly close friends. About half of the students chose to go by their last name, often with the prefix "little," a common familiar address in Southern China. The other half of the students went by their web names, which were often based on fruits, animals, or childhood nicknames. Examples include "Peach," "Bunny," and Jiji.[11] [10] Secondly, at most social events, a focus on politeness rituals was often ignored. While drinking alcohol still required toasting, toasting did not follow the strict hierarchical pattern required at banquets or even karaoke evenings. Instead, it was always very casual (*suiyi*), where women would raise their cups to invite whoever felt like it to drink. Likewise, club members were expected to help others without the expectation that a social debt would be incurred to be repaid. For example, when Pan, a young woman, was choosing a maternity hospital, Teacher Yuan told her to contact Dr. Seng, an obstetrician and former yoga student, as she would make sure Pan was treated well. When Pan asked Teacher Yuan where she should take Dr. Seng for dinner, a common practice for patients hoping to receive better treatment, Teacher Yuan dismissed Pan, claiming that "oh, you don't have to do stuff like that for Dr Seng. She's a yoga student, so she'll be happy to help you just because, without any of that sort of bother (*mafan*)." Finally, the conception of the yoga studio as a space outside normal Chinese sociality was also reinforced quite explicitly by the yoga practice itself. In the epigraph taken from the beginning of yoga, we can see that Teacher Yuan asks us to "forget our social roles," as we enter the yoga studio.

As a gendered space, I argue that women's spaces like the yoga studio have been constructed in opposition to or as a reaction to overtly male spaces. John Osburg writes in his ethnography of elite men in Chengdu that in contemporary China power operates through interpersonal networks of elite men, creating a plethora of "mini-publics" to which wealthy

[11] Names slightly altered for anonymity.

businessmen and officials are accountable, generally at the expense of the "abstract public good" (2013). These "mini-publics" are formed and reformed in private spaces inaccessible to the general public—generally private rooms in restaurants, karaoke parlors, or bath houses. Although not precisely the right word, I would argue that these "publics" are "privates," not in the sense of "private sphere" as corollary to the public sphere, with its connotations of the personal, individual, and domestic (which as Osburg demonstrates, they most decidedly are not), but rather as a sort of "non-familial private" that exists outside of either the liberal democratic ideal of the public sphere as a space accessible to the demos, or to the Maoist concept of a communal space fully penetrable by the collective. These spaces are also private in the sense that the networks Osburg traces primarily exist in spaces of private leisure, where relationships are built and reinforced through shared indulgence in recreation and pleasure. In this sense too, these "publics" operate as "privates" in that they come into being and exist only through activities categorized as relatively secretive, or inappropriate for the public sphere, such as gambling, drinking to excess, and sexual activity. These spaces, as Osburg notes, are highly gendered and inaccessible to women as equal participants, a situation in turn perpetuates gendered imbalances in wealth and political power.

Michael Warner in *Publics and Counterpublics* explores the creation of counterpublics, a public that is "defined by [its] tension with a larger public" (56). He continues, "A counterpublic, against the background of the public sphere, enables a horizon of opinion and exchange; its exchanges remain distinct from authority and can have a critical relation to power" (56). If we take Osburg's men to inhabit private nonfamilial networks, we can see that the yoga studio as a "counter-private," a space consciously created as a female-oriented space in reaction to men's social networks, one which parallels but also repudiates of the behaviors and values represented

by elite men and their private networks. Unlike public parks or other sorts of spaces where groups of female friends also gathered, the yoga studio exists as a private place, yet not a domestic, individual, or personal one. Like a private room in a gambling parlor, the yoga studio provides a way for women to actively build social networks free from 'public' scrutiny yet away from their own homes.

There were several ways that the yoga studio paralleled the social networks of elite men.

The first can be seen in terms of address. Just as elite men refer to themselves as "brothers," (*xiongdimen*) the women referred to the collection of yoga students as "sisters" (*jiemeimen*), and occasionally addressed one another as "Sister Wu" (*Wu jiejie*) or "Sister Wen" (*Wen meimei*) While addressing people with kinship terms is common in China, within the yoga studio, calling another student sister was done in a way that drew attention to the sororal nature of the bond, that is, one based on relative status equality and intimacy. When it was used as a suffix, the speaker would modulate speed and volume to create an exaggerated emphasis on the term. "Sister" was also used mainly in the context of describing social closeness in a tongue-and-cheek manner. It was usually followed by laughter on the part of both speaker and addressee, and frequently was followed by a second pair part where the addressee would respond to the first speaker by calling her "sister." Calling each other sister did occur in general conversation, but it was even more common on the yoga online chat groups, where people would frequently begin their address to "sisters" (*jiemeimen*). In a similar vein, other forms of collective address were "beautiful women" (*meinümen*), and, less commonly, "comrades" (*tongzhimen*) or "lady-comrades" (*nütongzhimen*). All of these terms, particularly taken together, emphasize the quite consciously explicit gendered solidarity of the space.

Secondly, participants commonly remarked that the yoga studio existed quite explicitly as

a space of women's leisure, and outside activities often mirrored those of elite male socializing, like dinners in private rooms or karaoke sessions. These events were explicitly metapragmatically called "women's dinners" or "women's karaoke." While wine was a part of these women's activities, drinking to excess through extensive forced toasting was never a part of the event. Although drinking still took place with rounds of toasting, toasts were often addressed to "us women" (*women nüren*) or "us sisters" (*women jiemeimen*). Rather than providing space for extensive debauchery, these events took place in the afternoons or early evenings, allowing women to partake without totally abdicating evening responsibilities such as preparing dinner. Somewhat parallel to men's joint massage sessions, women would also partake in joint grooming activities such as shampoos and hair blow-outs in hair salons.

Osburg describes male solidarity in these sorts of spaces as deriving in part from shared, homosocial debauchery. As expressed in the Chinese internet expression, "[d]oing a hundred good things for the leader is not as good as doing one bad thing with the leader" (37), mutual engagement in illicit behaviors such as parallel sleeping with prostitutes creates intimacy between the male participants. The yoga studio is not a homosocial space in the same way that Osburg describe, but similarly, it is a place where women can get together and partake in a collective physically intimate activity. Although practicing yoga with ones' friends is quite different from having sex with prostitutes with one's friends, it still involves the relatively intimate act of collective nudity, and carries with it an implicit and occasionally explicit sexual charge. Sexual comments in a joking register were quite common in the yoga studio. Women would comment on the "sexiness" of other women's naked or scantily-clad bodies, either generally or with a focus on a woman's specific body part (usually the breasts or the buttocks), or through the collective objectification of male "hotties" (*shuaige*), generally images of Korean

actors communally viewed on a student's cell phone. The yoga studio also created a space for, relatively frank by local standards discussion of one's sexual life (or lack thereof) with one's husband.

At the same time, the yoga studio also provided a form of female solidarity that could plausibly be a replacement for heterosexual romantic relations. One day after class, Wu, the assistant yoga teacher, another student and I were discussing extra-marital affairs. Both of them were talking about how they would feel if they found out their husbands were cheating. Turning the conversation around, I asked them if they would consider taking a male lover.

"No way," said Wu. "A male lover is too much work. There's nothing a male lover can provide that a female friend can't do better."

"How so?" I asked.

"Well," said Wu, "it's much easier to travel with a female friend. And you just have more in common. There's more you can talk about. You can have shared interests, like yoga."

"Can't you do yoga with a man?" I asked.

Wu laughed. "Well, it's just better with a woman." She said. The other student agreed. Men were too much work. While I do not think that Wu was thinking of homosexual or homoerotic same-sex relationships, her comments reveal that there is an element of intimacy in the female relations engendered in the yoga studio which exist on a plane comparable to heterosexual romantic relationships.

While female friendships allowed married women to substitute fulfilling friend relationships for unfulfilling romantic ones, such a sort of sociality was considered less positive for young unmarried women. Xing, an unmarried primary school teacher in her early 20s, was an active and popular member of the yoga studio. About halfway through my fieldwork, she used

her long summer break to study to become a yoga teacher, and was actively preparing to take the yoga licensing exam. A regular attendee of the 7:30 class, she frequently filled in for Yuan when Yuan was unable to make it. Xing at 24 was quickly approaching old maid status, as the local cut-off age was considered to be at 25.[12] [11] Her mother had been setting Xing up with a string of men, none of whom were suitable. Xing reported that, after another failed suitor, her mother told her that the reason she wasn't getting married was that she spent too much time with yoga women, and not enough time looking for a husband. The other students present, mostly older women in their 30s and 40s, reassured Xing, but behind her back they privately agreed with her mother, similarly expressing the worry that Xing had allowed yoga to occupy all her time and thus was not sufficiently anxious to find a husband.

Yet despite the similarities or parallels to elite male spaces of leisure, I would argue that the yoga club is also a female and non-elite repudiation of male social networks and their moral codes of 'honor' and 'face.' Even more so, the club is on some level a repudiation of what men's leisure activity means for the status of women in contemporary China. Elite male sociality is associated, as Osburg writes, with corruption and the loss of women's status. Wives of wealthy men must increasingly tolerate their husband's extramarital relations and the attendant drain on family financial resources, while poorer women are increasingly finding that well-paying service industry jobs requires working in the black or "gray" economy as prostitutes, karaoke women, or

[12] In larger cities, the general "cut-off" age for marriage for women is considered to be 30. In the more rural parts of Huangshan (and I believe rural China more generally), women are expected to be married by their early 20s. Jiji at 23 was the oldest unmarried woman in her village, an issue that was of much concern to her parents. In Huangshan, and even more so in other parts of Anhui, rural women were frequently married and mothers by 20, in widespread violation of the Marriage Law. Both Jiji and Pan had older sisters who had gotten pregnant and married by 18 (by Western age calculation, 16-17).

mistresses (*ernai* or *xiaosan*). Consciousness of the ways that male sexual and monetary improprieties personally affected their own lives was widespread among the women in my fieldsite. For example, one evening while taking an evening stroll with Auntie Hu, my retired neighbor, and her good friend, the wife of a very high-ranking official, the conversation turned to Auntie Hu's friend's daughter, a single 28-year-old with a prestigious TV job in Anhui's capital. The friend was complaining that her daughter, who was smart, ambitious, and beautiful, had become too picky, and was quickly aging out of an acceptable marriageable age. "I told her, you don't want someone who's too rich" the friend told us. "Because the more money he has, the more mistresses he'll have" (*qian duo, xiaosan ye duo*). This, conversely, would result in her daughter having less money on hand than had she married a poorer man with fewer mistresses. At the other end, Pan, a yoga student in her early 20s who had moved to Huangshan from elsewhere in Anhui and who worked at a graphic design firm, confided to me that despite being engaged at the time, she had considered taking an offer to become a mistress to one of her wealthy Taiwanese clients, a man in his late 50s. She only decided not to when she discovered his attitude towards women was one she found too degrading. Jiji, another young yoga student who still lived in her home village (about a 15-minute scooter ride away from the studio), told me that many girls from her village had moved to Hangzhou to work in karaoke parlors. Her classmates could earn 10,000 ($1,540) yuan/month, far more than they could earn in the restaurant industry in Hangzhou (3-5,000 ($460-770)/month), and far more than one could earn by staying in Tunxi. Indeed, even without anypersonal stake in the issue, awareness of elite male sexuality was unavoidable for yoga students, as the street the studio was located on was dotted with sex shops and "massage parlors."

It is against this backdrop, I argue, that statements such as Wu's about the value of

female relationships can be read as a repudiation of the need to attract or maintain fickle male attention. If men are going to spend time with their mistresses over their wives, actively shunning the heterosexual marriage bond to spend time with one's female friends turns an unavoidable and potentially victimizing situation into a more agentive one.

Likewise, divorced or single women who fell outside normal social categories also saw the yoga studio as a space relatively free from judgment or stigma. Yue, a divorced woman in her mid-30s who had moved back to Tunxi after breaking up with her long-term boyfriend of seven years, found particular solace in what she considered to be the overtly female space of the yoga studio. She would frequently mention how she found the studio to be a space of non-judgmental solidarity for independent women who did not need men. While there were women who did quietly judge Yue and her unconventional lifestyle, married women also emphasized the importance of women's financial independence, and would lament what they saw as a general regression in Chinese gender roles and gender equality. Teacher Yuan, who had been laid off from her job as a cadre at the state-owned pharmaceutical company, considered herself to be a victim of Reform and Opening-era free market downsizing, which disproportionately affected middle-aged women. Other women worried that their daughters did not take their own labor seriously enough, worrying that they were more concerned with finding a wealthy husband than investing in their own careers.[13] Concern with the loss of gender equality was generally tied to nostalgia for the 1980s and even the Maoist period, which was imagined by the yoga women as a period of gender equality by the women who had not lived through the period as adults. Although the yoga women had ambivalent feelings about Socialist feminism's formal insistence

[13] Of course, this concern did not prevent these same women from harshly scrutinizing the economic situation of any potential son-in-law.

on gender neutrality,[14] the general consensus was that such a time had been simpler and less burdensome for women as they had not had the pressure to perform gendered difference in daily life.

Osburg argues that male leisure spaces are intricately embedded in and indeed productive of social hierarchies, as "hosting" evenings of leisure allow for elite males to perform status and to create obligations of mutual responsibility or favors between wealthy entrepreneurs and the officials they entertain. While these relations are often based on very real affective bonds or friendship, they still nonetheless belong to the system of social debt which is considered to be "corruption" by the ordinary populace. Indeed, as Osburg and other anthropologists of Chinese social relationships, or *guanxi*, have showed, it is almost impossible for group leisure activities to exist outside preexisting social relations of the sorts of hierarchically organized responsibilities they create (see Kipnis 1997, 2002; Osburg 2013, Yan 1996, Liu 2002). For Teacher Yuan then, creating a space that existed outside of *guanxi* networks and social hierarchy meant creating a radically new sort of space from a social class as well as a gender perspective.

Yoga mats and Yoga hearts: Yoga in a public sphere

The type of space Teacher Yuan created in the yoga studio, however, was not uncontested. Not all students agreed with Teacher Yuan's vision of the yoga studio as a space of radical sororal egalitarianism outside of preexisting social norms. In this section, I show how the studio's

[14] I represent here the women's own representation of feminism under Mao and not the more complex picture painted by scholars of gender and women's history during the Maoist period, such as Emily Honig's "Iron Girls Revisited: Gender and the Politics of Work in the Cultural Revolution, 1966-1976" in Entwisle, Barbara., and Gail Henderson. 2000. Re-Drawing Boundaries: Work, Households, and Gender in China. Berkeley: University of California Press.
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increase in size and visibility amplified underlying personality conflicts and brought to the fore tensions over space, both physical and metaphorical. At the heart of these conflicts lay a dispute over what sort of space the yoga studio ought to be, who belonged in it, and how they ought to behave. Far more than simply disputes over yoga mats, the arguments in the studio reflect larger conflicts over value, values, and what sorts of qualities index a "quality" woman in 21st century China. Below is an excerpt from my fieldnotes:

It was 5:55 in the evening, and the yoga studio was filling up with students for the 6 pm class. Huang normally arrived 15 minutes early, but today for some reason she was running late. Her usual spot, the first mat on the left side of the studio, was occupied by a new student. Huang looked around in dismay. There were other empty purple mats in the back, and space behind them to lay down more mats. As more women entered and put their purses down on mats, Huang remained near the door, staring at the front spot. "This space is free" said Teacher Yuan, pointing to a mat near the door that was several rows behind the front mat. "Why don't you put your things down here." Huang looked at the front spot again, and then reluctantly put her purse down on the mat near the door. She sighed loudly and disappeared into the dressing room to change. After returning, she rolled out her personal mat cover over the back mat while still sighing.
"Wow, it's really hard to see anything back here." She said out loud to no one in particular. The other students, busy changing, stretching, chatting, or looking at their cellphones, did not respond. Huang sighed again. "My eyesight is so poor, I really can't make out what's going on in the front." She said, this time in a slightly louder voice aimed towards the front of the room. The surrounding students ignored her comment. Teacher Yuan made a noncommittal comment about how the space was small and everyone had a pretty good line of vision. Huang turned her body and focusing all her attention on the new student at the front of the room, sighed again, "My neck hurts, and I'm not sure if I can stretch it properly to see the front from all the way back here." Finally picking up on Huang's hints, the new student turned around.
"Oh, I'm sorry, is this your mat? Would you like to switch? I can see from the back just fine." The new student picked up her stuff and began walking towards Huang's mat.
"No, it's fine. Stay here. There aren't any assigned mats." Teacher Yuan addressed the new student, but her response was lost in Huang's enthusiastic acceptance of the switch. Huang re-rolled her mat cover on the front mat, looked around the room, and smiled. By this point it was slightly after 6, and class began.

What might this incident reveal about conceptions of the studio as a social space? Who is Huang, and why did she care so much about getting "her" mat? Huang, like Teacher Yuan, was a woman in her mid-40s. She studied yoga with Teacher Yuan from before she opened her own studio, and was one of her first students in the new studio. Huang showed up every day for the

first evening class, and frequently filled in for Teacher Yuan when she could not teach the first evening class. She began practicing yoga eight years ago through classes offered by the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF) as part of a "quality" (*suzhi*) raising program for women cadres. The ACWF had long since shuttered their yoga program, but Huang and a few others had kept up their yoga practice. Huang had a high-ranking position at the Ministry of Inspections and Supervision (MIS), a government division which monitors other government bureaus. She had a husband with an equally good job and an adult son who was an engineer in Tianjin. She took yoga seriously, but her sharp tongue and haughty demeanor caused problems with many other students. She was also one of the few students who went by her full name, rather than a web name or nickname.

As mentioned previously, the official policy mat policy in the yoga studio was "first come first served." Reserving a mat for a friend was acceptable if there were still empty mats, but not once the studio had filled up. While regulars tended to have favorite spots, Teacher Yuan thought that officially reserving a spot, or worse, asking someone to move from a mat once they had already settled there, was a violation of the egalitarian (*pingdeng*) principles of the yoga studio. Reserving mats, particularly at the front of the room, reintroduced principles of hierarchy into the yoga studio. In the words of Teacher Yuan, "this position [the yoga mat], I think that there aren't fixed spots. I didn't know how to tell her [Huang], but she's...it's just not very good.... because everyone doing yoga...you could say everyone is equal (*pingdeng*). No matter what their profession or job is, no matter what class, or what sorts of etiquette, all of that doesn't matter." That is, reserving a mat was not simply 'bad manners,' but it was a violation of Yuan's conception of the yoga studio as a space outside of normal Chinese society, where things that normally counted—profession, social class, and complex hierarchical system of Chinese

etiquette—were not important. Mat selection, unlike social hierarchy, ought to be unfixed and straightforwardly chosen as a matter of personal preference or availability. Pertinent values such as social status, or even seniority or skill, simply did not apply.

For Huang, however, reserving a yoga mat at the front of the room was perfectly acceptable, as she had a very different concept of what sort of space the yoga studio was. For Huang, and a few other students who also were government bureaucrats, yoga was an activity for women of high "quality" *(suzhi),* by which Huang meant civil servants (*gongwuyuan*), to work on further cultivating themselves. As such, yoga was not a private activity, but rather, an individualized extension of the general state "quality-raising" project.[15] This dispute—between yoga as a "counter-private" and yoga as a public space—proved central to many of the conflicts at the yoga studio.

Huang's conception of the yoga studio as a public space is reflected in her answer to my question of what made someone a good yoga student:

What I dislike the most is behavior that affects other people in a public (gonggong) place, for example, spitting anywhere, or talking in a loud voice. This—when you're practicing yoga, just doing casual movements, and then, answering your phone, playing on the cell phone, leaving the ringer on, it's all, to me it's really irritating. I like—that is, in my opinion, this is public order, or this—[when you're] in a public environment, you need to consider everyone. Each person has to maintain self-discipline. Only in this way can you have an environment for practicing [yoga].[16]

As we can see, rather than answer the question specifically, Huang begins by constructing a

[15] In Huangshan, there were several "quality"-raising projects aimed at raising the general "cultural level" (*wenhua shuiping*) of peasants. My erhu teacher, a young woman in her early 20s Party member, occasionally took part in these programs by performing Western classical piano concerts in villages.

[16] 我最不喜欢的是在公共场所，然后做一些影响他人的行为，比如说随地吐痰，高声讲话，这个—练瑜伽的时候随意做动，然后，这个，接听电话，玩手机，手机铃声，这些，都 是对我来说都很烦感。我喜欢就是，在我看来，这是公共秩序，或者公共的这个，环境，需要考虑大家，每个人的自律，去维护的。

general type of behavior—being inconsiderate of others in public—of which she sees poor yoga etiquette as an example. In doing so, she sets up the yoga studio as a public space, analogous to a place such as a plaza where public spitting might be an issue. Suggestively, public spitting has been the target of an intense government eradication campaign for the past seven years, and a prime example in government publicity of "uncivilized" or low-quality behavior. By framing the yoga studio as a public space and linking bad yoga behavior (talking or playing on a cellphone, not doing the right movements) to spitting, she is framing the yoga studio as an appropriate site for a state-like intervention to regulate behavior. Secondly, her example creates an equivalence between playing on one's cellphone—a ubiquitous activity requiring advanced technology that if anything skews toward upper-class status—to spitting, a behavior associated with China's peasant classes and seen as a marker of "backwardness." In doing so, she is making what might be seen as a marker of status into a marker of low-quality, and thus a problem. Playing on the cellphone was not seen as rude or inconsiderate by most of my informants, who would easily spend all day on the phone.

If we look at what Huang defines as good yoga behavior, we can see that she draws explicitly on the values of public-mindedness: a good student maintains "public order" (*gonggong zhixu*), a place where "disciplined" (*zilü*) individuals consider the concerns of others. Being a bad yoga student means behaving in a way which (negatively) influences others, rather than displaying concern for the public good. In so doing, we can see her bring together several ideas which are not inherently linked—being publicly minded, not playing on one's cellphone, and being a "civilized" person (i.e. the kind of person who does not spit in public).

Through these comments, we can see how for some portion of yoga students, of which Huang is representative, the yoga studio was not a space of private relaxation but rather an

extension of the far-from-egalitarian public sphere, where through yoga practice, select women would cultivate the discipline necessary to be high-quality Chinese subjects. Doing yoga, then, becomes the work of "doing" a high-quality self, and the stakes of failing at either then become the stakes of failing at both. When I asked her what the meaning of yoga was, Huang responded as follows:

You practice yoga in order to increase self-cultivation. If you engage in this sort of behavior [speaking loudly and answering one's cellphone], then you have not achieved the basic goal (benshen de mudi) of yoga practice, because you have not (properly) cultivated your speech and actions (xiushen yanxing). You have purely turned yoga into a sort of faddish pursuit, and you are simply doing it because it's popular, but you can't (bu neng) understand (lijie) the real meaning of yoga (zhenzhengde hanyi), right?[17]

Thus for Huang, the actions of an improper yoga student not only negatively influence others, but they are indicative of an improper mental state. For her, yoga is a form of mental and bodily discipline which simply cannot be practiced if one does not bring one's "speech and actions" (*xiushen yanxing*) into conformance. Huang saw her concerns relating to the meaning of yoga itself and was unaware that her attitudes reinforced outside social hierarchies by inappropriately bringing concerns about manners (*liyi*) or social status (*shangxiaji*) into an egalitarian space. Rather for her, if one understood what yoga meant, one would naturally approach it with a serious and respectful demeanor. To lack this demeanor was to lack a basic ability to actually do yoga and thus marked one as a person of low quality. Huang would readily agree that anyone of any social class could do yoga, but not if they talked on their cellphones, left the door open, or watched TV during rest periods.

[17] 因为你练瑜伽本身就想提高自己的修养。如果你还是这种行为，这个大声地喧哗，然后随意的打听打电话，对你连瑜伽的本身的这个目的你是没有达到。因为你修身言行你没有做到。你就单纯的把瑜伽作为一种追求时髦，还有现在还很流行做瑜伽，你越敢，但是瑜伽真正的含义你不能理解。是不是？

For Huang, we can see that to understand the real meaning of yoga is to understand how to be a quality Chinese citizen in a post-egalitarian state. Again, we can see the work Huang is doing to commensurate yoga, an Indian philosophical tradition, with the particular Chinese state policy of the past 30 years. By bringing them together, she naturalizes the connection, subsuming yoga as an activity of interpellation by the state. To be bad at yoga is thus to be a bad citizen, or simply a bad Chinese person.

Suzhi

For Huang, then, the yoga studio was a space of and for high-quality (*suzhi gao*) individuals. In this section, I will examine the concept of *suzhi* more extensively. What does it mean to be high- quality, and how does one manifest one's "quality"?

Teacher Yuan and I sat on the floor one evening after yoga class. Things had not been going well recently, and Teacher Yuan was stressed. Our New Year's celebration (Xinnian hui) had been a minor disaster, and everyone was mad at Teacher Yuan for reasons beyond her control. "But it's not just the people who came." she expressed. "Some people didn't even participate. Banban originally signed up, and then she told me she couldn't make it."
"What? Why couldn't she come?" I asked.
"It's not even just the New Year's Party. She said that she wasn't coming to that, or back to yoga ever again." I was shocked. Banban was a friendly woman in her early 30s, and an enthusiastic participant in most yoga outings. What had made her so angry she was quitting yoga?
"It's Huang." said Teacher Yuan. "Banban can't stand her. A couple of weeks before the New Year, Banban came to yoga a little late, and the door was left open. Huang said that only people with low suzhi leave the door open. Banban was furious. She hadn't even left the door open, but Huang was still accusing her of having low suzhi."
I was puzzled: "Why couldn't she just ignore Huang? She says mean things (nanting de hua) all the time. You just have to ignore her. She's only one person, and Banban shouldn't let her ruin yoga for her."
"But Yan [me], you don't understand. She insulted her suzhi. What was Banban supposed to do? If it had been something else, fine. But not her suzhi."

Suzhi, a term which translates loosely to the English "quality," has been written about extensively in the anthropological literature in China (see: Anagnost 2004; Kipnis 2006, 2007; Yan 2003). Originally a somewhat obscure term used in contrast with *suyang* to indicate a person's natural qualities as opposed to cultivated qualities in philosophical discussions of nature

vs. nurture, the meaning of *suzhi* underwent a radical transformation in the last 30 years of the 20th century, when *suzhi* became a key concept in Chinese family planning policies in the late 1970s. Adopting a rhetoric of 'quality' over 'quantity,' the One-Child policy promoted limited birth as a way to raise the *suzhi* or "human quality" of the Chinese population, which through its sheer numbers was seen as excessive and disorderly (*luan*). By the mid-1980s, *suzhi*, or lack thereof, was a nebulous but ubiquitous term used to explain the shortcomings of Chinese people on an individual or national basis, and to explain, justify, but also simultaneously remedy vast inequalities between rich/poor, urban/rural, Eastern/Western China.

For my informants, particularly those who worked as government employees, who were mostly new or aspiring members of China's middle class belonging to a rural area of one of the poorest provinces in China, having one's high *suzhi* recognized was incredibly important. Although Tunxi was most famous for its proximity to Yellow Mountain (*Huangshan*), Anhui province is best-known nationally for its crushing poverty and famine. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Anhui was best known for providing most of the migrant labor to China's wealthier Eastern Seaboard. For residents of China's large metropolises, "Anhui *baomu*" (Anhui maid) and "Anhui *qigai*" (Anhui beggar) are the first terms that come to mind when the province is mentioned (Sun 2003; 2007, Yan 2008).[18] Although neither the poorest nor the least developed province by most objective measures, its close proximity to China's wealthiest provinces and its relative lack of "exotic" ethnic minorities mean that Anhui is considered to be one of the most "backwards" provinces in China and its inhabitants are seen to be particularly lacking in *suzhi* (Yan 2008; 2012). Despite being a part of the province, Huangshan locals agreed with the

[18] I also found this to be the case. If I mentioned to Beijingers that the location of my fieldwork was Anhui, the first response was generally, "oh, Anhui maids!" *(Anhui baomu)*.

assessment that most Anhuinese are particularly "backward," (*luohou*) and "uncouth" (*tu*). They strongly distanced themselves from an Anhui identity by referring to themselves as as "Huangshanese" (*Huangshanren*) or "Huizhounese" (*Huizhouren*) rather than "Anhuinese." Locals considered Huangshan to be the only "cultured" (*you wenhua de*) part of Anhui, and resented being included in any general classification of the Anhuinese character.[19]

Kipnis writes that through linking *suzhi* to government-enforced family planning policies, the concept of 'quality-raising' has become inextricably tied to state power (2006). For the yoga students, particularly those who were government employees, being a high-quality woman meant behaving and conducting oneself in ways that were promoted by or aligned with state values. To be a high-quality woman, then, was to be a modern citizen of the nation-state. A high-quality woman would be capable of appropriately reproducing (i.e. giving birth to and raising the right kind of child(ren)) and producing (i.e. creating the right type of commodity or service) in a way that made China a global superpower competitive with "advanced" nations like the US or Japan. The stakes of being high-quality then, went far beyond etiquette and aesthetics. In Huangshan, a beautiful but "undeveloped" region of China, membership in the CCP and employment in government or one of the few state-owned enterprises in the area was one of the only sources of white-collar employment. These were the main avenue to middle class and advanced (*fada de*)

[19] My informants would frequently note that they gave the "Hui" to Anhui, not to indicate a sense of belonging the province of Anhui, but rather to demonstrate their gracious largess towards the poor benighted Northern Anhuinese. The province is a relatively recent creation, and in general there appeared to be little regional solidarity. It is also true that Huangshan has a better reputation in the rest of China. In Shanghai and Beijing, if I mentioned living in Anhui, most people would get confused and ask me why I would *choose* to live there given that as a foreigner I could live somewhere better. If I told them I lived in Huangshan, they would suddenly understand. "Oh, Huangshan is so beautiful!" At the same time, Huangshan does not exist completely out of the Anhui maid stereotype. The first movie on the Anhui maid phenomenon was called "The Girl from Huangshan" (*laizi huangshan de guniang*) (1985) (Sun 2003). For more on this topic, see chapter one.

status. Thus, as most yoga students were employed in government-related industries, most (though not all) of them had a very high opinion of the CCP and took state values very seriously. For Banban, a low-level government employee, being told by Huang, a high-ranking cadre, that her *suzhi* was lacking, was much more than a simple insult from a classmate. It was a judgment of her fitness as a Chinese citizen by a spokesperson of the party.

Most anthropologists examine *suzhi* from the perspective of the urban elite, for whom the rural migrant worker provides a ready foil (Yan 2012). They show how the concept is mobilized to reinforce rural/urban divides and justify rural/urban equality. Anagnost and Yan write about *suzhi* as a value-sign of incommensurability, contrasting the high-quality, value-added body of the urban, middle class, only child with the low-quality body of the rural migrant, from which surplus value is extracted. They claim that one body is the site of value accumulation, while the other the site of value extraction. Although one body is in need of value (which can be provided through enriching educational activities) and the other expresses an excess, they argue that the two bodies can never be made commensurable, as the urban child's lack of value can never be low-suzhi in the same way as the migrant, and the migrant is very unlikely become high-*suzhi* in the same way as the child (Anagnost 2004; Yan 2012).

In my dissertation, I want to move past this rather reductive binary to examine what sort of work conceptualizations of and mobilizations *suzhi* do outside a major urban setting. In one sense, discourse around *suzhi* is an example of "fractal recursivity," which Gal and Irvine define as "the projection of an opposition, salient at some level of a relationship, onto some other level" (2000, 38). In one sense, discourse around *suzhi* among the yoga students is a classic example of this, as the rural/urban and cultured/uncultured divide became projected at the both the provincial and municipal levels. At the regional level, Shanghai and Hangzhou elites may acknowledge the

Huangshan region's rich intellectual and cultural history and its natural beauty, but they do not consider its current inhabitants to share in their ancestors' glory, instead existing as part of China's vast uncultured rural masses living in the (picturesque) hinterlands. At the provincial level, Huangshanese, as mentioned, think their region is relatively cultured and that local inhabitants posses higher *suzhi* compared to the rest of Anhui.[20]

At the local level, the many yoga studio who worked as civil servants in local government saw Tunxi as an urban center and themselves as local cultural elites in comparison to the rural masses in the Huangshan countryside. Being high-quality meant being more highly educated than one's cohort, being employed in government, and frequently, being a Party member. Huang and her friends frequently contrasted themselves to both uncultured peasants (*nongmin*) and the "nouveau-riche" (*tuhao*), a term for wealthy peasants who had earned their money through entrepreneurial means. Becoming a civil servant required passing difficult, highly competitive exams, and those yoga students who had tested into white collar positions saw the process as more meritocratic and thus more reflective of one's *suzhi* than the Chinese college entrance exam (*gaokao*), which they saw as easy to game with enough money and effort.[21] Although civil servants had lower incomes than the nouveau-riche or even than many employed in low/mid- level service industry jobs, they saw themselves as an increasingly under-appreciated cultural vanguard who had foregone the ability to purchase name brand cars (or cars

[20] As is often the case, these judgments were disputed by those on the other side. While Huangshaneses did not dispute that Shanghai was the Chinese capital of global modernity, they disagreed that Shanghainese were in any fundamental sense better than Huangshaneses. In the same way, residents who had moved to Huangshan from elsewhere in Anhui vigorously contested Huangshan's superiority to the rest of the province, and were nonplussed by what they saw as unduly haughty local attitudes. As one recent migrant from rural Northern Anhui told me, "They act like Shanghainese, but Huangshan is no Shanghai."

[21] Not surprisingly, non-civil servants disagreed, seeing the civil service exam as easier to game through family connections than the *gao kao*.

at all) or designer clothes to serve the general national good.

At the same time, *suzhi* discourse in the yoga studio undercut the idea of stable, ontological binaries between high and low *suzhi* individuals. Most importantly, although a high-status government job could be a reflection of high *suzhi* and/or the natural outcome of possessing it, manifestations of *suzhi* were not found in one's social identity but instead located in one's daily behaviors, dispositions, and ethical orientations. *Suzhi*, while often correlating with education or career, was not reducible to either, nor was the correlation exact. *Suzhi* always existed in excess of any categories of definition, which made determining what exactly the qualities of quality were and how to recognize a high-quality individual somewhat fraught. According to Huang,

Suzhi, it's embodied (tixian) in the most basic parts of your life. For example, if you open a door, and if there are people behind you, need to hold the door open and wait for them to go through. This is one sort of behavior. A second one is, if you're in a public place, you have to speak in a low volume, because if you speak loudly you will affect others, and not everyone wants to listen to what you're saying. A third one is, well, it's the same as when we practice yoga. If you are casually answering phone calls, wandering around, it affects other people. Frankly, it's the sort of thing I can't stand the most. I would like to say something, but not everyone wants to hear what you have to say.[22]

Huang's definition of *suzhi* then, forefronts the moral aspects of the concept in a way that has political connotations. Given the origins of its current usage in state discourses on the One- Child Policy, *suzhi* is a shibboleth of state speech, and to use the term is to align oneself to a certain orientation towards the state. While not everyone who uses the term *suzhi* would identify as an enthusiastic supporter of the current government, use of the word indexes a person as someone

[22] 素质，它是体现你的生活的地面地点。比如说你拉开门，后面如果有人，你要把门拉来了以后等他过去，是一种行为。第二个，在一个公共场所你不能大声讲话。因为你大声讲话你会影响他人。不是所有人都愿意听你讲话。第三个就像我们瑜伽会所一样。这个，随意接听电话，这个走来走去，影响他人。这是我最（生活)痛觉的。有的时候想讲，但是你想，不是所有的人都愿意听你讲

who agrees with and takes seriously the values promoted by the state. Huang's definition of *suzhi* also forefronts the everyday behaviors that make someone high-quality, which mainly boil down to being considerate of others. In defining *suzhi*, Huang simultaneously demonstrates her own *suzhi* by mentioning how she would like to correct others' faults, but that she is attentive to how such an unwelcome act would be perceived by others. While many other students found Huang to be particularly overbearing and to put her own needs first, Huang performs to me, the foreign anthropologist, her own ability to attend to others.

This sort of ethical value, consideration of others, is also at the center of state campaigns to increase the general *suzhi* of the Chinese populace. In urban areas such as Beijing, state campaigns to promote waiting patiently in line have framed increasing one's awareness of others as necessary to civilized public order (*wenming de gonggong zhixu*). At the same time, government programs to retrain civil servants have centered around fostering attentiveness to the needs of others. Civil servants have been reviled in the media and by the general public as being unwilling to help ordinary citizens, to the point that bureaucrats have been attacked with acid by angry people who felt their needs had been ignored. A series of manuals, collectively titled *Civil Servants' Professional Morality* (*Gongwuyuan Zhiye Daode*), were published in 2015 as part of an effort to remind civil servants of their primary goal to "serve the people" (*wei renmin fuwu*). The training has emphasized that civil servants should follow the "warmth, patience, meticulousness, enthusiasm, and attentiveness principle" (*rexin, naixin, xixin, yongxin, zhuanxin yuanze*).[23] Huang, a high-ranking civil servant, is thus reinforcing in her definition not simply how *suzhi* can be manifested in ordinary behavior, but also the connection between the Chinese

[23] In Chinese, the principle draws on a series of positive qualities all containing the word *xin* 'heart', which provides an alliterative prosodic quality absent in the English translation.

state and the ethical value of caring for others.[24]

Whose yoga? Language and the qualia of "quality"

For Huang, *suzhi* is manifested in socially meaningful tokens of behavior, action, or demeanor—the volume of one's voice, the closing (or not) of the door. These tokens, or diacritics, as is often the case in social life, become "enregistered" as emblems of social types (Agha 2007). In this section, I will show how in the yoga studio, the social type of the *tuhao* is produced across multiple modalities of semiosis through dialectical processes of "rhematization" and "dicentization."

Rhematization is a process through which indexical or symbolic signs are taken as iconic, that is, as formal likenesses of their objects. This is a process of simplifying the sign relationship, or "downshifting" (Parmentier 1994, 18-19). In the social realm rhematization is a process of stereotypy in that "linguistic features that index social groups or activities appear to be iconic representations of them, as if a linguistic feature somehow depicted or displayed a social group's inherent nature or essence" (Irvine and Gal 2000, 37).[25] This process, like all semiotic processes, is a dialectical one: a quality or feature is seen to index a particular social type. This indexical connection is then metapragmatically justified as revealing inherent qualities which differentiate that social type from others. This in turn leads to an analogical extension in which that underlying logic of differentiation is expanded to encompass any number of other traits or qualities, which therefore become available to be recognized as indices of that social type (without necessary reference to the original metapragmatic justification).[26]

[24] Again, this is something that would be disputed by many non state-affiliated people.
[25] Irvine and Gal (2000) originally refer to this process as "iconization"; however, they later renamed it "rhematization" to more accurately describe the nature of the process, as they are actually describing a change in the kind of "interpretant," namely, from "dicent" to "rheme."
[26] For a more technical explanation of this general dialectical process, see Silverstein (1998,

In Huangshan, it is through this dialectic process of metapragmatic justification and analogic extension that the previously separate qualities of "coarseness" (*cu*) and "earthiness" (*tu)*[27] have become fused together, such that any manifestation of either is seen to iconically index the social type of the low-quality *tuhao,* who stands in contrast to the high-quality citizen.

C*u*-ness is found in certain aural, kinesthetic, and visual qualities. To be *cu* is to be loud: to clomp one's feet when one walks, to set things down heavily, to eat noisily, to speak in a loud voice without modulation based on context, to laugh loudly, to listen to loud music, and so forth. It is also to expansively take up space: to stick one's elbows out, to squat, to bump against others, to spread one's belongings out, to stand too close, to bump into people while walking, to spit or urinate on the sidewalk. In other words, to be *cu* is to involuntarily command the attention of passersby, through movement, through speech, through appearance, and through noise. To be *cu* is to be careless, in all senses of the term. It is to not value things, oneself, or others. Indeed, *cuxin* (lit. 'coarse-hearted') or careless is the antonym of *xixin* (lit. 'fine-hearted') or careful, one of the principles of public service mentioned in the manual of professional morality and one that was written on customer service reminders posted in government offices. If we return to Huang's definition of low-*suzhi* as lacking consideration of others in one's daily behavior, we can see that to be *cu* then means to lack *suzhi* (for a more general discussion of qualia, see Chumley & Harkness 2013).

Traits of *tu*-ness iconically index qualities of the peasant; dark, sun-damaged skin, a lack of education, and non-standard Mandarin point to (as an index) the peasant by virtue of likeness (as an icon). These qualities are not in themselves inherently *cu*,[28] but they become linked

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127).

[27] Other possible translations might be 'rusticness,' 'ruralness,' or 'bumpkin-ness'.

[28] Indeed, there is no natural connection between dark skin or wrinkles and being noisy or sitting

through the creative process of "reintensionalization." Qualities of *cu-ness* like squatting or spitting locally index the peasant. As these traits become naturalized qualities inherent to peasantness, the peasant herself becomes *cu*, and thus any other inherent quality of hers, such as dark skin or nonstandard Mandarin becomes *cu* through the process of analogical extension. In this way, *cu* and *tu* are "bundled" together such that to be *tu* is to be *cu* and to be *cu* is to be *tu* (Keane 2003). Dark skin is then thought to take on a "coarse" quality, and thus a negative moral valence. The figure of the *tuhao* may have money, but she is still marked by her looks and speech as *tu*, and therefore still *cu*, and thus has a negative moral valence in Tunxi.

Rhematization results in a naturalized connection between *tu* and *cu*, such that signs of peasantness are also signs of roughness. Identifying the peasant or the *tuhao*, however, does not merely rely on recognizing preexisting signs, but also involves the active creation of signs *as* a sign of *tu-ness*. This interpretive process —the creation of signs as socially significant indexical links to culturally meaningful (intensional) categories, has been called "dicentization" (Ball 2014). Contrasted with rhematization, dicentization is a process of "upshifting" (Parmentier 1994),[29] that is, of taking a relationship of formal similarity (icon) as a causal relationship (index). Unlike rhematization, which naturalizes the relationship between signs and their objects, dicentization heightens the significance of the connection, drawing attention in the moment to the nature of the sign-object relationship. Dicentization is the process that underlies ritual

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in a certain way.

[29] Parmentier calls rhematization "downshifting," as it is a move from Peircean Secondness to Firstness (taking indexical sign-object relation as an iconic one), whereas dicentization is the process of taking an iconic sign-object relationship as an indexical one is a move from Firstness to Secondness, hence "upshifting." (Dicentization is only upshifting in the direction of rheme to dicent. The move from taking a symbolic sign-object relation (Thirdness) as an indexical one (Secondness) would be an act of downshifting.) Peirce did not consider "upshifting" as a logical possibility (Parmentier 1994, 18-19).

efficacy, as rituals work through creating a "diagram" of sorts which then instantiates that which it diagrams. In this way, it is a particular sort of "indexical icon," one that actualizes that which it indexes through the act of indexing (see Tambiah 1985; Silverstein 1993, 2004; Ball 2014).[30] Lee and LiPuma note that linguistic performatives, like ritual, are indexical icons (2002); I argue that in daily life, the process of dicentization can be similarly performative in that the act of reinterpretation (i.e. of interpreting an icon as an index) itself *creates* individuals as belonging to stereotyped social categories.[31] That is, the act of identifying people *as* belonging to certain groups is often the process by which they become members of such groups. In other words, processes of rhematization and dicentization are two parts of the dialectic by which social personae are defined and recognized in the world: indexical relations are read as iconic, such that individual qualities are taken as inherent to a social type, and in turn iconic relations are read as indexical, such that any individual's formal resemblance through such qualities is taken as indexing (and thereby often creating) membership in that group.

Here I show how Wu, the assistant yoga teacher, was made to be a *tuhao* by other yoga students through a process dicentization, i.e., through taking what they saw as icons of peasantness as indices of peasantness. Wu, in her early 30s, was a stay-at-home mother and wife to a wealthy older businessman. She came from a family of modest means in rural She county[32]

[30] In the case of ritual, it is generally through bringing together the immediate realm with an otherworldly or spiritual "ontic" realm (Silverstein 1993) through the use of objects that through their resemblance create a connection between the two. For example, in the ritual of the Eucharist, the formal resemblance of red wine to blood is transformed into a contiguous relationship whereby red wine becomes Christ's blood, at least for some Christian traditions.
[31] Social classification of others is like linguistic performatives both because they are processes of dicentization, but also because classification is often achieved through explicit linguistic performative. In many circumstances, being labeled as a particular type of person makes it so.
[32] She County was adjacent to the Tunxi district and is one of the seven counties and districts that make up the Huangshan Metropolitan Area.

and was widely considered to have married up financially. Once her daughter was in school, she took up yoga to occupy her time, eventually training and becoming licensed to be a yoga teacher in her own right. Wu was a very pleasant and unprepossessing woman who never said anything negative about others. She was highly unpopular, however, as many women, especially Huang, were offended that a young woman with average looks, middling education, and with no obvious talents had been so materially successful at a young age. The tipping point for many women was when Wu received a red Audi as a present from her husband.

As a result, Wu was frequently the target of negative gossip in the yoga studio, much of which was centered around her obvious *tuhao*-ness. Moreover, while I found Wu to be sweet, humble, unpretentious, hardworking, and uncomplaining, all positive moral qualities and extremely suited to yoga, many other students identified her as a *tuhao* and therefore as morally suspect, a woman of low *suzhi* and thus an unwelcome presence in the yoga studio.

First, although Wu's skin was only somewhat on the darker side, Huang and other students frequently commented on how dark Wu's skin was, emphasizing this marker of peasant status. While there is significant natural variation in Chinese skin color, skin color was seen as something the individual had quite a lot of control over. The genetic heritability of skin color was acknowledged; however, it was simply an obstacle some women had to work harder to overcome. Extreme avoidance of sun exposure and extensive use of whitening lotions were considered ways women could make their skin lighter. Dark skin on someone who did not have to work outside and who could afford lotions, then, was seen as a mark of laziness, or perhaps a form of "letting oneself go." Wu's "dark" skin was then a stubborn assertion of her peasant status despite the free time and money she might have to remedy her skin color. Moreover, as an index of *cu*-ness and *tu*-ness, it was speculated that she must also be careless in other ways.

Women talked about how it was likely that she was also a lackadaisical housekeeper and cook and an indifferent mother. To the extent that Wu's skin was dark, we might consider it to be coincidentally like the dark skin of a peasant, an accident of genetics, and one that tells us nothing about her current social status, moral character, or lifestyle.[33] These yoga students did not consider Wu's skin to merely formally resemble that of a peasant, but rather indexed a causal relationship: it was not the case that Wu looked *like* a peasant, but rather, *because* Wu was a peasant, *therefore* she was careless, and *therefore* she had dark skin.

Likewise, although I did not notice this, even Wu's friends would frequently remark on how old Wu looked. One of Wu's good friends, a divorced woman about eight years older than Wu, would frequently comment on how, when she and Wu were out, people assumed Wu was older than her. Yoga students would note that the large age gap between Wu and her husband was more acceptable, because Wu was so much older looking than her age. In a society where hard manual labor prematurely ages poorer workers, looking young is not simply about vanity, but is also a way of expressing one's class position. For yoga women to insist that Wu looked much older than her age was then in part to assert Wu's peasantness: while she may no longer be a peasant, her body still managed to be dark and rapidly aging, regardless of her apparently cushy lifestyle.

Even traits that were unambiguously positive were suspect when associated with Wu. Her expensive and understated clothing, far out of the price range of most government workers, was often derided as tacky or ill-fitting. Even if individual pieces were acknowledged to be tasteful,

[33] Indeed, dark skin, while remarked upon, was not taken to be an index of *tu-ness* or *cu-ness* for other people in other contexts. Teacher Yuan, the yoga studio owner, had a husband with dark skin. This was commented upon by the students as a simple fact; and they noted that Yuan's husband was hardworking, successful, kind, gentle, and thoughtful, all positive traits. Here we can see that while Yuan's husband's skin was iconic of peasantness, it was not indexical of it.

how Wu put them together was off. She didn't have an "eye" for fashion, only her husband's credit card. Wu's extreme thinness, an otherwise valorized trait by yoga students who were obsessed with losing weight, on Wu became unhealthy and unattractive. Although many yoga students had body images and diets which might have met medical diagnostic criteria for anorexia, Wu's unhealthy eating habits were the ones that were gossiped about. Thus, women who bragged about consuming no more than an apple and three hard boiled eggs a day would express their concern at how little Wu ate,[34] and how "haggard" Wu's increasingly thin body was becoming.

These traits, which were unnoticed or unremarked on when manifested by other women were suddenly made significant when embodied by Wu. Wu's collection of traits—dark, old-looking, thin, expensively-dressed—do not neatly map on to a social persona, but were rather made to do so through this dialectic of dicentization and rhematization: through the attribution of a causal link to a formal resemblance (dicentization), the ways in which Wu was seen to *resemble* a peasant were a sign that she *was* a peasant. Through the analogical expansion (i.e., reintensionalization) of qualia that adhered to the peasant (rhematization), any perceived trait of Wu's (even one like wearing expensive clothing) were seen as peasant-like. To put it plainly, once traits of Wu's that indexed her as being a peasant were observed, then suddenly everything Wu did became a sign of being peasant-like, and therefore coarse.

This creative process of making Wu a *tuhao* through identifying key qualities that supposedly differentiated her from other yoga students was also manifested at the level linguistic perception. The ability of people to perceive the sensuous qualities they expect to perceive has

[34] Wu did indeed eat very little and lost a large amount of weight over the course of my fieldwork, considering her original weight and bone structure.

been well attested in the anthropological literature from Franz Boas (1889) onward. Sociolinguists have tested this observation through laboratory perception studies, which have found that people perceive different phonetic qualities depending on assumed speaker identity. Niedzielski (1999) finds that, when presented with identical speech tokens, Americans heard markers of Canadian vowel-raising among "speakers" they were told in advance were Canadian, but not in the speech of those they were told were American. Similarly, Strand and Johnson (1996) and Strand (1999) find that listeners locate the /s/-/ʃ/ boundary differently depending on the perceived gender of the speaker, an effect even more pronounced if they are shown male or female faces with the sound. The effect of perceived speaker identity on perception of speech can allow people to "hear what they want to hear," creating socially meaningful differences in speech where objective linguistic difference may not exist. With this in mind, let us return to Huang and Wu, presented in a vignette from my fieldnotes:

It is Christmas Eve dinner. I am treating three yoga students to post-yoga practice steak dinners at the next door coffee shop, a custom which they informed me with certainty was an American Christmas Eve tradition. My guests include Huang, Wen, a 32 year old single woman and employee of the city Financial Bureau (shi zhengcai ju), and Lin, also in her mid 40s and an employee at the Ministry of Culture (wenhua ju). All three students are regulars at the 6pm class. At the dinner, the conversation turns, as it so often does, to gossip about the other yoga students. Huang said that she didn't like going to the afternoon class or the 7:30 class, as both were 'disorderly' (luan qi ba zao). She especially didn't like the afternoon class, as it was filled with people who did business (gao shengyi de ren), and they were uncultured (meiyou wenhua). She continued, saying that they didn't understand what yoga was about and frequently talked during the class. She then gave an example of a woman who spoke for 20 minutes on the phone. Lin looked surprised, and asked if the other students said anything. Huang sniffed and said no. Given that both Huang and Lin often surfed their smart phones during yoga rest period, and had on occasion answered a call, I was a bit surprised by their comments. They continued with particular dislikes of particular yoga students.

Their greatest dissatisfaction, however, was reserved for Wu. "She's such a tuhao" scoffed Huang. Huang told us she had been avoiding Saturday afternoon yoga because she really couldn't stand it when Wu led yoga. "She speaks like a 50 or 60 year old without even a middle school education." Wen pointed out that Wu was, in fact, younger than her. Huang looked completely shocked. "How can someone so young have such terrible Mandarin?" Without pausing for an answer, she continued, "not only does she have a strong She accent, but she also talks through her nose." Huang makes a face of disgust, and says that there was no way she

could do yoga with someone who spoke like that. Wen pointed out that Teacher Yuan was also from She county, and Huang didn't have a problem with her Mandarin. "I'm from She county too" Huang responded, "and I don't have such nonstandard Mandarin." She confirms that the yoga teacher's Mandarin was fine, and soothing to listen to. "Yuan's Mandarin is fine. But Wu's is too distracting to listen to." (Again, I was surprised by this criticism. While I too found Wu's voice to be loud and nasally, I didn't notice that her Mandarin was all that less standard than Teacher Yuan's, which I found to be very heavily accented, to the point I often had trouble understanding her in daily conversation[35]. During yoga, I found that both Yuan and Wu seemed to make an effort to speak more slowly and in a more standard register.)

As we can see here, being perceived as speaking *Shepu* (She-accented Mandarin),[36] does not simply depend on the objective phonetic evaluation of the aural qualities of one's speech. For Huang, and to a lesser extent Wen and Lin, Wu's *Shepu* was unbearable while Yuan's *Shepu* was almost unnoticeable. While Wu more frequently spoke at a louder volume than Yuan, her voice was higher pitched, and she perhaps had somewhat more exaggerated qualities of *Shepu*, Yuan also spoke in a noticeably *Shepu* cadence and, particularly if she were excited, could speak quite loudly. On the other hand, when leading yoga class, both Yuan and Wu made a concerted effort to speak in a "yoga voice," which was slower, quieter, and adhered more closely to standard Mandarin phonology, tone, and prosody patterns.[37] However, as women from rural backgrounds with little formal education in Standard Mandarin, both Yuan and Wu's Mandarin still deviated from Standard, either through use of dialect-inflected pronunciation or through substituting Standard Mandarin phonetic features in words where they were not present. In the examples presented below, I have bolded deviations from Standard Mandarin for retroflex initials and

[35] To illustrate the point more clearly, at one point a Chinese-born colleague was visiting me. After listening to Teacher Yuan talk, she turned to me and asked me what dialect she was speaking. I told her Teacher Yuan was speaking Mandarin.

[36] Shepu is a portmanteau of Shexianhua (She county dialect) and Putonghua (Mandarin), and is used for "Mandarin with She characteristics." Shepu was used to describe any sort of Mandarin that noticeably deviated from the standard spoken by someone from She county.

[37] Here I focus on phonetic qualities over prosody or tone as they are more easily accessible for analysis.

nasal endings.

Table 4 Wu's Speech (1)

(a)	Standard Mandarin (expected) *ni keyi ba ni de ʂuaŋ jian xiang ʂaŋ xiang hou, rao guan jiŋ, rang ni de yaobei wang hou [unclear], ʂuaŋ jian fangsong xia tsʰe.*	Shepu (attested) *ni keyi ba ni de suan jian xiang saŋ xiang hou, rao guaŋ jiŋ, rang ni de yaobei wang hou, suan jian fangsong xia tʂʰe.*

"Keep your shoulders upright and push them backwards, roll circles around your neck, lean your back backwards [unclear], both shoulders relax down your sides."

(b)	Standard Mandarin *Faŋ soŋ, buyao jin, ʂu tʂaŋ lingxin, zuijiao weiwei ɕiao (yi ge)*	Shepu *Fan soŋ, buyao jin, ʂu tsaŋ lingxin, zuijiao weiwei siao (yi ge)*

"Relax, relax your spirit, make your mouth into a slight smile."

Table 5 Teacher Yuan's Speech (2)

(a)	Standard Mandarin (expected) *rang women zanshi yuan yi chengshi juexiao, wangji ziji zai jiating zhong de jue se, shehuizhong de jue se, wangji shenti de suantong fanlao, women yiqi zong lian yujia, kongmie shijie.*	Shepu (attested) *rang women zanshi yuan yi chengshi juexiao, wangji ziji zai jiating zhong de jue tʂʰe, shehuizhong de jue tʂʰe, wangji shenti de suantong fanlao, women yiqi zong lian yujia, kongmie shijie.*

"Let us temporally leave behind the world, forget our household roles, forget our social roles, forget our bodies' aches and pains and weariness, let us together practice completely yoga, extinguish the world."

(b)	Standard Mandarin *ʂuaŋ ʂhou he tʂaŋ xia tou lai ca*	Shepu *suan sou he tsan xia tou lai ca*

"Put both your hands in a prayer-like position, bow your head, and rub them together."

Wu, perhaps self-conscious that some students considered her be uncultured, was particularly fastidious in modulating her voice while leading yoga, speaking in a noticeably slower and softer manner. At the same time, Wu's yoga Mandarin contained systematic deviations from the Standard. As we can see in (1a), Wu pronounces "side," *ce* (*tsʰe*), with a retroflex "ch" (*tʂʰ*).

According to my observations, this was a regular change she made every time she said the word *ce*. By contrast Wu's pronunciation of "*ʂʰ*" retroflex did not seem to follow such a systematic pattern, and, similarly, she would interchange velar and alveolar nasals. In (1b), she actually pronounces a palato-alveolar sibilant (*ɕiao*) as an alveolar sibilant (*siao*), which is an even more marked deviation from Standard Mandarin.

While Yuan did in general pronounce her retroflex initials and nasal finals more in line with Standard Mandarin, her pronunciation systematically deviated from Standard Mandarin for certain commonly used words such as "shuang" (*ʂuaŋ*) (both/pair). In (2b) she says "suan sou," but it was not uncommon for Yuan to say, "suan shou."[38] Although less systematically than Wu, Yuan would on occasion overcorrect, in this case substituting the palatal-alveolar retroflex "tʂ" for the alveolar sibilant "s" in *jiaose* ("role").

Although there are slight observable differences, I would argue that Huang's singling out of Wu's yoga Mandarin as noticeably less standard than Yuan's yoga Mandarin, does not reflect objective difference in the aural phonetic qualities of their speech. Rather, Huang already considered Wu to be a *tuhao*, and so she looked for signs of unculturedness in Wu's Mandarin. In this case, Wu's lack of knowledge of Chinese standard phonology and her *Shepu* prosody were thus taken to iconically index Wu's own general coarseness, unculturedness, laziness, and general *tuhao*-ness. Huang saw Wu as idle and stupid, a woman who was entirely supported through marriage and not through her own talents as a worker.

A straightforward interpretation might be that Huang and the other bureaucrats found it

[38] When I first started doing yoga, I was unsure what suan meant and why it was frequently brought up with regards to our body parts. Suan in standard Mandarin means "sore," so I began to wonder if it was a yoga term-of-art to refer to one's body parts as "sore." It took an embarrassingly long time to realize that suan really meant shuang, the measure word for pairs. Rather than being asked to raise our sore legs, we were being asked to raise both our legs.

unfair that, despite having more prestigious careers than Wu, they would never be able to afford the material goods that she could. While this is certainly the case, I would argue that the concerns over Wu's low-quality also reflect a much deeper anxiety. For Huang, yoga is explicitly part of a state project of *suzhi*-raising, so a yoga teacher so obviously lacking in *suzhi* is not simply an annoyance; it is a threat to the fundamental purpose of yoga. Wu's position as a teacher means that she is an authority figure whose role is to raise the quality of other women. By being so low-quality, however, she threatens not only to not raise the quality, but to actively lower the quality of women who study with her and who are attracted to her slim physique and expensive clothes. A *tuhao* as a yoga teacher actively harms yoga as a civilizing project.

Wu's contagious *tu*-ness also threatens the high-quality status of Huang and other bureaucrats, who as aspiring middle-class women in a poor area of rural China are already in a precarious position. Even an indirect association with Wu risks the collapse or erasure of the carefully drawn distinctions made by Huang, Wen, and Lin. Again, I might suggest that the intense negative gossip around Wu in my presence was a performative prophylactic. By pointing out Wu's clear inferiority, Huang and others were demonstrating to me that they could see a difference between her and them (even if I could not).

Conclusion

In conclusion then, we can see that the yoga studio is a space of serious social work rather than simply being a space of carefree leisure. Michael Warner notes that "[b]oth public and private in this usage are existential categories, not social descriptions. They are different contexts for personhood" (59). Indeed, I would argue over the course of my fieldwork, these existential categories became increasingly defined, as anxieties over what sort of personhood was made possible by the yoga space.

Finally, I would like to note that for the anthropologist, the yoga studio is also a valuable sort of space. Like ritual space, the studio a place where social relations are intensified, sharpened, and distilled. Social differences, and the differing values, beliefs, and judgments that they index, are normally attenuated through social and physical distance. By bringing different types of people into close physical and intimate proximity, social relations are not only revealed but also re-made.

Epilogue

By the time I left the yoga studio after two years of fieldwork, the studio was undergoing its own form of schismogenesis. Huang and other students refused to attend classes taught by Wu, and the other *tuhao* whom attended her classes. At the same time, other students like Banban, attracted by Yuan's conception of the studio as a space outside of normal social hierarchy and offended by Huang's refusing to "cast off [her] social role," refused to attend classes taught or even attended by Huang. The yoga students then, ended up self-segregating into three separate classes: wealthy business women, or those not put-off by *tuhao-ness* chose to attend the noon class. Civil servants, including Huang and her friends, attended the 6 pm class, which became somewhat pejoratively known as the 'official' class (*guanfang ke*). The 7:30 class became known as the class for everyone else, those who had neither good jobs nor money, a label they bonded over with monthly dinners. We might instead then see the yoga studio as containing variety of spaces, creating a variety of personhoods, and as being recruited to a variety of social projects. As each class developed its own set of social norms and overt social character, the rise of 'class consciousness' and the fragmenting of social solidarity was viewed as a failure by Teacher Yuan, but we might also see it as a particularly acute microcosm of the current changes in Chinese society and all its attendant anxieties. Instead of seeing it as a space that transcended

the social, we might then see it as a space which encompasses the social and all its messy heterogeneity. Yet at the same time, it was while firmly embedded in the local social context that women were able to experiment with new forms of social relations and new projects of self-making. In this way, I argue that Teacher Yuan's project—to create a space for women *qua* women to relate to each other—was also not entirely a failure.

Conclusion

In conclusion, my dissertation shows how Huangshanese are undertaking various projects of curating value. In chapters one and two, I show how locals attempt to curate Huangshan in general and Tunxi in particular as a certain sort of place. Local officials seek to make Huangshan's value as simultaneously a modern and civilized region of China that has preserved an otherwise-lost important cultural and historical heritage of China legible to urban Chinese and foreigners. Local Tunxinese attempt to assert a sense of deeply local value in the face of increased migration from outsiders from other counties in Huangshan and other parts of Anhui. They worry that "traditional" local values of insouciance that are thought to define the Tunxi character will be lost through increased competition from outside migrants.

In chapters two, three, and four, I explain why it is the case that the unique Huizhou languages are not part of the local cultural preservation project. China's history of diglossia means that local vernaculars are not part of the traditional dynastic literary tradition that local officials see the regions historical prestige as resting on. Similarly, models of connoisseurship mean that local language experts have little interest in local dialects as living, evolving forms of communication rather than as word lists or dictionaries. Local speakers do not have a firm sense of the local "speech" as a reified object that marks social difference, and thus are not particularly interested in preserving or revitalizing their language as inherent to a sense of local character. Huizhou language-use in Tunxi city has now become tied to a sense of intimacy and familiarity that makes it seem inappropriate to use as the language of the public sphere. Those who do use it in formal settings are generally seen to be elite middle-aged men whose kinship-based networks of power exclude all others. Finally, chapter three makes clear the explicit political stakes of the dialect for local officials, who contrary to Chinese language policy are actively discouraging

dialect use through a process of *premature eulogization*. As Huizhou-languages become associated with peasants and their undesirable, "backward" way of life, dialect-speaking is therefore an undesirable behavior that marks Huangshan as underdeveloped and backward. Although officials cannot say this, Huizhou dialects as an index of backwardness are thus incompatible with either the present modernization project or the cultural preservation project of Huanghsan's elite Confucian history.

In chapters five and six, I explore how local women experience state mediation in daily life by focusing on how women evaluate themselves and others through state logics and state rhetoric. I show how local women take up and appropriate state values by combining them with their own personal concerns and aims. In chapter five, I show how the Family Planning policy has shaped the moral or ethical frameworks through which women judged themselves and each other as particular types of women. These frameworks directly compete with other pre-existing ones, and I show how women in rural China navigate and calculate life choices through sifting through these various moral frameworks of what it means to be a good wife and filial daughter. While the existence of different frameworks give women choices, it also opens their choices up to judgment and censure from those around them. In chapter six, I show how the yoga studio, an ostensible space of leisure, exists as a place where different projects of person-making and nation-building come head-to-head in a direct and personal way. In this chapter I look at how processes of semiotic enregisterment bring together language with other material sensory and bodily qualities to create certain sorts of social types out of women in the studio. This process of caricaturization—of turning complex individuals into stereotypes, is integral to the social work of the yoga studio. For those who see yoga as integral to producing certain types of high-quality

Chinese citizens, policing the boundaries of who can participate in yoga is necessary to prevent the project from being derailed.

Epilogue

I arrived in Huangshan with a project to study village reading rooms in rural China. Shortly after my arrival, that project fell apart as I realized that the Huangshan government had no interest in me conducting that project, as like many policies, local enactment on the ground was sporadic and haphazard at best. Few village heads and the Huangshan Ministry of Culture were willing to host a foreign scholar with close academic ties to Beijing poking around and writing reports, potentially for higher-level government officials in the capital. I was *persona non grata* to the local Women's Federation, as my previous pre-field research in the area had raised suspicions that I might be an American spy or undercover journalist seeking to either uncover military secrets from the local military base or write sensationalist articles in the Western media about the evils of the "One-Child Policy." The reticence to speak to me extended from the Women's Federation to other government offices, such that few people wanted to go on record as having talked to the foreign scholar.

By the second month of fieldwork, I was frustrated and stuck. My projects, such as I had imagined them, had collapsed in front of me. Instead, I was left doing yoga and "hanging out" with the people I met through the social networks of yoga students and other neighborhood residents that I encountered during my daily life. Although I could not see it at the time, I believe that the unceremonious and complete failure of my previous projects was the best thing that could have happened to my project. My initial and enduring research interest has always been to better understand how the state still mediates the lives of ordinary Chinese citizens in mundane ways. Had I conducted an institutional ethnography, spending my days in government offices,

interviewing government officials, I am not sure I would have ever had the ability to answer my question. Instead, my position living in a yoga studio and doing yoga six days a week with a large network of local women gave me exactly the sort of access that I needed yet hadn't realized when I set up my project.

As I got to know and befriend these women as a fellow yoga student, I realized that far from being separate from "the state," yoga as a project was in the minds of my fellow students intimately tied up in the sorts of large-scale "civilization-building" campaigns that were once again present in the Chinese countryside. I also realized that it was through casual and candid conversations with women as friends where I might have a better sense of how women took up, interpreted, and internalized state values and goals. This held true as I expanded my research beyond the yoga studio: as I got to know and befriend the bureaucrats I had initially hoped to work with, I realized that the sort of information I was looking for was much more available to me in these informal, casual, and intimate settings. I had been hoping to learn more about Ministry of Culture *suzhi*-raising projects in villages, however my formal inquiries went nowhere. I did learn quite a bit about these projects when my erhu teacher invited me out for crayfish and beer with a group of her former classmates one warm weekend evening. Over many plates of crayfish and many pints of beer, I chatted and laughed with her close friends, one of whom worked as an armed customs guard in Kashgar and one of whom ran *suzhi*-raising projects for the Ministry of Culture. At the meal, we teased the customs guard, a soft-spoken and petite classically-pretty young woman in her early 20s, about carrying an automatic weapon. At some point, I was able to turn to my erhu teacher's friend and ask her about her work, not as an anthropologist interviewing a bureaucrat, but as a friend's friend inquiring about her occupation.

Much of my fieldwork involved interacting as individuals with the low and mid-level bureaucrats who enacted state policies, and who, like everyone else, were embedded in local social networks and subject to the varying competing pressures and demands of local social life, I was able to see firsthand how government bureaucrats must, like everyone else, negotiate and navigate the competing and often contradictory demands placed on them. On a personal level, I also felt a deep affinity for the bright and ambitious young people who were genuinely interested in improving life in their hometown.

In Huangshan, I was one of a handful of foreigners living there long-term, and the only one who was able to speak Mandarin. My primary position in the city was thus "Chinese-speaking foreigner." In this role, I attended various ceremonies, shook hands with high-ranking officials, gave speeches (usually impromptu), toured historic sights, attended banquets, sang karaoke, appeared on TV, and even modeled for tourism materials. While I did not find such a role particularly enjoyable, I "leaned in" to it as a source of access to a group of people who I might not otherwise have a chance to get to know. While this did not produce the sort of intimate access that I had with my young friends, it was through my own position as a "tool" of tourism promotion that I was best able to observe how local officials, mostly male, mostly middle-aged, undertook curation of the city. I learned to read between the lines and against the grain at banquets, and to observe in real time the many frictions and difficulties that were ultimately erased from the final products of state-produced media like TV programs or tourism brochures.

I was ultimately able to interview various government officials through the course of my fieldwork, mainly those in charge of enforcing language standardization, a topic considered less sensitive than women's issues or media production. These interviews were helpful and illuminating in their own way, but they never gave me access to anything more than "the party

line." Had I conducted the bulk of my fieldwork in formal institutional settings where I was known as an anthropologist, a scholarly expert with a formal affiliation at Renmin University in Beijing, I would not have learned a fraction of what I was able to learn nor been able to develop even a small number of the relationships I developed. I would have known bureaucratic employees as bureaucrats, not as people embedded in my social networks. Very likely, had I been closely affiliated with government institutions, I would not have been able to get to know my working-class friends at all, who I met by hanging out at the neighborhood news kiosk, and later, through volunteering at both a township elementary school in the Tunxi District and a village elementary school in Xiuning County (the school where my friend Xing taught).

The wide-ranging and heterogeneous nature of my fieldwork was then not due to any particular design or forethought on my part. It was entirely due to the generosity, openness, and decision-making of my informants, who shared with me the messy, exasperating, humorous, and rich experience of living life in ruralish China.

Appendix A: Labeled Map of Tunxi District

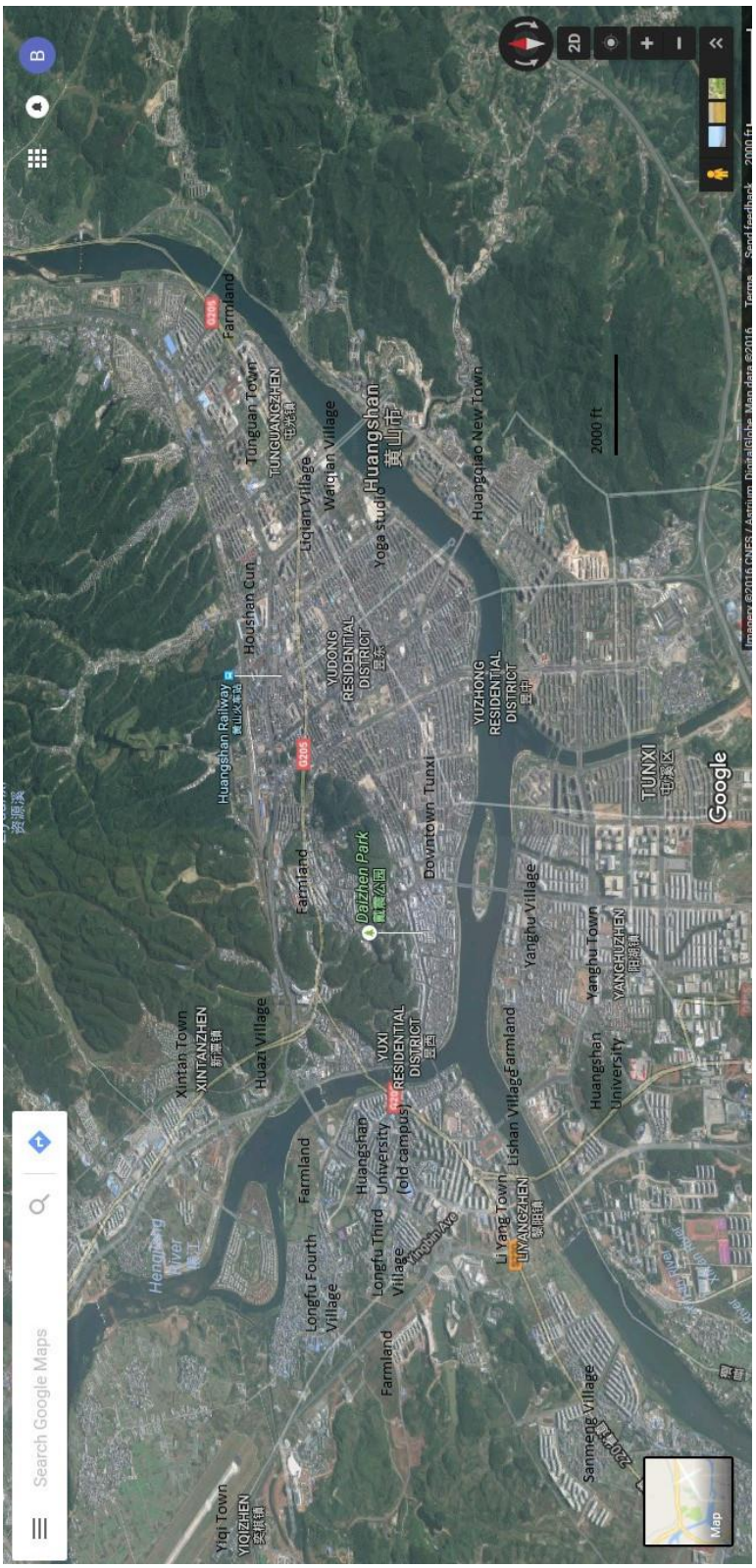

Figure 25 Map of Tunxi District with rural and urban areas labeled

Appendix B: Images of Huangshan from "Huangshan Dialects" Documentary

Women washing clothes in a river

Traditional Farming

Traditional forms of Transport

Huangshan Inhabitants

Figure 26: Documentary images that portray Huangshan as rustic



Images of Huizhou's "unique cultural heritage"






"Urban" Huizhou (images of urban centers as portrayed in the documentary)


Mr. Jin

Mr. Hu

Figure 26, Continued…

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