University of Alberta

Hindsight Hermeneutics:
Critical Reflections on Research with Middle School Teachers in Mainland China

by

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in

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Abstract

This thesis reports findings from research undertaken in the People's Republic of China. It explores the perspectives on educational reform of female, junior middle school teachers of English in urban, state operated schools in north-central China. At another level, the thesis is a conceptual, self-reflexive account of the research process, and especially of how I came to question the limits of understanding, interpretation, and explanation. Through an exploration of the epistemological and ontological precepts of Bourdieu and Gadamer, as well as the methodological procedures recommended by Ricoeur and further developed by John B. Thompson, I propose a *critical* or *depth hermeneutic* framework comprising three phases of analysis: *social-historical*; *formal or discursive*; and *interpretation/reinterpretation.* Using this approach, I engage in a discussion of the ways in which these teachers' perspectives are produced by and reproductive of the institutions and structures that circumscribe the social space of which they are a part.

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Acknowledgments

To pay homage to others at a moment that is normally taken to be a personal triumph is to acknowledge that one can never claim sole authorship over any piece of work. Each of us is inextricably part of a family, of many intertwined communities, and, in the end, of a larger world than we tend to acknowledge. Therefore, the number of names mentioned below might strike some as excessive. Each of them, though, has made a contribution in some form to my arrival at this stage of my life.

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This document is, in the end, the product of my studies in the Department of Educational Policy Studies. Many thanks to my two supervisors, Dr. Jennifer Kelly, who has passed on more wisdom than she is likely to openly claim, and Dr. Shibao Guo, whose ongoing guidance has continued despite his flight to parts south. Also thanks to Drs. André Grace and Ali Abdi, contributors of advice and reference letters, as well as to the members of my defense committee, Drs. Rosemary Foster and George Richardson. The assistance of the following people has in some way, whether small or great, helped along the way: Sandra Materi, Joan White, Barb Shokal, and Drs. Joe DaCosta and Frank Peters. Finally, thanks are due to my student colleagues in the department, too numerous to list here without unintentional exclusions: An Jin, Fu Xin, Cui Dan, Sarah Hoffman, Tonya Callaghan, Lydia Pungur, Jeff Baker, Liz Ocampo, Carolina Cambre, Bonnie Stelmach, Tatiana Gounko, Kris Wells, Colin Piquette, and many others.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to the teachers who participated in this study as well as my colleagues in China. It is perhaps the case that, over the past few years, I have been to some of them more burden than friend, more annoyance than help. I am indebted to them for their patience and support.

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Prologue
Coming to Inquiry

> New hotline offers support to teachers: work pressure, naughty students, and low pay are main problems. (Headline, China Daily, December 20th, 2006)

One's master's thesis is most often imagined as the culmination of many months, if not years of difficult study. For some, its completion means the achievement of a credential; for others, it represents a gateway to further study. And while in my own case, both of these apply, as I begin to write, I aim for something more than stale academic tome, more than my contribution to the library of blue-bound and seldom-read volumes of the my department's graduate student resource room. Indeed, were this act of writing to result in only this, I would be bitterly disappointed.

Having said this it cannot be denied that what you are about to read is a record of my labours in the service of the completion of my master's degree, a documentation of the research process in the typical sense of the term. In other words, I have conceived of a research problem, written a proposal, successfully passed an ethics review, traveled to China, recruited participants, generated data, and returned home to analyze the data and "write-up" my report. Seen in this way, what you are reading becomes the fulfillment of a requirement, a representation of my own submission to the "relations of ruling" (Smith, 1987) that discern a boundary between student and 'master' in the world of academic study. It is an audit-trail to be followed by those concerned with evaluating the process of my scholarly 'becoming.' I recognize, therefore, that I am engaged not only in the composition of a graduating essay, but in the realization of a particular social self-identity (Clark, 1998).

But of course the process that led to this writing was not as linear or unproblematic as such a terse accounting would suggest. Contrary to what is suggested above, I conceive of this document not as the transcribing of something known to me,

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but as a productive act, a continuation of a process begun some years ago, what Laurel Richardson (2005) calls "*writing as a method of inquiry*" (p. 960). The reality of this research project is that it has not proceeded smoothly along a predetermined path to 'completion'; it has, rather, struck many potholes, occasionally changing a conceptual/ theoretical/methodological wheel along the way. Thus, one of my goals is to disrupt the notion that one's research might somehow proceed according to a fixed and pre-planned agenda, that the whole of the project can at some point be framed in a perfect ethnographic moment that permanently positions researcher and researched; in practice, to pursue systematic, forward progress in qualitative research is impossible. Even as I write this passage, for example, I receive an email from one participant seeking my help to resolve a personal crisis. Another reminds me of a commitment I have made to help her realize a personal dream. In time of need, each rightly calls upon a friendship that has developed beyond the boundaries of *The Research*; borders have been and will continue to be crossed—the illusion of beginnings and ends is shattered.

At risk of appearing excessively self-absorbed, I should point out that this document is more than a record of ruminations on the self. It is also incumbent upon me to pass on the words of the five teachers who have entrusted me with their stories, to recognize how, having appointed myself their spokesperson and, thus, filter through which their accounts are strained, I have a responsibility to interpret their words without diminishing the truth as they see it. At the same time, to position myself as a reporter, as purveyor of "an account of accounts" [1] (Bourdieu, 1978, p. 21), would be to diminish the possibilities of critical inquiry to illuminate some 'truth' beyond the subjective perspectives of those embedded in this particular social context. As discussed below, the perspectives of social actors do not provide a transparent truth to be accepted without question. Indeed, even as they act upon and shape their world, the teachers whose perspectives provide the foundation of this work are rooted in a reality that shapes them in ways not always apparent to them. Such a version of the social—comprising both autonomous agents and limiting structures—recommends an in-depth exploration of both the accounts of social actors and the worlds in which they live. Positioning myself thus–as a critical cultural researcher—also demands a reflexive

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movement in which I "put myself forward" and consider my own role in retelling the stories told. To place the stories you are about to read in their proper context, I recognize how I too am bound to a context that makes and is made by me. Thus, I recall to some extent my origins as a researcher, as well as how living and working in China, how listening to and knowing these women as colleagues and friends has exposed and transformed my own life-world. This is *not*, in other words, "a chronicle where...[I] record events as unobtrusively as possible" (Lather & Smithies, 1997, p. xiii). It is, rather, a story of both "getting out of the way and getting in the way" (p. xiv) of a group of teachers whose lives called out to me in their otherness (Gadamer, 1988)

My thesis, then, while certainly a culmination of a specific phase of my own academic career, is also an account shaped by the tension between intent and result, between research as conceived in the mind of the researcher and delivered as the product of a dynamic interaction between actors situated in radically different and constantly shifting positions.

Genesis of the Research Questions

Delimitation of the Study

This study is an *interpretation* and *evaluation* of the self-understandings of a specific group of female, urban, middle school English teachers in a particular place and time. I commit myself, in other words, to "an emic or idiographic, case-based position" that relies on qualitative methods to situate participants' viewpoints (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 12) within the contexts in which they "act and interact" (Thompson, 1984). The findings presented here, then, should not be taken to represent the opinions of all Chinese teachers in all situations. This point is particularly relevant to this research, for, as Paine and DeLany (2000) rightly note, educational researchers in China, for a variety of reasons both practical and political, has tended to focus on the urban situation despite the fact that rural schooling is by far the more common experience. Their critique is surely correct, but my own experience suggests that the views represented here are frequently expressed by teachers in a broad array of

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situations and geographical locations. Therefore, I make no claims to *external validity* or *generalizability*, pursuing instead "rich" or "thick" description to allow for the possibility of *transferability* of findings to contexts that are nominally similar (Guba, 1981, p. 81; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 12).

Background of the Study

This document is the culmination of close to four years' work as a writer, editor, in-service trainer, and graduate student-researcher working with English language teachers in mainland China. I arrived in north-central China in 2002 to take up a position in a provincially owned educational publishing house whose series of English language texts and associated materials had been nationally approved for use in public schools. I was not the first 'foreign expert' to work with this company, nor did my arrival mark the beginning of the project. Following the initiation in 1996 of a program of educational reform in the host province, professors from my home university in Canada began cooperation with a Chinese team of compilers, an arrangement that is typical in the development of English language (EFL) textbooks in China[2]. These professors contributed to the planning and writing of a series of texts for primary grades three to six, and also participated in provincial, city, and county[3] level training institutes, as did a number of Canadian graduate students[4].

Prior to my arrival, however, none of the publishing company's foreign employees had stayed longer than seven months, so my one-year contract (and subsequent renewals) presented the possibility for a greater degree of immersion than had been the case for others. This prolonged stay gave me an opportunity to observe, participate in, and form opinions about the ongoing process of reform in that country's educational system. I hasten to add that my contribution, while perhaps substantial within the organization I worked in, could only be described as limited given the scale of the task and complexity of the educational system in which changes were being made, not to mention the surprising limitations that being a *wài guó zhuān jiā* (外国专家—foreign expert) imposes[5]. But my engagement also gave rise to a personal crisis, for despite the fact that I, as a teacher, was able to identify with educators' struggles in

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the classroom and school, I felt myself to be complicit in a systematic devaluation of teachers' practical knowledge and experience. Also notable is the fact that, as an employee of a for-profit publishing firm[6], I was uncomfortably implicated in the "tidal wave of marketisation" (Chan & Mok, 2001) that, from my perspective, does little to alleviate and much to exacerbate the degradation of teachers' working conditions, this despite official rhetoric to the contrary[7].

Two Moments of Disjuncture

By way of introducing the question(s) at the core of this study, I wish to relate two anecdotes, critical moments that contributed to my decision to adopt a particular approach to this research. I have chosen these stories not for their exceptionality but, rather, because they contain themes that played-out repeatedly in my work with and observations of teachers, educational authorities, publishing officials, and academics.

Moment One: Meeting the Teachers

The first anecdote is of my initial meeting with junior middle school teachers. Approximately three months into the fall school term, my partners and I spent several days preparing for a full-day seminar designed to provide teachers with ideas, strategies, and skills for using our company's recently introduced Grade Seven textbooks. The session was meant to be attended by as many as two hundred teachers, but drew no more than thirty because, I assumed, it was announced mere days before it was to take place. The quote below recalls our surprise when most teachers left when the first rest break arrived:

> We were supposed to have our first Junior High Seminar today BUT when we got there most of the teachers didn't even show up! There was supposed to be 120 and we ended up with 12! So we abandoned our seminar plan and had a sharing circle instead. We discussed all the problems the teachers are having. (Chrissy Cairns, Personal Communication, November 24th, 2002 in Wu & Spilchuk, 2003)

Those remaining complained openly about both the texts and the nature of the training. Following a few months of being praised for our excellent work, this was the first time that teachers had displayed anything less than a warm welcome. I learned later that these were not the first incidents of teacher resistance encountered by those working

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on the program's implementation. Similar situations are recalled by Spilchuk & Wu[8] (2002) as are the responses to the position my training partners and I found ourselves in:

> They are convinced that this NEW WAY is good for Canada but not suitable to China....We didn't have a chance to WOW them because all had their defenses up already. They all had disagreeable faces as soon as we entered the room. (Chrissy Cairns, Personal Communication, November 24th, 2002 in Wu & Spilchuk, 2003)

What I didn't know at that time was the degree of change that this new program represented for teachers. Nor had I developed an adequate knowledge of the beliefs and traditions that informed their practice, not to mention the working conditions that placed significant barriers before teachers in their positions as foot soldiers in the curriculum implementation agenda. Most importantly, I had not yet developed a self-critical reflex that would have allowed me to recognize the ways in which I had assumed my own knowledge and skills to be superior. This sense of superiority is easily discerned in the quotation above and, while not my own words, I do not dissociate myself from the gist of the remark. Indeed, much of the work of this research represents my desire to depart from this patronizing stance.

Moment Two: Getting Together-Sitting Apart

The second anecdote recalls my attendance at a gathering to discuss the new texts' progress. The meeting was held in part to address problems raised by teachers at the in-service session mentioned above, and included several experts in second language instruction from major Chinese universities, representatives from provincial and city educational authorities, officials and editors from the provincial publishing house, and several local junior middle school teachers. And while I relished the opportunity to take part in this discussion—I would hardly have expected to sit at a similar table in my home province—I also felt ill-equipped to participate fully. This was my first exposure to the complex ways in which teacher viewpoints can be simultaneously accommodated and invalidated; while the teachers present were given the opportunity to air complaints—and did so vigorously—their involvement came

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primarily after the fact of the texts' creation. I later learned that teachers tend to concur with this assessment:

Lorin:	Where did the changes come from? Who made the changes in the *xīn kè biāo* (新课标—new curriculum)?
Lǎo Pīng:	It is the experts from all around the country. (she laughs—the answer is obvious)
Lorin:	From all around the country?
Gāo Sù:	Yes. Some experts. Not teachers, but experts. (she laughs again).
Lorin:	Are teachers experts?
Gāo Sù:	No. (she deadpans—everyone laughs)

(Group Interview, October 7th, 2005)

As I sat in this meeting, it seemed to me that teachers' inclusion was more an effort to pacify them and explain 'proper' usage of the texts in order to ensure 'successful' implementation, and less a means of incorporating their concerns, knowledge, and experience into the texts. It was also here that I first recognized the privilege represented by my foreign expert certificate. Mere months into my stay in China and with little knowledge of the context in which teachers worked, it seemed that my voice was given more weight that day than that of teachers with many years' experience in the field.

I highlight these two incidents not because they are singular phenomena but, rather, because they stand-in for a string of similar episodes that played out repeatedly during the course of my work. Taken collectively, these events informed my initial perception of the disjuncture around which this research is formulated. As will be discussed Chapter 4, it is a truism that teachers occupy an important and respected position in Chinese society, a view typically supported by reference to a cosmology that makes specific reference to the teacher[9]. But my early observations suggested the need for a more complex understanding of teachers' social and professional status, particularly in light of the massive, reform-related changes occurring in Chinese society and, specifically, in the field of education. And while I trusted my perception that teachers did not derive the satisfaction that one might expect them to under

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conditions of high esteem, I also recognized how my outsider's ignorance of the socio-historical context limited my understanding (Cheng, 1997).

The Questions

These anecdotes illustrate how this study originated in a "routine and problematic moment" (Denzin & Lincoln, p. 3) that existing knowledge did not equip me to comprehend. As someone who had previously taught in Alberta, I felt confident with pedagogical content knowledge; past practice did not, however, prepare me for the difficulties associated with working in a complex, dynamic, and radically different culture. The movements described below, then, represent my effort to fill this gap. The questions that orient this study build on the work of Bourdieu (1977, 1997), Gadamer (1985, 1988, 1989), Thompson (1981; 1984; 1990), and, to a lesser extent, Lather (1991) to initiate a reflexively informed *depth interpretation* of the lives and work of contemporary Chinese English teachers. By way of coming to both understanding *and* explanation, I ask

- How do teachers perceive the conditions of their social and professional lives in the context of sweeping economic, social, and educational reform?
- How do they position themselves and/or see themselves positioned within this process?

Structure of the Thesis

The questions I pose do indeed spring from the experiences described above, but I have also modified them retrospectively as my thinking has come under a variety of influences during the process of writing this document. In Chapter 1, I review one of these, Pierre Bourdieu's critique of the epistemological stances of *objectivism* and *subjectivism* and his proposal of an alternative, third mode of *practical* apprehension of the social world. I then consider at length his notion of *habitus* and its relevance to this study. Finally, I summarize the guidance I have received from his insistence that the researcher maintain a constant *reflexive* stance. The second part of this chapter recollects the process by which I came to select Thompson's version of *depth*

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hermeneutics as a methodological orientation. My decision to follow Thompson's specific hermeneutic method was critically influenced by my reading of Gadamer's conception of the hermeneutic circle, a path I had pursued in order to resolve the problem of how to understand and interpret the data generated in the study. Therefore, I include in this chapter a substantial examination of Gadamer's thoughts on the *circle of understanding*.

The epistemological and ontological musings of Bourdieu and Gadamer give way in Chapter 2 to a detailed description of methodology, in this case of Thompson's *critical* or *depth hermeneutics*. In addition to detailing how the methodology has been applied in the present research, this chapter includes a substantial discussion of several key concepts, including *symbolic forms*, *culture*, and *ideology*.

Thompson's depth hermeneutic approach may be understood as a broad orientation, a methodology into which specific research methods may be inserted. In Chapter 3, I describe the techniques chosen to generate data. I supplement my rationale for making these decisions with an account, drawn from my research journal, of how participants were selected, approached, and eventually agreed to take part in the study. This chapter ends with each participant's self-introduction, augmented, when necessary, by additional information drawn from the data.

In Chapter 4, I present the results of the first phase of Thompson's depth hermeneutic process, the *social-historical analysis* of the conditions and relations in which participants construct their accounts of their lives. As Thompson insists, this stage of analysis is critical to an investigation that seeks not only *understanding* of agents' perspectives, but also causal *explanation* of the relationship between social structure and the realm of action. This stage is a necessary first step in a hermeneutically informed analysis and aims to provide a body of contextual knowledge by which participants' accounts of their lives in the context of educational reform may be understood.

Having thus contextualized the data, Chapter 5 summarizes a series of findings formulated during phase two of the depth hermeneutic procedure—*formal* or

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discursive analysis. It is here that I present, with special reference to the social-historical context presented in the previous chapter, an admittedly partial reproduction of the themes that were explored in conversations with the study's participants. I then undertake a structural analysis of the *symbolic forms* produced by participants', focusing on the strategies used to construct them. In doing so, I set the stage for Chapter 6, the final stage of depth hermeneutic analysis in which I consider the role of *ideology* as a (re)productive force in the social realm.

As suggested above, the goal of Chapter 6 is *interpretation* or *reinterpretation* of the participants' conventional accounts of reality. In the present study, I concern myself with ideology as an active and negative force in the social realm—how, that is, it implicates itself into participants' common-sense understandings of their lives and acts to reproduce asymmetrical power relations. As Thompson makes clear, the interpretations presented here are both creative and tentative, grounded in a contextualized understanding of participants' accounts, but nonetheless open to dispute and alternative interpretations.

Notes

[1] Bourdieu (1977) refers here to the interactionism of Schutz which "reduces the constructions of social science as 'constructs of the second degree, that is, constructs of constructs made by actors on the social scene'" or of Garfinkel's "accounts of the accounts which agents produce and through which they produce the meaning of the world" (p. 21).

[2] This type of cooperation mainly serves two goals: first, to add an element of 'authenticity' to the texts, i.e. to imbue them with a degree of 'native' proficiency in language and cultural knowledge; and second, to provide them with a sense of prestige derived from the expertise that is assumed to reside in the foreign (especially western) expert. Both goals serve to heighten the texts' marketability.

[3] I translate these levels of government—省 (*sheng*), 市 (*shi*), and 县 (*xian*)—as "province", "city", and "county" in accordance with common usage amongst my colleagues and others working in the education sector in China. On occasion 市 (*shi*) is translated as "prefecture" in order to make a distinction between the city as a distinct urban entity and as a larger administrative area which encompasses a number of counties. This hierarchy continues to the levels of *zhen* (镇—town) and *cun* (乡—village).

[4] For further details on this project and various participants' perspectives on it, see Fenwick (2001), Fenwick & Parsons (2001), Wu & Spilchuk (unpublished), and Otto-Steenbergen (2003).

[5] In the course of my work duties, I visited more than sixteen provinces to deliver in-service sessions of one to three days in length. I also had the opportunity to visit dozens of schools in these places and observe hundreds of teachers deliver lessons, occasionally in unplanned settings. Beyond this, I became intimately involved in translating teachers' complaints into revisions the have (hopefully) improved the quality of the textbooks they now use.

[6] My arrival to begin my most recent contract with this company coincided with their 'reform' of the employee salary structure, a 'restructuring' that resulted a twenty-five percent reduction for most

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employees. This meant that my salary and benefits were approximately seven to eight times that of my colleagues.

[7] Here I paint in broad strokes what has become a staple of reformist rhetoric since the post-Mao 'opening up' of China: the need for the elevation of teachers' professional and social status (for example of the centrality of this policy to general reform in China see, amongst many others, Cheng & Wang, 2004, and Li, 1999)

[8] Drs. Spilchuk and Wu planned and delivered an introductory week-long summer institute to middle school teachers prior to my arrival. Dr. Wu was the chief compiler of the texts for the Canadian team. Dr. Spilchuk was hired to design the in-service program to be further developed and delivered by teachers subsequently recruited by her.

[9] A full discussion of teachers' position in this cosmology appears in Chapter 5.

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Chapter 1
Conceptual Framework:
On Reflexivity, Understanding, & Interpretation

> There are ways of avoiding ethnocentrism which are perhaps no more than so many devices for keeping one's distance and, at all events, for making a virtue out of necessity by converting a *de facto* exclusion into a choice of method. (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 10)

As discussed above, this research represents the culmination of my work with English language teachers in mainland China. During this time, I have observed, participated in, and to some extent analyzed the ongoing process of reform in that country's educational system. It goes without saying that this experience has represented many things to me: a sense of camaraderie with a whole new set of colleagues; frustration as well as transformation of the self; and, along with these, disillusionment with my personal role in what I continue to see as a flawed process. Coming as it did in the midst of—indeed, as a *response to*—my engagement with Chinese educators, my re-entry into a university department with more than its share of critical educators only increased my desire to contribute to educational change in a more positive and personally satisfying way. It was this motivational miasma—a sense of solidarity, righteous outrage, and exposure to precepts of various critical research paradigms—that led me to a research design dependent on a number of theoretical concepts over which, in retrospect, I had little mastery, amongst them *emancipation*, *praxis*, and *reflexivity*. My purpose here is not institutional critique. My lack of mastery over these concepts has as much to do with time limitations and my own failure to sufficiently explore these concepts as it has to do with the lethargy and inadequacies of the university. But entering the writing phase of this project has meant revisiting the theoretical bases upon which this research was founded, a rather uncomfortable return to say the least, given the fact that continuous reading can only always serve to trouble even the most dearly held suppositions.

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The Limits of Objectivism and Subjectivism

It was the desire to better understand the last of these concepts, reflexivity, which led me to an exploration of Pierre Bourdieu's writings. But in doing so I unwittingly opened the door to a complete revision of the initial methodological orientation of my research program and, as a consequence, a reconsideration of the veracity of the sources upon which my data collection and analysis techniques had been founded. The body of work that led me to this change circumscribes an expansive conceptual field. Recognizing the futility of any attempt to summarize Bourdieu's *oeuvre* in this space, I instead ground my thoughts on reflexivity in his *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Bourdieu, 1977)—more precisely, one section ("Analyses") of one chapter ("The Objective Limits of Objectivism") of that work. This section outlines Bourdieu's rejection of the objective-subjective split in favour of a unified theory of practice. Bourdieu's synthesis has been useful in my effort to understand teachers' discourse about their lives as well as to posit some tentative explanation of the structures that influence, often invisibly, these accounts. My purpose here, however, is not to undertake a complete analysis of the data according to Bourdieu's formulations. Rather, it is to engage with this portion of Bourdieu's work in order to put it to use as a (meta)analytical tool in a critique of the foundations of my own research program. Through an analysis of my own prejudices and preconceptions, I model an approach to research that places *reflexivity* at its centre.

In this particular piece, Bourdieu examines the epistemic foundations of objectivist and subjectivist modes of knowledge with the goal of establishing a foundation upon which a third mode might be built. The problem with traditional anthropology, he insists, is that it effects a "theoretical distortion" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 1); the anthropologist, an 'outsider' with neither the means nor the motivation to move 'inside', is ensnared in the trap of the spectator, "condemned to see all practice as spectacle" (*ibid.*). If avoiding this hazard is difficult or even impossible, escaping it once trapped is an even thornier proposition. In the following passage, it is clear how

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my 'objective' outsider's viewpoint leads me to reduce Chinese teachers' experience to the spectacle of 'disempowerment':

> While I was confident with pedagogical content knowledge, past practice did not prepare me for the difficulty of working in a society with fundamentally different assumptions about the practice of teaching. Specifically, I was challenged by the disjuncture between the way political rhetoric ascribes to Chinese educators high status, and the air of disempowerment that surrounds the classroom teachers themselves. (Outline of Proposed Research, 2005)

Faced with what I deemed to be an intolerable situation, I immediately ascribed to teachers the same response—the struggle for 'empowerment'—that I would have had were I 'one of them'. In retrospect, I can also see how my limited knowledge of the socio-historical context of teaching in China provided little foundation for this conclusion. But it is equally clear how I attempted to overcome the limitations of my perspective through resort to a subjectivist[1] methodology. My initial research proposal demonstrates my belief that reading the world from the teacher's eye will resolve the problem of 'outsiderness':

> This observation led to my research question: what do Chinese teachers perceive their role to be in the current process of educational reform? (ibid.)

But as Bourdieu rightly points out, my proposal to enact an "elementary relativism" in which the object of study is "'knowing subject'" of his or her own life-world does not resolve the contradiction (p. 2). Re-positioning the social actor as self-analyst amounts to a transfer to a subjectively privileged informant the knowledge-limits that inhere in the outsider. Furthermore, one always risks misrecognizing the performative aspect of interviews, for "the interview is not a mirror of the so-called external world, nor is it a window into the inner life of the person" (Dillard in Denzin, 2001, p. 25). It is, rather "a simulacrum, a perfectly miniature and coherent world in its own right" (*ibid.*). Removed from the practice upon which her accounts are based, the 'native' becomes a stand-in for the ethnographer, disembodied observer of her own life-as-spectacle.

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Would I be justified, then, if I were to abandon my pursuit of the teachers' perspective in favour of an analysis of the objective structures of their social context? Bourdieu suggests that this, too, would be inadequate, for his goal is not to dismantle entirely two apparently antithetical modes of theoretical knowledge (i.e. subjectivist and objectivist); rather, his is an effort to "escape from the ritual either/or choice between objectivism and subjectivism" (p. 4), and to demonstrate that both exclude the existence of a third possibility, a practical mode of knowledge (*ibid.*) that would enable an "objective analysis of practical apprehension" (p. 3). He explains that one mode, the subjectivist, privileges an "unquestioning apprehension of the social world", avoiding altogether reflection upon "the conditions of its own possibility" (*ibid.*); the other, the objectivist[2] mode, validates the truth of objective structures in part through recognition of that which subjective knowledge excludes—conscious knowledge of the ways in which the social world inhabits and structures the individual (*ibid.*). Thus, Bourdieu offers a way out of the subjectivist trap by reclaiming the utility of objective analysis; one must effect a *reflexive* turn that considers the limits of objectivism without recourse to an all-consuming subjectivism. 'Object' and 'subject' are, for all intents and purposes, one. A *theory of a practice* that comprises both acting agents and causal structures is incomplete without a consideration of *habitus*, the embodied "dispositions" of social actors that "tend to reproduce" structures of which they themselves are a product (p. 5).

Human action, then, cannot be explained with reference to causal objective structures. In the present research, one need only pay attention to teachers' resistance to curriculum implementation initiatives to confirm that external mandates cannot be imposed wholesale on living, thinking beings. Yet any analysis based on the idea of an absolutely liberated agent is equally implausible. Were this the nature of action in the social world, how would we then explain social reproduction and the obvious socialization that takes place in the family, schools, and other institutions of our societies? In place of a crude choice between these two equally undesirable positions, Bourdieu proposes his *theory of practice*, an account of human action that at once requires the eschewal of subjectivism and, in order to avoid hypostatization or "*realism of the structure*", demands the "supersession" of "methodological

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objectivism" (1977, p. 72). *Habitus*, the core concept in his theory, comprises a set of "durable, transposable *dispositions*" produced in the individual through the influence of the "structures constitutive of a particular type of environment" (*ibid.*). It is, in other words, the result of the socialization that takes place within a given set of social conditions and relations. Thus engendered, it exists as "principles of the generation and structuring of practices" embedded in and unconsciously accessed by individuals in their everyday actions (*ibid.*). In doing so, in drawing upon these generative principles to formulate their actions, social agents confirm, reproduce, and contribute to the durability of these same structures. Habitus, we can say, is both *structured*—by the formations and conditions in which it is wrought—and *structuring*—i.e. reproductive of the structures to which it owes its specificity. That people are to some extent able to realize their own goals through conscious design presents the illusion of autonomy. For even the anticipation of the future (i.e. the planning and pursuit of one's goals and aims in life) is always also influenced by knowledge of past practice (i.e. what one has consciously or unconsciously absorbed in the process of attempting/succeeding/failing at things in a particular context). These understandings, furthermore, are contextually bound and are, therefore, a product of the structuring effects of objective structures (pp. 72-73). This does not mean that all action is predetermined in a manner that would allow it to be catalogued and predicted based on the presence of similar conditions. The influence of habitus does not exclude entirely the possibility of strategy, but nor are the actions it shapes reducible to the actors' intent. Rather, habitus manifests itself as a form of strategy devoid of conscious intent (p. 73). Such is the dynamic at play (according to my analysis in Chapter 5) in the interplay of participants' institutionally imparted professional habitus and the strategies they use to resist mandated policy. Despite the important role these acts of defiance play in alleviating the negative effects of top-down educational reform, the alternative structures formed by teachers tend to confirm hierarchy as the norm even as they interrupt the smooth operation of the conventional bureaucracy.

Given the ways in which particular dispositions are embedded as habitus, to what extent are human beings aware of and able to control them? Bourdieu suggests that objective analysis may at times demonstrate links between the statistical regularity

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of certain social phenomena and the aspirations of actors (i.e. proof that individuals are able to achieve that which they desire), but this does not confirm that these individuals have, based on past experience, *consciously* adjusted their motivation to desire that which is objectively probable (p. 77). The prognostic skill of everyday actors, i.e. for the "practical evaluation of the likelihood of success" or "*spontaneous interpretation of statistics*", is not the same as scientific estimation of probability that constructs knowledge according to precise rules of methodology (*ibid.*). Rather, the agent evaluates a given situation in light of "a whole body of wisdom, sayings, commonplaces, ethical precepts…and…the unconscious principles of the *ethos*…which determines 'reasonable' and 'unreasonable' conduct for every agent subjected to those regularities" (*ibid.*). This leads to a way of life from which the improbable is either barred as "*unthinkable*….or at the cost of the *double negation* which inclines agents to make a virtue of necessity, that is, to refuse what is anyway refused and to love the inevitable" (p. 77). According to Bourdieu, then, 'personal choice' has a different meaning than that to which we have become accustomed. Take, for example, how one participant, Gāo Sù, explains why she does not aspire to leadership:

Lorin: [Gāo Sù], would you like to be [a leader]?
Gāo Sù: No, no, no. I want to be the leader of my family.

She went on to explain, with the support of other participants, that "most" women are not suited to leadership, and that true happiness may be found in serving the family. My point here is not to cast aspersions on women's desire to dedicate themselves to family concerns, but, rather, to suggest that, in the absence of equal opportunity to assume leadership roles in the school, they tend to present as personal preference the only choice realistically available.

Bourdieu goes on to account for the *durability* (i.e. persistence over time) and *transposability* (i.e. exchangeability) by examining the nurturing function and collective character of social structures and institutions. The notions described in the previous paragraph, of 'objective possibility' and 'virtuous improbability' *qua* habitus, he says, are a product of the objective conditions in which they were formed,

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disproportionately so under the influence of early-life experience (p. 78). They are, then, the durable "basis of perception and appreciation of all subsequent practices" (*ibid.*). Bourdieu describes this condition of habitus formation as the "*hysteresis effect*" and implies that it is the source of intergenerational conflict over values and norms as well as a source of social change (*ibid.*). For habitus is also a social trait and is, therefore, both historically dynamic and shared—it "produces individual and collective practices, and hence history, in accordance with the schemes engendered by history" (p. 82). Historical change, in other words, ensures that the conditions under which dispositions form are always different, and it is these transformations that result in divergent forms of habitus in otherwise (apparently) homogenous communities (*ibid.*). Put simply, what is unacceptable to a generation whose habitus was formed at a specific historical juncture may not be negatively sanctioned by members of another cohort influenced differently.

I wish to re-emphasize at this point that Bourdieu proposes neither an elementary subjectivity nor an all-encompassing return to a deterministic structuralism: his is an empirical and *relational* sociology that resists "all forms of methodological monism that purport to assert the ontological priority of structure *or* agent[3]" (Wacquant, 1992, p. 15). Against conceptions of social life as a choice between individual will and societal limitations (*ibid.*), Bourdieu proposes structured yet malleable *fields* of play in which the agent's virtuosic *sense* of the game (habitus) allows the deployment of *strategy* to influence reality at the moment of its realization. For this reason, he is suspicious of phenomenological approaches that privilege "native experience" (p. 18) and "native theories" *of* that experience (p. 19). This is not because, as one might suspect, he is pessimistic about the human capacity for self-determination; but, rather, because he notes how the social actor as informant, imagined as master of her own practice and rational observer extracted from the everyday gamesmanship of life, "tends to draw attention to [only] the most remarkable 'moves'", thus obscuring the ways in which action is both spontaneous *and* guided by principles of which he is at best only partially aware[4] (pp. 18-19). Here the researcher is in "a particularly bad position", reliant as he is upon taking as "gospel truth the official discourses which informants are inclined to present...as long as they see

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themselves as spokesmen mandated to present the group's official account of itself" (p. 37). Drawing on the present research to illustrate this dilemma, how should I understand one participant's assessment of her personal power and my response to her account?

> Returning to [Wáng Diàn], I was quite surprised today by her cavalier attitude about leaving the school during non-teaching hours, and leaving for most of the day. She tells me that it doesn't really matter. She is a grade leader, not to mention an excellent teacher who can do "whatever I want!" (Research Journal, September 22nd, 2005)

> While [Wáng Diàn] may be in some senses exaggerating her autonomy, I have not seen much evidence otherwise. (ibid.)

Is her 'subjective', insider's assessment more valid that mine as the 'objective' outsider? Is my oblique allusion to an omnipresent force to which she is subject more 'truthful' than her judgment? And what of my apparent willingness to uncritically accept her analysis? Does my present lack of awareness of contradictory explanations mean that none exist? To present a 'construct of the second degree' or 'account of an account', Bourdieu warns, is to miss the point (p. 21). Such subjectivist moves are valid, he contends, provided I do not present these "pre-scientific representation[s]...as if [they] were a science of the social world" (*ibid.*). Even this strategy, though, is flawed, as it will always function to conceal the "structures which govern both practices and the concomitant representations" thereof (*ibid.*). Wáng Diàn's refusal to legitimate restraints and my own uncritical approval of this 'truth' do not, therefore, eliminate the possibility of their existence. Indeed, what I fail to notice in this journal entry is that, in framing her actions as a form of resistance, Wáng Diàn presupposes the existence of some form of limitation. That she does so should not surprise; as Bourdieu explains, "if a system is to work...agents must not be entirely unaware of the truth...while at the same time they must refuse to know and above all to recognize it" (p. 6). But the degree of this (non)recognition is not fixed from moment to moment. Despite the above statements, Wáng Diàn at times explicitly acknowledges the boundary that gender circumscribes:

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> Equally interesting was her assertion to me a couple of years ago (in the presence of many of her school colleagues) that she would prefer to be a man, because "they can do anything they want!" (ibid.)

We must also recognize the limitations of *post festum* description of action, which is always subject to the objective limits of the descriptive languages available to the informant[5] (p. 18). An actor's after-the-fact recollection of the reasons for and motivations behind her actions cannot, in other words, be accepted as explanation for an act, for action is always to a large degree unplanned and spontaneous. Nor should we reduce action to some biologically instinctive response. A theory aiming to discover the *generative schemes of practice* considers both: first, it grants epistemological privilege to the objective discovery of structures and their structuring effects and, additionally, it introduces "the immediate lived experience of agents" without resorting to representations of that experience (Wacquant, 1992, p. 11).

At this point, I step away from explication and summation of Bourdieu's text in order to consider more fully the implications of his theory for my own research. By implications, I do not mean how the questions he raises might influence my choice of data collection methods in the future. Rather, I am concerned with the method implicit in his analysis of objectivism and subjectivism. In addition to providing a theoretical basis for a third mode of knowledge, the text guides us toward a methodology based on the maintenance of "a position of constant reflexivity" (Miller, 2002, p. 87). In preparing this initial plan for my own research program, I drew on Lather's (1986) conception of "self-reflexive reciprocity" as a vital element in the pursuit of "emancipatory knowledge". In retrospect, I realize now that my initial understanding of researcher reflexivity was as a sort of advanced form of *reflective* practice in the mode my own students adopt in their pre-service teaching program[6]. For Bourdieu, however, reflexivity goes beyond simple declarations of one's sex, gender, or class standpoints, though he accepts that these social locations do "blur the sociological gaze" (Wacquant, 1992, p. 39). More than a mere backward glance on research methods gone right and wrong, "genuine reflexivity" has little to do with "engaging in …'Reflections on Fieldwork'" after-the-fact (Barnard in Wacquant, p. 41). Beyond these (and other) relatively simple reflexive moves, Bourdieu insists that true

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reflexivity demands the analyst's systematic attention to *scientific habitus*, the dispositions inscribed in the researcher as a result of being positioned in a disciplinary field (*ibid.*). Ethnographers are separated from the 'objects' of their study and, thus, "their differential distance to the necessity immanent to the universe under examination" is a truth that demands that the "epistemological unconscious... [be]... unearthed" (Bourdieu in Wacquant, 1992, p. 41). Bourdieu does not call the would-be researcher to ensure objectivity through withdrawal from action; conversely, any research claim to have entered the action as a full participant should be regarded with suspicion. Nor, he suggests, should one seek a solution in a morally pregnant crusade to "give voice" to an empowered subject, as my own research once proposed. Rather, it is a call to a different scientific construction of objects. Its purpose is, quite simply, "to produce objects in which the relation of the analyst to the object is not unwittingly projected" (p. 42), one that is adequately aware of the conditions of possibility of discovery of that which it seeks regardless of the particular data generation or collection methods used.

My engagement with Bourdieu has thus far helped me to develop a more nuanced epistemological stance, as well as more complex understanding of the nature of action and reflexivity. But the question remains: how can one gain access to and, following from this, claim even partial knowledge of the reality of another individual or group? In the next section, I consider the conditions of possibility of such understanding through an exploration of the philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer.

Theorizing Understanding & Interpretation

> ...whatever entices us to understand has first to have made itself prominent in its otherness... (Gadamer, 1988, p. 77)

In this section, I pursue two purposes concurrently. First of all, I continue the methodological reflections begun in my reading of Bourdieu. I move well beyond the *genesis* of research questions and edge my way toward the formulation, in Chapter 2, of a general methodology that will allow me to make more productive use of the data generated in 'the field.' If entry into the field would normally represent an *exodus*, it is

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important to re-emphasize at this point that the data generation techniques described in Chapter 3 were chosen *prior to* the methodology eventually used to analyze the data itself. They were devised, in other words, assuming an entirely different analytical scheme. Thus, this document affirms my suspicion that a teleological conception of research—i.e. as an orderly progression in which a question is conjured (genesis), a method for its investigation summoned forth (exodus), and a solution ultimately discovered (revelation)—is implausibly idealistic. Indeed, I invoke this problematic metaphor to draw attention to the irony of an after-the-fact move to impose linearity upon what is a fundamentally non-linear activity. As Gadamer (1988) makes clear, "the essence of a question is to open up possibilities and keep them open" (p. 77); to pose a question, that is, will always lead to the formulation of further questions as the problem is redefined in the act of investigation. In light of this observation, all findings of the kind put forward in this volume should be seen as partial and contingent. Limited by an arbitrarily established end point, they may be subject to reformulation and modification as new information and analyses enable the construction of fresh understandings.

I begin by revisiting the circumstances that first allowed and then motivated me to undertake the study. Using Gadamer's formulation, I wonder, what otherness enticed me to pursue this research as I have? I recollect, in other words, the conditions in which pursuit of the initial research question became both desirable and possible. At the same time and in recognition of my critical role in the production of knowledge about *them*, I respond to the call to "put myself forward" as a researcher (Absolon & Willett, 2005), to interrogate the prejudices that effect and affect my understanding, to examine myself as "a carrier of [a] complex and contradictory" tradition productive of a *scientific habitus* (Gadamer, 1989; Wacquant, 1991; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 22) that shapes my approach to the unknown. In this section and the two chapters that follow it, I construct a self-reflexive account of methodology that depicts the emergence of a non-static research design as well as the ways in which it evolved in the field. In the first stage of this recollection, I draw on the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer (1988, 1989) to explicate the *hermeneutic circle*, a concept central to this interpretive approach.

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Hermeneutics: Engaging the Self in the Other

> Harmonizing all the particulars with the whole is at each stage the criterion of correct understanding. Its absence means the failure to understand. (Gadamer, 1988, p. 68)

> The true historical object is not an object, but rather the unity of this One and the Other, a relationship in which the reality of history consists just as much as the reality of historical understanding. (p. 78)

My initial motivation for considering hermeneutics was the need to address the problem of respondent-researcher understanding, one that is common to all qualitative research, but which posed a particular problem in this case. My research was undertaken in mainland China and included individual and group interviews with six participants comprising five female, native-Chinese speakers and me, a male, Canadian, native-English speaker. Interviews were conducted in both languages even though, as we came to discover, none of us could claim fluency in the second language. A superficial analysis of this description exposes a number of critical identity factors—amongst them sex/gender, language, and social status[7]—that challenged my vision of forming a research cohort based on what Patti Lather (1991) calls "reflexive reciprocity". And while the conversations these teachers and I had were enjoyable and resulted in the expression of much of interest to all parties, a critical question remains: given the play of social, cultural, and language factors, to what degree can it be said that we were able to understand one another in a way that allowed us to access 'the truth' about the topics discussed? Clearly there is no easy answer to this question, but the discussion below does outline a number of possibilities.

As the quotations that head this section suggest, hermeneutics is concerned with an "art of understanding"—in its traditional mode, with classical and biblical written texts—in which the reader/interpreter, in anticipation of unification of meaning, engages in a circular process whereby whole and part are harmonized (Gadamer, 1988, p. 68). If we view the history of hermeneutics as an 'opening-up', as a re-orientation inclusive of the inner world of the interpreter as a part and the world itself as a textual whole, then we can see how these reflexive and inclusive moves position hermeneutics as central to the human sciences. From the recognition that a degree of

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contextualization is necessary to an understanding of social phenomena (Patton, 1990; Thompson, 1981, 1984, 1990) arises the need to examine the subjective situations of both author and interpreter, of social actor and the researcher who seeks to understand. To accept as true that "thought and feeling are always culturally shaped and influenced by one's biography, social situation, and historical context" (Rosaldo, 1993, p. 103), and further that action itself "belongs, as manifestation of a creative moment to the whole of the author's inner life" (Gadamer, 1988, p. 69), is to submit to the hermeneutical rule that "we must understand the whole from the individual and the individual from the whole" (Gadamer, 1988, p. 68).

When applied—as a mode of qualitative inquiry—hermeneutics refuses mere description of objective social reality and asks instead, "what are the conditions under which a human act took place or a product was produced that makes it possible to interpret its meanings?" (Patton, 1990, p. 30). Encouraged by this basic grasp of hermeneutics, I began to see it as an approach with potential applications in my research. In what follows I undertake a close reading of a portion of Gadamer's *Truth and Method* (1989) entitled "On the Circle of Understanding" (in Connolly and Keutner, 1988). Rather than restrict my reading to this single part, I supplement it with reference to the larger text from which it is drawn. By way of coming to understanding, I ask, under what conditions did this text come to be written? To whom did the author respond and what were the effects of his doing so? What critiques have been proffered in response to his and, finally, how is his work positioned within the contemporary academic context?

The ' Circle of Understanding '

Placed within the larger context of *Truth and Method,* Gadamer's consideration of the hermeneutic circle becomes a history of the development of contemporary hermeneutics. His initial focus is a critique of Idealism[8] and the Romantic hermeneutics of the German theologian and philosopher Schleiermacher, whom Gadamer nevertheless credits with extending the "hermeneutical problem from understanding what is written to understanding discourse in general" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 186). According to Gadamer (1988), Schleiermacher differentiated the hermeneutic

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circle according to its objective and subjective sides (p. 68). He made clear that even as syntactic parts belong to a textual whole—as in the chain of belonging that ties word to sentence to text, etc.—so too does the text exist within the subjective whole of the author's inner life (*ibid.*). Understanding exists to the extent that the objective (text) and subjective (author) can be reunited as a whole (p. 69). Thus, psychological investigation (of the author) is placed alongside grammatical interpretation (of the text itself) (*ibid.*). To access the truth, the original meaning of the text, one must enact a "divinatory process...[a] placing of oneself within the whole framework of the author" as means of re-creating the creative act (Gadamer, 1989, p. 187).

Gadamer, however, rejects both the subjective and objective foundations of Schleiermacher's argument. Understanding a text or the utterances of another is not an act in which we stand inside the author (or conversational partner) in an act of re-creation; it is, rather, one in which we enter into a relationship of trust with that which we wish to understand—we "let stand [the other's] claim of correctness....and [even] attempt to strengthen [its/his/her] arguments" (*ibid.*). It follows that the job of the interpreter is "to illuminate this miracle of understanding" by recognizing it as a "participation in shared meaning" (*ibid.*). Schleiermacher's objective conception, furthermore, forgets that the goal of hermeneutics is the pursuit of "agreement in the matter at hand" whose history has been that of an effort to "restore lagging or interrupted meaning" (*ibid*). Gadamer maintains that the philologist Friedrich Ast (1778–1841) was on the right path in his efforts to reconcile the past with the present, to understand, that is, the truth of the present through illumination of the past (p. 70; Gadamer, 1989, p. 178). Here he returns to Heidegger, who rejects altogether a conception of the circle comprising indeterminate subjective and objective moments (p. 293). Where Romantic hermeneutic theory conceived of the circle "within the framework of a formal relation between part and whole" and posited a back and forth movement that ceased with the achievement of understanding, Heidegger's circle is "neither subjective nor objective" (*ibid.*); rather, it is "determined by the anticipatory movement of fore-understanding"—as an element of the nature of understanding itself (*ibid.*).

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Hermeneutics, then, is a space of understanding that by necessity includes those parts of us that cannot be removed: the pre-opinions and prejudices by which understanding of our cultural world becomes possible. Understanding requires the recognition and screening of the interpreter's "imperceptible habits of thinking" (1988, p. 71). To understand, therefore, is to carry out projections of one's tentative readings of parts onto the whole (*ibid.*), where constant revision occurs and understanding is reconstituted. Consequent revisions are once again projected (*ibid.*) and worked out alongside all others until some semblance of a unity of meaning appears (p. 72). The task of interpretation is one of eliminating inadequate projections in favour of those that prove themselves in their application to the object of analysis (*ibid.*). A basic demand of hermeneutic inquiry, in other words, is that the interpreter must adopt a stance of constant self-reflexivity, an awareness of how one "is defined by his or her own historical epoch, society and culture, educational background, linguistic ability, familiarity with a subject matter, and purpose or practical interests" (Gallagher, 1992, p. 5). As Gadamer puts it, "it makes good sense for the interpreter…to test the living pre-opinion in himself for its legitimacy" (1988, p. 72).

But this is not to suggest that in knowing oneself one should endeavour to bracket those things that might influence one's reading. Indeed, to do so would be to eliminate the possibility of understanding itself. The key to grasping this precept lies in the realization that Gadamer "rehabilitates the concept of prejudice" by reclaiming its pre-Enlightenment meaning and giving it a "positive value" (1989, p. 277). The notion of value free or un-biased discovery is a presupposition whose origin may be found in Enlightenment rationality and should be understood as a prejudice of reason itself (p. 270/276). But prejudice, despite our modern understanding of it, "does not necessarily mean a *false* judgment [emphasis added]"; rather, it may "have either a positive or a negative value" (*ibid.*). The distinction here is between "unproductive prejudices" and those that are "justified prejudices productive of knowledge" (pp. 278-279). Interpretation is thus 'freed' through the radical application of a device (i.e. prejudice) that is always present when we approach 'the other': "openness for the opinion of the other or of the text will always include setting it in relation to the whole of one's own opinions or setting oneself to it" (1988, p. 72). Here the specter of

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relativism[9] raises its head briefly, but is quickly put to rest. Truth is, in a sense, negotiated as "the text presents itself in its otherness...[and] play[s] off its truth in the matter at hand against the interpreter's pre-opinion" (p. 73). But Gadamer insists that, while there is in the interplay of interlocutors (or text and reader) the possibility of many opinions, not all opinions are equally possible when compared against the expectations of pre-opinions of the listener/reader (*ibid.*). Thus, understanding is always produced with the active pre-understanding of the interpreter, and is not, as the Romantics would have it, a result of a "divinatory act of putting oneself into the other" (p. 74).

The rehabilitation of prejudice allows Gadamer to propose that the restoration of understanding of the text requires a singular prejudice: the "anticipation of perfection" (*ibid.*). The act of reading, that is, includes the assumption that a "perfect unity of meaning" might result (*ibid*). As suggested above, when we enter into an interactive situation (whether in reading or in conversation), we assume the truth of what is related to us, unless, upon engagement, we come to suspect it is not, in which case we "endeavor to 'understand' the text as the opinion of another" (p. 75). But we always also bring a "prejudice of perfection" in which we expect that not only will the text express its opinion completely, but also that what it says is the *complete* truth (*ibid.*). What Gadamer proposes here is a form of 'dialogical hermeneutics'[10] in the sense that the meaning of a text emerges in relation to the interpreter's unique engagement with the text: "to understand means primarily to understand [oneself in] the subject matter, and only secondarily to detach and understand the opinion of the other as such" (*ibid.*).

To this "hermeneutics of trust" (Ricoeur in Gallagher, 1992, p. 21) Gadamer adds that it must always be assumed that the listener or reader has either a pre-existing connection to the tradition to which the text belongs or that he or she might develop one (1988, pp. 75-76). But it is also the case that this link is not that which exists in "the case of the unbroken continuity of a tradition" (*ibid.*). Indeed, whatever the degree of familiarity, the possibility of hermeneutical understanding exists in a space between "strangeness" and "familiarity" (*ibid.*). Difference, in this case, is not a

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barrier to the discovery of truth or understanding; temporal distance is productive: "time is not…an abyss to be bridged because it divides and holds apart, it is rather…the supporting ground of the event in which present understanding has its roots" (p. 76). As discussed above, the task of hermeneutics is the restoration of understanding. It assumes as its starting point difference—in time, space, culture, or opinion. Gaps between self and other are the productive interstices of "possibility for understanding" (*ibid.*). Put differently, "*understanding is always the fusion of these horizons*", that of the text and that of the interpreter (1989, p. 306). It is clear at this point that Gadamer rejects standard divisions of objective *things* and *subjective* interpretations of them. Understanding, as an ontological condition, is achieved in the unity of self and historical-cultural other: "the true historical object is…the unity of this One [self] and the Other, a relationship in which the reality of history consists just as much as the reality of historical understanding" (p. 78).

Reception/Critique of Gadamer's Theory

To this point, I have generally aligned myself with Gadamer's view of hermeneutics. In doing so, it will be recognized that one could stand on softer ground. As Charles Taylor puts it, Gadamer "has made a tremendous contribution to twentieth century thought, for he has proposed a new and different model, which…shows promise of carrying us beyond the dilemma of ethnocentrism and relativism" (2002, p.126). Here Taylor underlines the importance of Gadamer's conceptualization of understanding as analogous to the interaction of "speech-partners", a metaphor that offers a new starting point for inquiry into the social. But I do not mean to suggest that his theory has been received without reservation. By way of considering the most significant of these challenges, I turn to Gallagher's (1992) typology of hermeneutics and its characteristic impasses.

Gallagher divides the field of hermeneutics into four traditions: conservative—the approach of Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Emelio Betti (1890–1968), and E. D. Hirsch (b. 1928) (p. 9); moderate—of which Gadamer and Paul Ricoueur (b. 1913) are the most prominent examples (*ibid.*); radical—inspired by Heidegger and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) and associated with Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) and Michel

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Foucault (1926-1984) (p. 10); and critical—developed by critical theorists such as Jurgen Habermas (b. 1929) and Karl-Otto Apel (b. 1922) (*ibid.*). Gallagher uses this map of the field to frame his discussion of three major impasses (*aporias*) that haunt hermeneutics. The significance of these debates for the purposes of the current discussion is that each takes Gadamer's hermeneutical theory (and *Truth and Method* in particular) as its point of departure.

The first aporia, *reproduction*, involves a disagreement between conservatives, who suggest that the author's original intention can be recovered, and moderates, who insist that discovery of essential meaning is neither desirable nor possible (pp. 12-15). This divergence, which may be understood as a struggle between proponents of objectivity (i.e. conservative or traditional hermeneutists) and those who reject it as a universal goal of inquiry (i.e. moderates), comprises the primary point of discussion in *Truth and Method.* As discussed above, Gadamer, as a moderate, rejects outright notions of objective re-creation of original intent through a bracketing of the interpreter's prejudice and a psychic relocation 'into' the author, as conservatives like Schleiermacher recommend. Understanding, Gadamer holds, is always accomplished in a dialogic middle ground, a space in which the definitional privilege of the originary moment is redistributed amongst an infinite array of interpretive instants. As Taylor insists, this sense of a "bilateral....coming to an understanding with an interlocutor" (2002, p. 127) is Gadamer's most important contribution to modern social science.

In the second aporia, over *authority and emancipation*, Gadamer and Habermas (representing critical hermeneutics) differ on the question of the relationship between different forms ('scientific' and 'natural') of language (pp. 15-19). Gadamer insists that all language contains the possibility of translation from one form to another; the potential for understanding, in other words, is a fundamental potentiality of all moments of intercourse. Thus, in the case of the specific quarrel between the two, Gadamer holds that the translation of scientific information and its integration into social consciousness through the structures of society is achievable (p. 16). Habermas, on the other hand, questions the universality of language: is there, he asks, "a universality, based on language, that bridges the dividing line between the

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monological language systems of science and dialogical natural language[?]" (p. 17). He claims that Gadamer is not sufficiently aware of those "extralinguistic experiences" and "extrahermeneutical factors", such as the distortions produced bys "force, compulsion, and coercion", which "always limit language" and interpretation (*ibid.*). In response, Gadamer accepts the possibility of distortion, but maintains that all experience, even extra-linguistic, comes to representation through and is thus mediated by language (*ibid.*) While it is clear that Habermas rejects what he might call Gadamer's naïve take on communication (p. 18), it is equally apparent that they are in agreement on the dialogical nature of understanding.

The third and most radical aporia troubles the very possibility of dialogue or *conversation*. For Jacques Derrida, Gadamer's approach does not break with the past, but, rather continues the tradition of conservative interpretation that takes as its goal the discovery of some form of "hidden truth, origin, being, or presence" (p. 20). He posits *radical deconstruction* as a successor to hermeneutics or, at least, as a second form of what might be termed *antihermeneutics* (pp. 19-24). This radical alternative, drawn from the earlier and subsequently self-repudiated thought of Heidegger, removes permanently any reference to origin, "affirms play and tries to pass beyond man and humanism" (Derrida in Gallagher, 1992, p. 20). The fundamental disagreement between the two lies in their divergent conceptions of the nature of language itself: for one, Gadamer, the ontological foundation of language may be found in the act of dialogue (p. 21); for the other, the poststructuralist Derrida, language is "a play of signifiers with indeterminate meaning" (*ibid.*). Derrida, in other words, rejects a key foundation of Gadamer's theory—that interpersonal trust is the default condition of communication—and, thus, raises questions around the very "possibility...of truth, conversation, and transformation" (p. 23).

* * *

My exploration of Gadamer's thought has encouraged a more complex understanding of the nature of communication and interpretation. But, given Gadamer's refusal to discuss matters of methodology, it becomes necessary, if I am to achieve my stated goals, to identify a multifaceted and inclusive hermeneutic approach.

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In the next chapter, I narrow my focus, moving from the broad theoretical concerns of Bourdieu and Gadamer to the more directly applicable interpretive methodology of John B. Thompson.

Notes

[1] Here Bourdieu refers to phenomenological knowledge, especially the voluntarism of Sartre's existentialism and the *ethnomethodology* of Garfinkel (King, 2005, p. 221).
[2] Bourdieu finds a "structural hermeneutics" that draws on Saussurian linguistics, especially as practiced by Leví-Strauss, "equally problematic, because human culture [can]not be reduced to a product of universal cognitive templates operating above the heads of individuals" (*ibid.*).
[3] Wacquant points out that "the relational perspective that forms the core of [Bourdieu's] sociological vision is not new" but is, rather, "part and parcel of a broad, 'polyphyletic and polymorphous' structuralist tradition that came to fruition in the postwar years in the work of Piaget, Jakobson, Levi-Strauss, and Braudel, and that can be traced back to Durkheim and Marx (Merton in Wacquant, 1992, p. 16).
[4] *Learned ignorance* is central to Bourdieu's theory of practice: "the explanation agents may provide of their own practice...conceals, even to their own eyes, the true nature of their practical mastery, i.e. that it is *learned ignorance* (*docta ignorantia*), a mode of practical knowledge not comprising knowledge of its own principles."
[5] Bourdieu refers to "semi-learned grammars of practice—sayings, proverbs, gnomic poems, spontaneous 'theories'" all of which serve to obscure the "generative schemes" upon which practice draws (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 20).
[6] The course I teach, "Managing the Learning Environment", asks students to undertake an in-depth examination of their own assumptions about the nature of students and the purpose of education, among other matters. Despite my entreaties, most take "reflection" to mean that they should always reconsider their lesson plans after attempting to deliver them.
[7] I am referring here to my legal status as a *wai guo zhuan jia* (foreign expert), a designation granted to all expatriates working (legally) in China.
[8] My starting point was thus the critique of Idealism and its Romantic traditions. It was clear to me that the forms of consciousness of our inherited and acquired historical education—aesthetic consciousness and historical consciousness—presented alienated forms of our true historical being. The primordial experiences that are transmitted through art and history are not to be grasped from the points of view of these forms of consciousness. (Gadamer, 1977, Retrieved from http://www.philosophy.ucf.edu/ahgad.html)
[9] Here I understand *relativism* to refer generally to positions that "reject absolute or universal standards or criteria" of truth (Scott & Marshall, 2005).
[10] Ricoeur terms this a "hermeneutics of trust" (in Gallagher, 1992, p. 21).

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Chapter 2
The Methodology of Depth Hermeneutics

To address the core questions proposed in the introduction, I draw on Thompson's (1981, 1984, 1990) program of *critical hermeneutics*, a form of *depth hermeneutics* well-suited to interpretation concerned with the role of *ideology* in everyday life (p. 23). I explore Thompson's account of the structure of social reality with reference to two essential theoretical contributions. Each dismantles as myth the *agency-structure* binary that has haunted the historical development of the human sciences: Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) *theory of practice* and Anthony Giddens' (1976) theory of *structuration*. Following this, I delineate the ways in which Thompson's three principal phases of analysis—"social-historical analysis", "discursive analysis", and "interpretation/reinterpretation" (Thompson, 1990, p. 22)—are applied in the current study. In doing so, I adopt an epistemological stance that rejects the traditional objectivist-subjectivist divide in favour of an approach that enables "*the interpretive transformation of doxa* [emphasis in original]" (Thompson, 1990, p. 25).

Reclaiming Methodology

In order to accomplish a thorough explication of Thompson's methodology and its application in the present study, I must first carry out a brief exploration of an additional personage. For between the ontological ruminations of Gadamer and Thompson's proposal of a distinct form of hermeneutics resides the transitional figure of Paul Ricoeur. Thompson draws on the French theorist as a way of transcending the objectivism of conservative or traditional hermeneutics as well as the limitations of Gadamer's anti-methodological stance. Ricoeur, he suggests, seeks to preserve the insights of Gadamer's and Heidegger's philosophical hermeneutics (i.e. their concern with the nature of reality) without abandoning matters of methodology (p. 278). To do so, Ricoeur proposed a *depth hermeneutics* founded on the notion that interpretation as understanding must be "mediated by a range of explanatory or 'objectifying' methods" (*ibid.*). One cannot, in other words, solve all questions of truth and reality through processes of interpretation, for "force" (i.e. power) is as much a constitutive element

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of the social realm as "meaning" (*ibid.*). Therefore, like Bourdieu, Ricoeur maintains that to undertake interpretation of the representations of social actors without reference to an objectively accessible object domain is to deny oneself the possibility of causal explanation of the structured limitations on human action. Such a move, granted, hints at objectivism, but it should not be assumed that recourse to explanation represents a return to "a methodology modeled on the natural sciences" (Thompson, 1981, p. 173). *Explanation*—causal analysis of restraining structures—and *interpretation*—the understanding of the symbolic forms by which we access agents' accounts of reality—are not separate and antithetical moments of analysis, an assertion that echoes Bourdieu's rejection of the view of subjectivist and objectivist modes of knowledge as mutually exclusive. These are, in Ricoeur's conception, "mutually supportive steps along 'a unique *hermeneutical arc*'" (in Thompson, 1990, p. 278).

But while Thompson positions himself as methodological successor to Ricoeur, he does not hold entirely to the specifics of the latter's approach. As he puts it, "Ricoeur places too much emphasis on…'the semantic autonomy of the text', and he thus abstracts too readily from the social-historical conditions in which texts…are produced and received" (p. 278). Even if, as Ricoeur suggests, the meaning of an action is distanciated from the actor—in the manner of the a text from its author[1]—at the moment of its accomplishment and may, thus, be readily grasped by all, its sense is re-inscribed in the instant of its *re*production—i.e. in the novel act of its description—and subject to a new collection of contextual influences (Thompson, 1984, p. 190-191). One cannot, in other words, ascertain "'the meaning of an action'" without recognizing the extent to which it is dependent "upon *the way in which it is described*" (p. 190). In this sense, Ricoeur's conception of action as an analogue of text is overly optimistic and "not wholly convincing" (p. 191), for it follows a trend in the social sciences that equates language with action as though one could extrapolate the meaning of action by "attending to certain properties of language or speech" (*ibid.*). Here Thompson's critique echoes that of Bourdieu against objectivist methodologies that fail to attend to the ways in which action is produced *in the moment* via structuring yet nonetheless flexible dispositions of habitus.

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The Nature of Symbolic Forms

Despite his concerns with this aspect of Ricoeur's theory, Thompson does not reject the assertion that the social realm is largely a construction of language and, therefore, a product of the activities of those who trade in them. He asserts, in other words, that social analysis is always also an investigation of the *symbolic forms* produced by thinking, acting agents. Thus, as I approach the data generated in this study, I accept, first of all, the symbolic nature of the transcribed and recorded utterances of participants. Such forms, Thompson affirms, cannot be treated as objects with a fixed (i.e. objective) essence to be discovered through controlled (i.e. objectivist) observation (1990, p. 272). But his rejection of objectivism should not be taken as espousal of subjectivism, for the nature of symbolic forms is such that the full meaning of human communication cannot be discerned by somehow accessing only the conscious intent of social actors. Indeed, any such simplistic approach is defied by the complexity of symbolic forms, defined by Thompson as a "broad range of actions and utterances, images and texts, which are produced by subjects and recognized by them and others as meaningful constructs" (p. 59). Their capacity to produce meaning, he explains, resides in four "typical" aspects. Symbolic forms are, first of all, "intentional.... *expressions of... and for a subject[s]*" (p. 138). They are, in other words, "produced, constructed or employed by a subject who...is pursuing certain aims and purposes or seeking to express...what he or she 'means' or 'intends', in and by the forms produced" (*ibid.*). They are, furthermore, "conventional" in the sense that the act of their production and reception "*involve[s] the application of rules, codes or conventions of various kinds*" (p. 139). Such norms range from "rules of grammar to conventions of style and expression...to conventions which govern the action and interaction of individuals" (*ibid.*). Symbolic forms exhibit a third characteristic, a "structural" aspect by which they "*display an articulated structure*", for they "typically consist of elements which stand in determinate relations with one another" (p. 141). This means that a "pattern of elements...can be discerned in actual instances of expression...or texts" that opens-up symbolic forms to formal analysis (*ibid.*). Finally, a fourth, "referential" feature of symbolic forms refers to the ways in which they are able to "*represent,...refer to,...[and] say something about something*" (p. 143).

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Symbolic forms, that is, typically go beyond mute representation to "assert or state, project or portray" something about an "object, individual or state of affairs" (p. 144).

So far, Thompson has been concerned with those properties of symbolic forms that relate to the construction of actual units of meaning. But he also reminds us of a critical fifth characteristic by which meaning is conveyed, one that recalls Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. Symbolic forms, that is, have a "contextual" aspect (p. 272). The symbolic constructions of human beings, however 'true' and 'natural' to those who trade in them, carry meaning that is encoded in specific cultural and historical contexts (*ibid.*). Furthermore, one should remain aware that she or he—as reader/listener—also finds her or himself situated in circumstances beyond those in which the initial communication was produced. What is at stake here is the end of any notion that 'true' meaning resides eternally in the principle moment of production; equally so, each subsequent reproduction of the same form can make no claim to permanence. Thus, Thompson holds, as did Ricoeur and Gadamer before him, that to study symbolic forms is "*fundamentally and inescapably a matter of understanding and interpretation*" (Thompson, 1990, p. 274). He stresses that this understanding of hermeneutics challenges analyses that posit social phenomena as natural objects accessible to "formal, statistical and objective analysis" (*ibid.*). And while he does not hold to such objectivism, neither does he reject entirely the notion that there is a vital place in sociological analysis for consideration of statistical regularity (*ibid.*). Such an approach, however, should be considered partial at best, for symbolic forms—in the present case teachers' *doxic* representations of their lives—demand a separate level of analysis (p. 275). The hermeneutic condition of social reality means that the field we seek to understand is already a "*pre-interpreted domain*" (*ibid.*) and cannot, therefore, be investigated as a product of a singular moment of production. The social analyst approaches a symbolic form with the knowledge that it is already an interpretation and is constantly subject to re-interpretation, including during the act of its investigation (*ibid.*).

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The Nature of the Subject

It follows from this analysis that the social realm differs from objects in the natural world in yet another fundamental aspect; the 'objects' of study are, like the investigator, thinking, acting *subjects* capable of reflection upon interpretations of the world put forth (p. 275-276). In practice, this means that research into subjects' interpretations of their world always exists in a "*relation of potential appropriation*" (p. 276) and may be used by these subjects to modify that world. Identifying this malleability permanently precludes the possibility of employing an encompassing objectivism in one's pursuit of knowledge in the social realm. But this reality, Thompson insists, should not been deemed, as it would be were one to follow the model of the natural sciences, an unfortunate limitation of social inquiry. It is, rather, the very "*condition of possibility* of the kind of knowledge that can be attained in the social-historical sphere" (*ibid.*). Whether or not actual change results from such engagement is another matter. What is important is to recognize that social subjects' potential for transformative action is an integral characteristic of the object domain (*ibid.*).

Tradition and Culture

Thompson makes a final point that forges a connection to Gadamer's hermeneutics. I have stated above that social reality is a symbolic order constituted by social agents who retain the power to alter their circumstances. But to paint a picture of unrestricted and autonomous agents is to ignore the ways in which the potential for human action is limited. Few would claim the power to perform their lives without the restraint of desire; indeed, all would recognize as destructive or absurd the claims of those who purport to do otherwise. But to attribute these restrictions to some externally located force is equally unsatisfactory; most, if not all, of our everyday actions are not subject to the coercive control of some corporeal authority, but, rather, come from within. Here Thompson is indebted to both Bourdieu (and his notion of habitus) and Giddens (for his theory of *structuration*)—each helps us to see how the individual, despite an innate capacity for 'freedom', is complicit in the machinations of self-control. On this account, hermeneutic convention "reminds us that *the subjects*

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who in part make up the social world are always embedded in historical traditions" (p. 276). Accepting this point means that we can never hold intercourse with an *other*—including the privileging of the interview as a mode of subjectivist inquiry—to be an isolated encounter between minds" (*ibid.*); each of us is situated within a tradition that shapes the contours of interaction. Furthermore, tradition by definition brings to bear the old upon the new. Indeed, to perceive an experience as 'new' is to fashion an ineluctable connection to an ontologically prior 'old' (*ibid.*). It is in recognizing how these "residues of the past" serve at times to conceal the truth of the present that we may come to identify them as *ideologies*. In Thompson's view, such an awareness, i.e. of the durability of the past (i.e. tradition) as a constitutive force in the present, necessitates "a hermeneutically informed approach" equal to the task of analyzing ideology (p. 277).

It is clear at this point that, in discussing 'tradition', Thompson and his intellectual progenitors concern themselves with something more than a collection of customs passed on from one generation to the next. The practice of social science, he explains, unavoidably involves investigation beyond the physical objects or discrete events. Indeed, exploration of the social realm entails contemplation of "the meaningful actions and expressions, of utterances, symbols, texts and artefacts of various kinds, and of subjects who express themselves through these artefacts and who seek to understand themselves and others by interpreting the expressions they produce and receive" (1990, p. 122). In a word, *culture*. Here, Thompson breaks from what he identifies as the three most commonly used conceptions of culture: the "*classical*", which equates culture with the "intellectual or spiritual development" of "*civilization*"; the "*descriptive*", an anthropological formulation concerned with an assortment of "values, beliefs, customs, conventions, habits and practices of a particular society or historical period"; and the "symbolic", also anthropological, whose study is "essentially concerned with the interpretation of symbols and symbolic action" (pp. 122-123). Thompson considers this third sense the most promising, but insists that it deals inadequately with the structured conditions and relations within which symbolic phenomena are situated (p. 123). In order to bridge this gap, he proposes a fourth, "structural conception" of culture, the analysis of which entails the analysis of

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symbolic forms on four levels: at the level of individual actors, *action*; concerning the spaces and places in which action takes place, *social institutions*; encompassing the previous two, *social structures*; and, finally, the *spatio-temporal settings* in which all action takes place. Figure 2.1 below offers the reader a rough sketch of Thompson's understanding of social contexts, the implications and specific characteristics of which will be elaborated below (on page 40). For the moment, it will suffice to say that he proposes a model of cultural analysis that focuses on the relationships between symbolic forms and the historically specific, socially constructed contexts within which they are produced, transmitted, received. Put another way, to study culture is to scrutinize the meaningful constitution and social contextualization of symbolic forms (*ibid.*).

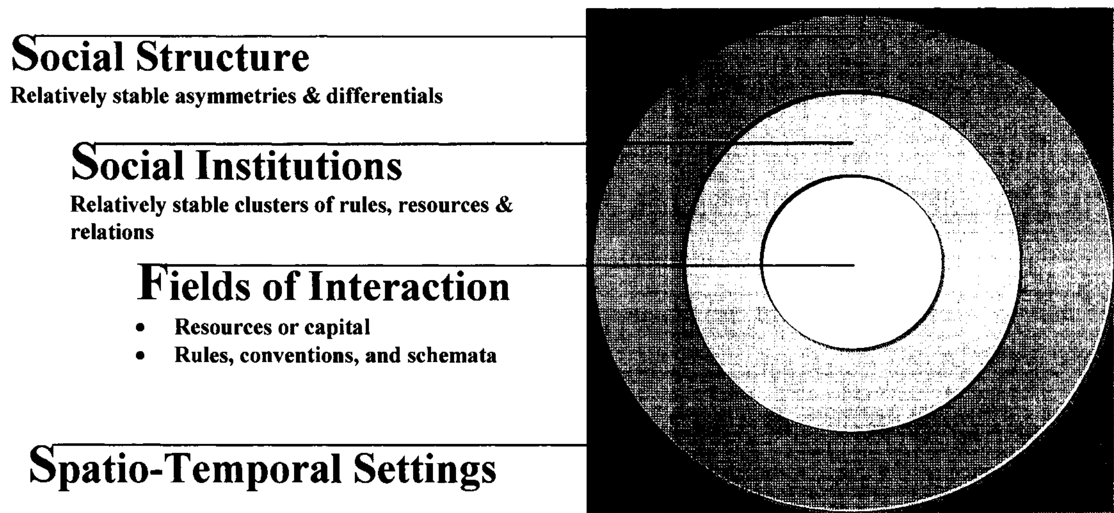

Figure 2.1 Thompson's typical characteristics of social contexts.
(1990, p. 151)

The Question of Power and Ideology

Central to this conception of the social—a realm of asymmetries and differentials, of unequally distributed resources and capital—is the question of *power*, in its "most general sense,...the ability to act in pursuit of one's aims and interests: an individual has the *power to act*, the power to intervene in the sequence of events and to alter their course" (p. 151). Social analysis of this kind of world, then, will always be concerned with the links between *meaning* and *power*, with how, in other words, meaning is mobilized to lay claim to or maintain power. It is an exploration of the role

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of *ideology* and represents a particular form of depth hermeneutics with a critical character (*ibid.*). One might take from this orientation an enjoinder to a forthright critique of symbolic products and the motivations of those who fashion them. But a *critical hermeneutics of ideology* that seeks to uncover the operation of power must resolve to investigate both the meaningful constitution of symbolic forms and their conventional interpretation. Such a goal necessitates, first of all, an ethnographic approach capable of explication of everyday actors' reception and interpretation of symbolic forms. In the present study, for example, I performed individual as well as group interviews in order to reconstruct "the ways in which symbolic forms are interpreted and understood in everyday life" (p. 279). These reconstructions—representations of reality—indicate the "opinions, beliefs and understandings...shared by the individuals who comprise the social world" (*ibid.*) and are "the indispensable starting point" (p. 280) of depth hermeneutic research.

But the unearthing of these interpretations should not be pursued as end in itself. To terminate analysis with an acceptance of social actors' *doxic* representations of their world is to forego the possibility of explanation. Such abortive analysis defies Bourdieu's insistence on scrutiny beyond the presentation of 'accounts of accounts', as well as Habermas' rejection of investigation that rests "content with an account of social action in terms of motives which coincide with the actor's interpretation of the situation" (Thompson, 1981, p. 106). To stop short of causal explanation is to give respite to forms of domination that distort and suppress such accounts, for the lay actor's insight is importantly proscribed by the limitations of accepted knowledge as well as the "sanctions of prevailing norms" (p. 107). What is required is an investigation that seeks knowledge at the level of a "social structure" that "may be conceived as a series of elements and their interrelations, which conjointly define the conditions for the persistence of a social formation and the limits for the variation of its component institutions" (Thompson, 1981, p. 145). A program of depth hermeneutics fulfills this demand by moving beyond the interpretation of *doxa* to other forms of analysis capable of revealing the social and institutional conditions that limit action as well as social agents' roles in reproducing these structures (*ibid.*). In the

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following sections, I describe in detail the various movements by which such depth may be achieved.

Three Phases of Inquiry

Thompson holds that the irreducible features of the social world—that it is both constituted *by* and constitutive *of* social actors and, as such, is subject to potential transformation through the active reflection of these agents; that aspects of its nature are accessible through the symbolic forms produced by agents; and that it has, by way of these same symbolic forms *qua* ideology, the capacity to conceal the nature of its constitution—combine to recommend a three phase-process of *depth hermeneutic* analysis. There is first of all an irony in Thompson's subscription to Gadamer's hermeneutics that the former is eager to overcome, for Gadamer himself was at pains to transcend the limitations of applied epistemology and held instead to a "philosophical reflection on the character of being and on the constitutive role of understanding" (p. 277). Despite this, Thompson pursues an approach that is properly 'methodological' as opposed to a series of 'methods', that goes beyond ontological questions of intersubjective *understanding* to seek *explanation* of how the "meaning" of symbolic forms may serve to undergird power (p. 278). His is a general framework in which no specific mode of inquiry is privileged but, rather, into which particular methods may be inserted and evaluated according to their effectiveness for answering the question at hand (p. 20). In what follows, I lay out Thompson's argument for this program of depth interpretation and how it was applied in the present study.

Social-Historical Analysis

As Thompson insists, "symbolic forms do not exist in a vacuum: they are produced, transmitted, and received in specific social and historical conditions" (1990, p. 281). The depth interpretation of ideology, therefore, "*is inseparable from the social-historical analysis of the forms of domination which meaning serves to sustain*" (1984, p. 135). Recognizing this, the first challenge in my analysis of teachers' accounts of their present circumstances will be to reconstruct the socio-historic context in which their perspectives are produced, consumed, and reproduced (p. 282).

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Thompson suggests that these social contexts comprise four aspects, each defining a distinct plane of analysis.

The first of these is *spatio-temporal setting*, a level that recognizes how symbolic forms are produced and circulate in particular times and places (*ibid.*), settings that are "partially constitutive of the action and interaction which take place within them" (p. 147). For the purposes of this analysis, I focus on social, economic, political, and educational change during the historical period following mainland China's 'opening-up' especially as it represents a response to the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, a time of dire consequences for the nation's teachers.

The second feature of social-historical contexts exists at the level of action (Thompson, 1984), and comprises what Thompson (1990) calls *fields of interaction* (pp. 147-148). This notion draws on Bourdieu's work and "may be conceptualized synchronically as a space of positions and diachronically as a set of trajectories" (*ibid.*) "which together determine some of relations between individuals and some of the opportunities available to them" (p. 282). Thus, to consider *fields of interaction* is to analyze how individuals are situated within the social structure, the pathways they might follow in the course of their lives, and how locations and tendencies inflect interpersonal associations and opportunities (p. 148). These positions are not entirely fixed, but social agents' ability to negotiate daily life within them (as well as their potential to transcend them) depends to a significant degree on their access to particular forms of what Bourdieu (1997) calls *social* and *cultural capital*:

> Capital can present itself in three fundamental guises: as *economic capital*...; as *cultural capital*, which is convertible...into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications; and as *social capital*, made up of social obligations...which is convertible...into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of a title of nobility. (p. 47)

Agents also draw upon a range of 'schemata', resources, rules, and conventions to "pursue their aims and interests" (Thompson, 1990, p. 148).

> In pursuing courses of action within fields of interaction, individuals draw upon the various kinds and quantities of resources or 'capital' available to them, as well as

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> upon a variety of rules, conventions and flexible 'schemata' These schemata are not so much explicit and well-formulated precepts as implicit and unformulated guidelines. They exist in the form of practical knowledge, gradually inculcated and continuously reproduced in the mundane activities of everyday life. (Thompson, 1990, p. 282)

The role of 'schemata' in this interactive space is better understood when conscious intentionality is removed, as in Bourdieu's (1977) notion of *habitus*:

> The structures constitutive of a particular type of environment...produce *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*, structured structures predisposed to function...as principles of the generation and structuring...which can be objectively "regulated" and "regular" without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them and, being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor. (p. 72)

For the purposes of this research, I present a historical overview of teachers' social and professional status, with a particular focus on how these have been affected by the various political movements that have taken hold of China in the twentieth century.

The third level deals with the analysis of the "clusters of rules, resources and relations which constitute" *social institutions* (Thompson, 1990, p. 282). Such institutions are defined to a certain extent by the ways in which they govern the conduct—i.e. actions—of individuals within them (p. 149). Thompson is careful to point out that such institutions do not *determine* action, but, rather, "*generate* it in the sense of establishing...the parameters of permissible conduct" (1984, p. 135). The typically hierarchical nature of social institutions can be seen as an extension of conditions in the broader social realm, but their influence also extends back to reinforce existing relations in these same fields. An example of this in the present research would be how the lower positioning of women within school organizations reflects a more general societal hierarchy; at the same time, subordination within schools tends to confirm that existing relations overall are normal or natural. In Chapter 4, I provide a structural overview of the Chinese education system, as well as what Lynn Paine (1990) considers a critical element to understanding the relations within it: the conceptualization of the teacher as *virtuoso*. I also consider one of the

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trends that have transformed the institutions in which Chinese teachers work: the devolution of responsibility for funding of schools from the national to the local level. This has led to the increasing privatization and marketization of schools and, consequently, a repositioning of the boundaries that produce and enable, even as they restrict and limit the possibilities of teachers' lives (Thompson, 1990, p. 150).

Standing in a position above these institutions are *social structures*, a level of "relatively stable asymmetries and differentials which characterize social institutions and fields of interaction" (1990, p. 149). If the level of social institutions represents the circumscription of possible action, then the plane of *social structure* presents a set of conditions and relations that "*structurate*" these same institutions (1984, p. 135). Social structures, in other words, act to produce the particular features of social institutions; these same institutions, in turn, reinforce the makeup of those structures from which they are drawn. In explicating the details of this level, we are not concerned with fleeting (i.e. temporary), individual (i.e. atypical) differences but, rather, those elements of the social realm that are "collective[ly applicable] and durable [over time]" with respect to the allocation of resources and power (p. 283). Analysis on this plane is, according to Thompson, "more theoretical" (*ibid.*) than at other levels and requires the identification of "evidence of systematic asymmetries and differentials in social life" (*ibid.*). In the present case, I offer a brief analysis of the ways in which women have been subordinated, both historically and presently, within a fundamentally patriarchal society. By doing so, I forge a link between asymmetrical relations in the broader society and the ways in which the professional prospects of a predominantly female teaching force have been and continue to be proscribed by stubbornly asymmetrical gender relations in educational institutions.

Formal or Discursive Analysis

In addition to being produced in particular social-historical contexts, symbolic forms are characterized by "structural features" that allow them to "represent something, signify something, say something about something" (p. 22), attributes that necessitate further investigation on the "*formal or discursive*" level (p. 284). Such analysis is concerned with the internal patterns and relations of symbolic forms (*ibid.*)

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and flows from the recognition that everyday utterances are composed of "polysemic units" that provide a "surplus of meaning which must be sifted through a process of interpretation" (Thompson, 1984, p. 177). But this does not necessarily tie the analyst to an examination of discrete linguistic units such as words and sentences. Drawing on Thompson's notion of 'discourse' as "actual instances of everyday communication..., conversations between friends, a classroom interaction, a newspaper editorial, a television programme" (1990, p. 286), I analyze instead certain structural features of participants' accounts on their lives in the context of educational reform. These discourses, representations of "the opinions, beliefs, and understandings" (Kelly, 2001, p. 2) of the social world held by the teachers who participated in this study, are the focus of this stage of analysis.

General modes	*Some typical strategies of symbolic construction*
Legitimation	Rationalization Universalization Narrativization
Dissimulation	Displacement Euphemization Trope (e.g. synecdoche, metonymy, metaphor)
Unification	Standardization Symbolization of unity
Fragmentation	Differentiation Expurgation of the other
Reification	Naturalization Eternalization Nominalization/passivization

Figure 2.2 Thompson's Modes of Operation of Ideology.
(1990, p. 60)

Following Thompson, I maintain that participants in this study draw on an informal grammar to construct their accounts of reality, a "*practical syntax*" manifested in "*strategies of symbolic construction*" (p. 60-61). These strategies (on the right in Figure 2.2), while by no means "intrinsically ideological" (*ibid.*), may nonetheless be revealed as such when associated with particular "modes of operation of ideology" (*ibid.*) (on the left in Figure 2.2 above). I recognize that Thompson does not present this list as exhaustive or exclusive (1990, p. 60). Indeed, he insists that there are no

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doubt other strategies that may be included depending on the case in question. Furthermore, he does not assume any given strategy to be "intrinsically ideological", but recommends, rather, that it be examined in relation to the circumstances in which it operates, as well as whether or not it serves "to sustain or subvert,...establish or undermine, relations of domination" (p. 61). Finally, Thompson suggests that a given strategy does not always work alone, nor does it belong exclusively to any particular mode of operation (*ibid.*). Rather, an individual strategy may work in combination with others and may, furthermore, exert influence across classifications. Hence, the categorizations proposed below should be taken as no more than "typical" associations that provide an appropriate framework for the present study and that may or may not be applicable in other situations.

The first set of strategies fall under the category of *legitimation* and comprise an ideological *modus operandi* whereby "relations of domination may be established and sustained...by being represented as legitimate...[or] as just and worthy of support" (p. 61). Thompson draws on Weber's schema that differentiates "three basic ways in which power [can] become *legitimate* **domination**: *traditional, charismatic, and legal-rational*" (Morrow, 2005, p. 150). Thompson suggests a corresponding framework of strategies—*narrativization*, *universalization,* and *rationalization*—through which claims to authority may be constructed in symbolic form (*ibid.*). *Narrativization* involves the embedding of legitimacy claims in stories that connect the present to past and, thereby, creates the illusion of an esteemed tradition worthy of preservation (p. 61-62). As one example of a symbolic form constructed through *narrativization*, the revolutionary anthem *No Communist Party; No New China* (没有共产党，没有新中国—*méi yoŭ gòng chăn dăng, méi yoŭ xīn zhōng guó*), presents a narrative in which the Party's rise is inextricably linked to the demise of a despised feudal past and the emergence of revolutionary China. Examples of state-sponsored efforts to connect past and present abound in the contemporary scene, such as the following commentary on a recent art work. The purpose of conflating these two events, which in fact occurred more than seventy years apart, is stated more or less explicitly:

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> The Long March of the Red Army and the successful exploration of space are certainly two very different "Long Marches" by Chinese servicemen from very different eras....However, both events equally proclaimed the take-off of the giant dragon in the east and the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. (XNA, July 31st, 2006)

Bringing together the revolutionary past and the reform present conveniently eliminates the less successful ventures of the interim, as well as any suggestion that the Party has lost its ability to deliver 'progress'.

Alternatively, the producer of a symbolic form might rely on *universalization* to portray the institutional privilege of certain groups or individuals as serving the interests of all while at the same time presenting a view of a hierarchy that is open to all those worthy of entry (*ibid.*). Here I would like to draw attention to the gender privilege embedded in the population control measures discussed in Chapter 5. As a policy formulated by the male-dominated government and party structure, the one-child policy, apparently equally disruptive to both sexes, has tended to favour men in its implementation (Greenhalgh, 1994). Thus, arguments in favour of the policy necessarily focus on the broader policy aim of population control and its (ostensible) connection to economic prosperity for the whole of society, rather than on the more negative results of sterilization as unevenly applied to women (*ibid.*), or to its encouragement of the cultural preference for male children. Even modifications accomplished in the name of family values, humanitarian concern, and/or effective policy implementation sometimes favour the parenthood aspirations of men over women[2].

Finally, *rationalization* is used to construct discourses that present existing social relations or institutions as praiseworthy (*ibid.*) as in the following quotation that seeks, on the occasion of Mao Zedong's death, to legitimate the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) rule:

> All the victories of the Chinese people have been achieved under the leadership of Chairman Mao; they are all great victories for Mao Tsetung Thought. The radiance of Mao Tsetung Thought will for ever [sic] illuminate the road of advance of the Chinese people... (XNA, 1987a, p. 52)

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By drawing attention to how he (supposedly) consistently produced, despite the intervention of unavoidable hardships and/or treachery, 'victories' on behalf of the people, this piece of official propaganda lionizes Mao, then proceeds, via the suggestion of eternality, to transfer his greatness to his institutional embodiment, the CCP. Such strategies, when consumed and reproduced in the everyday, result in the dissemination of symbolic forms that may, in particular social-historical circumstances, serve to legitimate relations of domination in the social sphere.

If, as a mode of operation of ideology, *legitimation* redefines and justifies an otherwise ambiguous state of affairs, a second mode, *dissimulation*, conceals, denies, and obscures relations of domination (p. 62). *Dissimulation* is often achieved through *displacement*, a strategy whereby the (positive or negative) connotations of a term normally applied to one person or thing are transferred to another (*ibid.*). The example reproduced above, in which the party claims for itself the glory of Mao's triumphs, reveals this strategy at work. Another may be found in the transfer, through various metaphorical guises, of the positive connotations of 'reform' and 'socialism' to the capitalist reorientation of the economy: the relatively transparent "market reform"; the somewhat more opaque "market socialism"; or the totally displaced "socialism with Chinese characteristics".

It may, on the other hand, be discerned in the presence of *euphemization* in symbolic forms. In much the same way that *universalization* valorizes systematically entrenched inequities, euphemism renders opaque the true nature of "actions, institutions or social relations" (*ibid.*). The revolutionary period offers countless examples of euphemiziation: *zhīqīng*[3] (知青—learned youth) of the Cultural Revolution are not exiled but 'sent-down' to the countryside; harsh and/or violent criticism of one's colleagues and neighbors becomes an honorable activity when redefined as 'rooting out class enemies'; indoctrination becomes 'reeducation'. But the utility of euphemization is not restricted to the machinations of an ill-begotten ideological past: the present government's failure to adequately fund schools and the subsequent flood of private money becomes more palatable when wrapped in the rhetoric of 'choice' and 'empowerment'; gendered layoffs in the state sector appear as

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an act productive of family harmony when described as 'women return home'; the usurping of women's reproductive rights slips under a veil of neutrality as the 'one-child policy'. Indeed, the ability to conceal the negative is particularly important to the continued legitimacy of the Communist Party as it attempts to present itself as a fully modern member of the world community in the era of 'opening-up'. In the age of universal human rights, it would no longer serve to publicly announce the "'smashing' of the gang of four" (XNA, 1987, p. 65).

A third strategy, here called *trope,* relies on figurative language—e.g. *synecdoche*, *metonymy*, *metaphor*, and others—to "dissimulate relations of domination" (*ibid.*). Synecdoche is a strategy whereby a part of something is represented as the whole or, conversely, the whole as a part, as in the instance described above—i.e. substituting *totum* (the CCP) *pro pars* (Mao). Similarly, metonymy substitutes one word of term for another which it is commonly associated. Examples of this abound in routine political discourse: "Taiwan urged to be sincere in official's visit" (http://www.chinataiwan.org/web/webportal/W2037304/Ushaotian/A326218.html). Here, a geographical region, "Taiwan", stands in for a more forthright designation of (anti-'One China') Taiwanese politicians. Likewise, metaphor, a device that produces expressions "midway between the unintelligible and the commonplace" (Aristotle in Lanham, 1969, p. 66), regularly finds its way into government slogans such as "The War on Poverty" (http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/poverty), which displaces the dramatic and, in this instance, positive connotations of "war" onto what is more likely the rather tedious administration of a variety of social programs or economic measures.

Another rhetorical strategy not mentioned by Thompson, but which is particularly relevant to the analysis below, is *adage*, most obviously on display in innumerable Chinese *proverbs*. For example, the following rather mundane two-part allegory "*ǎizi pá lóutī—bùbù dēng gāo*" (矮子爬楼梯—步步登高—a dwarf climbing a ladder—becoming higher with each step) (Yong, Qin, & Yi, 1999, p. 1) visualizes, using a comically cruel image, the effect of climbing a ladder on physical stature, but refers on the metaphorical level to the virtues of patience, diligence, and respect for

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hierarchy. Such expressions, when reproduced in daily discourse, serve as more than an artful way of expressing a pre-existing reality. They are, rather, intended to teach some 'truth' about world and, thereby, create or sustain a particular order of social relations. Thompson is quick to point out that the presence of such figurative devices does not necessarily indicate the operation of ideology, but maintains that, as a common feature of symbolic forms, they may be effectively mobilized to produce meaning that create, sustain, and reproduce unequal power relations (p. 64).

The third and fourth groupings identified by Thompson comprise complementary strategies of symbolic construction. Where *unification* seeks to infuse otherwise diverse communities and individuals with a collective identity, *fragmentation* attempts to weaken those who might represent a challenge to dominance. Typical strategies of *unification* include *standardization*, i.e. the adaptation of symbolic forms "to a standard framework which is promoted as the shared and acceptable basis of symbolic exchange", and *symbolization of unity*, which involves the creation and promotion of a variety of symbols such as flags, songs, or narratives of national origin (p. 64). Such strategies are most commonly seen at the level of the state, but may also be found on a smaller scale in social groups or organizations (*ibid.*). The pursuit of a common language (*putonghua* or 'common speech') for the entire nation is perhaps the most obvious example of *standardization*. *Symbolizations of unity*, which abounded in less subtle forms at the height of revolutionary fervour, find their modern equivalent in school textbook maps that avoid at all costs even the suggestion that Taiwan is a *de facto* separate political entity.

Ideology *qua fragmentation*, on the other hand, proceeds through *differentiation* to emphasize "distinctions, differences, and divisions between individuals and groups" in order to disunite (p. 65). Such strategies occasionally involve the nomination of easily identifiable groups to which undesirable and/or dangerous characteristics are imputed, thus making them ideal for *expurgation of the other* (*ibid.*). Prime examples of such an approach may be found in the castigation of teachers during the Cultural Revolution (see Chapter 4) or in the prompt about face represented by the denunciation of the Gang of Four (XNA, 1987b). On a more

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mundane level, the *hukǒu* (户口—household registration) system that restricts mobility (especially between rural and urban settings) has long served to reinforce, in the guise of developmental necessity, a societal prejudice against *nóngmín* (农民—peasants). In the contemporary arena, the Chinese government's banning and ongoing vilification of the *falun gong* for its "feudal superstitious", "heretical", and allegedly subversive activities (Thornton, 2003) serves as a reminder that, even in a more 'enlightened' times of 'socialism with Chinese characteristics', pogroms against identifiable groups are not ruled out.

Finally, discursive strategies of *naturalization* and *eternalization* as well as grammatical/syntactical manipulations such as *nominalization* and *passivization* indicate *reification* (*ibid.*). Where a need exists to portray relations of domination as normal and permanent, *naturalization* constructs the socially instituted and historically contingent as natural and inevitable (p. 65-66). Thus, the numerical dominance of women in the field of English teaching is commonly attributed to the innately superior ability of females to learn other languages, rather than to social factors such as the feminization of foreign language learning and the consequent devaluation of language learning and teaching as appropriate vocations for boys (Fu, 2000; Lin & Wu, 2004). The notion that it could, on the other hand, be the product of teachers' expectations of boys in the language classroom (Rosenthal, 1992) is dismissed out of hand. These now naturalized conditions are also subject to *eternalization*, a process that deprives "social...phenomena...of their historical character" by portraying them as "permanent, unchanging, and ever-recurring" (*ibid.*).

Nominalization and passivization function differently, but hold nonetheless to the goal of representing transitory states of affairs as permanent (*ibid.*) and of less desirable outcomes as the product of no known source. The following extract returns to the issue of women's over-representation in the teaching ranks and illustrates the strategy clearly:

> The feminization of teachers as a social group is a change that has occurred in the gender structure of Chinese teachers in the past dozen years or so. Its significant

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> impact on the overall quality of China's teaching resource and the effective practice of educating and teaching is becoming increasingly obvious. (Fu, 2000, ¶ 1)

Here, *nominalization* (i.e. a verb, 'feminize', rendered as a noun, 'feminization') and use of the passive voice (i.e. "*has occurred*" as opposed to "encouraged by government policy") combine to define a policy driven process as an accident of history with no known cause. Leaving aside for now Fu's insulting of the female teaching force, the article leaves open the door for a policy solution to the problem, but rejects without consideration the possibility that the present condition may have resulted from deliberate policy initiatives or, worse still, incompetence[4]. Also note how the following excerpt, drawn from a news article produced by the Chinese government's news service, lacks an agent responsible for the dearth of information:

> The Tangshan earthquake, which devastated north China's Hebei Province in 1976, was an event surrounded by speculation, guesswork and rumors because no official information about what had actually happened or casualties sustained was made available. (XNA, 2006)

While the earthquake is justifiably held responsible for the devastation, *passivization* serves to mystify the cause of the absence of information following the disaster ("no...information *was made* available"), thus removing responsibility from any specific individual. Later in the article, past "government officials" and inadequate legislation come under fire, but nowhere is it directly stated that human actors—indeed, members of the CCP itself—represented the only possible barriers to the dissemination of such information. Reification *qua* passivization here acts to sustain CCP rule by eliminating the attribution of negative behaviours to the party officials who comprise the party. The elimination of actors and agency and the constitution of "time as an eternal extension of the present tense"—such strategies of symbolic construction serve, in the examples given, "to establish and sustain relations of domination" (p. 66).

In Chapter 5, I explicate two major themes drawn from the transcripts of interviews with participants. Following this, I draw on elements of the framework above to focus on how participants' apparently transparent, internally consistent

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accounts of their lives are nonetheless constructed with particular goals in mind and which may or may not, in a given set of circumstances, indicate the presence of ideology *qua legitimation, unification, reification.* In so linking teachers' everyday discourse, as accessed through their thoughts on the conditions of their social and professional lives, to the social-historical context, I employ a method with the potential to uncover "the *structural features of symbolic forms which facilitate the mobilization of meaning*" (p. 292) in the perpetuation of relations of domination and subordination (p. 292-293). A detailed consideration of the repercussions of these manoeverings, however, is the task of the final phase of analysis, discussed below.

Interpretation-Reinterpretation

While the initial goal of this research is greater *understanding* of participants' viewpoints, it is also concerned with causal *explanation* and asks, in what ways do their common-sense understandings of the social world create or sustain asymmetrical power relations? Illumination of this question calls for the "creative construction of meaning" (Thompson, 1984, p. 137), a critical *interpretation* in which the connections between everyday actors' accounts of the social world and the structured relations of the broader social-historical context can be made clear. This third phase closes—if not permanently—the depth hermeneutic investigation and proceeds through a synthesis of insights offered in the previous two stages (Thompson, 1990, p. 289). Such a movement is necessary despite whatever rigor has been applied at the level of formal/discursive analysis, for it is here that the potential of depth hermeneutics to forge a link between symbolic forms and their function as bearers of ideology is realized, and, hence, its ability to provide a critique of the operation of power in the social realm. Analysis at this level offers the possibility of new understandings of symbolic forms, a potentiality that draws upon an understanding of their 'referential' aspect (p. 290), their capacity, that is, to "say something about something" (1990, p. 284). It is also importantly a *reinterpretation*, for, as suggested above, the accounts of the social world offered by its constituent actors are themselves pre-interpretations of a subject-object domain (*ibid.*). What distinguishes this from the first two stages is that interpretations proposed here may diverge from the "mundane and routine"

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understandings of lay actors (*ibid.*). As Thompson asserts, the "interpretation of *doxa*" should not be taken as one's arrival at the terminus of depth interpretation, for symbolic forms can be further interpreted vis-à-vis the social-historical environment of their production (*ibid.*).

By seeking to illuminate the role of ideology as a constitutive force in the social realm, I attempt to demonstrate how the ideologies that serve to reproduce power relations may be accessed through a critical reinterpretation of teachers' common sense understandings of the nature of institutional and social structures that comprise everyday life, as well as the ways in which they naturalize their own positions within these formations. My goal is not to proceed with a naïve repudiation of actors' subjectivities, for these understandings, despite whatever reinterpretation I posit, will continue to wield a constitutive and reproductive power (Outhwaite, 1987, p. 70-71). Analogous to Bourdieu's "semi-learned grammars of practice" that obscure the "generative schemes" upon which practice draws (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 20), these beliefs and values are embedded in participants' accounts of their everyday experience. In Chapter 7, I assert that, when invested with a 'natural truth', such symbolic forms may be understood as a medium of ideology by which power and privilege are transmitted and unequally distributed within the social body.

* * *

The purpose of this chapter has been to discuss the broad methodological orientation of this study as well as my justification for employing it in particular ways. In the next chapter, I provide a record of the detailed methods by which the associated field work was accomplished.

Notes

[1] Thompson refers here to Ricoeur's "first form of distanciation" by which the "event of saying" is surpassed by "the meaning of what is said" (Thompson, 1981, p. 52).

[2] I am referring here to local variations on the policy that function predominantly to permit a second child to men following divorce and remarriage.

[3] The term *zhīqīng* is shortened from *zhīshì qīng nián* (知事青年). Taken literally, it is a compliment. But in the context of the Cultural Revolution, it drew attention not to the knowledge accumulated by students from the city, but to that which they lacked—the practical knowledge that comes from labour. One might compare its connotations to the sarcastically inflected 'college boy'.

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[4] While I have been unable to locate studies on the historical causes of feminization in the work force, the topic has been taken up as a problem to be resolved in Chinese schools (see Fu, 2000; Shi & Gu, 2000). Studies in other contexts, however, have established the 'feminization of teaching' as the result of intentional policies related to popularization of education and the need for a low-cost, compliant teaching force (Prentice, 1977; Strober & Tack, 1980).

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Chapter 3
Laying an Audit Trail

In this chapter, I continue to a lesser extent my reflections on the question of interpretation. More importantly, I provide a reconstruction of how the research was accomplished in the field and where it has come to rest, if not terminally. I establish, in other words, an "audit trail" to account for the procedures by which data was generated and prepared for depth analysis, and, in doing so, imbue the findings with a degree of "dependability" and "stability" (Guba, 1981, p. 83).

Recruitment of Participants

At various points in previous chapters, I have stated that this study seeks to explore knowledge of an *emic* or *idiographic* nature (see Prologue) and that it is oriented toward interpretation and explanation (see Chapters 1 through 3). I draw attention to these points once again to demonstrate that neither the study's ultimate purpose nor its methodological orientation required the recruitment of a large group of participants. Therefore, it was most appropriate to gather a small research cohort using what Patton (1990) calls *purposive* and *convenience* sampling. The "logic and power" of purposive sampling in interpretive, qualitative research, he asserts, lies in the selection of "information-rich cases...from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research [emphasis in original]" (p. 169). In other words, participants were not selected randomly; they were, rather, identified as potential participants due to their membership in a 'homogenous' subgroup (p. 173) comprising female, native-Chinese teachers of English in public middle schools. In the months leading up to the summer of 2005, I secured the tentative participation of three prior acquaintances, each of whom—Gāo Sù, Lǎo Pīng, and Wáng Diàn[1]—is a public school English teacher in the north-central China city, Lǎozhuāng, where I had lived and worked for the previous three years. It would be imprecise to suggest that they happened to fit the profile of informants sought for the

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study; rather, the study's focus suggested itself to me precisely *because of* my previous contact with them. It was, in other words, formulated specifically with these women in mind.

The process suggested above would be more accurately characterized as a *recruitment strategy* than a *sampling method.* Patton (1990), however, holds to the standard expression in coining this strategy *convenience sampling*, i.e. selection that takes advantage of an existing and readily accessible population from which participants may be drawn. Working with teachers in the three years prior to the commencement of the study had allowed me to form friendly relationships with teachers in a number of schools. I did not, however, feel confident that I had solid relationships with enough teachers to confidently request their participation. For this reason, I contacted and confirmed Gāo Sù—a teacher with whom I had the most prior contact and ongoing interaction—as a participant, to help contact those who had already agreed to take part, and to recommend others who might be interested. As the following excerpt from my journal shows, Gāo Sù quickly became a valued "assistant":

> I decided to initiate contact with a participant, Gāo Sù, who had already agreed to participate in the study, in order to "get the ball rolling....I told [her] that I was eager to meet with her and whatever other teachers might be interested in taking part....We discussed a list of possible candidates...whom I thought might be both interested and would suit the criteria....Short minutes after the end of our conversation...[she] text messaged me saying that she had already called one of the participants...and had identified another whom she thought would be appropriate....Soon after, another message arrived that indicated [she] had already contacted (in less than ½ hour) yet another participant whom I had identified. (Research Journal, August 29th, 2005)

The eagerness with which Gāo Sù agreed to participate and secured the involvement of others demonstrates the ways in which the existence of personal connections is critical to the recruitment of a cohort, a reality to which other non-Chinese [2] researchers have drawn attention. Manion (2003), for example, describes how the "intervention of friends" is vital in gaining access to appropriate informants for interviews (p. 62), as does Mayfair Yang (1994) in her study of the Chinese phenomenon of *guānxìxué* (关系学—the art of social relations). Fraenkel and Wallen

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(1996) are also clear about how the researcher's "previous knowledge of [the] population" plays a role in choosing participants (p. 100). Beyond their membership in the subgroup of interest, then, Gāo Sù and I considered participants based on an assessment of three important criteria: first, the strength of our existing relationships; second, their ability to express themselves in English; and third, their openness or willingness to disclose personal thoughts on matters that are inherently political. Holding to these simple criteria and with the added advantage of Gāo Sù's inclusion in the process, recruitment of a cohort turned out to be one of the most easily accomplished phases of the research. Mere hours after initiating contact, Lǎo Pīng's involvement and that of two other teachers—Xiǎo Yān and Lǎo Lè—was confirmed. As I was personally familiar with her, I made direct contact with Wáng Diàn to ensure her availability and continued willingness to join the cohort. And while assessments according to the above criteria were primarily intuitive and turned out not to be universally accurate, the imprecision of initial impressions was not fatal.

At this point, I want to return to an aspect of the recruitment process that is not apparent in the description above. I have described Gāo Sù's heightened role as a response to a practical concern; indeed, this is partly true. But it is also the case that I approached her in this manner following my understanding of Patti Lather's (1991) call for the integration of research participants as *co-researchers*. According to Lather, *reciprocity* can only be engendered if those invited into the research are conceived of as a cohort of co-researchers—as opposed to an *informants*, *respondents*, or *subjects*—and included in all phases of the research process, including planning, data generation and analysis, as well as theory building. And while I was attracted by and committed to this concept from the earliest stages of planning, doing so turned out to be a greater challenge that anticipated. Indeed, large sections of my research journal record my struggle to understand what pursuing such a goal should mean in practice. For example, my instinctive reaction to Gāo Sù's eagerness was trepidation:

> ...my initial response to Gāo Sù's idea was to try to mitigate the control that she would have in the study, and, by extension, maintain my own authority. When she appeared to have stepped outside of what we had discussed together—particularly

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> because she had taken control of something I had planned to do—I had a moment of feeling affronted. (Research Journal, August 29th, 2005)

Upon re-reading Lather, however, I was able to cast this interaction with her in a different light:

> [I] quickly realized that she had accomplished in a few short minutes what I had planned to take an entire week to do.... In retrospect, her initiative can be seen at this stage to be quite productive, and certainly demonstrates how a participant can be integrated more fully as a 'co-researcher'. (*ibid.*)

I continued, however, to be suspicious of the degree to which this movement demonstrated a true repositioning of Gāo Sù, as opposed to evidence of another possibility: my appropriation of her 'native' proficiency in the service of my own practical goal:

> Identifying someone as an "assistant", it should be noted, does not make them precisely a "co-researcher". It would be naïve to suggest that there is no hierarchy implied here. It will be important to get Sue's thoughts on this at some point. (*ibid.*)

My discomfort around the heightened power of Gāo Sù vis-à-vis both me and other participants is a theme that continues throughout my journals, but is certainly at its most intense in the early stages. Further reflections on Gāo Sù's role indicate other worries about what her role might mean to my ability to maintain institutional ethical standards and control over the focus of the research:

> [Gāo Sù] has begun to make assumptions about the research based on limited information. She hasn't, for example, read the research or ethics proposals [yet]. It is important that she understand the purposes of the study for two reasons: first, so she can respect the limitations put on us in terms of the ethics proposals; and second, so that she can give input as to design, already identified as a key element of reciprocity. (*ibid.*)

I also expressed concern about the implications her status and how it might negatively affect intra-group dynamics at later stages:

> I am concerned already that [Gāo Sù's] "elevation" may result in a kind of hierarchy within the group itself. Her relative power, as has already been seen, has the potential

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to be productive, but are there other risks? This will need to be observed as time passes. (*ibid.*)

Revisiting this issue several months later, it appears that I had laid this concern to rest, and even come to reinterpret Gāo Sù's eagerness as evidence of a goal achieved. The following compendium of passages from my journal indicates a positive assessment of the generative possibilities of participants as co-researchers:

> I look back on [the previous] entry with some satisfaction. I express concern that Sue's elevated status might become a problem, but...it never became so. Nor do I think...that...her status was elevated relative to others....She did maintain the initiative in getting us together...but certainly did not become overly aggressive in making all decisions about where and when meetings would take place. This, I think, was due not only to her strong communication skills, but also to the strong relationship that each of us was able to form with the others....I should also note that Sue was not the only participant to exert herself in terms of organizing the group. Each participant expressed the desire to host the group at one time or another. ...[so]our meetings... took place at four different locations....Lǎo Pīng went to the extent of driving both Sue and I (and Sue's daughter) to her home for the final group interview. Wáng Diàn also insisted very strongly that she should host us at her second (and new) apartment, particularly strongly when some of us expressed concern that her apartment had no heat at that time. Her pride in showing us around the new place was apparent. (Research Journal, January 11th, 2006)

I remained, however, tentative in my appraisals of whether or not Lather's conception of reciprocity was eventually achieved. The positive tone of the above passage is immediately tempered in the next paragraph:

> Reciprocity, of course, suggests much more than simple involvement in the planning of group meetings. It implies the ability of participants to direct the research in ways that allows subjects to "enhance their capacity for self-determination" (Heron in Lather, 1991, p. 56). This, I think, is the central question in deciding whether or not this research has been a success. (*ibid.*)

As this study progresses towards its written completion, further problems have arisen around what I thought would be simple tasks, such as finding opportunities for the participants to read drafts of the interpretations I put forward in Chapters 6 and 7.

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Reciprocity or, at least, *my understanding* of Lather's conception of it, has proven an elusive goal.

The Cohort Members

The following sections are based on each cohort member's self-introduction. Following the data generation phase of the research, I asked the participants to respond in writing to the following questions:

> What do you teach? At what level? For how long? What kind of school is it? Good? Bad? In the middle? Tell me what the most important things in your life are. For you, why is this research interesting? Why did you participate? (Personal Communication, February 23rd, 2006)

In all but one case, I also reprint the participant's self-reported rationale for taking part in the study. I have included the full text of each person's response, changing only the format in order to use space more efficiently. Note that not all questions are answered in some cases, so I add this information insofar as it is known to me. At this stage, I offer no interpretive comments, expanding on those parts that are addressed to me directly as the recipient and whose meaning may be unclear to the reader. I supplement these accounts with my own recollection of previous contact with each teacher. In the case of one participant, Xiǎo Yān, no response has been received to date, so I include in this section what I know of her through personal knowledge and what she provided in recorded interviews.

Gāo Sù

> After I graduated from a teachers' university in 1995, I went to a junior middle school to work as an English teacher. My school is about middle level in Guáng'ān District, but maybe very small in Lǎozhuāng, both in area and students. Most of the teachers are from universities, just like me. Some of them even have got higher degrees and more honors [for their] teaching skills.
>
> It's not easy to say what the most important thing in my life is. Before I got married I think more about my work. But now I think I prefer to [think of] my family [first]. I hope each of the family members is healthy and happy. I [think that my] family should come first, but in fact I have more pressure in my schoolwork now. Often I stay longer

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at school and go home late, extremely tired. My husband has got[ten] used to it and never thinks that I can do more housework.

I found it interesting to take part in Lorin's research about teachers in middle school. Most of the teachers have the same feelings about their work. I feel relaxed whenever I talk with them. Sometimes I can find solutions to some problems. In the research I made some very good friends. I spend more time working but less time thinking. Lorin has brought us some time to make some of my ideas clear.
(Personal Communication, February 28th, 2006)

My first acquaintance with Gāo Sù resulted from her enlistment as a consultant on my employer's textbooks. Given the difficulties teachers were having implementing these materials in their classrooms, a group of them were invited to become members of teams proposing changes to the texts. My role in this process was to advise the team on what format these changes might take and to work together with each teacher to correct errors and make suggestions for improving their submissions. Stemming from this cooperation, I visited Gāo Sù's school and classroom a number of times. On three different occasions in 2004 and 2005, Gāo Sù and I cooperated to deliver in-service training in a number of locations across China. We thus attained a high level of trust as well as a strong understanding of one another's working styles and personal attitudes about teaching. We also became friends outside of work as I visited her home to have lunch or dinner with her family on a number of occasions, a fact that helps to explain why Gāo Sù readily helped me to organize the research. Gāo Sù also offered her home as the site of our first group meeting and has continued to assist me when communication with other participants has proved difficult. At the time of writing, she and I are once again engaged in planning a teacher training seminar in a neighboring province.

Wáng Diàn

I have been an English teacher for more than 30 years. I work as a teacher in [a] junior and senior high school which belongs to [a] good school. I enjoy teaching. I like teaching and being together with my students. I think learning and working are the most important things in my life. Learning much knowledge can change a person's life. Working (Teaching) brings me so much happiness. It [find it] enjoyable. I think this research which I participate in is very interesting. I like communicating with you and the other excellent teachers. In this way I can learn a lot on how to teach English well

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> in China. It helps me to improve my English level and make many friends. (I like friends, you know). (Personal Communication, March 3rd, 2006)

Of the five cohort members, I have known Wáng Diàn longest. In the anecdote above (see Introduction) about the problem solving meeting with company and educational officials, she is one of the school teachers involved. Even now, I can remember clearly her outspokenness in that meeting and recall that I found her rather intimidating. Soon after that meeting, however, hers was one of the classrooms that I visited. After this initial visit, I negotiated with Wáng Diàn to spend three weeks observing her classroom, an arrangement that quickly reversed as she 'forced' me to take over teaching while she scrutinized me. Since then, I have made many visits to her school and home. Wáng Diàn has become a friend with whom I often share meals and laughter. She offered her recently purchased second home, conveniently located near a wholesale fruit market, for our third group meeting.

Lǎo Pīng

> I became an English teacher in 1987. I taught Grade Eight for one year. Then I taught in an elementary school for three years. (My original school belonged to a tractor factory. It contained an elementary school, a junior school, and a senior school). I have been teaching Junior high school since 1990.
>
> I teach in No 23 Middle School now. It has both junior and senior school. I think it is neither very good nor too bad. It is not very big and the teaching equipments are quite simple. We don't have multimedia in the classroom and it is not convenient for teachers to use computers. But the teaching quality of our school is famous in Huadong District. Parents like to send their children to our school.
>
> I think I have different ideas about the most important thing in my life in different times. When I just had a chance to be a teacher, I thought the most important thing to me was to be a good teacher—get the students to like me, like my teaching and I could manage the class activities freely and the students could get high grade in the examinations. Now, I still consider that work is one of the most important things in my life. But while I want to be a good teacher, (maybe not the [most] excellent) and teach well (maybe not the best), I want to enjoy the life. If I have time, I will spend more time with my family, go traveling, do sports…
>
> I think the research is interesting because I'm interested in: your attitude towards the research—you are very careful and serious; you got everything ready—pen, paper,

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recorder—before our discussions; the different experiences in different school—when we five met every time, we all told some interesting sometimes unusual things happened in some school; the happy time we spent—though the topic was not very light, we were happy and relaxed.

I participated [in] the research because, first I could have a good chance to learn from you, to chat with you in English in order to practice my oral English, to learn some teaching methods in the discussions. Second I want to know how a foreigner thinks about China's English Teaching. And third, we had good cooperation in Guizhou in 2003 and in Guangxi in 2005 (Though throw me off and go to Shandong half way and leave me alone to Fujian—Making a joke) I think we are friends. If you need my help, I'm sure to give you a big hand if I can. (Personal Communication, March 2nd/4th, 2006)

I met Lǎo Pīng in 2002. Hers was one of the classrooms I visited after our disastrous training session in November of that year. In retrospect, I realize that her classroom was selected for us to see due to her reputation as one of the city's best and most experienced teachers, a fact that was known to others in the research cohort. While I was teaching and observing in Wáng Diàn's school, my training partner (also from Canada) did the same in Lǎo Pīng's school. As Lǎo Pīng herself brings to attention, she and I have a history of cooperation. As with Gāo Sù, she and I worked together on revisions of textbooks and cooperated in delivering in-service training in both 2003 and 2005. Lǎo Pīng's home provided a warm refuge from a cold December day for the fourth of our group meetings.

Lǎo Lè

Every time when we met together, I felt very happy. Because we, especially I, need the chance to talk with teachers from other schools or other countries(like you). So I think it is very useful to us all to know much information about the teaching methods, the level of teachers and the students in other schools, and the advanced ways of managing the whole school. And I think that all the parts of our research are very free; there is no difficulty for us to communicate with each other, and we have much [in] common in many ways. Although sometimes we didn't have the same ideas, we discussed on and on, we were happy and thought it was interesting.

To the third question, I think if we have the chance to continue this research in the future, we'd better write something after we discuss, and then maybe we can publish it if it is useful enough for other teachers. And I hope we can talk about one topic at a

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time, and try our best to make this topic useful enough.
(Personal Communication, January 24th, 2006)

As with Gāo Sù and Lǎo Pīng, I first met Lǎo Lè while working on textbook revisions. Mother of a four year old daughter, she has recently 'graduated' to teach in senior middle school after about ten years in a junior middle school. In 2005, we worked together on several occasions doing in-service training. Lǎo Lè was the source of some of the most surprising information to come out of this study, a fact I attribute to her particularly frank disposition. This frankness is also apparent above in her brief evaluation of the research and how it might be improved in the future.

Xiǎo Yān

Xiǎo Yān joined the cohort on Gāo Sù's recommendation. She has been teaching junior middle school English for approximately ten years and was helping her junior three (Grade 9) students prepare for their senior entrance exams during the period of the research. Xiǎo Yān made a significant contribution to the group despite her inability to attend three of the four group interviews. Her insistence on a positive assessment of her headmaster's[3] abilities as a leader made abundantly clear that not all teachers see themselves to be under the thumb of domineering or avaricious leaders, thus reminding me that my tendency to make this assumption needs to be constantly challenged:

Lorin: So, it reminds me of something you said today, [Xiǎo Yān], ummm...about ah...you said your headmaster is really excellent. Maybe, you said maybe in some ways, she's not, but in this way she is. What do you mean in some...not good...not strong?
Xiǎo Yān: Umm...I think...[nervous laugh followed by a long pause]
Lorin: If you don't want to say, you don't have to.
Xiǎo Yān: Uh...I think today our topic is now what are the teachers ask...asked to do. So I just want to talk about this.
Lorin: That's ok. We can talk about anything. I don't...[I clear my throat]...thinking....hot water! [I leave the room nervously for hot water]
(Group Interview, November 12th, 2005)

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Data Sources

Interviews

Having thus recruited the desired cohort, data generation began. Most data were generated in a series of formal and informal encounters with participants. My approach to these stemmed from two key understandings of qualitative interviews: first, that complete "neutrality is not possible" in such interactions (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 696); and second, that one's power as a researcher carries with it a special responsibility for ensuring that the data is not used to exploit those who participate. On the first count, I have already discussed at length how the likes of Gadamer and Bourdieu have exposed the fallacy of neutrality inherent in the objectivist mode of inquiry; the outside observer, they contend, is always a product of and, thus, to a significant degree influenced *ad infinitum* by a cultural and/or intellectual tradition. This ineluctable condition opens the door for others, amongst them Lather, to suggest that to strike a pro-participant stance does not necessarily impugn the validity of one's research, but is, in fact, desirable. On the second account, the question of the researcher-interviewer power, Atkinson & Silverman (in Fontana & Frey, p. 696) have pointed out the "asymmetric nature of the interview", which, despite any apparent equality in its productive phase, always becomes imbalanced in the inevitable "cuts and pastes" of writing (Wasserfall in Fontana & Frey, p. 697). The brutality of the editorial process has been more than revealed during the course of writing this document. In Chapters 6 and 7, for example, time and space limitations forced me to cut short what might have otherwise been a more complete presentation of the information generated.

Issues of power and trust have indeed been troubling as I have struggled to represent accurately the perspectives of the study's participants. Part of the reason for this is that I made a radical change to the study's methodology after data generation was completed, but the complexity of establishing rapport was also apparent during my work in the field. My efforts at building productive connections with participants were initially premised on personal respect for them, as well as the belief that they

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themselves are in the best position to shed light on the conditions and relations of their lives. Such an approach is described by Fontana & Frey as "empathetic" interviewing. The suggestion, of course, is that accessing the perspectives of situated actors is more important than the discovery of objective reality (p. 696), an attractive notion given my eagerness to 'right the wrongs' of my past dealings with teachers. But the suggestion that I could have brought 'emancipation' to these participants by engaging them in a critical analysis of their social circumstances could only have been troubled in light of my subsequent readings of Bourdieu, Gadamer, and Thompson.

Nevertheless, I have retained from my explorations of Lather her rejoinder to avoid the misappropriation 'empowering' research (1991). Such research, she claims, has often "operated from ahistorical, apolitical value system[s]" (p. 56) that have subverted emancipatory intent in favour of the use of knowledge produced to 'improve' those studied through professional development (Tripp in Lather, 1991, p. 56). Given that each of these teachers first knew me as a trainer, this risk was always a concern. The ease with which these two worlds—research and training—could be confused became clear in the first group meeting. Wáng Diàn, despite my repeated efforts to direct attention to other concerns, interpreted my questions as efforts to evaluate my employer's textbooks:

> Wáng Diàn: I think the textbooks are very good. And I have use the first and second and third and fourth. Ok. One, two, three, four...but because the time is very limited, we can't use the fifth and sixth, but I think all the books are very good.
>
> Lorin: I understand. So you're thinking about the textbooks, and my...I think you read my [proposal].
>
> Wáng Diàn: Yes.
>
> Lorin: My concern is not so much about books. So when you say the problem with the books is time....
>
> Wáng Diàn: Now, you said you don't care about the textbooks.
>
> Lorin: Right, the textbooks are only one thing. But my topic is not 'are the books good are the books bad.' I want to talk about all kinds of change. I just want to talk about your feelings about change in the last few years.

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Interactions such as these early in the research may be read as either misunderstanding or negotiation. Both possibilities raise questions about the risk of failures in communication, and continually served to remind me of the importance of *gaining trust* in ensuring the success of interviews (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 708).

In the case of the individual interviews I conducted, an unstructured format was deemed most appropriate. Fontana and Frey stress that unstructured interviews provide "greater depth" than other types of interviews (p. 705). Whereas structured interviews attempt to capture the regularities of social life through the collection of "precise data of a codable nature", unstructured dialogue seeks apprehension of complexity (p. 706). A second advantage is that it creates the conditions of possibility of a "human-to-human relation" productive of *understanding* rather than *explanation* (*ibid.*). To perform unstructured interviews, then, is to fulfill Gadamer's enjoinder to open oneself to the truth of the other. In the present research, unstructured one-on-one interviews were purposefully situated in a variety of settings associated with comfort and relaxation in Chinese culture: over lunch, dinner, or tea; in vehicles during work trips taken with participants; or on casual walks through neighborhood parks. My first interview with Lăo Lè, for example, took place in a restaurant. In retrospect, this setting appeared to have the effect of relaxing both Lăo Lè and me, as my comment about 'picking up the tab' suggests:

> After a couple of weeks of trying to get together, I finally made contact with [Lăo Lè], visiting her class and having a nice conversation over lunch afterward (I should note here that I managed to pay for lunch successfully for the second consecutive day—no small task, as my ability to do so relieves both my "freeloader" guilt and helps me to feel (and actually be?)) more accepted as an 'insider' rather than a 'foreigner'. (Research Journal, September 22nd, 2005).

These discussions were always informative, though some were more so than others, depending on the teacher involved. Lăo Lè, for example, offered some of the more surprising insights into life in the modern school:

> [Lăo Lè] provided another example of everyday resistance. Her school uses a finger print system for teachers to "punch the clock" four times per day (morning-noon-noon-evening). She readily admitted that she would sometimes "punch-in" then leave

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the school if she had something else to do, and that she assumed others do the same. (*ibid.*)

Individual interviews were not recorded and served a number of purposes: as mentioned above, to develop trust and rapport with each participant; to increase my knowledge of each teacher's specific situation; and to generate topics to be elaborated upon in subsequent group interview sessions. Following each of these interviews, I made extensive notes in my research journal on the content of the conversation, as well as my thoughts and concerns about process and possible topics for further exploration.

Interspersed with these private encounters, group interviews were used to elaborate topics raised and to provide a forum in which new areas of exploration might be identified. As discussed above, this study seeks in part to explore how teachers are active in constituting the "objects of their experience" (Crossley, 1996, p. 3). Such a purpose entails inquiry into "what people experience and how they interpret the world", but also assumes "that *there is an essence to shared experience*" (Patton, 1990, p. 70). This final supposition suggests that human experience of the world and others in it is fundamentally relational and takes place in an "interworld of shared meaning" (Crossley, 1996, p. 24). One cannot, therefore, "tap intersubjective meaning with depth and diversity" (p. 704) through individual interviews alone. Group interviews have the ability to "capitalize on the interaction within a group" (Asbury, 1995) and are specifically designed to "draw on the dynamic of the group interactions to stimulate thinking and thus the verbal contributions of participants" (Krueger & Martin in Asbury, 1995, p. 415). The productive possibilities of group interviews were sometimes realized, as in the following excerpt, where Gāo Sù learns that she has, based on her personal experience, significantly underestimated teachers' job insecurity:

Lǎo Lè: It is said, the teachers in that school, [if] they didn't work hard, or they cannot make the students get a good mark, maybe they will lose their job....
Gāo Sù: In our school, one teacher [lost her job]....
Lǎo Pīng: Every year we have less than ten. Four, five, six, seven, eight...
Gāo Sù: So many! So many!

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As a strategy of intersubjective inquiry, group interviews generate data "rich, detailed perspectives that could not be obtained through other methodological strategies" (*ibid.*). They also create a reflexive space in which the researcher's contributions are integrated into the data; no longer a separate, interrogating presence, the researcher is co-creative of a world that emerges in intersubjective space. Indeed, my own voice frequently directed conversation in ways that went beyond the influence typically associated with mere questioning. My own experiences of educational reform as a teacher were sometimes posed as points of comparison, here following Lǎo Pīng's recounting of her young colleague's struggles—

> Lǎo Pīng: But only one student passed the exam. The girl really was worried. She often said I don't want to teach now. It's not interesting.
>
> Lorin: I remember in my first year when I was teaching....I had two [classes] of non-academic students....But both of those classes were quite large, about 30 students, very big at that time. But it made me feel very stupid like I didn't know what I was doing—

and even more often in the form of stories that express negative opinions about 'leaders' similar to those articulated by participants—

> Lorin: They had a long, long meeting. Our company has maybe about six or seven of these leaders. Anyway, they had a meeting that was so long. Do this, do this, do this...and I thought it was a waste of time. They should just ask the workers what they want.

However much I intended at the outset to avoid influencing the direction of interviews, such redirections happened early and often during the process. Doing so, as discussed below, appeared to have the additional effect of strengthening interpersonal trust between participants and me.

Interviews—or, rather, discussions—were as unrestrictive as possible in order to encourage a broad array of responses. Fontana & Frey label this interview type "field, natural" (p. 705). Each was staged in an "informal, spontaneous" (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 705) setting, with participants taking turns hosting the group in their homes. Asbury (1995) notes the role of such settings as well as that of food in helping

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participants to feel comfortable. In each meeting, copious amounts of fruit and tea were consumed; indeed, the cacophony of clanking tea cups and pouring water occasionally obscure my recordings of these occasions. In one case, the discussion in Wáng Diàn's new apartment, the group meeting was preceded by a trip to a nearby fruit market and followed-up with delicious homemade noodles and soup. I also did nothing to curtail the interruptions of daily life, such as the ringing of doorbells and mobile phones. Gāo Sù's daughter was present at two of the group sessions and intervened in the discussions a number of times. This strategy mirrored the conduct of individual interviews, all of which were conducted in locations such as tea/coffee shops and restaurants.

As discussed above, my intention as interviewer was to adopt a "moderately nondirective" stance (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 705). Thus, prior to each discussion, I prepared a "semistructured interview guide" along with "probe questions" (Asbury, 1995, p. 417), though it was never the case that this guide was faithfully followed. In the end, interactions were "very unstructured" (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 705) as planned questions were abandoned in favour of directions recommended as the dialogue unfolded. The most memorable of these redirections came when Wáng Diàn, minutes into the first meeting, rejected my suggestion of an icebreaking activity by proposing that we get straight to the point:

Lorin: So, my idea is that on this piece of paper, each of us will draw or write one word or two....that describes your experience in the last three years with change in schools, in education, in English teaching. So we can think a little and then write one word...

Wáng Diàn: One word!

Lorin: Two words, if you like.

Wáng Diàn: Now, I think you can give us a topic. Or two topics and we can discuss the topics together and then say something on the paper.

Lorin: Ok. So, tell me more. I don't know what you mean. So, we'll say one topic and then...

Wáng Diàn: Ok. One topic or two topics or three topics. You give us the topics and then we can discuss these topics together and you give the answer.

Lorin: Ok. You mean write it after. Ok. It's a different idea, right. What do you think?

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Wáng Diàn: Yes.
(Group Meeting, October 7th, 2005)

By remaining open to such suggestions, a relaxed atmosphere was established in which more reciprocal relationships could be formed. Taking a non-directive stance also promoted reciprocity, allowing me at times to shift to a position from which I acted as informant. Stories of my own experiences of reform as well as tales of teachers' acts of resistance in my home province occasionally served as illustrations to help participants understand my questions. I also responded regularly to participants' queries regarding my opinions on the present situation in China. These moments of revelation acted to humanize me as a researcher, and perhaps curtailed the less desirable effects of my 'foreign expert' status, thus helping to establish relationships on less formal ground. That this strategy had some effect is confirmed in Lao Ping's comments on her motivation for taking part in the study:

> I participated [in] the research because, first I could have a good chance to learn from you, to chat with you in English in order to practice my oral English, to learn some teaching methods in the discussions. Second I want to know how a foreigner thinks about China's English Teaching. (Personal Communication, March 2nd/4th, 2006)

Having entered the research with the expectation of learning, Lao Ping sees herself as more than mere informant.

Reflective Journal

In addition to data generated in interviews, my own reflective journals have proved an important source as I write this document. Such fieldnotes are a fundamental feature of all research. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) stress the maintenance of "detailed, accurate, and extensive fieldnotes" (p. 107) including those that supplement recorded interviews as a way of capturing unrecorded contextual information (*ibid.*). In the present study, field notes have played a particularly important role and are collectively referred to as my 'reflective journal'. Notes kept in this form provided a forum for deliberation on analysis, ethics and conflicts, my "frame of mind" in the field, as well as clarification of other data (p. 121). Regular journaling helped me to make decisions on modifications to methodology as I

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continuously reflected on success and failure in the field and reviewed the literature seeking solutions (Schuhmacher & McMillan, 1993, p. 142). It also allowed me to speculate on and test emergent hypotheses based on data generated (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1996, p. 454).

* * *

The preceding chapters have dealt largely with matters of metatheory, i.e. the ontological, epistemological, and methodological foundations of this study. In the next chapter I turn my attention to analysis and, more specifically, to a consideration of the productive context of the symbolic forms through which I hope to develop an understanding of participants' social reality.

Notes

[1] All names given are pseudonyms designed to protect participants' identities.
[2] In this case I use "non-Chinese" to mean nationals of countries other than the People's Republic of China.
[3] I use the word 'headmaster' because it is the word used most frequently by the teachers themselves. They are familiar with the word 'headmistress', which is included in the vocabulary list of the national curriculum, and occasionally use 'principal' but, during the course of interviews and throughout my tenure in China, few dwelt making a gender distinction in this way.

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Chapter 4
Social-Historical Analysis

As discussed above, the first stage of Thompson's depth hermeneutics is an analysis of the social-historical context in which social actors' symbolic representations are produced, consumed, and reproduced (Thompson, 1990, p. 282). In Chapter 3, I described how Thompson divides this context into four constituent parts: *spatio-temporal setting*, *fields of interaction*, *social institutions*, and *social structures*. In the remainder of this chapter, I consider each of these in turn and thus fulfill the first condition of possibility of a hermeneutically informed understanding of participants' accounts.

Spatio-Temporal Setting

The socio-politico-economic topography of teaching in contemporary China owes much to the broader trends that have shaped the country since the death of Mao Zedong and the subsequent reorientation of the state policy under Deng Xiaoping and his successors, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao[1]. Special attention must also be paid to the period immediately preceding the vast economic, political, and social changes that constitute China's opening-up. The scope of this reorientation has been as inclusive in terms of its effects on the lives of all Chinese citizens—whether urban or rural, professional, or peasant/farmer—as it has been aggressive in its pursuit of the complete 'renovation' of the nation and its people (Anagnost, 1997). The ostensible starting point of this reform was the rise to power of Deng Xiaoping, who raised to the pinnacle of the political agenda what both Mao Zedong (in 1965) and Zhou Enlai (in 1975) had identified as the crucial goals of socialist development (Shen, 1994, p. 61): the "Four Modernizations" in "agriculture, industry, science and technology, and national defense" (Henze, 1987, p. 252). These general goals were spelled out as a set of aims designed to improve an all-encompassing yet ill-defined "quality" (Henze, 1987, p. 253):

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(a) An increase in national income and in the output of industrial/agricultural production as well as freight volume;
(b) An expansion in commodity flow and domestic as well as foreign trade;
(c) An increase in industrial labor productivity and in the average wages of workers and staff;
(d) An overall rise in living standards (including housing and the availability of consumer goods;
(e) An improved (planned) linkage between production and scientific research, and
(f) An increase in output within the higher education system, paralleled with a balanced reduction on the level of secondary general education and a more diversified structure of educational opportunity through the provision of secondary vocational education. (Li & Zhang in Henze, 1987, p. 253)

And while, as Henze suggests, these proposals were "diffuse in operational terms", they are clearly oriented toward the development of science and technology, "product quality", and "economic efficiency" (p. 253), a shift that represents a concomitant turn away from a past focus on labour-intensive industries (Chan & Mok, 2001, p. 26). But the prominent place occupied by essentially socialist aims (readily apparent in items c and d above) as well as the connection between the modernization policies of Mao, Zhou, and Deng renders problematic any suggestion that Deng era reforms represent a radical reorientation away from socialism and toward Western style capitalism. Wang & Karl (1998), for example, argue that, while reform does indeed represent a sharp contrast to Mao's "antimodern theory of modernization" (p. 14)—in terms of a *modus operandi* that stresses expertise, economics, and "international interaction" over ideology, politics, and isolation (Adamson, 1995, "Background", ¶ 1)—it nevertheless shares with the 'new way' a teleological conception of history in which China's current path is an extension of the inevitable march toward modernization begun at a unspecified point in the past. As such, "contemporary socialism", far from being a repudiation of Mao or an embracing of the capitalist road, may be seen as "a type of Marxism as an ideology of modernization…[that has been] stripped of the antimodern character of Mao's socialism" (Wang & Karl, 1997, p. 16). But this is not a Marx*ism* in the mode that has come to be expected of historical communist movements; rather, it may be seen as a return to a properly Marx*ian* course of development in which policy encourages a process Mao willed the country to avoid—that of a developmental

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succession from a traditional, agrarian economy, to capitalism, and, finally, to socialism. Fan (1997) summarizes how this theory of "'socialism with Chinese characteristics'" (p. 631) did not serve as a guide to policy formulation, but was, rather, adopted after the fact to legitimate a program already in place:

> [The]...theory of a 'primary stage of socialism'....argued that China was a semi-colonial and semi-feudal country when it adopted socialism; and because it has not yet reached the socialist stage as defined by Marx and Lenin, the transition to socialism would entail a very long process. But it was not until the late 1980s, when party leaders desperately sought legitimization for the reform movement and the non-state economy, that...[the] idea became popular and official. (p. 622)

Framed in this way, it is not surprising that the market is looked to as the driving force of the new Chinese economy, as is an acceptance of the global world's impact upon it. As the transition to a more capitalist economy is recast as a natural development of "great historical progress" (Wang & Karl, 1998, p. 16), the apparent eschewal of socialist ideals ceases to be a contradiction as the nation pursues a policy to "allow some people to get rich first" (*ibid.*). This view of inequality as inevitable and even productive at the level of the individual is also present on the order of regional development, where the Mao era practice of diverting investment from rich coastal areas to the poorer inland has given way to a policy of "uneven development" in which rapid expansion of eastern regions is touted as a necessary stage of in the overall economic progress of the nation (Fan, 1997, p. 620).

Much has been made of the success of Deng's reforms, and few would argue that they have succeeded on many levels. Between 1975 and 2005, China's real gross domestic product grew at an average rate of 9.6% per year (Morrison, 2006; see also UNESCO, 2004). Variously described as the world's sixth (Keng, 2006, p. 183) and second (Morrison, 2006, p. CRS-12) largest economy, it will become its largest exporter and economy by 2010 should economic output continue to grow at current rates (*ibid.*). Its accession to the World Trade Organization in 2001 is often held up as a signal of its inevitable arrival as a world economic powerhouse. Poverty has fallen dramatically since 1978 when one in three lacked a basic standard of living as compared to one in twenty in the present (Andornino & Wilcox, 2006). But these

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dramatic results have not come without cost and controversy. 'Restructuring'—privatization, rationalization, closures, bankruptcies—has resulted in precarious conditions for workers in a system once characterized by "low-income, high-welfare, [and] lifetime employment" (Wang, 2003, p. 160). *Xiàgǎng* (下岗—layoffs) have hit state sector worker's hard, with more than 68% of the country's unemployed laid off coming from state owned enterprises (*ibid.*). Women have been disproportionately victimized by unemployment as a combination of traditional values, state policy, and academic discourse[2] have led to a situation in which women account for more than 62% of the unemployed despite comprising less than 39% of the urban workforce[3] (Braun, 2005; Maurer, Rawski, & Zhang, 1999; Wang, 2003, p. 160).

Trends such as these led to widespread expressions of concern over the pace of reform as well as its uneven effects. The uneasiness evident in rhetoric broadcast on state media reflects the government's overriding concern with threats to social stability reflected in the disenchantment of broad sectors of society (Perry & Selden, 2003, p. 1). Unrelenting development in urban centres makes visible both prosperity and its shadowy underbelly—the expanding and 'illegitimate'[4] *míngōng*[5] (民工) labour force (Huang, 2001; Mallee, 2003, p. 136). The spectre of social unrest is embodied in these tens of millions of serially displaced migrant workers who wander the country in search of a marginal living, if not 'the Chinese Dream' of prosperity. And while industrial and urban growth continues at record levels, neither rural economic prospects nor those trapped within them are so optimistic. Diminishment of income inequality within the rural population, closing of the urban-rural disparity, a sense that all benefited to some extent despite the inequities engendered—all were features of the late-1970s and early-1980s that have gradually given way to stagnation and growing economic discrepancies within and between rural and urban settings (Bian & Logan, 1996, p. 740). Disputes over land ownership (Ho, 2003) and environmental protests (Jun, 2003) continue to generate massive numbers of protests[6] and, on occasion, violent reprisals (BBC News, 2005; Beech, Hua, & Jakes, 2006; Selden & Perry, 2003). Such dissatisfaction amongst the workers and peasants—still the vast majority of the population—upon whom the CCP traditionally based its legitimacy, not to

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mention those displaced by 'progress', does not bode well for social stability, and serves as a reminder of an earlier time when the peasant-worker embodied the (labour) wealth and, thus, future of the nation. Whereas s/he was positioned in both national myth and policy as prime benefactor of the Revolution before reform, not so in the reform era, a time when the rural peasant/unemployed urban worker represents an absence of the very 'quality' promoted as the key to Deng's reforms and the ever-present potential of one's child slipping into failure (Anagnost, 2004). That economic advancement has largely ceased for this segment of the population over the past fifteen years rightly triggers consternation in cadres and trepidation amongst proponents of market-oriented economics.

Criticism of the theory and reality of uneven development eventually led to changes in the Ninth Five-Year Plan that, while "reaffirming Deng's vision and the reforms' success", nevertheless repositions uneven regional development as a flaw "to be corrected rather than tolerated" (Fan, 1997, p. 631). Despite changes to policy in recent five-year plans and whatever the 'correct' or most expeditious path to prosperity, there can be little doubt that the past thirty years have seen a radical change in China's social, political, and economic structures. It is also clear that the growth in income disparity continues unaffected by these adjustments and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future (Keng, 2006). As a result, disparity—in terms of both individual and regional gaps—has been positioned higher on the political agenda. The Tenth Five-Year Plan (2001-2005), for example, was notable for its initiation of the 'Go West Program', a plan that, along with other policy statements, testifies to the relative import of inland development in contemporary policy discussions (Lin & Chen, 2004). Whether this reflects a genuine concern for those residing in the impoverished hinterland or simply a matter of securing economic inputs to ensure the continued success of the coastal regions is a matter for further analysis and debate. But the rhetorical attention paid to such matters does indicate, as suggested above, the continued legacy and influence of socialist concerns with equality.

It would seem, however, that such a focus on discovering 'natural' or 'objective' economic laws ensures the continued failure of policy to pay attention to

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historical continuities across policy eras. Individual and regional equality are not, after all, unique to an arbitrarily defined post-reform epoch. Indeed, the Communist Revolution itself was a rejection of traditional and feudal structures founded upon institutionalized inequality, but it did not result in a break from hierarchical orders of privilege, despite its egalitarian rhetoric[7]. A more productive analysis might supplant arguments of regional and urban-rural inequality with questions about the role of power and privilege in the formulation of reform policy and, central to the concerns of this research, how socio-cultural schemata embedded in and reproduced at the level of the individual actor mediate the realization of a more just society. In the following section, I review trends in educational reform since the opening up, but also point out the ways in which this era is inextricably joined to the past. In doing so, I consider the ways in which post-Mao reforms in education represent less a break with the past than a return to a time-honoured and briefly interrupted tradition.

Educational Reform

It might seem obvious that the success of such an aggressive program of modernization would be tied to the educational system, but it was not until 1974-75 that this tie was made explicit (Henze, 1987, p. 253). Not surprisingly, it was Deng Xiaoping who agitated for an "interpretation of education as a productive force" (p. 253) and as having a central role in preparing the country for its transformation (Shen, 1994, p. 62; Paine, 1992). Such policy directions were made clear in Deng's addresses to the Central Committee as early as 1977:

> the development of science and technology [is] 'the key to achieving modernization,' that 'it is necessary to improve education at every level...to promote scientific and technological work' and that improving education comprised two aspects to 'raise the standards of education at the same time as we make it available to more and more people. (Deng in Henze, 1987, p. 253)

And while Deng has taken his place as the great leader of China's resurgence in the late 20th century, voices of 19th century reformers echo loudly in his words:

> As a result of these repeated wars and repeated losses, the early reformers came to the conclusion that China lacked advanced talented people (*ren-cai*) who were also versed

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in the knowledge of Western science and technology. The reformers passionately urged the public as well as the imperial court that 'schools are the places where human talent is created, people with talent make a nation strong; So the strength of the Western countries is due to their learning, not to their people' (Zheng in Shen, 1994, p. 58-59).

Here the connection between the West, modernity, and science and technology is present one hundred years before the opening-up, as is the invocation of quality—in the descriptors *rén-cái* (人才) and 'talent'—as critical to raising of the nation to the level of the other. Before considering in detail the course of educational reform following these initial pronouncements, I offer a brief description of the period immediately preceding promulgation of the policies that overturned the effects of a period that marked the highest point of revolutionary radicalism. Doing so will serve to place educational reform within its proper context and allow a fuller understanding of the changes that marked the late 1970s and beyond.

The Legacy of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution

Universities and middle and primary schools should all resume classes and make revolution. (People's Daily headline, October 25th, 1967 in Seybolt, 1973, p. 65)

In order to better understand the specific actions that the general goals of reform set in motion, one must recognize that China was emerging from a "disastrous period of ideological fanaticism, economic depression, and national isolation known as the [Great Proletarian] Cultural Revolution" (GPCR) (Shen, 1994, p. 57). It would be difficult to overstate the effects of that period of time on both individual citizens and the national psyche. The GPCR by design attempted to dismantle the foundations of Chinese society, including the family, educational institutions and, indeed, culture itself (Barendsen, 1975, p. 6; Fan, 1990). And while the public immolation of the 'Gang of Four'—one of whom was Mao Zedong's wife, Jiang Qing—and the refutation of the policies promoted by them during that period helped to control damage to Mao's reputation, this has occurred despite the central role he played in stoking revolutionary fervor (Hu & Seifman, 1987; Xinhua News Agency [XNA], 1987a). Much effort has been made to separate Mao from the more destructive activities of that time[8] without absolving him entirely from his responsibility as

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Chairman of the CCP (Cleverley, 1991; Hu & Seifman, 1987). Whatever his ultimate role in the violence that occurred[9], there can be little doubt that the general direction of the GPCR was his[10]. Mao's conclusion by the mid-1960's that the nation's youth had thus far failed to adequately take up the Revolution's new values made the nation's educational institutions, stubbornly dominated in his estimation by 'intellectuals' and 'bourgeoisie', an easy target of blame (*ibid.*). If the revolutionary successes of the GPCR were mediated by the strength of the very institutions it sought to undermine, it was not due to a failure of radicalism in its ultimate goals. Mao's educational thought and subsequent disruption of it was a central feature:

> While their main task is to study, they should also learn other things; that is to say, they should not learn only book knowledge but should learn also about industry, agriculture, and the military. They should also criticize the bourgeoisie. The period of schooling must be shortened and education must be revolutionized. The atmosphere in which the bourgeois intellectuals control our schools must not be allowed to continue any longer. (Mao in Seybolt, 1973, p. 63)

Such statements and their later radicalization by various arms of the party and state apparatus led initially to attacks on the elite of China's key universities and later spread throughout the country's educational apparatus (*ibid.*). The movement reached its height in the Red Guard's "campaign to eliminate all vestiges of 'old' ideas, customs, culture, and habits" (p. 6), a pogrom enabled by the Party Central Committee's granting of free travel rights to the young radicals, not to mention Mao's encouragement of their activities at massive rallies in Beijing (*ibid.*). If a 'reactionary intelligentsia' stood-in as counter-revolutionary target of the Red Guard's campaign, then Mao's pronouncements made clear that the 'worker-peasant' would be the primary beneficiary in the new order:

> To accomplish the proletarian educational revolution, it is essential to have working class leadership....The workers propaganda teams should stay permanently in the schools..., and they will always lead the schools. In the countryside, the schools should be managed by the poor and lower-middle peasants—the most reliable ally of the working class. (Mao in Barendsen, 1975, p. 13)

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Knowledge of the sweeping effects of the GPCR also helps one better understand the comparative and self-critical nature of reform following the repudiation of the Gang of Four. If past revolutionary struggles were justified by reference to a superior *other* or the ghost of an inferior Chinese *self*—as in the Great Leap Forward's battle to rectify China's lack of industrial capacity relative to the USSR or Western nations; or the GPCR's determination to root out, amongst other evils, remnants of the feudal self—so, too, has the course of 'opening-up' been initiated and propagated as a battle against those things that made China 'underdeveloped' and, by definition, less 'modern' than 'developed' nations (Henze, 1987, 1992). One might argue that this sense of inferiority—however mediated by patriotic fervor and pride—has been consciously nurtured as a locus of common struggle. Regardless of its origin and role, the invocation of Chinese inferiority inexorably ties the notions of *modernization*, *development*, and *quality* together. According to Henze (1992), the equation of the first two concepts was central to Deng's vision (p. 104). But in order to understand the thrust of policy in the reform era, one must realize that development *qua* modernization was to be achieved through the 'renovation' of the population itself; poor quality of peasants, teachers, or any other identifiable group appropriate to the sector under discussion, was deemed responsible for the failure to 'progress', as opposed to an unfortunate result of underdevelopment[11] (Anagnost, 1997, 2004; Fan, 1990; Henze, 1992; Lin & Xie, 1988; XNA, 1987d). Anagnost argues that policy implementation in the reform era may be analyzed as a set of practices by which the government has subjected the population itself and, by extension, the individual bodies it comprises, to processes designed to elevate quality (*ibid.*). Positioned thus, schooling becomes a technology for overhaul of the social body and removal of barriers to modernization. In the following section, I review the details of this 'technologization', focusing on how the specific problem of 'low quality teachers' (Wang, 1987) has been addressed.

Details of Post-Mao Educational Reform

> The "gang of four" deliberately distorted Chairman Mao's appraisal of intellectuals, sabotaged the party's policy of united with, educating and remoulding them and

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dampened the socialist enthusiasm of the cadres and teachers. (Daily Report, 1987, p. 55)

Perhaps the most telling feature of educational reform following the GPCR is the disappearance of the "zero-sum", 'moderate' versus 'radical' politics that characterized public discourse during the revolutionary period, most strikingly so in the Cultural Revolution (Rosen, 1984, p. 65). In line with the goal of refocusing the nation's economy on science and technology, reform era policy takes on a strikingly pragmatic tenor. Deng proposed a program centred on four points:

1. Raising the quality of education
2. Restoring order and discipline in schools
3. Reforming education to meet the needs of economic development
4. Raising the quality and status of teachers (Deng in Lo, 1984, p. 154)

Memories of the worst days of the GPCR resonate in the second point, but the overwhelming focus is the "theme that educational policies must be changed to bring up more and better qualified people to meet the demands of the Four Modernizations" (Lo, 1984, p. 154). 'Quality' loomed large in this vision, and a number of concrete measures signaled that much of the road ahead would be paved with elements of the past, as the re-introduction of examinations, diversity in types of schools [12], and keypoint schools indicated (*ibid.*; Rosen, 1984, p. 66-67; Fan, 1990; Hu & Seifman, 1987). Further developments have involved new curricula and reorganization of primary, secondary, and higher education (Rosen, 1984, p. 66-67). And while reform to primary and higher education systems have been relatively uncontroversial, the same cannot be said for secondary schools. If the popularization of primary education has been widely accepted, and the connection between the restoration of higher education a necessary condition for the success of the Four Modernizations, then changes to secondary schools have been most problematic, especially considering the ways in which they were to be returned to their role as a proving grounds for those striving to be admitted to universities (p. 65; Rosen, 1992). Such moves should be understood in relation to tensions that existed prior to the GPCR, for both examinations—with their selective function—and keypoint schools—with their inherent elitism—were targeted by radical elements as barriers to a class equalization

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appropriate to the revolutionary society (1984, p. 67). Whatever the choices and possibilities offered by that system, it was perceived—perhaps rightly—that its prime benefactors were the children of intellectuals (*ibid.*). But despite this distaste for privilege-based promotion, the system that emerged following the closure of schools at the outset of the GPCR was plagued by a new type of preferential treatment—this time in favour of a new elite, the children of cadres (p. 70). Pre-GPCR tensions, never fully resolved, were thus re-instated and intensified (p. 71) in Deng era reforms, for it would seem that, in the absence of critical analyses separate from the viewpoints of GPCR radicals or an appreciation of the roll of cultural capital in educational attainment, and especially given the disaster that the GPCR represented, little could be said to counter the resurrection of the elitist features of the old system. Thus, the legacy of pre-GPCR secondary educational system has persisted throughout the reform era, despite occasional adjustments and significant strides forward in the provision of more equal educational possibilities. Certain schools are still considered superior, as are regular secondary schools over vocational schools (Rosen, 1984, p. 68). Reform that privileged quality—of schooling and the students produced by the system—over quantity—in terms of numbers of schools and students enrolled at higher levels—resulted, in other words, in the restoration of an fundamentally hierarchical educational system, a characteristic that I consider below as critical to processes that have led to the marketization of Chinese schools.

Reform of Teaching & Teachers

> All work, be it mental or manual, is labour. (Deng in Hu & Seifman, 1987, p. 43)

The fourth item in Deng's shopping list makes clear that teachers would need to be some of the first targeted for 'enhancement', for in Deng's words, "teachers hold the key to the success of a school in training qualified personnel for the proletariat; namely, workers with both socialist consciousness and culture who are developed morally, intellectually and physically" (Deng in Lo, p. 154). Pronouncements about the need to raise the status of teachers became ubiquitous as Deng's leadership gained momentum and was consolidated in 1980 (for examples see Deng, 1987a, 1987b; Fang,

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1987; XNA, 1987b, 1987c). But any notion that such policy statements returned teachers to a gilded age would be a simplification of the contingent nature of teachers' social and professional status both before the Cultural Revolution and following the reform of the late-1970s. In what follows, I offer a summary of the ebb and flow of teachers' status in the twentieth century.

Fields of Interaction

Taken at face value, Deng's identification of a need to rehabilitate teachers as well as his belief in power of education to transform the nation might be taken as confirmation of the popular perception that teachers enjoy high status within Chinese culture (Fwu & Wang, 2002; Hui, 2005). There is, of course, a degree of truth in this assessment; as discussed below, the teacher is a figure of considerable esteem in the historical-cultural imagination. But to accept uncritically such a link between traditional ideals and reality would be to gloss over the historically dynamic nature of teachers' social position. It is important to recognize, first of all, that no particular occupation may be labeled 'prestigious' once and for all. On the one hand, social status is not objectively fixed, but is, rather, a shifting measure of the "relative standing of teaching as an occupation in a hierarchy of occupations" (Fwu & Wang, 2002, p. 211). This comparative notion of social status requires quantification of people's attitudes toward various occupations such as Lin and Xie's (1988) survey of occupational prestige in urban China. On the other hand, the discovery that secondary school teachers rank higher than "high ranking officials", "police officers", and "miners" in a given occupational pecking order does not necessarily mean that they are more or less reviled than these others at the level of the individual, nor that they stand in particularly privileged position in terms of quality of life. In the context of the People's Republic of China, one must also pay attention to the fluidity of relations of prestige and their tendency to shift in relation to official policy. Such ambiguity and conditionality is clearly the case in the historical ups and downs experienced by teachers. In the present research, I am not concerned with a quantifying teachers'

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status vis-à-vis other occupations at a particular moment in time. Rather, I attempt establish in a limited way the trends that have characterized teachers' status over time.

Teachers' Social Status

> One should respect one's teacher as if he were one's father even if the teacher-student relationship exists only for a single day. (Traditional Chinese Maxim quoted in Fwu & Wang, 2002, p. 217)

> It takes ten years to grow trees, but a hundred years to cultivate a person (十年树木, 百年树人 – *shí nián shu mù, bái nián shu rén*). (Traditional Chinese Analogy quoted in Hui, 2005, p. 17)

> If the country will prosper, it will value teachers and stress instructors. If it values teachers and stresses instructors, then the laws and regulations survive (国将兴, 必贵师而重傅, 贵师而重傅, 则法度存 – *guó jiang xing, bi gui shi er zhong fu, gui shi er zhong fu, ze fa du cun*). (Xun Zi in Hui, 2005, p. 25)

The Chinese conception of 'teacher' (教师—*jiàoshī*)[13] finds its roots in the two characters which compose the word *jiàoyù* (education): *jiào* (教)—to "teach, educate, guide"; *yù* (育)—to "rear, nurture, nourish" (Hawkins, 1983, pp. 3-4). The teacher is both *jìnshì* (进士—"learned scholar"), transmitter of knowledge, and *rénshì* (仁士—"moral exemplar") (Chan, 1999; Fwu & Wang, 2002; Hui, 2005). Teachers perform an essential service in Chinese society, a reality recognized in the position of the teacher in the Daoist cosmology—*tiān* (天—heaven), *dì* (地—earth), *jūn* (君—emperor), *qīn* (亲—parent), *shī* (师—teacher) (Qi, 1983; Fwu & Wang, 2002)—as well as in the traditional hierarchy of "four estates" comprising "scholars, peasants, artisans and merchants" (Fwu & Wang, 2002, p. 217). Scholarly tradition provides additional support for the value of teachers: Mencius considered its rewards above that of "kingship"; "Mozi warned his students that trying to refute his words by theirs was like throwing eggs at a boulder"; Xunzi likened a challenge to the superiority of one's teacher to "asking a blind man to distinguish colour, or a deaf man sound"; and Han Yu affirmed the high status of educators in his essay 'The Teacher' (Cleverley, 1991, pp. 23-24). Maxims, analogies, idioms, and proverbs such as those quoted above also indicate the influence of traditional schema on Chinese education (Hui, 2005). From

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the perspective of tradition and language, the teacher is the primary and esteemed practitioner of an education articulated as a complex process attending to the cognitive, physical, emotional, and moral needs of the child. Indeed, a recognition of a nurturing function beyond knowledge transmission is much in evidence today: the structuring of student-school relationships around the *bānzhǔrén* (班主任—homeroom teacher)[14]; the prominence of the *jìsù xúexiào* (寄宿学校—boarding schools) for children as young as pre-school age; and the practice of *looping*[15] in primary and middle schools (Liu, 1997) all speak to the substantial responsibility and trust placed on teachers. For the *lǎoshī* (老师—teacher, or the more formal 教师—*jiàoshī*) to act as master of knowledge and in *loco parentis* is not only allowed and accepted, but expected.

But this responsibility has not always translated to a commensurate level of respect. Qi (1983) suggests that even before the establishment of formal training in the early-twentieth century the status of teachers was in a state of decline (p. 203). Common teachers[16], for example, were afforded living standards scarcely higher than a "personal servant, clerk…master workman" (Cleverley, 1991, p. 24) or "'knowing' servant" (Hu & Seifman, 1987, p. 40). Teaching was not considered a particularly desirable career choice, and teachers had no special training in pedagogy and were, as a rule, 'failed' scholars, or those who had passed examinations at a lower level[17] (Cleverley, 1991; Pepper, 1990; Qi, 1983). The seeds of a better situation were planted with the establishment in 1902 of training schools in Shanghai and Beijing, though progress was limited as many governing bodies—still fragmented at this point—failed to make education a priority or lack the funds to do so (Guo, 2005; Qi, 1983). Where expansion of education in the Republican era (1911-1949) was successful, it included remission of fees and greater regulation (Cleverley, 1991, p. 42). Much of this period was consumed with struggles over the degree to which foreign systems (Western and Japanese) can and should serve as a model for China, as well as continuous struggles over ideological control and the popularization of schooling (Cleverley, 1991; Pepper, 1991). Attempts were made to address teachers' working conditions under Guomindang [GMD][18] leadership during the 1930s (Cleverley, 1991, p. 61), which saw education as the primary means by which national unity could be promoted (p.

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54). But it was also the case that combined with the Anti-Japanese and Revolutionary Wars, the de-emphasizing of examination and certification standards during the period preceding the Revolution led teachers to their lowest status[19] (Qi, 1983).

Arising as it did from this context, the establishment of the Communist Republic in 1949 was a mixed blessing for teachers. On the positive side, teacher education[20] was considered to be at par with industrial development (Li, 1999, p. 184); on the negative, "the poor social image of the teacher carried over" (Hu & Seifman, 1987, p. 40) into the increasingly politicized educational environment (Sautman, 1991). Teaching remained an occupation with poor financial prospects: "the common complaint was that...teachers could not earn enough money to clothe themselves, that living and working conditions were very poor, and that teachers—in spite of their many sacrifices—still had a low social status" (Hu & Seifman, 1987, p. 40). The Party was generally suspicious of the political and educational qualifications of teachers, particularly those in primary schools, who were sometimes poorly treated by rural cadres (Cleverley, 1981, p. 125). The first concrete evidence of the more politicized nature of the new China came as intellectuals (including teachers) were targeted in the "Three Anti's" campaign against "corruption, waste and bureaucratic working styles" (*ibid.*). This was the beginning of a period characterized by rises and falls in teachers' fortunes in conjunction with the "macropolitical orientation of the CCP leaders" (Sautman, 1991, pp. 670-671). The teaching profession, according to Sautman, has been "politicized", "hyperpoliticized", and "depoliticized" with varying effects for practitioners (*ibid.*). This is mainly due to the critical positioning of the educator in communicating the new socialist ideal immediately following the establishment of the People's Republic (Qi, 1983), but has continued as the orientation of Party policy has shifted in the ensuing years. During the early part of the 1960s, for example, schools were required to "take teaching as the most important thing" and teachers were freed from the dictates of local authorities (Clevery, 1991, p. 151). But if the Revolution has always recognized the key position of teachers and often treated them with a concomitant deference, it has also been guilty of vilifying them[21]: "when the Cultural Revolution started in 1967, teachers' status plummeted. Disheartening stories were often heard of teachers being persecuted to death" (Li, 1999, pp. 184-185). Teachers

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became members of the *láo jiǔ* (老九—stinking ninth category) along with other intellectuals—'bourgeois academic authorities'—and were the targets of near continuous vilification at the hands of the emergent dictatorship of the proletariat (Cleverley, 1991; Fan, 1990; Fang, 1987; Hu & Seifman, 1987; Rosen, 1984). Such ill treatment was the symptom of a larger reorganization of education that aimed to eliminate, among other, more abstract elements, the scourge of favoritism and inequality, but which, in its early phases at least, resulted in the near destruction of the education system as a whole, a consequence since blamed entirely on the machinations of the Gang of Four (XNA, 1987a, 1987b, 1987c).

> Today, whether in the schools or in society, the trend of respecting teachers is beginning to form, and the position of teachers has improved somewhat. The broad ranks of teachers enjoy ease of mind and work actively, toiling to improve the quality of education and the level of teaching, and a flourishing prospect has appeared on the education front. (Li, 1987, p. 99)

But even since the repudiation of the Gang of Four and the "opening up", teachers have not walked a uniform upward path. Events at Tiananmen Square, for example, led to a short-lived backlash against this influential group (Li, 1999, p. 185). There can be little doubt, however, that much rhetoric in favour of teachers has flowed from official levels, beginning with the ministry of education's excoriation of the Gang in 1976 for its pursuit of an "ultraright", "metaphysical" line that resulted in assaults against teachers and their profession (XNA, 1987b). Deng (1987a) made clear that intellectual work was henceforth to be regarded as labour (p. 56) and that those engaged in teaching should have their material conditions improved (p. 57). The rhetorical force of such commitments is born out in the proliferation of documents from that period addressing teachers' training, status, and pay (Deng, 1987b; Henze, 1992; Li, 1987; XNA, 1987c, 1987d).

Each of these elements was seen as needing of correction, but such moves did not necessarily arise out of an altruistic cultural impulse or desire to change old ideas. Any illusion that this was case is dispelled by mainstream academic research of the 1990s, replete as it is with criticism of women teachers' 'low quality' and suggestions

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that the true source of teachers' low status may be found in the "feminization" of their profession (Kwong, 2000; Shi & Gu, 2000; Zhang & Guo, 2000). If only more men could be attracted to teaching, Fu (2000) suggests, all problems would cease to exist. As appealing as this argument may be in some quarters, the desire to elevate teachers' status must be understood in relation to the broader goals of modernization. In order to properly position teachers as a technology by which the quality of the people would be improved and, thus, modernization achieved, the quality of teacher training institutions needed to be raised, as did the quality of entrants. Attracting highly-ranked candidates suggested a similar need to raise the prestige of teaching as an occupation. The government launched a number of initiatives to do so, including the organizing of a 'Teachers' Day' each September 10th to recognize their contribution to the development of the motherland (Hu & Seifman, 1987, p. 43). The Teachers Law institutionalized improvements to teachers' social image, including ascribing to them professional status (Law, 2002; Lin, 1999, p. 40-41/46-48). Once a part of the 'stinking ninth' category, teachers became members of the "fragrant third" alongside workers and peasants (Cleverley, 1991, p. 225). Nevertheless, teachers' modest remuneration was a critical factor limiting their standing—"some people in society look down on teachers simply because of their low pay" (Li, 1987, p. 101)—and remains so today, despite efforts to improve the situation (Fan, 1990, p. 126; People's Daily Online, 2001). Salaries were raised at least twice in the 1980s in order to elevate them from their last place ranking amongst twelve professions in 1977 (Cheng, 1990, p. 220). Despite this, they still lagged behind in average growth and ranked only tenth by the 1987 and even further below the average of these (Gai, 1990, p. 203; Cheng, 1990), clearly a motivating factor in the drain of teachers from the field (L. N. K. Lo, 1999; Paine, 1992). Poor living conditions persisted into the 1990s, and for teachers in poorer areas, security of pay has been a problem above and beyond low level salaries (L. N. K. Lo, 1999, p. 51). Lin (1999) concurs with this assessment and suggests that improvements for teachers have been "symbolic rather than real" (p. 46). Whatever the stated goals of reform, it appears that teachers' as a whole face intensification in their work to go along with a degraded quality of life (p. 47).

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Generally, though, the volatile history of teaching and current advances in education should not be assumed to indicate either a torturous existence or a professional nirvana in today's Chinese schools. The working situation and reform experiences of teachers varies across economic and political boundaries. Teachers in Shenzhen and Shanghai, for example, may face qualitatively superior living and working environments compared to those in Shijiazhuang or Urumqi[22]8; the itinerant teacher of English in Hebei's mountain villages would not expect the same support as those in much larger centers. Also, a key goal of restructuring has been the effort to devolve power to lower levels of authority (Chan & Mok, 2001, p. 26), a move that has led inevitably to "local solutions" dependent on the economics and micropolitics of cities, villages and schools. This variety in policy implementation frustrates any attempt to enunciate an essential description of teachers' status at this time. Complexity aside, there is consensus among scholars that much work remains to realize a comprehensive upgrading of teachers' status. Li (1999) provides a thorough discussion of educational reform and forcefully asserts the continuing need for governments to address the economic and social standing of teachers. Also, the Ministry of Education has expressed a desire to recruit stakeholders at all levels in the curriculum reform process (Huang, 2004, p. 109). Taken together, the opinions of both government and scholars lend credence to the idea of greater teacher involvement in decision making. Given this attractive posturing, it is surprising to observe a large degree of dissatisfaction with and resistance to change in the EFL curriculum (Cheng & Wang, 2004; Lin, 1999, p. 47). Teachers continue to defy the government's various efforts to halt their defection from schools and continue to leave in large numbers out of frustration at poor working conditions and unpaid wages (Hannam & Park, 2002) or to take advantage of more lucrative opportunities in other sectors (Lin, 1999, p. 47). Many teachers, it would seem, remain dissatisfied with their lot in life.

An historical understanding of the roles of teachers as well as the rises and falls in their status is helpful to an understanding of the ways in which teachers are both products and propagators of an environment in which they are at once respected and disdained. If the Chinese teacher is expected to "never grow tired of learning or weary

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of teaching" ("学而不厌, 诲人不倦"—"*xué er bù yan, hui rén bù juan*"), to be a "diligent gardener" ("辛勤的园丁"—"*xin qin de yuán ding*"), and, like a candle, 'self-sacrificing' (Hui, 2005, p. 26-27), then such expectations, clearly present in these culturally embedded metaphors, must be seen as more than an "internal motivation to most Chinese teachers" (*ibid.*). Hui is perhaps right to point out that teachers are for the most part "willing to fulfill their roles" as set out in this guiding schema and, in doing so, "reinforce their roles and consolidate their status" (*ibid.*). Such an understanding of cultural schema is similar in many ways to Bourdieu's account of the function of *habitus* as dispositions embedded in and reproduced by teachers by virtue of the actions they take. But to perform a task according to a certain set of criteria is not equivalent to doing so with a sense of satisfaction at being required to do so. Indeed, positing such a relationship between cultural expectations and one's contentment at living within these boundaries de-historicizes and de-contextualizes culture, ignoring the ways in which it has changed over time and continues to do so. Furthermore, it fails to consider the connections between symbolic forms, ideology, and a systematically asymmetrical distribution of power, and disregards the potential of social actors to engage in dissent and transformation of their worlds.

Social Institutions

As discussed above, the orientation of the Chinese educational system changed following Deng's rise to power to serve the goals of socialist modernization. What did not change was its hierarchical nature, a structural ladder in which Chinese teachers occupy the lowest rung. Indeed, whatever advances have been made with respect to teachers' status in the broader social realm, there is little evidence to suggest that they have gained advantage within the educational chain of command. While Figure 4.1 helps to clarify the relative position of teachers in the educational hierarchy, it is unable to depict a number of elements critical to understanding the nature of these institutions, including the rules that govern possible action, the resources available to members, and the relations between actors within and between various levels. Such

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information is needed to understand the relatively low degree of power that flows to teachers whatever their position on the organizational chart.

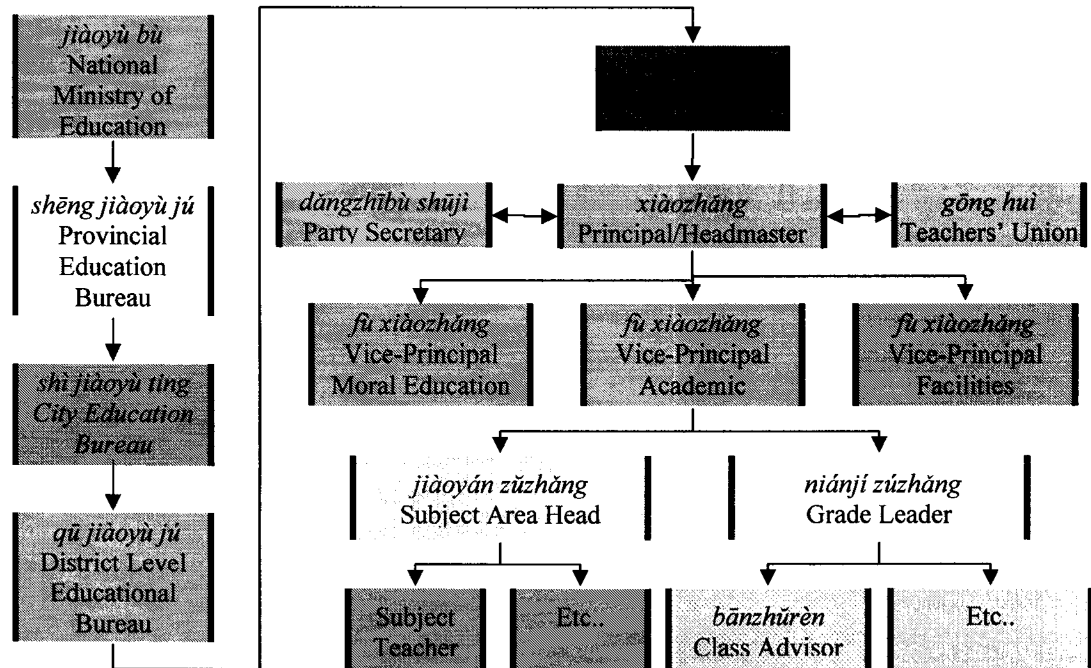

Figure 4.1. Organizational Structure of the Chinese Education System.
The chart is a general depiction of the public school system and takes into account neither local variations in school structure nor the detailed connections between various levels of governance.

The Teacher as Virtuoso

Lynn Paine's (1990) description of the conceptual foundation of teaching in China, what she calls "the teacher as *virtuoso*", is helpful to an understanding of the institutional rules and resources that simultaneously constrain and permit the actions of teachers. Paine claims that this framework rests on a number of key principles: first, that "the central aim of teaching is to provide knowledge for students"; second, that "knowledge is the most important requirement for a teacher"; and third, that "students are expected to receive the teacher's knowledge as it is presented" (p. 50-51). In addition to being the technical locus of knowledge transmission, the *virtuoso* teacher also possesses "heart", a dispositional requirement associated with moral and ethical qualities (p. 62-63). The need to inculcate these elements, knowledge and heart, in teachers has important implications for the way they are trained and, subsequently, how they behave once initiated into the profession. The pre- and in-service training of

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teachers, as with other kinds of learners, relies on the transmission of knowledge, in this case from university- and teacher-experts. According to this *virtuoso* model, both pre-service and neophyte teachers are trained in a system that produces a *professional* habitus that makes them most at-ease when working within hierarchical organizations. Thus, while they may express dissatisfaction and even contempt for specific leaders, they do not necessarily question the validity of the structure itself. They will even, in some cases, aspire to leadership positions themselves. This final point, of course, is obvious—absent the individuals whose personal qualities and ambition are well-suited to the assumption of power, the hierarchy itself would see to exist.

Gender & Teaching

An analysis of the conditions, resources, and relations that characterize educational institutions must also take into account gender. The reader will note the fact that all of this study's participants, excepting myself, are women. While it is not the case the all middle school teachers are women, it is not an exaggeration to say that to explore the perspectives of middle school *English* teachers is to investigate a realm primarily occupied by women. Given this fact, it is not surprising that female teachers—perhaps because of their numerical superiority and their assumed nurturing qualities—are commonly appointed as *bānzhǔrèn* (班主任—class advisors) and—due in part to their assumed superiority in language learning/teaching—*jiàoyán zǔzhǎng* (教研组张—subject area head teachers). But they are less likely to sit as *fù xiàozhǎng* (副校长—vice-principal), and even less so as *xiàozhǎng* (校长—principal). Here, Gāo Sù offers a neat summary of how this imbalance is realized in her school:

> There are about two hundred teachers and only ten percent of them are men teachers. We have sixteen English teachers and only two men of them. [There are] two very important men headmasters and no women headmasters. Most of the other [fù xiàozhǎng] are also men, only two of them are women, but their jobs are…not as important as the other men leaders. (Personal Communication, January 18th, 2006)

There are, of course, numerous and important examples of successful women in higher leadership positions. One of these is the principal of Xiǎo Yān's middle school, identified by her and the other participants as an excellent and well-known leader. Her

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case is an exception nonetheless, a reality also asserted by participants, and may be seen as such in light of similar, gender-inflected hierarchies found in other areas of the education system (Zhang, 2000), not to mention in those of North America (Danylewycz & Prentice, 1986; Prentice, 1977; Strober & Tack, 1980). In the case of middle school English teachers, gender schemas drawn from the broader social structure inflect the aspirations of local actors toward teaching English (gendered female) and leadership (gendered male). To aspire to leadership beyond the level of *jiàoyán zŭzhăng* is to strive to cease being a teacher and, perhaps, become more 'masculine', as Wáng Diàn implied on more than one occasion (see Chapter 6). The added pressure of traditional expectations for women to marry and bear children (Honig & Hershatter, 1988 in Turner, 2006, p. 51) and, furthermore, to shoulder the load of child-rearing, raises the spectre of personal 'de-feminization' and the moral disapproval of family for would be female leaders. These intra-institutional movements help one to understand the perception amongst the female participants of this study that male teachers remain as such only insofar as they are prevented from becoming leaders.

Labour or Party Rights?

The organizational chart presents a further deception, for it indicates notional recognition of labour rights in the form of a teachers' union within the structure of the school. Note, however, that the seat of union leader is most commonly occupied by the school's headmaster. The union, as participants in this study report, offers little more support than an annual opportunity to submit 'suggestions for improvement' and a birthday wish. The response of participants in the present study neatly summarizes their feelings toward this arrangement:

> Lăo Pīng: Do you know, if there is a teachers' union, who will be the chairman of the teachers' union?
> Gāo Sù: The headmaster.
> Lăo Pīng: The headmaster. *(they both laugh)*
> Lorin: The headmaster?...No reason, right?
> Gāo Sù: No use.
> (Group Interview, December 7th, 2005)

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At the level of interpersonal relations, yet another element of the school can be discerned in the presence of the *dǎng zhī bù shū jì* (党支部书记—party secretary). And while it is the case that this title has become less important under market reform, it still represents an important locus of power in many public organizations in that it indicates a link to the broader political power structure. Party membership, most often devalued in the present atmosphere, is nevertheless an entitlement dependent upon and indicative of one's access to a more powerful *guānxī* (关系—social relations) network.

Trends of Privatization & Marketization

Despite the ostensible commitment to 'quality' education, funding of schools has continued to be problematic throughout the reform era, a reality that, when combined with the dominant rhetoric of the 'socialist market', has led to increased privatization and marketization in education. In developing this argument, I do not assert that China's education is in a less advanced state than it was in 1977. Indeed, as I have already discussed, one would be hard-pressed to claim that great strides have not been made in the past thirty years. But the significant achievements made in China's modernization program should not be taken as evidence of uniform and absolute progress in all sectors for all people. While overall enrollment increased by twenty-five percent between 1995 and 2004, including an expansion in the number of students entering senior middle schools from eighteen to twenty-five million, (UNESCO, 2004, p. 38), the achievement of *universal* nine-year schooling has proved more troublesome—ten percent still do not receive the final three or more years (p. 35). As has been the case in the economic realm, improvements in education have been tempered by the fact of regional, ethnic, and gender disparities in access and attainment (Lamontagne, 1990; Lin, 1999) that have been, one might argue, a regrettable yet nevertheless predictable and inevitable condition of market-based reform.

Prior to 1978, as much as 80% funds for schooling were provided by the government (Chow & Shen, 2006, p. 130; Lin, 1999, p. 41), a situation that changed with the shift from provision based on *equality* to *quality*-based provision. This change

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in focus, when combined with the general desire for 'development' and expansion, necessitated a higher level of funding, an elevation that has proven difficult to realize. As discussed above, absolute additions to teachers' salaries, the highest single cost in the education system, have failed to result in real gains in the years following Deng-led reform (Cheng, 1990; Lin, 1999, p. 121). While gains were realized in the first several years of reform[23], the priority of funding for education has been questionable given the remarkable expansion of China's economy, particularly in rural areas which, in keeping with official policies espousing uneven development, have been forced to fend for themselves more so than their urban counterparts (*ibid.*). Though the precise figures are in some dispute, it is nevertheless clear that government commitment to public expenditure on education has not yielded results similar to overall economic growth: by 1987, the state allocated only 2.51% of GNP, a number that increases to 3.20% if other sponsorship is included (Chiao in Cheng, 1990). Other sources claim a figure as high as 3.85% by 1986 (Li in Cheng, 1990; see also Fan, 1990; Gai, 1990), but both numbers were low in comparison to the international standard of 4.0% for developing countries and an overall average 5.7% (UNESCO in Cheng, 1990).

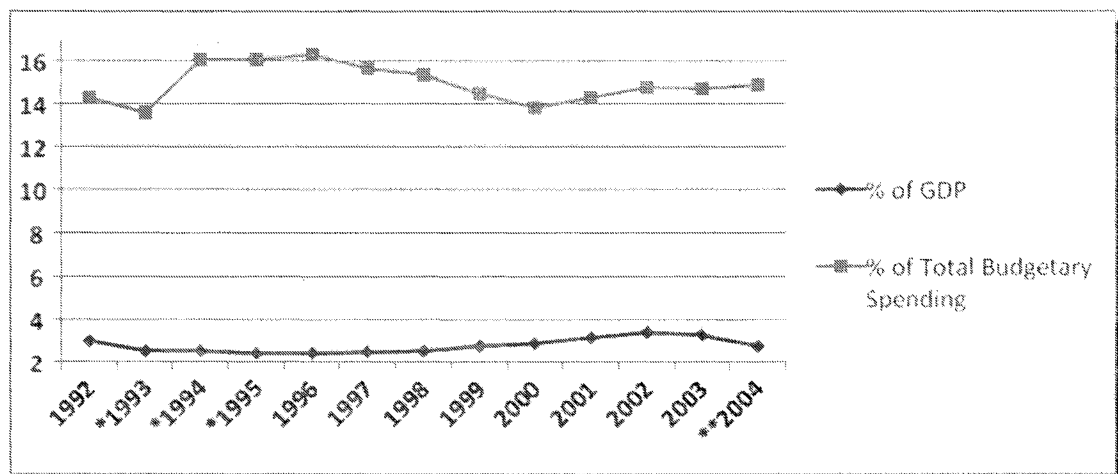

Figure 4.2 **Public expenditure on education.**
Calculated as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) and as a percentage of total budgetary spending (CERNET, 2004).
* Data for these years was adjusted from initial figures.
** Due to an adjustment to the total GDP, this year appears to represent a dramatic drop. It is more likely that previous years over-estimate of the actual percentage devoted to education.

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Whatever the correct number, Figure 4.2 (see above) demonstrates that spending decreased as a percentage of GNP and total budget through much of the ensuing decade (Bray & Borevskaya, 2001, p. 351; Chinese Education and Research Network [CERNET], 2004). Expenditure as a percentage of the total budget in 2004 was 14.9%, marginally higher than 1992's 14.3%, but still lower than the peak level of 16.28% in 1996 (Bray & Borevskaya, 2001, p. 352; CERNET, 2004; UNESCO Institute, 2006). Such statistics speak to the difficulties China has had in maintaining its stated commitment to raising the quality of its education through increased funding. Having committed in 1993 to achieving a level of 4% of GNP by 2000, the government would later admit that this goal would not be achieved (Bray & Borevskaya, 2001, p. 352). But such lack of success did not prevent it from re-announcing a similar goal in 2006 (China Daily Online, 2006).

In the face of lack of funding and in response to the "decentralization" and "diversification" *qua* devolution of responsibility for school finances (Chow & Shen, 2006; Communist Party of China Central Committee [CPCCC], 1985, p. 6; Rosen, 1985; Ross, 2000; Tsang, 1996), other revenue has been sought, so much so, in fact, that private sources[24] now comprise a significant portion of overall educational budgets (See Figure 4.3 below). Since 1977, when the state took full responsibility for schools, alternative sources have grown to a level of 43.2% and now threaten the state's role as majority provider (UNESCO, 2002; Chow & Shen, 2006).

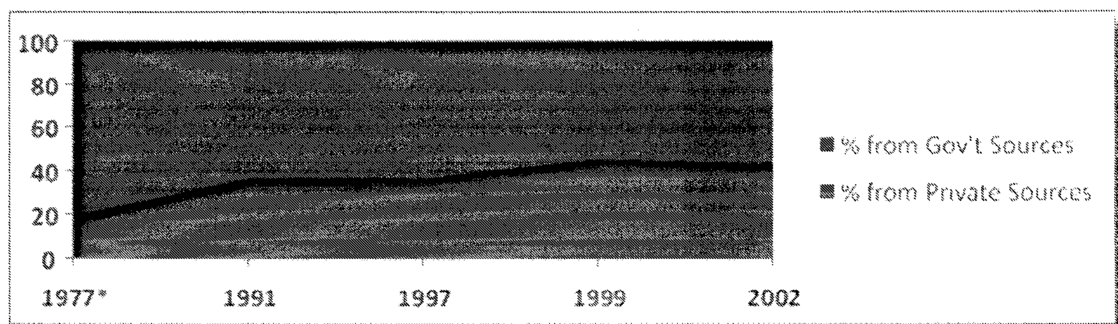

Figure 4.3 **% of Education funding from government vs. private sources.**
(UNESCO, 2002; Chow & Shen, 2006).
* Estimated in Lin (1999)

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In considering trends of privatization and marketization in Chinese education, I do not make a simple distinction between private and public schools. Such a binary may be of use in countries that have achieved educational systems marked by high degrees of universality, equal provision, affordability, and quality at all levels. In these cases, it is easy to see the emergence of private education a threat to systems cherished for the apparent (if disputed) role they play in equalizing socio-economic conditions. None of these have been defining characteristics of China's educational system historically or presently; as discussed above, the last large-scale attempt to make them so was scuttled by the excesses of the Cultural Revolution. I would argue that, in addition to serving as a conduit for the transmission of social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977; Lin 1999, p. 169-180), privatization and marketization in the Chinese context should be seen as individual and collective attempts, however partial and flawed, to secure these conditions in the absence of governmental commitment and/or ability to do so. While it is the case that privately owned institutions now play a large and important role in the overall system, particularly at the pre-school/kindergarten and tertiary levels (Lin, 1999), these are not my primary concern. Rather, I am concerned with the substantial role of alternative funding in schools typically understood as government enterprises, a function that Bray & Borevskaya (2001, p. 347-348) and Chow & Shen (2006, p. 143-144) rightly recognize to be an integral part of the overall trends of privatization and marketization. Refusing to limit consideration of the influence of market forces to private schools better positions me to ascertain the role and effects marketization on traditionally public institutions and the teachers who work within them.

In order to better understand the effects of the struggle to fund schools, one must consider the unequal balance of monies contributed to various levels of education and how this material reality acts as an additional motivation to families already acting under a powerful cultural impulse to invest significant resources in their children's education (Bray, 1996, p. 4; Lin, 1999). In comparison to amounts allocated to tertiary institutions, primary and secondary schools receive a paucity of funding. In 1999, for example, per student allocations in tertiary institutions was 12 to 16 times than the allocation at the primary level, and 6 to 8 times than that of secondary schools

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(UNESCO, 2002, p. 14). Local educational authorities are thus encouraged to undertake any number of activities to raise funds, including operating for-profit enterprises (Tsang, 1996, p. 426) and, more important for the purposes of this study, collecting fees for items such as tuition fees and a variety of other items (Bray, 1996; Tsang, 1996, p. 427). Bray provides a list of twenty-five items charged to students at a regular middle school, noting that, while tuition was nil, the total of other amounts represented a significant burden to individual families (p. 19; West in Bray, 1996, p. 18). Significant among these additional fees are those charged to students residing outside a school's catchment area (*chaoyuan*—超员), but whose parents reportedly are willing to pay twenty thousand *yuan* or more per year (~CAN$2,800) for the privilege of attending a school perceived as higher quality (Bray, 1996, p. 4; Lin, 1999, p. 54-55). The significance of these activities cannot be understated in terms of their effect on competition between schools. Schools are typically adorned with banners and photos heralding the achievements of their students as a way of attracting the best and brightest, as well as those able to pay substantial fees determined by the school's reputation for producing highly qualified university entrants.

But such school practices base their success on a particular response from students' parents. Much has been made of Chinese families' traditional respect for education and readiness to invest substantially in terms of time and money in order to give their child the best possible education (Cheng, 2000; Cleverley, 1991; Lin, 1999, p. 33-34; Paine & DeLany, 2000). It is also widely held that a combination of factors has intensified this already strong belief. For the "delayed generation" whose educational careers were demolished by the Cultural Revolution, there is little that cannot be sacrificed to ensure that their children avoid the same fate (Lin, 1999, p. 34-35). Also worthy of note is the increased significance of education in the reform era (p. 35-36). New opportunities arising from modernization are accompanied by heightened competition for entrance to the best universities and subsequent hiring by top companies at high salaries (*ibid.*). Add to this the fact that most families, particularly in urban settings, are eligible to raise only one child (p. 36-37), and the conditions are established for an intensification of hope for and expectations on the child and, thus,

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spending on education (Chow & Shen, 2006; Bray, 1996, 2003; Bray & Borevskaya, 2001; Tsui & Rich, 2002). Competition amongst secondary schools has emerged, in other words, at the intersection of government policy, economic conditions, and cultural values.

Social Structure

The 'Traditional' Woman

It is generally (and often uncritically) asserted as fact in historical analyses of Chinese culture that women have occupied a subservient position vis-à-vis men (Huang, 2000; Larson-Jones, 1996; Yang, 2001). Certainly traditional values make clear the position of the woman vis-à-vis the 'man of the house', as well as the negative sanctions to be applied by way of enforcing them:

> With a traditional culture which gives emphasis to the "three obediences of women", that is, obedience to father when in the "maiden home," obedience to husband when married, and obedience to son when widowed, Chinese women have long been ascribed an inferior status in society. The rules of the family (*jia-fa*) further justify the use of violence as a legitimate means to discipline women when they are perceived as failing to meet the standard. (Tang, Wong, & Lee, 2000, p. 207)

Such ideas about women and their effect on intra-familial relations are the central theme of films such as Zhang Yimou's (1991) adaptation of Su Tong's (1993) dark tale of republican era misogyny, *Raise the Red Lantern.* Chinese ideographs themselves act as an historical record reflecting men's ascendancy over women, and of masculine over feminine concerns (Yang, 2001). From a statistical perspective, the over-representation of men in the population indicates how male babies have been granted greater value than female children (CIA World Factbook, 2006; Coale & Bannister, 1994). Female infanticide and, more recently, sex selection procedures cast a long shadow over China's claims to women's equality and human rights (Coale & Bannister, 1994; Greenhalgh & Li, 1995). The battle against such abuses began in the republican era and was raised to the level of official dogma with the establishment of the communist state, but the promise of theory had mixed results in practice. And

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while the post-Mao era has also pledged and occasionally delivered new possibilities for Chinese women in the shape of economic freedom, educational opportunities, and enhanced political rights (Larson-Jones, 1996), it has just as often failed to achieve its lofty goals (Li & Barlow, 2001, p. 1276).

Teng (1996) has pointed out the ways in which 'the subordinated Chinese woman' is in part a construction of Western writers eager to reinforce notions of imperialist superiority, but this should not be taken as repudiation of Chinese women's past and present claims to repression. Indeed, a growing body of scholarship, both Western and Chinese, continues to establish the scope and detail of women's studies in response to the very real conditions of Chinese women's oppression and resistance (Li & Zhang, 1994). This body of work has developed, among other crucial insights, an analysis of how the establishment and eventual rise to power of the Chinese Communist Party represented an ideological shift that transformed male-female relations, yet maintained the fundamental hierarchy of the old gendered order (Chun, 2001, p. 1281; Evans, 1997; Wang, Chow, & Zhang, 2004, p. 163; Zhou, 2003). "Women's liberation" as a central ideology of socialist construction dominated this period (Greenhalgh, 2001), yet hangovers from traditional attitudes toward women could be found even at the height of revolutionary fervor in the stubbornly change-proof sexual division of labour in ostensibly egalitarian enterprises (Andors, 1976; Turner, 2006; Wang, 2003, p. 158-160). In many ways, the state had replaced the landlord in the patriarchal structure, with the important difference that it additionally positioned itself as liberator of women (Leung, 2003). On the other hand, it could envision no distinct role other than the elimination of the traditions (e.g. polygamy) and those roles—i.e. homemaker, caregiver—that 'oppressed' them and their elevation as 'comrade workers' in the new egalitarian order (*ibid.*). If women truly 'held up half the sky', as the Maoist slogan went, they supported only that portion of the heavens apportioned them by predominantly male leaders (Wang, 2003).

Return Home or Go to Work?

Far from alleviating inequality, post-Mao reform led to renewed attacks on the tentative advances made by women in the years since 1950 (Leung, 2003; Turner,

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2006). Quotas established to make room for women were effectively abandoned under market reform (Pepper, 1990; Turner, 2006). Record levels of unemployment that accompanied massive layoffs in the state sector during the 1980s and 1990s culminated in the 'women return home' push (Turner, 2006; Wang, 2003; Yang, 2001). This initiative combined an ostensibly economic argument (lowering unemployment) with traditional ideas of feminine roles (as caregivers) and nationalist themes (of sacrifice to the its modernization); it drew, in other words, on "the discursive links connecting 'woman' and 'nation' to 'population'....[,] three figures of discourse...bound together by women's roles as reproducers of the population that constitutes the nation" (Greenhalgh, 2001, p. 850-851). If the revolution promoted a new, collective economic unit in which women proved their value by participating in labour outside of the home, the reform era has reestablished the family as the primary economic unit and has lauded, to some extent, those "socialist housewives" once praised as the "'iron' women" of the revolution (Leung, 2003, p. 368).

But along with this push home from secure labour has come a contradictory pull, this one of "very young factory girls" (打工妹—*dǎ gōng mèi*) away from the home toward the kind of "intensive, short-term, export-manufacturing" work favoured in the new economic climate (Huang, 2001; Ngai, 1999). Ngai draws attention to the feminization of such labour, and how managers and supervisors capitalize on culturally grounded urban-rural, interregional, and male-female distinctions to devalue the work of these women in order to create "malleable workers" (pp. 1-2). If opening-up to the outside world has brought certain kinds of economic opportunity to women, it has also had the negative side-effect of *en masse* entry of foreign investors and, in the case of those from Korea or Japan, neo-Confucian attitudes even more anachronistic than those already present in China (Chen, 2002 in Turner, 2006).The deeply held belief in female inferiority helps to explain both the concentration of women in these industries as well as the growing gap between female workers' earnings and those of their male counterparts under market reform: women's wages compared to men's fell from 55% (1988) to 42% (1994) overall and from 86% to 75% in the same period for similar work (Maurer-Fazio, Rawski, & Zhang, 1999).

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Contested Sexuality

Women's sexuality is another area of continued contestation. Recall that the one-child policy arrived along with reform, heralding an intensified form of control over the reproductive rights of women already subject in many cases to the coercion of their husbands and families (Greenhalgh, 1994, 2001; Greenhalgh & Li, 1995; White, 2003). And while the program has been more variable in terms of its *modus operandi*—i.e. in its employment of compulsion (e.g. induced abortion or sterilization, monetary penalties) versus a system of encouragement of late marriage and alternative family values—than is commonly recognized beyond China's borders, it has always been goal or quota driven, placing state goals ahead of the autonomy and health interests of women (Greenhalgh, 1994). Such practices indicate not only the primacy of state over individual goals, but also women's relatively powerless position. Despite the relative simplicity and safety of vasectomy operations as compared with more risky procedures such as induced abortion or tubal ligation, for example, surgical interventions were overwhelmingly applied to women (*ibid.*; Liu & Chang, 2006; Wu & Walther, 2006). One might argue that the history of the one-child policy cannot be written exclusively as the triumph of state intervention over individual rights, that resistance has been as much a feature of the program as has falling birth rates (Greenhalgh, 1994; White, 2003). But struggle against government control does not, in this case, indicate a nascent feminist awareness. Indeed, it is critical to understand oppositional women as "acting as agents not only for themselves, but also for the patriarchal families to which they belonged" (Greenhalgh, 1994, p. 12). Furthermore, if modern conceptions of one-child are at least superficially more sensitive to women's rights and desires, the socialist market often positions the employer, rather than the state, as the more immediate agent of reproductive coercion. Participants in the present study indicated that their schools often adopt coercive methods largely abandoned by the official population control bureaucracy, forcing young teachers to delay childbirth by requiring them to ask permission before proceeding with pregnancy. Reform, it would seem, merely provides a fresh context for otherwise durable asymmetries in power between men and women.

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As efforts to control women's reproductive behaviour have increased, the days of the asexual female comrade have given way to a newly sexualized woman at once limited and unshackled by her 'feminine difference' (Li & Barlow, 2001). In many cases, she is able to cash in on her youthful beauty as a shop-clerk, a 'white-collar beauty', or, with somewhat more legal ambiguity, as a *sanpeinü* (三陪女—tri-service escorting girl) (Hanser, 2005; Jolly, 2000; Wang, 2003). For those women able to capitalize, reform, opening-up, marketization, and globalization may offer increased choice in "marriage and sex markets" (Li & Barlow, 2001, p. 1277). 'Cashing-in', of course, does not indicate an unmediated triumph for the individual woman, for it often presupposes the presence of a more powerful male boss who mines and manufactures the eternally renewable resource of the female body. Such is the case with prostitution, which, following its supposed eradication (along with 'venereal disease') in 1964, has reemerged in its various forms in the reform-era, a constant reminder that the passing of an oppressive regime need not necessarily lead to unconditional liberation for women (Evans, 1997; Ren, 1999).

Gender and Education

In the educational realm, the stubborn continuation of women's and girl's lower educational attainment, particularly at the tertiary level (UNESCO, 2004, pp. 47-48; Cleverley, 1991, p. 303), is yet another indication of the barriers to equality faced by women in the contemporary context. As in most nations, though, education for girls and women has come a long way. Due primarily to the Confucian assertion that uneducated women made ideal wives and daughters (Turner, 2006), schooling for girls was limited in ancient times and reserved for the daughters of the wealthy (Cleverley, 1991, p. 26). Tradition gave way to increasing access in the late-Imperial and Republican eras (p. 39-40, p. 47, p. 56), and educational provision for girls became universal in policy if not in fact following the revolution (p. 122). Equality has been the official approach to the question of girl's and women's education since 1949, a stance that reached its zenith in the Cultural Revolution when equitable treatment for all was expected[25]. The reform era has continued the pursuit of educational popularization, though motivation for doing so has shifted from *quantity* (i.e.

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egalitarianism) to *quality* (i.e. as an economic input). As a guiding principle, quality education for the greatest number possible reflects the pragmatic concerns of modernization and assumes the uneven development (regionally and socioeconomic status) of education. Increased educational opportunity is one result of the opening-up with more women than ever studying in institutions overseas (Turner, 2006). And, in what is perhaps a counter-intuitive movement, private education has come to represent a growing arena of educational empowerment for women (Turner & Acker, 2002 in Turner, 2006). Despite these positive developments, women's education remains an area of concern, particularly in rural areas. Illiteracy, for example, continues to be primarily a female phenomena, standing at a rate 2.6 times that of men within the adult population (China Human Development Report [CHDR], 2005, p. 3).

* * *

The purpose of this chapter has been to develop an understanding of the social-historical context in which the ideas and opinions—and, by extension, their *professional habitus*—of the study's participants have been formed and formulated. This social-historical context represents a critical formative influence and is, therefore, to some extent productive of the accounts at the core of the data generated in this study. In doing so, I have set the stage for what Thompson calls *formal* or *discursive analysis*. The context explicated here provides a backcloth against which participants' accounts of their lives might be understood at a deeper level.

Notes

[1] This list of China's leaders is obviously incomplete and represents an oversimplified view of what is a labyrinthine party structure. These names do, however, reflect the public face of leadership in China and, despite the deceptiveness of such periodization, provide a useful framework for discussing the general course of reform. A more complete list of the post-Mao influential would include the likes of Zhao Ziyang (who was ousted from the premiership during the Tian'anmen incidents), Hu Yaobang (whose death ignited the Tian'anmen protests), Li Peng (whose sullied himself in the Tian'anmen killings), Hua Guofeng (however ceremonial), Zhu Rongji (the current premier), and others.

[2] A doctrine of "women return home" was trumpeted in the 1980s by official media sources and academic journals as a solution to the problem of urban unemployment (Wang, 2003; Rosen, 1992).

[3] I have witnessed firsthand the power of this discourse. In the summer of 2005, workers in the state owned publisher for which I worked were 'offered' a 25% pay cut. It was apparent that many of the mostly female workers actively considered returning home to take up child bearing/rearing duties.

[4] While it is gradually being reformed, restrictions entrenched in the country's outdated *hùkǒu* system—i.e. household registration system—mean that migrant labourers are often faced with a dearth of

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social services and protection including but not restricted to welfare benefits, labour rights, and basic schooling for their children.

[5] "The term *míngōng*, today the most common designation for rural labour migrants, can be found as early as the regulations of the 1950s. *Míngōng* are not 'full' workers, *gōngrén...*, because the *gōng* is qualified by *mín*, which may come either from *nongmín*, peasants, or from *rénmín* (the people *at large*, but anyway not part of the inner circle)" (Mallee, 2003, p. 139).

[6] Government statistics for 2005 report more than 87, 000 public protests, a dramatic increase from 1994's 10,000 (statistics cited in Beech, Hua, & Jakes, 2006).

[7] Wang (2003) provides a review of the discrepancy between the Party's feminist rhetoric and the reality of gendered employment in state owned enterprises in the Mao era. The question of how unequal educational opportunity persisted even in the hyper-egalitarian Cultural Revolution is considered below.

[8] Mao's own rejection of his wife aided this effort (Cleverley, 1991, p. 216).

[9] There can be little doubt that Mao was a source of approval for if not the originator of the violence perpetrated by Red Guard troops (Barendsen, 1975, p. 6).

[10] The rehabilitation of some was accomplished through a clever rhetorical twist that involved distinguishing the unavoidable 'mistakes', such as those made by Mao, from the 'criminal offences' of the Gang of Four (Jiang Qing, Wang Hongwen, Zhang Cunqiao, and Yao Wenyuan) and others (Hu & Seifman, 1987, p. 5-6).

[11] While Lynn Paine's (1990; 1992; Wang & Paine, 2003) excellent analyses of teaching in China tend toward critiques of the structural impediments to adequate teacher *qualifications* rather than *quality*, they nonetheless repeat the suggestion that teacher's are the weak link that "obstructs the intellectual, technical and social liberalization at the heart of modernization" (Paine, 1992, p. 193).

[12] Pre- and post-GPCR schools thus comprised regular, specialist, vocational, and agricultural schools (Rosen, 1984, p. 71).

[13] Hui (2005) clarifies that "the English word 'teacher' is not equivalent to '*jiào shī*' (教师 - teaching master) in Chinese characters. Firstly, *jiào shī*, alternatively used as '*lǎo shī*' (老师 - old master), or *xiān shēng* (先生 - early born: master, teacher) in the traditional fashion, is a term used to refer to all the teachers collectively in China from kindergartens to universities. The hierarchical nature of the Chinese teaching society is not reflected by this term" (p. 24). Also, *jiào shī* is used more often in written language and *lao shi* more commonly in oral exchange.

[14] Each class of students has a *banzhuren* who deals with "both academic concerns and personal issues" (Liu, 1997, ¶ 11).

[15] Looping is the practice of having teachers remain with the same group of students for all of the primary school years, and for three years each in junior and senior middle school.

[16] As opposed to the "highest grade of teacher [who] did well through salary, gifts, free accommodation and small classes" (Cleverley, 1991, p. 24).

[17] Li (1999) disputes this negative depiction: "In old China, teachers (usually tutors) were those who had succeeded in the most rigid and strict examinations administered by the king and other officials" (p. 184).

[18] Also 'Kuomintang'.

[19] Qi's assertion is hard to accept given the humiliation teachers suffered during the Cultural Revolution. On the other hand, perhaps the fact that teachers were targeted prominently in that terrible time can in itself be read as a recognition of their vital positioning.

[20] Mao Zedong himself studied at the Hunan First Normal School (Qi, 1983, p. 204).

[21] Pepper (1991) points out that the struggle between radicals and intellectuals did not originate with the rise of the Communist Party. It was, rather, a theme of educational reform stretching back to China's mid-19th century defeat at the hands of the British and the subsequent invasion of Western missionaries and modes of schooling.

[22] Shenzhen is a modern city in the province of Guangdong and one of the most prosperous of China's "Special Economic Zones." Shanghai is widely considered China's most successful city, while Shijiazhuang (Hebei) and Urumqi (Xinjiang) are provincial capitals, but markedly working class, primarily industrial cities.

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[23] Compared with the pre-reform, however, the situation has improved: "during the 1967-1985 period, total government expenditure on education average 2% of GNP and 7.7% of the national budget. In the same period, general-education expenditure (primary and secondary education) averaged 1.6% of GNP and 6.2% of the national budget" (Tsang, 1996, p. 424).

[24] For the purposes of these calculations, private funding is defined as 'total education funding', including both government and private sources, minus the budgetary portion, which includes "(1) taxes for education levied by local governments, (2) educational funds from enterprises, (3) funds from school-supported industries, from self-supporting activities ('qin gong jian xue'), and from social services; and (4) other funds that belong to government appropriation" (Chow & Shen, 2006).

[25] It should be pointed out that, despite its ostensibly egalitarian aims, the Cultural Revolution confirmed Freire's (2000) warnings about anti-oppressive struggle: "the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors" (p. 45).

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Chapter 5
Formal or Discursive Analysis

In this chapter, I continue the depth hermeneutic process as a formal engagement with the data generated in my conversations with the five teachers over the course of several months in autumn 2005. The analysis undertaken has two purposes: first, to explicate teachers' perspectives on their lives in the context of reform; and second, to uncover some of the strategies employed by teachers to construct these accounts. The analysis undertaken in this chapter sets the stage for a critical interpretation/reinterpretation that posits a connection between such strategies of symbolic construction and the maintenance of relations of domination.

Two Themes: Presentation of the Data

In what follows, I present in a limited way the data generated in the study. By treating in detail only two themes drawn from the data, I am, admittedly, taking a decision that proves with certainty Atkinson & Silverman's insight that the researcher always retains, in the end, the balance of power in the research relationship. This does not suggest, however, that participants' thoughts are not present in other forms throughout this document. Indeed, these individuals have in many ways been my teachers as I have struggled to come to an understanding of China and its schools. Therefore, their thoughts and opinions on the matters under investigation have influenced my thinking in ways that are both direct and subtle.

Each of the sections below, then, relate to an aspect of participants' opinions, beliefs, and understandings in and around one of two themes: *teachers and teaching* and *the effects of educational reform*. In order to avoid obscuring participants' thoughts and feelings with my own, I first draw on transcripts of the group interviews to convey a sense of teachers' self-understandings on a particular theme. Following this, for each theme I identify and describe a number of examples of the *strategies of*

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symbolic construction that I have discerned in my analysis of the transcripts. These strategies, I assert, represent participants' efforts to construct symbolic forms with meaning beyond what can be discerned by reading for only surface meaning—how, in other words, they marshal meaning in order to accomplish specific purposes. This phase offers one of the more thorny tasks in Thompson's depth hermeneutics, for it is difficult, as Thompson rightly contends, to avoid slipping into interpretation/reinterpretation (1990, p. 293). Recall that the purpose of doing so is to demonstrate how a particular unit of discourse attempts to mobilize meaning to sustain relations of domination. Rather than attempting to prove such ideological utility at this point, I draw attention instead to the presence and purpose of the specific strategies used to construct the accounts below. The consideration of ideology, then, is reserved for Chapter 6.

Beliefs about Teachers & Teaching

> I think most teachers know that sentence..."*jiào shī shì ge liǎng xīn huór*" (教师是个良心活儿). Right? (Lǎo Pīng quoting a common saying that I have translated as "teaching is a moral trade, a vocation of the heart", Group Interview, December 3rd, 2005)

> The question of educational reform is mainly one concerning the teachers. (Mao Zedong in CCP Kiangsu Provincial Committee Writing Group, 1973, p. 156)

Doxa

For those who participated in this study, beliefs about teachers' personal traits, their roles and responsibilities, and their social and professional status generally converge with those held in the wider cultural community, but also diverge with public perceptions in important ways. In our conversations, they painted a collective self-portrait of teachers as hard-working and capable workers who contribute selflessly to the learning and well-being of their students.

> Lǎo Pīng: I think the teachers in China are working hard. Hard-working teachers.
>
> Gāo Sù: Very, very hard. And very good teachers. Many of the teachers want to learn more things and they don't often complain. They just work hard....They also spend more of their own time working for their students.

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Hard work, according to Gāo Sù and Lǎo Pīng, includes activities undertaken beyond the classroom:

Gāo Sù:	Teaching is different from the other jobs. And the teachers, they do their work not only because the leaders ask them to do it.... You see, not all jobs they need to spend extra time for other stuff...
Lǎo Pīng:	Though sometimes they complain, they still devote themselves to teaching.

To be a teacher, as the maxim *jiào shī shì ge liǎng xīn huór* relates, demands far more than clocking in for a specific number of hours each week. Gāo Sù and Lǎo Pīng, then, refer to a critical dimension of the teacher as 'virtuoso' (Paine, 1990; see also Chapter 5). Apart from her role as expert imparter of knowledge, the teacher is incomplete if not also *virtuous*. By way of illustrating such virtue in herself, Gāo Sù related a story in which she had to respond to a violent incident involving one of her students:

Lǎo Pīng:	[He] fought with some other boys from another school. And then, the next morning, the parents, the students' parents....went to my school, and they asked the policemen to come...
Lorin:	To your school? (I sound surprised)
Gāo Sù:	Yes. To arrest that bad boy....To take him away from school.
Lorin:	Because he had a fight. With some other boys?
Gāo Sù:	Mmmm... (Yes)
Lorin:	So one boy had a fight with some other boys, [but only] this boy...[went] to the police? (I sound dubious)
Gāo Sù:	[Yes,] to there. [He was] asked by the police.
Lorin:	The police [can't] do [their] job without the parents?
Gāo Sù:	(She doesn't respond) I felt worried about him. Every week there is something...happening in my class.

This initial encounter with police was only one of many in the weeks following. As *bānzhúrèn*, she was her school's primary point of contact for the police assigned to investigate the incident. For Gāo Sù, being a teacher entails a maternal attachment to her students beyond the legalistic sense suggested in the western concept of in *loco parentis*. She appeared unimpressed at my suggestion that surely her principal should take care of this problem; for her, this intervention was routine—a part of her job, but also the right thing to do. Duties such as legal mediation on behalf of one's students, it

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would seem, fall well within institutional expectations and are generally accepted as such by teachers. Gāo Sù's espousal of the teacher-as-nurturer trope illustrates well Thompson's understanding of the connections between social structures, its component institutions, and the individual actions comprising both. Clearly it would be a mistake to attribute a teacher's aid to a troubled student exclusively to a singular and autonomous decision-making process. For Gāo Sù's interpretation of the student-teacher relationship and the actions she undertakes based upon this understanding, correspond to both the societal ideal of the teacher (as discussed in Chapter 4) and the formal requirements of her school and various elements of the educational bureaucracy. Thus, her actions are generated (as opposed to determined) by her (un- or semi-acknowledged) adherence to parameters of acceptable behavior established by school regulations and expectations (Thompson, 1984, p. 152) which exist, in turn, in a co-productive relationship with cultural norms (see Figure 5.1).

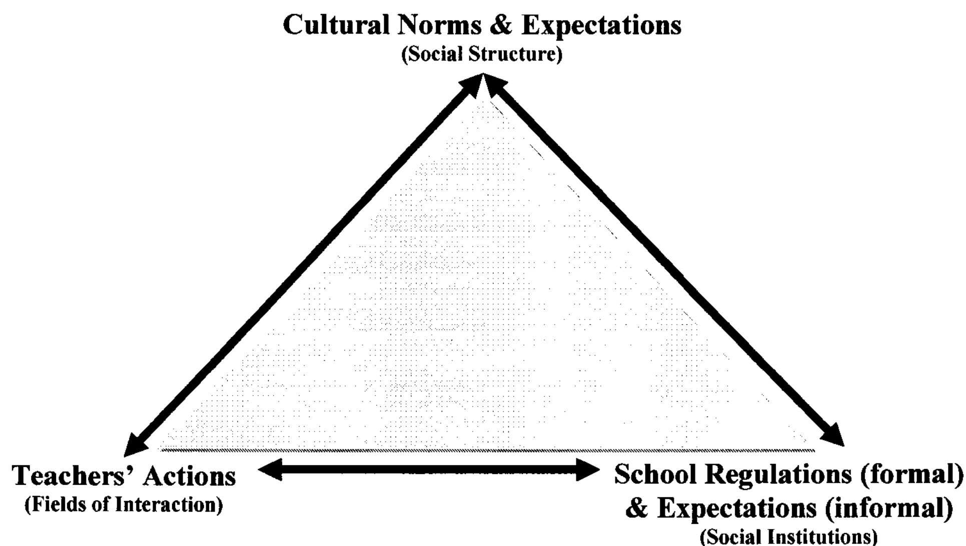

Figure 5.1. Diagram of the structure of teachers' social world.
The diagram illustrates the co-constitutive relationships between social structures, social institutions, and fields of interaction.

As discussed in Chapter 2, social structures are the source of the conditions and relations that *structurate* social institutions; institutions, as the embodied, bureaucratic form of such formations, reproduce the stuff (the social structures) of which they are made. Thus, it may be said that, in the case of Chinese teachers, structures (both social

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and institutional) and agents (both individually and collectively) are symbiotic rather than singular, competing elements of the social world—each acts to establish and sustain the other.

Whatever their assessment of teachers' personal qualities and however critical they deem their own roles and responsibilities to be, participants nevertheless perceive their social and professional status to be uncertain, if not completely undesirable. Such views, as expressed in this excerpt, are not surprising:

> Wáng Diàn: The problem is…the teachers are not….emphasized in China.
> Lorin: What is? What is emphasized?
> Wáng Diàn: They earn little money. And have no power.
> Lorin: Do you mean respected? Not respected? Or…?
> Wáng Diàn: [They are] not respected…

In addition to being teachers, these women are embedded in and influenced by a social-historical context in which, as discussed in Chapter 5, intellectual workers' position has been far from secure. As members of society, they absorb and, to some extent, ascribe to some extent to these same attitudes, such as the notions that status is tied to the level of one's salary and that, in general, things have improved under reform.

> Gāo Sù: [It's] better now…
> Wáng Diàn: Now better, but…
> Lorin: The money is better now, for example? The pay?
> Wáng Diàn: Now, the pay is lower than…better than workers, but lower than…
> Gāo Sù: Leaders! (with cynical forcefulness—everyone laughs)

Cynical tone aside, Gāo Sù voices a view taken up at different points by each participant—that teachers are relatively powerless in the school and in the educational hierarchy in general. Indeed, when questioned about whom they consider to be the source of educational reforms, participants sketched out a conceptual hierarchy in which they occupy a position substantially lower than those endowed with decision-making power:

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Lorin: Where did the changes come from? Who made the changes in the *xīn kè biāo* (新课标—new curriculum)?

Lǎo Pīng: It is the experts from all around the country. (she laughs as though to suggest the answer is obvious)

Lorin: From all around the country?

Lǎo Pīng: Yes. Some experts. Not teachers, but experts. (she laughs).

Lorin: Are teachers experts?

Gāo Sù: No. (she deadpans—everyone laughs)

Lorin: Experts in teaching?

Gāo Sù: Not [in] theory!

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the general hierarchy depicted in Chapter 5, "leaders" and "experts" are seen to occupy a higher and inaccessible rung on the institutional ladder. But in yet another conversation, it was suggested that the chasm between common teachers and higher-ups was once more easily bridged. Recent years, in other words, have seen the lamentable diminishment of teachers' voices in the school:

Lorin: Do you think that teachers can make a difference, that you can change the way things are?....

Gāo Sù: No! No chance! (everyone laughs)

Lǎo Pīng: No power, no right.

Lorin: So…you mentioned *min zhu* (democracy)—is there a relationship? When you say "no power, no rights"...is that a word you would use about schools?....

Gāo Sù: Democracy?

Lǎo Pīng: It is less. Less and less….in school.

Lorin: Why is that? Do you mean there was more before?

Lǎo Pīng: Maybe.

Gāo Sù: Yes!

Lǎo Pīng: Yes, maybe….Before that the teachers in school often…give the headmaster some suggestions or otherwise. Maybe the headmaster…maybe they change their ideas. But now, we have no right to talk to the headmaster. Have no chance….

Gāo Sù: And the teachers and the headmasters are just like slaves and noblemen. So, no rights.

But participants did not always portray themselves as downtrodden pawns of an undifferentiated class of administrators and intellectuals. This portrait of the institutional power structure was often contrasted with an alternative formation in

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which teachers are seen to operate with a greater degree of autonomy—even as the experts of a different order:

Gāo Sù: The teachers can learn something from the experts' ideas. But the exact teaching way, no. The teachers have to think about this…or they go to the other class and they learn something from the others.

Colleagues represent an important source of practical knowledge that counters experts' overly-theoretical approaches, confirmed here by Wáng Diàn and in Gāo Sù's story of her dilemma as a new teacher and its resolution:

Gāo Sù: I learn a lot from my friends.
Wáng Diàn: Now, to be a good teacher…she or he must learn better things from the people around him or her….
Gāo Sù: I studied four years in [the] normal university, but, in fact, I didn't know how to teach middle school students. So, at the beginning of my teaching career, I felt very, very sad. (laughs) So, I just used the old ways that my teacher taught me.
Lorin: [Your teacher] when you were a student?
Gāo Sù: Yes.

Teachers may also draw on cultural resources to build independence and subvert top-down administration:

Gāo Sù: The different students, the different classes, maybe, the teachers must give the different idea…different ways to teach them. In Chinese *yīn cái shī jiāo*….
Lorin: Do you think teachers are experts in a different way?
Gāo Sù: Yes.

In support of her claim to a practical expertise that contrasts with expert or legitimate forms of authority, Lǎo Pīng quotes a Confucian principle by which she guides her teaching practice, *yīn cái shī jiāo* (因材施教), meaning that "teaching should be directed to develop that in which the pupil excels, and correct the defects to which he is prone" (Confucius in Dawson, 1939, p. 225). Such declarations of independence represent a foundation upon which teachers act both autonomously and collectively to reject the directives of leaders and experts they deem unreasonable.

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Nevertheless, I remain curious about the pattern of relations between teachers and those who to exercise a substantial degree of power over them. In the following responses to my query about whether or not experts respect teachers' knowledge, Gāo Sù, Lǎo Pīng, and Wáng Diàn seem to suggest that this point is moot:

Lorin:	So...if we have *xīn kè biāo* experts and we have classroom experts, do these experts think of teachers as experts? Do the...
Wáng Diàn:	Maybe they are different.
Lorin:	They are different? I mean do these (*xīn kè biāo*) people [respect teachers]?
Lǎo Pīng:	I don't think so....
Wáng Diàn:	Now, the experts' ideas or methods...don't fit all the students. So, all the teachers...must choose which ways, which methods or which ways [are] fitting....
Lorin:	What's the experts' opinion about the teachers' knowledge?
Gāo Sù:	How can we know? They are the experts. (everyone laughs)
Wáng Diàn:	They are all staying in their rooms...or in the office. They stay away from the teachers, and they make ideas...themselves, and they force the methods or ideas...
Lǎo Pīng:	But the teachers don't accept them. (she laughs)

These teachers did not, in other words, couch their claims to agency in a consideration of whether or not experts and leaders take teachers' opinions into account. Similarly, Lǎo Lè declared teachers' resistance to disagreeable working conditions to be deliberately covert acts of defiance. When faced with a card reader system to track teachers' arrivals and departures at the school's front gate, she and others countered by checking-in before leaving when personal errands demanded their attention. By contrast, Wáng Diàn, in claiming to act in defiance of school rules *and* gender expectations, attributes her achievement of "freedom" to her excellence according to measurements valued by school officials:

Wáng Diàn:	In my school, I have much freedom. (she laughs mischievously) Nobody can control me! (she laughs again)
Lorin:	But you're not a man...[1]
Wáng Diàn:	What?
Lorin:	You're not a man. You have much freedom and do whatever you want, but you're not a man. So, maybe...

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Wáng Diàn: Maybe, maybe I work hard....because I can do everything myself. I can do everything well or better or best myself, so nobody [can]...order me or force me to [do] this or that ....I control myself. I can do anything everything myself [because] I'm the...best in my school.

In summary, participants see themselves as individuals who, despite the obstacles placed before them, work diligently and unselfishly for the betterment of their students. The principles by which they guide their practice flow from their understanding of what it means to be a good teacher, as well as from the roles and responsibilities charged them by their schools and higher levels of the educational structure. And while they express a degree of frustration at the asymmetrical nature of relations between themselves and an often unresponsive hierarchy, they also maintain that they exercise considerable power in a kind of second-order hierarchy controlled by and for the benefit of teachers themselves. Thus, teachers' accounts indicate an ability to use the rules and resources at their disposal to creatively manipulate the actuality of their daily lives. One might also discern in this inventive capacity a degree of awareness of the interplay of structure-institution-(inter)action. Recall Bourdieu's (1977) suggestion that the smooth operation of a social system requires its members to have knowledge of the truth, even if they refuse to acknowledge it is relevant (p. 6; see also Chapter 1).

Paine's analysis (discussed in Chapter 5) is also useful here, for it suggests that the virtuoso model of teaching, with its system of differentiated ranking of teachers, reinforces hierarchy as a general phenomenon of the educational system (1990, p. 69). But it helps to explain how the concept of teaching as an act of virtuosity supplies, in the form of inter-colleague dependence and solidarity, the form of conditions and relations needed to circumvent structural impediments to personal satisfaction and autonomy. Such a class system within the ranks of teachers themselves may indeed be a product of teachers' conceptual understanding of the teaching act (i.e. at the level of action), but it also reflects the organization of the larger educational system (i.e. at the level of social institutions) in which educational attainment and age/experience (i.e. differentiating factors at the level of social structure) work to constitute institutional relations. An acceptance of hierarchy as a general principle of interpersonal relations,

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in other words, produces asymmetrical relations between differently positioned members of the institution, as well as a competing set of associations that works to counteract the effects of domination.

Strategies of Symbolic Construction

I have suggested above that participants' beliefs and attitudes about teachers and teaching are largely drawn from the values and norms present in the institutions and structures of society. But I do not mean to suggest that they do not attempt, in constructing their statements in particular ways, to express an individualized and/or unique perspective. Indeed, it is clear at times that they express their sentiments with their own purposes and interests in mind. Whether or not the positions adopted in actuality reproduce the conditions and relations of which they are a product, they are nonetheless put forward by their producers for reasons that often bear no acknowledged connection to the wider social structure. In what follows, then, I re-focus my analysis on the structural features of participants' discourse in order to unearth the strategies of symbolic construction by which teachers construct their accounts.

In the discussion above regarding beliefs about the personal traits of teachers, Lǎo Pīng makes reference to the popular maxim *jiào shī shì ge liáng xīn huór* (教师是个良心活儿), which I translate here as "teaching is a moral trade, a vocation of the heart". The *tropes* contained therein effectively convey Lǎo Pīng's sense of what it means to be a teacher in China. Specifically, she invokes this *root metaphor* to articulate the underlying association that shapes her understanding. The work that teachers do (教师—*jiào shī*) is linked to the concepts of conscience (良心—*liáng xīn*) and labour (活儿—*huó er*), thereby generating "a new and enduring sense" (Thompson, 1990, p. 63) of teaching as more 'duty' than 'job', a responsibility that one has little choice but to fulfill without complaint. Teachers do, however, "sometimes complain", as Gāo Sù and Lǎo Pīng and confirm:

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Gāo Sù:	...teachers want to learn more things and they don't often complain....They also spend more of their own time working for their students....
Lǎo Pīng:	Though sometimes they complain, they still devote themselves to teaching.

But framing the work of teachers as a moral obligation, as a vocation of those with little choice but to follow, allows them to justify this behaviour using the rhetorical strategy of *antanagoge*, by which an undesirable trait (discontentment) is balanced with an infinitely more positive one (devotion) (Lanham, 1969, p. 119). Furthermore, the metaphor implies that teaching entails labour of both body and mind, a proposition that draws its power from positive valuations of physical labour in the early years of the communist regime, and from the reclamation of intellectual endeavours as 'labour' in the reform era.

This foundational metaphor was frequently accessed by participants to explain how and why they do their work. It is, for example, the implicit referent of the following discussion:

Lǎo Pīng:	Our headmaster ...once said to other teachers..."[Lǎo Pīng] was born for teaching"....
Lǎo Lè:	Ya. Have some gift for...for...has a gift for teaching. (everyone laughs, Lǎo Pīng especially heartily)
Lǎo Pīng:	I think...maybe I can't do anything else. Teacher...now, that's the job for me....
Gāo Sù:	I just learned to be a teacher (she laughs). You were born a teacher. (everyone laughs)....
Lǎo Pīng:	When I was in middle school, some students said "you will be a teacher"... But...I didn't like [the idea] at that time.

As a character in Lǎo Pīng's story, the headmaster employs *naturalization* to elaborate the popular notion that some teachers are 'born to teach'. Lǎo Pīng, for her part, considers and accepts his statement, with the support of Lǎo Lè ("has a gift for teaching") and Gāo Sù ("you were born a teacher"), by pairing the negative proposition "maybe I can't do anything else" with the positive "now that's the job for me". Lǎo Pīng later returns to this theme, this time to narrate (*narrativization*) the

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story of her becoming a teacher. Her tale layers a recollection of a distant past lived in exile—

Lăo Pīng:	But after...after I graduated from school, I went to the countryside...for about three years. And then I [came] to a...tractor factory....I had to be [a worker for nine years].

—with a nostalgic remembrance of her salvation from a life of manual labour, a memory linked to a cherished sibling relationship (yet another strategy, *pathos*) —

Lăo Pīng:	I don't like the...I don't like the noise in the workshop. So I want to change the environment... [I] listened to the radio. [There was] no TV at that time....
Lăo Lè:	But I'm surprised you...why [did] you choose English? Why [didn't] you choose Chinese or other subjects?
Lăo Pīng:	My brother. My brother...
Gāo Sù:	Working abroad...
Lăo Pīng:	No, no, no. At that time he didn't. He was in the army....And he learned English. After I learned English, we wrote letters to each other. But before that, we [could] not.

Others interject to encourage the telling of Lăo Pīng's inevitable transformation, her submission to fate: first, Gāo Sù,

Lăo Pīng:	The only way. The only way [to change your life]. (her voice fades reverently. She continues to listen);

and then Lăo Lè,

Gāo Sù:	Did [your brother]...teach you English?
Lăo Lè:	Like father like son. Like brother like sister. (she laughs gently)

Narrativized thus, being a teacher ceases to be Lăo Pīng's chosen profession, and becomes, rather, the result of her escape from a less desirable fate through surrender to the inevitable. Teaching, the implied object of her parable, is rendered a *naturalized* state, the correct choice for those 'born with' the appropriate disposition.

Gāo Sù confirms this portrayal of teaching as a natural ability and a moral labour and develops the theme in a series of comments constructed through strategies

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of *synecdoche* and *differentiation.* Teaching, she asserts, is "very, very hard" work requiring that one "spend extra time for other stuff" outside of school hours, such as marking and preparing the next day's lessons. Having thus appraised the profession, she confers upon teachers themselves a set of qualities needed to perform such a job (a *synecdochal* transfer). "Teachers"—here a unified entity—are then positively evaluated vis-à-vis (i.e. *differentiated* from) a second, similarly amalgamated, albeit unspecified group whose work does not necessarily require a comparable level of dedication. Such a positioning of teachers as a distinctive assemblage enables subsequent claims to both *victimhood*—the teacher as powerless dupe, as in Wáng Diàn's comment on experts' behaviour,

> Wáng Diàn: They stay away from the teachers, and they make ideas...and they force the methods or ideas [on teachers];

and, alternatively, *outlaw-dom*—the teacher as resilient, independent, and even rebellious, here intimated in Lǎo Pīng's immediate response to Wáng Diàn:

> Lǎo Pīng: But the teachers don't accept them. (she laughs)

A final example will suffice to demonstrate the presence of the strategies by which symbolic forms are constructed to "*say something about something*" (Thompson, 1990 p. 143). In the following interview excerpt, Gāo Sù returns to the negative conception of teachers' status:

> Gāo Sù: The teachers and the headmasters are just like slaves and noblemen. So, no rights.

Eager to delineate with force her view of relations in the school, she paraphrases a text message received from Lǎo Lè earlier the same day. Her *simile* (a sub-strategy of *trope*) relies on a terse juxtaposition of the present position of teachers (slaves) vis-à-vis headmasters (noblemen). The comparison is deliberately extreme (*hyberbole*), thereby imbuing her feeling about the situation with a sense of gravity. Her declaration is also *anamestic* (i.e. an invocation of the past): its implicit reference is to China's (undesirable) pre-revolutionary, feudal past. Indeed, the entire text message, translated

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below, rests on the strategy of *anamnesis* to recall revolutionary values and construct a tongue-in-cheek commentary on the hierarchy of Chinese schools:

The changes in schools:	(学校的变化— *xúe xiào de biàn huā*:)
Headmasters become noblemen;	(校长贵族化— *xiào zhǎng guì zú huā*)
Teachers, slaves;	(教师奴隶化—*jiāo shī nú lì huā*)
Students, ancestors;	(学生祖宗化— *xúe shēng zǔ zōng huā*)
Relations, complicated;	(人际复杂化— *rén jì fū zá huā*)
Overtime, day and night;	(加班日夜化—*jiā bān rì yè huā*)
Going to work, unpaid;	(上班无偿化—*shàng bān wú chang huā*)
Inspection, more severe;	(检查严厉化—*jiǎn chá yán lì huā*)
Compensation, that of migrant workers;	(待遇民工化—*dāi yù mín gōng huā*)
Emancipation is a myth.	(翻身是神话—*fān shēn shì shén hu*ā)

Each line presents, explicitly (e.g. headmasters and noblemen) or implicitly (one assumes that overtime was once less demanding), a comparison of the objectionable conditions and relations of the present and those of a more just past. Punctuated by the repetition of the rhyming phonemes *huā* (化—change) and *huà* (话—speak), the associations build momentum and culminate in the final line, in which the term *fān shēn* (翻身—emancipation) is summoned forth to suggest that not only have things become worse as a result of reform, but also that the promises of the revolution have been betrayed.

This notion, that teachers' status is merely one indicator of a general state of degradation in schools, is central to the theme developed on a broader scale in the next section—participants' opinions and beliefs about the effects of educational reform.

Effects of Educational Reform

> Education should be oriented towards modernization, the world, and the future. (教育要面向现代化，面向世界，面 向未来—*jiào yù yào miàn xiàng xiàn dài huà, miàn xiàng shì jiè, miàn xiàng wèi lái*)

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Doxa

The poem reproduced in the previous section dwells on a number of negative effects of educational reform considered relevant by the teachers in this study, amongst them intensification of teachers work ("overtime, day and night"), unsatisfactory levels of pay ("compensation, that of migrant laborers"), and the annoyance of an increasingly invasive managerialism ("inspection, more severe"). It does not, however, address the more optimistic outcomes of reform acknowledged by participants to counterbalance these obviously undesirable trends. Increased pressure at work versus greater opportunity outside of the school; heightened prestige of education versus depleted job security—each of these contradictory pairs represents for participants the many paradoxes of an educational reform program strongly influenced by privatization and marketization.

Of the themes to emerge from the data, teachers' identify the progressive intensification of their work as one of the most serious. For the purposes of relaying this aspect of participants' *doxa*, 'intensification' refers to teachers' sense that they face longer hours, higher expectations, and increasing pressure to improve their ability to fulfill these duties. One indicator of the time commitment expected of teachers was the difficulty we had finding time to convene for group interviews. Over the course of five months, I had hoped to conduct four or more of these discussions, but we six consistently struggled to find the time to meet, managing to do so as an entire group only once. Even one-on-one meetings wree extremely hard to arrange. Not surprisingly, the transcripts of our group conversations inevitably begin with an informal exchange of information on one another's personal schedules. The following exchange is one example of such 'timetable talk', and provides an outline of Xiǎo Yān's and other participants' weekly time commitment:

Xiǎo Yān: Do you have the entire day off every Sunday?
Lǎo Lè: Yes.
Xiǎo Yān: We have never taken a whole Sunday off. Saturday is our day off, but we have to work a half-day on Sunday. Totally, one and a half days off per week.
Lǎo Lè: Terrible!

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Lǎo Lè's initial reaction would seem to indicate her feeling that Xiǎo Yān has things particularly hard, but her response only briefly obscures the fact that her schedule is lighter on this day only due to her shuffling of priorities.

> Lorin: You have none? Don't you usually have classes [today]?
> Lǎo Lè: I have classes, but I gave them to other teachers. So I'm free today.
> Lorin: Because you have a meeting tomorrow?
> Lǎo Pīng: Yes.

Later in the same session, Xiǎo Yān offered this elaboration of the coming afternoons' work, as well as some insight into the difficulties an intense schedule presents:

> Xiǎo Yān: This afternoon I have four classes. I must prepare for my classes. Now, last night, yesterday afternoon...I had parents' meeting...so, I [had] no time to prepare today's classes.

The weekend schedule she describes is slightly shorter than on weekdays, but is, nonetheless, a full school day for students, if not teachers:

> Xiǎo Yān: There are ten classes for my students today. For English...[I] teach each class [for] two [periods].
> Lorin: What do you mean they have ten classes?
> Lǎo Lè: Five in the morning, five in the afternoon.
> Xiǎo Yān: Ya!
> Lorin: 7:40 it will start?
> Lǎo Pīng: No, no, no. 8:00 o'clock...Each [period] lasts forty minutes.
> Lorin: It's a normal...it's a normal school day, right?
> Xiǎo Yān: No, special. Only on Saturdays (note: it is Sunday)
> Lorin: Is [the Saturday schedule] longer?...
> Lǎo Lè: Shorter...In our school or the other schools...class lasts forty minutes.
> Xiǎo Yān: Now on the weekdays, each class lasts forty-five minutes. But only on Saturday, because [there are] ten classes,...each class [is] forty minutes....Terrible! (everyone laughs)

Such a description might not seem like a particularly difficult schedule for teachers to maintain. Indeed, on a weekend workday, Xiǎo Yān teaches twice as many periods, four, as on a typical weekday. But one must take into account the demands of lesson preparation. The virtuoso model hinges on a conception of the teacher with not only expert *knowledge* (a condition to which few English teachers would lay claim), but

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also expert *delivery* of each lesson (Paine, 1990). To accomplish such perfection, teachers tend to spend many hours each day meticulously planning the detailed steps comprising each lesson. Furthermore, actual teaching hours represent only a portion of a teacher's daily responsibilities. A variety of additional roles are filled by classroom teachers. When also appointed *bānzhŭrèn* (班主任—class advisor, similar to homeroom teacher) teachers take charge of an entire class of students. For Gāo Sù, Lăo Lè, Lăo Pīng, and Xiăo Yān, being a *bānzhŭrèn* brings a modest salary stipend, but entails caring for the academic, social, and psychological welfare of more than sixty students. Wáng Diàn, for her part, takes the special duties of the *niánjí zúzhăng* (年级组长—grade leader), responsible for dealing with the daily affairs of the students and teachers of a single grade level. Another position available to teachers, *jiàoyán zúzhăng* (教研组长), puts them in charge of teachers in their subject area. Beyond these teaching and administrative tasks, teachers attend school meetings and in-service training sessions

These commitments, however, are not unique to Chinese schools, nor are they specific to the reform era. While weekend teaching does represent an element of intensification of teachers' work, in order to more fully understand the nature of participants' grievances, one must set aside such *quantitative* measures of time to consider instead the *qualitative* changes resulting from the mounting competition engendered under educational reform. For this group teachers, one of the pressures they feel is to improve their own ability in an environment in which English has become a high stakes subject area:

> Wáng Diàn: Now, I think that because of the changes,...the task for us is very heavy.
> Lăo Pīng: Mmmmm. (she agrees)
> Wáng Diàn: Now I think...because I'm older (she laughs), my abilities are...poor!...
> Lorin: [You mean] your English skills are poor?
> Wáng Diàn: Ok (yes). And my vocabulary is poor, like you told me....So, if I want to teach my students well, I must be a good teacher. So, the first thing for me to do, I must improve my English level first, and then I can help my students improve their level.

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Wáng Diàn's honest self-assessment is partly a statement of fact; her skills could be improved. But one might also sense in her self-deprecating remarks the internalization of the precepts of Deng's reform program, with its critique of the 'quality' of the nation, and its particular focus on the problems of teacher 'quality'. In other words, her sense of obligation to 'self-renovate' demonstrates more than her own desire to be a better teacher; it is also importantly a reproduction of the general precepts of well-entrenched government policy (at the level of social institutions). She is, of course, aware that external forces bear upon her and other teachers. In the following, she attributes demands for teacher development to "society", its "leaders", and a general condition of progress:

> Wáng Diàn: The society is advancing...[and] language is more useful.... So, now the leaders of the society, I think they must pay more attention to it....The society is advancing quickly...[and] language is very important.

At the school level, the pressure of high-stakes examinations for students at all levels fuels these expectations:

> Gāo Sù: You know, every university student, they have to pass one English exam....No matter she is learning chemistry, physics or English, they have to pass [the same] English examination.
>
> Lorin: Everyone writes the same examination?
>
> Gāo Sù: This exam is, actually it's very difficult, so those students have to learn English better in middle school.

Here, Lǎo Pīng speculates on why her headmaster has called a meeting at the unusual time of 5:50pm on Sunday:

> Lǎo Pīng: Maybe they will say something about the midterm examination. Analyze [it]...[and] give many numbers[:] whose class is the highest, [whose] got the highest marks.

In addition to the obvious honours and humiliations attending such occasions, these results have important consequences for the future success of individual teachers. In schools like Lǎo Pīng's, where students are grouped according to ability, teachers with

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less experience or with poor examination results are given classes of students not expected to achieve:

Lǎo Pīng:	[The young teachers will be given] the worst class to teach.
Lorin:	You mean the worst grades?
Lǎo Pīng:	Yes. The lowest grades....In our school, we have three levels: the high, the medium, and the low.
Lorin:	According to the examination marks?
Lǎo Pīng:	Yes. The [entrance] examination....In our school, for example, [one teacher] had taught four years. This year, she [had] a class which is the lowest students. After the midterm examination there was only one student [who] got higher than sixty.
Lorin:	Really?
Lǎo Pīng:	Yes. She feels very, very sad. She doesn't feel confident in teaching.
Lorin:	So, it's good if you have the high students?
Lǎo Pīng:	Yes. Maybe she [would] feel confident. But only one student passed the exam. The girl really was worried. She often said [she doesn't] want to teach now.

This system, of course, adheres to the virtuoso model and its internal hierarchies: seniority and success, however determined by the idiosyncrasies of a given school, are both rewarded. But one cannot ignore the potential negative effects, for this teacher (increasing stress and falling job satisfaction) as for the school itself (the potential loss of a teacher), of such competition-based evaluation. Gāo Sù, by contrast, reports facing a different dilemma in her school:

Gāo Sù:	In my school, [they are all] in the same class. I have to deal with all the students in my class. Very, very clever students and, at the same time,...the medium and also the...bad boys. (she laughs)
Lǎo Pīng:	I think it's [stressful] for the teachers to teach a class like that.
Gāo Sù:	Very difficult.

Such an arrangement might suggest a more egalitarian approach, perhaps due to her school's origin as a 'factory' (i.e. owned and operated by a state owned manufacturing enterprise), or it may, alternatively, be ascribed to the school's efforts to raise the examination results of all students. Whatever the motivation in the particular case, results on examinations of all kinds are treated seriously by school leaders, for student performance is the foundation upon which a school's reputation is built. A school's

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good name, in turn, attracts not only more registrants, but also academically stronger ones from lower grade levels. Fees charged to these students grow in conjunction with the school's standing, especially those associated with *chaoyuan* enrollment (i.e. fees charged to 'outside' students—on page 99 above). Stronger financial footing creates other advantages for a school in the form of new and better facilities and the ability to attract the best teachers with higher remuneration, as Gāo Sù explains:

Gāo Sù:	If [a] school cannot make money…the teachers will not get rewards [in addition to their] salary. So, [a teacher] can get two kinds of money every month. One part is the salary from the government,…and the other is from the school... about several hundred yuan. In my school it's also the same.
Lorin:	So, if the school is more famous, the part from the school is more?
Gāo Sù:	Yes, so if this school is good, it can pay extra money to its teachers. If this school is poor, the teachers get the money from the city government. No extra money. Nothing. So the teachers all want to go to the good schools to get more money.

There is, of course, a dark side to this 'advantage'. The spectre of unemployment is always present:

Lăo Lè:	It is said, the teachers in that school, [if] they didn't work hard, or they cannot make the students get a good mark, maybe they will lose their job....
Lorin:	Does this happen in your school as well? Any of you?
Lăo Lè:	We have many. (everyone laughs nervously)
Gāo Sù:	Mine also has.
Xiăo Yān:	In our school, one teacher….
Gāo Sù:	Only one [in mine].
Lăo Lè:	Every year we have less than ten. Four, five, six, seven, eight…
Gāo Sù:	So many! So many!

Lower salary or even, remarkably, a form of professional exile is also a possibility, as the following story illustrates:

Gāo Sù:	An old math teacher worked with me last term….She complained about a lot of things that the leaders and the headmaster does. So no matter whether in a meeting or just in the work time, this old lady just complained. So all the leaders didn't like her.

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Lorin: She complained directly to them?

Gāo Sù: Yes, and she even quarreled with some very...I mean the leaders with very great power....Yes, so very strange....So this old teacher didn't get [a] job [placement].

Lorin: So, she had her salary but no teaching?

Gāo Sù: Yes, she had the salary. A very low salary. She had the salary with no work to do. So, one day in this term, the government asked one teacher to go to the countryside to help the local...schools teach....so our headmaster just gave this chance to that old teacher.

School leaders, no doubt, face similar pressures, but they also stand to profit from good results in the form of public plaudits and compensation, though monetary gain sometimes comes in ways that are less than above board. Indeed, one participant linked her school's demands on teachers to the school leaders' pursuit of *huìsè shōurù* (灰色收入—'grey' or under the table income), kickbacks paid by building contractors and others eager to supply services. Whatever various school administrators' motivation for organizing classes in a particular way, participants universally cited high expectations for student performance as an important source of stress in their lives.

But even as it presents challenges to their aspirations to a good life, competition also opens up avenues by which it might be achieved. Indeed, the opening-up to the outside world has engendered unique opportunities for financial gain to teachers of English. I have already discussed above the link between examinations, student performance, school reputation, and teachers' salary. But teachers also take advantage of 'moonlighting' opportunities:

Gāo Sù: You know, English teaching is the most important teaching in China now... That is why many, many English teachers earn... much money in their teaching. Not only in [their] school, but also after school. I mean they give extra classes to the students who want to learn English better.

Like school leaders, teachers earn substantial *huìsè shōurù* in a number of ways. It is widely known, for example, that teachers tutor their own students in defiance of official guidelines, sometimes individually, but usually in small groups. Performing an

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equally if not more common job, many others teach courses at evening schools several hours per week, in Lǎo Lè's case, earning about eighty *yuán* (CAN$11) per forty minute lesson[2]. For a teacher whose regular monthly salary may be only 1000-1500 *yuán* (and often less), such an opportunities are difficult to pass up. Our group discussions themselves became a chance for Wáng Diàn to suggest that we take advantage of these opportunities despite practical barriers:

> Wáng Diàn: If we want to open a school, we must have much money. But we don't have money. We can't afford.
>
> Lǎo Lè: You can look for a man who has a lot of money....Only [money]. [He] should give some money...to help us to have a school.

In addition to extra teaching opportunities, participants have found other ways to utilize their highly valued skills. Each had at some point acted in an advisory role and written and edited textbook materials for the local education press. In the case of three of them, they had traveled extensively throughout the country giving in-service training for teachers (occasionally partnering with me) on behalf of the same company. And while none of these participants had personally *xià hǎi* (下海—gone into business), Wáng Diàn often held up her friend, who has had success in private business since leaving the teaching world, as a model of the new possibilities available to teachers. Such activities were sometimes represented as a form of resistance to or a complete rejection of poor school conditions and inadequate pay and, indeed, it is tempting to understand them as such. But teachers' engagement in private teaching also represents their adherence to the new economic circumstances, at best a cooptation of an undesirable set of conditions for their own purposes. In other words, their concerns over specific problems created under reform coexist with their tacit acceptance of them.

Strategies of Symbolic Construction

Setting aside for now details about the effects of educational reform, I consider again the strategies used by participants to construct these perspectives on reform. Perhaps the most common of these involves, once again, the use of *synecdoche* to obscure from view the causes of the effects discussed, as well as the nature of

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interpersonal relations within the social structures and institutions. Specifically, participants consistently cited "society" as the root cause or fundamental force driving changes in education. In this example, Wáng Diàn responds to my probes into the causes of change:

> Lorin: So,...somebody is asking you to do more, to teach the students more, so it means that you'll have to change and it's more difficult?
> Wáng Diàn: Yes. Now, the second thing is the society is advancing...the language...the language is more useful, ok. Is too...
> Lǎo Pīng: Foreign language...
> Wáng Diàn: Language is too. So, now the leaders of the society, I think they must pay more attention to it. The society is advancing quickly, fast...

"Society" and its forward advance, in other words, are the ultimate source of pressure on teachers. Gāo Sù has a similar take on things—

> Lorin: I'm curious; I think you have said that it is more difficult even for you. [Has] it become more difficult?...
> Gāo Sù: English teaching is becoming more and more difficult for the teachers, because the students...the parents, or even the society, they are asking more—

a view subsequently underscored by Wáng Diàn—

> Lorin: So there's pressure from students, from parents, from yourself also?...
> Wáng Diàn: Now I think there is pressure from all sides of the society. (Lǎo Pīng laughs in agreement)

Such a strategy works in this case to evoke a sympathetic image, the teacher as a lone figure *shí miàn mái fú* (十面埋伏—ambushed from all sides), under siege from a variety of forces—students, parents, and leaders. Society, an imposing unity one could hardly be expected to successfully defy, exerts its will on the individual teacher or, alternatively, on a differentiated *group* of teachers. Synecdoche, thus deployed, has an essentially positive effect, despite the negative undertones of the specific symbolic form produced. In orienting their beliefs around such an outlook, and in doing so in a group interview setting, participants take steps toward building solidarity with other

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teachers. This strategy is similar to that employed by participants in describing their resistance to the official hierarchy.

If the interview excerpts reproduced above provide ample evidence of differentiation and whole-part conflation (synecdoche), they also demonstrate the use of *trope* as a strategy of construction. Participants drew heavily on the trope of progress in their discussions around the effects of reform. The notion that Chinese 'society' is continuously advancing came up frequently, here as partial critique of the present leadership:

> Wáng Diàn: So, now the leaders of the society, I think they must pay more attention to it. The society is advancing quickly, fast.

This trope was prominent in both one-on-one and group discussions, a fact that would appear to reflect Wáng Diàn and other participants' absorption of the kind of political discourse that has become ubiquitous since being inaugurated by Deng (see Chapter 5). The following excerpt from the state news agency is but a single recent example of a theme that can be found in most government press material:

> China's reform in rural areas, having made remarkable progress in the last 30 years, serves the joint purposes of safeguarding farmers' material interests, democratic rights and developing productivity [emphasis added]. (XNA, September 4th, 2006)

'China is progressing', 'China is developing', 'China is on the correct path'—similar statements drone on in government propaganda channels and are taken up and repeated in everyday interactions. Whatever problems occur can be *rationalized* by the 'fact' that China is a 'developing country' with many problems that the government is continually struggling to overcome. When paired with the visibly obvious and statistically indisputable economic growth since 1976, 'progress' becomes a seemingly irrefutable justification for the continuance of present reform policies and, by extension, maintenance of the status quo. Adherence to the 'truth' of reform—i.e. that it represents 'progress'—weakens the force of observations that reveal certain problems (e.g. gender disparities in wages or the intensification of teachers' work) to be the *result of* reform as opposed to the mistakes of a bygone era to be *corrected by*

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the new way. But even when errors are admitted, as has been nominally so in the case of 'uneven development' (see Chapter 5), there would appear to be broad popular support for the idea that inequality is a normal condition if the country is to pass through a period of capitalistic development (i.e. socialism with Chinese characteristics) on its inevitable rise to prosperity.

Concerns over job security feature strongly in discussions of reform. In most cases, this anxiety is expressed in narratives of teachers who have been demoted, have had their salaries or status reduced, or who have lost their jobs entirely. This is not to suggest that all such stories are proffered as an expression of solidarity with these teachers. In Gāo Sù's story about the math teacher who complained openly and was subsequently assigned to a countryside school, for example, a model is presented of a teacher who does not hold to accepted 'teacher-like' behaviour. While Gāo Sù cannot be said to be unsympathetic to the specifics of this teacher's grievances, she nonetheless constructs the tale using a number of strategies that render the teacher's actions unsavoury and, thus, unworthy of emulation. Note that this is no ordinary teacher, but, rather, an "old" one who "complains a lot" and 'quarrels' with leaders. The adjective "old" has more than one meaning here. It may be read as an objective description of chronological age, which in more traditional uses is a respectful appellation. But one must also recognize how labeling another person 'old' can indicate that individual's antiquated thinking as well as her or his failure to 'keep up'. In the post-Mao era, all things 'new' and 'advanced' are permeated with the positive valuations of the politically favoured discourse of 'reform' and 'progress'. In addition to her 'oldness', this teacher plays the part of 'complainer' in this story, a role that is, as discussed above, undesirable if occasionally understandable. More than this, she argues openly with leaders, thus subverting normal ways of interacting with those in higher positions and, thus, disturbing the school's harmony, a condition considered of paramount concern in Chinese culture. Despite the negative implications of such disciplinary action for all teachers, there is little evidence in Gāo Sù's narrative that she considers the school's leaders' response either surprising or unfair. Note that the story concludes with Gāo Sù describing the teacher's being sent to a countryside

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school, normally considered a kind of punishment, as a "chance", an opportunity she didn't necessarily deserve.

* * *

In this chapter, I have concerned myself with analyzing two themes drawn from the interview transcripts. I have maintained that these accounts are accurate representations of participants' beliefs and opinions around these themes and, as such, wield a constitutive power over social reality. Recognizing the multi-layered nature of symbolic forms, I have sought to demonstrate how these same accounts can be analyzed according to the strategies by which they are constructed. In the next chapter, I expand my analysis beyond these *strategies of symbolic construction* and consider the *modes of operation of ideology* with which the former are associated.

Notes

[1] My comment here—that Wáng Diàn is "not a man"—followed a discussion on the advantages that men have over women. I will return to this discussion at a later point.

[2] This salary represents a fairly high rate of pay in Lǎo Lè's home city. Foreign teachers, usually considered to be more marketable, draw a slightly higher salary (~100 *yuan*) per lesson.

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Chapter 6
Interpretation/Reinterpretation

> The terms of a discourse carry out their ideological role by explicitly referring to one thing and implicitly referring to another, by entangling these multiple referents in a way which serves to sustain relations of domination. (Thompson, 1984, p. 138)

> The [television] series [on Dr. Bethune], sponsored by the propaganda division of the Shanghai government, is a key element in China's latest effort to revive a "socialist sense of honour" in a country where ideology has faded and morality has eroded. (York, 2006, p. 1)

In the previous chapter, I presented two themes drawn from the data generated in discussions with the study's participants. I then pointed out how their perspectives on the present state of teachers and teaching as well as the effects of educational reform are not merely transparent accounts of reality. On the contrary, by examining their discourse at the level of their constructive principles, I was able to discern the presence of a number of strategies used by participants to construct credible, explanatory accounts of the world. But can similar conclusions be drawn as to the presence of ideology in this same data? Thompson points out that answers to this question will always be multiple, to some degree speculative, and open to dispute. Nevertheless, the present chapter aims to make a connection between the symbolic forms produced by participants and the *modes of operation of ideology* listed in Chapter 4 (on page 44). Before proceeding with this analysis, I elaborate on the central concept in this analysis, Thompson's *critical conception of ideology*.

Thompson's Critical Conception of Ideology

Thompson discerns two ways in which the term *ideology* has typically been used: a "purely descriptive", *neutral* conception, in which all political movements, whether conservative or transformative, are oriented around a system of beliefs; and a negative, *critical* conception that specifically links ideology to the preservation of

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asymmetrical power relations (Thompson, 1984, p. 4). Thompson critiques a number of prominent perspectives on ideology: first, those who locate ideology exclusively in radicalism (p. 82) (as in the excerpt from York that heads this chapter); second, the work of theorists who detect "the end of ideology" in the rise of pragmatism (pp. 79-81); and finally, and perhaps most importantly, those who propose a universal or unrestrictive notion of ideology (p. 76-83). Thompson identifies Seliger as a leading proponent of this final position, and suggests that, in attempting to demonstrate the weakness of restrictive, Marxist conceptions of ideology, the latter has mistakenly stripped the analysis of ideology of its utility in the critique of domination (p. 82). Furthermore, Thompson contends, a view of ideology as a "belief *system*...exaggerates the unity and discreteness of ideologies" and tends to direct analysis toward organized political entities rather than the institutions and "domains of everyday life", the "effective ground in which objective reality...is played out" (p. 83). Thompson's critique of Seliger's position concludes by pointing out the ways in which it fails to adequately consider the connection between ideology and the ways in which it is expressed symbolically in the form of language.

Having thus discarded the neutral conception and having determined that an adequate account of ideology requires "a greater sensitivity to the dimension of language", Thompson turns to Gouldner, whom, he claims, "elaborates a richly historical perspective on the concept of ideology" (p. 83). Modern ideology, in Gouldner's account, emerged simultaneously with social science and concurrently with the decline of older traditions (p. 83-84). Despite the fact of their co-emergence, ideology and social science have developed in opposition to each other, mainly due to Marx's attacks on these 'new sciences' and their unjustifiable claims to scientific truth (p. 84). But the surpassing of traditional modes of legitimation by new forms of justification *qua* ideology has not meant the end of domination and subordination; it has, rather, resulted in the rise of rational, evidence-based, scientific modes of political action (p. 84-85). These modes, whatever the specific political agenda they are used to forward, are necessarily effected through language, through "that part of the consciousness which can be *said*" (p. 85). Ideology, in other words, travels through and achieves its effects on the social body by enabling and limiting those things which

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can be communicated and discussed and, thus, made real (*ibid.*). While he agrees with the focus on language, Thompson claims, nonetheless, that Gouldner's project is "both too general and too specific" (p. 88). On the first count, it is too general in that it refers only to "public projects advocated by rational discourse" and thus eliminates from consideration the link between ideology and domination (*ibid.*). What Thompson refers to here is the fact that, according to Gouldner, it matters not whether it is directed toward reaction, conservation, or transformation—ideology is defined only by its concern with rationality as opposed to tradition (*ibid.*). Thompson's second critique, that Gouldner's account of ideology is too specific, arises from the fact that the latter identifies ideology as a phenomenon of modernity (*ibid.*). On this account, Gouldner implies that social science is the vehicle by which ideology travels (*ibid.*). But what, Thompson asks, of the role of the natural sciences, or the ideological functioning of non-scientific movements such as nationalism or liberalism (*ibid.*)? Furthermore, he contends, in locating the origin of ideology in the European Enlightenment, Gouldner's conception strips ideology of its potential as an analytical category in investigations of pre-Enlightenment or non-European societies (p. 89). Notwithstanding these difficulties, Thompson appreciates Gouldner's emphasis on language, but insists that a complete theory of ideology must extend its concern beyond the formal social sciences and into the realm of everyday language (*ibid.*). It is entirely possible, Thompson holds, that "the language of everyday life is the very *locus* of ideology and the very *site* of the meaning which sustains relations of domination" (p. 89-90).

In order to fill out his own critical conception, Thompson considers Paul Hirst's elaboration and critique of Louis Althusser, whom Thompson credits with redefining the discussion of ideology in a way that brings into focus "everyday phenomena" and, additionally, with extracting the study of ideology from its European prejudice (p. 90). For Althusser, ideology is neither a "form of consciousness [n]or a realm of ideas", but a "real relation" in and of itself, a necessary component of all societies (*ibid.*). All societies must produce, but in order to do so, must reproduce the relations that enable production (p. 91). Such reproduction is accomplished, in Althusser's account, through the violence or repression of 'repressive state

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apparatuses' (RSA's) and, at the same time, through the machinations of embodied transmitters of ideology, 'ideological state apparatuses' (ISA's) (*ibid.*; Althusser, 1992). Hirst, while clearly a successor to Althusser, is nonetheless critical of the latter's acceptance of the "primacy of the 'economy'" (in Thompson, 1984, p. 91) and questions the "false unity" suggested by the RSA/ISA conceptualization. He is also doubtful about Althusser's account of "the nature and *modus operandi*" of ideology, specifically with the unitary assumptions of the final of his three theses (p. 92), in which Althusser posits a critical role for what he calls *interpellation*, the notion that ideology functions by appealing directly to individuals: "*all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects*" (Althusser, 1992, p. 55). Despite Hirst's critique of Althusser, Thompson maintains that the latter's contributions to the theory of ideology are important for a number of reasons. His main assertion is that Althusser is right to emphasize the connection between ideology and the subject, thereby directing "our attention towards processes by whereby consciousness is constituted, both at the individual level and at the level of groups and classes" (Thompson, 1984, p. 95).

Building on these and other historical contributions to the theory of ideology, Thompson holds to what he calls a new, critical conception. The primary goal of this reformulation is to avoid the trap that he claims hampers each of the conceptions above; the *neutralization* of ideology, he insists, should be avoided. Ideology's utility as an analytical category lies in its ability to critique "the ways in which symbolic forms intersect with relations of power" (p. 56). "*To study ideology*", in other words, "*is to study the ways in which meaning serves to establish and sustain relations of domination*" (*ibid.*). But this formulation is, at first glance, problematic, for it suggests a degree of deceptive intent in communication that defies outright what individuals know and/or believe about themselves and their world. Few would accept the notion that they and their fellow human beings are completely unaware of attempts at manipulation presented to them on a daily basis. Furthermore, if he were to propose that symbolic forms are *always* ideological, Thompson's argument would be untenable. Recall, however, his position on the hermeneutic condition of knowledge of the social world: "ideological phenomena are meaningful symbolic phenomena *in so far as* they

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serve, in particular social-historical circumstances, to establish and sustain relations of domination" (*ibid.*). It is not possible, then, to discern ideology in the shape and content of symbolic forms themselves, as has been seen in the analyses proffered in Chapter 6. One might be tempted at this point to accuse Thompson of affecting little more than a return to a Marxian analysis of ideology, of portraying social actors as cultural dupes, of locating in them false consciousness. But such is not the case, for, he claims, ideology need not travel in the shape of "erroneous or illusory" symbolic forms (*ibid.*). Indeed, while they may be bogus and deceptive, ideological effect is not inevitably drawn from the falsity of symbolic constructions. In order to demonstrate the operation of ideology, according to Thompson's negative formulation, one need only demonstrate that certain symbolic forms act, in specific social-historical contexts, to create and sustain asymmetrical relations.

Reinterpretation: Ideology in Everyday Language

How, then, can symbolic forms that circulate among this study's participants be seen to act in this manner? To what extent do the meanings conveyed in their accounts serve to establish and/or sustain relations of domination? What specific ideological discourses might be discerned when these accounts are situated within the social-historical context in which they have been produced? I have already demonstrated, in the previous chapter, how participants access strategies of symbolic construction in order to 'say more' than is initially apparent. As I continue the depth hermeneutic process, my task is to suggest how these accounts may be reinterpreted with an eye toward ideology. When set against the backcloth of the social-historical context developed in Chapter 5, such depth analysis of symbolic forms has the potential to reveal the presence of ideology as it operates according to the five general modes introduced in Chapter 4: *legitimation*, *dissimulation*, *unification*, *fragmentation*, and *reification*. In order to accomplish this chore in a manner that is familiar to the reader, more or less systematic, and efficient, I deal with only the those categories—*legitimation, dissimulation, and reification*—most prominent in the study's data.

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Ideology as Legitimation

In Chapter 4, I discussed how symbolic forms, when constructed using strategies of rationalization, universalization, and narrativization, may serve to *legitimate* asymmetrical relations between differently situated actors. But the presence of these strategies does not, according to Thompson's critical conception of ideology, necessarily correspond to an ideological function. Take for example Gāo Sù's story of the 'old, complaining teacher' (on page 127). Here, several strategies are combined to construct a moral tale about the fate of those who fail to 'keep up with the times' and, worse yet, disturb the harmony of the school. Framed thus, this teacher's characteristics as well as her actions are demonized, while, at the same time, the school leaders' subsequent retaliation is justified.

But how does the presence of these strategies legitimate relations of domination? First of all, it is important to stress once again that Gāo Sù's anecdote is not a neutral recollection of fact. Consider that she could have, had she so desired, told a different version of this incident, one in which the dissident teacher's behaviour is valorized, thus positioning her as a martyr struggling against an unjust system. Furthermore, the specific forms produced must be understood in relation to the social-historical context developed in Chapter 5. In that chapter, I discussed the relatively powerless position occupied by teachers in the institutional hierarchy of Chinese education. I also discussed how the emulation of ideal models is a critical component in the production of teachers' professional habitus. Clearly, the image fashioned by Gāo Sù is not one to be imitated; who, after all, would take as a model an old-fashioned loudmouth who has been exiled to the countryside with a substantially reduced salary? On the most basic level, then, stories like these, when circulated amongst the teachers, stress the undesirability of certain traits in teachers and, more to the point, the futility of rebellion. Positioned as they are at or near the bottom of the institutional pecking order, teachers' generalized adherence to the moral imperatives embodied in Gāo Sù's story could only serve to reproduce an existing order that disfavours teacher autonomy.

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But in order to understand with greater depth the limitations within which teachers work, a further question needs to be asked: is it significant that the lead character in this story is female? In Chapter 4, I discussed the historical and contemporary disadvantages faced by Chinese women as a whole. Recall also that teaching in China's middle schools is predominantly an occupation of women, while leadership in these same schools is a role filled for the most part by men. By reading this story against the backcloth of this institutional reality, we see how a symbolic form (i.e. the story told by Gāo Sù) can be implicated as part of a larger system that works to sustain asymmetrical power relations. Such analysis reveals the ways in which teachers' subordinate status in educational institutions is legitimated at the intersection of occupational and gender habitus. Teachers' low social and professional status is less an accident of history to be repaired through policy initiatives than the logical extension of an historically entrenched feature of the broader social structure.

...as Dissimulation

As a mode of operation of ideology, *dissimulation* renders opaque, masks entirely, or refuses to recognize relations of domination. To achieve its effects, it constructs symbolic forms using strategies such as *displacement*, *euphemization*, and *trope*. In Chapter 5, this final strategy was discussed at length in relation to a number of participants' statements, and was found to be particularly relevant to understanding the expression *jiào shī shì ge liáng xīn huór*. Teaching, here raised to the level of duty, is a job to be approached with dedication and perseverance, regardless of the trials and obstacles one might face. These difficulties, according to the participants in this study, are numerous and have increased in the reform era, an intensification engendered by increased competition in and between schools. Scarce funding, relaxation of residency requirements for students, the education system's ongoing reliance on competitive examinations to screen students—each of these factors works to the detriment of teachers' sense of fulfillment. Given this contemporary reality and the long list of government initiatives ostensibly designed to improve the lot of teachers, it follows that the reproduction of expressions like this can be taken as a genuine effort to praise

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teachers for the doing their jobs selflessly, or, on the other hand, to encourage them to continue to do so.

In what sense, though, might this apparently harmless maxim be read to function ideologically? The key is to understand how the expression is invoked to explain why teachers do what they do despite the erroneous conditions in which they work. Deployed thus, teaching can be depicted an intensive task by its very nature, one which will remain so no matter what steps are taken to alleviate the pressure. Those who do the work, therefore, must be possessed of the selfless devotion necessary for the successful accomplishment of such a difficult job. The strategies used to construct this symbolic form conceal the truth of the contemporary Chinese middle schools: that enhanced competition and its consequent intensification is not the result of the pressures of rapid economic growth, but, rather, the pursuit of economic policy that favours privatization and marketization over adequate government funding. Further to the point, by valorizing the image of the self-sacrificing hero, a group that could be a powerful political force, a least in terms of provoking positive change in schools, is discouraged from acting to forward its own self-interest.

A more clear-cut example of dissimulation may be located in the insistence of Gāo Sù, Wáng Diàn and others that 'society' is ultimately to blame for the intensification of their work (see on page 125). In the previous chapter, I interpreted this constructive strategy (i.e. synecdoche) as having an essentially positive goal—to put forward a sympathetic portrait of teachers. A divergent reading, however, reveals an ideological function in the same symbolic form. Recall my analysis in Chapter 4 of the ways in which the Deng transformation of educational policy was premised in part on reinstituting a multi-tiered system of schools (i.e. regular, vocational, and key) and, concurrently, competitive examinations. Furthermore, as discussed in the previous paragraph, it is worthwhile to note how the post-Mao government has consistently looked to the market as a partial if not total solution to the woes of the past. Increasing competition and intensification of teachers' work, in other words, is the entirely predictable result of deliberate government policy. By identifying 'natural' forces of development as the cause of their difficulties and, furthermore, in claiming that the

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pressure they feel emanates from an abstract uniformity (i.e. 'society'), the possibility that a disproportionately empowered elite might be held responsible for these conditions is eliminated outright. Allowed to escape their responsibility, members of this ruling class successfully retain their privileged positions.

...as Reification

The final mode of operation of ideology in Thompson's typology is *reification.* Amongst the various strategies employed to produce the symbolic forms comprising participants' accounts of their social world, *naturalization* is the most prominent. Lǎo Pīng's narrative (see on page 118) of how she became a teacher provides a poignant example of this strategy at play. Her primary intention is to relate her story of becoming a teacher in a way that elicits the empathy of the listener and, in doing so, to express what she believes to be a truth about teaching—that some people are born (i.e. they have a *natural* ability) to be teachers. She includes in this retelling the voice of her school's principal, whom, she relates, sees her as a model teacher, naturally inclined to the occupation. One is not surprised that such an explanation would be offered and accepted, for 'nature' and 'providence' alike are commonly posited explanations for otherwise mysterious circumstances in the social realm. But once again, knowledge of the social-historical context suggests that the location of 'natural' ability in a teacher is related to the gender of the individual so described. This is particularly so in the case of English teachers, who, it is said, possess more 'natural' teaching ability as well as genetically programmed aptitude for learning language. The former is certainly not true, a fact illuminated in a number of historical accounts of the ways in which teaching has been deliberately constructed as a female vocation (see Chapter 4 for a brief discussion of the feminization of teaching). The latter point remains a matter of debate in language learning circles, but the proposition that genetics somehow determines who will or will not become an excellent English teacher is obviously dubious. Whatever the truth of the matter, widespread adherence to such tenets has the power to (re)constitute objective conditions in which this subjective belief becomes reality. Such attitudes, ironically, skew segments the employment market *in favour* of women.

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Clearly, certain gender ideologies, deeply entrenched at the level of the social structure, circumscribe, in the sense of both limiting and enabling, opportunities available to Chinese women. But if reification of assumed differences creates apparent advantage for them, how, then, does Thompson's critical conception of ideology apply? A potential answer to this question lies in the knowledge that Chinese women, on the whole, tend to find the greatest number of employment opportunities in occupations with substantially lower wages than those dominated by men (see Chapter 4 for a detailed discussion of wage differentials in contemporary China). While certainly not a poorly paid job in the context of modern, urban China, teaching still ranks lowly as an occupation of choice for men, a reality that becomes more pronounced at lower levels of the school system. Not surprisingly, wages in primary schools, in which women fill almost all teaching positions, are lowest of all. Teaching, defined as an occupation to which they are 'naturally' suited, is easily accessible to women, unlike more powerful and lucrative positions, such as the school principal, an office which continues to be occupied by men. In other words, to borrow a phrase from Bourdieu, most women teachers, including the participants in this study, choose not to pursue that which is objectively denied them.

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Epilogue
Hindsight Hermeneutics

Several months and than one hundred and forty four pages ago, I introduced this document as an exploration of both *self* and *other*. At that time, I was referring to my intention to write about my experience working with teachers in China and the complex ways in which those experiences had, in addition to clarifying my knowledge about them, shifted my own self-understanding. But just as living in China meant almost daily change in my understanding, so too has further reading and the writing of my thesis seen a continual transformation of these inward and outward perspectives. In what I hope is a fitting conclusion, I offer a brief synopsis of what the process of writing this rather lengthy essay has taught me not only about Chinese teachers and the society in which they live, but also about myself.

In the initial stages of this research, I held a grand vision of what I might accomplish. Buoyed by my certainty that I understood the situation of Chinese teachers and what needed to be done to 'help' them, I designed my fieldwork based on what, in retrospect, was a limited understanding of 'emancipatory research'. The principles by which I guided this libratory mission were drawn from Patti Lather's work, in particular her notion of 'self-reflexive reciprocity'. It is not surprising, then, that much of my research journal, reproduced in large part in Chapter 3, reveals a preoccupation with this precept and how its promise might be fulfilled in practice. Post-fieldwork reflection prompted by the constructive critique of colleagues, however, revealed my understanding of the concepts embedded in this phrase, *reflexivity* and *reciprocity*, to be rather shallow. Still other critiques led me to conclude that I was, in fact, engaged in a mission to 'save' a group of people who were quite likely not hoping to be rescued. The process of 'writing-up', in other words, rather than bringing about a set of straightforward and immediate conclusions, served first and foremost to trouble the essential assumptions of my project.

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If writing this essay initiated self-doubt about the methodology and ultimate goals of the research, then further reading took it in new directions. Reading Bourdieu to some extent filled the gap in my understanding of *reflexivity*, and, furthermore, forced me to reconsider the epistemological privilege I had granted teachers' understandings on their lives and work. If their perspectives could not, in the end, be taken to contain the truth of their reality, then it seemed to me that my entire research design was faulty. Yet holding to the second part of Bourdieu's argument also proscribed the possibility of returning to any kind of objective analysis. At the same time, I did not wish to abandon altogether Lather's call for *reciprocity* in research, which I still hold to be a valid if not easily achievable goal. But Bourdieu's closing of the subjectivist-objectivist schism suggested to me a more complex relationship between researcher and research, one that, in its refusal to accept without question social actors' perspectives on the social realm, seemed to eliminate altogether the possibility of any trouble-tree formation in which research might lead to knowledge productive of concrete improvement in the lives of those involved. If I were to constantly strike a doubtful pose vis-à-vis the information related to me, what effect might this have on rapport, and, furthermore, how might my ability to work in solidarity with these teachers be diminished? Then again, does the previous sentence reveal an ontologically pessimistic view? Am I, in other words, assuming that the subjects of my study do not have the capacity to take into account and reflect upon the perspectives of others? I draw some guidance from Thompson's (1990) insistence that research into subjects' interpretations of their worlds always exists in a "*relation of potential appropriation*" (1990, p. 275-276; see also page 36). Those studied, in other words, have the ability to accept and incorporate (or reject outright) the researcher's theories should they so choose. Despite the reassurance that this analysis brings, as this research draws to a close, I continue to be troubled by these questions.

Did I, in the end, achieve a measure of reciprocity in this research project? Have I managed to maintain a position of constant reflexivity? In the initial phases of fieldwork, as my research journal shows, the former goal was paramount in my mind. As a result, I feel that my overt attempts to shift power away from myself did yield concrete results. In retrospect, however, I have not been able to maintain a more

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balanced relationship with participants as the study has moved into the data analysis and writing stages. Distance, personal schedules, and, not to be discounted, the pressures of institutional deadlines have worked to prevent me from fully integrating reciprocity into all phases of this research. The condition of reflexivity has been equally hard to maintain despite the fact that the concept was part of my planning from the outset. In terms of my ability and willingness to critique my own methodological choices, a measure of reflexivity is indeed apparent in the overall structure of this thesis. But the degree to which I have been able to incorporate reflexivity into the specific framework chosen (i.e. depth hermeneutics), however, is very much in question. Given that a fundamental tenet of hermeneutics, according to Gadamer, requires that the hermeneutist pay careful attention to the tradition in which he is embedded, it is unlikely that I have paid enough attention to the epistemological legacy that has formed my intellectual habitus. I would appear, in other words, to be far more concerned with exploring the formative context of the teacher-participants of this study, than I am with delving into the social-historical context that colours my own reception of their stories. Were this not the case, Chapter 4 would likely contain a much more in-depth consideration of, for example, the academic culture in which I have been schooled, as well as the forces that played a role in my coming to be a teacher trainer in China in the first place. On the other hand, it is quite possible that these reflexive shortcomings are partly the result of my tight adherence to the specifics of Thompson's methodology. Despite the fact that he founds his methodology upon hermeneutics of Gadamer and Ricoeur, both of whom recognize the importance of the productive and receptive curves of the circle of understanding, Thompson does not integrate into his framework a mechanism to facilitate explication of the researcher's background to the same extent that he allows for exposition on the social-historical context of the researched. Whether the source of this shortcoming in my work reveals a weakness in Thompson's process or my own failure to compensate for it, future studies of this kind will require a reconfigured methodology able to incorporate a fuller mode of researcher reflexivity, yet still retain a focus on the subject-object of study.

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The initial purpose of this research was to explore the perceptions of mainland Chinese teachers on the conditions of their social and professional lives in the context of sweeping economic, social, and educational reform, and, furthermore to investigate how these teachers position themselves and/or see themselves positioned this process. I feel that I have, regardless of the limited presentation I have given these perspectives in this document, achieved a degree of success in this project. Indeed, my explorations have shown me that, while there is much that the participants in this study would like to see improved and changed outright, they do not see themselves, as was obviously my expectation, to be unduly repressed. Nor do they sit in passive acquiescence as they wait in quiet hopefulness for foreign researchers to liberate them. Yet despite the well-developed strategies by which they set up resistance to the asymmetrical relations that surround them, they seem only marginally aware of how their own common-sense understandings of their social world act to reproduce the very relations that circumscribe the possibilities of their lives. Such, however, is the strength of depth hermeneutic analysis: by attending to the ways in which everyday actors are implicated in the constitution and re-constitution of social institutions and structures, we may facilitate a deeper causal understanding of the durable differentials that characterize the social realm. Such understanding, I contend, represents an important first step if these conditions are to be alleviated and transformed. Depth hermeneutics can, in other words, engender the conditions of possibility of positive social change.

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Appendix A
Letter of Consent

参与研究意象表 – Participant Consent Form

请填写以下表格，表明您对所研究课题理解并同意参与。在参与课题中，您有以下权利：
By signing this form, you indicate your understanding of the research project and agree to participate. In giving your consent, you have the right to:

- ☐ 隐私权、匿名权和资料的隐秘权。privacy, anonymity and confidentiality.
- ☐ 有随时撤出课题的权利。withdraw participation at any point during the study without explanation or penalty.
- ☐ 保障资料的安全。safeguards to security of data.
- ☐ 涉及参与者利益的事情，参与者应享有知情权。disclosure of the presence of any apparent or actual conflict of interest on the part of the researcher.
- ☐ 可复制采访的脚本。a copy of interview transcripts.
- ☐ 可复制以下表格以供参考。a copy of this consent form for your reference.
- ☐ 可要求获得最终的报告。a copy of the final report upon request.

所有的资料均符合 Alberta 大学对参与者人身保护权利的标准。如您想获得进一步的信息，All data will be handled in compliance with the University of Alberta Standards for the Protection of Human Research Participants. 请访问网站. Information regarding this is available on the University web site at http://www.ualberta.ca/~unisecr/policy/sec66.html.

这项学术研究的计划符合民族伦理的精神，被 Albert 大学教育学学院以及人类学研究院所认可与认证。如您想进一步获得这方面的信息，请联系学院主席。他的电话是：(780）492-3751。The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to the ethical guidelines and approved by the Faculties of Education and Extension Research Ethics Board (EE REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EE REB at (780) 492-3751.

请在参与研究的过程中随时和我联系。您可拨打我的手机：13931152399，也可给我发电子邮件到 lyochim@ualberta.ca。如您有任何疑问，可与教育体制研究系的主席 Dr. Jennifer Kelly 联系，联系电话: 492-4229 电子邮件: jrkelly@ualberta.ca.；或与我的导师 Dr. Jose da Costa 联系，联系电话: 492-5868 电子邮件：jose.da.costa@ualberta.ca. Please contact me at any point during the study at 13931152399 or via Email lyochim@ualberta.ca. In the case of concerns or complaints, please contact the Chair of the Department of Educational Policy Studies,

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Dr. José da Costa at (780) 492-5868, or my doctoral supervisor, Dr. Jennifer Kelly, at (780) 492-4224 or by email at jennifer.kelly@ualberta.ca.

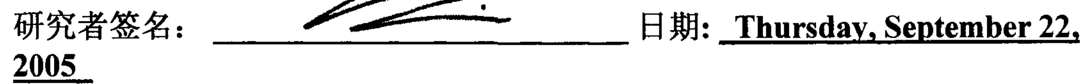
参与者签名:

______________________________ ______________________________

名字（要求加拼音） 签名

日期: ____________________ 电话: ____________________

电子邮箱: ____



研究者签名： ____________________ 日期: **Thursday, September 22, 2005**

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Appendix B
Sample Interview Questions

I. Topics for Focus Group Sessions (Unstructured)

While it is anticipated that focus group sessions will be allowed to flow according to the interests of participants, the following questions and probes are drawn from the research questions and will be used to establish an initial direction for discussions.

1. Describe your experiences with the recent reforms in education.
    a. What have the changes meant to your role as a teacher?
    b. How would you characterize these changes? Negative? Positive? Other?
    c. Does the fact that you are a woman play a role in your experiences with change?
    d. Can you describe some specific experiences that illustrate this?
2. What has been your role in the reform, and what do you believe the role of English teachers in general to be in the process?
    a. Has this role changed in recent years? If so, how would you characterize these changes?
    b. Does the fact that you are a woman play a role in your experiences with change?
3. Within the working context of a female, middle school English teacher, what meaning does the word "empowerment" have?
    a. As a teacher, do you believe yourself to be empowered in your work and workplace?
    b. Does gender play a role in empowerment or lack thereof?
4. Do you believe that teachers could or should play a greater role in the reform process?
    a. If so, what form(s) might this increased role take?
    b. What steps would need to be taken to overcome current limitations?

II. Sample Questions for Individual Interviews (Semi-Structured)

The intention of these interviews is to serve as a debriefing phase for both the researcher and participants. As such, specific lines of inquiry will flow from data generated in focus groups. It follows, then, that the questions related to the data generated cannot be accurately anticipated. The questions below relate to the method of inquiry used in the study and are intended to help the researcher and participant better understand the purpose and effects of the research process itself.

1. What words would you use to describe your experience in the focus group sessions?

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2. What parts of the focus group process did you particularly enjoy? Which not?
3. Can you offer some suggestions about how this kind of research could be improved in the future?

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