

The Moving Boundaries of Social Heat: Gambling in rural China

Hans Steinmüller
London School of Economics
J.Steinmuller@lse.ac.uk

- Draft paper for “Rethinking Economic Anthropology”, workshop on “Calculability and Gambling, London 12th January 2008-

Please do not quote or cite without permission of the author

Whilst gambling for money had been prohibited during the Maoist era, since the 1980s it has become very common in many rural areas of central China. In fact, it often is the major communal activity in many villages, focus point of daily gossip and object of government campaigns. I want to describe several different forms of gambling common in Houmei County, Eastern Hubei Province, and relate them to local discourses on capability and luck/fate, striving and display. Gambling can be desired and necessary as an expression of “hot” sociality (*renao*), and objectionable if it surpasses certain social boundaries. These boundaries are contested in local society, and they are contested by the state. Discourses and practices of gambling can give instructive comments on marginal positions in economy and polity, and on the ambiguous relationship between local sociality and practice, and official representation and control.

It was just about two weeks after my arrival in Shuanketan village¹, that some young men invited me to learn ‘*za qinghua*’ from them. This is card game works similar to poker, but only with three cards in front of each player. The gamblers, which will be at least three, but are mostly up to ten people, take turns in putting bills of money on the table, each betting on the combination of cards in front of him. Everyone will put in at least one RMB at the beginning, and then more at every consecutive turn, until he gives up. For an average game there will be between 50 and

¹ All personal names, and those of all places below the level of the prefecture, are pseudonyms.

100 RMB on the table for the winner to take. One game will last only a couple of minutes, and money bills go over the table at rapid speed.

I vividly remember the first evening I spent with them; 10s, 50s, and 100s of RMB were handed over the low table in the storehouse of the village. Sitting there, I was surprised, almost shocked, at the amounts that these young men were gambling with – easily more than a week’s income in the jobs they would have in Beijing, Shanghai or Guangzhou; let alone of what they would earn in the odd jobs they could find locally. I thought of what I had read before embarking on fieldwork in rural China – about the huge inequalities in wealth in China now, about neoliberal regimes and ‘casino capitalism’. Could it be that I had found here something that the Comaroffs had called “the occult economies” (1999) of “Millennial Capitalism and the culture of neoliberalism” (2002)?

In the context of rural China, it seems that such an argument could hold very well: in fact most of the young people migrating to the cities to work in factories and other low-skill manual jobs are participating in a hugely unequal economy. According to official data, urban households had about three times more annual disposable income than rural households in 2006,² but this does not even completely express the realities that are so visible to most people in the countryside. Both on TV and in their everyday life in the city they are confronted with glaring inequalities on a daily basis. It is in particular the young who are susceptible to dreams of incredible wealth, when they leave the countryside to go down to the sea (*xiahai*), to the coastal provinces, and its mega-cities. How would they explain it to themselves that some “got rich first”, that some in this society are buying cars and houses that they will be never able to buy in a lifetime, and that the countryside where they are from seems more and more stagnating, a place of boredom and dullness? Could it not be that the explanation of something like that comes close to being “luck” and something like “magic” – just what one would need in gambling?

But this is not the direction I want to take here.³ After a short introduction about gambling in China, I will look at various forms of gambling in one village, and try to delineate how they are inter-related with discourses of capability and fate in other

² See China Statistical Yearbook 2006, 10-2; with 10493 RMB average annual disposable income per urban household and 3255 RMB for rural households; that is a ratio of 3.22:1.

³ Others have done, if not related directly to gambling, but to describe contemporary China with categories like “millennial capitalism”, “neoliberal culture”, e.g. Yan Hairong 2003, Pun Ngai 2003, Lee Haiyan 2007. One of the reasons I do not want to relate gambling in rural China to these arguments is the implicit relationship between certain traits of Christian moralities to arguments about “occult economies” and “magic”, which do not so much apply to China.

areas of life. In gambling itself, one can find certain local expressions around desired forms of sociality, which are opening up a semantic field of vitality, heat and fire. But there are also many occasions now where gambling is running out of the borders within which it was socially accepted. The boundaries of the acceptable in expressions of a vital and “hot” sociality in general, and of gambling in particular, have changed a lot in the last decades. The central section of this essay is then dealing with the different ways in which these boundaries are contested in local communities and in official ideologies. I conclude that discourses and practices of gambling potentially allow ordinary people to comment on their position in economy and polity; and they exemplify the ambiguous relationship of state representation and local sociality in general, and state control and free market in China.

Gambling in China

Whilst any forms of gambling were forbidden during the Maoist era, since the 1980s many different forms of gambling and wagering have become increasingly common. In many areas of rural China, playing Majiang and various card games have become the most common communal activity since then. But it remains difficult to determine continuities and discontinuities as what regards gambling in rural China. Gambling in many different forms have a long history in China (cf. Gernet 1962:226, Wakeman 1985: 96, 625); there is even the probability that playing cards were first introduced to Europe from China (Wilkinson 1895). According to most accounts, gambling has been a part of rural life for a very long time. C.F. Fitzgerald writes for example about Dali in Yunnan in the 1930s, that the people there “are rather fond of gambling, card games being the favourite with adults, and dice with children” (2005:191).

I have no way of proofing exactly what is new about gambling in the places in the Chinese countryside that I have seen from 2005 to 2007. But some changes are clear: Whereas gambling was prohibited under the Maoist era, it is condoned by local government now. The money economy is penetrating ever more any sphere of live; quotas for grain have been abolished, and for most crops there are markets now. The household registration system exerts gradually less influence on mobility, and the majority of young people from the countryside are labour migrants in the cities.

Most ethnographies of rural China are mentioning the topic on the side,⁴ but to my knowledge there is no focused analysis of gambling in rural China. The two texts in Western languages that are trying to deliver a social analysis of Chinese gambling are

⁴ E.g. Hsu 1948:26,65, Kulp 1925: 325-326 , Watson 1975:168.

Oxford 1991 and Festa 2007, both dealing with Majiang, the first in a Chinese community in Calcutta, and the second in Taiwan.

Ellen Oxford starts from the apparent contradiction between the “entrepreneurial ethic” of a Chinese community of tanners in Calcutta, and the propensity, in particular of adult males, for high-stake gambling. In her words gambling “mimics and re-enacts both the risks and possible gains of entrepreneurship, but it does so within an arena contained by both temporal and spatial restrictions” (1991:255). Drawing on Goffman’s model of “fateful action” (Goffman 1967), Oxford interprets Majiang gambling as an action that is “problematic”, “consequential” and “done for its own sake”, and hence a great occasion for the display of character; and beyond that, it expresses wealth and status, and possibly “the central contradictions of the community’s ethos”, in the sense of Geertz’s “deep play” (Oxford 1991:256, Geertz 1973).

Even though there are certain similarities, the place and role of both the “entrepreneurial ethics” and of gambling is different in rural China in 2007 when compared with this overseas Chinese community. Besides the high-stake gambling of business men, there are many other forms of entertainment that involve gambling. But similar to Oxford, I want to focus on the internal contradiction of striving and luck/fate that can be shown in gambling.

Paul Festa, in his analysis of Majiang gambling in Taiwan, also takes these two elements as distinctive parts of the social imaginary of gambling. Re-working a theoretical framework of Roger Caillois, he extends them however into four elements: *agon* (competition), *alea* (chance), *mimesis* (simulation) and *ilinx* (vertigo). He connects the element of chance in gambling with certain images of the state, where both personal and national aspirations are linked together, as in the official lotteries, or in the astounding ways in which the state is also seen as an element of “fate” in individuals’ lives. The third element of mimesis is a martial imaginary that appears strikingly with his informants, who all took part in compulsory military service in Taiwan. There is no compulsory military service on the mainland and this element seems to me less convincing in other contexts. Even less so is the last element of possession: Festa illustrates it with himself going to a T-bar of lesbians, dancing with them, showing that all the same things are possible for women, including gambling, and taking that as a potential participation in the “sympathetic *agon*” of democratic politics.

In terms of a social ontology, it seems to me that the pair of “fate/luck” and “capability/striving”, or “*nengli*” and “*ming*” in Chinese, is crucial. When talking

about Majiang, and when playing Majiang, the culturally dominant modes are “*agon*” and “*alea*” – it is a “fair” struggle in which everyone sees his luck/fate directly in every round of the game. There might be a hints of something mimetic, like in the mention that “Majiang is like war” or even of possession, as in the case of the Majiang addict. But these are certainly not the primary reasons to play, and the primary embedded metaphors of the game. But the observer of Majiang can ask what might be simulated and mimicked in the game. Festa argues that it is primarily imageries of war, and I will argue below that in the countryside it is one’s place in an economy and a polity.

Whilst it is intriguing that the dominance of competition and luck/fate, of “*agon*” and “*alea*” seems to be both a characteristic of Western society and Chinese society – as different to other societies, which would emphasize more elements of “simulation” and “vertigo” - it seems to me that the connection between these elements of “competition” and “fate/luck” is rather different in China, when compared with Western societies. Oxfeld quotes in passing from a classical study on gambling in the United States: Eduard Devereux’s dissertation on “gambling and the social structure” (1949; Oxfeld 1991:250).⁵ A student of Talcott Parsons, he analyzes gambling from the perspective of structural functionalism. Gambling is both in its internal logic and its extrinsic functions an expression of the “cleavages and ambivalences” within contemporary US-American culture, characterized by a capitalist economic system that is fostered by protestant ethics. There are the inherent frustrations that such a culture engenders, the contradiction between thrift and spending, prudence and risk-taking, the values of capitalism and of Christianity, and the intrinsic contradictions in the development of ‘rationality’ that narrows scope for innovation and risk.⁶ These contradictions play themselves out in gambling, where individuals can find “safety-valves” for a staged “protest” against rationality, ethics, and boredom; where they can live out waste and aggression and find a thrill that might be absent from their everyday life. The dominant values of this society, in particular its protestant ethics, are most prevalent amongst the middle class; and it is here where small-stake and occasional gambling are most common, and where the condemnation of high-stake gambling is strongest.

⁵ Devereux’s argument is summarized in Downes et al 1976:16-28.

⁶ It is worth mentioning that these frustrations are intrinsic to capitalism in Devereux description; that means that they would occur even if a certain value system was completely institutionalized and absorbed. If merit and award would not be visibly correlated, this could equally force strain on individuals, but this is something external to the capitalist system in this description. This is exactly what occurs in forms of money magic according to the descriptions of the Comaroffs and others, quoted at the beginning.

Even though contemporary Chinese society can well be described as capitalist, individual motivations and ethics are certainly quite different to such protestant Calvinist ones, and so must be the contradictions in and around gambling. An argument could be forwarded that monotheistic religions, which claim a universal authority on transcendental and moral issues, create particularly powerful condemnation of gambling.⁷ But there has been official disapproval, countless campaigns against gambling, and prohibitions in Chinese history as well.⁸ The official delimitation of gambling followed always certain forms of governance and control that are rather different to an authority that claims a monopoly on the last matters of morals regarding individuals.

There are several accounts of local gods that were worshipped as patron saints of gamblers, prostitutes and thieves (cf. Weller 1995, Feuchtwang 2001:48). Weller sets forth an argument that such phenomena might become especially prominent in an environment in which the state was retreating from its control of religious authority (Weller 1995). But even in times of “normal” state control, there was an ambivalent relationship between government and state ideology, and the prevalence of gambling amongst the populace. Gambling has been providing throughout much of Chinese history something that could be called “cultural intimacy”. Michael Herzfeld has coined this notion to describe forms of sociality that are an embarrassment to national collective representations, whilst offering intimate forms of sociality that are of crucial importance for local identifications (Herzfeld 2005). I will come back to the ambivalent relationship of the state with gambling later; first I want to outline more local dimensions of gambling.

Ambivalent descriptions of gambling exist also in local discourse. The English word ‘gambling’, which applies to all kinds of games that involve wagering, and has some tone of “righteous condemnation” to it, does not have an equivalent in other Western languages, and neither does it in Chinese. The two words that are most commonly used here are ‘wan’ and ‘du’; the first is more entertainment and play, whereas only the second denotes the increased involvement of money and wagering. As Pina-Cabral and Chan in their analysis of gambling in Macao illustrate, the decision whether a certain game is better described as one or the other, is certainly a question of perspective – frequently the gamblers themselves will prefer to speak of ‘wan’ (Pina Cabral 2002:82ff). This ‘wan’ side of gambling is also extremely important for the celebration of kinship, of friendship, even of relatedness in general. To ‘play’ (*wan*) together is the best way to cement a relationship. Such ‘wan’ can involve gambling,

⁷ Binde 2007 has spelled out this argument in detail.

⁸ e.g. Gernet 1962:226, Naquin and Rawski 1987:22.

but also many other social activities, like going out, eating, chatting etc. It is the other side of gambling – ‘*du*’ – that is purely associated with wagering and money. The games that I mentioned in the beginning – high-stake card games played by young men, are almost unequivocally called “gambling” (*du*). There are other games, in particular the pastimes of elders that will be just as unequivocally called ‘*wan*’. But perhaps the biggest part is in between those two extremes, and there is a lot of ironic playing with the positioning of these forms of gambling into what is socially acceptable and what not.

Everyone’s Games, Fate and the Heat of the Social

The games that I have mentioned at the beginning are in fact not the most common ones, and they are reserved commonly to young men. The most ordinary games in the villages of Houmei are Majiang and *dou dizhu* (“beat the landlord”), a card game.

These games are played in the most diverse occasions, during weddings, funerals, and other family celebration; and very often at rainy days in the houses. During the “idle” period of the peasant calendar (*nongxian*), and in particular at the time of the Spring Festival, many people will gamble all day in their families, or with relatives and neighbours. The period of the Spring Festival is a time of permissiveness, of amusement in the families, amongst relatives and close friends that more often than not takes the form of gambling.⁹ Such forms of gambling will be unequivocally called ‘*wan*’ – which is more the ‘play’ side of gambling. Similar, if to a lesser extent, is the gambling at family celebrations like weddings, funerals and house inaugurations.

Setting up a gambling table, providing guests with a set of Majiang tiles or playing cards, belongs to the proper ways of hosting a guest, together with offering cigarettes and a meal. This is especially the case in families of higher social standing, where guests are frequent; gambling equipments are invariably required household assets in such families. These guests will also include friends, business partners and officials; and to entertain guests, and to spend some time together in “amusement” and “play” (‘*wan*’) is the best – and often necessary – form to establish and cement good relationships. Before going further into gambling, I want to make explicit the images of fate and luck that are very often associated just with such families; just as much as

⁹ “Both the New Year season and the Autumn Festival are times of increased licence. Gambling is sanctioned by custom if not by law.” (Feuchtwang 2001:104)

they are implicit in gambling.

Social Ontologies in Gambling

When asked about their life stories, and in particular the reasons for success or failure in their lives, many people in Houmei would end either with stressing their capabilities (*nengli*, *benshi*), or bluntly relate it to their good “fate” (*ming*). Every time I insisted on this point, trying to force a decision on either of both, people would admit that it is in fact both elements, and the relationship between them can never be finally determined.

In an early article, Wang Mingming (1997 [1986]) demonstrates how people in villages in Southern Fujian see achievement and failure based on exactly these two elements: someone’s capability (*nengli*) and hard work, on the one side, and someone’s “fate” (*ming*), on the other. Wang delineates the opposition of ‘capability’ (*nengli*) and ‘fate’ (*ming*) as a “local social ontology”, structurally similar to the opposition of “structure” and “agency” in the social sciences. The metaphorical relationship between ‘capability’ (*nengli*) and ‘fate’ (*ming*) can be paralleled in verbalizations of important life decisions, and also in the discourses on and the practice of gambling in rural China.

One could illustrate the interaction of capability (*nengli*) and fate (*ming*) in many verbalizations of life decisions. Let me give an example with the following story:

Tan Jiafu is a farmer in one a relatively remote village of Houmei county in the West of Hubei Province. He had been outside the village for about 10 years, labouring in Hangzhou and Shanghai, and just come back to his home village this year. At one evening I spent in his house, he told me about his wedding, the different ways he tried to earn money, and how they built their house last year. He had been very poor when he was young, and had tried to make some money with a small shop he opened in the village. But because his father and his brother liked to drink liquor when he wasn’t there, they gave too much to people that couldn’t pay, and lost lots of money with this shop. Later Tan Jiafu tried to make some money by trading in herbal medicine. He had heard from a friend that very high prices would be paid for a certain herbal medicine in Long Shan, a city in neighbouring Hunan province. But when he went there, he realized that they were actually paying only half the price for which he had bought the plants in Enshi. With that business he lost another ten thousand RMB, and came back to Enshi with debts.

At the time he was proposing marriage to a girl in a neighbouring county. Her father is a teacher in the local middle school, and head of a much respected family. Tan Jiafu couldn't have any chance in his proposal, if he had told her his real situation (that he had huge amounts of debt), and so he remained silent on this issue. In fact, he 'tricked' her (*pian ta*), he admitted himself. She only found out after the wedding, that he had loads of debts. Yet, she stayed with him, and has been a very loyal and extremely hard working wife ever since.

After three years working in Hangzhou and Shanghai, he called her over to come with him to the city as well. They came home together last year, to build a new house in their home village. Actually, Tan Jiafu didn't want to build a new house; he thought that their old house was still fine, and he would have preferred to invest the 30 000 RMB that they had together then, and start some minor business in the region. But he said that a new house had been his wife's foremost wish for years. In the end they built the new house; and not only with (cheap) concrete bricks, but with red clay bricks – which would look nicer, and show to everyone that they had actually now achieved quite a comfortable living standard. His wife wanted so much that they could show now to everyone in the village that they had overcome poverty now.

Whether someone's good fate is visible to the public depends not the least to whether it is shown in public. Both Tan Jiafu and his wife had had so far a very hard life; and they never had many possibilities to show that they had achieved something. By building their beautiful new house, their moderate wealth is made clearly visible to the public of the village community.

This story was told to me by Tan Jiafu himself, and I think it is safe to assume that his wife would have told it in a quite different way. Perhaps he was not at all successful in dealing with money, and that just made it more reasonable for her to insist on building a house, a stable investment that he would not be able to squander away. In any case, it was not possible for me to go deeper into the demands, needs and desires of either of them, but in particular his wife. Nevertheless, this story illustrates, I think, a central opposition: namely the one between re-investing and display, between striving and showing off, in the spending of money. When assessing someone's capability (*nengli*) and someone's fate (*ming*), people will look both at his/her hard work and also on the proper ways of display, of spending.

In local discourse, a good 'fate' (*ming*) is something that can be measured by basically three criteria: sons and descendants, long life and health, and prosperity. But as much as these are not obvious to everyone, and as much as there is never a final moment,

when others would assess these, the problem of whether to show them to others (so that they would be recognized and become meaningful) or whether to save money, re-invest, or just continue working, poses itself frequently.¹⁰

In the example above, Tan Jiafu says he would have preferred to re-invest his money; but in the end he built the house out of compassion for his wife, because she had been living such a hard and miserable life on his side ever since their marriage. The house was primarily an investment in their outside appearance, in the face (*mianzi*) of their family.

A social requirement not only in such big decisions is to give when it is expected. One of the strongest reprehensions is to call someone “miserly” (*xiaoqi*) and “stingy” (*seba*¹¹). Gossip about neighbours that didn’t spend much on their cloths, and in particular, on the food they ate, are very common. In recent times, these people are also called “old-fashioned” and “backward”, they are “stubbornly” (*juejin*) sticking to their old habits, the customs of the old generation.

One could even parallel the showing of a good ‘fate’ to something like a Chinese version of doctrines of predestination.¹² Even if someone’s ‘fate’ would be predetermined, one could never know absolutely about it. There are many attempts to do exactly that, most prominently the very popular interest in divination and *fengshui* – which then also tries to influence the future. But on a more basic level, one could just work hard, and do everything to *show* someone’s good ‘fate’. I hasten to add that there are many obvious differences between protestant ethics and Chinese ethics; above all the lack of a transcendent god and absolute judge, and related to that the idea of a “calling” that could be shown in one’s work.

What is very often taken as just the opposite to hard work, is gambling. People would refer continuously to men that were addicted to gambling and had lost all their money in it, as people that had a bad ‘fate’ (*ming*), and in particular so, their parents – who might have been hard-working people. Notions of fate and luck on the one side, and of capability on the other, are at the core of local discourse on gambling.

¹⁰ As to the question whether a young couple should spend money in building a beautiful house, or invest it in business, it seems that it is more frequently young wives that opt for the first and young husbands that opt for the latter. An example from Chinese literature is He Xiulian and her husband Sun Shao’an in the novel “An Ordinary World” by Lu Yao (2004: 266ff).

¹¹ or *linse* in standard Chinese.

¹² Cf. Weber 1932.

Metaphors of Life in Gambling

When talking about gambling I could often hear that this and that form of gambling are demanding some capability and intelligence; or conversely, that they are based entirely on luck (*wanquan shi huoqi*). When asked directly, most gamblers would say that in Majiang and “beat the landlord” the ratio between luck and capability is about 80% to 20%. But contrary to this insider estimation, people that were condemning the gambling attitudes of the young sometimes said that the gamblers and their admirers thought that those who can gamble well are intelligent (*congming*) and powerful.

There is some affirmation of male identity here as well, especially when it comes to risking large sums of money. Very frequently men in their middle age would say that they are not gambling much; but when they were young, they were tremendous gamblers. A man in his thirties, Liao Jiangxiang, for instance, was sitting next to me on a Majiang table one day in winter 2006. The men that were sitting at this table had been gathering for almost ten days in a row in the time of the “idle months” (*nongxian*) of the peasant calendar. I left early this evening, together with him, walking home. On the way he said to me “Majiang, majiang, majiang; all the time Majiang. It is so boring and useless”. I asked him why he then gambles at all, if it was just boring, and he answered that there is just nothing else to do. But the way they are gambling now is “just fun” (*hao wan*) there are no big stakes in there. When he was young, he went on, he was gambling much more. And he would loose not 10s or 100s, like no, but 10000s of RMB just in one night.

But there is more to it: participation in gambling as showing that one’s *ming* is really powerful. Through the participation in gambling, people show that they are ready to take up risks; in particular they take up the risk of loosing money in high stakes. The higher the stakes, the higher is the possible prestige of the person that looses it.

Gambling has become so common in many parts of the Chinese countryside that is now the major communal activity in many family gatherings, as well as reunions with friends and neighbours. Any of these family celebrations is supposed to be lively, loud and “hot” (*renao*); if it would be too quiet and with only very few people, it would exactly convey a sense of loneliness, maybe even of impropriety.

I cannot ascertain the exact association, but I don’t think it is random that the word for ‘luck’ that is commonly used in Enshi is also related to warmth, and fire: “*huoqi*” is locally used in the sense of luck (*yunqi*) – but according to a standard dictionary it would mean: “anger, temper; heat in human body; cold-resistant capacity; internal heat.” There is another very similar word that can also be used as an attribute signifying luckiness and good fate: ‘*huose*’. It is explained by locals as similar to

saying that someone's "flame" (*huoyan*) is "high". There are at least two senses to this word. One is a more spiritual one, meaning that one's "life-force" is strong. So one could say that ghosts will not attack someone whose "*huose*" is good, because they would fear him; whereas they would attack someone whose "*huose*" is not good. The other sense, which is much more commonly used by young people, is meaning basically that someone is capable, tough, and tremendous.¹³

This semantic field of heat, vitality and success stretches from the proper warmth of a social occasion (*renao*), to luck (*huoqi* and *house*), and can be also extended to how a business should be: like fire (*huo*). The expression that a business goes like "fire" (*huo*) means that it goes exceptionally well. The relationship is certainly not only semantic: People that are successful in business, will have many reciprocal relationships (*laiwang*), which is seen in them frequently receiving guests and partaking in the "heat" of celebrations, of commensality, and of amusement (*wan'* – quite frequently in gambling – together).

Commensality in hosting a guest also shows in particular ways the verticality and horizontality of the relationships between the people on the table: There will be always a clear positioning of the seats on the table, according to the questions of age, superiority and power. Inferiors, sitting on the "lower seats" (*xiawei*) will invite those at the "higher seats" (*shangwei*) to drink. An important guest will sit invariably at such a higher seat. In these toasts, one can see clearly an expression of homage on the one side (the inferior invites the superior), and on perfect reciprocity on the other (both drink exactly the same amount). Just like with inviting someone to eat and to drink, there is a particular emphasis on perfect reciprocity in gambling. Gambling means to put one's luck in front of the immediate arbitrator of the Majiang tiles or the cards. Everyone sticks to the rules, and there is whole ethics of proper behaviour, and of paying one's gambling debts. But just like with commensality, hierarchical relationships are also plainly visible in gambling; and the powerful and rich mostly end up showing that the "fire" (*house*) of their life is higher: by showing indifference to the loss of huge sums; or by winning – often the inferiors will let them win, to make the superior feel good; or in a form of indirect "gift" to him. If the social distance between the superior and the others is too huge, he can also outwardly deny an invitation to gamble – denying such a form of reciprocity and conjoined indulgence in social 'heat' all together.

This element of "fire" is parallel to what is called '*yun*' in the standard Chinese

¹³ In standard Chinese the equivalent in this sense would be *lihai*. The character "*li*" means originally sharp, fierce, and dangerous; it can also mean "evil ghost", as in "*ligui*".

expression for “luck” (*yunqi*). Both categories are more susceptible to human influence; they stand more for the everyday contingency, which can be manipulated by everyday means. Such “luck” (*yunqi* or *huoqi*) can be seen within gambling, and immediately so, after every round. In this it is different to ‘*ming*’, which is both “fate” and “life”. ‘*ming*’ has to do with the outside limits of gambling, and its place in the wider social environment. One’s “life” will not be changed in one round of gambling; but it is still visible in the way someone participates – or doesn’t – in gambling rounds. The propriety of such behaviour, in particular of the powerful, is much talked about. And so are the boundaries of gambling – of that which goes beyond what is socially expected as “entertainment” and joined amusement (*wan*) in social “heat” (*renao*) and becomes unsocial gambling (*du*).

The Boundaries of Gambling

Boundaries of Gambling I: in local Society

Majiang is probably the most common form of gambling in the Chinese world, and is sometimes ironically called a distinctive trait of Chinese civilization. Another form of gambling stands in just as ironically for local belonging and traditionality. A very common form of card game played in the villages of southwestern Hubei is called ‘*shaofu*’ or ‘*changpai*’. In various forms, this game is very common in many areas of central and south-western China; but each locality has its own rules and its own sets of cards. In Enshi the game consists of 4 sets of 24 different long cards with one Chinese character painted in calligraphy on each of them. The 24 characters form 8 verses of 3 characters each, and make up a poem: ““His Greatness, Confucius, has taught three thousand students, of which 70 became virtuous scholars. A young student like you should learn from eight or nine sages [of those 70 scholars], and should learn how to be benevolent (*ren*) and hence understand courtesy and manners (*li*).”¹⁴ This verse was commonly used in late imperial China to teach reading and writing to children; they had to copy the characters written with brushstrokes, and memorize the verse. By doing that the children should also learn the good ways of ‘benevolence’ (*ren*) and ‘manners’ (*li*) – but in fact, many students were just copying the characters without understanding their meaning.¹⁵

¹⁴ “*shang da ren, qiu yi ji, hua san qian, qi shi xian, er xiao sheng, ba jiu zi, jia zuo ren, ke zhi li*”.

¹⁵ When I first asked for the meaning of the characters on the card game, a twenty-year-old told me that it is ‘Kong Yiji’, “you know, the Kong Yiji of Lu Xun”. Lu Xun wrote a famous short story entitled “Confucius” (*Kong Yiji*), which has become required reading for middle school students in China. In the short story a bedraggled Confucian scholar, known as a thief and drinker, is mockingly called the nickname “Confucius” (*Kong Yiji*). The locals take this nickname from the copy papers (*miaohongzhe*) that were used to teach writing, on which phrases such as “*shang da ren kong yiji*” were written, phrases that people “half understood and half didn’t understand” (Lu Xun 2004:18).

The 24 cards are grouped in 8 families of three single cards, according to the 8 verses of three characters each. The rules of the game are similar to Majiang; people pull cards from the stock in turn, and the one, who first reaches a full combination of all his cards in families of three, or sets of three or four of the same card, wins.

What is remarkable about *shaofu* is the social confinement within which it takes place: it is exclusively elder men that would play the game; and it is played mostly at occasions where it clearly does not conflict with other demands. The accusation that they would waste their time, instead of doing productive work does almost never come up here – people would be just playing at the right occasions. That is, either amongst those that are not working much anymore anyways; at rainy days when there isn't much to do anyways; or when visiting relatives or at holidays. In so being limited, the game is in itself a clear expression of what some central elements of Neo-Confucianism in China were: the propriety of social action.

And – as if the central ideals of Confucian ethics and propriety on the playing cards would call for it – this game almost never will take place with very high stakes, played all night. It is primarily a pastime for elder men. This stands in stark contrast with the games that I have started with here. Gambling with such high stakes is happening mostly among young unmarried men. Such high-stake gaming is also frequently seen as stepping out of the accepted boundaries of 'play' and amusement (*wan*) and judged "gambling" (*du*).

If these young men fail to fulfil social expectations, in particular earning enough money to marry a wife, they will face fierce criticisms, both from their family and outsiders. Even worse would be the case of a married man who gambles all the wealth of his family away. This might occur especially when he has considerable wealth, either earned by himself or inherited from his father.

A case in point was Hu Taimin from Shuanketan. His father had been extremely hard working, so much, that the neighbours would often call him a "model worker". Even though he had been a "rich peasant" during the Maoist era, and thus didn't have much wealth at the beginning of the 80s, he built a huge tea factory, and even a house at the market town, on the ground of Hu Taimin's father-in-law. This marriage was considered an extremely good match, the father-in-law providing wealth and building lots on the market place, and Hu Taimin's father building two houses, one of which they sold later, to build the next tea factory.

Hu Taimin was the youngest son of three; his two older brothers got the tea factory

at home, and the house, whereas he inherited the house on the market. With that he was clearly the most favoured one – which is rather common locally for the youngest son. His father had from early on demanded too much of the other sons, and the oldest son had left the area some 15 years ago, to work in another province; whilst the second son had several major fights with his own father. Being the most favoured and youngest son, Hu Taimin had never worked much in his life, he was just doing small tea business, and his presence in gambling dens and brothels in the nearby towns were widely commented upon. In 2007, after several fights with his wife, related to gambling debts, he divorced, and the family had to sell the house on the market. In local gossip he was often described as a “spendthrift” and “prodigal son” (*baijiazi*).

This kind of conviction by the talk and gossip in the village community is well-documented in the literature on rural China.¹⁶ But there are certain aspects to that now that bespeak the huge social and economic changes of the last thirty years, and which come out clearly in the ambivalent position of the state towards gambling, just as much as in the state’s position towards the excesses of the economy, of speculation and profiteering.

Boundaries of Gambling II: The State, the Economy and Cultural Intimacy

On many occasions elder people would complain about the morals of the day, and the ubiquitous example for that would be corruption, prostitution and gambling. Such talk would often come together with comments that were directly about ‘economic’ relations, like linking these other forms of bad morality to exploitation¹⁷, speculation¹⁸, and the chaos of the bigger economy of China.

¹⁶ Cf. for instance Kulp 1925: 325-326.

¹⁷ A teacher from the local primary school explained this to me with a saying: “the gentleman loves money as well, but he has morals in the way he gets it” (*junzi ai qian, qude you dao*), but the good-for-nothing (*xiaoren*) does not have morals; he will use exploitation (*boxue*) and gambling (*dubo*) to accrue wealth.

¹⁸ It is clear to most people in the countryside that the real estate market in bigger Chinese cities has been exploding, and the prices for apartments rocketing in the last three years; and it is also clear to many people that this is driven by speculation and profiteering (*touji daoba, touji maimai*). Just like “exploitation” (*boxue*), “speculation” (*touji daoba*), was an activity the “bad classes” would engage in and be accused of under Maoism. I was told stories of neighbours that were criticized in class struggle sessions for selling minor goods like chairs or vegetables on the black market; they were said to have gotten astray onto the “capitalist road” and to want to engage in speculation and profiteering (*touji daoba*).

Frequently people would also express some hope in the civility and benevolence of higher officials, which would finally punish the corrupt and debauched. In a more apocalyptic version, an older peasant told me a legend of 108 “old people” (*lao nian ren*) and “heroes” (*yingxiong*) that would come in 2008 out of the “treasure house of the country” (*guojia baoku*) to punish all the corrupt officials of now.¹⁹ This is a contemporary adoption of older Chinese legends about 108 righteous men that would stand up to fight for the restoration of an old order in times of corruption and decadence. One of the most popular collections of histories of such uprisings, “The Water Margin” (*shui hu zhuan*) relates the stories of 108 bandits, 36 of which remain at the end of the novel. Many of them are presented as righteous fighters against a cruel and unjust regime. The history of these bandits is loaded with Daoist and astrologic symbolism: they are released as 108 spirits from a Daoist temple at the beginning, and they are seen as 108 stellar influences; with many parallels in local beliefs and legends. Stephan Feuchtwang gives the examples of local beliefs of 108 spirit soldiers, represented as baleful stars, of which 36 are in heaven, and 72 are on the sky (2002:45-46). This is another example of his main argument about “the imperial metaphor”, namely that in local beliefs and cults there are metaphors of bureaucratic and imperial rule, but just as often there are others that present alternatives to ruling orthodoxy, in particular in militaristic imageries and warrior gods.

In this context it is not a coincidence, I think, that the *shaofu* card game that is played in Hubei has also 108 cards; 36 of which count as points (*fenpai*), whilst the remaining 72 cards don’t count (*supai*). Similar to the imagery of Daoist warrior gods and righteous bandits, the 108 cards of the *shaofu* game, and the poem about Confucius on them, - just like the 108 righteous bandits - stand in an ambivalent relationship with dominant and official orthodoxy. On the one side, they stand for uprightness and conformity, invoking solemn verses and ideals, and the social confinement of gambling. But they are also just as much a parody of the archaism of the classical language of Confucian ethics – sentences that had been repeated countless times, and were mostly only half understood.²⁰

The rounds in which *shaofu* is played are most often also those rounds in which the strongest judgements about the lack of moralities of the young are heard. In their

¹⁹ The 108 heroes included figures of Chinese history, several generals of the communist party and the nationalist party (*guomindang*), and Mao Zedong’s first wife.

²⁰ It is just as ironic to call an unsuccessful scholar, who speaks arcane language (“*zhi hu zhe ye*”) and is a drinker and thief, “Confucius”, taking up Confucius’ name from the very same verse. That is what the customers in an inn do in Lu Xun’s famous short story mentioned above, in which he exemplifies the decadence and anachronism of Confucian ethics (Lu Xun 2004).

ironic displacement of orthodoxy, and in their ambivalence towards the gambling business, these rounds are however also something that is not strictly encouraged by officialdom. It is much rather something that is tacitly sanctioned – but definitely not publicly shown.²¹ After all, *shaofu* itself is also a form of gambling.

The “fire”-like sociality and “vitality” (*renao*) that is created in gambling is something that is frowned upon by the authorities. Every now and then, there is a campaign against gambling. It is in particular local officials, representatives of the state, which are the aim of such campaigns. These local officials are very often frequent gamblers. Besides the propensity of individuals, and the boredom of a life in the civil service, there is another reason for the frequency of gambling amongst officials: it serves the function of establishing tight relationships to superiors, to peers and to businessmen, in the celebration of lively, vital and “hot” (*renao*) sociality. These cases speak also very clearly of the boundaries of gambling (*du*), boundaries that are imposed by the state in attempts to create frameworks of “civilized” leisure activities.

Paul Festa has written an account of attempts by the Chinese state to regulate and control the emerging mass consumer culture in the People’s Republic of China. With the example of a governmental and academic discourse on Majiang, Festa aims to exemplify an emerging normalizing framework, of “modern modes of regulating” or “moral regulation.” Dealing primarily with consumption, these discourses also construe notions of civility and national belonging. Festa’s examples for these “Majiang Politics” are exclusively textual, mainly focusing on one treatise entitled “The Study of Majiang” (*majiangxue*) by Sheng Qi, which both suggests an academic investigation on Majiang, and recommendations for a “healthy Majiang” (*jiankang majiang*) that would be a proper cultural expression of Chinese culture, against the degraded “popular Majiang” which is simplified and mostly involves wagering.²² Expectedly, Festa concludes that there are countless contestations around that, and has observed “that popular mahjong and the gambling that accompanies it are alive and well” (2006:26), and that there is an “official ambivalence over whether or not to promote healthy mahjong”, which however “merely underscores the party-state’s unequivocal antipathy for popular mahjong, ensuring that playing mahjong in

²¹ In summer 2007 I visited the neighbouring county Songtaiping, which is known locally to be the origin of *shaofu*, and where until now most of the *shaofu* cards are produced. During this short visit, I got several introductions about the local situation, mostly about local economy and culture. Even though local officials are nowadays often “digging out” (*waque*) anything that could count as “local culture”, the *shaofu* game was never mentioned – only once as an anecdote and with a benign smile on the face of the official that told me about it.

²² “Ideally, then, to play healthy mahjong would involve the self-cultivation of civilizing norms and, at the same time, the reproduction of Chineseness as a commercial value to be capitalized by the regime of accumulation.” (2006: 26).

contemporary China will remain at once a personal and political act” (Festa 2006:28).

In the countryside of Hubei, there is not yet such a sophisticated “moral regulation” of Majiang to be found; a promotion of “healthy Majiang” is unheard of here. There are however numerous denunciations of businessmen and officials that engage in high-stake gambling; every now and then there are reports in the local newspaper about cadres that were punished for taking part in gambling.²³ In a similar vein, gambling is often portrayed in the newspapers as the pastime of thugs and shady elements in society.²⁴

That stands in stark contrast to the rootedness of the several forms of gambling that I have mentioned here. As a local practice that is both crucially important for local communality and deplored by the authorities, these forms of gambling can be seen as expressions of what could be termed “cultural intimacy”. Michael Herzfeldt has coined that notion of “cultural intimacy”, and defined it as “the recognition of those aspects of a cultural identity that are considered a source of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality...” (2005:3). Ethnographic and anecdotic accounts can show shared metaphors of the state and the people, that are used by both officials and ordinary citizens strategically. The latter will just as much use “practical essentialisms” of themselves and of the state, sometimes in an ironic way, sometimes in a utilitarian way for their own self-interest.

In the *shaofu* game, we have seen just such an imagery that stands in an extremely ambiguous relationship to official ideology: it is ordinary people themselves who affirm their position in society, and who condemn perceived injustice, corruption and chaos. This affirmation is however somewhat ironic, just like in the quotation of the Confucian poem in the card game.

The card games of the old men do not represent anything nearly as dangerous and unruly as the games of the young. In newspaper articles and doctrinal announcements, “gambling” (*dubo*) is not presented as the flip side of economic development, but as residual of “backward” (*luohou*) peasant culture, together with lack of hygiene, and

²³ E.g. ‘*wo zhou sanqi dangyuan ganbu canyu dubo anli bei quanshen tongbao*’ (The case of gambling of three cadres from different levels of Enshi prefecture has been publicized in the whole province) Enshi Evening News 2nd January 2007, ‘*guanyu Li Zeyu dengren canyu dubo wenti de tongbao*’ (report about the problem of Li Zeyu and several others engaging in gambling) Enshi Evening News 29th September 2007.

²⁴ E.g. ‘*dubo shule qian toudao luo fawang*’ (lost money in gambling – thief caught in the nets of the law) Enshi Evening News 28th March 2007, ‘*dubo shule qian xing qie bei zhuhuo*’ (Lost money in gambling – delinquent was caught) Enshi Evening News 29th October 2007.

“feudal superstition” (*fengjian mixin*).²⁵ But in fact the older people and their forms of gambling, in particular *shaofu*, would never be attacked seriously: all that is forgiven as harmless “entertainment” (*wan*). It is precisely the younger men and the officials, those that are partaking in business and migrant labour, who will be the focus point of such attacks. They themselves, just like businessmen and officials that sometimes engage in gambling as well, will always describe their actions as such harmless “entertainment” (*wan*) as well. The conflict between this local form of sociality and the ideological representation of gambling as a social pathology is in fact only a conflict if seen from the outside. People in their everyday practice will either pretend that there is no conflict, or creatively bring them together in their practices, or in “social poetics”, as Michael Herzfeld prefers to call them (Herzfeld 2005). People make strategic and practical use of essentialisms, like those that describe them and gambling as “backward” (*luohou*) and of “low population quality” (*suzhi di*).

The following is a short recount of a long conversation I had with some young men in the village. It might show how perfectly possible it is to bring an official and ideological representation of advanced and modern cities together with the cultural intimacy that is produced in gambling: The story that Chen Wei told me once about *suzhi* of the bosses in Shanghai that gamble with computers at their tables.

It is a hot day in early summer, and we are sitting in a side room of the tea factory that Liu Xiangmin is leasing from the village administration. I’ve had lunch with the boss, his family and the workers, including his son Liu Ke and his son-in-law Chen Wei. Heavy from the two glasses of liquor that most of the men had during the meal, the workers, Chen Wei and I sit down chatting for a while. Chen Wei is talking about Shanghai, where he has spent several years. After he got married during the Spring Festival period, he is preparing now to go again to the metropolis. Chen Wei generally doesn’t like to talk much about his feelings, perhaps even less so in standard Mandarin (*putonghua*) instead of the local dialect that everyone speaks at home. This afternoon was one of the very few times that he was speaking openly about his experiences in Shanghai. He was complaining much about the discrimination they face from the local residents. They are called “outsiders” (*waidiren*) in Shanghai, “country

²⁵ A report entitled “Fascination for Rural Construction and Forgetting Adversities (*mizui wangfan xin nongcun – baiyang zhoujia yinxiang*)” gives a stereotype of how the results of successful rural development should look like: “Now the villagers and neighbours live together in solidarity and harmony, the villagers are actively devoted to rural construction; gambling (*dubo*) and playing cards (*dapai*), disputes over trifles (*chepi lajin*), heterodoxy and superstition (*xiejiao mixin*), do not exist in this village, and instead development, construction and knowledge are quietly on the rise.” (Songtaiping County 2006).

bumpkin” (*xiangbalao*) in Beijing; and “working boys” (*dagongzai*) in Guangdong, Wen Shen, who is sitting with us, adds. All three notions are similarly negative, and they just mean that the urban dwellers “look down on you” (*qiao bu qi ni*), both of them confirm.

Chen Wei goes on talking about his own boss in Shanghai. This boss was good to him, even though he was a native of Shanghai. He even offered him to pay for a computer course. Skills like this are necessary now, to find good work. He says that there is a saying in Shanghai: “to find a good job, you have to learn how to walk, how to talk and how to write.” That means now that you have to learn to drive a car, to speak English and to be able to use a computer. He cannot do any of that so far. Maybe he will learn to drive a car in Shanghai now; he hopes that his boss is paying him for that.

His boss in Shanghai has a fortune of about 10 Million RMB, Chen Wei reckons; and even if that seems a lot of money, it is not much for a boss in Shanghai. His boss would gamble with friends almost every evening. For them, gambling for a basic stake of a hundred RMB is “just fun” (*hao wan*), if it is for a thousand than it has a hint of gambling, and only starting from 10000 it would become really interesting for them. I asked how they would do that with the money bills – they biggest Chinese bank note is only 100 RMB. Chen Wei describes vividly now the special Majiang tables that they use: these tables have computers inside. Every player just inserts his credit card on a slit at his place, and the computer will always show the exact balance of the gamblers.

I ask him what he thinks that distinguishes the people in Shanghai the most from the people here in Enshi. Chen Wei answers that they are all different in their character (*piqi*) and their behaviour. They are more civilized (*wenming*). They would also give money presents to others, but never just like that, but instead in a ‘red envelope’ (*hongbao*), and no one would ever look immediately how much money is inside. These people do not get into physical fights (*dajia*); at the most they will argue verbally. But more frequently conflicts are resolved by recurrence to the law. The Shanghai people are also using fewer swearwords. The streets in Shanghai are clean, and Shanghai is even more developed than Beijing. There are less outsiders and labour migrants in Shanghai than in Shenzhen and Beijing.

Conclusion

We have now seen how both in gambling and outside gambling, a central opposition of a “social ontology” is represented, that between luck/fate and social capability. From there I traced the boundaries of acceptable forms of “entertainment” (*wan*) against that which should be condemned as “gambling” (*du*), both in local communality, and vis-à-vis the local state. We saw that ordinary people stretch these boundaries strategically, and frequently turn designations of what is officially presented as “advanced” and “civilized” on their head. Chen Wei was able to completely sideline official presentations of what “population quality” and “civilized” behaviour is, by linking them to extraordinary forms of gambling. Such viewpoints are not the last also a comment on his own and many others’ position within a wider economy and polity.

Even though it is rather difficult to describe this economy all together as “neoliberal”, there are certain traits in it that offer themselves as comparators to other ‘neoliberal’ economies. It is, it seems to me, not a mere historical contingency that it was about the same time – at the beginning of the 1980s – that a distinctively new form of economic deregulation started off in the United States and Britain, and that Deng Xiaoping was leading China into a ‘market economy with Chinese characteristics, slowly at first, and much faster after his southern trip in 1992.’²⁶

Indeed, the way gambling is seen and talked about in the villages of central China prompts one to think of another parallel to the pairs of striving and luck/fate, of working and display: namely the one between industrial capitalism and neoliberalism, or in China, the one between the Maoist era and the “market economy with Chinese characteristics” of now. Older people, when asked about the morals of the time, frequently named prostitution, gambling and the lack of filial piety as the signs of the decline of public morality. As to what regards gambling, it seems to me that this does not refer to gambling per se - which has long existed in China anyways - , but more so to the fact that gambling nowadays is more and more pouring out of the confines, inside of which it was socially acceptable and even expected. As we have seen above, the ideal of social vitality, of a “heat” in any important social occasion, is crucial to both what is accepted norm of old, and what is belonging to market relationships now. If anything, there might be something like a “fetishism of the social” here – the liveliness and heat that is good and proper on the one side, but can turn over into corruption and chaos on the other.

²⁶ David Harvey, in one of the few attempts to describe “neoliberalism” as an analytic category, describes the Chinese political economy in terms of it (Harvey 2005, chapter 4).

Bibliography

Binde, P. 2007. 'Gambling and religion: Histories of concord and Conflict', *Journal of Gambling Issues* 20, pp 145-166.

Comaroff, J. and J.L. Comaroff 1999. 'Occult Economies and the Violence of Abstraction: Notes from the South African Postcolony', *American Ethnologist* 26: 2, pp 279-303.

Comaroff, J. and J.L. Comaroff 2000. 'Millennial Capitalism: First Thoughts on a Second Coming', *Public Culture* 12:2, pp 291-343.

Devereux, E. 1949. *Gambling and the social structure: a sociological study of lotteries and horseracing in contemporary America*, Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Harvard University.

Enshi Evening News 2nd January 2007. 'wo zhou sanqi dangyuan ganbu canyu dubo anli bei quanshen tongbao' (The case of gambling of three cadres from different levels of Enshi prefecture has been publicized in the whole province).

Enshi Evening News 28th March 2007, 'dubo shule qian toudao luo fawang' (lost money in gambling – thief caught in the nets of the law).

Enshi Evening News 29th September 2007. 'guanyu Li Zeyu dengren canyu dubo wenti de tongbao' (report about the problem of Li Zeyu and several others engaging in gambling).

Enshi Evening News 29th October 2007. 'dubo shule qian xing qie bei zhuhua' (Lost money in gambling – delinquent was caught).

Feuchtwang, S. 2001[1992]. *Popular Religion in China: The Imperial Metaphor*, London: Routledge.

Festa, P. 2006. 'Mahjong Politics in Contemporary China: Civility, Chineseness, and Mass Culture', *positions: east asia cultures critique* 14:1, pp 7-35.

Festa, P. 2007. 'Mahjong Agonistics and the Political Public in Taiwan: Fate, Mimesis, and the Martial Imaginary', *Anthropological Quarterly* 80:1, pp 93-125

Fitzgerald, C.P. 2005 [1941]. *The Tower of Five Glories. A Study of the Min Chia (Bai Ethnic Minority) of Ta Li, Yunnan*, Hong Kong: Caravan Press.

Gernet, J. 1962. *Daily Life in China on the Eve of the Mongol Invasion, 1250-1276*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Harvey, D. 2005. *Neoliberalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Herzfeld, M. 2005. *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation-State*, New York: Routledge.

Kulp, D.H. 1925. *Country life in south China: the sociology of familism. Vol.1, Phonix village, Kwantung, China*, New York: Columbia University.

Lee Haiyan 2006. 'Nannies for Foreigners: The Enchantment of Chinese Womanhood in the Age of Millennial Capitalism', *Public Culture* 18:3, pp 507-529.

Lu Xun 2004 [1922]. *Na Han (Cry)*. Beijing Yanshan Chubanshe.

Lu Yao 2002 [1989]. *Pingfan de Shijie (An Ordinary World)*, Guiyang: Guizhou Renmin Chubanshe.

Naquin, S. and E. Rawski 1987. *Chinese Society in the Eighteenth Century*, New Haven: Yale University Press

Oxford, E. 1991. 'Profit, Loss, and Fate: The Entrepreneurial Ethic and the Practice of Gambling in an Overseas Chinese Community', *Modern China* 17:2, pp 227-259.

People's Republic of China, National Bureau of Statistics of China 2007. *China Statistical Yearbook 2007*, Beijing: China Statistics Press.

Pina-Cabral, J. de 2002. *Between China and Europe. Person, Culture and Emotion in Macao*, London: London School of Economics Monographs in Social Anthropology 74.

Pun Ngai 2003. 'Subumption or Consumption? The Phantom of Consumer Revolution in "Globalizing" China', *Cultural Anthropology* 18:4, pp 469-492.

Songtaiping County 2006. *Mizui wangfan xin nongcun – baiyang zhoujia yinxiang*

(Fascination for Rural Construction and Forgetting Adversities), unpublished announcement.

Tan Tongxue 2007. *Xiangcun Shehui zhuanxing zhong de Daode, Quanli yu Shehui Jiegou. Qianxiang "Hexin Jiating Benwei" de Qiaocun* (Morals, Power and Social Structure in a Rural Society under Transformation. Qiaocun going towards the primacy of the nuclear family), Wuhan: Huzhong Keji Daxue, unpublished doctoral thesis.

Wakeman, F. 1985. *The Great Enterprise: The Manchu Reconstruction of Imperial Order in Seventeenth Century China*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

Wang Mingming 1997 [1986]. 'meifa cun – 'fu', ziwo quanli yu shehui bentilun' (Meifa Village – 'Happiness', self empowerment and a social ontology), in: *ibid. Cunluo Shiye zhong de Wenhua yu Quanli: Mintai Sancun Wulun* (Culture and Power from the Perspective of the Village: Three villages and Five Essays from Fujian and Taiwan). Beijing: Shenghuo dushu xinshi sanlian shudian.

Weber, M. 1932 [1920]. *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus*, Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr.

Weller, R. P. 1995. 'Matricidal Magistrates and Gambling Gods. Weak States and Strong Spirits in China', *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 33, pp 107-124.

Wilkinson, W.H. 1895. 'Chinese Origin of Playing Cards', *American Anthropologist* 8:1, pp 61-78.

Yan Hairong 2003. 'Spectralization of the rural: Reinterpreting the labor mobility of rural young women in post-Mao China', *American Ethnologist* 30:4, pp 578-596.