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RELATIVE EXPECTATIONS IN RURAL CHINA:
LATER-LIFE DISTINCTION, DUTY, DREAMS, AND DISCONTENT

By

Deborah Sue Wilson Lowry

A DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

RELATIVE EXPECTATIONS IN RURAL CHINA: LATER-LIFE DISTINCTION, DUTY, DREAMS, AND DISCONTENT

By

Deborah Sue Wilson Lowry

Beginning in 2010, the proportion of the Chinese population over age 65 is expected to increase rapidly until it comprises 20 percent of the population in 2025 and over 30 percent of the population by 2050. China is unique not only in terms of the speed with which its age structure is changing, but because it is still a developing nation. Its infrastructure is less equipped to meet the growing demands of an older population than are the developed infrastructures of other aging nations.

Most of the discussion about the relationship between China's aging and China's economic and social transformations has remained at a macro level, based only on "expert" perspectives and expectations for the future. This research inquires into the experiences, viewpoints, and expectations of older villagers. The dissertation is based on a six-month mixed-methods study in "Seven Mountains," a village of three hamlets in southwestern Fujian Province. Informed by a critical-gerontological theoretical framework, it investigates two central issues: (1) how older women's and older men's lives shape and are shaped by China's rural changes and economic development; and (2) what elders expect of later life in developing rural China.

I found that elders' understandings of past, present, and future rural changes were strongly shaped by their life experiences of hardship. I argue that a sense of increasing relative wealth (across time) countered a sense of relative poverty (across place) and

mitigated the discontent which older villagers felt in witnessing the greater wealth of nearby hamlets, villages, or of international peers. The relative wealth of current life also helped to counter the negative effects of village industry, as well as the perceived failure of village development to specifically benefit elders as a group. In general, “offsets” or a lack thereof were key to shaping elders’ experiences of aging, social change, and development.

I observed Seven Mountains elders playing important, albeit indirect, roles in households and the village. But because elders understood “development” mainly in economic terms, they did not see themselves to be contributing to village development or even to households. I suggest that elders’ perceived lack of contribution to their communities and households was an extension of the “invisibility” of “women’s work.” Additionally, the tendency to compare current work loads to those of the difficult past resulted in elders minimizing the extent to which they were contributing now within and around households.

From this particular “ground-level,” rapid aging of the population failed to be a source of concern for elders, and instead often engendered optimism about longevity amidst the companionship of one’s peers. This discrepancy between “expert” and “village” viewpoints demonstrates how interpretations of demographic conditions are shaped by social locations. Moreover, the case of Seven Mountains showed on a small scale how economic development is not sufficient to guarantee the well-being of elders. Rather, economic growth and increased new wealth have promoted perceptions of increased inequalities as well as attitudes about “deserving” and “undeserving” poor.

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Dedicated
to
Geraldine M. Morrill
and
the memory of
K. W. Zeeff

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Great Uncle leafed carefully through the pages of the clan lineage records as techno-dance music blared from his grandson's CD player. The volumes had been hidden during the Cultural Revolution, he explained over a table covered with tiny cups of amber-colored tea. The pages were only slightly yellowed and in good condition, with the ink characters still clear and set exactly as the hands had scripted them generations ago. Their elegant black strokes contrasted with the zany, motion-filled Chinese font digitally inscribed on the poster of a spiked-haired pop star I saw through the doorway of the next room.

Contemporary rural China, like most of the world's developing areas, is filled with what many viewers see as contrasting images. Shiny luxury sedans, cell phones, designer-label clothing, dark internet bars, and junk food packages seem out of place against a backdrop of traditional houses, red-painted doorways, wandering chickens, and stacks of rice straw. Relaxation of government restrictions on rural-urban migration, improved transportation, and telecommunications have given rural residents access to cities and personal wealth and have even allowed overseas travel and glimpses of life in other nations. But villagers do not have to "go out" in order to experience the latest fashions, technologies, and ideas about how to live; these are advertised on the color televisions displayed in almost every home, and are also brought back by villagers working in China's cities (Davin 1998).

As new products, factories and "foreign-style" houses change the landscapes of rural China, human relationships are also changing. Of special interest to students of culture and society is the interaction of modern social changes with China's family

structures and power dynamics. Chinese culture is widely known for revering elderly people and for the concept of *xiaoshun*, or "filial piety." Although high levels of respect and standards of care appear to have withstood the Cultural Revolution (Davis 1972), can they withstand the influences of globalization or "Western" ideas and family arrangements? Are the status and well-being of China's elderly people in danger as younger generations become more accustomed to living in two-generation families and to making their own decisions about their education, employment, and marriage partners?

Changes in family values are not the only shifts threatening the old-age security of China's rural elders. Millions of working-age family members are migrating out of villages, attracted by higher wages in China's cities. It is estimated that by the mid-1990s China's temporary migrant workers or members of the "floating population" numbered up to 120 million (West and Zhao 2000). U.S. media highlight the struggles of Chinese elderly people who are left in villages while working-age adults are away in the cities. A story in *The New York Times* announces that mass migration to the cities, along with abandonment of traditional values, have "shattered" rural China's "ancient assurance of care in old age" (French 2006). A *Washington Post* video series on China's changing families implicates increasing materialism in Chinese society in the decline of filial piety within households (Fox 2007). Chinese newspapers also draw attention to the number of families "broken" by rural-urban migration and call for increased help for these households in which children and elderly people are "left behind" or forced to become "empty-nest elderly" (Ma 2008; Xinhua 2006; China Daily 2004). These stories portray a rapidly changing rural society in which temporary migration by family members has

already resulted in a large segment of the elderly population being, at best, abandoned and, at worst, abused or even left for dead.

Underlying these concerns is anxiety over the increasing proportion of elderly people in coming decades, as China's rapidly aging population threatens to place heavy responsibilities on the still-developing social infrastructure. The change in the age composition of China's population is mainly due to the effects of the nation's one-child policy enacted in the mid- to late 1970s, combined with a baby boom and past restrictions on emigration (Grigsby and Olshansky 1989; Bongaarts and Greenhalgh 1985). Many people born after the late 1970s do not have siblings to help share the responsibilities of caring for and financially supporting elders. Only-children's responsibilities may be heaviest in rural areas, where retirement pensions are relatively rare and where families are still usually the main source of support for elders (Zimmer and Kwong 2003). Nursing homes, elderly health clinics, and old age entertainment centers are also less common and less accessible in rural areas than they are in the urban centers.

As a national population ages, it requires more social and financial resources in order to meet greater medical and support needs. The ratio of the number of people over 65 to the number of people considered to be of working age – commonly known as the *elderly dependency ratio* – is expected to be 2.3 to 1 by 2025 (see Adamchak 2001). Experts examining the issue from this perspective emphasize that China will be facing a future of millions of Chinese elders who “consume but do not produce, connecting China's aging population problem to the future of China's development (England 2005; Fang and Wang 2005; State Council Information Office 2004). On the one hand, Chinese officials point to continued rapid economic development as the solution to both China's

aging population problem and to the "left-behind" elderly in rural areas (State Council Information Office 2004). That is, increased wealth should enable the government to build more complete support infrastructures and old-age homes, while allowing children to financially support elders with greater ease. On the other hand, some experts predict that China's growing elderly population will hinder the speed of China's development, such that economic development will not be sufficient to meet the social needs of an aging society (England 2005). From this perspective, China is caught in a conundrum in which elders threaten the advancement of the nation. In sum, taking into account the descriptions of changes in family relations and household conditions, lack of retirement pensions and social security in rural areas, and inadequate access to health care, it would seem that rural elders – who comprise a vast majority of China's people over age 65 – face a difficult future.

Sociological Demography

The conclusions above are drawn mainly from macro-economic studies of aging and from journalists' accounts. Like any lone perspective, they cannot present a full picture of the situation nor are they capable of telling "the whole story." We cannot assume that most rural elders' experiences are reflected in studies at national levels or in select media tales of neglect and loss. An aging population is not only an economic phenomenon, but is also an individual, social, and political process that is shaped and lived by actual people and groups. While journalists may strive to produce the most eye-catching headlines, social demographers are faced with the task of trying to understand holistically the complexities of population changes, characteristics, and the social conditions that shape and will be shaped by them.

In the following section, I indicate some of the challenges faced by social researchers hoping to understand aging in the rapidly transforming society of modern China. I point to five promising directions for sociological studies of aging populations while introducing the related aims and objectives of my own research in a village in rural China. I end with an outline of the chapters in this dissertation.

Understanding Aging in Social-Political Context

Demography has been classically defined as "the study of the size, territorial distribution, and composition of population, changes therein, and the components of such changes" (Hauser and Duncan 1959:2). As a field that investigates social phenomena, it is necessary that population studies be rooted firmly in the social sciences to explore the complex processes by which people influence and are influenced by their demographic environments. A contemporary *sociological approach* to population studies would examine how population size, distribution, composition, and changes affect groups and individuals in daily life, as well as how actual groups and individuals go about actively shaping population changes, composition, distribution, and size. Importantly, these investigations can be launched from a number of theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches, simultaneously enriching theories while expanding knowledge(s) of the processes of population change.

Demographic conditions and their interpretations have a long history of being politically charged (Malthus 1798; Ehrlich 1971). Changes in population size, composition, and distribution inevitably have the potential to affect certain groups of people in different ways, and in many cases they may be encouraged, discouraged, or variously represented according to particular interests. Population conditions and

interpretations of them are linked to the maintenance or shifting of power relations, inequalities, and surrounding social relations, topics central to the discipline of sociology. In addressing a demographic problem, a *critical sociological approach* to population “problems” would ask: Who defines the population problem? Who are the stakeholders and who benefits from which representations of the issue? This line of critical sociological inquiry is compatible with or complementary to a number of methods and forms of data analysis, from large-scale surveys and statistical analyses to interpretations of in-depth interviews. In other words, it is possible, indeed necessary, to investigate systematically social phenomena through a variety of methods while maintaining a critical awareness of the power relations, politics, stakeholders, and multiple perspectives which are always involved.

Kirk (1996) and others have perhaps unfairly described social demography as being “short on theory.” Population studies are necessarily – if not as explicitly – based on theory to the same extent as is other social research. But, indeed, the field can benefit from engaging the variety of theoretical developments that have emerged in sociology during the last few decades, such as post-structuralism, standpoint theories, feminist approaches, and other studies of power distributions. These viewpoints encourage understandings of population changes and conditions not as blind structural forces, but as actor-driven phenomena that, in multi-dimensional ways, influence and are influenced by the conditions and actions of people of particular social locations and identities.

One of the aims of this dissertation is to apply the above-described arguments to the case of China's aging population in order to ask how changes and expectations of changes in China's population composition and distribution “play out” in the daily lives

of rural elders, as well as how representations and understandings of aging issues in rural China may serve particular interests.

Multiple-Scale and Comparative Social Demography

Social demography frequently studies population issues at large scales, and accordingly, much research has predominately engaged the subject of aging in China at a national level (England 2005; Bongaarts 2004; Du and Guo 2000; Goldstein and Goldstein 1986). However, population age composition itself varies greatly among different regions in China (Poston and Duan 2000), and studies at national levels preclude in-depth study of variation in the conditions and experiences of aging in China. Urban and rural areas are quite different in terms of net migration rates, fertility rates, economic development, community infrastructure, and wealth, not to mention social customs, living arrangements, and the extent of preservation of traditional cultures. It is important for certain purposes to examine aging in China as a national phenomenon, but research at other scales is also necessary in order to understand the conditions of aging and of elderly people's lives in this diverse nation. Studies at "lower" levels can help to provide observations of the diversity in speed and intensity of population aging as well as descriptions of social and cultural changes occurring locally (Xie and Zhu 2006; Li et al. 2004; Whyte 2003; Benjamin et al. 2000). Studies at various scales also allow for comparisons, thus fostering in-depth analysis of the social processes and relations within which population changes occur and are interpreted. In the case of China's aging, for example, conducting aging studies in locations that differ in levels of wealth or development may suggest whether and how wealth and development interact with aging conditions and experiences at community and individual levels. In short, variety in the

scale of social demographic inquiries is beneficial to producing knowledge not only of how population changes and conditions happen, but also of how these changes and conditions play out in the social world and actual lives. Another aim of this project is to address a pertinent population issue –aging in rural China – at a level that can produce such knowledge, complement prior large-scale research, and provide opportunities for comparison with research in urban centers or other rural regions.

Linking Population Studies to Related Fields of Inquiry

In addition to further engaging sociological theories and researching at various levels, population studies can benefit from noting and exploring current trends in related fields of sociology. Scholars of China's aging might apply new theoretical approaches and concepts from the broader field of critical aging studies. For example, in light of the rapid social changes occurring in China, social demographers have conducted a number of studies focused on the well-being of China's elderly people (Zimmer and Kwong 2004; Hermalin 2002; Benjamin et al. 2000; Chen and Silverstein 2000). These studies address the extent to which elders continue to be cared for by family members in the wake of modernization, globalization, and economic development, and they also investigate regional, cohort (or age), and gender differences in elders' health and socio-economic status. These studies are valuable and much needed in efforts to improve conditions for older Chinese and to address growing inequalities in Chinese society. At the same time, studying *only* the well-being of elders may promote or sustain a view of elderly people primarily as victims, overlooking situations in which elderly people make or attempt to make a difference in their own lives and conditions. Influenced by recent feminist thought, new research in aging studies challenges stereotypical portrayals of older people

as victims and encourages investigations that acknowledge elders as actors who resist conditions over which they have seemingly little control (Grenier and Hanley 2007; Borland 2006; McColgan 2005). This research broadens understandings of aging conditions and the connections between aging, elderly people, and social change. Additionally, contemporary critical aging research is giving attention to elders' own viewpoints on aging and the experiences of aging (Park-Lee 2006; Winterstein and Eisikovits 2005; Heikkinen 2004; Petry 2003). This research likewise emphasizes that in later life people have the ability to interpret and respond to social conditions and social change.

Critical aging theories and research can enrich demographic studies of aging in Chinese contexts insofar as they point out the unidirectional nature of focusing only on the *effects* of social change on elders. China's transitions of course affect the lives of elderly people, but a large part of the picture is left out when we do not acknowledge or investigate how elderly people might affect social changes such as population shifts (e.g., migration), economic development, and globalization. Some scholars argue that the failure of academic projects to imagine elders as active and responsive people reflects widespread social ageism within research, much of which is designed and conducted by "middle-aged" individuals (Calasanti and Slevin 2001). The concerns of scholars and officials that elders (at an individual level) will become unbearable burdens to their families and (at a national level) will be an impediment to economic development do indeed acknowledge elders' influence on the social world – but only in the most negative terms. These representations of elders' negative and passive influences upon China's future may indicate some unacknowledged ageism. This dissertation research aims to

apply critical aging perspectives to the context of China's aging by exploring the possibility that elders actively interpret, respond to, and influence (perhaps positively) social changes in their households and village.

Population Studies and Gender: An Identity and a Social Relation

A fourth way in which social demography may continue to be enriched is through additional attention to gender – not only as an identity of individuals, but as a social relation and an organizing principle of society. Demography has historically given attention to gender as an important variable, which alone has contributed a great deal to understandings of gender inequalities, women's disadvantages across the globe, and how gender shapes fertility, migration, mortality, and population composition and changes (Hogdaneu-Sotelo 2003; Morgan et al. 2002; Mason 2001; Goyette and Xie 1999; Yu and Saari 1997; Kitagawa and Hauser 1973). Recently, a few social demographers have begun to discuss how the field can incorporate new developments in feminist theory and thus expand understandings of gender and population issues (Riley 1999, Greenhalgh and Li 1995). This means not only studying women, but studying the lives and circumstances of both women and men in relation to one another (Knodel and Ofstedal 2003, Calasanti 2004). This type of acknowledgment of gender as a social relation can occur at all stages of research, including design, positing of research questions, and interpretation of findings.

Applying a contemporary feminist perspective to the case of aging in China would mean addressing the conditions of both elderly women and elderly men and asking how gender relations in Chinese society and between elderly people might shape the processes of aging at individual and group levels. For research at lower levels, it could

mean paying attention to the ways in which men and women experience aging differently, and how gendered power relations influence aging and vice versa. Another goal of this dissertation is to investigate gender as an organizing principle in the experiences and conditions of aging in China by inquiring into elderly women's and men's aging experiences and analyzing how gender relations interact with the processes and contexts of aging and population aging.

Population Studies, the Context of Time, and a Life Course Approach

A fifth continuing direction of promise for population studies is research that spans time. Longitudinal studies are particularly useful for their ability to track transitions over time and to investigate the topic at hand as social contexts change. But researchers studying population issues can conduct repeated studies at various points in time, or they may conduct research at a single point in time that addresses changes over time. Generally speaking, the importance of somehow consistently considering historical and time contexts is to a certain extent a theoretical argument, and one which is clear in a *life course* perspective. A life course approach, often employed in new aging studies, is not satisfied with a "snapshot" view of social conditions at one time, but seeks to understand how the past continues to shape present conditions as well as present ideas about the future. A "life course" may refer to events over an individual lifetime, or to the historical path of a social institution, group, or event (Mortimer and Shanahan 2003).

Studies in social demography which are not formally "longitudinal" may still give attention to history and time period contexts. To overlook the importance of life courses can result in narrow views of present conditions and social changes, and would be a great disadvantage to scholars attempting to project into the future – as social demographers

often do. In terms of understanding the need to consider life courses in studies of Chinese elders, we might consider common representations of elders' low levels of economic productivity. In this case, a static temporal view promotes the idea that many non-waged elders are economic burdens to their families and an impediment to economic development. That is to say, if we look *only* at elders' current economic productivity levels and find them to be lower than are those of waged workers, we overlook their extensive economic contributions to family and nation in the past and fail to acknowledge these older people's contributions to current social, political, and economic conditions.

Perhaps in the most simple sense, research that pays attention to changes over time, to life courses (of individuals, groups, or events), and to history, is research that engages the "sociological imagination," that is, the intersection of history and biography (Mills 1959). A final aim of this dissertation is to employ a sociological imagination and life course perspective in understanding the experiences, processes, and social contexts of aging in rural China. This means paying attention to previous social, political, environmental, and biographical contexts when inquiring into and analyzing aging in rural China, as well as attempting to understand how past conditions shape elders' understandings of the future.

The Dissertation's Aims and Objectives

I have just outlined some directions for population studies that have great potential to enrich the field. The broadest aim of this dissertation is to put these suggestions into practice in research on aging in China, thereby contributing to sociological developments in the field of "new" population studies. In brief, I attempt to do this by employing a critical sociological stance toward this demographic topic,

engaging in research at a scale complementary to previous studies, incorporating actor-orientated perspectives on aging, acknowledging gender as an organizing principle of society, and adopting a life course perspective.

Why frame this project as a study in social demography? Why not describe it as a case study of contemporary rural Chinese elderly and avoid links to population studies? The answer is two-fold. First, divisions between social demographic research and research that belongs in other fields or is considered more generally sociological are often drawn along methodological lines, regardless of whether the substantive topic is relevant and meaningful to studies in fertility, mortality, migration, or population size, density, or composition. (Migration studies is a field which has been relatively open to embracing a variety of approaches, methods, and venues of presentation.) Yet, findings from numerous ethnographic qualitative studies have the potential to contribute to knowledge in social demography, just as conclusions from many large-scale population studies can inform and support research based on in-depth interviews and participant-observation. I argue that both “sides” have upheld this dichotomous view, with demographers traditionally resistant to qualitative studies (with notable exceptions such as Caldwell and Greenhalgh) and many qualitative researchers unwilling to affiliate themselves with population studies and demographic topics. In this project I aim to join other demographers interested in a variety of methods and approaches and ultimately to demonstrate how a ground-level study of aging in rural China is both part of and contributive to population studies.

Second, as evident in existing studies and popular reports, the themes of population aging, economic development, and rapid social change are widely promoted

and perceived as important social contexts in which Chinese people are aging, and so a project interested in the conditions and processes of aging in China would do well to address critically these issues. Bringing these topics into a study at a village level, as I do, also gives a “worm’s eye” view of these social issues opposed to a common top-down perspective, and explores how relevant they may or may not appear to people in their daily lives.

A mid-level objective of this dissertation is to add to substantive knowledge of aging and population aging in China. Drawing on critical feminist gerontology and in light of prior research, I hope to accomplish this by producing knowledge about (1) how elderly women’s and men’s lives are shaping and being shaped by China’s rural transitions and (2) how elderly women and men understand and experience aging in a rapidly changing rural community. I strive to meet this mid-level objective through my specific research objectives – my research questions – which I present in the following chapter after a review of relevant literature and theoretical developments.

The Dissertation’s Broad Arguments and Conclusions

Most broadly, this dissertation demonstrates how rapid occupational, agricultural, and environmental village changes present older women and elderly men with sets of advantages, disadvantages, and power relations that must be understood within the context of biography and history. Growing old occurs within changing social contexts and shapes elders’ power relations and aging experiences. In this corner of rural China, past political conditions and cohort experiences are key factors. In connection with these changes, elders have in some aspects experienced decreased autonomy, and in other aspects experienced increased autonomy. I suggest that for many elders, loss of authority

within the household, stemming from changes in both age and time period, are offset by increased autonomy granted through political and technological changes. Accordingly, when examining the life course as a whole, including present conditions of later life, elders express senses of both relative poverty and relative wealth. A sense of relative wealth offsets many elders' sense of relative poverty and dissatisfaction with the outcomes of village development and also promotes optimistic views of future old age in rural China.

Many elders contribute to social changes and village development in crucial yet indirect ways, which often remain unacknowledged even by elders themselves. In this dissertation I argue that, when rural changes are understood as blind structural forces and examined at points "frozen" in time, and when development is understood primarily in economic terms, elders (especially women elders) will tend to see themselves as not contributing to rural changes, households, or "development." This view can be understood as an extension of the devaluation of women's work, as many of the contributions of elder women and men who participated in this project were in or near the household; namely, through childcare, cooking, cleaning, caring for small gardens, and tending small livestock. I suggest that as long as this widely held perspective prevails, China's aging population and China's economic development will continue to be understood as inimical; a representation that serves a mainstream political imperative of economic growth at any cost.

Finally, while most elders in this village expressed optimism about their personal futures as well as confidence in the central government, three factors appeared key in determining the extent of these attitudes: (1) individual family relations and economic

conditions, (2) perceptions of fairness in distributions of subsidies at the local level, and (3) senses of relative poverty and inequality. The ability of families to support and provide medical care for elders will likely continue to be the main factor in elders' future well-being, and I argue that it is not viable to assume elders in "well-off" regions of rural China are themselves well-off. On the contrary, elders living in pockets of poverty within relatively prosperous areas may *experience* even more disadvantage than do their counterparts in generally poor rural counties or townships. Importantly, economic growth and development is no guarantee of the well-being of rural elders.

Outline of Dissertation

The following chapter provides a review of relevant literature and theoretical developments that lead me to pose my particular research questions. Chapter Three then introduces the research site, research design and procedure, and notes on the research experience. Chapter Four addresses elders' views and understandings of aging and village changes during the past decades, while the focus of Chapter Five is on elders' roles, activities, and perceived participation in households and the village. Chapter Six discusses perspectives on the future from the standpoint of village elders, including expectations, concerns, and hopes for the next decade or two. Finally, in Chapter Seven I summarize the main arguments and findings of the project, evaluate its contributions and limitations, and suggest areas for future research.

CHAPTER 2: AGING, LATER LIFE, AND SOCIAL CHANGE

In this chapter I review major theories of aging, particularly as they apply to studies of aging amid China's rapid social change. I then summarize what we know from recent research on aging and social change in China and offer background information on current socio-political contexts of aging in China. Finally, based on gaps in the literature and my assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of aging theories, I introduce my research focus, my theoretical framework for studying aging in a rural Chinese village, and my research questions.

Theorizing Aging and "Old Age"

As in the field of sociology generally, there is debate within the field of aging studies about the viability and usefulness of so-called "grand" theories. Drawing from postmodern and poststructuralist perspectives, many scholars reject attempts to generate over-generalizing theories that explain and classify aging in contemporary times (Katz 1996 cited in Bengtson et al. 1999). At the same time, others argue that the field is already too fragmented and needs more "theoretical rigor" and "theoretical impetus" (Meyers 1996:8, Hagested and Dannefer 2001:3, Birren 1999:459, Hendricks and Achenbaum 1999). In reviewing the development of aging theories, I make distinctions between three categories: (1) traditional theories, (2) mid-range theories or frameworks and (3) critical perspectives. Reviewing these theories provides a background from which to introduce and justify my own theoretical frame for studying aging in rural China.

Traditional Aging Theories and Concepts

Several traditional aging theories may be grouped together based on their common roots in functionalism (Fennell et al. 1988:42). These theories approach aging

with a focus on older people's usefulness in the social "system." Role theory, for instance, posits that age is associated with particular roles, (e.g., daughter, sister, mother, worker, grandmother) and that with each stage of life, our age will determine the roles that we play. Changes (including marginalization) experienced by elderly people serve some social function and are to be expected. Disengagement theory argues that as humans age we "disengage" from society – a natural process that reflects a "biological rhythm of life" and, again, serves the functions of human society (Moody 2000:317). Fennell et al. (1988:46) cite an exemplary passage from Cummings and Henry's (1961) classic proposition:

Aging is an inevitable mutual withdrawal or disengagement resulting in decreased interaction between the aging person and others in the social system he belongs to. The process may be initiated by the individual or by others in the situation . . .

Activity theory and continuity theory also focus on the levels of social involvement of elderly people. Specifically, activity theory argues that continued activity and participation of elderly people tends to ensure their sense of well-being. Moody (2000) calls this "the busy ethic." Continuity theory is similar in positing that continued habits and lifestyles will be maintained by elderly people whenever possible. An important distinction between these latter two theories and the preceding ones is that the latter two attribute the failure to remain in an active to a decline in health or other complications rather than to the individual's desire to "naturally" disengage (Moody 2000:319).

Some key problems with these theories is that they envision old age as a period of abandonment and loss, in which people become passive and eventually, useless. Additionally, they tend to attribute difficulties in later life to individual failures or decisions and ignore social representations of later life and old age. As Moody

(2000:319) warns, we should keep in mind that activity and detachment are “loaded terms.” Theoretical focus on activities of older people can serve a variety of political ends. For example, linked to these ideas of activity and continuity is the more recent concept of productive aging, in which elderly people are encouraged to continue producing only in particular ways (namely through the waged economy). Furthermore, although the concepts of roles, activity, disengagement, and continuity are important elements to include in aging research, they are based in views too homogenizing to explain the social world in context. They do not address political or institutional contexts of aging, nor do they adequately indicate differences in experiences of growing “old” for people of different genders, classes, and other social locations.

Theoretical Perspectives and Mid-Range Theories

Scholars of aging and social gerontologists more recently employ some key mid-range theories and approaches to study aging. Here I further elaborate on the life course view, a social constructionist perspective of aging, and offer some examples of new conceptual approaches to aging studies.

First, “the life course” is both a substantive area of study *and* a theoretical perspective.¹ As a perspective, it has been described by Elder et al. (2003) as consisting of five principles:

(1) *Life-Span Development*: Human development and aging are lifelong principles . . .

(2) *Agency*: Individuals construct their life course through choices and actions they make within the constraints of history and social

¹ Substantive study of the life course includes research on difference phases and transitions from birth to death. Scholars of aging use the term “life course” rather than “life cycle” in acknowledgment that life experiences do not necessarily follow standard set stages as a “life cycle” construct suggests.

circumstance . . .

(3) *Time and Place*: A person's life course is embedded and shaped by the historical times and places they experience . . .

(4) *Timing*: Events and experiences affect people in different way depending on when they occur in the life course...

(5) *Linked Lives*: Lives are lived independently and socio-historical influences are expressed through this larger network of shared relationships . . . (11-13).

In its most simplistic form, a life course perspective on old age reminds us that "to make sense of later life we need to understand the entire life history"(Moody 2000:314). A life course perspective is a valuable aid in understanding agency and structure in the aging process, as well as the importance of history and place. While a life course perspective has been widely adopted by sociologists studying aging, it has also received criticism from outside and within for what Riley calls "life-course reductionism": the tendency to study the life course without appropriate attention to social structures and processes (Hagested and Dannefer 2001:7; Riley 1998:50). This tendency has produced life course research with a heavy focus on the individual, criticized as being too psychological or individualistic (Meyer 1986) to aid sociological understandings of later life. However, to the extent that we acknowledge the importance of institutional and political-economic contexts we can avoid or minimize life course reductionism.

Social constructionist perspectives on aging include a collection of approaches that emphasize the socially constructed character of age, aging, and of "being elderly." Through resonances with symbolic interactionism and phenomenology, constructionist

perspectives vary in focus, ranging from studies of everyday life to subjective understandings of social reality and the world of meanings (Holstein and Gubrium 1999). With these strengths, constructionist perspectives highlight the need to examine the way aging is talked about, represented, and socially contextualized. A theme commonly addressed from a constructionist perspective is the management of identity as one "grows old" (ibid.: 292). These narratives about experiences of aging and everyday life have the potential to indicate the variety, strategy, and activity involved in aging (Biggs 2004).

Additionally, recent research utilizing the concept of congruence has promise for application across and within cultures. As an example, Chang (1996) in her study of aging in Chinese and American cultures argues that congruence between "age reference set" and activity level leads to a sense of meaningful existence. (By "age reference set," Chang means the age group with which one self-identifies.) Eyesemitan and Gire (2003) also posit that the concept of congruence – in this case, between elderly people's needs and environmental capacities – can be applied across societies and cultures in order to understand levels of satisfaction, needs, and expectations for the future.

These insights from constructionist and environment-person perspectives can be important in part for studies of aging in the context of rural China. In any setting, the representations, interactions, and social meanings of age and aging are consequential for older people's lives and for social research. Although these concepts do not speak to large processes of social change, they do offer opportunities for understanding how elderly people in rural China and elsewhere assess and experience the quality of their lives. They also point us in an important direction for further exploration, namely, the interfaces of person-environment fit as understood by people themselves. However, I

argue that in themselves, they cannot explain the experiences and contexts of aging. Their explanatory power in terms of institutions, social change, power, and inequalities is very limited. Neither do these frameworks and theories adequately address differences in aging experiences and conditions along the lines of gender, class, or race/ethnicity. They do, however, offer key insights that can be included in a theoretical framework, including the most basic argument that age (at least in part) is a socially constructed concept filled with personal and social meanings (see Bernard et al. 2000).

Feminist and Critical Perspectives on Aging

Noting that traditional and more contemporary mid-range theories tend to overlook larger structural and institutional contexts and differences in aging experiences, scholars have turned to critical and feminist theories. Because there are a variety of feminist perspectives it is not possible to speak of "the" feminist perspective on aging. Marshall (1996:23) summarizes well when he remarks that feminist theory "is not freestanding but rather reflects a commitment to use theory in certain ways, and to critique mainstream theories for their neglect of the gendered nature of work life, family life, and social stratification."

Both feminist and critical gerontologies encourage reflexivity and critiques of mainstream approaches to aging research. A 2004 volume of the *Journal of Aging* (18) is dedicated to explicating and exemplifying a feminist gerontological perspective. As editor, Calasanti (2004:1) begins by offering a succinct description of feminist perspectives:

Feminist approaches share theoretical ground, including emphases on power relations and inequality, on the notion that men and women gain identities and power in relation to one another, and on a view of gender as a dynamic structural force with important consequences for the life

chances of men and women. Scholarship that does not include these emphases on gender as a social organizing principle and identity (and not just a demographic attribute) is not feminist, even if such terms as "gender" appear in research design or text.

A feminist gerontological perspective is valuable in its focus on the intersections of age and gender, and in the encouragement to examine the social world through an "age lens" (Calasanti and Slevin 2001). Key points in Calasanti's and colleagues' perspective are that we should (a) view age as a relation, (b) focus on gender relations rather than on "Women," and (c) consider studies of masculinity and male experiences as important toward understanding processes of aging.

Encouraged by postmodernist feminists, researchers of aging are increasingly more likely to study inequalities in terms of intersections of age, class, gender, race, and ethnicity (Foner 1986:189). Such research demonstrates inequalities between generations, cohorts, genders, races, ethnicities, socio-economic groups, and regions. While feminist scholars are responsible for much of the research on gender, findings from large-scale demographic and epidemiological studies also demonstrate age, gender, class, and racial differences in processes of morbidity, mortality, and disability (Johnson 2000).

Specific studies of gender inequality in later life usually find connections to previous life course experiences, particularly in terms of unequal participation in the labor force. Women who have not worked in the formal labor force are disadvantaged compared to their male peers, who are more likely to be the recipients of (or control access to) pensions or benefits connected to their previous employment (Skucha and Bernard 2000, Calasanti and Slevin 2001: Ch.5). This is one example of how disadvantage can be understood as *cumulative*. Yet older men, when compared to their younger counterparts, often experience lowered status as they age (Calasanti and Slevin

2001), sometimes finding themselves having more in common with women and minorities than with middle-aged and young men. From this perspective, we might observe a *leveling* effect in gender inequalities within birth cohorts.

There is research to support both *age-as-leveler* and *cumulative disadvantage* hypotheses of aging (Blakemore and Boncham 1994). In addition, studies of elderly people from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds suggest that women and minority groups experience doubled or tripled shares of disadvantage as they hold membership in multiple marginalized groups including that of "elderly." This *double-jeopardy* hypothesis is equally contested, as evidence has been found that both supports and challenges this argument (ibid.).

In short, research on aging and inequalities continues to test these hypotheses in different settings, with no consensus on which hypothesis is most accurate. In the context of rural China, it is probably equally difficult to wholeheartedly reject or accept either of them. In both rural China and elsewhere, inequalities in aging may include leveling, accumulation of disadvantage, and double-jeopardy characteristics at the same time, with their strength and explanatory power depending upon the areas of inquiry and contexts. I suspect that it is not so much "which?" but "in terms of what?" and "how?" that we must ask.

Finally, the field of critical social gerontology offers much promise toward understanding larger contexts of later life. The field is to some extent divided into two "camps" (Minkler 1999:2). In one camp are studies of the human experiences of aging and a related critique of mainstream social gerontological approaches. In the other camp are researchers focused on the political economy of aging and the ways in which

"politics, not demography, determine how old age is defined and approached in a society (Minkler 1999:1). In the former case, studies of the experiences and meanings of old age are critical in the sense that they focus on experiences as a point of departure for analysis. By giving value to meanings and representations of growing old, critical gerontologists strive both to uncover and to avoid the ageism contained within studies of aging.

As proponents of a political economy of aging perspective, Quadagno and Reid (1999) argue:

the central objective of the political economy of aging is to analyze the structural conditions that create inequality in old age and to emphasize the relevance of these struggles for understanding how the aged are defined and treated (344).

Critical gerontologists point out that social research tends to either render elderly people as invisible or to problematize them (Bernard et al. 2000). Economic perspectives on aging tend to cast elderly people as "unaffordable," and critical-feminist gerontologists point out that connecting aging with welfare has an effect of portraying elderly people as useless and burdensome (Calasanti and Slevin 2001, Minkler and Estes 2004). Even studies intending to improve well-being and quality of life for older adults often cast later life in negative, loss-ridden terms.

A weakness of a political economy perspective of aging as it has been applied in the past is the tendency to conflate "political economy" with capitalism. Estes (1986), for example, appropriately calls for an "examination of society's treatment of the aged in the context of the national and world economy, the role of the state, conditions of the labor market..." but argues that what is required is an "examination of the relationship of capitalism to aging" (121). However, this weakness in a political economy of aging perspective is a problem in application, not in the perspective itself. Of course, it is wise

to remember that different aging conditions and inequalities can be produced and reproduced within a variety of political-economic settings and markets.

Other weaknesses of a political economic perspective on aging include a failure to adequately address gendered inequalities and to recognize agency within the structures they study. However, attention to gender and agency is compatible with this approach and can actually serve to enrich and expand the framework. In fact, more recent publications on the "new political economy of aging" encourage sustained attention to intersections of class, race, gender, ethnicity and age at micro, meso, and macro levels (Estes 1999:26)

Theoretical Perspectives on Elders and Social Change in Developing Nations

Probably the most clearly articulated theory of aging that addresses growing old in the midst of rapid social change is the "modernization and aging theory" attributed to Cowgill and Holmes (1972). Put succinctly, they propose that "the role and status of the elderly are inversely related to technological progress" (Moody 2000:316). The theory proposes that new technologies result in a devaluation of traditional wisdom and life experience of elders (Burgess 1960). Moreover, urbanization and industrialization are thought to weaken families and disadvantage elderly people who depend on them for support.

The problems with this modernization and aging theory are the same as those found in modernization theory generally. First, it rests on a traditional/modern dichotomy. In this case, the past is romanticized as a "Golden Age" for elderly people. Moreover, the world's past is homogenized, despite vast amounts of evidence pointing to major differences in the treatment of elderly people both between and within societies,

across space and time (Calasanti and Slevin 2001). In the case of China, for example, it is dangerous to assume that elders have enjoyed high status within families throughout its numerous dynasties, or that they have done so invariably across geographic locations and among various ethnic groups. Moreover, empirical studies of rural change and families in China and elsewhere show not so much a "decline" of families in times of social change, but rather, their innovative strategic adaptations (Johnson and Wang 1997, Davis and Harrell 1993). Although relationships between social change (e.g., rural development) and aging deserve continued attention from scholars, and although economic and technological development can contribute to the marginalization of elderly people, modernization and aging theory is likely too simplistic to explain experiences of aging and of power relations in later life.

Still, many theorists agree with Cowgill and Holmes' (1972) most general argument that the "status of the aged tends to be high in agricultural societies and lower in urbanized settings" (322). The relative status and power of elderly people may be linked to the importance of technology and new information, often possessed to greater extent by younger people. Albert and Cattell (1994) elaborate on this idea in arguing that:

If modernization affects the positions of elders, it would appear that it does so through a radical alteration of the organization of information in society, removing the accumulation of valued information from the aging process, and hence eliminating a valued role for elders in social life....A shift away from agriculture evidently does decrease the value of information controlled by elders and does result in a status decline for them (182-183).

They go on to suggest that older people's power and influence relate to their level of control over resources and the ways in which resources and the rights to resources are passed along to younger generations (ibid.). This emphasis on age roles and access to

resources is evident in Amoss and Harrell's (1981) proposition that

two factors largely determine the relative success old people have in a particular society in achieving their goals. The first is the balance between the costs old people represent to the group and the contributions they make. The second is the degree of control old people maintain over resources necessary to the fulfillment of the needs or wants of younger members of the group (5).

Treas and Logue (1986) outline four possible ways in which population aging and elderly people might interact with social change in the form of economic development.

The first viewpoint sees elderly people over the typical labor force age as unimportant and irrelevant for development processes one way or another. This perspective results in a lack of inquiry into the role of elders in development, a lack which certainly seems apparent in the literature. A second perspective views elders as an impediment or a "drain" on resources. This view is also present in the literature, as well as in the popular press. England (2005:34), for example, concludes that an aged population poses an "obstacle to China's progress" (although he believes it should not impede the course of economic development until after 2020 when China strives further still to become one of the "most developed" nations). England joins other analysts to argue that, in the meantime, economic growth and development are necessary precursors to successful support of the elderly population. From a third view, elders are victims of the modernization process as they become marginalized and devalued (Yao 2001; Ikels 2004). This perspective reiterates the modernization and aging theory outlined above. Finally, a fourth view sees aging people as a stimulus to development through their potential value as a flexible labor force, transmitters of skills, help with childcare and housework, and the consumer market. Proponents of this view might emphasize the need to retain elders in the work force, create an "army of volunteers," or simply acknowledge

the work which they may already perform. Randel et al. (1994:4), for instance, argue that for the most part older people have been “characterized as economically unproductive, dependent and passive, have been considered at best as irrelevant to development and at worst as a threat to the prospects for increased prosperity” and offer numerous examples in which elders engage in household work so that family members have the opportunity to earn wages and otherwise participate in economic development.

Although general theories of aging and social change contribute to scholarship, there is a danger in generalizing both about later life and about development (Lloyd-Sherlock 2004). To understand the process and experiences of aging and social change in developing nations it is helpful to continue examinations of aging, demographic change, and development in actual context.

In terms of the little that we know about the relationships between population aging and China's development, we can say that economic and social development have certainly played a role in decreasing mortality rates and thus increasing the life expectancies as well as the number of elderly people (Banister and Zhang 2005; Banister and Hill 2004). Yet as Treas and Logue (1986:645) point out, population aging is both an outcome and a shaping factor in economic and social development. Studies empirically inquiring into both Chinese elderly people's effects on development and development's effects on Chinese elders are needed.

Aging and Elders in the Context of Contemporary China

Lloyd-Sherlock (2004) argues that “the well-being and quality of life of elderly populations are strongly conditioned by their capacity to manage opportunity and risks associated with rapid and complex change” (1). Chinese elders are entering later life

during a time of major transition and social change in China, including particular political conditions and recent changes in the form of government policies directed toward elders and their families. Rapid sustained economic development, possible threats to family cohesion and traditional structures, rural industrialization, and widespread rural-urban migration are some key social contexts. In this section I relate major themes and findings relevant to the experience of growing old in China, while at the same time providing background on these important socio-political contexts.

Chinese Elders and Families

For thousands of years, the traditional form of Chinese eldercare has been for co-resident family members (almost always married sons and their wives) to provide material and instrumental care for aging parents. Underlying this tradition is the Confucian concept and system of *xiao*, or *xiaoshun*, which is most often translated as "filial piety." It includes the concepts of obedience, respect, and reverence for elders and it has long permeated Chinese society, apparently surviving the Cultural Revolution and other political upheavals (Davis 1983; Sher 1984). However, scholars debate the extent to which long-held traditional family values and elderly support may now be weakening in the wake of market transition, reforms, and demographic changes since 1978, leaving older family members to rely on themselves. Evidence from studies on current levels of family support and care of elderly people is contradictory. Some analysts assert that family elderly support has weakened in the post-reform era from the mid-1980s until now. Xu (2001a: 77-78), for example, writes that "the fragility of family eldercare under today's new circumstances" is evidence that the "foundation stones under the pillars of support for the elderly are being shaken." Yet many systematic empirical studies show

little or no evidence of this trend to-date (Whyte 2003; Li 1998; Yao 2001; Mu and Yao 200; Davis 1986; Sher 1984).

A "decline of the family" related to modernization or Westernization is a major theme of investigation in general aging studies, since it is believed that older people benefit from the support and support-exchanges of families. Yet because claims about "the family's decline" in China and elsewhere are debatable and difficult to prove or to disprove, the concept of a changing generational contract has been used successfully by a number of researchers in discussions of the extent to which familial exchanges (mediated by political and economic institutions) adapt and change rather than simply disintegrate (Bengston and Achenbaum 1993). Such investigations of generational exchanges and informal "contracts" have been conducted in studies of aging in urban China (Whyte 2003).

Co-residence with adult children is still the most common form of living arrangement for Chinese elders, although an increasing proportion of elderly are living separately from children, especially in urban areas (Bian, Logan and Bian 1998; Yan, Chen and Yang 2003). Co-residence may enable junior family members to readily assist their senior family members with daily living activities and chores. The relationships between co-residence, elderly support, and overall benefits to elderly are likely tied not only to the extent of assistance, but to the type of support (instrumental, financial, help with chores, gifts) received. Some studies show that living with adult children tends to increase instrumental, but not material (financial) support (Yan, Chen and Yang 2003; Zimmer and Kwong 2003). This situation might reflect conditions in which elders living with adult children are not receiving financial support in the form of money gifts, but

rather in the form of shared housing, food, and daily assistance. Silverstein et al. (2006) find that co-residence with grandchildren or with both children and grandchildren was beneficial to older people due primarily to material support received from younger generations as well as to opportunities to enjoy emotional bonds with children. Their study also suggests that by living in multiple generation households, elderly people are able to occupy a “culturally sanctioned role within the family” and thus receive a sense of fulfillment (Silverstein et al. 2006:S263).

Yan, Chen and Yang (2003) in their study of living arrangements and types of support of elderly people in Baoding conclude that "there is not a necessary or automatic connection between marrying or moving away from the parental household and reduced support to parents" (161). Money sent back by migrants might substitute for the economies of scale achieved in shared housing and shared groceries. Chen (2005:129) also points out that continued co-residence does not necessarily indicate continuation of traditional family values, and critiques studies in which "change or no change in residential patterns is perceived as either the erosion or persistence of social norms" (also see Logan and Bian 1999). Overall, studies of co-residence and later-life support in urban China show that the relationship between residence, family support, and values is fairly complex and not mechanical.

Reductions in family elder care are also thought to be related to reductions in family size (Yan and Chi 2001). Jia's (1988) case study in a rural village finds people in smaller households (4.08 people on average) juggling time and resources to care for elderly members. Yet Zimmer and Kwong (2003) find that only to a small extent does reduced family size negatively affect the provision of care to elders. Rather, their study

and others show that children appear to provide support based on needs and resources (Logan and Bian 2003; Bian, Logan and Bian 1998; Shi 1994). Zimmer and Kwong (2003) argue from their findings that having more children does not always mean having more support, just as having few children does not equate with inadequate support. This argument suggests that decline in fertility alone does not mean certain doom for family support of elders. Zimmer and Kwong (2003:41) suggest that worry about care of elders – based *only* on changes in family size and separate living arrangements – might to some extent reflect a "moral panic." At the same time, it would seem that rural-to-urban migration by family members in the labor force would pose a challenge for *physical care* of fragile elderly, and is likely to leave elderly people to care for themselves and often, their grandchildren (Zhang 2004). Additionally, the need for psychological comfort and companionship is an important component of quality of life for aging people, and may be met through close proximity to family members.

A few studies suggest that the biggest threat to family support of elderly members is likely to come in the form of broader financial and social pressures (Benjamin, Brandt and Rozelle 2000; Sen 1998). In other words, we must distinguish between *will* and *ability* to care for aging parents. Globalization and the influence of Western family customs may or may not affect the will of families and elderly people to maintain traditional living arrangements and reciprocal exchanges. But educational reforms, new agricultural policies, and massive temporary migration of working-age rural residents could be enormous challenges to the ability of families to care for elderly members (Hannum 2005; Zimmer and Kwong 2003). In particular, migration of family members affects family roles, household and village demographic characteristics, and has

"profound effects on those left behind" (Davin 1998; see also Zhang 1998). Reform and privatization of medical services has also increased the price of health care, which can become cost-prohibitive especially in serious and chronic cases (Zimmer and Kwong 2004; Banister and Hill 2004: 67; Li and Tracy 1999). Researchers also express concern about future family eldercare abilities in light of increasing regional and economic inequality (Joseph and Phillips 1999).

Ultimately, the question of whether high levels of family support will continue can only be answered in due time. The complexities of social change ensure that, as Fang and Whyte (2003:33) remark, we are dealing with a "moving target." In any case, many studies of China's aging overlook rural elders, possibly due to the belief that, because fertility rates in China's cities have been lower than in rural areas, urban elders' and families' problems in the cities are greater. Additionally, access to research in rural areas has been limited until relatively recently.

Aging and Inequalities in Contemporary China

Confucian cultures are known for their veneration of elderly people, and it is often assumed or asserted that Chinese elderly experience much higher status than do their American peers (see Formanek and Linhart 1997). However, at least two problems exist with this assumption. First, it is difficult to assess the validity of these claims due to subjectivity in cross-cultural standards and experiences of treatment, respect, and quality of life. Moreover, though we may argue that a social group's power and status is relatively high or low overall, we should not ignore the status and power variations within a group as well as the possibility that power can increase in some aspects and decrease in others. Yet, to be sure, age relations are a key area in which elders may

experience social inequality. Age inequality also interacts with gender inequality and, in the case of China, with rural-urban disparities in living conditions, health, and well-being. So, just as some scholars refer to the big “three gaps” in Chinese society generally one might consider Chinese elders to be facing three gaps of their own: rural-urban inequality, gender inequality, and age inequality, each intersecting.

Recent research has done much to shed light on urban-rural health care inequalities in China (Zimmer and Kwong 2004, Zeng 2002), and yet making overall claims about differences in well-being can be difficult. On the one hand, rural elderly may be better off due to larger family sizes and traditional customs in rural areas (Jiang 1995). On the other hand, the services and resources in urban areas appear to provide advantages to elders in China's cities. Zeng and colleagues have examined the health of China's "oldest old" (people aged 80 and above) in a number of studies based on the China Healthy Longevity Survey of 631 randomly selected counties and cities, first conducted in 1998. This data set helps to demonstrate current differences in the living conditions and health of rural and urban elderly. Zeng et al. (2002) find that proportions of the *oldest* old are higher in urban areas, that they are less likely than rural counterparts to be widowed, and that a very low proportion of rural older elders have pensions.

Using measurements of activities of daily living (ADLs) and self-rated health as measures of health status, Zeng et al. (2002) find rural elders are more active than urban counterparts, perhaps due to differences in built and natural environments or a selection bias related to rural survival. Notably, these rural-urban differences in health status mostly disappear when age, sex, and education are controlled. The proportion of both rural and urban oldest-old men in “active status” is also greater than their female

counterparts, likely due to advantages in education, income, and pension support (Zeng et al. 2002:267). Zimmer and Kwong (2004:47) argue that rural-urban differences are “critical in understanding the well-being of older adults” in China. They measure SES and health of older adults in rural and urban China, and find superior SES of urban elders but an increased likelihood of urban elders reporting chronic diseases. This situation could simply mean that urban seniors have better access to the medical infrastructure diagnosing chronic diseases. Liu and Zhang (2004) find that lower self-reported health is associated with lower social status for China's oldest old.

Although regional differences in the health and well-being of China's elders are difficult to characterize generally, it is clear that urban-rural residence is an important factor in shaping the conditions of later life. Further attention to the situation of rural elderly in itself is needed (Benjamin, Brandt and Rozelle 2000; Zeng et al. 2001). Studies that report *current* high levels of health and well-being for elderly people still express concern about *future* inequalities in standards of living and disparities in access to health care as more rural people move into the oldest old age category (Whyte 2003; Benjamin, Brandt and Rozelle 2000). Additionally, differences in health status and well-being according to gender need further exploration.

In many societies, clear gender differences exist in terms of life expectancy and morbidity. Often, men live shorter but healthier lives and women survive longer, albeit in the company of chronic diseases and physical limitations (Manton and Land 2000). In China, women's life expectancy at age 65 (15.69) is approximately two years more than men's life expectancy at age 65 (13.54) (Banister and Hill 2004). Yet Zeng et al. (2002:269) conclude that

on average, the female oldest old in China are seriously disadvantaged in every respect save sheer survival itself . . . any long-term care service programs sponsored by China's government should take into account the disadvantaged status of elderly women . . .

Old-age mortality in China is different from that in many other nations in terms of gender differences. In population projections, Chinese male populations grow more rapidly than female elderly populations. Li (1998) reported 80 male elders for every 100 female elders in 1982, with the ratio presently expected to be approximately 91 to 100. In other words, the sex ratio of Chinese elderly people has been increasing in the past two or more decades as the male elderly population becomes larger in relation to the female elderly population. This situation contrasts with many other cases in which improvements in medical conditions further add to the sex gap in survival ratios (in women's favor). Notably, Li (1998) interprets these data as reflecting *excess* mortality for older women rather than greater comparative longevity of males.

The ways in which aging is experienced are also likely to differ with gender. Randal et al. (1999:36) outline several possible gender dimensions in the economic activity of older people: (1) the kind of tasks it is expected or accepted that they should do, (2) the environment in which they perform these tasks, (3) the recognition of their contribution, (4) the remuneration they receive, and (5) the degree of control they have over any income from their activities.

The processes of aging and social change may also affect women and men differently. For example, men may be affected more than are women by changes in roles and family structure to the extent that they are seen as less useful in old age. Women, on the other hand, may simply tend to continue previous roles of cooking, cleaning, and performing household work. Also, in terms of well-being within families, women appear

more embedded in extended families and more likely to receive family support. We can interpret this situation as both advantageous (Ofstedal, Reidy and Knodel 2004) and disadvantageous (Xu 2001). In other words, depending on how we understand family life and the protections or conflicts therein, elderly women's "support from" (or "dependence on") families can be viewed positively or negatively (also see Knodel and Ofstedal 2003).

Gender and aging also intersect through resources to affect older people's power and status. In Taiwan, which shares cultural characteristics with mainland China, Li et al. (1993) find that widows are more than twice as likely as are their male counterparts to have divided their property among relatives. This gender difference suggests that, insofar as older adults relinquish power through division and relinquishment of any privately owned assets (perhaps less abundant in communist China), widowed women are more disadvantaged than are widowed men.

While gender inequalities intersect with age and rural-urban inequalities to produce multiple disadvantages such as those related to education, literacy, physical health and cognitive performance (Zeng, Liu and George 2003), and household power, it is notable that they also transcend geographical location in China. Using two waves of national longitudinal data from 1998 and 2000, Zhang (2006) found that among the oldest old, Chinese women were more likely to suffer from cognitive impairment than were oldest old men. This gender difference was partly explained by women's lower socioeconomic levels, smaller social networks, and less participation in leisure activities. Additionally, Zeng and colleagues (2002) find that

the differences by sex and rural-urban residence in main source of financial support are striking. The female oldest old in both rural and urban areas are much more disadvantaged in terms of pension support than their male counterparts (263).

Finally, the age-based status and power of Chinese elders also may be changing. Yao (2001) suggests that the "almost god-like power" attributed to elders in traditional China may now be diminished to a "more earthly" basic respect. Studies such as Wang's (2004) find that by the early 1980s children began more readily to disobey parents, demonstrating "young people's abandonment of absolute submission to parental domination in everyday practice" (27). Relatively earlier household division in contemporary times allows children, especially daughters-in-law, to assert more authority in their daily lives (Gallin 1986). But it appears that in some cases that the status of Chinese elders within the household has not only been lowered to a level that ends previous "tyranny" of elder family members, but that elders now suffer fairly great age-based disadvantages, with studies reporting elders' frequent quarrels with children, lack of freedom in multiple generation households, and expectations that they "serve" younger generations (Zhang 2004, Wang 2004).

Population, Development, and the Politics of Aging in China

Contexts in which Chinese elders are entering later life include China's demographic landscape and concerns about population aging. Complementing press headlines such as "Nation Urged to Cope with 'Grey Tide'" and "Burdensome Population a Headache for China," demographers have anticipated for decades the rapid aging of China's population and the challenges associated with this transformation (Bongaarts and Greenhalgh 1985; Nan 1986; Poston and Duan 2000; Eberstadt 2000, 1998; Hussain 2002; England 2005). Forecasts vary, but it is generally agreed that beginning in 2010, the proportion of people over age 65 will increase quickly until it comprises 20 percent of

the population in 2025 and over 30 percent of the population by 2050 (United Nations Population Division 2006).

Demographers say that a population "ages" as the proportion of elderly people grows in relation to the proportion of other age groups. While the populations of many nations are aging, China is unique in that it is still a developing society. China's population aging is also occurring at time when families, the main institution of support for elderly people, are coping with market transitions, educational reforms, new agricultural policies, and smaller family size linked to low fertility rates (Hannum 2005).

All three demographic processes (fertility, mortality, and migration) shape a population's age structure. First, with the exception of a period during the Great Leap Famine (1959-1961), mortality in China has decreased rapidly since the inception of the People's Republic of China (PRC) (Banister and Hill 2004). Banister and Hill (2004) attribute the halving of the crude death rate since 1949 to a number of factors:

near cessation of international invasion and civil war; the disarming of the general population; allocation of arable land to most peasants through land reform; government distribution of grain to areas with a shortage; vigorous strategies of epidemic control for the main infectious diseases; and the retraining of midwives in modern midwifery (55).

Decreases in mortality rates have occurred for the elderly and all other age groups except infant females (Banister and Hill 2004), and life expectancies in China have also increased. In the past 30 years, life expectancies at birth in China rose from 64 to 71 years for men and from 66 to 75 years for women (Banister and Zhang 2004). (These national averages hide considerable regional variation.) In other words, not only is the proportion of elderly people growing, but also the number of elders is growing, as they

live to experience higher ages and likelihood of chronic disease and related physical limitations.

Decreased fertility is even more important in promoting population aging than is decline in mortality, for reasons outlined by Coale (1964).² Indeed, China's pattern of fertility change is largely responsible for current and anticipated population aging (Riley 2004; Bongaarts and Greenhalgh 1985). As Riley (2004:10) notes, due to enforcement of a one-child-family campaign of the late 1970s, China experienced "one of the most rapid and impressive declines in fertility ever recorded in a national population." In the span of 15 years, the total fertility rate (TFR) declined from just over six children per woman to around two children per woman. The fact that China's rapid fertility decline during the 1970s was preceded by a "baby boom" responsive to strong pronatalist rhetoric of the 1950s and '60s has further ensured that markedly smaller size younger generations will soon be responsible for the care of their elders. The "1:2:4" ratio is often cited to indicate that in the future, one child may have to care for two parents and four grandparents. As for migration, China's tight restrictions on international migration have precluded possibilities that its population aging would be slowed either by the influx of young immigrants or by the emigration of older citizens.

Currently, the percentage of China's people aged 60 and above (now around 8 percent) is expected to double in the next 14 years and to reach 24 percent and 27 percent by the years 2035 and 2050, respectively (Riley 2004). The age distribution of China and other societies is important to researchers and policy makers especially insofar as the labor of people aged 15-60 (or 65) is seen as supporting people who are too young

² In brief, mortality decline usually affects people of *all* age groups, and especially improves infant survival rates. Fertility decline, on the other hand, continues to affect the population age structure of subsequent generations.

or too old to participate in the labor market. The ratio of people aged 65 and above to every 100 people aged 15-64 is specifically known as the elderly dependency ratio (see Bongaarts 2004). A major concern of scholars and Chinese officials is that the elderly dependency ratio will be too large; in other words, China will have too many elderly people to be supported feasibly by people in the labor market. Zhang (2001:69) reports China's elderly dependency ratio as growing from 13.74 in 1990 to 15.60 in 2000 and then (projected) to 29.46 in 2025 and 48.49 in 2050. As more of China's elderly people are surviving, they are also living until older ages when they may be more likely require support not only in terms of financial assistance, but in help with daily living, and in companionship and "spiritual comfort" (*jing shen wei jie*) (Arnsberger et al. 2000; Ge and Shu 2002).

The current percentage of elderly people in China is not especially high in comparison with global standards. For example, the proportion of US residents aged 65 and over in 2000 was around 12.5 percent (Arnsberger et al. 2000), compared to China's 7 percent. However, two points are noteworthy. First, there is a wide range in terms of regional and ethnic differences in population aging that is obscured by national averages. Depending on an area's fertility, mortality, and migration levels, population aging may already be well underway. Population aging is primarily a phenomenon of the Han nationality, which makes up approximately 92 percent of the population. In some areas of China, and among certain ethnic groups, the percentage of elderly may be as low as 4-6 percent (Poston and Duan 2000). Currently, the major metropolis of Shanghai is known for having the highest proportion of residents age 60 and over (16.7 percent). Some scholars argue that all urban areas will eventually include higher proportions of

elderly in comparison to rural areas (Shen 1998), but others point out that increasing rural-urban migration of young people could very well create the oldest “population ages” in China’s rural villages (Lin and Fang 2004:4; Zeng et al. 2002: 268).

Secondly, the increase in people over age 60 is expected to occur extremely quickly, doubling in a matter of several years. Not only does the speed of the transition require rapid adjustment for any society, but, as has been mentioned, unlike other nations experiencing aging at a rapid rate (e.g., Japan), China’s infrastructures are still developing. China’s level of economic and infrastructural development is therefore expected to present challenges for providing adequate support and services for elderly people. As expressed in a recent report on plans for national social security, the PRC government feels pressure to balance spending on elderly support with continued development projects (State Council Information Office 2004).

Population Aging and China’s Development

According to some analysts, addressing the needs of China’s booming elderly population will divert significant resources from other sectors, preventing China from fulfilling its goals of being a moderately well off (*xiaokang*) society by 2020 (England 2005). Others, including central government officials, claim that *only through* sustained growth and development will China be able to care for its elderly population (State Council Information Office 2004).

A small body of research is now growing, as both researchers of aging and scholars of development and social change recognize the importance of understanding older people’s roles in social change. HelpAge International has collected research from various settings to argue that

all over the developing world, older people make an “invisible” contribution to their families and society at large, performing domestic tasks and caring for children and sick or disabled adults so that other members of a household may engage in “visible” economic activity. In addition, older people engage in a range of income-earning activities in the informal sector, which contribute to the household economy but are rarely acknowledged, or are seen as “reducing the burden” of their presence (Randal 1999:36).

Research on aging in China has already given much attention to the problems of an aging population and the possibility of national support systems for the elderly with scholars divided over whether a national welfare state is an attractive or feasible notion in the PRC (Saunders and Shang 2001, Li Wen Lang 1998). However, systematic scholarly research is required in order to go beyond theoretical assertions and better understand how and whether elders do and might influence social change and development in China.

Government Policies and Responses

How has China responded to and addressed the conditions and roles of elders as the nation rapidly transforms? By the mid 1980s the government was aware of China’s future aging population, and by 1983 the National Committee on Aging was established to educate the public about China’s aging problem and to “develop ways to utilize the talents and energies of the elderly” (Olson 1988). In the mid-1980s and especially throughout the 1990s the PRC government began experimenting with pension reform, health insurance systems, and the development of social security systems. In 1995, a law was promulgated that requires localities to adopt pilot pension and social security schemes (Stevenson-Yang and Shi 1998). Throughout this era the ratio of workers to eligible pensioners (former state-owned enterprise workers) began to drop, having decreased from roughly 30:1 in 1978 to 5:1 in 2000 (Song and Chu 1997). It became increasingly difficult to secure promised pensions and a number of enterprises defaulted

in pension delivery (ibid.). Stevenson-Yang and Shi (1998:8) argue that, “at least in part, social security reform has been driven by the country’s need to free state-owned enterprises from the obligation of paying retirees pensions.” Increased independence in financial accounting for state-owned enterprises has also prompted the government to reform pension law. Despite extensive reforms and experimentation of the past two decades, critics of state and private social support for elderly people indicate continued fragmentation along urban-rural lines, impractical pay-as-you go approaches, and an overall lack of coverage (Stevenson-Yang and Shi 1998; Saunders and Shang 2001). Retirement pensions are primarily an urban benefit received by former state-owned enterprise (SOE) workers (Hong 2001). Health care coverage is linked to individual work units (*danwei*) rather than to a national plan. Although the Chinese government continues experiments with various systems, even within urban areas, inequalities in terms of access to pensions continue (Jiang 2001; Davis 1988). Urban retirees are still advantaged in comparison to their rural counterparts, but in many cases employers have reduced their coverage in recent years (Hong 2001).

Since the majority of China's elders live in rural areas and have not worked in state-owned or private enterprises, even a vastly improved pension system would overlook these approximately 61 million elderly people (Hong 2001). Approximately six percent of rural elders receive pensions (Pei and Pillai 1999). Moreover, while health services in China's rural areas were upheld as exemplary before economic reform this praise no longer appears applicable (Li and Feldman 2004; Joseph and Phillips 1999). Community (or “social”) care for elderly people is discussed as an additional source of support along with state financial assistance and family care, however, analysts point out

that establishing “old age homes” and other services will be more challenging in geographically remote rural areas than in urban locations (Chen 1996; Jiang 1995).

The most destitute of China’s rural elderly qualify for assistance in securing the “five guarantees” of food, clothing, medical care, housing, and burial expenses. The policy was established in the 1950s, but in 1994 the State Council issued stipulations for eligibility in the program (also known as the “three nos”) especially for residents of rural areas. Specifically, individuals who have (1) no family member to support them, (2) no ability to work, and (3) no source of income are eligible. Currently only a small percentage of China's elders qualify for this support (State Council Information Office 2004).

In post-reform years, the Chinese government has issued several laws and statements concerning the care of elderly people. The 1980 Marriage Law, which has its roots in the original marriage law of 1950, is the “fundamental code governing family and marital relations.” It declares the legal ages of marriage for men and women, as well as regulations pertaining to divorce, inheritance, illegitimate births, and gender equality. It is significant to elderly people not only insofar as it ensures the protection of elderly people, but in that it requires children to support and assist their parents and directs elderly people, given they can afford it, to care for grandchildren whose parents are deceased. Parents who are unable to work also have the right to demand support from their children. Adult children who violate the Marriage Law may be subject to legal penalties and sanctions.

Equally notable is the more recent (1995) *Law on the Protection of Elderly People's Rights and Interests*, in which quality of life – including appropriate housing,

adequate food, physical care, medical treatment, authority over decisions related to inheritance and divorce, and respect and regard from family and society – are framed in terms of basic rights. The state has also encouraged families to sign contracts or "eldercare agreements" (Xu 2001). The efficacy of these laws is difficult to measure, but based on litigation research in China, it is difficult to believe that Chinese elders would feel comfortable prosecuting family members for failure to comply with elderly rights laws, particularly in a society in which litigation has historically been a source of shame (Gallagher 2006). Indeed, Xu (2001) finds that only in extreme cases do elderly family members take legal recourse.

There is an imbalance in the degree of state support and services for urban elders and rural elders. Specifically, pensions, health care, insurance, homes for elderly people, and elder associations are much less accessible to rural elders than to their urban counterparts (Wang and Xia 2001). Scholars debate the feasibility of providing national health care plan, but most parties agree that family eldercare must be supplemented with state support (Wang 2001; Zeng 2001; Bian, Logan and Bian 1998; Jiang 1995).

Researching Rural Chinese Elders' Duties, Dreams, and Expectations

In this section I summarize gaps in the research on aging in China, thus pointing toward the focus of my own research. I then introduce my theoretical framework for a study of aging in rural China which is based on an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of aging theories and concepts, followed by my specific research questions and some brief notes on some assumptions underlying the project.

Much of the academic literature, although sometimes critical of past policies and programs, does not problematize representations of China's aging population and

development, but rather re-states popular and official claims that new solutions should be sought to help balance the obvious burden of elderly support with goals for continuing economic development. Additionally, examination of the relationship between economic development and aging is engaged mainly at the macro level, with some conclusions that the needs of the rapidly aging population for financial support and services could hinder, or at least slow, economic growth and national development. There is also a shortage of research explicitly focusing on elderly women's and men's experiences of aging and development in rural China.

Moreover, while studies of family support and elderly well-being must continue, a heavy focus on support received and on the burden of elders might obscure the active roles and day-to-day contributions to household and community made by both co-resident and non-co-resident elderly people (Zhan 2002; see Hermalin 2002; Goldstein, Yu and Ikels 1990). As Chen (1996) reminds us,

support is a phenomenon of interaction; the elderly are not passive recipients. The attitudes of the elderly will strengthen, maintain, or weaken their family support. They may accept social services or not; they have the final say about their needs (264).

Support to and from parents is also dynamic, often depending upon the needs of children and grandchildren as well as the elderly parents (Zimmer 2005; Xu and Ji 1999). To shore up gaps in the literature, research on aging in China should expand to incorporate actual experiences of individuals and better knowledge of daily life and interactions in their households.

Additionally, many studies assume that co-residence is positively related to well-being and support of elderly residents, and therefore focus on levels of co-residence as indicative of elder's well-being and family support. However, new studies continue to

suggest that elderly people residing near (not necessarily with) adult children receive comparable amounts of support. We should also remember that families can also be a source of conflict and negative experiences rather than assuming that co-residence ensures the safety and happiness of elders (Xu 2001; Hu 1995; Leung 1997; Kosberg and Gracia 1991; Ikels 1990). Finally, instrumental and financial support are crucial; yet emotional and psychological support (and conflict) can be equally or more important (Chen and Silverstein 2000; Sun 2004). In short, although studies of family living arrangements and support exchanges are valuable, they alone cannot present a complete picture of the conditions of aging in rural China.

Next, a body of more general literature on gender and aging demonstrates variations in aging experiences and outcomes for women and men (Calasanti 2004; Calasanti and Slevin 2001; Arber and Ginn 1991; Marchand and Parpart 1995; Mortimer 2003). More research is needed on the ways older women and men cope with aging and social change in China, especially in rural China where the majority of elders reside and where it appears that less diversity of resources is available. Further research is also needed on the role of gender in the provision, needs, and experiences of eldercare. For instance, it is traditionally held that in China daughters marry out of the family and provide care for their husband's parents only. Yet, research suggests that support from daughters can be under-estimated, under-acknowledged (Bian, Logan, and Bian 1998; Yu, Yu, and Mansfield 1990). Findings from recent studies show daughters contributing just as much financial assistance as their brothers, and even more instrumental assistance (Xie and Zhu 2006; Whyte and Qin 2003; Hermalin and Shih 2003; Li et al. 2005). Elders'

needs and resources may also differ with gender, and further research on this topic can provide information to assist with eldercare in the future.

Finally, aging research in China and elsewhere suggests that elderly people themselves, particularly women and elders in rural areas, contribute significantly to care of elders and also of grandchildren (Wang and Xia 2001; Joseph and Phillips 1999; Zhan and Montgomery 2003; Magilvy et al. 2000). Again, this contradicts the argument that additional support for elders can be found through "new" reliance on the elderly themselves (Jiang 1995). Additionally, research on elderly people in other developing nations finds elders actively contributing in valuable ways to community and household development (see Eyesemitan and Gire 2003; Randel et al. 1999). Indeed, a recent study in rural China finds elderly people "working until they drop" (Pang, DeBrauw and Rozelle 2004). Further research on current household care distributions and potential household contributions of elderly people is needed. Research that inquires into elders' activities, contributions, and their own understandings and expectations for aging in the future will provide knowledge about household and elder needs and resources in the coming decades.

In short, the major themes in studies of aging in China -- population aging, regional differences, and family-elder relations -- can benefit from critical assessment, additional attention to ground-level experiences, agency within particular social constraints, and the significance of gender. Furthermore, although studies of aging in China continue to report fairly favorable social conditions of aging, and (although with marked regional variation) relatively good health of elderly people, scholars express concern about the persistence of this trend, especially in light of population aging,

continued rural-urban migration, and increasing socioeconomic inequality. Inequalities in financial and social resources clearly exist between urban and rural elders, with the challenges of aging in rural areas appearing particularly formidable (Zeng et al. 2002; Lin and Fang 2004; Benjamin, Brandt and Rozelle 2000). Additional research on aging in rural China is therefore needed. Taken together, current knowledge of conditions of aging in rural China calls for studies at household and village levels that investigate the experiences, expectations, and activities of both older rural women and men.

Theoretical Framework of the Project

In sum, much research on aging and development in China has been approached from the perspective of modernization theory which views the process of development, on the one hand, as a Western, economic, and macro phenomenon that on the whole improves a society, and on the other hand, as detrimental to the status of elderly people (England 2005; Fang and Wang 2005; State Council Information Office 2004; Cowgill and Holmes 1972). Embedded in this theoretical approach is a representation of an inimical relationship between aging and development and a portrayal of elderly people as victims. Beliefs that elderly people are passive and unproductive can lead to research focused only on the extent of their social burden or only on the well-being of elderly people, who may even be portrayed as helpless. Indeed, many studies of aging in transitioning China tend to focus on the burden of elders on their families, or on elders' well-being, de-emphasizing elders' active roles and the care provided to elderly people and children by elderly wives and other older family members. Additionally, non-economic aspects of eldercare such as physical care, psychological support, and companionship are relatively overlooked. Furthermore, researchers often approach

economic development as being either a force, produced through activities in the labor market, or as a set of procedures initiated and executed at the top levels of the state (Long 1989). When the focus is only on national strategy and macroeconomic capacities, elderly villagers', families', and community strategies and capabilities are overlooked (Angresano 2005; Lloyd-Sherlock 2002; Zhang 2001; Kallgren 1992).

In this study, I aim to avoid the ageism inherent in much general research on aging that results in older people being either invisible or problematized. Rather than investigating elderly villagers as passive victims of social change, or as troublesome burdens on families and society, I approach the study of rural aging attentive to ways that elderly people might contribute to their families and communities and how they might cope and adapt to social changes. My critical gerontological perspective also gives weight to the perspectives of older people and their understandings of their own lives. From this perspective, I assume that older Chinese villagers know something about the social contexts in which they live. Furthermore, their perspectives might supplement “expert” views and help to create a broader understanding of aging in China than currently exists (Harding 1998, 1991).

A critical gerontological perspective also emphasizes the importance of political and economic contexts and institutions in shaping the experiences and conditions of aging. Aging in a rural Chinese village is experienced in the context of China's market transitions, economic reforms, and government policies (e.g., those relating to agriculture, education, fertility, and aging). Moreover, social constructions of aging and the way in which aging is politicized and popularly presented is a key context in which contemporary women and men transition into later life. In particular, a perceived crisis

of demographic population aging, regardless of the extent to which it is or will be an actual crisis, may shape the reality of aging in rural China.

In short, adopting a critical gerontological perspective requires me to situate my study within the current politics of aging in rural China, to ask in what ways economic institutions and "interlocking systems of inequality . . . shape the experience of aging and growing old" (Minkler 1999:1), and to give attention to how village elders understand and respond to perceived challenges and opportunities of aging in contemporary rural China.

The other major component of my theoretical framework consists of a feminist gerontological approach as forwarded by Calasanti (2004) and Calasanti and Slevin (2000). There are four key assumptions and arguments of this perspective that I adopt. First, I view age, like gender, as a relation between individuals and social groups. This means that I do not plan to focus exclusively on women. Next, I consider analysis of men's experiences and issues of masculinity and aging as crucial to an understanding of the gendered experiences of aging that involved privilege and disadvantages. Third, I keep in mind that elderly people are not homogeneous, and that experiences of aging differ not only in terms of gender, but also in terms of other social locations (class, ethnic, racial) and life course experiences. In terms of research in rural China, these three propositions led me to study aging as a gendered experience, to inquire into the lives of *both* elderly women and elderly men, and to be open to the likelihood that there is no one Elderly Woman Experience or Elderly Man Experience in rural China. Fourth, recent research in feminist gerontology (Calasanti 2004) demonstrates the effective use of a variety of methods in efforts to understand gendered aging and age relations. Along with

these researchers, I believe that feminist studies can be produced through many methods, and that quantitative methods do not necessarily rely on ontological or epistemological assumptions inimical to feminist theory. This last assumption informs my research design and analysis.

In addition to these two main components, I incorporate perspectives, suggestions, and concepts from recent work in the sociology of aging and the life course. First, a large amount of research in aging and demographic fields has shown the importance of a life course perspective (see Mortimer and Shanahan 2003). In the case of rural China, it is important to remember that cohorts nearing and experiencing later life have lived through monumental historical events in the last decades, including a communist revolution and establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC), the Great Leap Forward (1958-1960), the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), the Open Door Policy and subsequent reforms (starting in 1978), and rapid development and industrialization in many rural areas during the 1980s and 1990s. It would be a mistake to overlook the effects of these past experiences and people's interpretations of their meaning for them on their current aging experiences and contexts.

Finally, I do not reject entirely all facets of some of the traditional theories of aging. For example, a study of aging in rural China need not reject out of hand the possibility that modernization has, on one hand, negative effects on elder status and, on the other hand, many positive effects on a community. Activity and role theory also remind us of the importance of social roles and activities of elderly people and their possible effect on the well being of elderly women and men. But what we learn from decades of research is that these relationships are multi-dimensional, complex, and play

out differently across social groups. Questions about later life, power, and social change should be answered empirically.

In terms of understanding the processes of development, I myself hold a critical modernist perspective forwarded by Peet (1999:197), who argues that there is a need to "rethink the development project rather than discard it" (1999). In past years, development, as "an idea, objective, and activity" (Kothari and Minogue 2002) has come under fire as fundamentally harmful to many of the world's marginalized peoples and as mainly serving the interests of most powerful and advantaged actors (Rist 2002; Escobar 1995; Sachs 1992). I acknowledge that development, especially when conceived only in terms of economic growth, can reinforce or create additional disadvantages, inequalities, and social problems, but I do not dismiss the possibilities that thoughtful development of economic and social institutions can bring improvements to the everyday lives of general (non-elite) populations. Moreover, I take an actor-oriented perspective on development, arguing that development occurs through the decisions, behaviors, actions, and plans of people – rather than through some faceless structural force (see Long 1989). In fact, Croll's observations of China's development and reforms over the past decades led her to argue that peasant *households* (as varied and changing as they can be) are "the locus of much of the rural development process" (1994:x).

Finally we also know from research on Chinese households in previous decades that families often respond strategically to economic and social changes (Davis and Harrell 1993). This general finding can be applied to studies of aging in rural China to hypothesize that elderly people and their support networks have expectations and perhaps strategies concerning challenges of aging during economic reforms, market transition,

and population aging. Davis' work (1982) and Sher's (1984) studies in earlier decades suggest that traditional family supports for elderly are maintained when they are compatible with the interests of current political contexts and power structures. We can use these observations as a warning against assuming any deterministic relationships between political-economic changes, family dynamics, and aging experiences in rural China.

In sum, critical and feminist perspectives on aging and development suggest that a study of aging and development in rural China must seek understandings of the contributions and activities of elderly people in households and village development, their everyday experiences and relations in later life, and differences in the resources and conditions of aging for elderly women and men. My theoretical framework also calls for attention to the political economy of gendered aging in rural China as well as to the role of biography and history in the lives of elders.

Research Questions

Based on the gaps in the literature and informed by a critical-feminist theoretical perspective on aging, I posed two central questions in this dissertation project. I addressed each of these questions through five "sub-questions" or lines of inquiry (Creswell 2003).

1. *How are elderly women's and men's lives shaping and being shaped by local development and social change?* This question inquired into the aging—development relationship at individual, household, and village levels.

To address this first central research question I investigated:

- a. Older women's and older men's day-to-day experiences in a developing village; past and present
 - b. Household conditions, demography, and family living arrangements
 - c. Village conditions and characteristics
 - d. Older men's and older women's activities within households
 - e. Participation and influence of elders in village-level activities
2. *How do elderly women and men understand and anticipate aging in a developing rural village?* This question focused on rural Chinese elderly people's views, understandings, and expectations of later life now and in coming decades.

To address this second central research question I investigated:

- a. Older men's and older women's aging experiences (activities, challenges, reflections)
- b. Older women's and older men's perceived non-economic needs (physical, psychological, social)
- c. Older men's and older women's expectations and strategies for later life support
- d. Older women's and older men's community and household networks
- e. Household power relations and decision-making

Ontology and Epistemology

Underlying this research project is a critical realist understanding of the social world. In other words, I accept the argument that there exists a reality external to and separate from human perceptions, but I take seriously the importance of standpoints, competing perspectives, and how perceptions in turn shape the social world. The feminist epistemology most commensurate with this view is forwarded by Harding (1991:138) in her call for "strong objectivity," – not in the sense of striving for value-neutrality, but in the sense of promoting "less partial and less distorted beliefs." In this case, we currently have little understanding of how China's rural elders perceive, interpret, and possibly respond to the potential problem of China's aging. Knowledge of aging experiences and how they relate to past and continued development in China are necessary complements to "from above" views of China's future population and development challenges. In the case of aging in rural China, researchers and policy makers can benefit from understanding better the daily lives, contributions, and expectations of elders at local village levels, and what current aging strategies and resources suggest about present and future needs. I do not argue that "local" knowledge is more valuable than are "expert" perspectives, but rather that a wider range of views, experiences, and knowledge can contribute to a better understanding of the research issue. I view my study as complementary and part of a larger effort undertaken with other researchers of aging in China and other less developed countries.

CHAPTER 3: SIX MONTHS IN SEVEN MOUNTAINS

Seven Mountains (a pseudonym) was an administrative village (*xingzhengcun*) of approximately 475 households located in southwestern Fujian province. Set in a rolling mountainous area, it was one of numerous villages nestled in the hills along a winding rough road dotted with cement factories and small towns. A main road and two rivers cut across the village, forming three hamlets (*ziran cun*). Many villagers saw themselves primarily as residents of these hamlets, which I fictitiously name Stone Flower, Southern Slope, and Buddha's Peak. As I describe in following chapters, these three hamlets varied in terms of household expenditures and house size, with Buddha's Peak widely considered to be the least wealthy of the hamlets. Socio-geographical division of the three hamlets was related to the agricultural production units of the past, and villagers who lived in Seven Mountains during the 1960s and 1970s continued to identify with and organize themselves within these production units. In other words, both natural and political landscapes continued to shape household identities and residents' affiliations. Families in Seven Mountains traced their lineage back to the same ancestor and male villagers shared a common surname.

Village Amenities

The village was approximately 30 minutes walking distance from the nearest small town, where one could purchase a variety of food, household items, clothes, and other goods. This local town held an outdoor market every five days – in accordance with the traditional lunar calendar – where villagers bought and sold vegetables, fruit, herbs, fresh meat, clothing, livestock, religious items, and miscellanea. Local villagers often waited by the side of the road to catch a bus to the market, but motorbikes

abounded, often transporting three or four people, and large cobalt blue trucks hauling coal or other materials were ubiquitous. Houses and foliage close to the roadside were covered with a layer of dust and soot, and walkers inevitably inhaled black exhaust from passing vehicles.

The village included three general stores that sold household items and several small businesses that provided services such as motorcycle and bicycle repair. Residents could receive mail at one of the local general stores, but they traveled into the nearby town to send an envelope or package. Medical care was available at a small clinic in the village or at one of the nearby towns' small hospitals. Middle school students attended classes in one of the nearby towns as well, while older children attended high school and lived in the nearest small city, about 20 miles from Seven Mountains. Thanks to the recent construction of a highway, Fujian province's capital city, Fuzhou, was only a three or four hour trip by motor vehicle from Seven Mountains, and an air-conditioned tour bus to Fuzhou traveled past the village four times daily.

Village Characteristics

During the appropriate seasons, it was still common to see local people (mainly women) planting or harvesting rice in the field, burning rice straw, or drying rice on the roof tops. Chickens and roosters wandered around and through homes, guard dogs perched at their posts, and pigs and an occasional water buffalo raised an eyebrow at passersby. In the evenings television dramas attracted many viewers, and groups of people sat together chatting or playing *majiang*.

Villagers usually acquired drinking water from the mountain creeks or from wells, since in recent years the river water had become undrinkable due to both household and

industrial waste. New homes had piped water, but others relied on hauled water, and many households used both methods. The river, growing shallower with every passing year, had become a depository for garbage and old clothing.

One of the most striking characteristics of Seven Mountains and nearby villages was the widespread construction of new homes made of brick, cement, and steel. Villagers either built the homes together as families or, if it were financially feasible, they hired workers to do the construction. According to residents, home construction had been increasing for several years, but the “boom” during the period of my research was mainly related to a severe flood during the spring of 2006. With many homes in the village area damaged or washed away, the local government waived certain construction fees and restrictions, prompting families to take advantage of these temporary money-saving conditions.

Village Government and Economy

The local government in Seven Mountains villages included a village committee (*cun wei hei*) comprised of several members and the committee head (*cun zhang*). In addition to the committee head, there was the Secretary of the Communist Party (*cun zhi shu*). (This separation and representation of the Chinese government and the CCP occurs at all higher levels of government as well.) Although village committee members and the Party Secretary are said to be elected, the democracy of the village election in rural China has historically been very questionable, and it is difficult to know to what extent elections in the Seven Mountains adhered to the guidelines set forth by the National People’s Congress in the 1998 *Provisional Organic Law of Villagers’ Committees*. I had at least one conversation with a resident who implied that the integrity of the village elections

was questionable. Officially, the village committee oversaw administrative matters such as management of the budget and public utilities. However, the Party Secretary at village levels often asserts a large amount of decision-making power, and in many cases village committees mainly implement decisions made by the village Party branch (Yang 2003:160). Still, it would seem that some Seven Mountains villagers might have had at least a certain amount of influence in determining who sat on the village committee. In the course of my research, I did not press respondents to discuss elections or to identify specifically the cadres or local political bodies with whom they were dissatisfied, since these inquiries might have required them to indict neighbors and probably would have placed them in an awkward position.

Like many other Chinese villages, Seven Mountains had “industrialized” to a certain extent, but was still mainly agricultural. In the past few decades, local officials had overseen the construction of two cement factories, a coal mine, and a brick factory in Seven Mountains. These township-village enterprises (TVEs) generated income for the local government. Villagers could buy and sell livestock, produce and other goods at the local market, and were free to establish family-run businesses. At the time of this research Seven Mountains’ economy was primarily cash-based, with only occasional trade or bartering between households.

Cultural, Geographical, and Demographic Contexts

Seven Mountains was home to Hakkanese (*kejia*) families, people of Han descent who speak a version of a Chinese dialect, *kejiahua* (not to be confused with *minnanhua*, or “Hokkien”). Local villagers described their Hakkanese culture as being particularly hospitable, friendly, and tending to emphasize the importance of education. While it is

difficult to generalize, this region was probably more likely (rather than less likely) to maintain traditions than were some other areas in the diverse and expansive nation of China. I surmise this because of the hilly geographical terrain that limited outside contact for so many generations, as well as to a general interest in maintaining the cultural identification of Hakkanese. At the same time, Longyan Prefecture was home to Yongding County, famous for its traditional round houses, and it was not unusual to see foreigners *en route* to visit these traditional Hakka earth homes. During the past decade new highways had made Seven Mountains and the Longyan Yongding area easily accessible to tourists, returning migrants, and social scientists. To this extent, the area was most likely becoming less isolated relative to other regions in China.

Although the Hakkanese culture and history is distinct, Hakkanese people are members of the ethnic Han majority and do not engage in kinship structure or arrangements markedly different from those typical of Han Chinese. In other words, women usually marry “out” of their natal homes and go to reside with or near their husband’s family. Three or more generations often live together under one roof, although these conditions may be changing. Lineage is traced through male family members, and in later life it is traditional for parents to reside with their youngest son and his wife. As elsewhere in China, in rare instances – and with some loss of social prestige – a man may agree to marry into a woman’s family and adopt her surname and lineage. (This arrangement is more likely when the woman has no brother to carry on the family line and when the husband who marries into her household has several brothers who are able to continue the lineage of his family.) So although residents of Seven Mountains had their own distinct Chinese dialect, oral language, and historical narratives about their

ancestors, there were no social or family characteristics unusual enough to suggest that later life within this cultural setting would differ from that of other Han due primarily to special customs or kinship structures.

The provincial context of Seven Mountains provides information about the relative wealth of the surrounding regions and the resources available at higher levels of government. In general, Fujian is relatively rich in mineral resources and ranks among China's more economically developed provinces. A wide variety of subtropical crops are grown, including peanuts, bananas, rice, sugar cane, longyan, and litchis. Fishing and aquaculture industries are well developed along the coast, as is electronic manufacturing. The coastal city of Xiamen is classified as a special economic zone (SEZ) and has a history of contact with missionaries and merchants. Fujian residents are also famous for traveling overseas and establishing Chinese restaurants. Further inland where Seven Mountains was located, coal mining, cement production and transportation were common sources of income. Although Fujian is one of the wealthier provinces of China, there are clear disparities between rural and urban areas. The urban coastal region is quite developed and has a history of contact with foreigners, while it is only in recent decades that inland rural areas have become more open to the outside world.

The demography and age structure of the village at the time of this research was difficult to ascertain. Although village records could provide a list of people registered as residents, these data could not reflect the people who were actually regularly present in the village (i.e., who were not "working out" or regularly away studying). Although many households included people at a variety of stages in the life course, it was most common to find elders at home. (Research requiring the presence of junior-aged family

members would have been decidedly more challenging.) Certainly residents did not have a sense that the village was aging rapidly, nor was there evidence to suggest that any marked shift in age structure had begun. Most residents claimed that the oldest villagers were in their early to mid-80s. I suspect that the demographic and age characteristics of Seven Mountains did not differ drastically from that of rural Fujian generally. In *rural areas* alone in 2003, Fujian was assigned an HDI (Human Development Index) of 0.724, with rural life expectancy at 72.54 years, rural literacy rates unreported, and rural per capita GDP at 8,821 *yuan* (1,192 US dollars). (HDI is based on life expectancy, literacy rates, and Gross Domestic Product [GDP]). The reported sex ratio at the provincial level in 2003 was 99.82, meaning that for every 100 boys born, 99.82 girls were born (UNDP China 2005). As of 2000, the total percentage of persons aged 65 and older was 6.54, slightly lower than the national average at that time of 6.96 percent. Overall, in 2003 Fujian ranked ninth out of China's 30 provinces on the Human Development Index, with an overall score of 0.784. A score from 0.800-1 is considered "high," from 0.500-.799, "medium," and from 0.300-0.499, "low.") During the same year, life expectancy was 74.26 years, the literacy rate was 86.45 percent, and per capita GDP was 14,979 *yuan* (2,024 US dollars) (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP] China 2005).

Seven Mountains' Transitions

Like all mainland rural Chinese communities, Seven Mountains had experienced some turmoil and rapid change since the establishment of communist rule and the People's Republic in 1949. As in other areas of China, there were food shortages and famine between the years of 1959 and 1961, in the midst of China's "Great Leap Forward" campaign (1958-1963). It is estimated that nationally around 30 million people

died of starvation during that time (Yang 1996). The Cultural Revolution between 1966 and 1976 was also a difficult and tumultuous era. Beginning in the 1960s, workers in Seven Mountains were organized into communes with village households assigned to one of eight agricultural production units, a system that continued through the late 1970s.

After the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, China turned toward new approaches to national prosperity. The 1978 Open Reform policy allowed China to “open up” to the rest of the world, and the household responsibility system let households choose which crops they would produce and allowed them to keep some profits from their labor in exchange for assuming certain responsibilities from the production unit. Beginning around 1984, loosened restrictions on migration allowed residents to migrate temporarily to cities for work. Since then, wages from residents who “go out” for work in the city, along with increased business opportunities, have brought increased wealth and income to some village households. In 1991, the first village family constructed a brick and steel three-story house, complete with western-style toilets. By the mid-1990s most homes had landline telephones, cellular phones, and color televisions. During the 1990s, the local government also refurbished the local primary school building and augmented it with additional stories.

At the time of this research most Seven Mountains families who could afford to purchase a refrigerator and one or more air conditioners had done so. White-tiled brick and steel homes dotted the village, mixed in with the older traditional yellow-toned earth and wood houses. These township-village enterprises (TVEs) had brought profits for the local government and shareholders, but they had created air and water pollution in the village. Trees surrounding the cement factory were grey with soot as smoke puffed

continuously from the factory towers. In recent years villagers attempted, unsuccessfully, to have the brick factory closed due to pollution. Residents' complaints could not compete with profits from the enterprise.

Research Design and Procedure

My research in Seven Mountains included a combination of methods: Focus groups, a household survey questionnaire, and in-depth interviews. My purpose in employing more than one method was to maximize the quality and depth of data analysis by inquiring into aging in rural China at a variety of levels: community (focus groups), household (survey), and individual (interviews). Additionally, since different methods of inquiry can together produce rich knowledges and insights, my aim was to triangulate findings from different phases in order to understand better the contexts and experiences of aging in the rural area of China (Creswell 2003). There was some overlap in phases with regard to the questions I asked, and also issues which I addressed mainly through a particularly appropriate method.

I conducted this research in three phases over a total of six months between early July 2006 and the middle of February 2007, when I lived with a village family in Southern Slope. (I returned home for a month during that period.). Although I did not engage in formal participant observation methods, my daily life in the village supplemented descriptions and analyses of findings from the research phases. I conducted this research with the help of several different research assistants (a teacher and university students), all of whom were able to speak the local version of a Hakkanese dialect and who posed questions and listened to answers in Hakkanese. Although almost all residents under age 50 were able to speak Mandarin, some of the oldest villagers,

particularly women, spoke only the oral local dialect and were unable to read written Chinese characters. Because this study was focused on elders, it was necessary to communicate in this local dialect in order to avoid alienating participants. In some cases I was able to understand some of the Hakkanese. I occasionally asked questions in Mandarin Chinese, and my daily communications and conversations with villagers was also in Mandarin Chinese.

I scheduled time for translation and cursory analysis of the data between research method phases. In doing this, I was able to rearrange, omit, or add questions in the upcoming research phase(s). In this sense, not only did I triangulate findings from the research phases, but I utilized cursory findings from the previous phase in order to inform the subsequent one. In no cases did I drastically alter research instruments. However, spending time with prior findings before beginning a new phase did help to enrich and clarify my approach in the survey and interviews. By reviewing data in past research phases, I was also occasionally able to ask participants to help me to understand particular social contexts or to interpret apparent contradictions in findings.

Focus Groups

I carried out this initial research phase between August 15, 2006 and August 24, 2006. For the focus group segment of the project, I drew heavily on suggestions from experienced focus group researchers such as Morgan (1998, 1996), Knodel (1995), and Krueger (2000, 1998). Focus groups are appropriate when researchers aim to understand the perspectives of certain individuals and groups, differences in these perspectives, how viewpoints are influenced and by what factors, or when they are hoping to inform subsequent quantitative research designs. Because I was interested in first gaining a

broad understanding of the perspectives of elders in Seven Mountains, how these views might have differed with social identities, and because I hoped to improve my subsequent survey questionnaire, I chose to perform focus groups as the initial phase. In another case I might have chosen to conduct focus groups after a survey or as a final research phase. My choice of sequencing was appropriate to the exploratory nature of my study. The overall purpose of the groups was to generate knowledge of elders' understandings of social change and development in the village and to inquire into possibly gendered experiences and views of aging and development and into the roles of elders in village life. Within the mixed-methods project, the purpose of conducting the focus groups first was to acquaint this "outsider" researcher with themes and issues most important to village elders.

Focus Group Sampling and Composition

Determining how and whom to recruit is a crucial component of focus group design, and must be considered in light of the specific goals of the particular focus groups. Although the point of focus groups is not to represent a population, careless recruitment can still be problematic, particularly when researchers are focusing on a narrowly defined topic or hope to reach a select group (Morgan 1998). Since my purpose was to gain a broad and initial understanding of village elders' views of social change, life experiences, and roles, it was not necessary for me to limit participation to a very select group. All Seven Mountains villagers over age 55 were eligible to participate in the focus groups. I posted advertisements in written Chinese (Hakkanese is an oral dialect only) at four different locations within the village. However, the most effective method of recruitment was by word of mouth, likely because many elder villagers could not read or were not

inclined to stop and read a posted announcement.

Primarily, I used a modified snowball method to recruit focus groups participants. My host family put me in contact with a woman who acted as my liaison and who, by telephone, invited members to participate and bring a friend if desired. My “recruiter” knew that I was aiming for six to eight participants in each group, but in most cases, I was not aware how many people would actually attend until the scheduled time arrived, since respondents tended to say they “might” come or “might” bring a friend. In one group, some confirmed attendees brought friends, resulting in a fairly large focus group of eight. In another case, two people who had planned to attend were unable to participate, resulting in a small focus group of four people. In fact, this small focus group was one of the most productive in terms of conversation and active participation of the members, whereas the larger group did not result in relatively more pages of transcripts. Tables 1a and 1b, which present biographical information about participants, show that focus group size ranged from four to eight participants, with the majority of groups comprised of six people.

Focus groups are designed around *common characteristics* and *break characteristics* (Knodel 1993). Common characteristics of participants were (1) current residence in Seven Mountains and (2) being age 55 or older. Break characteristics were the characteristics by which I segmented the groups, specifically, by sex (female and male) and by age (elders age 55-69 and elders age 70 or older). (I chose to use the age groups 55-69 years and 70 years and older in order to follow the groupings used in prior research on Chinese elders.) The point of segmenting focus groups is to create environments in which participants feel comfortable expressing their viewpoints; large

differences in levels of experiences and power may stifle discussion and make respondents uneasy. In this case, at the research design stage I suspected that elder men's and elder women's experiences would be different enough to warrant separating groups, and that differences in cohort and age experiences could also possibly interfere with the flow of discussion and level of comfort. In retrospect, segmenting by age group was probably not necessary. Rather, it probably would have been more fruitful to segment by socio-economic status (a difficult challenge for an initial research phase in this setting). On the other hand, the approach to topics and the level of confidence in discussion was much different in the men's groups than in the women's groups, confirming the desirability of segmenting groups by sex.

I collected basic biographical information from elders who participated in the focus groups related to education level, perceived socioeconomic status, and health. In order to avoid confusion due to cultural differences in calculating age, I asked for both year of birth and current age. Consistently, respondents reported their age as being a year older than I calculated using the method typical to US culture, indicating the continuation of Chinese tradition in this regard. Women participants' overall average age was 69.9 years old, while that of men's was 70.8 years. Average age of young-elders was 64.0 years old and 66.0 years old for women and men respectively, and 74.9 and 75.0 for old-elder women and men respectively.

There were differences in respondent's education level, self-reported health, and perceived economic conditions. Clearly older women participants had received less education than their male counterparts, especially the old-elder women – only one of whom had received any formal education at all. On the other hand, almost all old-elder

men had received at least a primary school education, with many having gone through or partially completed middle school (US equivalent 9th grade). Differences in education level likely influenced the extent to which participants felt informed and confident in speaking about social issues, the extent to which they were aware of social issues, and the type of insights or solutions they might suggest with regard to topics we discussed. Still, to the extent that focus group questions inquired into participants' experiences of social change and what was important to them, all participants were equally qualified to respond.

In terms of health status, elder men were more likely than elder women to describe their health as "average," and during this phase men reported their health as being lower (an average score of 3 on a 5 point scale) than did women (an average score of 3.38, or just above "average," on a 5 point scale). Overall, young-elder male participants perceived their economic conditions more favorably than all other groups (scoring an average 3.7 on a 5 point scale, or above "average," compared to other groups' scores of approximately 3.1). However, in most cases groups had similar compositions, including people reporting a variety of health and economic conditions. It is worth mentioning that focus group respondents resided mainly in Southern Slope or Buddha's Peak hamlets, a situation not surprising for a snowball sample.

Research Assistance and Research Procedure

My role in the focus groups was mainly that of a facilitator, welcoming participants, offering refreshments, and directing the moderators. The women's focus groups were moderated by two female graduate students in their 20s from Fuzhou University's Department of Sociology. A male law student in his early 20s from the same university moderated the men's focus groups. That the research assistants and I

were a few decades younger than participants might have affected how respondents answered questions, particularly in the extent to which they would have been willing to criticize younger generations or complain about family members in their 20s and 30s. However, our relatively younger age (and my identity as a foreigner) might have been helpful in encouraging respondents to explain past life events, histories, and social conditions in a way more detailed than they would have for their contemporaries. At times, I noted an atmosphere akin to a “story time” or traditional passing along of knowledge, experience, or opinion from older generations to younger generations.

Ideally, I would have moderated the focus groups myself in a context in which I could further explore tangents, engage in probes, and evaluate the significance of “aside” comments. However, due to language barriers it was necessary to have research assistants moderate the groups while I observed and occasionally asked for general translations. As Krueger (1998) indicates, it is highly desirable for focus groups to be conducted in participants’ native language, which in this case was Hakkanese. Additionally, regularly translating questions and answers during the focus groups is unwieldy and not conducive to generating discussion (*ibid.*). Fortunately I was able to attend each focus group session, direct research assistants, and offer the opportunity to answer participants’ questions about my research and about life overseas, which is often not the case in cross-cultural focus group research (Knodel 1993).

We conducted each of the groups in a classroom at Seven Mountains’ primary school on weekdays during late morning hours (between 9 and 11 am). The school was closed for summer holiday during this period, and the morning hours appeared to suit both young- and old-elder participants best by being least likely to interfere with meal

times, meal preparation, and the afternoon resting period. All focus groups lasted approximately one hour. On one hand, asking participants to travel by foot to this location from other parts of the village created an inconvenience for them, and likely prevented elders with physical limitations, very busy schedules, or severe health problems from attending these groups. On the other hand, the choice of any common location would have required most elders to leave their homes. The point of choosing the local school was to provide a neutral setting in which participants could feel safe discussing their viewpoints with minimal concern about non-group members listening. With participants' consent, I audio-recorded these focus groups and research assistants transcribed these sessions from oral Hakkanese into written Chinese, which I then translated into English. I provided participants with refreshments and an incentive of 10 RMB (about 1.50 USD) for participation.

We pre-tested the focus group interview guide with the first focus group of older women. Although the discussions that emerged from this first group were informative and I made no major alterations to the question guide, the experience demonstrated that we would need to strongly encourage only one person to speak at a time. Additionally, while some participants spoke freely and in relative length, others had to be encouraged to share their viewpoints.

Focus Group Questions and Context of Answers

Questions for the focus groups are presented in Appendix A. In designing the questionnaire, I followed the advice of Krueger (1998) and included an “ice-breaker” question, introductory questions, transition questions, key questions, and ending questions, respectively. This approach mimicked a “natural” progression and helped

participants and research assistants to warm up to discussion through the session.

Additionally, the focus group schedule included a variety of question types, some short questions calling for “factual” answers (e.g., “When do elders usually stop doing farm work?”) and others calling for more lengthy discussion.

The social context of questions will shape participants’ answers in style and extent. In the case of these focus groups, it is possible that the relatively public nature of the setting discouraged participants from voicing grievances, making negative comments, or providing information that might have caused embarrassment to themselves or others. It is not possible to ascertain to what exact extent this was the case; moreover, contexts other than the research method must be considered. In other words, depending on tradition or custom, a relatively public setting may have various effects on responses. For example, Morgan (1996) highlights cases in which focus groups resulted in *greater* level of disclosures than in survey interview settings. In my own research experience in US settings, focus groups can also easily transform into “gripe sessions.” However, considering that responses from focus groups were overall more sanguine and positive than responses from other phases, I suspect that, at least in Seven Mountains, elders were less likely rather than more likely to voice negative thoughts and opinions when in a group of peers than when asked questions in a survey or interview.

Focus Groups: Data Analysis

Knodel (1998) points out that focus group analysis is comprised of at least two parts: mechanical and interpretive (Seidel and Clark 1984). The mechanical aspect of focus group analysis entails categorizing the data or “cutting and pasting” so as to organize the data for interpretation. I found *The Ethnograph* software highly useful in

labeling and marking, or coding, data from focus groups. The processes of focus group data coding and interpretation are inevitably subjective; I treated *The Ethnograph* mainly as an organizing tool. Using this program I was able to assign multiple codes to segments of data (phrases, sentences, paragraphs, and more), make comments and reflections on data, and see an overview of my coding scheme or “map.” The software was able to list and organize the themes (as I had determined and coded them) from focus groups and I was able to see how they differed in content and extent among the different groups. It was particularly helpful to be able to assign multiple labels to sections of data while being able to maintain the data in their original context. Additionally, *The Ethnograph* allowed me to “pull up” all quotations which I had labeled under one or more categories.

The process of coding and reviewing focus group data was reiterative and combined with interpretation. I approached analysis of focus group data by reading and re-reading through the transcripts, reflecting on the themes of focus groups, analyzing quotations, and comparing the content of focus groups. As suggested by experienced researchers, focus group data analysis requires the researcher to search for similarities and differences, as well as “patterns” in data. Because another main goal was to inform my subsequent research instruments, I also paid attention to relevant topics unexpectedly raised by respondents and to information suggesting that questions in my current version of the survey or interview questionnaires were inappropriate or incomplete. Additionally, I took notes on the process of conducting focus groups and reflected in journal notes on the overall experience and main insights of the research phase.

The version of *The Ethnograph* which I employed was unable to read Chinese

characters, so I carried out the code-mapping and interpretations on my English translations of the written Chinese transcripts. Using my native language to analyze focus group data facilitated the process for me and was appropriate to the overall purpose of this research phase (generating themes important to elders and learning about general experiences of social change and aging). Had I been interested in analyzing the particular phraseology and words that respondents used to talk about social change and aging, or if the purpose of the groups was to determine very specifically the vocabulary through which elders spoke about their lives, the language difference would have been a larger impediment and *The Ethnograph* software would not have been appropriate.

After I had conducted an initial review of focus group transcripts and noted the major themes, common experiences, and possible divergences related by elder villagers, I turned to revising my survey instrument. Based on the cursory results of focus groups, I added a three-part question to the survey questionnaire regarding issues (village pollution and the lack of an elderly person's activity center) that appeared important to elders who participated in the focus groups. It is important to note that, to the extent that participation was biased due to the sampling procedure, it is likely that the concerns or experiences of certain "types" of elders who were unable or unwilling to participate in the focus groups were not added to the survey instrument, or that the views and silences of participants were overstated in the survey phase, which in turn influenced questions in the interview phase. For this reason it was beneficial that I had done careful preliminary research and compilation of all research phase instruments *a priori* rather than relying solely on one research phase in order to draft instruments for the next phases.

Household Survey Questionnaire

In the second phase of this research, I conducted a survey of 60 households in the village between October 15th, 2006 and November 18th, 2006. Random-sample surveys are appropriate when a researcher wants to describe a population that is too large to observe directly. They are helpful for posing short questions about attitudes, conditions, knowledge, and practices or activities. For this project the purpose of the questionnaire was to generate knowledge about household demographics, economic conditions, possible aggregation of households, plans and current arrangements for elder care, household relations and decision-making practices, and elders' attitudes about family living arrangements and the future. Additionally, I intended the questionnaire to provide information on household dynamics that could be further discussed in the next research phase (in-depth interviews). The reason for placing the survey in the middle of my three-phase research project was so that the instrument could be improved through findings from focus groups and so that confusing or incomplete results could be further explored in the following interview research phase.

Sampling and Participation

For this survey I drew a simple stratified random sample of 60 Seven Mountains households. The sample was stratified by hamlet, meaning that I first divided the population list into hamlets and then randomly drew and surveyed an equal number (20) of households from each region. The purpose of stratifying this sample was to ensure that hamlets were equally represented in the survey. (See Table 2 for a description of surveyed households' characteristics by hamlets.)

Originally I had planned to draw my sample using house numbers. However, many of the newer houses did not have house numbers, and some of the house numbers

on the older homes were in disrepair or missing. Instead, I used a village directory that claimed to list all households in each hamlet, including households with no telephone. (Indeed, several households phone numbers were listed.) After entering the names of all listed householders into an *Excel* spreadsheet, I employed the random generating function in *Excel* software to produce a random list of households for each hamlet. I then progressed down the list during the survey process, surveying the first 20 willing households from each list that included a person 55 years or older living in the household. Because I sampled randomly with replacement, the total number of completed surveys amounted to 60.

In this survey a certain amount of sampling error could have occurred because in some cases, cell phone numbers of household members were included on the listing, meaning that some homes were “double-listed.” To minimize this error, I worked with my main informant who had lived in the village for over 60 years and, through participation on the village council, was familiar with most village households. His knowledge, along with the fact that cell phone numbers were visibly distinct from household numbers, helped to eliminate a number of double listings. It is also possible that households might have been divided during the time since the printing of the directory. However, the directory was less than one year old, and these cases were likely minimal. In short, I minimized the amount of sampling error and non-coverage error as much as possible by investigating the listings and doing my best to ensure that the directory was complete and not redundant.

The woman or man age 55 or older who was born closest to Spring Festival in the household was the target respondent. (See Table 3 for a description of respondent

characteristics by hamlet.) The survey was divided into two sections, the first pertaining to household information and the second pertaining to information about the target respondent. In almost all cases, the target respondent provided answers for both sections. In only a few cases was the respondent not present to answer the questionnaire, and a proxy respondent replied instead.

When the survey itself began, two households elected not to participate in the study, with one target respondent explaining that she was too busy, and another saying that she had already answered questions during the focus groups and did not want to answer questions again. In these cases, we moved on to survey the next eligible and willing household. Additionally, members of one household were all absent at this time. After returning three times, I decided to choose the next eligible household on my list of randomly selected households for that hamlet. In total, only five percent of the 60 households were unwilling or unable to participate in the survey. It is difficult to assert for certain whether these households had in common certain characteristics that would affect the viability of my sample, but perhaps, as I suspect in the focus groups, “busier” elders were less likely to participate in the survey phase.

Segmenting by hamlet showed differences in perceived economic conditions, types of homes, and number of family residents (Table 2). As suggested by my conversations with villagers and my own observations of hamlet conditions, reported income in Stone Flower was the highest, as were levels of household education and number of family members. Villagers told me that the reason for Stone Flower’s relative affluence was due to households’ participation in transportation work. On several occasions people referred proudly to a total of 18 heavy cargo trucks owned by families

in the hamlet, noting that Buddha's Peak boasted few or none. I suspect households' ability to participate in mining and transportation industries was related to family resources and perhaps to slightly larger family sizes in this hamlet. Higher education levels in this hamlet are also likely related to relative wealth, whether as a cause, effect, or both. Buddha's Peak households reported owning rights to the most farm land, having the lowest household incomes, ranking lowest in terms of perceived economic conditions, and having the smallest proportion of households living in new brick and steel homes. These characteristics support the argument that Buddha's Peak remained relatively more agricultural and less industrialized than did the other two hamlets.

While we followed the same protocol in these hamlets as we did in the Southern Slope, Stone Flower and Buddha's Peak included a smaller proportion of women respondents; approximately half the proportion I would have expected (Table Three). As mentioned, my method of selecting target respondents was to choose the person whose birthday fell closest to the Spring Festival, which is in January or February. I observed that it appeared more likely for women to not know their birth month than for men to not know their birth month. In these cases, concerned about an imbalance in the sex of the target respondents, I selected the woman as the target respondent. In other cases, we were told that the husband's birthday was closest to the Spring Festival. Still, men's participation dominated, especially in Buddha's Peak. The unexpectedly large proportion of men could be due to (a) miscalculation (b) inadvertently inaccurate information about peoples' birthdays, or (c) deliberately inaccurate information about people's birthdays.

Survey Instrument and Research Assistance

Questions on the survey instrument were drawn from the National Family Health

Survey II of India as well as from questions posed by researchers at The University of Michigan as part of a study of aging in three Chinese cities conducted by Xie and colleagues. Additionally, I devised questions that spoke to the overall purpose of the survey and would aid me in answering my research questions. A Chinese graduate student in the MSU Department of Education assisted me in translating the survey into written Chinese.

Before beginning the survey, I asked two Chinese colleagues, one host family member, an older village neighbor, faculty at Fuzhou University, and my research assistant to review the instrument and offer suggestions. My host family, neighbor, and research assistant were reluctant to offer substantive suggestions, but once we pre-tested the questionnaire on another neighbor it was apparent that some sections were too cumbersome and time-demanding. Specifically, I had initially planned to ask for an accounting of which chores each family member completed. Listing these activities for each family was difficult for respondents, since they were not in constant contact at all times. Furthermore, I questioned how accurate responses about others' daily activities could be. Additionally, I elected to omit specific questions about sources of income. While assistants assured me it was not rude to ask about income, I noted during the pre-test that asking about overall income was feasible, but that expecting respondents to list how much income came from what sources (farm work, small business, waged work, etc.) was very troublesome to them. Even after removing these more detailed questions, a good proportion of respondents (27 percent) were not willing to report their overall 2005 monthly household income. Occasionally a respondent would say "I don't know," but in most cases he or she would smile awkwardly or say they preferred not to answer. (This

situation occurred more frequently in Buddha's Peak, the most socio-economically disadvantaged hamlet.) Also, questions asking how much income came from farming, pensions, business, gifts, and other sources not only further pressed respondents to answer financial questions, but added to the time required to answer survey questions. The final version of the survey commonly took between 40 and 50 minutes to complete (see Appendix B).

I completed the survey phase with the help of a research assistant who posed questions from the instrument. The research assistant was an English teacher from a nearby village in his early 30s who spoke the appropriate version of the Hakkanese dialect and was able to communicate with me in English and Mandarin. We conducted the surveys in the afternoon, after the typical post-lunch rest period, in order to minimize inconvenience to the respondents. With the help of informants we located the household next on the sample list and determined whether there was a resident age 55 or older in the household. We then asked the resident if they minded participating in the study and explained the average length of time needed to complete the survey. After completion, I provided 10 *yuan* (about 1.50 USD) to the target respondent to thank him/her for participation.

I accompanied the research assistant to all households. While he posed the questions I was able to observe the household living conditions, presence of family members, and affect of the target respondent. I was also able to direct the research assistant and answer any questions regarding the survey instrument or procedures. Of all three phases, I found language differences to be least problematic during this phase.

Household Survey: Data Analysis

Data from the household survey included both qualitative (from open-ended questions) and quantitative types. With the help of a Chinese university student in the English Department at Nantong University, Jiangsu Province, I translated the open-ended questions and analyzed them in a similar way as I analyzed the focus group questions. That is, I looked for common themes and for unique divergences that might be explained by other characteristics of the respondent.

Using *Stata* software, I employed both descriptive and inferential statistical procedures to analyze quantitative data from the survey. In many cases, I was interested mainly in describing the conditions or viewpoints of elders, and so determining frequencies and means was appropriate. However, in order to investigate the relationships between variables I relied on correlations, regression tests, and analysis of variance.

For data with interval or ratio-level response variables I performed analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests, which are special cases of multiple regression analyses (Agresti and Finlay 1997). Here, F = the ratio of the mean sum of squares explained by the independent (between-groups) variable to the mean sum of squares unexplained (within-groups):

$$F = \frac{\text{Between estimate}}{\text{Within estimate}} = \frac{\text{BSS}/(g - 1)}{\text{WSS}/(N - g)}$$

where BSS is the group sum of squares and WSS is within sum of squares., $(g - 1)$ is the degrees of freedom for the grouping variable, WSS is the within – group sum of squares, and $(N - g)$ is the degrees of freedom associated with it.”

The F test statistic tests the null hypothesis that the means of the groups are equal, that is:

$$H_0: \mu_1 = \dots = \mu_g$$

This method assumes that the cells in the cross-classification of variables have normal distributions with identical standard deviations. This test was useful in investigating correlations between variables such as income, target respondent age, and number of household members.

In order to infer explanations about response variables that were categorical and binary, I ran binomial logistical regressions. For example, many of the survey questions asked whether or not a household owned particular appliances, or whether or not target respondents regularly participated in certain activities. Binomial logistic regressions may be run to investigate relationships between such “Yes/No” questions and other factors. Additionally, I found that participants seldom selected the extreme responses listed on Likert scales, such as “Strongly Agree,” or “Very Concerned.” Rather, almost all respondents said that they either agreed or disagreed with statements, and that they were either concerned or not concerned about a particular issue. As such, it was necessary to transform these ordinal data into binary data: “Agree/Disagree” and “Concerned/Not Concerned.”

The basic logistic regression model can be summarized as:

$$\text{logit}(\pi) = \alpha + \beta X$$

and allows us to investigate the probability of a “success” (or positive condition) for all possible X values. The z (or Wald) statistic tests the null hypothesis that the explanatory

variable has no effect on the odds that the response variable equals one. Put another way, we investigate whether we can reject:

$$H_0: \beta = 0$$

It is therefore necessary to correctly code binary data 0 or 1, with 0 representing the absence of a condition and 1 representing the presence of a condition. In interpreting the results of binomial logistic regression, we can examine probabilities or look at the odds of “success” when the explanatory variable carries a certain value or quality.

Finally, for cases in which my response (Y) variable of interest was ordinal, I employed ordered logistic regression analysis. This model is a cumulative logit model that describes the effects of an explanatory variable (X) on all cumulative probabilities for Y, and is also known as the *proportional odds* model. Unlike the binomial logit model and tests such as chi-squared and Pearson’s, it takes into account that categories of the explanatory variable are ordered. The model can be abbreviated as:

$$\text{logit}[P(Y \leq j)] = \alpha_j + \beta X, j = 1, 2, \dots, c - 1$$

and we can test whether the X and Y variables are independent through the z test statistic or with a likelihood-ratio test based on the difference in ($-2\log L$) values with and without the explanatory (X) variable in the model.

Between the second and third phases of my research I primarily examined means, frequencies, and bivariate relationships between variables from the survey phase. I also reviewed open-ended responses and considered conversations that had arisen during

surveys and between myself and my research assistant regarding respondents' replies. Based on points that interested me during the survey process and my cursory review of data, I added two questions to the subsequent interview instrument and labeled two other questions as "optional" or "time permitting." Additionally, throughout the survey phase I had taken note of which respondents appeared to enjoy telling their life stories and who might be able to offer the most interesting insights into experiences of aging, social change, and views of the future in Seven Mountains.

Interviews

In the final phase of this research I interviewed 18 elders (three women and three men from each of the three hamlets) ages 55 and older. I conducted these interviews between January 22, 2007 and February 9, 2007. In designing and conducting this phase, I drew on some suggestions offered by Holstein and Gubrium (1995) in their description of "active interviews." From this perspective, interviews are a process of generating knowledge and are unavoidably influenced by interviewers and other social contexts. Approached moderately, this perspective acknowledges that my own identity and that of research assistants influenced the content of conversations, focal points, and silences. "Active" interviewing also encourages the researcher to pursue relevant topics and engage in more conversational (but still guided) approaches to interviewing.

Interviews are appropriate when researchers want to understand how people "make sense of" their lives, how social phenomena play out in daily life, and how concrete examples can offer insights or challenges for existing academic knowledge. In this project, the purpose of the interviews was to generate knowledge of elderly women's and men's understanding of aging in the midst of a rapidly developing village, of the

level and type of participation in household and village development, their strategies for the future, and how they "made sense" of (a) aging and social change and (b) their role in the household and village and (c) hopes and concerns about the future. The purpose of conducting the interviews as a final phase was to address questions that arose during the survey phase and to provide an opportunity for elders to comment on some cursory research findings and observations from my own perspective.

Sampling and Composition

I selected interview respondents who would be able to offer perspectives from various social locations, and who, during the survey phase, had demonstrated particular interest in talking about their lives. Biographical information on interview respondents is summarized in Table Four. As the table shows, participants included young-elder (ages 55-69) and old-elder participants (ages 70 and above), both married and widowed individuals, as well as respondents reporting different economic conditions. In terms of socio-economic status and age, the overall profiles of interview participants were not markedly different than those of focus groups participants, although male interviewees were on average slightly older (73 years rather than 71 years). All elders whom I approached to participate were willing to participate in the interviews.

Research Assistance and Research Procedure

A male English teacher from a nearby village assisted me in conducting the interviews with men, while a local female university English major posed the questions in interviews with women elders. The point of choosing a woman to interview elder women and a man to interview elder men was to minimize discomfort should sensitive themes have arisen, for example, those pertaining to private medical issues or to spousal relations.

However, in retrospect, although sensitivity to gender-specific embarrassment is important, I suspect that it would have been more fruitful to focus on the research assistant's skills, resources, and interest in the project than on gender identity, *were it necessary to prioritize* (having both appropriate skills and gender identity being ideal).

Because I did not personally conduct the interviews, it was difficult to engage in “active interviewing” to the extent that I would have liked. However, I encouraged research assistants to pursue topics and to probe when they felt a particular comment or story was interesting or in need of further exploration. I determined that this approach was more desirable than conducting the interviews myself in Mandarin or asking research assistants to act as formal translators during the interview process.

In order to minimize inconvenience to interviewees, we conducted interviews in the afternoon after the typical post-lunch resting period. Interviews usually lasted for approximately one hour. I audio-recorded these interviews and my research assistants transcribed the Hakkanese recordings into written Chinese, which I then translated into English. I thanked respondents for participation with 10 *yuan* (about 1.50 USD).

Interview Questions and Contexts of Answers

Interviews were semi-structured and focused mainly on elders' understandings of aging, social change, village development, and personal experiences. A copy of the interview schedule can be found as Appendix C. Depending on the participant, some questions were more or less “successful” in eliciting detailed or in-depth responses.

In many interviews, family members or neighbors were present for at least the initial period. The presence of others likely discouraged participants from voicing negative comments or concerns about family, although this was not always the case. At

other times, the presence of family, neighbors and peers resulted in short side conversations that added to the data and provided new information. In any case, the social context of the interviews certainly influenced the content of participants' narratives, and factors such as researcher and research assistant identity, presence of others, or even time of day likely created a unique set of advantages and disadvantages in the interview process.

Interviews: Data Analysis

I returned to *The Ethnograph* software in order to analyze interview data. Compared to the focus groups, interviews were focused less on generating themes than on encouraging elders to produce narratives, provide examples of how social change and aging experiences shaped their lives, talk about their role in households and village, and offer perspectives about current conditions and the future. As I did in analyzing the focus groups, I began by using *The Ethnograph* to organize and re-organize data through coding and mapping. The process of organizing and interpreting was reiterative. Although I paid attention to divergences and convergences in the interview transcripts, my sampling was purposive and the point was to provide examples, lessons, and insights, and to suggest areas for further study rather than to present respondents as representatives of their particular age group, gender, or class. Again, the ease of labeling and organizing quotations under one or more topic was helpful.

In most ways, organization of interview data mimicked my organization of focus group data. However, in interpreting data I focused more on understanding the respondents' experiences and viewpoints within their biographical context. In the case of interviews, the unit of analysis was the individual rather than elders as a group of people

within a particular age range. My goal was to understand interviews and data from interviews as separate cases, and then ask how these cases (individual lives), in the context of other findings, provided insights for answering my research questions.

Being in the last phase of research, I was able to consider these data in light of the overall project. For this reason my analysis was inclined to be more comparative and holistic than my analysis of surveys and focus groups. I was also not oriented toward understanding how the interview data could improve a subsequent research instrument, but rather how the interview data added to or challenged existing data from the project.

Notes on Mixed-Methods Analysis and Presentation

After each phase of research and at the conclusion of the data production phase it was necessary to analyze findings from each respective phase independently. However, a second step, integrating these findings from all three phases, was then required. Although triangulation was reassuring when findings were confirmed across phases, points of apparent contradiction and confusion in the findings gleaned from various methods were particularly fruitful because they demanded sustained contemplation. Coming across a possible contradiction in findings from phases, I paused to consider “How can we explain this?” rather than assuming that some findings were “wrong,” inaccurate, or due *only* to different sampling techniques and contexts. Utilizing a number of methods highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of each approach. I consider the increased transparency of particular methods’ weaknesses to be a positive characteristic and one that encourages integrity in the processes of research and analysis.

In this study, none of the three methods I utilized could have stood alone to adequately answer my research questions. Because I reached my arguments and

conclusions through integration of data from all three findings, I chose to present my findings in a similarly holistic way. The chapters in the dissertation are therefore organized by substantive topic rather than by method. Had I chosen the latter style of presentation, my conclusions would have been incomplete and probably fragmented.

Finally, the experience of engaging in mixed-methods research reaffirmed the problematic nature of the common quantitative/qualitative methods distinction. First, although data themselves can be quantitative or qualitative, a method in itself (or even a style of analysis) perhaps should not be described as such. For example, focus groups and interviews, often considered to be “qualitative methods,” produced quantitative data in response to questions such as “How many children do you have?” and “At what age do most elders stop doing farm work?” The survey, often considered to be a mainstay of quantitative methods, produced a goodly amount of qualitative data, not only from open-ended questions but in responses to “typical” survey questions. In fact, analyzing qualitative data from surveys calls for more sophisticated statistical models. I suggest that more attention be paid to the scale of research (e.g., differences in large-scale surveys and small-scale surveys), and to appropriate application of findings (whether the researcher attempts to generalize to all people of a certain social identity based purposively selected interviews) rather than to the extent to which responses are comprised of numbers or of words.

Definitions and Measurements

At what age one becomes “old” or “elderly” is socially and even individually defined. However, villagers agreed that most people in Seven Mountains were grandparents by the time they were age 55. Therefore, in this dissertation I use the terms

“elder” and “older person” to refer to people aged 55 years and above. I distinguished between “young-elders” (age 55 to 69 years-old) and “old-elders,” (ages 70 years old and above) acknowledging that this distinction, like any I might have made, is somewhat arbitrary. Many scholarly studies of aging categorize older people into three age groups. However, because so few Seven Mountains elders were over the age of 80 years by US standards, I opted to collapse the commonly used categories of “young old,” “old,” and “oldest-old” into two categories. Also, I prefer to use the term “elder” rather than the adjective “elderly” to describe older villagers, since I believe it minimizes negative connotations of frailness and antiquity and encourages more respect than does the term “old.”

Throughout my research and this dissertation I use the terms “development” and “economic development.” How development is best defined as a topic has been contested, analyzed, and re-imagined in a number of volumes (Rist 2002; Sen 2000; Peet and Hartwick 1999; Jackson and Pearson 1998; Martinussen 1997; Sachs 1992). Moreover, discussions about what development “is” have often been conflated with discussions of what development “should be” or “could be,” and it is not uncommon for development to be portrayed either extremely positively, as a means by which people come to enjoy higher standards of living and health, or extremely negatively, as a means by which domestic or (post-) colonial powers oppress some social groups or nations.

In conceptualizing this project, I use a very broad definition of development: “the structural and behavioral changes that a society undergoes in the process of acquiring an industrial system of production or distribution” (Chow and Lyter 2002:25). Development as I understand the term therefore has at least two aspects; a structural

aspect (e.g., new buildings, roads, utilities, technology) as well as a social aspect (e.g., changes in behaviors, human relations, labor forms, and occupations). Cases in which I refer to “economic development” indicate growth in wealth and income. This concept is measurable to a large extent by noting increases in production and income at local levels or, at a national level, by noting gross domestic product (GDP). I avoid using the term “modernization” as a proxy for social or economic development, since the concept has historically reflected “First World” beliefs about the necessary characteristics of a modern society – usually being those same characteristics that describe Westernization (see Huntington 2002; Myrdal 2002). Finally, I define agricultural development as a set of technologies and practices aiming for increased efficiency and crop yields, including innovations such as irrigation and high-yielding seeds. The process of de-agriculturalization, evident in Seven Mountains, involves changes in land use and subsequent loss of farm land, less participation in agricultural work, and smaller proportions of income stemming from farm labor.

However, since one of my goals was to understand how older villagers defined and understood for themselves such a contested concept as “development,” I deliberately did not offer a definition of these concepts in my lines of questioning. As I argue in Chapter Four, elders’ answers to questions about development in focus groups and again in interviews suggested that they already held a particular common conception of development, which I hoped to ascertain rather than to assert myself. In line with this goal of understanding elders’ perspectives, I did not attempt to operationalize or measure development that had occurred in Seven Mountains. Rather, I asked older villagers to talk about what kinds of development had occurred (if any), whether they felt it had

influenced their lives, and whether they felt older villagers did or could influence development in the village and at a national level. Later, in my analyses, I make my own argument about the extent to which elders affect village development and social change according to their definitions and according to my definitions. At a national level, whether and how China's elderly population influences "development" or "economic development" is in fact a main point of discussion that I address in my analyses.

Finally, another concept that required clear definition was *socio-economic status* (SES), which can also be termed "class." Following sociological tradition, I regard SES as multi-dimensional, including not only income, but also educational achievement, prestige, wealth, and power (Johnson 2000:299). Data generated in focus groups and interviews suggest that older villagers perceived an increase in SES inequality in recent decades. I discuss this topic further in Chapter Four.

Measuring SES is a challenging task in any project, and my research in Seven Mountains was no exception. The household survey provided data on household income, highest attained education level within the household, household expenditures, house type (e.g., new brick and steel or earth), household appliance ownership, and perceived economic conditions. The data on household income was difficult to acquire since respondents were in many cases reluctant to provide that information. Additionally, education level of household members was largely a function of the age of household members and is therefore an unsuitable measure upon which to base an assessment of household SES. However, data on household expenditures probably offer valid insight into households' economic conditions, as do data on the building materials used to construct the home. In my analyses I employ these variables, and I especially give

attention to the variables of household appliance ownership and respondents' perceived household economic conditions. I argue that ownership of appliances such as water heaters, motorbikes, and dish sanitizers reflects household income (purchasing power) as well as household wealth (ownership of assets). According to my informants, household appliances were also related to prestige, since many households would purchase certain items (especially a refrigerator) in order to advertise or gain social prestige. The focus on respondents' perceived economic conditions is also commensurate with my theoretical framework, which emphasizes the significance of respondent experiences of later life and social change.

The survey questionnaire required additional definitions of terms and measurements. One concept that required a firm definition was that of a "household." In deciding on a final working definition for this term, I consulted with villagers and my survey research assistant also periodically asked actual respondents for their ideal definition. We found a consensus that "household" referred to people regarded as family who, unless away for school or work, eat together daily or almost daily around the household table.

In the survey instrument, I also asked respondents to identify the head of households, and in each case the oldest family member was named. Although it was important to know that many villagers consider the eldest person to be "head" by tradition, my choice to defer to local definitions of a head of household made it difficult to assess who in the family, if anyone, provided the main income and had primary decision-making power (which is often how heads of households are understood in my own culture). It was also difficult to categorize households into common typologies in

which elder people are or are not considered dependents, as I had hoped to do. However, I decided it would have been even more problematic to ask the target respondent to utilize my own definition of a head of household if they did not understand it in a similar way.

Finally, the survey questionnaire included a series of questions that comprise a depression scale. I acquired this scale from a study conducted by Sun (2004) that investigates depression levels of urban elders in Baoding City, China. Sun utilized this shorter (14 item) version of a depression scale from the Center for Epidemiologic Studies. Seven of the 14 items address somatic complaints (e.g., difficulty eating and sleeping), three items inquire about positive affective symptoms (e.g., feeling happy), three inquire about negative affective symptoms (e.g., feeling lonely), and one item asked about personal relationships (feeling disliked). As in Sun's study, the items are assigned four labels (1-4) related to the frequency in which elders experienced them: *often*, *sometimes*, *rarely*, and *never*. I recoded the negative items to reflect accurately higher levels of depression. When all questions on the scale were answered, the minimum score was 14, reflecting a lower level of depression, and the maximum score was 56, suggesting a higher level of depression. Sun (2004) found that the reliability coefficient for the overall depression score was .84, suggesting good overall internal consistency (567).

The Research Experience: Challenges and Limitations

I encountered various challenges during my sixth months of research in the village. In this section I review the few challenges I mentioned above, discuss some other challenges, and suggest how they may have influenced the research findings. I also

discuss some additional challenges and some ethical issues I faced in planning and conducting the research.

First, some elders whom I asked to participate in focus groups declined, explaining that they were too busy. In some cases participants, especially women, were also careful to ensure they would be home in time to prepare lunch or dinner, but it is likely that the busiest elders were unable to attend and share their viewpoints. Focus groups are not meant to be representative of a population or to allow us to generalize about a population, but self-selection is important to note because it is possible that themes most relevant to very busy elders did not arise clearly in this phase. This concern extends to elders who were not physically mobile enough to attend a focus group, whether due to health problems or to physical limitations.

Second, an expected challenge in conducting the household survey was ensuring the quality of the sample. I drew names from the village directory, which in some cases listed more than one man in the household, especially when a son or father owned a personal cell phone. Before drawing my sample, I worked with my major informant to remove the “extra” person from the village directory and thus see that each household was listed only once. However, there is still the possibility that some households were over-represented, thus creating sampling error.

Third, during the household survey phase, one of the most obvious challenges was ensuring that a roughly equal number of women and men participated as target respondents. In actuality, the number of male target respondents ended up constituting two-thirds of the respondents rather than the desired one-half. I worried that this inadvertent or deliberate lack of representation for women reflected the same sentiment

that I found in focus groups, namely, that elder women were less able to “talk” and to contribute to my research.

Next, during inquiries, it was common for other people to be present in addition to the key respondent. Likely the presence of others encouraged participants to suppress or express particular viewpoints. Different methods of inquiry also may encourage particular responses, as do different time and place contexts. This situation was obvious in one case in which an elderly man mentioned suicidal thoughts while he was responding to the survey questionnaire. A few months later when we returned to conduct an interview with him, he was resolutely disinterested in discussing any feelings or negative psychological states. This discrepancy could have been due to the fact that a neighbor was present during the initial few minutes of the interview or because his conditions or feelings had changed. Interestingly, this situation pointed out how surveys, sometimes characterized as being less “personal” or “emotional” than are interviews, can indeed elicit in-depth responses from participants. Indeed, perhaps research setting and environment is just as important as method of inquiry in determining the knowledge produced at a certain time of inquiry.

Finally, conducting research in Hakkanese was necessary and advisable in that it did not exclude elderly participants who did not speak Mandarin Chinese. However, because I do not speak Hakkanese I was not able to participate in as much of a discursive manner as I would have liked, particularly during focus groups and interviews. I was able to understand the basic themes of discussions and I asked my research assistants to occasionally translate throughout the course of the discussions or interviews, but had I been able to more clearly understand participants’ replies at the time, I would have

pursued comments certain themes and comments in more detail. My more active participation likely would have produced slightly different (but perhaps not necessarily “better”) data, or even allowed me to explore themes that may have directed the final product of my research in a different direction.

I also experienced two challenges which I have not addressed. One of the challenges that I least foresaw was the need to reassure and explain to research assistants and villagers that the viewpoints of elderly women in the village were indeed important to the project even though many of them had no formal education or only attended primary school for a few years. Well-meaning people around me were concerned with helping me find elderly women and men who “could talk” or who were relatively well-educated in order to participate in focus groups. Although the focus group questions centered on villagers’ experiences and everyday lives, some participants were themselves insistent that they did not understand social issues and could not contribute to the discussions. As such, the views of some of the elderly villagers who were not considered eloquent or knowledgeable may have been absent from these focus groups.

Also, throughout this research it was difficult to assess the extent to which participants genuinely felt grateful to the Communist Party rather than feeling that they must express loyalty and appropriate language about China’s political history and current contexts. In any project the researcher must deal with the issue of “appropriate” responses, but in the case of the People’s Republic of China it may be that respondents felt the necessity to praise the government or at least refrain from criticizing the Party or central policies. I had to rely on my own reading and judgment of the situation, as well as advice from colleagues, to determine the extent to which respondents were sincere in

their praise of the CCP versus to what extent they were repeating the “party line.” I kept this context in mind in analyzing findings from the research phases.

Ethical Issues

In the course of conducting this research I strove to minimize negative effects of this project on participants and other villagers. One of my concerns was the project’s potential to provoke conflict within families, especially in cases where an elderly person complained of level of family support or of the household relations. Although I encouraged survey and interview questions to be asked just in the presence of myself and a research assistant, it was sometimes difficult or awkward to create this setting, and in some cases would have been more disruptive, suspicious, or offensive to ask others to leave. Respondents had the option of answering the questionnaire and interview questions in various rooms in their own home or in a nearby outside location. I also tried to create some reciprocity and reassurance by offering to answer any questions about my own life, experiences, or knowledge about elders’ lives in the United States.

During the survey and interviews there were times when respondents expressed sadness, usually with regard to past conditions or current family relations. At these times, I asked the research assistant to remind the participant that answering any and all questions was voluntary. In one case, for example, we moved on to another section in the survey and later returned to the line of questioning after the respondent became very emotional when answering questions about her loneliness. Another woman, for example, became very tearful when discussing her husband’s recent death. In these cases I expressed sympathy and did not press participants to continue.

A final ethical issue that invoked constant challenges was the moderately higher social status of my host family and the related need to avoid direct host family involvement in recruiting participants and helping to conduct the actual research. Although my host family did not belong to the wealthiest segment of the population, two family members had advanced degrees, which was unusual in the village and resulted in high prestige (although probably not in extremely unusual amounts of power or wealth). Moreover, the head of the household was involved in the village council and received an envied monthly government pension after retiring from work as a primary school teacher. Had my host family members helped to directly recruit and conduct research, it is possible that other villagers might have felt coerced or pressured into participating or unwillingly disclosing personal information. Still, one of the greatest challenges was adequately explaining to my hosts and other villagers why I was not better utilizing the resources of my host family. At times my behavior probably appeared highly unusual at best, and insulting and suspicious at worst. Custom also detracted from the efficacy of my pre-meditated explanations. For example, since the definitions of “family” in rural China vary with those of the US, villagers could suggest that I employ a person as a research assistant who, in my view was certainly a family member but who, in the eyes of local people, was outside the family (having been born to a daughter) – a situation requiring additional difficult explanations and negotiations. In short, at times I found myself contemplating the extent to which the ethical solutions of my own society were in fact creating ethical problems in the research setting. Still, through careful attention to these challenges, I trust that I was able to minimize disadvantages to research participants and informants.

CHAPTER 4: “VILLAGES HAVE ELECTRIC LIGHTS”: ELDERS AND RURAL CHANGE

Yellow mud houses, some on the brink of collapse, stood next to many of Seven Mountains’ new white and pink three-storied brick and steel homes. Without resources to tear down old homes, families simply built and moved into new houses next to the earthen structures that had sheltered previous generations. Weeds and wildflowers poked out from the doorways of some of these older buildings, beckoning the occasional curious rooster. Others were home to household rabbits and chickens or were utilized as storage rooms. Also abandoned were the small structures which at one time served as outhouses, their floors now lain with dusty, cracked wooden boards. They had been made obsolete by indoor flushing floor toilets and Western-style commodes.

These old buildings were monuments to the stark and rapid changes that had occurred in Seven Mountains in the past few decades. With the 1990s came widespread coal-powered electricity, first to larger surrounding towns and then to Seven Mountains. This fulfilled dream of electricity allowed villagers to buy refrigerators, air conditioners, televisions, and other appliances such as dish sanitizers for use in their new houses. Such physical changes accompanied shifts in daily life, family structures, community relations, and political organization. People living through these transitions had perspectives and interpretations of them particular to their experiences and thus, in some ways, dissimilar to “expert” observations.

This chapter describes village, hamlet, and household changes as recounted by the residents of Seven Mountains who were entering later life in the midst of those continuing rural transitions. I asked which changes were important to elders, how they

saw these changes affecting their own lives and futures, and how elders understood “development” as a concept and influence in their current lives. I found that older villager’s descriptions and interpretations of the past helped to explain and shape their views and expectations of the present (and, as I argue in Chapter Six, of the future as well). These insights add to an understanding of the relationships between China’s aging population, economic development, and future challenges.

The first section of this chapter is primarily descriptive, relating older villagers’ stories and interpretations of social changes and economic development in Seven Mountains. In the second half of this chapter I discuss these findings, synthesizing major themes and examining divergences and convergences. In particular I focus on how elders’ definitions of rural change and economic development influence evaluation of their living conditions, and on how increased wealth in the village promotes experiences of disadvantage, shaping elders’ level of satisfaction with current conditions. Based on my inquiries into elders’ experiences and perspective, I also suggest that gender interacts with rural change so as to shape aging experiences differently, and yet does so within particular political-economic contexts. In the end, I point out ways that these findings add to and challenge understandings of aging in rural China. Personal observation and survey responses provide some basic information on household and village changes; however, narratives from interviews and discussions from focus groups play the most significant role in indicating elders’ view of changes within their families and communities – the focus of this chapter.

Seven Mountains: Contexts of Aging and Development

Results from the random survey of households indicate that village households (*in which older people resided*) included an average of 5.4 family members. Because elders' homes were likely to house multiple generations and be relatively large, we can note the 479 households listed in the village directory and estimate that no more (and likely fewer) than 2500 individuals had registered residence in the three hamlets under Seven Mountains' jurisdiction. According to the village directory at the time of this research, approximately 48 percent of all households (231 households) were located in Southern Slope, 36 percent (172 households) were in Buddha's Peak, and 16 percent (76 households) were in Stone Flower hamlet.

Without the benefit of longitudinal research and careful reliable records, demographic changes in Seven Mountains over recent decades were difficult to ascertain. Locals assured me that official records were dubious at best. However, residents agreed that the village population had certainly increased in the last few decades due to greater longevity. Of course, with new opportunities for family members to migrate temporarily to cities, some houses were relatively empty on a day-to-day basis. Additionally, there was more opportunity than previously for younger family members to receive high school and university educations, which meant that they too were often absent from home.

Like many rural areas of China, Seven Mountains displayed signs of de-agriculturalization, "townization," or "urbanization" (Guldin 2001). New houses were the most apparent mark of change and economic development on the landscape, as farm land, mainly in the form of rice paddies, was slowly disappearing with continued construction. Of all elders' households surveyed, 76 percent reported farming less land

than they had five years ago, and none reported an increase in farm land over the past five years. The average amount of land farmed by households who farmed less land than they did five years ago was 2.73 *mu* [0.45 acres], compared to the 2.78 *mu* [0.46 acres] average of households farming the same amount of land. In most cases, households “lost” this farming land when they built a new house or otherwise altered the land surrounding their home. Still, the target respondents who described their household economic conditions as being adequate or better than adequate tended to come from households with relatively more land than those housing poor respondents. All of the elders who said their households were “well-off” came from households that owned above the average amount of land.

Changes to the village and in household life were also evident by the variety of buildings I saw on my walks through the village. This variety not only marked the progression of social change and village development but also indicated diversity in socio-economic status. Structures in the three hamlets included several kinds of buildings:

1. Toppled, unoccupied earth buildings (homes and outhouses)
2. Buildings on the verge of toppling, some occupied (homes and outhouses)
3. Empty earth buildings, apparently still stable (homes and outhouses)
4. Earth buildings that housed only livestock
5. Older earth homes without many decorations, occupied
6. Older earth homes with decorations, occupied
7. Newer (post-1978) earth homes with few decorations and unfinished

- floors, occupied
8. Newer (post-1978) earth homes, decorated and with finished floors, occupied
 9. Unfinished brick and steel homes, unoccupied
 10. Unfinished brick and steel homes, occupied
 11. Finished brick and steel homes with few decorations, few appliances, and no painted or tiled exterior, occupied
 12. Finished brick and steel homes with external paint or siding and modest interiors, occupied
 13. Finished brick and steel homes with paint or siding and relatively affluent interiors, occupied

Survey respondents often reported that their households owned two homes: An older earth home and a modern-style brick and steel home. In some cases, family members returned daily to their previous house (which might be adjacent to their new home) in order to feed resident livestock or fetch water from the well still located there.

Survey results suggest that the monthly income of elders' households had increased markedly over the past twenty years, from a reported average of 583 *yuan* (about 78 US dollars) in 1985 to a reported average of 3475 *yuan* (about 463 US dollars) in 2005. Inequality in household income has also increased, with reported monthly income standard deviation increasing from 659 *yuan* (about 88 US dollars) in 1985 to 6388 *yuan* (about 852 US dollars) in 2005. Per capita, average incomes were 7698 *yuan* (about 1,026 US dollars) annually in 2005. This figure was greatly inflated by two

households in the sample (one located in Stone Flower and the other in Southern Slope) who claimed a monthly income of 30,000 *yuan* (about 4,000 US dollars) earned by 13 and five household members, respectively. I chose to include these households in the calculations as they represented the new found possibilities of rural households becoming uncommonly wealthy through business ventures and advanced education.

A small change in the number of elder households owning livestock was indicated by the household survey, with all households owning livestock five years ago, shifting slightly down to 98 percent reporting they currently owned livestock in 2006. Elder households appeared less likely than before to sell or trade livestock as well, with a reported 35 percent selling or trading livestock in 2006, but a reported 71.67 percent selling or trading livestock five years previously. Stone Flower elder households less frequently reported selling livestock, but this difference was not statistically significant. Status of a household that sold/traded livestock or that stopped selling/trading livestock was *not* significantly related to perceived household economic conditions, household education level, or house type. This decline in sales of livestock came mainly from fewer households selling fowl and pigs. Likely, many households did not need the extra money that came from sales of these small animals and preferred to raise animals only for household consumption. These changes in income, land use, and livelihood all support the suggestion that Seven Mountains was gradually becoming “de-agriculturized” or “urbanized.”

Brick and steel homes not only produced markedly different aesthetics than did the yellow earth homes of the past, but they shaped and reflected different living arrangements and social relations. The architecture of new homes facilitated a different

type of lifestyle than did the older earth homes, which were often comprised of small dim rooms surrounding an open inner courtyard where household members cooked, washed clothes, bathed, and did other chores. Many of the earth homes still standing housed multiple extended families and shared communal spaces and wells. Elders living in older style houses had small rooms connected to those belonging to other (non-family) householders, living in very close proximity on a daily basis.

On the contrary, although three or more generations may have lived in the newer homes, families with new houses lived further distances from other households. New homes often had an outer yard space and a porch on which to sit where the family might hang large red lanterns or other decorations. Inside the larger new homes were foyers and sitting rooms where family members greeted and entertained guests. The amount of living space in older homes and of newer homes also varied, with some new homes being surprisingly large. At least one newer home in which I interviewed consisted of 40 rooms spread out among three stories. New homes usually included more modern appliances and accoutrements in comparison to the older homes. Still, of all elder homes surveyed, 70 percent owned motorbikes and 83.33 percent owned color televisions. (Households that reported poor economic conditions were less likely to own these items.) Even villagers living in old earth homes were able to watch stations in Longyan, Fuzhou, as well as all of the national Central Chinese Television (CCTV) stations. Some homes, both earth and brick, even had satellite dishes that allowed them to watch international broadcasts.

"Now Life is Better": Elders on Village and Household Changes

One of my main research objectives was to understand how older women and older men understood and viewed village and household changes of recent decades. To do so, I began by posing general questions in the focus groups, mainly asking for descriptions and reflections. I found that in discussing changes to their village and hamlets, elders in Seven Mountains were likely to initially point out physical landscape transformations. They quickly told me, “Just look...I can see...you can see...” Repeatedly, elders first indicated the construction of new houses, two cement factories, a brick factory, and a calcium refinery. Although no new schools or clinics had been built, elders were proud of the additions and aesthetic improvements to the local primary school. It was common for participants to say that everyone, or almost everyone, now owned new homes or vehicles. The permanent paved construction of the main road, with which residents had battled for decades through floods and natural forces, was also a very significant change often highlighted by respondents.

A second important theme in elders’ initial narratives of social change was that of political shifts. In order to allow elders’ themselves to explain how they categorized and understood historical and biographical shifts, my discussion questions referred very generally to “recent changes” rather than to changes in certain year periods or eras. However, many elders indeed recounted the past decades in terms of the wider political shifts commonly delineated by textbooks and scholars: Before Liberation, after Liberation, the early 1960s, the Cultural Revolution, the collective era, the open reform and Deng Xiaoping era, and so on. Their responses confirmed that political eras and policies had, and continued to have, a major influence on their lives, particularly through changes in the organization of labor and related levels of income and wealth. This

narrative from a 78 year-old male interviewee who had worked as a teacher was typical, especially for elder male respondents:

During the period the *Guomindang* (KMT) ruled, life was quite difficult. There was no public road and no electricity. After Liberation the social atmosphere was very good. In 1966 the Cultural Revolution started and social change was very chaotic. Afterwards during the open reforms, life slowly became better. There was a public road and electricity.

Men were especially likely to recount and connect political changes to their own careers and to waged work and “outside” affairs, as did this respondent:

I became a soldier and then was a production team chief. After a year, [a nearby hamlet] and Southern Slope hamlet were combined and called Seven Mountains team, and then were called Seven Mountains village. Before, production teams needed to pay 5 percent of the production expenses. At that time the leader of the production team earned 70 or 80 *yuan* per year. Now, Seven Mountains has changed a lot. There are paved roads crossing here and there. Cars come and go, there are more motorbikes than there used to be bicycles. The living standard of village people has risen greatly. The level of consumption has also risen.

Another prominent theme in focus groups and interviews emerged as elders spoke of new-found opportunities to make money and receive an income. They asserted that the overall situation of all villagers had improved, particularly since the days of the collective system and production teams. One young-elder woman’s comments are exemplary:

Now we have entered the market. It's very good. We opened up. You can buy whatever. If you have money you can make a profit People who can make money, they just do it.

Compared to previous eras, there was money by which to start businesses and send grandchildren to high school and university. Moreover, these money-making opportunities were not limited to younger family members. Quite a few respondents

(26.6 percent) and older villagers with whom I spoke grew vegetables and easily sold them to workers at the local coal mine. They expressed satisfaction at being free from the production team's control of their labor and their relative ability to work to support themselves.

In many elders' descriptions of current conditions there was even a sense of abundance; the claim that "everyone has everything." Fresh flowers, television, cars, refrigerators, washing machines, and a seemingly endless supply of rice were things that village elders listed in their descriptions of the modern accessories of daily life. One woman described her home as "heaped full" and lacking nothing. The combination of recent rapid physical transformations in the village, developments in technology, and the comparative difficulties of the past had resulted, for some elders in Seven Mountains, in a sense of having seen dreams come true. In a focus group an old-elder man recalled that

[t]here used to be a line from a song: "The villages have electric lights and telephones." Now it is a reality, now every house has electric lights and telephones! We even use cell phones!

Still, elders perceived and experienced inequality between households, among hamlets, and across Seven Mountains, other villages, and urban areas. In Seven Mountains, 8.33 percent of elders labeled their households as "very well-off," 26.67 percent said their families were "somewhat well-off," 38.33 percent said their households had "enough for expenses" and 26.67 percent said there was "not enough" to cover expenses. In the household survey, only 45.0 percent (not a majority) of elders reported that their family had built a brick and steel home, 41.67 percent said they lived in an earth home built before 1978 and 13.33 percent of their homes were made of earth but built

after 1978. In my walks through the village, it was clear that compared to Southern Slope and Stone Flower, fewer families in Buddha's Peak hamlet were in the process of constructing new homes. Stone Flower's new homes appeared most massive and magnificent in design. In some cases, two or more brothers built a home together. They had separate entrances and kitchens but the overall building size was massive. (In Seven Mountains, the ideal house height was three stories, with less wealthy families building one- or two- story homes, sometimes with the intent of adding an additional story when financially feasible. However, driving through other regions of Fujian and rural China, I saw village standards of four- or five- story houses and variety in the extent to which most homes had external embellishments.)

The conveniences of daily life were another clear significant theme in elders' description of changes in household and village life. They described transportation as fast and convenient, using gas (rather than firewood) stoves to cook rice as easy, and noted that "whatever you think of, you can buy." Piped water from the wells and mountains had made the chores of cooking and washing clothes much easier, and the official opening of a permanent paved road through the village, along with public transportation to nearby towns, allowed elders to quickly transport groceries, sell vegetables, and visit with friends. In the past, these same people carried goods to sell or trade on shoulder poles, sometimes very long distances. A solid rain made travel on the roads by bicycle impossible.

Elders' accounts suggest that tasks typical for both men and for women had been made easier. Although both women and men performed farm work in years past, elder men more often discussed the relative ease of hauling fertilizer and performing other

“outside” work and repairs, while older women talked about the past troubles of fulfilling responsibilities of cooking, shopping, and sewing. Like many of her peers, Mrs. Tang (a fictional name, like all others in this dissertation), a 69 year-old woman living in Buddha’s Peak hamlet, recalled that:

life before was really bitter. I would buy one water jug to use to bring back wine. Because there was no road, I used my head to carry the jug home. Before there was only one store. You had to ask a person in order to get sugar, oil, and salt. Before everything required manpower to do, but now it's not necessary. There is a road and you can travel by car. Life is much better.

Mrs. Chen of Southern Slope, 78 years old, suggested that fulfilling age-based duties and responsibilities had become easier than they were during her youth:

Before I had to prepare the fire for my parents and get them water to wash their hands and feet. Now life is good. My children directly buy water or an electric radiator for me. It's much more convenient.

Elders’ discussions went beyond talking about the enjoyment of the convenience of present life to relate a strong sense of relief from the extreme bitterness and hardship of past years. Even respondents who expressed dissatisfaction with their living conditions said that current living conditions were better than those of the past, noting that although life was currently “not so good,” it was better now than before. In both interviews and focus groups, older villagers spoke happily of having enough rice and vegetables, as well as being able to enjoy meat, usually pork or fowl, on a regular (even if not a daily) basis. Older villagers also often enjoyed locally grown seasonal fruits such as tangerines, grapefruit, bananas, longyan, and litchis. They commented that their clothing was no longer ragged and that they seldom worried about having daily necessities. These conditions were starkly different from those during the production

team era, when villagers were frequently hungry and worked from before dawn until late at night. Mrs. Sun, a 79-year old woman living in Southern Slope hamlet remembered:

In the 1960s there was no electricity. It was only later that there was [electricity]. In 1954 and 1959 there was the most hardship. We ate tree leaves. There were no cars. Everyone used shoulder poles to carry things. As soon as the day began I'd go to [a small town now about a ten-minute drive by car] carrying material with a shoulder pole. All of the roads were through the hills, made of stones. When I got back I'd go back out and work. In 15 days I'd carry 100 *jin* [100 pounds] of fertilizer and only get 10 work points. In 1954 I carried millet every day to [another town in the area]. I could only get 6 *mao* [1 cent] for carrying 90 *jin* [90 pounds]. In 1960 I gave birth to my son. It was also very difficult. During the time I gave birth there was not enough to eat. There was no chicken or fish or meat to eat. Every day I ate vegetables.

During the era of the Great Leap Forward respondents recalled eating leaves, seeds, sticks, and “anything.” Women in the focus groups noted that during the years of production teams, it “didn’t matter if you were elderly;” everyone had to work, including pregnant women. Stories of these years of hard labor and difficulties were common for almost all respondents, regardless of their gender, socio-economic status, and living arrangements of later life.

Besides citing new technologies and changes in the political-economic realm, many respondents also understood the relative ease of their lives to be connected to the current stage of their life course. Although I often saw older women assuming a great deal of childcare responsibility for grandchildren in their households, they tended to consider this responsibility easier to fulfill than were those of caring for their own children and in-laws in the contexts of previous years. Mrs. Li, a 79 year-old woman who lived in Buddha’s Peak hamlet explained:

The hardship was greatest when I first married. I had to support so many children. I also had to make clothes for them to wear. Each person needed

one outfit. That is more than ten outfits [including clothing for her husband, mother- and father- in-law]. Now that's not the case.

Older men also reflected on the difficulty of financially supporting large families during times of economic hardship and commented that their grown children were much less of a burden than they were at younger ages. A young-elder man describing his household said: "Now everyone is independent. Each person's burden is lightened."

Still, elder women tended to recall past hardships in greater detail than did elder men, who usually referred vaguely to "past bitterness." For example, like many of her peers, Mrs. Fei from Stone Flower, widowed with seven sons, described:

Before there was farm work to do every day until late, and still not enough money for food. If clothes were ripped and tattered I'd mend them again. I made shoes by myself. There were 12 people in one family. That's 12 pairs of shoes. Every day I was working before dawn. Still had to get up very early to make food for everyone, and the food was really bad. Every day we ate vegetables. When we celebrated Spring Festival, each person ate only a little pork. Sometimes it was even more difficult.

During 1960 there wasn't enough to eat. If there wasn't food we just ate sweet potatoes and pumpkin. I remember one time there was a neighbor who cooked a kind of rotten tree leaf and gave it to her husband to eat. Her husband wouldn't eat it. She asked me if I wanted to eat it. I tried a bite, then I quickly took it all and swallowed it down. That tree leaf smelled bad and made me choke -- it was very slimy. At that time I was extremely hungry, I just ate gulp after gulp. At that time everyone had much hardship. We ground peanut shells to eat. Sometime we ate weeds.

Finally, in reflecting on the changes of the past decades, elders spoke positively about increased freedom and access to the outside world. The ability for families and individuals to earn money had provided opportunities to fulfill desires and travel further from home. Speaking in a group of young-elders a woman pointed out that until relatively recently, they couldn't even see images or pictures of other places. In another

woman's words, "as long as you have money, if you want to go you just go." In some cases elders had the opportunity to visit family members who "went out" to cities even thousands of miles away, or with children and grand-children studying abroad:

Now we all take a bus, take a plane. My granddaughter and grandson are both in Australia studying and working. I just take a plane to get there. A few hours and I'm there (79-year old woman).

"These Changes are Bad": Gambling, Pollution, and Personal Character

While changes in recent decades might have seemed to be overwhelmingly positive, elders also spoke of negative aspects of social change. One of these perceived negative changes was increased gambling. With more wealth and pressure to acquire wealth, villagers played cards and *majiang* for cash or played electronic gambling machines located in the general stores. Others were said to gamble with extremely large sums of money. Additional social changes of which elders disapproved included increased theft or perceived changes in personal character, including decreased concern about elders and children:

This follows along with social development and [economic] development: You can use four words to describe people today: crafty, tricky, slippery, and evil. People's level of civilization today is generally quite high; however people today put more importance on money. Care for elderly people and children is quite far down the list [a 74 year-old man living in Buddha's Peak].

Additionally, elders' perceptions of changes in age relations were often negative. Many compared their own youthful attitudes and behavior toward their elders to the attitudes and behavior of young people today. For example, Mrs. Sun, 74 years old, asserted that:

The young people before were more filial. Before when I was a daughter-in-law, when I saw my father- and mother-in-law I had to get

water for them to wash their hands. After they had washed their hands I got water for them to wash their faces. I had to call them to come to meals. At night I had to get water for them to wash their feet. When I saw them I had to greet them "Father" and "Mother." Not greeting them was not okay! I would be scolded by them. Young people now are not like this.

Other respondents echoed this sentiment in descriptions of changes to household relations, with one 69 year-old woman going so far as to say that “before we were yelled at by parents. Now parents are yelled at by sons and daughters-in-law.”

Another point of many elders’ dissatisfaction with recent changes was with the amount of pollution produced by the new factories and mines within the hamlets. Survey results showed that pollution of water and air in the village, mainly stemming from the new industries and the disposable products newly available to households, was widely regarded as a negative change that affected elders’ daily lives. Smoke from the factories and exhaust from the road seriously affected the air quality, while household garbage in the form of product packaging and plastic bags lined the local river. All of the elder women whom I surveyed agreed that pollution had negatively affected their households and daily life, and 95 percent of elder men agreed with the same two statements. In some focus groups and interviews, elders blamed pollution problems on lack of concern by the local government, who could have better controlled the negative effects of local industry. Still, no elders or younger villagers expressed concern that the recent flood had been related to environmental landscape changes such as soil erosion, decreased riverbed areas, or deforestation.

In fact, local government performance was one theme over which elders expressed divergent views, not only in terms of environmental protection, but also in terms of provisions of financial assistance to elders and their families in need. Most

elders were reluctant to criticize generally current national policies, but rather pointed out problems in their particular details or with their implementation. A young-elder man typically declared that “the Communist Party policy is good; everyone has money. But the government officials are really corrupt.” An old-elder man explained why he thought that rural elders were deserving of more economic government support:

The government should send some support to rural elderly people. Previously, we elderly people did a lot of things in our production teams for the nation – contributed something to society. Now the nation should reciprocate a little. Especially, elderly people with no economic income should receive some subsidy.

Although policies were in place to subsidize disadvantaged elders, some needy elders were unable to fulfill the eligibility requirements, and others reported that the amount of subsidy was simply too little: often 30 – 40 *yuan* per month [210-280 dollars], and not much more than 900 *yuan* [6300 dollars] per year. Additionally, some elders complained that the “Five Guarantees” (food, clothing, shelter, burial expenses, and medical care) program was often not implemented properly.

Still other village elders were pleased with changes in the amount of care and concern demonstrated by the local government. Rescue efforts and subsidies distributed by the township government after the bad flood in the spring of 2006 encouraged positive attitudes such as the one expressed by young-elder Mrs. Liu:

During this recent flood, I saw an older woman crying. She said that inside her house were two or three thousand pounds of grain taken away by the flood. I said, “Don't worry, the government will help you.”

A final major aspect of social change about which elders expressed mixed feelings was that of household members' temporary migration. They expressed varying

views about both the extent and type of influence that family members' "going out" had on their lives and households. (Of elders that I surveyed, 40 percent of respondents said that their households had at least one member "going out" for work. We can thus surmise that a large proportion, although *not a majority* of Seven Mountains' elders, lived in families in which some member worked in cities or towns.) Elders who viewed positively the effects of family members' migration usually did so to the extent that remittances (often gifts and cash at Spring Festival) were sent home. However, quite a few elders expressed views that "going out" had a negative influence on their households, was a mixed bag, or had little overall effect. Mrs. Sun (79 years old) was quite well-off compared to her neighbors in Stone Flower hamlet. She lived in a large new house with her husband, one of her sons and his wife and children. Her comments suggest how "going out" created inconveniences for members at home:

Q: Do any of your children go out of the village to work?

A: Two of my sons are [out] working.

Q: Do you think their working affects your household?

A: My sons are working in a quite distant place. There is no way for them to look after the household. Now there are some people having wedding celebrations, but [my sons] have no way to participate or send a congratulatory gift. Even if they are invited, they still need our family to give a red envelope.

Q: Do you mean that having children working far from home negatively affects a household?

A: Of course. At most they can send a little bit of money to parents. But they cannot help with any other matters at home. They also cannot help any other relatives.

In cases such as this, it appeared that the benefit of receiving "a little bit of money" was outweighed by the disadvantages of not having sons nearby to perform household chores and to fulfill family social obligations.

Mrs. Xu, a 58 year-old widow with two sons and five daughters, provided another example. She complained that her grandson's sales job in Fuzhou had a bad influence on her household. She explained that "He is always outside; there's no one at home and the house piles up with dust." Indeed, in my own experience, I found that new homes were difficult to keep clean. In a matter of just a few days, dirt quickly accumulated and was particularly obvious on modern tiled floors and high-lacquered furniture surfaces. When family members were home and rooms were in use, they casually (even inadvertently) cleaned off and swept surfaces through daily use, but it was time consuming for only two people (often a mother-in-law and her daughter-in-law) to maintain the two or three empty stories in large new homes. On my visits I found that homes in which youth were away at school and their parents were "out" working were filled with dust.

Mrs. Lin, 70 years-old and struggling financially, pointed out that living in cities requires, as well as produces, financial resources:

Q: Do you think your son going out for work influences the household?

A: Of course there's an influence. Every one is building a new house.

My son cannot. Our family has no new house. He can make money outside more easily, but he also spends more money. You need money for everything outside. They just send 200 *yuan* back to me every month to support my grandson.

Still other elders said that family members who "went out" had little effect on their households or lives at all. In these cases, the money earned (or remitted) did not appear to be so great as to vastly improve their lives. Elders who were satisfied with their current standard of living also appeared unlikely to encourage children to find jobs in cities or towns, as 73-year old Mr. Tan Wei with three sons living in the village demonstrated:

Q: Would you like your children to go out to earn money or work? Would it influence your lifestyle?

A: It doesn't matter. If, like now, they can give me living expenses, it's okay. As long as they give me living expenses and I have money to spend, life can go on. If I have money, I can go into town and have some beef soup [laughing]!

Other elder households who were economically disadvantaged sent relatives “out” mainly to avoid financial burdens on the household rather than to increase the household income:

Q: Do any of your sons go do work outside of village?

A: My sons and daughters are now all out working in Guangzhou.

Q: Do you think their working outside has an effect on the household?

A: There's nothing that can be done about this. My family is very poor. They must rely on themselves to make a living. If they stay home I must support them. If they go out, I don't need to worry.

In terms of “village development,” older women in focus groups and interviews expressed slightly less satisfaction than did men. (In the household survey only 21.05 percent of women agreed that village development had improved life for elders, compared to 29.27 percent of their male peers, but the result was not statistically significant.) Such a tendency in difference would make sense in light of elders’ conception of the benefits of development: village subsidies and services. Some elder women with whom I spoke explained that in order to receive subsidies from the village, they had to be widowed and have no sons. In some cases these women’s standards of living were quite poor and they did not receive adequate help from male family members. Yet because their husbands or sons were still alive, the village would not grant them financial assistance. To the extent that women were less likely to receive, and to receive directly, subsidies from the government, it is likely that they experienced village economic development as less beneficial to them.

There were no major differences that emerged between young elders and older elders in any of the three phases regarding the theme of social change and development. Both age groups expressed both satisfaction and discontent with social change and economic development. However, this knowledge in itself is valuable. With only a decade or two in age difference, probably the lived experiences of both young elders and old elders were similar enough so as to avoid major disparities in perspectives.

Elders' Explanations for Social Change

In addition to describing and evaluating social changes, elders also offered explanations for the speed and characteristics of transitions in Seven Mountains' environment and living conditions. Quite often, elders referred to the Communist Party and policies in their explanation of positive social changes and experiences. For example, Mrs. Liu, who visited her grandchildren studying in Australia, made a point of saying that she was able to do so "thanks to the Communist Party. Without it, we wouldn't have this happiness." Her neighbor reminded others that "we should feel grateful to the Communist Party; 'When you drink water, don't forget the people who dug the well.'" Although less vehemently, a participant in a young-elder women's focus group noted:

Before we had much bitterness. No one was willing to listen to us. Now we are happy. Now we have good children. Probably it is due to the Communist Party. We are happy.

Elder men were also likely to refer to the Communist Party and officials in explaining current improvements in daily life, but they did so in more specific terms, mentioning particular Party members, policies, and actions:

People cannot forget Wen Jiabao and Zhu Rongji. They resolved the rural land problem, stopped public provisioning, fixed the reservoirs
[an old-elder male focus group participant]

Elders and Village Development

Through focus group discussions and later inquiries in interviews, I began to sense ways in which many elders distinguished “village development” from general social change. Some elders explicitly said, for example, “Factories -- that’s development” or spoke in terms of roadways being developed and life “advancing.” However, more telling was the vocabulary and topics they discussed when directly asked about village development. Rural industry and increased wealth of the local government were topics that elder women and elder men cited in connection with “village development”. In short, their views of “village development” closely matched what is commonly understood as “economic development,” with some added social services such as clinics or centers. In cases in which elders complained about lack of support from the village, they sometimes excused the situation as being a function of under-development or lack of resources. Elders who received small sums of money (although “not enough”) from the village around Spring Festival or at other times were more likely to be understanding of village wealth distribution and lack of resources for village elders as a group than were elders who did not receive such gifts – probably because they felt more acknowledged and appreciated than did elders who did not receive money or gifts.

Still, in the household survey, 73.68 percent of women elders disagreed with the statement that “the past few decades of development in this village have improved life for elders,” and 68.29 percent of male elders disagreed. (These views were not significantly related to household economic conditions.) In interviews, I pursued this topic further,

asking elders to talk about the ways in which village development had or had not improved their lives. In responding, many village elders equated “village development” with the village brigade or simply with “the village,” as reflected in the following typical exchange with Mrs. Sun, 79 years-old:

Q: Do you think village development has helped elderly people in any practical way?

A: For us elderly people? Just, there's no senior citizens' activity center.

Q: Do you think the village development has helped you in terms of daily life?

A: No. The village has not given us anything.

Mrs. Zhang, 69-year old resident of Buddha's Peak hamlet, suggested a similar connection between benefits from development and economic or service benefits:

Q: Now has the village development helped elderly peoples' lives?

A: This year I have low-income support. My husband and I get over 300 *yuan* (40 US dollars) per year, an average of one *yuan* (13 US cents) per day. This goes in turns. Next year I don't know if I'll have [support]. People who especially have difficulty get it every year.

Mrs. Chen, 78-years old, was not as satisfied:

Q: Southern Slope has developed a lot now. Has it helped the lives of elderly people?

A: No. But some places, for example in [two nearby villages] elderly people have a support subsidy. We don't have this in Southern Slope.

Q: In other words, in terms of economics, the village has not subsidized you elders, right?

A: They haven't! I am very angry, but there's nothing that can be done.

From the first day of research it was clear that an elderly person's activity center was a main way in which elders believed village development *could have* benefited them. Their dissatisfaction was increased by knowing that nearby villages had been able to build these centers for older residents. Elders emphasized the need for an elderly activity center or “room” in all focus groups, creating the sense that one was overwhelmingly in

demand. In the household survey it was again clear that the majority of elders desired a village elderly activity center, but some respondents explained that they would be too busy to attend, or that physical limitations would prevent them from participating.

Of course, not all elders were willing to say that village development had done nothing for them, and many were willing to say that development *of transportation and utilities* was responsible for many of the conveniences they mentioned in focus groups and interviews. Elders described China as a nation that had developed quickly and in this way had created better living environments and happier lives for its citizens. Most elders also expressed a view of national economic development as a solution to China's future social problems, including its aging population. An old-elder man demonstrated common confidence in China's continued economic growth, as well as the handling of government affairs:

There are more older people. Life spans are longer. It has raised China's burden a little. But the nation will rise up strongly. The nation has money and can handle this situation well.

Aging and Inequalities in Seven Mountains

As Seven Mountains opened to the rest of China and the outside world via television and transportation, opportunities for comparing living conditions also increased. In all research phases, elders' responses indicated inequalities in relations to nearby villages, other rural areas, China's urban centers, and elders' conditions in other nations. Mr. Tan Qinghai, 73 years old, was a soldier who fought against the Guomindang and lived in an older earth home with his wife. He said:

. . . The village doesn't care about us elderly people.

Q: Why do you feel this way?

A: On TV you can regularly see this kind of image: Some cadre will often go to greet and sympathize with some elderly people. Then the elderly

people are welcoming and happy. But now, here, it's not like this – there's nothing like this here.

Elders who traveled to other cities or countries were often visiting children or grandchildren, and had the opportunity to spend some time in different communities. Mr. Tan Derong was 74 years old, married, and living alone in a newer earth home when he recalled visiting his son in Guangzhou and seeing the elderly persons' activity center there. He described tables of people playing majiang and chess, and wished that Seven Mountains could have a similar center "to make the elderly people a bit happier."

Another old-elder man told me:

I've been to other cities. Older people all gather together – one big crowd, one big crowd. Everyone gets their happiness; sword dancing, dancing, jogging – anything.

Although there was a consensus among elder participants that life was much better compared to previous years, not everyone enjoyed equal benefits from village changes and economic development. Based on my observations, the frequent comments that "everyone" now had a car, electrical appliances, and a new home were certainly exaggerations. Evidence of household inequality was present in focus groups as some participants quietly noted that their conditions were not as easy, arose clearly in survey responses, and was explicitly noted by many interviewees. In focus groups, many respondents mentioned new homes, personal and household possessions, and increased ease of daily living as major positive changes. But not all participants made these comments, and when asked about their own circumstances they would offer slightly

different perspectives. For example, in a group of young-elders, one woman quietly mentioned her family's situation:

. . . [W]e built a new house. We've been building it for a few years now. As far as other things, I can't agree with other people.

There was also variation in how households built and within what time frame they completed construction. Some families had built their homes through the help of contracted laborers, while others relied only on family members and the advice of neighbors in order to design a floor plan, lay the foundations, construct the steel frameworks, and set the cement roof and tiled siding. Families with money were able to finish their homes in a matter of months, whereas less affluent families were forced to build as able, sometimes living for a few years (or even indefinitely) in unfinished brick homes. It is likely that the temporary loosening on building restrictions and fees after the flood in the spring of 2006 encouraged more households to build homes that otherwise may have waited. Families who were building homes in the wake of the recent flood indeed seemed to be less affluent. These were probably not families who had compiled a sum of savings large enough to completely build a new house, but families who may have borrowed money and were completing the construction work themselves. While living in Southern Slope, I had the opportunity to watch the day-by-day construction of two houses from my bedroom window. The house that was started first remained only partially built even as a wealthier family completed their third story and set off fireworks to announce completion of the project. Still, the poorer family moved into their unfinished structure once the roof was laid.

The type of home in which an elder lived appeared to affect his or her daily life in terms of both physical comfort and level of contentment. Analysis of findings from the household survey shows that living in a new home was significantly associated with a number of other daily conveniences and household possessions; such as, an electric or gas stove, dish sanitizer, water heater, color television, computer, and car or truck. Elders living in old homes were more likely first to acquire refrigerators (probably perceived as more practical and conspicuous) than they were these other accoutrements, while many families waited to move into a new home with its modern electrical circuitry before installing dish sanitizers and water heaters. Elders also demonstrated pride in living in a newly constructed brick and steel home, which was often funded by sons working in the city or going into business. My research assistant and I pursued this theme in an interview with 73 year-old Mrs. Zhang in Buddha's Peak:

Q: ...[E]lderly people think a house is very important?

A: Every one has built a new house, but I haven't. Moreover my house isn't big enough. Right now I'm living in other people's older house.

Q: Do you have to rent it to live there?

A: I don't need to pay money.

Q: So can't you just stay there and live? Why must you definitely build a new house?

A: Everyone has one. I also want one. That would be much better.

Q: Is it that everyone has one but you don't, and you will be looked down on?

A: Yes. I will be looked down on. If everyone has one and I have one, then I can be happy.

In addition to a sense of inequality with other villages and in the extent of household wealth, there was also perceived inequality in the way in which subsidies were distributed to households and elders in need. In interviews and focus group discussions, elders commented on the unfairness or lack of clarity and transparency in distribution of

financial assistance by the local government. For some elders it was clear that officials focused their attention and services on wealthy people and overlooked economically disadvantaged families and individuals. Mrs. Lin, 70 years old, had been trying to acquire assistance from the government in repairing damage to her home from the recent flood, as well as a subsidy for the household that only she maintained while looking after her grandson. She felt doubtful about ever being able to receive any compensation for the flood damage, and frustrated in her efforts to secure regular subsidies:

Q Did you apply for a low-income subsidy?

A: They said they can only send it in February, but I still don't know.

The government usually looks after people with money but looks down on poor people. A wall of my house was knocked down by the big flood last year. I asked the government to send some containers of cement to re-construct the wall but they were not willing. We don't have money to re-build it ourselves. . . .

Q: How much is the village subsidy?

A: About 1000 *yuan* per year.

Q: Do you need to apply for this subsidy yourself? Does the government take the initiative to care?

A: I must apply for it myself, they do not take the initiative to care about it. Now people have to use *guanxi* [social networks] in order to deal with this.... If you have money people will speak with you. If you don't have money people will not pay attention to you. Rich people look down on small sums of money, but we who have no money cannot even get a little bit of money.

Residents who did receive a subsidy often expressed uncertainty about when and why they received subsidies, and whether they would receive subsidies in the near future. An exchange between Mrs. Tang, her neighbor, and my research assistant illustrates:

Mrs. Tang: Life is much better. But the village brigade has not given me any subsidy. Other people have gotten some.

Neighbor (interjects): This year I have a subsidy. It's a government subsidy. My family has 11 mouths to feed, so my husband and I both get a subsidy.

Q: So is it that if your household has many people you can receive a subsidy?

Neighbor: I don't know. It's sent in turns. I don't get it every year. This year I do, next year I don't. Every four months I get over 90 *yuan*. It's very little, but it's still good.
Mrs. Tang: I have never received any help.

Village elders who worked in official positions were eligible for government retirement pensions, but these situations were rare in Seven Mountains and the recipients appeared to be almost exclusively men. Being able to receive a pension clearly created an advantage for those elders. Even if the amount was not large, a pension provided a stable and reliable source of income, independent of children. Although most elders were proud of filial children and generally agreed that living in a home of three or more generations was desirable, their comments suggested that relying on children was not the *most* ideal situation. Mr. Tan Dai was 80 years old, with three sons and 2 daughters. His wife had passed away and he lived in a two-room area in a multi-family earth home in Stone Flower. In an interview he lamented:

Although before I worked as a cadre, I was a deputy, so after I became old the government did not give me any subsidy. You had to have been on regular duty to get one. Now I don't have any income. I totally depend on my children to support me.

His sense of relative economic instability reflected the sentiments of other elders who described their futures as relying mainly on “whether this next generation will be filial.”

Elders' Explanations of Village and Household Inequality

Seven Mountains' elders tended to explain inequalities in income and wealth in terms of intelligence, family resources, or a combination of both factors. Repeated in my conversations with village elders and their neighbors was a young-elder woman's view that “as long as you are intelligent anyone can make money.” This idea was not only

forwarded by well-off residents seeking explanations for their own relative success, but by poorer elders themselves. Mrs. Lin explained her disadvantaged circumstances based on personal and familial inadequacies:

Q: Many people here depend on business in order to get wealthy. Why don't your sons do business?

A: My family has no economic base. There's no family property. There's no money to start doing business. Also no one is willing to loan us money Development zones are everywhere. Commercially-minded people can all get rich. First I'm not smart enough. Second, I'm too old – I don't have the physical strength. So there's no way.

Mrs. Lin connected the inability of her family members to start their own businesses with poor access to resources such as initial capital, credit, training, and *guanxi* (personal connections) yet also faulted herself for lack of intelligence.

DISCUSSION: EXPERIENCES OF AGING AND RURAL CHANGE

Older women and older men's descriptions of past changes and current conditions offer opportunities for better sociological understandings of how people experience aging in a context of rapid socio-political transformation, as well as how rapid rural change and development relate to aging in rural China. In turn, these insights can inform understandings of the future of aging in China. In this section I point out some key insights from my analyses of Seven Mountain elders' perspectives on social change and development. With regard to this theme, I also indicate the contributions of this project to the sociology of aging as well as to studies of aging in China.

Elders' Experiences of Rural Change and Development: Time and Place Relativity

In recalling the troubles and bitterness of the past in both focus groups and interviews, elders related a clear sense of what we can consider *relative* (or comparative) *wealth*. Although their living conditions and assets were simple at best and in most cases

would be considered sparse, inadequate, or uncomfortable by many residents of China's urban areas and of developed nations, elders' comparisons with their past experiences produced a firm sense of being "better off" and in some cases, of living in abundance and luxury. Some elders still struggled to adequately meet basic needs, but socio-economically disadvantaged respondents were quick to note that life was still "much better than before." Psychological relief at not having to worry – or not having to worry *as much* – about basic food, clothing, and shelter was significant in their stories about how life had changed. In short, elders' comparisons over time between their present conditions and their own past conditions promoted positive experiences of their current conditions.

At the same time, many respondents expressed a sense of *relative* (or comparative) *poverty* when comparing their present conditions with the present conditions of peers in both nearby and faraway places. Transportation and communication allowed elders to see or hear easily about amenities in other villages, some of which were only within a minute's drive; and elders who visited large cities in China or places outside of the country brought back descriptions of what peers were doing. Also, both women elders and men elders watched television and therefore had access to images and stories across China of other elders' lives. Quite a few male elders also regularly read newspapers, including publications targeted especially at China's older population. Even if state-approved articles about benevolent, concerned officials being met by welcoming elderly villages were mainly propaganda, one of the effects was that elders compared their situation with an image of other conditions and lifestyles, and did so unfavorably.

It is possible to experience simultaneously a sense of relative poverty and a sense of relative wealth, and this was indeed what elders in Seven Mountains expressed in their stories of past and present village life. I argue that village elders' sense of relative wealth (across time) countered many elders' sense of relative poverty (across place) and likely mitigated some amount of discontent which many of them felt in witnessing the greater wealth of nearby hamlets, villages, or of international peers. It is likely that the observed relative wealth of current daily life also helped to counter the negative effects of village industry, as well as the failure of village development specifically to benefit elders as a group. These insights suggest that, when aiming to understand and support rural Chinese elders' well-being, studies should consider not only the subjective experiences of wealth and poverty, but also how they may counter one another in various ways.

The Significance of Offsets in Experiences of Aging

These findings suggests that “offsets” are key in shaping elders' experiences of aging, social change, and development. For example, one arena in which real and potential discontent appeared to have been countered was within the household. Both my observations and comments from respondents suggest that elders in Seven Mountains' hamlets were served by younger family members to a far lesser extent than they recalled serving their elders as young people. I suggest that discontent with a lack of traditional service and attention from family members would have been greater without the modern conveniences of daily life and the ability to have needs met through other sources, namely technological devices, appliances, and utilities. In many cases, pipes and indoor plumbing allowed elders to have toilets and acquire water with minimal effort. It made past rituals of bringing water, bowls, or towels to elders somewhat obsolete. Children

presently could purchase shoes and clothing for elderly family members rather than making these items, and this ability probably reduced the time burden more for women than for men. Additionally, although sons and daughters may not have visited frequently and may have lived far away, they could regularly contact their parents with cell phones, and thus follow Confucius' admonition: "When your parents are still alive, do not go far from home. But if you do, tell them where you are going" (*fumu zai, bu yuan you, you bi you fang*). This technology allowed children to fulfill quickly their chores and obligations, or in cases in which elders did these chores, minimized physical hardship for them.

Of course, not all families or family members could afford the newest household appliances or other amenities to substitute for traditional demonstrations of filial piety or care. In these cases, elders were in "double jeopardy" of disadvantage. Elders in households that were unable or unwilling to purchase the goods or services for them would not only lack a sense of psychological satisfaction, comfort, and high status, and would need either to perform the necessary tasks themselves "the old-fashioned way" (e.g., hauling water, preparing blankets, walking to the market rather than taking the bus) or to go without. Nevertheless, unlike experienced age-based community development inequalities and decreased prestige of old age within households, the lack of an activity center was a village-level discontent not adequately countered or offset by new social arrangements or devices. (Television was not able to satisfy elders' entertainment and social needs.) The proximity of other villages' elderly activity centers exacerbated elders' dissatisfaction with a lack of such a center, as did the ongoing construction, industry, and social changes in the village and township which appeared to benefit people

in middle and early life stages. Additionally, the sense of community and richness of social exchanges in the present did not appear to compare favorably across time, as did other aspects of daily life. (In other words, there was a lack of appropriate offsets to counter disadvantages and to quell elders' dissatisfaction.) In general the significance of offsets in shaping elders' views of rural change and current life suggests that studies take into account how aspects of social change that are disadvantageous to rural elders are (or could be) minimized through new social relations, technologies, or resources.

Elders, Development, and Studies of Aging in Transitioning Rural China: Insights from Seven Mountains

One of the advantages and challenges of employing mixed methods is that findings from various phases may appear to conflict. I consider these areas to be “fruitful contradictions” which, when contemplated, provide opportunities to discover important tensions and insights. In this mixed-methods research, a few “fruitful contradictions” arose with regard to elders' ways of speaking about “social change” and “development” and “village development.” First, especially in focus groups, respondents overwhelmingly insisted that “changes” in Seven Mountains during the past decades were positive and had improved their lives greatly. However, results from the household survey found many elders unsatisfied with “village development” in the past “few decades.” Are these findings contradictory? How was it that, according to focus group participants and many interviewees, life had improved so much over their life courses, and yet elders whom I surveyed often claimed that village development had not improved their lives? First, this discrepancy between the very positive attitudes of elders in focus groups and the viewpoints offered in the survey may mean that the relatively public

nature of the focus groups discouraged complaints, or that the focus group participants were not part of a random sample and over-represented well-off, highly content older villagers. After all, focus group participants did not so much contradict views that older residents expressed in the survey or the in-depth interviews, but rather, were silent on some issues that arose in the survey and interview phases.

I suggest that elders' particular definitions of "social change" and "village development" can at least partly explain discrepancies between positive views expressed with regard to household and daily life changes, and the negative remarks about "village development." Narratives and responses suggest that Seven Mountains elders commonly distinguished among at least three concepts: (1) "change" (a general collection of transitions over the past several decades including construction of new buildings and utilities, household and family re-arrangements, and modern conveniences), (2) "development" (economic growth, especially on a national scale, which provided resources for the central government to improve China) and (3) "village development" (local industry and economic growth, by which local officials could improve residents' material conditions). Particularly telling were elders' indictments of "the village" when indicating points of discontent in interviews. For example, in response to the interview question "Has village development improved your life?" many elders responded, "No, *the village* has done nothing to help me [italics added]." At the village level, elders frequently used the term "village development" to refer to funds generated by the local industry and village-owned enterprises – of which most felt they had no direct share or benefit. On the other hand, older villagers spoke of economic and technological development as solutions, citing increased labor efficiency, less need for manpower, and

innovations such as high-yield rice. A few elders even asserted that due to technological development “any disease can be cured with enough money.” Yet in most elders’ accounts it was not “development” or “technology” per se that alleviated hardship. Rather, development was a tool employed more or less successfully by the Party, who was the ultimate hero. In other words, just as they saw “development” as the medium through which the central government improved China and the lives of Chinese people generally, “village development” was the medium through which the local government *could* directly help elders, but didn’t. From many elders’ views, “the village” either didn’t care, or didn’t have enough money to put successfully into action the tools of economic development in order to benefit them. As such, although changes in households and the village were positive, elders did not believe that they had directly benefited from economic gains of the village.

Another seeming contradiction emerged as older villagers responded to questions about village development and changes. Elders’ explanations of changes over the years, village development, and ways their lives had been affected by them highlighted both technology and government, but did so in seemingly inconsistent ways. Specifically, common explanations for hardship and common explanations for improvement in daily life followed somewhat contradictory paths, suggesting an underlying tension. In describing difficulties of the past, elders linked hardship to a lack of technology and development. It was usual for a respondent to string together statements and thoughts such as “We ate tree leaves. There were no cars.” Not having enough food and having to carry heavy loads on shoulder poles to nearby towns were experiences that elders paired probably due to their poverty in past daily lives. However, since elders spoke about the

communal production era as being very difficult, and because the system was explicitly hyper-political, one might expect elders to explain past hardships as a function of political conditions and policy. However, to the contrary, no elders explicitly faulted the Party or government for past bitter experiences. They instead faulted lack of technology and only attributed current *improved conditions* to the Party and to government policies (which utilized economic growth and development to help the people.) In other words, even though many elders asserted that “without the Party we would not have this happiness,” it did not follow that “because of the Party we had past bitterness.” This discrepancy suggests that older villagers were not willing to openly criticize the Chinese Communist Part (CCP), which is not surprising within the political climate of mainland China and in light of elders’ experiences during the Cultural Revolution. When villagers complained that village development had not improved their lives notably, they were (sometimes admittedly) criticizing the *local* government who was failing to successfully employ development in ways that would benefit elders and check inequalities. Criticizing the local government’s implementations of policies allowed elders to voice political frustration and discontent without fundamentally criticizing the Communist Party or the Chinese government, thus maintaining their patriotism. (I found this practice to be common in my conversations with people from a variety of backgrounds and living conditions in China.) Although some elders likely worried about being considered unpatriotic, I sensed that their sentiments regarding the CCP were genuine and not stated out of fear.

Some observers might consider Seven Mountains’ elders to be politically naïve or “duped,” but it is notable that they were at least clearly conscious of the political nature

of development, even if not willing to discuss or confront the politics of past travails. Whereas much literature in the “global North” has been devoted to arguing and demonstrating that development is not a neutral or apolitical social force (Sen 1999; Peet 1999; Marchand and Parpart 1995; Escobar 1995; Sachs 1992), Seven Mountains villagers almost “naturally” connected politics with development and its effects. Likely, this perspective is related to being socialized within a “planned” economy rather than a “free market” economy. Studies of political and social awareness of elders (and others) in mainland China might inquire into how aspects of political awareness differ from those in other geo-political contexts rather than asking or asserting that respondents are politically “aware” or “unaware” to various extents.

Finally, Seven Mountains’ elders had definite concerns about the negative aspects of social change; such as, increased gambling and village pollution. Elders indicated gambling to be a fairly recent social problem and identified as culprits the increased amount of leisure time and money, as well as the changes in the quality of people’s personal character. Respondents described pollution, on the other hand, to be a problem of bad local governance, policy implementation, or factory site location, not as an inevitable or unacceptable outcome of industry or development. Still, neither of these negative aspects of change or village development instilled substantial doubt in elders as to the overall beneficial character of rural changes or economic growth, again, likely due to elders’ frames of reference and to elders’ overall assessment of the advantages and disadvantages.

For example, while elders talked about pollution problems and many respondents agreed that they personally were negatively affected by pollution, others pointed out in interview

narratives and focus group discussions that in earlier decades “the environment was very bad” indicating lack of electricity, coal, and reliable roadways. This point demonstrates different but equally viable definitions of “environment” as green space and fresh air and “environment” as built surroundings shaping ease and quality of life, a point that environmental sociologists have recently begun to acknowledge in practice but that seems “obvious” in the eyes of many village elders. Secondly, this suggests that environmental and other social problems are assessed within the span of a life course and in geographical context, both setting certain standards and defining what kind of environment is acceptable. It is possible that people in Seven Mountains who are too young to remember lack of electricity, heat, or permanent roads may be more prone than are their seniors to claim that rural industry and village development have destroyed the local quality of life. Timelines and historical contexts are important to consider in studies of changing environments in rural China and elsewhere.

Aging, Social Change, and Inequalities in “Well-Off” Developing Rural China

Elders expressed various senses of success, achievement, and contentment in their lives, often based on family member performance and household acquisition of new goods. Being able to eat meat every day and having time to relax were major sources of satisfaction for village elders. However, by far the most important mark of social status for elders was living in a new brick and steel home. According to research assistants and informants, this emphasis on having a new home was not commonly shared by young people in the village, who would have been content with renting a home or living in an apartment so that they could acquire brand name clothing and electronic devices. But elders living in new homes relayed a sense of pride that their son(s) had built a new home,

representing not only higher socio-economic status, but prestige and fulfillment of one's son's filial obligations. I suggest that, much like people in urban China (and elsewhere) who engage in retail consumption in order to distinguish and "class" themselves (Hanser 2004), owning and decorating a new home was a primary way in which elders in Seven Mountains engaged in "social distinction." Although Seven Mountains was not by any means a destitute location, it was not tenable to assume that village elders were therefore physically or psychologically well-off. In focus groups and interviews, elders often explained household inequality in a way that reflected the concepts of "deserving" and "undeserving" poor. The widespread sentiment of elders and other villagers that anyone could make money "if they are intelligent" implied that elders living in less advantaged conditions did so due to lack of their own or family member's merit. (From my own observations, heavy burdens of medical bills and health care were commonly to blame for household disadvantage.) The increasing socio-economic gap between their households and those around them magnified the distress of elders who experienced financial difficulties, adding shame to daily hardships. Whereas younger family members had the opportunity to strive to overcome these conditions by migrating or working harder to start businesses, older villagers had little recourse but to accept the lower status of their household. Elders' sense of relative poverty in Seven Mountains, combined with the presence of a social view of "deserving poor," suggests it is problematic to assume that a particular county, township, or village is well-off to the extent that all elders are doing fine. Indeed, in some areas in which poverty is not a widely shared phenomenon, relatively poor elderly people may suffer more in their experiences than do their counterparts in areas of more egalitarian, albeit generally lower, socioeconomic status.

An important research implication is that studies of elders' well-being or of the "aging population problem" should not be confined to areas commonly considered to be destitute.

Aging, Gender, and the Politics of Social Change: Insights from Seven Mountains

Findings from focus groups, the household survey, and interviews suggest that older women and older men in Seven Mountains had both similar and different experiences of rural changes and economic development. To the extent that gender dictated daily chores and experiences in this social context, it was a key factor influencing elders' viewpoints on the type and extent of social change as well as experiences of aging. When asked about social changes, elder women tended to speak in detail about changes within the household. They focused on the ease or difficulty of "inside" chores, the burden of day-to-day responsibilities, and practical issues of feeding and clothing family members. On the other hand, older men mainly spoke of general difficulty and focused on changes to the public roads, the development of utilities, developments in agricultural technology, and political and leadership shifts. Put simply, elders tended to talk about social changes of which they were most aware and experienced. In particular, present *and* past gendered organization of labor influenced the perspectives and focal points of elders in Seven Mountains. This evidence supports arguments that studies of aging and social change include consideration of gender roles and identities across life courses.

Elder woman's perceived relative ignorance of past and current public affairs and social phenomena probably shaped the extent to which they experienced age inequality in an age of new technological gadgets, information, and highly educated grandchildren. Women with no formal education who felt (and were regarded as) uninformed were at a

greater disadvantage in the new “information age” and in relation to young tech-savvy youth than were their literate (male) counterparts with junior high or high school educations. Members of men’s focus groups were certainly more apt to adopt a pedagogical stance when answering questions than were women elders. In each of the women’s focus groups and in many of the interviews and surveys, it was primarily women who claimed ignorance and made statements such as: “People in our generation are all unlearned; we never went to school” and “We older people don’t understand such topics.”

Although some woman elders said: “I’m really an ignorant person,” they did not indicate their identity as a woman as the implicating factor. Research assistants and other villagers did, however. Because my purpose in the village was often understood as that of “fact-collecting,” both respondents and helpers warned me not to expect valuable responses from women elders. As such, through past gendered education opportunities, gender was also a significant social identity shaping experiences of aging and social change in Seven Mountains.

How gender relations in Seven Mountains interacted with social transitions over time was more difficult to assess. Both the influence of the past gendered division of labor and of gendered educational experiences suggests that in Seven Mountains, older women experienced *cumulative disadvantage*. However, the fact that both women and men could earn wages was a social change that meant a relative loss for male elders in later life (the *age as leveler* phenomenon), who in other eras might have had total control over all wages received by all household members. It would mean a relative gain for women as they approached later life, as they now had the opportunity to spend their own

(albeit small) sums of money from selling vegetables, when in previous eras they would not have had an opportunity to do so. Again, these new conditions were a matter not only of gender/age relations, but of political-economic contexts.

Aging, Politics, and Social Change

It is apparent from interviews and focus groups that past levels of economic development, as well as the past organization of production and consumption, greatly shaped the extent to which Seven Mountains' elders experienced economic power (earning and spending ability) in later life. Older women and older men emphasized and expressed satisfaction in later-life opportunities to make money and enjoy the fruits of their own labor, something that was not possible during the production team era, and which was less possible before coal miners and factory workers arrived as customers. Although in many cases the money that elders earned from the sale of vegetables or repair jobs was small, these opportunities should be understood in the context of past agricultural policies, organization of work, and newfound chances to "support yourself by working."

Additionally, elders spoke of increased freedom to "just go if you want to go" and to have control over daily routines and activities. These freedoms are not related only to technological developments, but also to the politics of work and organization of production. Under past economic and political conditions, these particular women and men lived through times when they had no chance to take spending money into town to buy a bowl of beef soup, visit with friends, or choose vegetables to cook for a favorite meal.

That many elders in Seven Mountains found their later years to be in some ways freer and filled with more opportunities for self-sufficiency than they were in earlier eras indicates both the apolitical and ahistorical character of notions about aging as being filled with less autonomy, freedom, and inactivity. As demonstrated by older villagers in Seven Mountains, we see how aging is neither automatically a period of loss nor of gain. Aging experiences are relative within the life course, and socio-political contexts through which people live must be taken into account when assessing the gains or losses linked to aging and when evaluating autonomy in later life.

With respect to understanding aging and development, this research suggests that a problem with the classic modernization theory of aging is that it is one dimensional. The theory inquires into how elders' group status goes either "up" or "down." For Seven Mountains' elders, social change appears to have reduced opportunities to enjoy traditional old age distinction (that is, high status as elders within households) and authority (a main focus of the age-modernization theory). However, power (e.g., in the form wage-earning ability) over life courses has increased in some ways for many elders, and in many cases has included shifting household generational relations in which elders often lose relative status. Better understanding these "mixed bags" is task for future studies in the sociology of aging. This chapter illustrates the importance of relative deprivations experienced when comparisons are made by older people between their remembered pasts and current conditions, across contemporary landscapes that are local, national, and global, and when nuanced by gender.

CHAPTER 5: "IF YOU COUNT THAT": ROLES AND AGE RELATIONS IN LATER LIFE

Days in Seven Mountains began before dawn with the sounds of fireworks, sweeping, and laundry. Early mornings were an active time for older villagers, many of whom rose with or before the sun. In contrast to mornings in China's urban areas, Seven Mountains was not filled with troops of elderly people performing calisthenics or *tai qi*. These older villagers maintained their commonly agile and lithe figures by doing chores, climbing the slopes, or walking to one of the village halls or temples. Women elders laid out food and burned incense while others swept houses and courtyards and oversaw the morning's rice porridge. Some elders who lived in homes without piped water hauled buckets for cooking and washing, or took garbage to the river. Older villagers with more leisure time and fewer household duties strolled down village paths, read newspapers, or hiked up the nearby hills for exercise.

As further investigation showed, elders' activities were not limited to the early morning hours. Walking in the village throughout the day, I passed women elders on their way to feed livestock and saw others sitting in doorways chatting and cleaning vegetables. Grandmothers did chores with their grandchildren strapped to their backs or stood by the main road waiting for the bus that would take them to the town market. More than a few of the men hauling wheelbarrows filled with bricks and gravel had graying hair. In the cooler evenings village elders sometimes sat together in doorways or joined family members to watch the latest television drama. While the oldest old family members performed light but meaningful chores, I observed that young-elders, who in

some cases performed care work for young grandchildren, adult children, and aged parents, were often most active in household tasks.

This chapter describes the roles, daily activities, and household relationships of elder women and elder men mainly as related by older villagers. In order to gain insight into elders' aging experiences and daily lives in rural China, it also examines living conditions, living arrangements and gendered-age relations within the village and households. As in Chapter Four, I first present findings from the focus groups, household survey, and interviews in a descriptive manner before discussing and analyzing how these findings inform studies of aging in China as well as relevant sociological theories of aging.

Elders' Living Conditions and Well-Being

Elders in Seven Mountains lived in a variety of socio-economic conditions and as indicated by perceived adequacy of resources and by culturally relevant material conditions (Table 5). Through the household survey I was able to better understand broadly these day-to-day conditions and living arrangements, whereas focus groups and interviews allowed me to inquire into specific cases and examples. It is important to note that these survey findings reflect only the conditions of households in which one or more persons over age 55 resided ("elder households"). It is possible that Seven Mountains' households with no elders were systematically different.

On average, elders perceived their household conditions as being "somewhat well-off" or even leaning toward "well-off" (Table 5). This assessment tended to be strongest among the older male survey respondents, although the means were not statistically significant (col. 1). The material indicators of household wealth, as shown by

the average on the Housing Type Score (col. 2), showed the most favorable mean score to older males. Thus, on both psychological and physical measures of socioeconomic status at the household level, I find that oldest-old men were the most advantaged.

Economic and social development are related but separate phenomenon. Social power, thus economic power, can be most efficiently mustered from a larger number of household members (which may mean more rooms) and especially if they belong to the CCP. The size of households also did not vary significantly for young- and old-elders, or between male and female elders; averages ranged from 4.45 people in households with old-elder male target respondents to 5.70 people in households with young-elder women target respondents. Yet the average number of CCP members per household ranged from .64 in households in which old-elder men responded to .20 in households about which young-elder women responded, but was not significantly related to age and sex. In sum, higher household socioeconomic status appears to be symbolized by residence in brick-and-steel structures or those built after 1978 or those household with more members of the Communist Party.

Household Living Arrangements: Descriptive Information

Of all elder households surveyed, exactly two-thirds (66 percent) were comprised of three generations, averaging 5.4 persons per household. This size is quite a bit larger than the average household size (inclusive of non-elder households) of 3.13 persons for China overall and 2.99 persons for Fujian province (China Statistical Yearbook 2006). Only five percent of households hosted four generations, and none were made up of more than four generations. Most elder households included only one or two elders (the mean number of people over 55 being 1.67). Fifteen percent of households included only one

older person or an older person and his/her spouse. The majority (76.67 percent) of households did not expect any changes in living arrangements in the next year. The number of rooms in households, not related to gender or age, was an average of 9.88 in these elder households.

Like many places in China, it was customary in Seven Mountains for elderly parents to live with a son and daughter-in-law. Traditionally, it was the youngest son with whom elders in Seven Mountains resided. Families that had no sons might “bring-in” a son-in-law through marriage to a daughter, who then assumed the lineage and obligations of a biological son. Survey and interviews revealed one of these arrangements. In general, it was necessary to ask carefully how many children respondents had, since some elders only counted sons as children while others included daughters when asked about offspring.

In cases in which elders did not live with sons, daughters, or grandchildren, interview respondents in three cases described the arrangement as mutually agreed upon, and in other cases said that they chose to live separately from younger family members in order to lighten their children’s financial burden. In some households I suspected that family relationships were strained and that the decision to live separately was related to past or current conflicts. Mr. Tan Rong for example, was 70 years old, with three sons and one daughter. He lived with his wife in an old earth home in a structure shared with another family:

Q: Did your sons ask you to live with them?

A: No.

Q: Why not?

A: They are scared of seeing an elderly person. They are repulsed by elderly people.

Q: Do you want to live with your sons?

A: No.

Q: Do you fear you won't get along well together?

A: Ah, us elderly people living together by ourselves is better.

In at least one survey case, an elderly man lived alone while his wife lived with their son and daughter-in-law nearby. In some households, a spouse (usually a wife) was away in the city working or looking after grandchildren. In short, elders who did not live with their family members did not always do so because of financial or geographical obstacles.

Of elders' households surveyed, only 58.33 percent said that all household members slept there the previous night. In these cases, most frequently one-to-three people had slept elsewhere. On the other hand, only 40 percent of households reported including family members (usually two) who "went out" for work. The explanation for the discrepancy in these numbers is likely that high school students lived in dorms during the week and returned home at most just a few times throughout the semester. This hypothesis is supported by a positive significant correlation (.474) between the number of people sleeping in other locations the night before and the highest household education level. Fewer households in Stone Flower reported members "going out" than did other hamlets, but there was not a statistically significant relationship between hamlet residence and having a member of the household who "went out."

Although elders occasionally ate with other sons' households when members of their house of residence were absent, caring for elders in "rotation" was not common here, nor was there strong evidence of aggregation (Croll 1994), or cooperation, of households in Seven Mountains. (A minority of households, 21.67 percent, reported doing business in another household.) On the contrary, I was surprised by the frequent apparent autonomy of households and sense of "each household for itself" in the village. Since the

village was not segregated into clusters based on socio-economic status, it was common to see wealthy families living within yards of quite poor households. These conditions make sense if one remembers that land rights were distributed after the communal era; families did not move into “better” or “worse” neighborhoods as they might in rural and suburban United States.

Elder Household Socio-economic Status

Survey findings supported focus groups’ hints of household inequalities and differences in Seven Mountains. Many households (roughly 30 percent) elected not to answer questions about income, but the average reported monthly expenditures for all households village wide was 1233.71 *yuan* (about 166 US dollars), with 120 *yuan* (about 16 US dollars) the least amount spent and 6550 *yuan* (about 885 US dollars) the most amount spent. Spring Festival, or Chinese New Year, was the highlight of the year, when most families spent whatever they could afford on special food and gifts of money and clothes. How much a household spent during this period is probably indicative of economic status, although naturally expenditures will vary according to the age structure and size of households. (Gifts generally flowed from working family members to the very young and elderly.) On average, Seven Mountains’ households spent 1865.36 *yuan* (about 252 US dollars) at Spring Festival, with expenditures ranging from 100 *yuan* (about 13.50 US dollars) to 5000 *yuan* (about 675 US dollars).

Although the mean highest level of education in elder households was between junior high and high school (including vocational school), only 25 percent of elders reported that someone in their household had graduated from high school, and less than one-third said a family member had attended either high school or a vocational school.

(Household education level is of course also related to the presence of children and grandchildren.) Just over 13 percent of households included a family member with an undergraduate college degree.

Main sources of household income in Seven Mountains included business, factory work, and relatively small sums from selling livestock, rice, vegetables, and other crops. A majority – 86.67 percent – of elder households had no members drawing a steady income (i.e., a salary or pension). At the time of the survey, 93.33 percent of elder households reported having some income from farming. Over 98 percent said that they owned livestock – usually chickens and ducks. The average amount of rights to farmland that elder households held was 2.73 *mu* [0.45 acres], with the smallest plot being 1 *mu* [0.165 acres] and the largest 8.5 *mu* [1.4 acres]. Most families reported having rights to farm 2 *mu* [0.33 acres] of land. (The land was distributed to households as part of the household responsibility system in the early 1980s. Since then, some households had leased their land rights to neighbors.)

Of elder households surveyed, 26.67 percent reported including at least one Communist Party member. Membership rates are important, as studies elsewhere in mainland China have shown relationships between household Party membership, health, and socio-economic status of elders (Zimmer 2005). Indeed, in Seven Mountains there was also a positive correlation between a household including a CCP member, having a household income, education level, number of rooms, and number of household members with health insurance (Table 6). Among old-elders the men's report of resident CCP members was almost twice as large as what was reported by the women (Table 5).

There was also variety in the type and extent of utilities and appliances, although all elder households surveyed reported having electricity, and all households reported boiling their drinking water. The main source of drinking water for 70 percent of households was piped from the mountains. Another 18.33 percent of households hauled drinking water from a well, and another 11.67 percent had it piped from a well. The main source of washing water for 50 percent of households was piped from the mountains, while 28.33 percent hauled it from a well and 20 percent had it piped from a well. A very small portion of elder households (1.67 percent) reported acquiring washing water from an “other” source, likely the polluted river. Approximately 65 percent of elder households reported some kind of change in cooking fuel usage during the past five years, and at the time of the survey, 80 percent of households were using a combination of coal, electricity, and wood for cooking. The changes in the past five years in cooking fuel usage mainly involved decreased use of wood and coal and increased use of gas and electricity.

Certain appliances, such as electric fans, were very common in all households. Of elder households, 78.33 percent owned a telephone and 83.33 percent included someone who owned a cell phone. Also common were color televisions – with 83.33 percent of households owning at least one – and motorbikes; 70 percent of elder households owned one. A relatively small proportion of elder households still owned an “old-fashioned” bicycle (13.33), although this question was often met with a chuckle. Less frequently owned were refrigerators (43.33 percent), cars or trucks (25 percent), computers (13.33 percent), and air conditioners (11.67 percent). Families with new houses were significantly more likely to own these more expensive and modern commodities. The

size of houses also ranged from having two rooms to forty rooms, with an average of almost ten rooms (Table 5). Survey respondents' reported household economic conditions, house type, and number of household members, Party members, and rooms were not statistically significantly different across age groups or gender (Table 5).

Inequality in household economic conditions among hamlets was apparent. Elders' perceived poverty was greatest in Buddha's Peak and least in Stone Flower. From an observer's eye, Buddha's Peak was visibly less advantaged. Most of the homes were made of traditional mud, and few construction projects were underway. None of the elder respondents residing here considered themselves "very well off." The average reported 2005 annual household monthly income for Buddha's Peak elder households (1280.00 *yuan*, or about 173 US dollars) was much lower than averages reported by older residents of Southern Slope (4013.33 *yuan*, or about 542 US dollars) and Stone Flower (4400 *yuan*, or about 594 US dollars). However, in terms of per capita household income, Southern Slope was better off financially, since Stone Flower had larger overall families over which the household income was averaged (Table 2).

In the village overall, 32 percent of elder respondents said that the food and nutrition were inadequate, 35 percent of elders agreed that medical care was inadequate, 46 percent of target respondents agreed that help with chores was inadequate, and 36 percent of respondents agreed that personal care was inadequate (Table 3). Slightly fewer (23 percent) of elders said that companionship was inadequate, and very few (3 percent) reported that they did not have enough or appropriate clothing. There was a significant correlation between hamlet residence and elders' reports that help with chores was inadequate; elders living in Southern Slope more often agreed that they did *not* have

enough help with chores (Table 3). It is possible that households in the more “modern” Southern Slope required more or different types of housework or maintenance than did those of Buddha’s Peak. For example, newer homes usually had many more stairs to climb and items to clean than did older homes. Moreover, the slightly smaller family sizes in Southern Slope in comparison with those of Stone Flower may have caused elders to feel that assistance from family members was inadequate. The number of family members “going out” was not significantly related to elders’ reports of inadequate help with chores; however, it was positively correlated with elders’ reports of inadequate personal care.

Elders who perceived their household economic conditions less positively were significantly more likely to report that both food and companionship were inadequate. While the relationship between household economic conditions and food supply is understandable, it is more difficult to understand how economic conditions might influence perceptions of adequate companionship. It is possible that economic disadvantage affects elders’ psychology such that they experienced greater loneliness. Economic difficulties might also prevent elders from being able to utilize transportation or participate in other social activities that require money. Gender and age of respondents were not significantly correlated with the perception of adequate help or other needs.

Elders’ Physical and Mental Health

In my daily observations, most elders appeared to enjoy good health and agility. They were generally slim, appeared strong, and most did not struggle with lack of mobility. Still, the elders in the best physical and mental health were likely the ones most

frequently visible, and so the random household survey afforded an opportunity to investigate more thoroughly the overall health status of Seven Mountains' elders.

First, the majority of elder households (78 percent) did not include any family members with health insurance. The greatest number of households (85 percent) had sent elders to the nearby town in order to be treated for illness, and just less than half (48 percent) of elder households had made use of the Seven Mountains clinic to acquire medical care for an elder. The town clinic offered greater amenities than did the village clinic, and was still easily accessible (as compared to clinics further away).

Gender differences in reported health were clear. On average, elders rated their health as being somewhere between "average" and "good" (3.5 on a 5 point scale; Table 7). Only a small minority of elders reported their health to be "very poor," but notably, twice as many of these people were women (5.3 percent) than were men (2.4 percent). No women reported that their health was "very good," while 29.3 percent of men did so. This gender difference was statistically significant, and elder women also rated both their health and their current memory capacity lower than did elder men (Table 7). However, men (51.22 percent) were far more likely to smoke tobacco than were women (5.26 percent). It was so rare for older women to smoke that one of my research assistants would inadvertently pause to watch with her mouth agape each time an elderly woman interviewee rolled a cigarette and began smoking.

Elders in Seven Mountains enjoyed a fairly high level of mobility (Table 8). Overall, only 13.33 percent of respondents reported that they had some level of difficulty with mobility. In terms of specific tasks, only 8.33 percent of respondents said they had "some difficulty with," "much difficulty with" or were unable to walk 200-300 meters

(10.53 percent of women and 7.32 percent of men), and 13.56 percent of respondents said that they had difficulty shopping (16.67 percent of women and 12.20 percent of men). Relatively few elders (18.33 percent) said they had difficulty getting on a bus, but women expressed statistically significantly more trouble with this task than did men (36.84 percent of women compared to 9.76 percent of men). Perhaps this type of physical exercise was not something to which women had become accustomed in their daily chores, whereas men's outside work and hiking included frequent stepping up and down.

Most elders also expressed little difficulty performing daily tasks within the household (Table 8). Approximately ten percent of respondents said they had any difficulty carrying a ten kg. object (15.79 percent of women and 7.69 percent of men), 6.67 percent of respondents reported difficulty with cooking (5.26 percent of women and 7.32 percent of men; 75.61 percent of surveyed men said they regularly did some cooking), and only 3.33 percent of respondents said they had any difficulty getting dressed (5.26 percent of women and 2.44 percent of men). A task in which relatively more elders (39.33 percent overall) reported that they would have trouble accomplishing was standing for two hours. In this case, women were statistically more likely to report difficulty (57.89 percent of women compared to 29.27 percent of men). It probably means that older Chinese women are more likely than their male counterparts to suffer from arthritis in the spine or lower limbs.

In terms of psychological health, there was also a trend (but it was not statistically significant) between elder women's and men's scores on the survey's depression scale (Table 9). With a possible and actual range of 14 to 56 points, the average score was

42.48. Men's average was slightly higher (44.80, meaning they were less depressed) than was women's average (37.47). Scores on the depression scale were positively correlated with perceived household economic conditions ($r = .326$), the number of rooms in the household ($r = .317$) as well as the household expenditure during Spring Festival ($r = .297$) (Table 9). This suggests that elders in larger homes felt happier than their counterparts in smaller homes. Because there was no significant relationship between depression scale scores and having a new brick and steel home, it is possible that having more rooms (or perhaps more space) in one's home directly positively influenced elders' mental health.

Elders' Households Roles, Activities, and Power

The household survey included questions on elders' daily activities within the household, as well as questions about their recreational activities and their perceived roles and contributions in the household and the village. Interviews and focus groups also included discussions about what elder women and elder men did in their households and the village, and to what extent their activities influence their families and community.

Reported Household Chores

The survey found elders performing regular tasks within their households. Much of this work was inside and involved maintaining the home by performing daily chores (Table 10). Overall, 58.33 percent of elders said that they regularly hauled water (63.16 percent of women and 56.10 percent men), while 80 percent of elders did some cooking in the household (89.47 percent women and 75.61 percent of men). Other common tasks included raising animals, which 81.67 percent of elders reported doing every day (78.95 percent of women and 82.93 percent of men) and household cleaning, which 93.33

percent of elders listed as a daily activity (94.74 percent of women and 92.68 percent men).

Participation in certain daily activities was significantly related to gender (yet not significantly related to perceived or reported economic conditions of the elder household). For example, washing clothes was a daily task that 78.95 percent of elder women reported performing, but that only 31.71 percent of elder men included in their list of chores (Table 10). On the other hand, 78.95 percent of women said that they never participated in clan rituals, while of the minority of elders who frequently participated in them (4.88 percent), all of them were male elders. Going to the market to buy goods was also an activity more often reported by men than by women (78.05 percent of older men and 47.37 percent of older women), as was selling goods in the market (15.79 percent of elder women and 31.71 percent of elder men). This likely put elderly men more often in control of spend-able and consumable resources.

Findings about activities that were most surprising to me related to gender, work and childcare (Table 10). No men said that they worked for wages, while 5.26 percent of women reported doing so. (I suspect that the men at this age were formally retired if they had received wages, whereas women continued to work in a less formal, but still waged, capacity.) Over half of elder men (58.54 percent), reported that they still did farm work, while only 36.84 percent of older women said the same. Participation in farm work was significantly related to age; only 30 percent of those in the “old-elder” category reported doing farm work while 62.50 percent of “young-elders” said they performed farm work. Also surprisingly, more elder men reported caring for children than did elder women (26.32 percent of women and 41.46 percent of men). Yet I observed many women caring

for young children – sometimes at the same time as they were in the fields – causing me to question how definitions of “farm work” and “child care” might be different between individuals or along gender lines.

Reported Recreational Activities

The survey asked respondents about their leisure and recreational activities, both in terms of type and frequency (Table 11). One of the most common recreational activities was watching television, with an overall 81.67 percent of elders reporting that they watched television several times a week or almost daily. These people included 87.80 percent of elder men and only 63.16 percent of elder women. I suspect that women were busier in the evenings with housework, perhaps preferred to chat with friends, or chose other activities if they could not understand the Mandarin Chinese spoken on television.

Just as interesting was what elders were *not* doing in Seven Mountains. Only a few elders said that they occasionally played *majiang*, visited the temple, went to parks, went fishing, or went to the market “for fun.” No survey respondents reported doing *tai qi* or *qi gong* during the past year, and all respondents said that they either “never” or “rarely” visited scenic or historical sites during the past year. A significant difference along gender lines was the very small amount of women (5.26 percent) compared to their male counterparts (48.78 percent) who said they read the news several times a week or almost daily (Table 11). This finding is not surprising based upon gender differences in education level and literacy rates.

Hiking the nearby hills was a popular morning activity among elders in Seven Mountains, although some older villagers said they were unable to do so due to health

problems or the need to tend to morning chores of cooking or washing laundry. It was more common to observe elder men walking up the hills in the morning for exercise while older women stayed by the stove or courtyard. Some elder hikers combined this activity with visiting with neighbors or praying at a temple. My own experience hiking up the nearby hills showed it to be a challenging task, even in the cool early morning air.

Elders' Descriptions of Roles and Activities

Compared to survey findings, elders' descriptions in focus groups and interviews of what they did tended to downplay their levels of activity and contribution within households. One of the most prominent themes emerging from both focus groups and interviews was many elders' views that they "did not do much" or "did not do anything," besides "just" housework, cooking, childcare, and tending to or selling items from the vegetable garden. Other activities that elders mentioned included feeding rabbits and chickens, going out to the market to get a little food for the household, boiling rice or rice porridge in the morning, and cutting rice straw. Speaking generally about elderly people's activities in the home, an old-elder woman's comment summarizes many of her peers' viewpoints: "[Elderly people] do not really contribute. They help care for children and do some housework, if you count that."

In focus groups both women elders and men elders emphasized that older people could not do heavy labor or farm work. Focus group participants generally agreed that after age 60 and depending on household economic conditions, most villagers were not expected to engage in heavy manual labor. (This finding is interesting because survey results show 51.67 percent of elders reported doing regular farm work. Perhaps the snowball sample of focus group participants were more likely to have "retired.") A

division between heavy farm work and household work seems to mark the distinction between “doing” something and “not doing” something for the household. Mrs. Sun’s words reflect this common sentiment:

Currently I don't contribute. I can't do any farm work. I also don't contribute to the village. At most I can help with some family matters and look after grandchildren a little.

Not all elders were willing to discount their activities and roles in the household, however. Elders who did farm work *in addition to* housework would say that they “did all of it” when asked about the distribution of work in and around the household. Older villagers in more difficult financial situations also had more difficult daily lives and less leisure time, especially when they were also responsible for caring for their own parents as well as their grandchildren. They were more likely to acknowledge their contributions, as was 58 year-old Mrs. Lin:

I get up about 6 o'clock. I'm very busy. My mother-in-law is over 80. Since last year she falls out of bed. I have to look after her. . . . I must grow vegetables and sell a little for money and manage the home subsidy money. I am extremely economical. I buy just a little pork. The child [her grandson] eats a little, my mother-in-law eats a little, but I don't eat any. I also raise some chickens and ducks to eat only at Spring Festival. Sometimes our luck is not good and at Spring Festival there is no chicken or duck meat to eat. My life is very difficult.

In open-ended survey responses, elders repeatedly cited “watching the house” (*kan jia*) as the primary contribution of an older family member. To watch the house might have included watching over school-aged children, welcoming visitors (especially people who stopped by when other family members were out), making sure the household livestock was well fed, and tending to the family vegetable plot. Only a few respondents portrayed this work as itself important and significant, understanding elders’ “new” roles in the household as meaningful in today’s world: “Before no one made

money,” a young-elder woman explained, but “now elderly people look after the home and young people go out and make money.” This perspective portrays elders as contributing along with (although perhaps not as much as) junior family members.

Elders on Later Life and “Burdens”

While elders did not see themselves as helping other family members to a great extent, they did at times emphasize that they were able to care for themselves, which avoided placing additional burdens on their family. A young-elder woman was firm in her statement during a focus group: “Elderly people don't just idle around at home eating food. Elderly people still must go out and do work. We feed ourselves and eat by ourselves.”

Based on elders’ discussions in focus groups and their responses to survey questions, I further inquired through interviews the extent to which elders saw themselves as burdening households or family members. When asked whether children felt they were burdens, elders often denied it; rather, their children were very filial. Yet many elders were quick to call themselves “burdens” in a way that suggested they did not find it a degrading label. For example, an old-elder woman explained:

Q: Do you think you are a burden to your household now?

A: You could say I'm a burden. I hope [my son and daughter-in-law] can make money. The things that I help them do they can also do. Other things I have no way to do.

Q: Do your children think you are burdensome?

A: No way. They don't dare. After all, it was so difficult before.

These comments suggest that it was unacceptable for children to call their parents burdensome, but that elders would say this about themselves or about their age group generally.

Some elders' own "burdens" had not been reduced greatly since their youth or middle-age. Young-elders especially often continued to bear significant financial and household responsibilities. A young-elder male focus group participant drew attention to situations in which elders continued to support the household once children had married or moved out:

Before I had to support children, now I still support my parents and my wife. As before, I support three people. I'm also a bit old. But to respect parents is tradition, a Chinese virtue – wouldn't you say?

At the time of this research, relatively few elders (3.33 percent) reported on the survey that they regularly cared for other elders. However, those who did say they cared for an aging relative included more women than men.

More than once, the double use of the word "burden" (*fudan*) as both a noun and a verb created an interesting misunderstanding and provided evidence that some elders felt they indeed shouldered responsibility in the family, a responsibility that was shared when family members returned from "going out."

Q: Do you think elderly people are a burden to the household?

A: Of course they shoulder responsibility.

Q: Why do you think this?

A: I have to help do much work. I must support the household.

Q: I mean are you a burden to your children? Do you think you make them tired?

A: Of course. If my son comes home his burden is definitely heavy.

Finally, few interviewed elders suggested that they contributed to the family through providing guidance or information. One man mentioned that he was able to read newspapers and learn about new policies, thereby keeping the household informed. Another old-elder woman offered advice to family members – although clearly her role was not authoritative:

Q: [So] if the family has some issue, they can ask you for advice and give you some responsibilities?

A: Yes. If there is some situation, my son will come and ask me about it. For example, when my grandson wanted to go to university my son asked me where would be a good place for him to attend. I said a medical college. It's just that later my grandson did not want to study medicine.

Elders' Views on Living Arrangements, Family Relations, and Filial Piety

Besides describing and explaining living arrangements and household conditions, elders also offered their viewpoints on these situations through the focus groups, survey, and interviews. Older villagers gave examples of “filial” and “unfilial” children and commented on possible changes in power in intergenerational relationships.

Attitudes about Living Arrangements

In all phases, older villagers demonstrated a high level of continued support for traditional arrangements in which elders live with children. The household survey included a section inquiring into elders' views and attitudes about living arrangements (Table 12). Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with a series of statements about elders living with children and grandchildren. In this phase, 94.87 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that elders living with children and grandchildren “make a big happy family,” and 81.03 agreed that living with children and grandchildren “saves money.”

Almost all elders agreed or strongly agreed with other statements supporting traditional living arrangements without significant differences along gender or class lines, including that “elderly living with children and grandchildren fosters support within families” (98.31 percent), that “elderly living with children and grandchildren helps elders,” (98.31 percent), and that “elderly living with children and grandchildren helps

younger family members” (again 98.31 percent). These findings from survey responses suggest that elders in Seven Mountains continued to view positively multiple generations living together. Indeed, 96.67 percent of respondents expressed agreement with the statement that “three or more generations living together is ideal.”

Participants in focus groups and villagers in conversations also repeated the common explanation that it is Chinese tradition for sons to care for and live with elders. Some elders complained of deviations from this plan, noting that in too many cases in Seven Mountains, “younger people do not eat and live together with older people: “[In Seven Mountains] a hundred 80 year-old people eat by themselves,” a young-elder woman bemoaned. Although there was variation in agreement to these statements along age group and gender lines, these differences were not statistically significant (Table 12).

Family and Age Relations

Living arrangements did not always dictate the character of family and age relations in Seven Mountains. Elders who lived “separately” from their children or grandchildren often lived in houses less than ten yards away. They could still share meals with their children and be involved in the household chores or affairs. These types of conditions were probably reflected in the low percentage (15 percent) of elders who agreed that “elderly living separately from children do not need to do housework for younger family members” (10.53 percent of women and 18.42 percent of men concurred) (Table 12). The majority, 70.27 percent, of elder respondents agreed that “elderly living separately from children and grandchildren allows both to live according to their wills.” However, 96.15 percent of elders agreed or strongly agreed that “fewer conflicts occur

when elderly live separately from children and grandchildren” (93.75 of older women and 97.22 percent of older men).

In terms of age relations within the household, the survey found that 15.79 percent of women disagreed and 21.95 percent of men disagreed that “younger adults and elders are equal in the household.” In whose favor the inequality worked is not clearly discernible from the way this question was posed, but interviews and focus groups suggested that many elders felt they held less power than did other family members. One man in a focus group noted that “the [television] remote control is in the hands of the young people.” Another noted that “our lives depend on whether this next generation is filial.” An old-elder man announced in a discussion:

I have a statement. Men and women are equal. But in our home the phenomenon of honoring elderly and loving children is out.

Although a vast majority of elders said that women and men were equal in the household (100 percent of women and 96.67 percent of men), elder men were more likely to manage money in the household (21.56 percent) than were elder women (5.25 percent). No survey respondents, women or men, said that they needed permission to leave the house or go on errands. When faced with an illness, most elders (58.33 percent) said that they decided with others whether they would receive medical care, some (23.33 percent) said that they decided themselves whether to seek medical attention, and in a relatively minor number of cases some one else (usually a son) made the decision. Often surprised by the “silly” question, most elders (88.34 percent) said that family members, usually sons, would pay for their medical bills, while five percent said they would use their own savings.

When asked in-depth questions about family and age relations in actuality (rather than in an ideal setting), focus group participants' comments displayed more variation in perspective and experience. Many elders were happy with their living conditions, explaining that they no longer had to do much work, nor did they feel very anxious about having enough food or clothing, since they anticipated that children could provide for them:

We don't worry about food to eat. Our children all help us. Also, before we all had to tend to our own survival. Now you can work or not work. If you don't work there is still food to eat. Children help us with chores. We don't worry about food. Children can provide you with food [young-elder woman].

Other elders were happier than in previous times, but did not express the same carefree and confident view of the present, like this woman from a relatively poorer household participating in the same focus group:

Life is much better. [But] elderly people have no way [to get an income]. Children don't give us food to eat. An elderly couple can only get their own food. My daughter, where she is, takes care of elderly people over 80 years old. There is also a nine year-old grandson.

Repeatedly, it emerged in focus groups that if children's economic conditions were good *and* if elders were on good terms with children, elders would enjoy happy lives. Put another way, elders with self-perceived "filial" children expressed much more contentment than did their counterparts who implied or clearly stated that their children were unfilial.

Views on Filial Piety and Family Relations

In order to better understand such a seemingly important factor in Seven Mountains elders' level of contentment, I directly asked older villagers to explain what the terms "filial" and "unfilial" meant to them, and to what extent they believed younger

generations were maintaining the Chinese tradition of filial piety. Although I expected long or complex explanations, the concept of filialness appeared fairly straightforward based on older villager's accounts and examples. In general, "filial" children were those who inquired into elders' health, spoke respectfully, offered them food and called them to meals, and who ensured that they received adequate clothing, medical attention, and spending money. "Unfilial" children yelled at their parents, beat them, did not care whether they were hungry or sick, and seldom or never visited or called. Several elders, as well as a research assistant, summed up the concept of filial piety by saying: "Basically it just means being good to your parents."

Elders' views diverged on whether or not children needed to have money in order to demonstrate filial piety. If children could only be filial in word, did this count as being filial? Or was being filial mainly a matter of fulfilling financial obligations and providing material support? This old-elder woman's words suggest the importance of wealth and income in achieving filialness:

Of course I wish for good health and that my sons will get rich -- that they will fix up their houses to be a little more beautiful. If they have money they can be filial. If I don't have money they could really be filial to me!

Q: Do you think you have to have money to be filial?

A: If you don't have money you can only be filial in word. But in terms of food, things would definitely be bad. I just hope the next generation carries forward. Then I will be happy.

Mrs. Liu, 69 years-old, lived in Buddha's Peak and struggled financially. When asked whether her children were filial, she responded:

They don't have money for themselves and their lives are not good. How can they be filial to me? They can just care for me with words, say to me, "Ma, take care of your health."

For others, being filial or respectful “in word” did count for something. Some elders who had no complaints about material conditions expressed wishes that their family members’ “attitudes” toward them could be better, and in my observations Seven Mountains’ elders certainly appreciated respectful words and actions, especially if they felt that was all the younger person could offer due to their own financial difficulties.

Whether or not current younger generations were more filial than those of the past was also a point of divergence, with some elders confidently claiming that present day youth were clearly less filial, others equally insistent that the younger generation was more filial, and some elders who were unsure or said that it depended on each household:

Q: Are today's younger people filial to parents? Are they better than people before?

A: In this regard, young people are about the same. You must look at their own living conditions. If those are okay, they will be filial to parents. If they are not okay and they cannot solve problems with their own food and shelter, they will not be filial to parents. But compared to people in the past it's much better [a young-elder man, 67 years old].

Elders who argued that the younger generations were *more* filial usually did so based on the notion that filial piety mainly meant providing material support. That is, to the extent that villagers had more wealth and income than in previous eras, they saw filial piety as more likely and more common. Other elders cited modern, higher education levels and “more-cultured” youth in explaining how it was that young people were able to be more filial and respectful to elders.

Older villagers also gave many examples of “unfilial” children, and while most older villagers tended to consider kindness and respect to elders a uniquely Chinese cultural characteristic, a few like 78 year-old Mrs. Chen, who had traveled abroad to visit

grandchildren, suggested that other cultures also emphasized respect and distinction in old age, perhaps to an even greater extent:

I think foreigners are the most respectful people. When I took a plane to Australia, the staff gave elderly people a red card and first brought them to a special door to wait. Then they let elderly people [first] board the plane. Our own country doesn't do this.

A majority of elders with whom I spoke mentioned the filial piety of daughters.

Although continued son preference was acknowledged by most elders, some elders had a viewpoint similar to that of 78 year-old Mr. Tan Dingshen:

I have one daughter. She is more filial than my son. Other people are very pleased to have a son. I am more pleased to have a daughter.

In interviews, an overwhelming proportion of elders mentioned that daughters at least occasionally gave them money, bought items of clothing for them, visited them, and treated them kindly. In cases in which a daughter did not frequently give money, gifts, or time, elders usually explained that it was because they had heavy responsibilities of “their own household” (i.e., her husband, children, and parents-in-law) to attend to, or that they simply lived too far away after having married out. In cases in which a daughter was struggling financially, elders were especially unlikely to expect any assistance, and “wouldn’t dare” expect a daughter to provide financial help. Still, it was clear that older villagers appreciated daughters who provided care and support. Mrs. Tang (69 years old) had a daughter whom she considered filial:

Every time she gives me a call, she says “Ma, do you still have money?” If she hears from other people that I don’t have money, she will send money to me.

Q: You're saying after your daughter married out, she still looks after you?

Yes, my daughter still cares more for me [than does my son]. She frequently invites me to go to her place for fun.

While daughters would visit and speak kindly with parents, bringing new shoes or treats, some of their brothers seldom visited parents living alone. Mr. Tan Mao (74 years-old) had one son and five daughters. In an interview he told us:

[My daughters] frequently phone me and ask whether or not I am healthy, what I need, and so on. Moreover occasionally they will come back and visit me and bring me some things – for example, all different kinds of fruit. Last time my daughter even brought me a pair of brand name leather shoes! But actually my son seldom comes back.

In short, older villagers compared the behavior of daughters to that of their sons, the latter receiving a less favorable evaluation. While elders in Seven Mountains were proud and relieved to have filial sons who built new houses and provided abundant material support, they appeared especially pleased with, albeit not demanding of, daughters' gifts of money, goods, and attention. This finding suggests that daughters provide elders with important emotional comfort that they do not receive from sons (see Gallin 2000).

Village and Hamlets: Elders' Roles, Activities and Relations

Elders' roles, activities, and relations in their larger communities were more subtle and difficult to detect than were their roles in households. Through focus groups, participants represented elders as a group interested mainly in peace and social harmony. They saw this characteristic as fulfilling a role within the community, especially during contemporary times of increased competition and wealth. An old-elder woman explained that:

We elderly people don't teach other people to do any bad things. Older people are more kind-hearted. For example when other people are yelling, we elderly people just will encourage them to be polite and friendly.

Some elders were also active in community projects. The main road leading into Southern Slope had been built with the contributions of households in the hamlet, and much of this fund-raising had been done by village elders, many of them men. Elders (mostly men) also attended clan meetings and helped organize festivals. While women appeared less likely to be active in recruiting and fundraising, elder women – especially young-elder women – helped host weddings and other celebrations, which *de facto* were community and neighborhood events.

Many of the current physical structures in the hamlets had been planned, put together, or funded by villagers who were now in later life stages. These actions were performed in the past but continued to contribute to day-to-day present life in Seven Mountains. Although this perspective is informed by my own theoretical “life course” view, some elders also demonstrated this perspective. For example Mr. Tan Mao, 74 years-old, noted:

The village hasn't called on me to do anything. However, I help the village ancestral hall in contacting people and obtaining money. Previously, I contributed quite a bit more. I used my own hands to help build that arched bridge in the village.

Participation in construction work continued for some elders, who helped family members smooth cement, lay bricks, or perform other duties when building homes. Old-elder women did not commonly haul gravel in wheelbarrows, but they swept and maintained the construction work site area or otherwise helped younger family members who were laying bricks and pouring cement. These images of older villagers wielding tools, building materials, and cleaning equipment contradicted claims that older villagers played no part in local development (as conceived in terms of construction and physical

changes to the landscape). Still, to the extent that elders defined development as an economic phenomenon based on waged work and income generation, they saw themselves as unable to influence development – certainly less so than were younger people able to do. In response to a survey question about elders’ role in local development, 98.33 percent of elders said that compared to younger people, elderly people played a less important role.

Age Relations

Age relations in Seven Mountains were marked by age segregation, especially between old-elders and young adults. Yet, contrary to images of abandoned or ignored elders, older villagers did not just passively or begrudgingly accept an imposed generational separation. In many ways the “generation gap,” if not actually a mutually formed division, probably contributed to elders’ desires for an elderly person’s activity center as a place where they could come together as an exclusive group. In an old-elder man’s focus group discussion, one participant explained:

We watch the programs that young people want to watch . . . [O]ur most important need now is for an elderly person's activity hall. This way we elderly people would not stay at home watching young people give us dirty looks.

Elders’ gatherings in doorways and on porches afforded social activity where they could not only engage in discussions and activities that interested them as a cohort but also avoid generation-based family tensions.

DISCUSSION: RURAL ELDERS’ ROLES, AND RELATIONS IN LATER LIFE

Taken together, themes that emerged in focus groups, results from the household survey, and narratives in interviews provided examples of rural elders’ roles, activities, living arrangements, and age relations in a developing village. In this section I point out

key lessons to be drawn from this knowledge and suggest how this research contributes to (1) studies of aging in China and (2) the sociology of aging.

Elders' Invisible Contributions

From my vantage point, there was a discrepancy between elders' reports of their household and village activity level and what I saw elders doing. Although most respondents did not believe so, I found Seven Mountains elders playing supportive but mainly indirect roles in social change and development. I explain this discrepancy by suggesting that elders' perceived lack of contribution to households and communities is an extension of the relative "invisibility of women's work." Much of the labor that elders described doing was inside or near the household and involved cooking, cleaning, growing vegetables, raising small animals for consumption, looking after grandchildren, and washing clothes. These tasks were neither waged nor performed in the public sphere. Harvesting rice and cutting rice straw, on the other hand, were tasks that most elders did appear to "count" as work, probably due to the manual labor required as well as to the possibility that the rice could be sold. It is not possible to claim that the devaluation of elder's work was either a "Man's view" or a "Women's view" in Seven Mountains, nor was it an attitude that I found to be age-based. Rather, this perspective is suggestive of gender-age inequality on a broad social level which continues to laud and make visible the work done outside the home while not acknowledging the fundamental role that many elders (and women) play by allowing family members to earn wages and participate in public spheres – including the sphere of "development."

Definitions of development and concepts of social change strongly shaped the extent to which elders saw themselves as contributing to village and households. Based

on older villagers' explanations of village development as economic growth and industry, it is not surprising that they did not see themselves as playing an active part in village development. Because development was understood only in economic terms on a large scale, and when social change was understood as a structural force examined at a fixed point in time, elders did not appear (or understand themselves) to be contributing to "development," "village development," or "social change." Only those respondents who took a long-term view and considered their past contributions were likely to say that they had played a role in developing their village or hamlets, and no elders believed that they contributed to development through household work or indirect support of wage-earning family members.

I would argue that, to the extent that rural households are a key site of China's development (Croll 1994) and older people in Seven Mountains showed evidence of being key actors in families (Silverstein et al. 2006), Seven Mountains elders were important, albeit indirect, players in village change and development. Along with highlighting the "invisible" work of women, studies of social change and development in developing nations should include work and planning done not only in waged sectors by "working age" women and men, but also the active contributions of elders and even children. Besides helping to avoid ageism in research, this inclusion would better illuminate the processes of social change and development by showing how and by whom change is "done" and what work is necessary (even if not sufficient) to promote what kinds of rural social changes and development. This approach is distinct from that of projects aiming to encourage "participation" through contributions in the waged sector or through volunteering for unpaid work in "social development."

Elders' Roles and Activities: The Long-term View

Adherence to a life course view of one's activities and contributions influenced not only the extent to which elders saw themselves as contributing to development and household change, but also whether elders thought their family members were likely to consider them burdens. Elders believed that if members of the household remembered how hard they worked for the family in the past they would be less likely to view them as inactive or burdensome. This long-term view demonstrates that many respondents understood and evaluated family relations not only in terms of the present, but as an institution spanning decades and generations. The relationship between cultural norms of family living arrangements and the tendency to adopt a long-term view of household contributions could be further considered in studies of elders, household power relations, and changing family structures. Scholarship and political actors might also learn from this view of contributions over the life course when evaluating to what extent elders are "unproductive" members of society.

Another simple lesson from elders' daily lives that demonstrates the significance of views across time is that elders compared their present activities with those of the past. A sense of relative leisure always – albeit to various extents – arose when older villagers made these cross-time comparisons. Work that they did in the present day was much easier than in prior eras when it was "a struggle just to be a person." No matter what chores they performed in or around households in the present, their workloads were surely lighter than they were in the past. Unfortunately, the tendency to minimize current work loads in light of past hardships may have effectively encouraged elders to minimize the extent to which they were real and contributing workers within and around

households; their standards for evaluating “hard work” were shaped by their life experiences. Cohort experience and frames of reference appear important both in elders’ senses of contributions *and* of well-being.

Studies of Aging in Rural China: Insights from Seven Mountains

This village scale study also offers some insights that might be applied to or further investigated in future studies of aging in rural China. It highlights and debunks some assumptions in the literature about growing old in rural Chinese villages, particularly in terms of family relations, living arrangements, and effects of migration.

Family Age Relations, Offsets, and Relativity

As a “Westerner” taught that Chinese culture heavily emphasizes honoring older people, simply “not beating, yelling at, or letting elderly people starve” was not the minimal standard for acceptable elder treatment that I expected to emerge from interviews and conversations with Seven Mountains villagers of various ages. One explanation for the simple definitions and relatively low standards of filialness given by villagers is that the concept is, indeed, difficult to explain or to think through and thus people caricatured or abbreviated it. It is also possible that definitions of filial piety fluctuate over time and space contexts, gender, socio-economic status, and family background. For example, ancient examples of filial piety recounted to me by one of my informants in another village consisted of stories in which children performed magnificent feats of martyrdom to ensure the comfort or survival of parents. The “filialness” described in these dramatic accounts is starkly different from the contemporary day-to-day images of children politely inquiring into parents’ health, offering them snacks, and paying their medical bills. These findings suggest that the

concept of filial piety is unwieldy and mutable not only for “outsiders,” and energy might be better spent by focusing on elders’ expectations and satisfaction with family relations and dynamics rather than in attempting to understand to what extent “filial piety” in China can withstand globalization and social change.

Still, another insight found in the perspectives of Seven Mountains older villagers is that filial piety in contemporary China could be understood to be *increasingly* common. Most studies ask how much traditional family values and filial piety are either holding firm or disintegrating, seldom if ever asking whether there might be a strengthening of family bonds or perceived increase in levels of filial piety that comes with globalization or “Westernization” (Ikels 2004; Zhan and Montgomery; Sher 1984). Yet, as some elders’ comments imply, if “filial piety” is understood to be determined by children’s level of “culture” and economic resources to provide abundantly for aging parents, China’s “opening” could indeed promote filial piety. This argument, although uncommon, could be simply a small-scale version of the claim that increased wealth will solve the problem of supporting China’s aging elderly population.

Lastly, older villagers’ comments about age relations in households, combined with their stated reasons for wanting an elderly village activity center (e.g., chatting together with other elderly people) challenge the assumption of scholars and journalists that elderly people desire to spend more time mostly with junior family members. Given the option, it appears many elders in Seven Mountains would choose to visit with *peers*, especially in cases where they find themselves not easily relating to junior family members, receiving “dirty looks” from young people, or not being able to select which television show to watch. Findings suggest that for many elders, ideal companionship is

something that one gets from “one big crowd” of one’s cohort members, in addition to - not exclusively from – children or grandchildren’s company. This understanding of later-life companionship warrants re-consideration of concerns that elders living alone or whose family members “go out” have no opportunities to enjoy companionship and meaningful social exchanges. On a positive note, it suggests that elders who stay behind in villages when family members migrate to the city are not doomed to loneliness. At the same time, it also suggests a major need for rural elderly activity centers, regardless of levels of village development, rural-urban migration, or socio-economic affluence.

Later Life Living Arrangements, Independence, and Well-Being

Unlike some other recent studies of aging in rural China (see Zhang 2004), I did not find elders in Seven Mountains expressing a desire to live and survive independently from children in order to enjoy personal freedom. This situation probably reflects maintenance of strong traditional viewpoints about family structure and living arrangements. However, although elders might have been satisfied with a traditional arrangement, they had other ideas about what was truly most ideal. Respondents without pensions frequently pointed out in a wistful manner that elders with pensions did not have to count on sons for survival. These elders could imagine an even better alternative than relying on sons; a situation in which elders *could* but did not *have to* financially depend on children. Studies of aging in China and elsewhere have found that the most content elders are those who know that children will provide personal care if needed and yet have not had to draw on that resource (Li et al. 2005; Silverstein et al. 1996; Lee et al. 1995; Dunham 1995). Based on my analysis of elders’ views about living arrangements and financial support, I suspect that in Seven Mountains an ideal of having untapped available

financial resources also existed – an ideal embodied by having both a pension and “good children.”

Among research respondents who lived alone were a number of elders whose children lived in the village or very nearby in separate households. This point should caution against assuming that children and family members who can reside in the same village as parents will live together with them. Probably most key to understanding rural elders’ levels of participation in family affairs (in Seven Mountains and similar contexts) are interpersonal relationships and household proximity rather than the dichotomous variable of whether elders’ children do or do not live with them. In Seven Mountains, the extent of elders’ ties with these sons and daughters-in-law appeared to depend on the households’ economic conditions and personal factors. Notably, the economic situation of their household appeared crucial to elders’ level of satisfaction with living arrangements. This observation supports other research arguing for attention to overall economic conditions in rural areas rather than mainly to a (potential) decline of family values (Davis 1993, Joseph and Phillips 1999).

Another assumption that interviews challenged is that elders living with multiple generations of family members are content, well-cared for, and enjoy adequate companionship. In most cases in Seven Mountains in which interviewees expressed feelings of sadness and depression, they were not elders living alone, but rather, they were living with other family members with whom they either did not get along or did not have frequent positive exchanges. Extrapolating from this small scale lesson, I would argue it is likely too presumptuous to suggest that elders will enjoy well-being and happiness as long as traditional family structures are maintained in rural China.

Migration, Elder Abandonment, and Effects on Households

I did not come across any instances in Seven Mountains in which family members had “gone out,” leaving behind elders who were unable to care for and feed themselves. (If there were cases like this in Seven Mountains, it may have been that I simply failed to discover them or that they were kept from me.) There were elders who were left in the village and were struggling financially, but it is not possible to claim that their financial or physical hardships were *caused* by household members’ absence; remittances may have in fact alleviated some difficulties. According to villagers, if elders were in need of instrumental care, a family member (I suspect a daughter-in-law) would stay in the village to care for them. Moreover, most elders did not suffer major physical limitations until fairly high ages, at which point a young-elder would likely be present to care for them. I suspect that abandonment of elders is more likely in settings of extreme poverty where household members see no choice but to send family members to the cities, where the local government is unable or unwilling to provide subsidies, and/or when family relations are acrimonious to begin with. (In this latter case, it is likely that “unfilial” children who live outside of the local area would be able to avoid social criticism and pressure that they would otherwise experience were they living in their hometown.) While rural-migration has certainly done much to transform China on a national level and has been shown to affect dramatically some impoverished households, as well as to promote social change (Zhang 2003, Davin 1998), this study shows that elders’ lives or households are not necessarily dramatically affected by family members’ temporary migration to cities or towns (see Chapter Four). Faulting rural-urban migration for creating a situation in which older parents are physically abandoned is probably a

spurious claim. Rather, research at multiple levels and in various contexts is necessary in order to avoid caricaturizing the effects of rural-urban migration on households and individuals.

Chinese Rural Elders and Daughters

Finally, this research provides an example of a traditional rural setting in which almost all interviews with elders (although not drawn as a random sample) included reports of daughters frequently inquiring into parents' well-being, visiting their homes, and offering gifts of clothing, food and money – sometimes in reported excess of their brothers' gifts and visits. Moreover, many elders reported daughters and granddaughters making substantial financial contributions to households prior to marriage. These findings demonstrate that systematic empirical research about rural daughters' support in mainland China is needed (see Gallin 2000 and Gallin 1986). Recommending that rural daughters be held more responsible for parental support (Qiao 2001) implies that they do not already greatly contribute, thus overlooking or minimizing the help that China's rural daughters may already provide. In fact, insofar as daughters care not only for their husband's parents but also provide help and support for their own parents, they are (or will be) doing "double duty."

The Sociology of Aging: Insights from Seven Mountains

Investigations into later life in a developing village also provide lessons and insights that contribute to broader studies in the sociology of aging. In particular, analysis of elders' viewpoints contributes to knowledge about gender and aging, as well as to the politics of aging. Seven Mountains elders rarely, if ever, explicitly connected gender and their roles or activities in households. Women did not make comments about

life “as an older woman,” nor did men label their experiences as those of men who were growing old. Instead, both age-gender relations and the politics of aging in Seven Mountains were phenomena that I had to observe and analyze from clues implicit in the data.

Gender and Experiences of Later Life

Differences in elders’ types of activities demonstrated a continued division in later life between a male sphere located “outside” and women’s sphere “inside” or close to the home, in addition to elders generally being more “inside” people in relation to working- age family members. In later life older men performed more farm work than did older women, and the elders who handled or raised large animals such as oxen were men, while the women elders tended only the rabbits, chickens, and smaller livestock. It is notable that this inside/outside division of labor has continued despite elder women’s prior (and, in over a third of cases, continued) participation in farm labor and past years of earning work points in production teams, not to mention “Liberation” and the Cultural Revolution.

This “inside work/outside work” distinction was also reflected in other ways. For example, although both elder women and elder men participated in religious rituals, elder women did so by setting up small tables and burning incense inside or directly outside the household door. Both my observations and survey responses show that elder men were much more likely to venture out of the immediate household area and hamlet to the clan ancestral hall. Elder men’s greater likelihood of reading newspapers, watching television, and going to the market to buy goods also reflect a higher level of participation in the “outside” world, just as the typical women’s task of washing clothes required daily

presence in the home. Many of the elder women whom I met, especially those under age 70, appeared to maintain busy and active routines in the home during the day while their husbands went “out to do errands.”

Because Seven Mountains’ older women are more encapsulated in the household and because they may likely live to a later average age than elder men, elder women are likely to be more intensely affected (both positively and negatively) by household age relations, power dynamics, and living arrangements than are older men. Older women in a desirable situation may feel particularly supported, while those in bad situations may be especially vulnerable and unhappy. Women elders who do not live within multiple generational households may suffer greater senses of loneliness and isolation, whereas men elders are more likely to have public places to which to escape or avoid turbulent or awkward relations within the household. To this extent, an elderly person’s activity center may be particularly positive for the lives of elderly rural women.

Elder men’s greater participation in outside events and greater visibility in public places also suggests that they continued to have more opportunities to play a role in the village. Members of the seven-person village council were all male persons mostly over age 55. Even if these elder males did not command the same level of respect and power as their counterparts of the past, there still existed a role for some (particularly well-off) older men in Seven Mountains in which they could exercise influence and make decisions at the extra-household level. There was not a comparable role for older women. Pensions, received by men who had held government or teaching positions, were present-day reminders of previous participation and contributions at an extra-household level. Moreover, a life course perspective allowed some men to regard their previous work in

the village (e.g., construction or official work) as presently contributing to Seven Mountains. But even a life course perspective could not influence the extent to which most elder women understood themselves as affecting village changes or participating at a community level. An elderly persons' activity center might be especially important in providing a space for elderly women's participation in their communities.

Elder women in Seven Mountains were more likely to self-report poor health, memory loss, and depression than were elder men. (This difference could be due to women's greater likelihood of having poorer health, memory, and greater depression, to women's greater likelihood of *reporting* these problems, or to both factors.) When cognitive health is relatively poorer, a cumulative age disadvantage is likely at work via lower education levels, years of less intellectually stimulating work, and smaller social circles and spheres (see Zhang 2006). Still, the relatively greater prevalence of smoking and (as I observed) of consuming alcohol on the part of men in the village causes me to believe that these men will have a greater likelihood of facing heart disease and stroke in later life. These behaviors, especially by young-elder men who performed little physical labor in and around households (an unusual situation for young-elder women), will likely lead to earlier death or greater morbidity. Indeed, although male elders overall reported fewer difficulties with daily tasks, male young-elders generally reported slightly (although not statistically significantly) more problems with walking 200-300 meters than did their female peers, and the survey participants who reported suffering from strokes were men.

Along with evidence of *cumulative disadvantage*, age-gender relations within the village suggest the presence of *age-as-leveler* phenomena. Changes in intergenerational

power relationships within the household generally also brought men closer to the “level” of women elders in terms of household status and decision-making. Also, in this setting, older men who no longer performed farm labor or public work experienced relative declines in status as they aged, whereas older women, accustomed to being primarily identified with housework, probably enjoyed relatively more continuity across the life course. However this continuity was a continuance of relative invisibility, and in any case was not beneficial enough to provide women with mental and psychological health experiences equal to those of their male counterparts.

In sum, in Seven Mountains, both “leveling” and “cumulative disadvantage” appeared to exist simultaneously in experiences of aging, even at an individual level. Rather than seeking to bolster one or the other theory, studies might give attention to the multiple ways in which power relations are leveled (or not leveled) and to what kind of disadvantages accumulate under what conditions. Because economic conditions, wage sources, and family resources were so important to shaping women’s and men’s household experiences, socio-economic status must also be considered when studying gender relations in rural households and communities. In other words, examining only gender or only the categories of “women” and “men” without consideration for age, class, and other social locations cannot produce adequate knowledge of life experiences and social change in rural China.

The (National, Village, and Household) Politics of Aging

Finally, this research in Seven Mountains reinforces the significance of current and historical political-economic contexts in terms of elders’ experiences of aging and development. For example, the past communal system and relative lack of private

property precluded a situation in Seven Mountains in which older family members were in possession of great wealth or resources to be passed down and divided among children and grandchildren. (This situation will likely be different when today's younger cohorts are elders.) Much of the wealth in Seven Mountains, probably as in most other parts of China, was newly found by junior family members. In particular, money to build houses usually came from sons working in the city or profiting from recent business ventures. To the extent that younger family members in Seven Mountains were able to make enough money to build houses, buy vehicles, and travel while their parents possess scant monetary savings and few things, generational power relations were indeed in favor of the youth, supporting the argument that rural "modernizations" decreased the power and status of elders. However, the *process* by which this occurred was likely different for Seven Mountains' elders than for their peers living under different political-economic conditions. In this setting, elders experienced declines in household generational power as their children and grandchildren began to make more money in a transitional market economy – not through a seemingly apolitical, "natural" aging process or through elders' relinquishment of assets in the form of pre-inheritance. The process of generational power shifts is sure to shape experiences of aging, even if the outcome (e.g., children gaining control over assets and resources) is similar (Albert and Cattell 1994, Amoss and Harrell 1981). It is also important to recall that, although many older villagers owned fewer and less costly private possessions than did their children, in relation to their own previous lives, many elders now owned more things – "even cell phones."

Indeed, I argue that, besides influencing elders' views of current living standards, offsets also more or less successfully mitigated elders' perceived household power

disadvantages in later life. It appears that for many elders, loss of age-based prestige and power in later life was supplemented by increased relative wealth. Power itself is also multi-dimensional, and power that elders “lost” within the household was probably offset by a relative sense of gain in personal effectiveness and autonomy in comparison to previous years. Studies interested in ascertaining how to promote satisfactory living conditions among elderly people would do well to explore existing and potential offsets to changing power relations and household/family politics.

CHAPTER 6: REFLECTING ON THE FUTURE: EXPECTATIONS, DREAMS, AND WORRIES

Daily scenes in Seven Mountains were a visual conglomeration of past, present, and future. Posters of Chairman Mao, stacks of burning rice straw, and portraits of ancestors displayed in many households recalled earlier eras and ways of life, just as pop music blared from radios, heavy trucks barreled down the road, and smoke stacks from local industries were constant reminders of the busy pace of modern life. Villagers' dreams of prosperity were manifest in piles of red bricks waiting to be formed into new homes, construction equipment waiting to lay new roads, and school bags packed with textbooks.

The purpose of this chapter is to describe and analyze elders' expectations for later life. Social change is shaped by the plans and expectations of people, and like other villagers, older residents of Seven Mountains had their own hopes and concerns about the coming decades. This knowledge about the nature and extent of older villagers' future needs, worries, and hopes for coming years is valuable for understanding the extent to which families and the state will be able to support rural elderly people. Furthermore, rural Chinese elders' views of the future in this village challenged some common ideas about happiness and contentment in later life and suggested areas for further inquiry.

The first portion of this chapter addresses elders' specific expectations for future support from family and state, as well as what they most hoped for and worried about in later life. After describing these perspectives, I forward suggestions as to how they contribute to existing knowledge about aging in rural China and to the field of

sociological aging studies. I conclude with a brief section that examines what findings from this and previous chapters say about elders, aging, and development in rural China.

As with other themes of later life explored in this dissertation, previous experiences and political-economic contexts played major roles in how elders envisioned the next decades and how they defined adequate support, prosperity, and a happy life. Thinking about the future elicited optimism for elders who had families with adequate economic resources and who enjoyed harmonious family relations. Having survived past hardships, it was difficult for many older villagers to imagine times more bitter than those they had already experienced. Even if food, shelter, and good health would be lacking in the future, they would eventually only have the “burden” of themselves rather than additional responsibilities to feed children and parents. However, older people whose sons were not able to support them or who were not willing to support them (a seemingly rare phenomenon in Seven Mountains) faced the future with hesitation and uncertainty. These less advantaged older villagers planned to continue to work until they could no longer work, hoped that their family conditions would improve, and kept faith that the local government would eventually provide them with some support.

Who and What? Expectations for Family Members

Elders in Seven Mountains relied on families for future old age support. This finding is not surprising in light of Chinese tradition and other research in China’s rural areas (Li et al. 2004; Zimmer and Kwong 2003; Fan 2001). Yet findings from the household survey showed that the support they expected from family members varied according to gender, perceived household economic conditions, and the type of support (financial, instrumental, or psychological) anticipated (Table 13). They had expectations

not only for sons, but for daughters-in-law, sons-in-law, and grandchildren, contradicting villagers' common remark that "Chinese elderly people rely on sons for support in old age." Of course, it is important to note that these findings do not take into account that some elders may not have had sons or other particular family members from whom it would be possible to expect help. Therefore, rather than reflecting the perceived willingness of particular existing family members to support older villagers, these findings represent elders' perceived future resources based on existing family members.

Expectations for Financial Support

Survey results show that 76.67 percent of elders expected a son to provide financial support, while 60 percent reported expecting a daughter-in-law to provide financial support (Table 13). Thirty-seven percent said that they expected a daughter to provide financial support, and 30 percent of elders expected sons-in-law to do so. A very small percentage of older villagers, three percent, expected a grandson to provide financial support. In this case, there was a significant difference along gender lines: All of those saying they expected a grandson to provide financial support were women. From my observations, older women spent more time with grandchildren, and perhaps they anticipated that this investment would encourage reciprocation in the form of future material support. An even smaller percentage (1.67) of older villagers expected support from a granddaughter, with no significant difference in terms of gender.

Along class lines, there was also a significant difference in future expectations for financial support: Respondents who considered themselves to live in a "somewhat well-off" or "very well-off" household were more likely than their poorer counterparts to

expect financial help from a daughter-in law. Likely, these “better off” daughter-in-laws had enough to help pay for elders’ expenses.

In general, elders did not expect financial support from a spouse. Notably, no women reported relying on or planning to rely on husbands for financial support. (Of the elder men who said they expected wives to help provide financial support, most of them said that they would also provide support for wives. In other words, these men imagined a mutually supportive situation.) A small portion of elders, 1.67 percent, said that they did not expect that any family member, including themselves, would be providing financial support. Expectations for people outside the household unit to provide financial assistance appeared minimal, as only 1.67 percent of elders said they expected support from a sibling, and no respondents were expecting aid from a friend or other person such as a neighbor (Table 13).

Expectations for Physical Care

In terms of anticipated physical care, 58.33 percent of elderly respondents said they expected a son would provide physical care, and about the same amount, 56.67 percent, expected a daughter-in-law to do so. Of those surveyed, 28.33 percent reported that they expected a daughter to provide physical care, and 23.33 percent said a son-in-law would help in this aspect. These expectations did not differ between elderly women and elderly men (Table 13).

A significant gender difference again existed with regard to elders’ anticipated help from grandsons. While no men said they expected grandsons to provide physical care, 15.79 percent of women did. This difference might again relate to grandmothers’ expectations of future reciprocation in exchange for physically caring for grandsons as

children. Also, perhaps women also expected to live to older ages than did their husbands, and therefore anticipated needing assistance with physical care. Only 1.67 percent of elders expected help with physical care from granddaughters.

In terms of spousal assistance with physical care, 10.53 percent of women anticipated help from a husband, although quite a larger percentage (29.27 percent) of men said that they expected their wife to assist with physical daily care. (This gender difference might be due to women's beliefs that they would outlive their spouses.) This means that, overall, 76.67 percent of respondents did *not* expect a spouse would help with personal care in the future. As with financial support, 1.67 percent said that no one, including themselves, would be available to assist in this aspect. No elders expected physical care help from siblings.

Respondents who considered their households to be somewhat well-off or very well-off were also more likely than their economically disadvantaged peers to expect personal care both from sons and daughters-in-law. Perhaps these "better off" junior family members had more time than did junior family members in households that elders perceived as having just enough money to pay for expenses or not enough.

Expectations for Psychological Support

The third type of support about which the survey asked was psychological comfort; that is, emotional support and companionship. As in the case of financial assistance, 76.67 percent of elders said that a son was expected to provide psychological comfort (Table 13, third panel). However, more elders – 68.33 percent -- said that they anticipated a daughter-in-law would provide psychological comfort. Fifty-seven percent of respondents expected a daughter to provide psychological comfort, and 41.67 percent

anticipated psychological comfort from a son-in-law. Older women and older men differed significantly in the extent to which they expected a son-in-law to provide support: Over half of the older men surveyed (53.66 percent) said that they expected a son-in-law to provide psychological comfort, whereas only 15.79 percent of women respondents said the same. Perhaps male elders anticipated being able to bond with their sons-in-law through passing down information and roles related to the clan history or other gender-based activities. Elders generally did not consider grandchildren a future source of psychological comfort; only 6.67 percent of elders listed grandsons as an expected resource in this regard, and only 1.67 percent listed granddaughters. Roughly the same amount of men and women said that they expected a spouse to provide psychological support; 10.53 percent of older women and 9.76 percent of older men. No elders reported expecting to receive psychological comfort from a brother or sister. There were no significant differences in expected psychological support from family members based upon elders' perceived household economic conditions.

Elders on Development, the State, and China's Aging Population

Focus groups, the household survey, and interviews also asked older villagers to describe their views and expectations for their lives and more generally for “the future” of their village, China's development, and China's aging population. According to the household survey, 55.17 percent of elderly people reported believing that China's aging population would interfere with China's future development, with no significant difference along gender or class lines. This question was not something that most elders had previously contemplated, and they often expressed hesitation before answering. Certainly such a broad question could be difficult for many people to answer, including

analysts who specialize in topics of China's economic and demographic conditions. However, the mixed nature of older villagers' responses suggests that there was not a widespread sense of crisis or concern among elders in Seven Mountains regarding China's population aging. The issue of China's aging population was not as much of a perceived problem as was, for example, the challenge of China's population size.

Whether or not their lives or the village would be affected by an increased proportion of elderly people was an easier question for older residents to answer. In focus groups and interviews, many elders said that elders would not and could not influence village development, and only in cases of extreme poverty would families be unable to support older family members. This old-elder woman's comments related the typical components of optimism about the future which many Seven Mountains' elders expressed:

The Communist Party state power is the best. My children are filial. We don't need to do anything. Everything is good. Now the medical technology is very advanced. If older people and children get sick, they will be looked after well. Not like before.

This kind of perspective, combined with perceived benefits related to age (for example, having no children or grandchildren to look after), allowed older villagers to look toward the future as an era of improvements and happiness, especially when imagined in the context of their life courses. As reflected in the above quotation, they indicated a number of explanations why the "1-2-4" phenomenon (an only child supporting two parents and four grandparents) would not be a problem. Below, I elaborate on elders' expressions about the desirability of having many contemporaries, their trust in the Communist Party leadership, the ability of technology to resolve challenges of an aging population, the belief that families would financially support elderly members as long as elders and

children were “good,” and the faith that the earning power of one descendent would be much greater than the earning power of several descendents in earlier eras.

The More the Merrier

Rather than being concerned about future support, elders regarded an increased proportion of older people as a highly positive demographic change because it meant opportunities for companionship with peers. Elders imagined a future of “having fun and talking together” in excited tones and emphasized the importance of being able to go out and “see people and communicate with them,” often in reference to people in their own age group. A male elder who had traveled in China noted:

I've been to other cities. Older people all gather together. One big crowd.
One big crowd. Every one obtains their happiness. Sword dancing,
dancing, jogging...anything

Additionally, except for the most disadvantaged, older villagers were overwhelmingly optimistic about a future in which they expected to “live long lives and watch the changes.” Elders had already witnessed monumental advancements in transportation, communication, and medical care and only expected to witness more of these progressive changes in the future. They understood that China’s aging population was partly due to people in their birth cohorts living longer lives, and they viewed increased longevity as an undeniably positive social change.

Trust in Party, Nation, and Technological Advancements

Older villagers also expressed strong faith in the central state’s ability to oversee appropriately the continued economic growth and progress of the nation. This trust in the Party was inextricably linked to pride in the nation and confidence that continued

development of the economy and technological sectors would bring with it solutions to China's social problems:

There are more older people. Life spans are longer. It has raised China's burden a little. But the nation will rise up strongly. The nation has money and can handle this situation well.

Though some elders complained of improper implementation, the "Five Guarantees" program and subsidies for poor families appeared to satisfy most elders' expectations for state support of needy elders. In particular, women in focus groups explained that the Party would care for elders and that it was safe to assume the Party would do what it could to help elderly people. Said one old-elder woman:

We go along with the government. It can take whatever and give it to us. We are just fine. We are willing to go along with the government. The government can make its own calculations.

Although elder men also put faith in the Communist Party, they were inclined to offer specific suggestions as to how and why the nation would succeed in providing for older people. This young-elder man explained that less labor power would be needed to feed China's growing elderly population:

Compared to before, there are more rice seeds. Before, one *mu* [0.165 acres] of land required 10 pounds of fertilizer but only produced 500 pounds of rice. Now the best types of blends produce one or two thousand pounds of rice. Many people can use a little land and eat

Other elder men expressed similar viewpoints, focusing on the ability of national economic growth and advancements in agricultural technology to meet the challenges of a larger proportion of aging people. Probably due to their own experiences and occupations, they focused on issues of production and agriculture when talking about the

extent to which China's aging population might affect the prosperity of families or the country:

The nation has developed. It can spur village development. The economy has developed. The nation is prosperous. Of course this can resolve the problem of the increase in elderly people

Previously people who depended on labor needed more manpower. Now many people rely on machines, they don't need labor power. Most older people are idle; younger people [also] don't have work to do and are idle.

Elders also expressed optimism regarding medical technology and quality of medical treatment. The availability of ready-to-consume medicines (Western, traditional Chinese medicine, and combinations of the two) and the development of surgical techniques were positive changes in their lives that contrasted with previous experiences. In earlier years traditional medicines were sometimes difficult or costly to acquire and required time-consuming preparation at home.

Faith in Family

Finally, although Seven Mountains' elders generally portrayed shifts in age relations as unfavorable to older people at the household level, they maintained confidence that families would continue to be a main, stable source of support for the majority of elders in their village *as long as economic resources (i.e., families to support them, people from which to borrow or receive cash, enough money to pay for medical expenses) were adequate*. Due to the increase in wealth and income in comparison to previous eras, many elders believe that an increased proportion of elderly people would be a relatively minor issue:

As an elderly person looking at the situation right now, there will be no influence. If it were before when everyone had no money, there would have been a big effect [young-elder man].

Mrs. Zhang, 79 years old, explained that ten years later her “grandchildren will be finished with school, [her] daughter-in-law's business will be bigger and earning more money and a house should be built.” A man of the same age from another hamlet echoed this hope in family, envisioning that “at that time my grandson will be grown up and he can help his father.” This old-elder man explained, “I am working so hard to bring [my grandson] up -- he will also care for me and look after me.”

Older villagers also expressed willingness, ability, and intentions to look after themselves to a large extent; to do work for themselves if able, to meet their own needs, and to find ways to entertain themselves and socialize that were relatively independent of younger generations. Their doubts about family support in the future were mainly regarding general household well-being, not about the extent to which family members would lose “family values,” migrate to the cities, live separately from elders, or not have enough siblings to help them shoulder the burden of elder care. In fact, in Seven Mountains, large families did not guarantee support for elders. In some cases, interviewees with five sons or more lived in relatively poor conditions and maintained little hope for future prosperity. One old-elder woman with many sons advised:

Older people should not have too many children. If you have too many children they will try to pass along the responsibility. You should just have one. This way at least there will be one to take care of you.

Dreams and Concerns about the Future

Judging only from focus group discussions it seemed as if Seven Mountains' elders had little or no concerns about the future. In interviews as well, many elders

described their current lives as markedly better than the past precisely because they “had no worries.” This relatively well-off old-elder woman was jovial in her description of her current life:

Q: Do you worry about the future?

A: I don't worry. I just hope for world peace. In this case we elderly people would feel relieved. Now we don't worry about food and clothing. The most important thing is world peace.

Q: You don't worry about anything else? Do you worry about your health being bad?

A: No. As long as there's money you can treat any illness. Moreover my sons and daughters-in-law are all very filial. There was one time I went to bed quite late. My son got up and saw my bedroom door was closed. When he called out no one answered. He was worried about me and called someone to use a bamboo pole to open my window. Ha ha! After that I didn't dare sleep too late again

I asked older villagers to describe an ideal life for an elderly person. Almost all elders described scenes in which their basic needs were met and they did not have to be concerned about survival. Having enough food and being able to enjoy occasionally some “special treats” was a source of great enjoyment. Mrs. Fei, who had earlier recalled bitter times of eating leaves and wild grass, confessed:

I just think about eating and having something to eat. I want all sorts of things to eat. Soon it will be the New Year! I love to eat all the oranges and cakes.

These elders who did not worry about survival expressed contentment and ease about the future, but less advantaged people like Mrs. Lin, 58-years old, dreamt of “having three meals a day and eating until you are full, not needing to borrow money from other people, having clothes to wear.”

Because a strong desire for an elderly activity center was evident in focus groups and the survey, in interviews I asked elders to elaborate on what activities and qualities

they would hope to see at such a place. Older villagers often said they hoped they would have a chance to dance, sing, play musical instruments, and chat together. They imagined playing games such as cards, chess, and *majiang* -- “but not for money” -- and they suggested that elders could enjoy books, newspapers, videos, and television. Many elders also envisioned an elderly activity center as a place where older villagers could exercise. (Not everyone was able or willing to hike up the hills, and having seen the exercise equipment in older people’s centers in other villages, towns, and cities, older villagers were eager to enjoy similar facilities.) Most of all, an elderly activity center was, as described by 79-year old Mrs. Sun (who lived in a relatively well-off household), a place where “everyone could go, have fun, talk and laugh, and that would make the days pass more quickly,” – opposed to her current daily routine in which she was “just idling at home all day, with nothing to do.” Such desires for more recreation and entertainment opportunities were also apparent in elders’ dreams of travel to scenic and historic places in China, cities such as Hong Kong, or even overseas.

Hopes for Future Generations

Because family was a fundamentally important aspect of elders’ lives, it was no surprise that their hopes often touched upon the circumstances of their children and grandchildren. A 74 year-old widowed Mrs. Xu, with two sons and many daughters, explained that:

R: Being so old . . . I just want to go to the temple and ask the *bodhittsatva* to bless my sons to do good business and make a little more money.
I: This counts as a wish. What else do you wish for?
R: Nothing.

Many elders hoped that their grandchildren could receive good educations, that their children and grandchildren would marry at appropriate ages, and that their sons could prosper. In fact, villagers and research assistants explained to me that older people seldom thought of themselves and were mainly concerned about the younger generations. This elder man's answer demonstrates the tendency to downplay elders' needs and living conditions:

I am old; whether I eat well or not doesn't matter, so I don't have any worries. I just hope the next generation can be stronger and get better and better every day (80 year-old man, Stone Flower).

Still, elders linked the prosperity of children and grandchildren to their own well-being, suggesting that their focus on younger generations was not based on a selfless altruism as was sometimes implied by their juniors, but, rather understandably, on practical considerations for their own well-being and survival. Mr. Tan Rui, 68 years old, lived in a new house and had several children and grandchildren, yet he hoped that his family would be still more prosperous, saying, "of course I hope for this," since, "if the household economic condition is good, elderly peoples' lives will be good." Mr. Tan's explanation echoed the viewpoint of many of his peers and demonstrates the importance of socio-economic status in later life for Seven Mountains elders.

Besides family prosperity and good health, other dreams or wishes were often difficult to elicit from interviewees, many of whom claimed they were "too old" to have hopes, did not have much time left to realize dreams, or felt that their age somehow affected the value of their desires. In some of these cases, elders again focused on future generations:

Q: What three things do you most desire?

A: I've become old. Soon I will descend the mountain like the setting sun – and to still talk about hopes!? If I really had to say, I hope my son can make a contribution to the nation.

Q: What else?

A: I hope my grandsons and granddaughters have good health.

Q: And a third wish?

A: I hope the Communist Party leadership may live long.

(74-year old man)

Worries and Concerns

Despite the general optimism that older villagers expressed in focus groups and in interviews, results from the household survey suggest that older villagers were actually quite concerned about some of the basic necessities of later life. Elders answered questions about the extent of their concerns over the adequacy of future housing, future nutrition, future clothing, future medical care, future help with chores, future help with personal care, and future companionship. In all but two areas, the majority of respondents said that they were either “concerned” or “very concerned” about these needs being adequately met (Table 14). Specifically, 61.67 percent of respondents said they were concerned or very concerned about future housing, 65 percent of respondents said they were concerned or very concerned about future food and nutrition, 50 percent of respondents said they were concerned or very concerned about having adequate clothing in the future, and 80 percent of respondents said they were concerned or very concerned about future medical care. Just over half of respondents, 55.93 percent, said they were concerned or very concerned about future companionship. The only areas about which fewer than half of survey respondents said they were concerned were help with chores (43.33 percent) and personal care (46.67 percent). Notably, there were no statistically significant gender differences in terms of types or extent of concerns about the future.

As a sociologist, I argue that social factors at the individual and collective levels structure people's expectations about problematic future developments in their lives. In order to assess what factors could affect the seven domains of concerns in Table 14, I computed seven logistic regressions (one for each domain) in which four individual-level factors were the predictor variables (Table 15a) and seven logistic regressions in which six supra-individual-level factors were the predictor variables (Table 15b).

The Likelihood Ratio-Chi-Square and its associated degrees of freedom, when statistically significant, indicates that the whole set of predictors significantly reduces the difference between the observed and the expected cell means over the difference arising from the null model (no predictors). By this criterion, the set of individual factors well-described the odds of being concerned about future clothing and future help with chores and personal assistance (versus being unconcerned about these matters); and the supra-individual factors did the same for the odds of being concerned about future nutrition, medical care, and companionship. For the sake of parsimony, I describe the findings only from these five logistic regressions.

At the individual level, age, gender, education, and marital status were used to predict concern (vs. unconcern) about needs for future clothing being met (column 4, Table 15a). *Ceteris paribus*, age, gender and education were less relevant than was marital status. The odds of being concerned about the adequacy of future clothing were 5.577 times as high for married people as for widowed people. It is difficult to explain this difference, but perhaps because widowed people were often eligible to receive help from the "Five Guarantees" and since clothing is one of those items guaranteed, they were less likely to feel concerned about adequate apparel in the future.

Education level of respondents was related to their level of concern about future help with chores and personal care (Table 15a). Respondents with a junior high education or above were more likely than were 9.365 times as likely as elders with less education to be concerned about help with future chores. Perhaps in this regard, more education resulted in greater concern because these elders were more likely to read and contemplate issues about old age support in China's future. It is also possible that elders with less education were more accustomed to physical labor and hardship than were their more educated counterparts, and simply expected to continue performing chores and looking after themselves in later life.

Elders' concern about having adequate food to eat in the future varied by hamlet (Table 15b). On this account, elders living in Southern Slope (the most well-off hamlet considering household size) were significantly less concerned than were their peers in Stone Flower and Buddha's Peak (the odds ratio for Southern Slope, 0.156, is significantly below unity). That fewer elders here were worried about having adequate food in the future suggests that more elder households in the other two hamlets were still struggling to overcome (or only recently had overcome) "absolute poverty" conditions, in which the basic staples of survival were lacking. Indeed, the odds of being concerned about future food and nutrition needs decreased with perceptions of being "well off" (Table 15b). Elders in reported "well-off" households were less likely than were their peers to report concern about food and nutrition (the odds ratio, .187, is significantly below unity.) Additionally, the number of CCP members in the household was inversely related to concern about future food and nutrition (the odds ratio, .253, is significantly below unity) (Table 15b). This latter relationship probably reflects the higher

socioeconomic status (SES) often related to Party membership and could also reflect greater “faith” in the Party’s ability to provide sustenance for rural elders. Notably, concern about future food increased with greater number of household members (the odds ratio, 1.361, is significantly above unity). This finding contradicts the idea that living in big stem families provides a sense of food security for elders. Rather, it is possible that elders saw living in big families with “many mouths to feed” as involving more competition for food at meal times.

The domain over which the greatest percentage of elders expressed concern in the survey – future medical care (Table 14) – was significantly related to respondents’ perceived household economic status (Table 15b). Elders who reported being “well off” were significantly less concerned about future medical care than were those people who saw themselves as less economically advantaged (the odds ratio, .197, is significantly below unity.) This finding suggests that elders’ concern about medical care in the future was mainly about whether or not they would be able to afford it (rather than whether or not it would be of good quality, for example.) Concern about future medical care costs also emerged as a strong theme in interviews and focus groups. Older villagers were aware of the rising costs of health care, and preserving their health was important not only in order to maintain mobility and enjoy daily life, but in order to avoid heavy financial burdens on the household. The possibility of chronic illness or need for expensive surgeries did appear to threaten a happy later life.

Survey respondents with larger household sizes were less worried than were those with smaller household sizes (odds ratio of 0.66 is significantly below unity; see last column of Table 15b) about companionship. When asked in interviews whether they

worried about companionship in the future, elders who lived alone or whose family members were away minimized their concerns and pointed out that they could visit with peers, watch television, contact family members by telephone, or even move to the city to live with children. Notably, the majority of elders were not willing to leave the village where they had spent so many years of life, even if it meant enduring relatively more hardship. Seventy-eight year-old Mr. Tan Dingshan summarized the general reaction of elders to the idea of moving to a town or city, even within the county, to live with children:

I would not be willing. In the city I would not be familiar with the outside environment. Staying in your room everyday is very boring, and you also cannot meet people. Moreover, the food in other places is not like that in my home. At one time I lived in [another section of the county] and was not able to get accustomed to things there.

DISCUSSION: ANTICIPATING LATER LIFE IN RURAL CHINA

Data from focus groups, the household survey, and interviews provided examples of rural elders' visions for the future, including their expectations for family members and their own hopes and concerns. In this section I review how understanding these perspectives contributes to (1) studies of aging in rural China and (2) knowledge about how to address future challenges of China's aging population.

Studies of Aging in Rural China: Insights from Seven Mountains

In analyzing findings from focus groups, the survey and interviews, some apparent contradictions arose again. That is, older villagers in focus groups and interviews often claimed that they had few or no worries, but in the survey, an overall majority of elders reported being "concerned" or "very concerned" about basic staples in the future such as clothing, help with chores, nutrition, medical care, and companionship

(Tables 15a and 15b). Of course, the survey sample was random, unlike the focus groups and interview samples. It is probable that focus group participants from the “snowball” sample had more leisure time and came from households of greater economic standing. Probably only the more well-off respondents (which may have been over-represented in focus group) were willing to say that they had little or no concerns about future material needs. Additionally, elders may have felt more comfortable expressing personal concerns in a more private interview setting.

Still, contradictions in the reported levels of elders’ concerns can also be partially explained through noting the importance of life experiences via the question contexts. In focus groups and, to a lesser extent in interviews, discussions centered on *past* times when life for all elders was difficult and when securing enough food and clothing for dependent family members was a major challenge. Within the context of these discussions, elders’ present and future concerns about food and housing appeared minimal. On the contrary, the survey asked elders to reflect on their current health, family arrangements, resources, and mental health before asking about potential unmet needs in the future. In contemplating future resources in light of *current* resources, I found that elders appeared more likely to admit they were concerned about basic necessities. Besides being a matter of question context, it seems that elders’ future concerns were shaped and assessed within the overall context of a life-course.

Like their standards for current living conditions, elders’ future expectations were relatively minimal (i.e., focused on subsistence), based on previous experiences of hardship. The implications of these rural elders’ relatively simple expectations for the future warrant consideration. For example, projects aiming to ensure psychological and

physical well-being of rural elders might consider the lived experiences of the specific birth cohorts under inquiry. This small scale study suggests that rural elders' future material needs (as shaped by their expectations) could be comprised primarily of the basic necessities of food, clothing, and community. A focus on elders' production levels might obscure what are probably relatively minimal consumption levels and material expectations of China's rural elders; consumption levels and material expectations which may differ markedly from their younger counterparts. At the same time, as household incomes and the village economy grow, it is possible that elders' expectations and perceived needs may also rise. We see this change already in desires for new, large homes with modern appliances and more expensive decorations. This may be especially true for younger rural elders, who will live through more years of economic growth, development, and urbanization. In short, studies investigating or attempting to make projections about the well-being of elders must at least address in their analysis a consideration of elders' local standards of well-being, prosperity, comfort, health care – and the fact that these standards might vary across time and place. Put another way, more attention might be given to how elders' actual “demands” relate and might relate to the ability of families (and government) to “supply” adequately.

For about half of village elders, old and young, future physical care was not a concern. What I consider a surprisingly low level of worry about having adequate future personal physical care may again relate to older villagers' experiences and environments. While there were elderly people in the village who had suffered strokes and had difficulty with mobility and daily living activities, I found through the survey and personal observation that chronic illness, obesity, and confinement to home were relatively rare,

even as older villagers approached age 80. The challenges experienced by these elders were probably understood as problems of health rather than as lack of personal resources or of technology by which to minimize any future physical limitations and accomplish daily physical care tasks. Many older people were firm in their viewpoints that elders could and did frequently take care of themselves; and this sense of independence also likely contributed to a belief, perhaps overly optimistic, that physical personal care would not be lacking in the future. Still, as longevity increases in rural China, it is likely that chronic disease and physical limitation will become more frequent – to an extent that elders have not witnessed in their own lifetimes.

In my own view, health care education, improved healthcare quality, and preventative health care will be needed in order to safeguard elders' quality of life and to minimize financial loss due to illness. Opportunities to exercise at an activity center and anti-smoking campaigns are examples of actions that would promote healthy longevity. Education about cancer and early detection of chronic illness might also minimize medical bills, as would instructions on how to treat common illnesses such as colds and the flu. In Seven Mountains, like many areas of China, people frequently went to hospitals for small ailments and received unnecessary intravenous drips and even multiple antibiotics. These expenses could be minimized through public education and increased monitoring of the increasingly privatized health industry.

Smaller family sizes in rural China may influence the extent to which elders receive adequate physical care and instrumental assistance (Du and Guo 2000). However, the idea that “more is better” in number of family members is a traditional and common belief that may or may not hold up under scrutiny and that elders also simultaneously

questioned, as shown in interviews with women who had “too many” children. In terms of receiving help with chores and personal physical care from children, it is possible that having a few “extra” children might make up for the lack of filial piety of another child, but that having too many children results in siblings passing along responsibilities to others. Additional research on Chinese elders and family resources might investigate whether there is an “ideal” number and sex ratio of children for rural elders and at what point elders experience diminishing returns from high numbers of offspring (see Zimmer and Kwong 2003).

The effects of China’s “one-child policy” probably contributed to a certain amount of variation in elders’ responses about expected future support. The youngest respondents, born in 1951, would have been in their late 20s when the policy first became most strictly enforced. These individuals may not have had either a male child or a female child on whom to depend in the future, thus explaining their lack of reported anticipated support from such a family member. Due to birth control policies, even more elders also may have had only one grandchild, either male or female. In this case, they may not have had a grandson or a granddaughter from whom to expect support. Still, because most older villagers would have become parents for the first time well before their late 20s (according to villagers), and because age was not a major predictor of whether elders reported anticipating support from particular family members (Table 15a), it would seem that the effects of the “one child” policy do not fully explain variation or gender differences in expected support from grandsons and from sons-in-law. Understanding the expected roles of these family members and of daughters, granddaughters, sons-in-law, and daughters-in-law may provide knowledge about the

resources of elders and the actual practices of rural old age support. The saying that “sons take care of parents in old age” would seem to obscure the help expected and probably received from other family members – particularly female family members such as daughters-in-law and daughters.

The absence of family members due to rural-urban migration would seem to pose a problem for future physical care and instrumental assistance, even if it provides additional financial resources for the rural household. Yet in Seven Mountains, there was no significant relationship between the number of family members “working out” and elders’ concerns about future personal care or help with chores (Table 15b, sixth and seventh panels). Most elders who expressed worry about help with chores and physical care in the future lived with or had children and family members present in the village. This situation challenges the idea that rural-urban migration was the major cause of elders’ concern about future inadequate family resources.

Finally, interviewees’ overall unwillingness to relocate to a city or township in order to live with children suggests that being re-united with children who go out of the village may not be the number one priority for many older villagers in the future. Only in cases in which a son or daughter lived in places that were “fun” did elders say they would move to reside with them. This finding suggests that out-migration of working family members may not necessarily rob rural elderly people of their most important sources of future psychological comfort. The future mental health and happiness of rural elders may depend just as much on opportunities for entertainment and participation in meaningful social circles.

Reflecting on Rural Elders, Aging, and Development

My argument has been that older women's and older men's viewpoints on rural change, later life, and the future would provide complementary knowledge about China's aging. In this final section of Chapter 6, I address what this "worm's eye" view tells us about aging, later life, and development in rural China. Just as perspectives from "the top" are limited and local, Seven Mountains elders' understandings of the relations between development, China's aging population, and the future of China's elderly stemmed from their own particular locations that reflected particular definitions of development, day-to-day experiences, and priorities. Yet the point of inquiring into elders' viewpoints of China's aging and future development was not to uncover the "true" story about China's elderly population and development which only older villagers could relate, but to ask how their perspectives contributed to or challenged representations of China's aging and development issues.

Elders' Future Needs in Relatively Prosperous Rural Regions

Findings suggest that within a relatively well-off village in a prosperous province, a fair proportion of elders are worried about their future material conditions. For example, elders' perceived economic conditions varied among respondents, and those who did not see themselves as "well-off" were more concerned about future food and nutrition. Although all elders felt that their economic standing had improved since earlier eras, older villagers who had not been able to move into new homes or did not live in self-perceived "somewhat well-off" or "very well-off" households had a different view of the future than did their peers in more financially secure situations. Socio-economic status played a significant role in shaping Seven Mountains elders' understandings of later life.

As I argued in Chapter Four with regard to elders' sense of relative poverty in the present, studies of aging and well-being in China and other developing societies should not overlook geographical sites of overall prosperity or assume that people in these regions will not face difficulties and poverty in later life. Disparities can be understood both as an issue of "absolute" poverty (in which requirements for human survival may not be met) and of "comparative" (sometimes called relative) poverty, as poor elders become increasingly aware of inequalities. As China's markets continue to transition, increasing inequalities may create for many elders a sense of anxiety over future well-being – especially with regard to medical costs and social status– perhaps even for those elders who are currently content with a few items of clothing and regular meals. At a larger scale, that many elders in a relatively well-off village see their futures as uncertain suggests that achievement of a relatively well-off (*xiaokang*) society at a national level would be equally unable to assure elders of physical and psychological well-being in later life.

Development "For" and "By" Elders

Having become "old," many elders described their lives and future needs as less important than those of younger generations. Junior family members and younger villagers pointed out these characteristics of older people proudly and affectionately, noting that elders "just thought about other people, not about themselves." I found that many older people indeed expressed a willingness to sacrifice for their children and grandchildren. Yet, promoting the idea of elders, especially women elders, as martyrs or saints not only de-humanized older villagers, but in some cases condoned devaluation or

even neglect. Such a perspective also discouraged development or social change that enriched elders as a group.

Elders in Seven Mountains had clear ideas about what they needed and desired for future contentment. They wanted a village elderly activity center. In their vision, such a center could take care of companionship needs, entertainment needs, and could provide opportunities for regular physical and mental activity. (I suspect that elders' interests in China and the outside world could also be partially explored through videos and photographic magazines at an activity center.) This "ground-level" solution to problems of meeting later-life needs might be applicable in many areas of rural China.

However, because construction of buildings in Seven Mountains was largely funded by private households, inequalities in wealth may have impeded development "for" and "by" older people. As in many communities, villagers in Seven Mountains were willing to donate money and time to build projects that directly benefited them, but roads or buildings needed in another hamlet or for a certain group were not considered relevant enough to warrant personal financial investment. Since an elderly person's activity center would not be utilized by the wage earners in the village, and because elders were commonly seen as being "happy to make sacrifices," such a venue was unlikely to be built.

The extent to which elders will influence development at both local and national levels is a question that will be answered differently according to definitions and goals of development, participation, and how these are commensurate with the roles that elders are able and willing to play in households and communities. At this site, the fact that rural elders themselves saw little or no chance of participating in development – which

they defined mainly in terms of economic growth and construction of new buildings and government services – suggests that this definition of development and elders’ roles in it probably permeates multiple levels of society and will not easily be challenged.

An Aging Population: Problems and Solutions from a Ground-Level View

In focus groups and interviews I directly asked participants to talk about the extent to which an increased proportion of older people would and could be a problem. At the village and hamlet level, Seven Mountains did not appear to have a rapidly aging population, nor were the larger geographical regions (city and province) widely perceived to be rapidly aging. Therefore, questions about the “aging population problem” (which has yet to materialize in many regions of China) were probably not extremely relevant to elders’ daily experiences. Still, I was curious about the minimal level of concern and asked elders to explain why, although the “aging population” has been a point of concern at the national level in media since the mid-1980s, people in the village seemed unconcerned about family support of elders and the fewer number of young people available to support their seniors. In all cases, elders either explained that earning ability was more important than the number of family members, and/or they expressed a “more the merrier” attitude toward their birth cohort’s longer lifespan and larger size.

This first point reflected a perceived solution to the problem of material needs. That is, although elders may have had only one or two (grand)children to support them, they believed that their earning power probably would be greater than was the collective earning power of several descendents in past decades. They would be better off than were the elders in the days of their own youth. The second point demonstrates a perceived solution to a problem of companionship needs. More elder peers would mean

a larger elder community, and in an age of increased migration and changing family structures, the increasing proportion of elders was not problematic, but rather was a solution. Village elders were also aware that part of the “aging population issue” was linked to older people being able to live longer lives, a condition which, from their viewpoint, could hardly be considered problematic.

These differences in viewpoints between official or academic understandings of changes in China’s population composition and those of local rural elders indicates the subjective nature of how China’s aging population issue is understood and represented. Rather than allowing us to claim to what extent the aging population is or is not a “problem,” elders’ views of the future demonstrate how aging population issues can be inadvertently or deliberately presented in various ways based upon the interests and priorities of the viewer. This insight is important to keep in mind when thinking critically about demographic conditions and changes.

Findings also suggest possible problems with solutions to elder support suggested in the academic literature. First, I observed that elders’ social circles were relatively small, especially those of old-elder women, who generally could not read newspapers and only partially understood evening television dramas. Up until recent decades, travel outside the village even within the township was difficult and sometimes impossible. Therefore, it is no surprise that many elders, although interested in other places, did not feel comfortable residing even temporarily in a town or village even within the same county. Suggestions that elders can simply move to new city homes with children or grandchildren once they become frail may not be realistic. Additionally, in this particular study no elders expected or relied upon siblings for help in the future due to custom and

to logistical challenges. Should this be the case in many parts of rural China, a goodly amount of supportive policies might be needed in order to encourage sibling old-age support.

Older residents' experiences in Seven Mountains also demonstrate how rapid development – in this case at a local level – does not automatically assure older people of well-being in later life but simply creates variations in wealth and income that may cause some elders to worry about “keeping up” with peers in the future. Bringing this lesson to a national level, representations of development as a solution to meeting future challenges of an aging population are built on the assumption that wealth and income from economic development and growth will be applied and distributed in ways that benefit elderly people as a group. In order to ensure that the aging population issue is minimally problematic in the future, and that old age support is indeed fostered by development, state-regulated distribution of the “goods and bads” of economic growth and development would be necessary. However, this approach conflicts with the fundamental design of China's development, which is based on the argument that some people and areas must be allowed to become rich before others, with competition a driving engine of development (Xie and Hannum 1996:952). Additionally, what are traditionally thought of as typical needs or desires of elders (e.g., having washing water brought) will probably be made obsolete as new needs or desires (e.g., elder activity centers, cell phones) arise. Attention not only to national economic growth and family socioeconomic status, but also to daily lives and changing requirements of elders is necessary the fruits of local or national development address elders' future needs.

Finally, in Seven Mountains, women elders who had unfilial male children or unsupportive husbands were often not eligible to be helped by local subsidy programs. Although probably well-meaning in intent, these policies can also foster age and gender discrimination. Moreover, regardless of the official policies “according to the books,” actual practices on distributing subsidies to elders and low-income families should be less nebulous and more transparent to villagers, who understood accessibility to be more a matter of having personal connections than of need. Clear explanations of why and how these funds are distributed would help to mitigate feelings of unfairness and confusion, as well as beliefs that local government officials improperly distribute subsidies and are unconcerned about the welfare of elderly villagers.

In sum, insights from Seven Mountains suggest that many of the ways in which local, provincial, and state government could assist rural elders in their future daily lives would be through general policies and approaches, not necessarily those in which the word “elderly” appears in the title. Specifically, lessons learned in Seven Mountains suggest the need for further attention to (1) socioeconomic inequalities, (2) the distribution (not simply promotion) of the fruits of economic growth, (3) transparency and clarity in local distribution of subsidies, and (4) public health education, quality of healthcare, and preventative healthcare programs.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

One of the aims of this dissertation was to contribute to population studies by examining how changes and expectations of changes in China's population composition and distribution "played out" in the daily life of rural elders. I intended to bring a topic common to large-scale analyses of a demographic condition "down to earth" in order to see what current and future population conditions might mean to rural elders' everyday lives. Then, by comparing people's daily experiences at the household and hamlet level with views from larger-level analyses, I asked whether and how representations of aging and development in China might benefit stakeholders.

From this ground level, elders' concerns about current and future well-being in China were fundamentally concerns about household resources. When assessing whether and how future conditions would affect their quality of life, elders considered their health, their family members' ability to make money, and the attitude and filialness of junior family members. Elders' assessments of the future were often positive due to their perceptions of increased cash-earning opportunities and improvements in health care and technology. However, many older villagers were still concerned about future survival, and poorer elders and those in poor health, especially, expressed concerns about future living conditions. This research supports other studies of rural China that suggest that increasing inequality and difficulty of disadvantaged families to "get ahead" are more fundamental causes for concern about rural elders' well-being than are smaller family size, erosion of filial values, or an aging population (Zimmer and Kwong 2003; Joseph and Phillips 1999). A new finding from this research is that, at least in this rural site, not only did China's aging population fail to be a major source of concern for elders, but on

the contrary, it was the cause of optimism for a long life amidst the companionship of one's peers. This discrepancy between "expert" and "village" viewpoints demonstrates how interpretations of demographic conditions are shaped by age and other social locations.

Another important demographic context in which rural elders were entering later life was that of Chinese villagers' wide-scale temporary migration to cities. This small-scale inquiry gave an example of a setting in which Chinese rural-urban migration did not result in abandonment of older villagers but instead produced various (or sometimes little) effects on elders, depending upon other contexts such as socio-economic status, family resources, and interpersonal relationships. Since it was not a particularly impoverished region, it is likely that push-pull factors were not as strong in Seven Mountains as in very poor rural areas. Still, this study suggests that rural-urban migration is neither always a panacea nor a source of agony for "left-behind" elders.

Who benefits from mainstream representations of China's aging population issues? First, elders' views of the increasing proportion of Chinese older people indicate the middle-age-based character of viewing large proportions of elders as a social problem. In this case, common representations of Chinese elders as burdens cast junior family members in the roles of hard-working heroes struggling to support unproductive elders. Moreover, portraying *rural* elders as burdens on the nation obfuscates a history in which these same villagers contributed enormously to the prosperity of China's urban regions and to the development of the nation as a whole (see Yang 1996).

Additionally, insofar as official statements imply or explicitly indicate an automatic link between China's "development" and adequate old age support (State

Council Information Office 2004), the challenges of an aging population can be utilized to promote what continues to be a main political agenda: economic growth. Publicizing population aging issues as a “Chinese family challenge” is a way of affirming the responsibilities of families for providing support for elders while at the same time indicating that the government is mainly responsible for promoting economic growth, not for providing old age support. In the meantime, increasing inequalities and the negative effects upon China’s elders of increased production (e.g., pollution) and “competitive” development are obscured.

Representations of the effects on rural elders of China’s internal migration may also reflect and promote certain interests. As Davin (2000) argues, rural-urban migration is often represented in an exaggeratedly negative light in the Chinese press, with China’s rural migrants “being blamed for its ills” (288). She suggests that rural migrants, although they may indeed pose problems to the cities in which they work, are treated unsympathetically, when in fact

[t]he problems and their treatment by the media are symptomatic of the divisions between the city and the countryside or the core and the periphery that already existed in Maoist China and that have, in many cases, been exacerbated by the rapid and uneven growth during the reform years (Davin 2000:288).

Davin asserts that the discourse on internal migrants in China “stigmatizes the rural migrant in a way that we associate with racism” (2000:284). Rural migrants, usually less educated and less sophisticated, are often looked down upon by urban residents for their “shabby clothing, their distinctive accents, and sometimes even their darker skins, different physiques, and differing body language” (2000:288).

I take Davin’s argument further to suggest that China’s rural migrants are often

blamed unfairly for problems in *rural* areas as well as for problems in the cities; in particular, they are indicated in the abandonment of rural elderly. It is indeed a serious social problem when older villagers who are unable to care for or support themselves are left behind by migrating junior family members. Yet my exploratory research in Seven Mountains leads me to suspect that these situations, if not overstated, may be oversimplified when blame is misdirected toward rural migrants themselves rather than toward larger structures and institutions of inequality such as past and current policies that perpetuate large urban-rural disparities. The “rural elderly abandonment” issue as it is popularly presented thus serves the interests of overlooking the role of China’s institutions of inequality in perpetuating situations (however common or rare they may be) in which households find it necessary to send junior family members “out,” leaving frail elderly alone.

Finally, from the ground level at Seven Mountains, it was apparent that increased wealth and development at the village or hamlet levels did not guarantee the well-being or satisfaction of elders. Rather, increases in inequality, regardless of whether the economic tide had allowed “all boats to rise,” resulted in disadvantaged elders feeling more poverty-stricken and ashamed than they had in eras when most villagers were even poorer. A lesson to be drawn from this ground level insight is that local-level (and probably national-level) economic growth may or may not be necessary, but certainly is not sufficient, to tend to the needs of older people. Instead, when the relationship between China’s economic development and China’s aging is overstated or presented in a deterministic fashion (either positively or negatively), the role of local government

officials, central state officials, and “everyday” actors in guiding the course of development and in distributing the fruits of economic growth becomes minimized.

A second aim of this dissertation was to address a pertinent population issue – aging in rural China – at a level that may complement prior large-scale research and provide opportunities for comparison with studies in urban centers and in other rural regions. First, research in China’s urban areas has suggested that daughters provide a fair amount of support to aging parents (Whyte and Xu 2003; Sun 2002). Most recently, in a study of three Chinese cities, Xie and Zhu (2006) found that adult daughters may provide even more financial support to parents than do sons. Some of the gender difference in monetary support may relate to the common situation in which elders mainly receive material support from sons in the form of co-residence and provision of food and daily needs. Still, Xie and Zhu (2006) suggest that

a fundamental change has taken place in contemporary urban China: intergenerational support to parents is optional and primarily symbolic, and it serves the important roles of (1) binding family members across generations, (2) distributing resources informally within the family, (3) buffering in times of economic shocks, and (4) serving as a concrete mechanism through which one can display the traditional Chinese value of filial piety (17-18).

Is such a change occurring in rural China as well? Zhang (2007) suggests that new cash-earning opportunities in the cities are creating new filial roles for rural daughters and increasing their economic value to parents. Evidence from my study in Seven Mountains goes further to provide examples of how, in a fairly traditional and inland rural area, even adult daughters who remain in a rural area may contribute a goodly amount of material support to parents. Additional and larger-scale studies of rural daughters’ contributions

could confirm and specify the extent to which rural elders already receive aid from their daughters.

Another point highlighted by this small-scale study is the possibility that elders have differing expectations for family members in amount and type of support, and that these expectations vary according to the gender and socioeconomic conditions of elders and the role, birth order, and gender of family members. Further understanding the support roles and expectations of various family members may help to understand better the family resources available to current and future senior family members. What accounts for gender differences in expectations? Moreover, do these family members (such as grandsons and sons-in-law) frequently feel obliged to meet expectations for future support of grandparents and parents-in-law? These topics might be further explored in larger-scale survey studies as well as through smaller-scale in-depth interviews and household studies.

Additionally, this research in Seven Mountains provides a “new take” on elders’ need for companionship and psychological comfort. Findings suggest that studies focus too much on the presence of junior family members, and too little on opportunities for peer group socializing and entertainment. This focus probably stems from ageism or middle-aged centered perspectives, from the traditional Chinese idea that households filled with family bring greater happiness to elders, and by a “Western” emphasis on the primacy of affective ties within family relationships (Wang 2004). Seven Mountains’ elders’ viewpoints suggest that elders are not relying upon junior family members to provide entertainment or companionship, calling into question the extent to which out-migration of junior family members is as necessarily psychologically troublesome to

elders as might be assumed by middle-aged researchers. Better meeting the needs of elders may be as simple as providing formal venues in which elders can gather, play games, and enjoy entertainment.

A third purpose of this dissertation was to inquire into whether and how elders actively interpret, respond to, and influence social changes in a variety of ways. In Seven Mountains, elders played an important supportive role that in many cases allowed junior family members to study or work outside the village. However, they generally did not understand their roles to be significant. It is understandable that elders would place importance on earning wages in light of their previous life experiences, in which during some eras earning wages was not possible for anyone. At the same time, this understanding indicates a focus on economics, wage-earning, and “outside” work commensurate with national agendas of economic growth.

Still, research in this village found that elders were not victims of old age, out-migration, or social change, and who, although in some ways “happy to sacrifice” for juniors, were also ready to express dissatisfaction, particularly with regard to a need for an elderly community and peer activity opportunities. Seven Mountains’ elders adapted quite well to rural transitions, especially considering the rapid changes in technology, household dynamics, and built environment. They were willing to accept “offsets” to perceived negative changes and relatively seldom complained about current living conditions. While some elders felt that they burdened families, most saw themselves as able to care for themselves. Some continued to feel pride and self-worth that they had contributed greatly to their families, village, and nation in the past. As health permitted, elders continued to be physically active and contributing members of households. These

images contrasted with portrayals of obsolete and frail rural elders dependent upon the goodwill of others.

A fourth aim of this dissertation was to investigate gender as an organizing principle in the experiences and conditions of aging in China by inquiring into elderly women's and men's aging experiences and analyzing how gender relations interacted with the processes and contexts of aging. Supporting other studies of aging and gender, the case of Seven Mountains suggests that gender has a cumulative influence over the life course (Zhang 2006; Calasanti and Slevin 2001; Blakemore and Boneham 1994). In particular, older women's lack of education and opportunities to participate in public circles shaped their self-perceptions of having made and continuing to make contributions to the village and household. Their social circles were also smaller insofar as they did not read newspapers and were less likely to speak Mandarin Chinese – affecting their ability to listen to news or fully enjoy contemporary television shows. Having married “out” and moved away from their natal families may also have influenced the type and extent of their social resources (Zhang 2007; Watson 1991). Women's focus in interviews and in focus groups was located within their hamlets or even within their households, while men were more likely to be familiar with details of political issues and policies. As a result, villagers viewed elder women as less informed and less able to understand their own lives. These gender experiences in turn probably affected older women's feelings of self-worth and accomplishment. Indeed, findings showed older women to be significantly more depressed than were older men.

Later life experiences in Seven Mountains also provided examples of how gender shapes levels of continuity in old age. For the most part, elder women continued many of

the chores and activities they had performed for years, whereas men who formally retired or who relinquished their main chores of heavy farm work to junior family members had to adjust to new roles inside the household. Here, aging likely worked as a “leveler” between genders. Moreover, in some cases, aging allowed men, but not women, relatively more additional leisure time which, perhaps enjoyable, may also have created experiences of anomie as they relinquished old daily routines and responsibilities.

Examining gendered-age relations in Seven Mountains over the life course suggested that gender indeed shaped experiences of aging and household relations in later life, but not as a sole factor determining the prestige, power, or socioeconomic status of villagers in later life. In Seven Mountains, elder men’s status was higher in relation to their wives, and yet these conditions were still influenced by age relations, production and occupational conditions, and the past and current political economy. That is, the spirit of the Cultural Revolution, past communal systems of production, and apparent decreased authority of elders – not only gender -- strongly influenced the conditions in which older villagers found themselves entering later life.

A final general aim of this dissertation was to employ a “sociological imagination” and a life course perspective in understanding the experiences, processes, and social contexts of aging in rural China. First, a life course perspective revealed how representations of old age as a period of loss and ineffectiveness can be apolitical and ahistorical. That is, these elders had lived through a communist era in which it was not possible to earn individual wages: when workers were awarded points instead of cash, and when doing business would have been stigmatized, if not punishable. But they had entered into later life at a time when opportunities to earn money had emerged and when

making profits was socially acceptable. This shift allowed elders who sold vegetables or helped tend a family business to experience increased senses of autonomy and effectiveness in old age. Like gender, age (as a social location and experience) cannot be examined without attention to socio-political-economic contexts.

Additionally, past conditions shaped elders' views of current contexts and of the future. It was clear that the hardship and bitterness through which older villagers had lived influenced their assessment of the present and, even in light of present inequalities, promoted a sense of current good (or at least better) fortune. Yet the distinct "generation gap" between senior and junior family members also begs the question of how different standards in evaluating ones' quality of life might influence future support, exchanges, and levels of satisfaction. Will rural elders continue to be easily satisfied in later life with the bare necessities of food, clothing, and shelter, or will social changes and increased standards in living conditions and wealth encourage elders to expect more from family members, just as junior family members might raise standards for their own material success? Are elders placing too much faith in contemporary opportunities to make money, overlooking the commensurately high expectations and desires of younger generations for their own lives? It may be important for studies contemplating the continued fulfillment of generational contracts to consider the life-course experience and birth cohort standards for both senior and junior generations.

An unexpected point suggested by adopting the life-course perspective was that definitions of environment and of environmental degradation (or improvement) may be understood by people within the context of their own lives and comparisons over time. The extent to which people believed that environmental conditions in Seven Mountains

had declined was probably at least partly shaped by birth cohort. Elders who lived prior to electricity and paved roads had memories of a time in which, although the river and air were clean, the daily surrounds created hardship. They were probably less likely than were others to understand village development as having only negative effects on the environment. For example, cohorts born in the 1970s grew up in an environment that included electricity, relatively stable transportation, and telecommunications and yet they still had memories of clear river water and fresh air. These people had experienced the “best of both worlds” and, I suspect, were likely to see environmental changes of recent decades in more negative terms.

Reflections on the Project

In evaluating this research, I have reflected on the choice of methods and on mixed-methods research design. In retrospect, did all three phases contribute to the research? Was utilizing three methods a wise approach? I have also considered the limitations of the study.

Research Phases

One of the reasons for choosing to use multiple methods in three phases was to address my questions at various (individual, household, group) levels. Focus groups successfully gave me some insight into key themes of later life and acquainted me generally with the “research terrain.” Interviews were helpful in examining more closely at an individual level my research questions and the issues raised by focus groups and the household survey. Conducted between these two phases, the household survey provided information about how both individual characteristics and “supra-individual” level

characteristics related to elders' conditions and attitudes. It was necessary and helpful at both levels.

Overall, the household survey showed how elders' individual-level characteristics were – *or were not* – significantly related to other living conditions and attitudes. That is, evidence that particular variables were not significantly related to each other was just as important as was evidence showing a significant relationship. Second, the randomly sampled survey helped to corroborate or contradict my own observations and subsequently elicit insights. For example, the survey gave evidence that Seven Mountains elders indeed regularly performed work in households and showed how their activities differed by gender. I could have argued these points about individuals' activities based on my own observation and experience, but the random sample provides me with reassurance that my sense of elders' contributions was not erroneously based only on experiences living within one village household, or on interviews with elders whom I might have inadvertently selected based on their high levels of activity and interest.

Similarly, the “supra-individual” perspective offered by the household survey helped to answer questions about the relationships between elders' individual conditions and the community or household contexts. Most of these factors (e.g., hamlet residence, number of household members, number of people “going out,”) were not as important in determining elders' future concerns, attitudes toward development, or health status as I had suspected, but this information is itself valuable. Such knowledge allowed me to suggest that family living arrangements were not as crucial in determining elders' views on current and future conditions as might be assumed. Additionally, these questions

provided a baseline that could be compared with future research as village changes continue. As such, in retrospect I would retain this element of the project and continue to pursue lines of questioning regarding the influence of “supra-individual” level conditions on rural elders’ lives.

Mixed Methods

The use of mixed methods in this project made analysis of the data more complicated. Due to differences in aims of the methods, question contexts, and research contexts, the various methods sometimes produced data that seemed to contradict or at least to “tell different stories.” Employing mixed methods highlighted the weaknesses of each method but also maximized strengths and minimized limitations of each method. Focus groups overstated particular viewpoints and sentiments (probably due to the relatively public arena and to the snowball sampling method), while surveys provided important descriptive information but relatively few explanations, and interviews in themselves were not broad enough to provide a picture of conditions at hamlet and village levels. For example, focus groups suggested that elders worried little about the future, while survey findings told a very different story and interviews offered insights into how and why some (but not all) elders worried. At the same time, certain phenomena were apparent in each phase such as, household inequality, elders’ sense of improvement in living conditions, and concern about health and future medical costs. In this way, the three methods served as both checks upon one another and worked complementarily. Importantly, had I analyzed and presented findings from different segments separately, the conclusions of this study would have been very different and possibly very fragmented. In other words, a mixed-methods study such as this one

required an additional step in the collection-analysis-conclusions process: that of synthesizing and re-analyzing apparent contradictions until viable arguments and conclusions were found.

Additionally, sequencing of mixed methods is likely crucial in shaping the emphasis of conclusions from research, and should be considered in light of the aims of the research. I started with focus groups, hoping to generate broad themes and thus compensate for my outsider status and lack of insight into topics important in the lives of elderly people. I chose to do interviews last in order to provide an opportunity to inquire into “puzzles” and ask for elders’ explanations of data. However, had I started with the survey, I might have chosen to engage different topics or themes in subsequent focus groups. Had I begun with interviews, I might have altered the survey questionnaire to include different lines of questioning. Although I believe my overall findings would not have differed greatly, the points upon which I chose to focus and elaborate in this dissertation might have been quite different.

Finally, as Creswell (2003) indicates, mixed methods usually (but not always) require the researcher to emphasize the role of either qualitative or quantitative analysis in the study. In this research, I focused on qualitative methods and analysis insofar as my goals were to generate points of theoretical significance rather than statistical significance. This approach was appropriate to the project, since the overall goal of the study was to generate “ground level” insights, and because the survey was intended only to allow me to generalize to the village as a whole. Another mixed-methods research project might have different ultimate aims and need to emphasize a quantitative analytic approach. In any case, it is key to remember that the goals of each research phase do not need to re-

state or match exactly the aim of the overall project, but rather that they must contribute to reaching the largest goals of the study.

Limitations of the Research

In considering the limitations of this project I took into account its overall aims. First, this research is not generalizable to rural China or even to other villages of similar conditions and contexts. This study was limited to one village made up of three hamlets in the southwestern corner of Fujian Province. A repeat study in an urban area and/or in an area of China that has seen little development might generate additional lessons about how conditions of urbanization and economic growth shape and are shaped by the lives of Chinese elders. This study was also limited to Mandarin- and Hekkanese speaking people of Han descent. A new analysis of one of the 55 ethnic minority groups (excused from the “one child policy”) might result in different conclusions about relationships between aging, family, and economic development in rural China. However, since the aim of the project was not to produce generalizable findings, but rather to generate fruitful insights, lessons, and examples, it would not be fair to evaluate the research on its ability to represent conditions around China.

Additionally, this project is quite exploratory and descriptive. Both the research questions as well as the focus group and interview questions I posed were in most cases very general. Yet this level of specificity was appropriate to the relatively small amount of scholarly knowledge about rural elders’ experiences, expectations, and perspectives with regard to aging in a developing village. In the future I could pursue in greater detail questions and points raised by this research.

Another limit of this research is the scope of knowledge upon which it focuses. That is, the viewpoints and information highlighted in this project start and end mainly with the perspectives of older villagers. It neither inquires into “official” knowledge about local conditions, nor into the views and plans of rural elders’ family members. A study focused on changing rural Chinese family dynamics rather than on rural elders alone would probably include interviews with both senior and junior family members (see Xie and Zhu 2006; Sun 2002). However, this focus is again commensurate with the theoretical approach of the study (which seeks to highlight viewpoints of elders) and the aim of complementing other studies that focus primarily on high-level analyses of population problems or conditions of contemporary rural families.

Finally, this research did not *a priori* provide definitions of concepts such as “development,” “social change, and “aging” as clearly as some readers might expect, nor did it operationalize these concepts in a way common to traditional studies. This approach creates complexity in the analysis process but, I argue, is again appropriate to a study intending to emphasize and produce knowledge about how elders understand their own social worlds, roles, and futures. In other words, while extrapolating “local” definitions from data is complex and “messy,” a more traditional or top-down style of defining in advance concepts such as “development” and then measuring their presence in the research setting would conflict with my epistemology and theoretical framework.

Areas for Further Research

Throughout the dissertation I have suggested some areas for future study, including topics suitable for larger-scale population studies. For example, recent studies in urban China show that daughters indeed provide as much, if not more, support for

elderly parents as do their brothers (Xie and Zhu 2006; Whyte 2003). I suggested that similar studies might be conducted in rural areas to investigate the extent to which daughters' aid is also a contemporary rural phenomenon, and whether it is reasonable to expect rural daughters to increase aid in the future. Also, I noted how in Seven Mountains, elders' expectations for grandsons and sons-in-law differed by gender and socioeconomic conditions, and with regard to type of support. I suggested that future research ask: In similar and different contexts, how might elder women and elder men differ in terms of anticipation of aid and in subsequent satisfaction levels? How do expectations compare to practice? Is the idea that "sons support parents in old age" indeed too simplistic? Additionally, women elders in Seven Mountains report expecting less psychological comfort from family members, friends, or others than did men. Is this the case for women elders in other areas of rural China, and what does this say about their later life resources? Where (or *do*) Chinese women expect to receive psychological comfort in old age, and what social conditions and policies might foster reception of this support?

Age Relations, Social Change, and Cohort-Based Standards of Well-Being

Another direction for future research that the findings of this study indicates is that of the importance of lived experiences, or "cohort effects," on standards of physical and psychological well-being. A wide generation gap between China's rural older people and contemporary youth is evident. However, few studies have investigated what kind of practical effects this generation gap has on the current and future lives of rural Chinese older people. In terms of aging, how might different standards in living conditions, personal possessions, and priorities shape rural elders' experiences of aging? How does

a generation gap affect the fulfillment of psychological and companionship needs? A larger scale study might investigate more thoroughly how rural older women and rural older men actually regard the absence of junior family members, how they gain (or could gain) a strong sense of community and ownership within villages, and what factors provide and could provide sources of emotional and psychological comfort. Besides suggesting how generation gaps shape senses of later-life satisfaction, this kind of study could both draw on and contribute to general theories and studies of old age and community integration.

Satisfaction Levels of Rural and Urban Elders, Comparatively

Although elders in Seven Mountains acknowledged the superior amenities available to their urban counterparts, they rarely expressed willingness to live in an urban area. Elders who continued to perform work in and around rural households fulfilled expected roles, likely achieving a sense of accomplishment and purpose. How do rural and urban elders' levels of satisfaction compare, and do the roles and activities from which they derive a sense of fulfillment differ (see Silverstein et al. 2006)? What do similarities or differences in urban and rural experiences of aging contribute to theories of aging? Although answers to these questions might be extrapolated from studies of urban elders, a study designed to specifically compare experiences, roles, and satisfaction levels of rural and urban elders might best provide knowledge about how to improve the quality of life for both rural and urban Chinese elderly.

Who Goes Out in Rural Households?

Two-fifths of households in Seven Mountains included family members who temporarily migrated to other areas for work. The decision for a family member to go

out appeared strategic and flexible, allowing for the possibility that they would need to return in order to assist their family members. In this rural area, both daughters and sons “went out,” supporting Zhang’s (2007) argument about the rise of China’s “new rural daughters.” However, this research did not examine whether daughters were as likely or more likely than were sons to migrate to work in a city, nor did it consider how birth order influenced the likelihood of “going out” or staying in the village. Future research on rural migration, aging, and family support could pose these questions.

Family members’ “going out” probably affected household members in different ways and to different extents depending upon the age and gender of the migrant and the family members staying behind. Understanding better how these decisions are made and their effects on household members would add to existing knowledge about rural-urban migration in China, as well as to knowledge about contemporary gender/age relations within rural households. Likely, the motivations and experiences of out-migration vary according to regional and household socioeconomic status, as well as with individuals’ social location and inter-household power relations (see Hare and Zhao 2000 and Yang 2000). On-site research investigating these motivations and experiences might produce more nuanced understandings about the people and institutions involved in generating China’s “floating populations” and might challenge negative portrayals of rural migrants (Davin 2000).

Promoting Health, Education, and Health Care Reform in Rural China

This research suggests that poor health, chronic disease, and subsequent inability of family members to earn enough money to cover medical bills are major concerns for many elders – and ones which are probably based on realistic assessment of their

resources. More “ground-level” research is needed on how to promote and deliver rural health education, most effectively encourage preventative health measures, and bolster the quality of rural health services. Additionally, appropriate rural educational reforms might provide the youngest family members with better resources by which to continue on to higher education, establish their own businesses, and manage social networks that will in turn bolster their ability to care for older family members.

Elder Abuse in Rural China

Finally, older villagers in Seven Mountains referred to instances in which elders were mistreated or physically abused by family members, but it was difficult to pursue such a sensitive topic, especially as a foreign researcher. Chinese villagers might not have wanted to project a negative image of family age relations to an “outsider,” particularly when, as so many villagers explained, “to respect elders is a Chinese characteristic.” To what extent is psychological and physical elder abuse a problem in rural China, and what might be done to minimize elder abuse? Emphasis is often on the neglect and physical hardship of rural elders whose family members are working in the city (Ma 2008; French 2006; Yardley 2004), overlooking the possibility of neglect and physical hardship of elders living in traditional stem family households. As older villagers lose status in the household and yet continue to rely mainly on junior family members for support, are they at increased risk of domestic violence or neglect? Older Chinese women, who are more insulated in the family and whose social networks may be smaller than those of men and of young women (see Zhang 2006:S108), may be at risk.

Looking Out from Seven Mountains

Looking out from the rooftop over Seven Mountains each day, the view was one of continuous changes, however stark or subtle. The patchwork of rice fields, new homes, crumbling earth buildings, and construction equipment reflected the complexity of social transitions shaping the lives of older residents. More hidden was the underlying work of elders which supported these changes. In this village as in many parts of China, economic reforms since the 1970s have shifted the intra-familial balance of power across generations and between the sexes (Ikels 2004; Entwisle and Henderson 2000; Davis and Harrell 1993), in turn shaping elders' experiences of later life. However, additional changes brought by economic reforms, as well as the resounding echoes of previous eras, also bear upon the lives of older villagers and challenge simplistic descriptions of the relationships between aging and power, between China's population change and economic growth. Memories of the bitter past, new cash-earning opportunities, and contemporary technological developments work together with (and sometimes counter) changes to elders' household relations, social lives, and health – more often than not promoting optimism about the future. Yet as development continues to be equated with wage-based economic growth at both local and national levels, elders' crucial but indirect contributions to current Chinese society will likely remain overlooked along with their past contributions to the nation and national development. Economic growth creates opportunities but also inequalities, allowing some elders to feel pride and comfort in personal and household entrepreneurial endeavors while peers experience shame and disadvantage despite relatively improved standards of living. Indeed, China's "left-behind" elders are perhaps not so much those elders who stay alone in rural households

while family members migrate to the cities as they are those elders who live within households unable to participate in new-found prosperity.

TABLES

Table 1a. Biographical Information on Female Focus Group Participants

	Year Born	Highest Education Level	*Hamlet	Economic Status (Self-reported)	Health (Self-reported)
Group 1					
1	1947	primary	BP	“Below Average”	“Above Average”
2	1945	primary (2)	BP	“Above Average”	“Above Average”
3	1937	none	BP	“Average”	“Below Average”
4	1939	none	BP	“Above Average”	“Average”
5	1941	primary	BP	“Above Average”	“Below Average”
6	1947	none	BP	“Below Average”	“Above Average”
Group 2					
1	1941	none	SS	“Above Average”	“Average”
2	1937	none	SF	“Above Average”	“Very Good”
3	1948	primary (5)	SS	“Average”	“Below Average”
4	1937	none	SF	“Average”	“Average”
5	1947	none	SS	“Below Average”	“Average”
6	1938	none	SF	“Below Average”	“Very Good”
Group 3					
1	1932	none	SS	“Below Average”	“Below Average”
2	1936	none	BP	“Very Good”	“Very Good”
3	1929	none	SS	“Average”	“Average”
4	1928	none	SS	“Below Average”	“Above Average”
5	1933	none	SS	“Average”	“Below Average”
6	1929	none	BP	“Below Average”	“Above Average”
Group 4					
1	1936	none	SS	“Below Average”	“Above Average”
2	1930	none	SS	“Poor”	“Below Average”
3	1932	none	SF	“Average”	“Average”
4	1925	none	SS	“Above Average”	“Above Average”
5	1928	none	SS	“Above Average”	“Average”
6	1928	primary	SF	“Very Good”	“Very Good”
7	1934	none	SS	“Very Good”	“Above Average”
8	1936	none	SS	“Below Average”	“Below Average”

* BP= Buddha’s Peak, SS = Southern Slope, SF = Stone Flower

Table 1b. Biographical Information on Male Focus Group Participants

	Year Born	Highest Education Level	*Hamlet	Economic Status (Self-reported)	Health (Self-reported)
Group 1					
1	1939	primary (2)	BP	"Above Average"	"Average"
2	1939	primary (5)	BP	"Above Average"	"Average"
3	1937	primary (4)	BP	"Very Good"	"Average"
4	1939	primary (3)	BP	"Average"	"Below Average"
5	1941	middle (9)	BP	"Above Average"	"Average"
6	1940	primary (3)	BP	"Very Good"	"Above Average"
Group 2					
1	1940	middle	SS	"Below Average"	"Average"
2	1942	primary	SS	"Below Average"	"Below Average"
3	1944	high school	SS	"Above Average"	"Average"
4	1939	primary	SF	"Above Average"	"Above Average"
Group 3					
1	1930	primary (6)	SS	"Average"	"Average"
2	1934	middle	BP	"Average"	"Above Average"
3	1933	middle	BP	"Average"	"Above Average"
4	1929	middle	BP	"Average"	"Average"
5	1922	middle	SS	"Average"	"Below Average"
6	1931	middle	BP	"Above Average"	"Below Average"
Group 4					
1	1935	primary	SF	"Average"	"Average"
2	1927	primary	SF	"Average"	"Average"
3	1932	primary	SF	"Average"	"Average"
4	1933	primary	SS	"Average"	"Average"
5	1934	primary	SS	"Average"	"Average"
6	1934	middle	SS	"Average"	"Average"

* BP= Buddha's Peak, SS = Southern Slope, SF = Stone Flower

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics: Surveyed Households by Hamlet and Village

	Buddha's Peak (1)	Southern Slope (2)	Stone Flower (3)	Village
Mean Number of Household Members	5.00	5.40	5.85	5.42
Mean Reported 2005 Overall Household Monthly Income (yuan/month)	1280.00	4013.33	4400.00	3475.00
Reported Mean 2005 Monthly Household Income Per Capita (yuan)	285.77	738.57	549.62	641.54
Proportion Willing to Report Income	.50	.75	.75	.67
Mean Reported Perceived Household Economic Resources 1 = "not enough for expenses" 4 = "very well-off"	1.80	2.30	2.40	2.17
Mean Highest Level of Education of Any Household Member	3.65	4.10	4.40	4.05
Mean Amount of Farm Land Per Surveyed Household (mu)	2.95	2.51	2.79	2.74
Mean Food Expenditures (yuan)	313.33	869.23*	782.14*	641.67
Proportion Willing/Able to Report	.75	.65	.68	.70
Mean Monthly Annual Medical Expenditures (yuan)	125	136.79	346.77	212.09
Proportion Willing/Able to Report	.40	.70	.65	.58
Mean Annual Educational Expenditures (yuan)	56.67	123.68	403.16*	196.96
Proportion Willing/Able to Report	.90	.95	.95	.93
Mean Annual Spring Festival Expenditures (yuan)	1664.71	1841.18	2077.78	1865.38
Proportion Willing/Able to Report	.85	.85	.90	.87
Mean Number of CCP Members Per Household	.30	.25	.45	.33
Proportion of Households Owning a New Brick and Steel Home	.30	.55	.50	.45
Proportion of Households Owning an Air Conditioner	.05	.10	.20	11.67
Proportion of Households Owning a Motorbike	.65	.60	.85	.70
Proportion of Households Owning a Water Heater	.20	.25	.35	26.67
Proportion of Household Including Someone Who "Goes Out"	.45	.50	.25	.40
Mean Number of People Going Out for Work	.95	1.1	.4	.82

* Differed significantly from Buddha's Peak at $p \leq .05$

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics: Survey Participants

	Buddha's Peak (1)	Southern Slope (2)	Stone Flower (3)	Village
Mean Age of Target Respondents	65.70	68.25	64.80	66.25
Mean Education Level of Target Respondents (1 = no formal education; 5 = high school)	2.00	2.10	2.10	2.07
Proportion of Women Respondents	.25	.40	.30	.32
Proportion Reporting Limited Physical Mobility	.20	.15	.05	.13
Mean Self-Rated Health (1 = very poor, 5 = very good)	3.55	3.35	3.6	3.5
Depression Scale Score (14 = most depressed; 56 = least depressed)	42.60	41.50	43.35	42.5
Proportion Reporting Still Performing Farm Work	.45	.65	.45	.52
Proportion Agreeing that Housing is Inadequate	.40	.50	.40	.43
Proportion Agreeing that Food/Nutrition is Inadequate	.35	.35	.25	.32
Proportion Agreeing that Clothing is Inadequate	.00	.10	.00	.03
Proportion Agreeing that Medical Care is Inadequate	.25	.55*	.25	.35
Proportion Agreeing that Help with Chores is Inadequate	.30	.75*	.35	.45
Proportion Agreeing that Personal Care is Inadequate	.25	.47	.35	.36
Proportion Agreeing that Companionship is Inadequate	.25	.20	.25	.23
Proportion Agreeing that "The Past Few Decades of Development Have Improved Elders' Lives"	.26	.42	.15	.28
Proportion Agreeing that "China's Aging Will Interfere with Development"	.50	.70	.47	.56

* Differed significantly from Buddha's Peak at $p \leq .05$

Ratio/interval dependent variables: Age of Target Respondent, Depression Scale Score; Ordinal level dependent variables: Education Level of Target Respondent, Self-Rated Health; Binary (categorical) dependent variables: All other variables listed in the table above.

Table 4. Biographical Information on Interview Respondents

ID	Sex	US Age	Hamlet	Number and Gender of Children	Marital Status ID
1	M	73	Southern Slope	3 sons	widowed
2	M	78	Southern Slope	3 sons 1 daughter	married
3	M	73	Southern Slope	6 sons 1 daughter (dec.)	married
4	M	68	Stone Flower	3 sons 2 daughters	married
5	M	80	Stone Flower	3 sons 2 daughters	widowed
6	M	67	Stone Flower	1 son 3 daughters	married
7	M	74	Buddha's Peak	1 son 5 daughters	married, lives alone
8	M	75	Buddha's Peak	3 sons 1 daughter	married
9	M	69	Buddha's Peak	3 sons 1 daughter	married
10	F	69	Stone Flower	3 sons 1 daughter	widowed
11	F	61	Stone Flower	7 sons	widowed
12	F	79	Stone Flower	3 sons 2 daughters	married
13	F	69	Buddha's Peak	1 son 1 daughter	married
14	F	73	Buddha's Peak	2 sons 2 daughters	married
15	F	79	Buddha's Peak	1 son 3 daughters 1 son in law	married
16	F	70	Southern Slope	2 sons 1 daughter	married husband lives/works outside
17	F	58	Southern Slope	2 sons 5 daughters	widowed
18	F	78	Southern Slope	3 sons 2 daughters	widowed

Table 5. Household Mean Scores by Target Respondents' Age and Sex

		Reported Household Economic Conditions	Number of Household Members	Number of CCP Members	Number of Rooms in House
		1. Very well-off			
		2. Somewhat well-off			
		3. Just enough			
		4. Not enough income for spending			
Total		2.17	5.42	.33	9.88
	Men	2.17	5.41	.37	9.78
	Young-Elders	2.27	5.77	.27	11.13
	Old-Elders	1.91	4.45	.64	6.09
	Women	2.16	5.42	.26	10.11
	Young-Elders	2.10	5.70	.20	8.90
	Old-Elders	2.22	5.11	.33	11.44

Table 6. Correlations Between Selected Variables

	2005 Income	1985 Income	No. of CCP Members	No. of Rooms	Amt. of Farm-land	No. of People Going Out	Age of Respondent	House Type	Highest Household Education Level	No. of HH Members Insured
2005 Income	1.00									
1985 Income	0.12	1.00								
No. of CCP Members	0.45*	-0.07	1.00							
No. of Rooms	0.66*	-0.04	0.48*	1.00						
Amt. of Farmland	0.34* -	0.21	0.05	0.35*	1.00					
No. of People Going Out	0.08	-0.32*	0.11	0.18	-0.11	1.00				
Target Respondent Age	-0.11	-0.11	0.25	-0.13	-0.17	0.29*	1.00			
House Type (1=new)	-0.43*	0.02	-0.06	-0.60*	-0.54*	-0.13	0.46*	1.00		
Highest Household Education Level	0.43*	-0.03	0.40*	0.41*	0.23	0.43*	0.50*	-0.38*	1.00	
No. of Insured Household Members	0.52*	-0.05	0.49*	0.56*	0.07	0.29*	0.02	0.08	0.43*	1.00

* p ≤ .05 level. (The Spearman rank ordered coefficient is reported for correlations with "House Type," "Highest Household Education Level" and Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficients are reported between other data.)

Table 7. Average Self-Rated Health By Sex and Age Group

			Self-Rated Health 1= Very Poor 5 = Very Good	Self-Rated Current Memory 1= Very Poor 5 = Very Good
Total			3.50	2.95
	Men		3.78	3.29
		Young-Elders	3.87	3.40
		Old-Elders	3.55	3.00
	Women		2.90*	2.21 *
		Young-Elders	2.80	2.30
		Old-Elders	3.00	2.11

* $p \leq .05$

Table 8. Percentage of Respondents Reporting Difficulty with Daily Tasks

			Reported Difficulty with Mobility Generally	Percentage Reported Any Difficulty Walking 200-300 Meters	Percentage Reported Any Difficulty Shopping	Percentage Reported Any Difficulty Carrying 10 kg	Percentage Reported Any Difficulty Standing For Two Hours	Percentage Reported Any Difficulty Boarding the Bus	Percentage Reported Any Difficulty Cooking	Percentage Reported Any Difficulty Dressing
Total			13.33	8.33	13.56	10.34	38.22	18.33	6.67	3.33
	Men		9.76	7.32	12.20	7.69	29.27	9.76	7.32	2.44
		Young- Elders	10.00	6.67	13.33	3.57	20.00	10.00	10.00	3.33
		Old- Elders	9.09	9.09	9.09	18.88	54.55	9.09	0.00	0.00
	Women		21.05	10.53	16.67	15.79	57.89*	36.84*	5.26	5.26
		Young- Elders	20.00	0.00	10.00	10.00	50.00	30.00	0.00	0.00
		Old- Elders	22.22	22.22	25.00	22.22	66.67	44.44	11.11	11.11

* $p \leq .05$

Table 9. Depression Scale: Respondents' Mean Scores and Tests of Correlation with
Select Variables

Respondents' Scores By Gender and Age Group			
Overall			42.48
	Men		44.80
		Young-Elders	45.13
		Old-Elders	43.91
	Women		37.47*
		Young-Elders	36.40
		Old-Elders	38.67
Tests of Correlation with Select Variables			
Household Member Composition	Depression Scale		
	Number of Old-Elders in Household		-0.07
	Number of Young-Elders in Household		0.039
	Number of Members Under Age Five		-0.016
Economic Conditions			
	Perceived Household Economic Conditions		0.326*
	2005 Income		0.225
	Number of Household Members with Steady Income		0.162
Household Expenditures			
	Food		0.105
	Telephone		0.148
	Transportation		0.135
	Education		0.183
	Medical		-0.084
	Recreational		0.087
	Spring Festival		0.297*
Household Conditions			
	Number of Rooms		0.317*
	Amount of Farm Land		0.234
	Number of People Working Out		0.069
	Number of Household Members		0.085
Target Respondent			
	Age		-0.166

* $p \leq 0.05$ level

Table 10. Percentage of Elders Participating in Household Chores on a Daily Basis

			Fetches Water	Child Care	Cleans	Cooks	Works for Wages	Performs Elder Care	Does Farm Work	Washes Clothes	Raises Animals	Buys at Market	Sells at Market
Total Percentage			58.33	36.67	93.33	80.00	1.67	3.33	51.67	46.67	81.67	68.33	26.67
	Men		56.10	41.46	92.68	75.61	0.00	2.44	58.54	31.71	82.93	78.05	31.71
		Young-Elders	56.67	40.00	90.00	80.00	0.00	3.33	70.00	36.67	90.00	80.00	30.00
		Old-Elders	54.55	45.45	100.00	63.64	0.00	0.00	27.27	18.18	63.64	72.73	36.36
	Women		63.16	26.32	94.74	89.47	5.26	5.26	36.84	78.95*	78.95	47.37*	15.79
		Young-Elders	60.00	40.00	100.00	90.00	10.00	10.00	40.00	70.00	70.00	60.00	10.00
		Old-Elders	66.67	11.11	88.89	88.89	0.00	0.00	33.33	88.89	88.89	33.33	22.22

* $p \leq .05$

Table 11. Percentage of Elders Participating in Recreational Activities “Several Times a Week” or “Several Times a Month”

			Plays Cards	Fishing	TV	Reads News	Visits	Goes to Temple	Goes to Clan Rituals	Goes to Market	Travels
Total			5.00	3.33	81.67	35.00	18.33	16.67	96.67	1.67	0.00
	Men		7.32	4.88	87.80	48.78	17.07	14.63	4.88	2.44	0.00
		Young- Elders	10.00	6.67	90.00	46.67	20.00	16.67	6.67	3.33	0.00
		Old-Elders	0.00	0.00	81.82	54.55	9.09	9.09	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Women		0.00	0.00	68.42	5.26*	21.05	21.05	0.00	0.00	0.00
		Young- Elders	0.00	0.00	90.00	10.00	30.00	30.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
		Old-Elders	0.00	0.00	44.00	0.00	11.00	11.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

* $p \leq .05$

Table 12. Percentage Agreement with Statements about Family Living Arrangements (By Sex and Age Group)

	“Having elderly live with their children and grandchildren makes a big happy family.”	“Having elderly live with their children and grandchildren saves money.”	“Having elderly live with their children and grandchildren fosters supportiveness within families.”	“Having elderly live with their children and grandchildren helps elderly household members.”	“Having elderly live with their children and grandchildren helps younger household members.”	“When elderly live separately from their children and grandchildren elderly and young people can both live according to their own wills.”	“When elderly live separately from their children and grandchildren conflicts will occur.”	“When elderly live separately from their children and grandchildren elderly do not need to do housework for young people.”
Total	94.87	81.03	98.31	98.31	98.31	70.27	96.15	15.79
Men	97.56	77.50	97.56	97.56	100.00	72.00	97.22	18.42
Young-Elders	96.67	75.86	96.67	96.67	100.00	75.00	96.00	14.81
Old-Elders	100.00	81.82	100.00	100.00	100.00	66.67	100.00	27.27
Women	88.89	88.89	100.00		94.44	66.67	93.75	10.53
Young-Elders	88.89	80.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	50.00	100.00	10.00
Old-Elders	88.89	100.00	100.00	100.00	88.89	75.00	87.50	11.11

Table 13. Elders' Expectations for Family Support: Household Survey

Percentage of Elders Anticipating Financial Support from Particular Family Members									
Sex of Respondent	Son	Daughter-in-law	Daughter	Son-in-law	Spouse	Grand-son	Grand-daughter	Sibling	No One
Total	76.67	60.00	36.67	30.00	6.67	00.03*	1.67	1.67	1.67
Women	84.21	63.15	36.84	26.32	00.00	10.52	5.26	5.26	00.00
Men	73.17	58.54	36.59	31.71	9.76	00.00	00.00	00.00	2.44
Percentage of Elders Anticipating Personal Care from Particular Family Members									
Total	58.33	56.67	28.33	23.33	23.33	00.00*	1.67	00.00	1.67
Women	63.16	63.16	26.32	21.05	10.53	15.79	00.00	00.00	00.00
Men	56.10	53.66	29.27	24.39	29.27	00.00	2.44	00.00	2.44
Percentage of Elders Anticipating Psychological Comfort from Particular Family Members									
Total	76.67	68.33	56.67	41.67*	10.00	6.67	1.67	00.00	00.00
Women	68.42	57.89	52.63	15.79	10.53	10.53	00.00	00.00	00.00
Men	80.49	73.17	58.54	53.66	9.76	4.88	2.44	00.00	00.00

* p≤.05

Table 14. Percentage of Elders “Concerned” or “Very Concerned” about Future Needs Being Met: Household Survey

Sex of Respondent	Future Housing	Future Food/ Nutrition	Future Clothing	Future Medical Care	Future Help with HH Chores	Future Physical Personal Care	Future Companionship
Total	61.67	65.00	50.00	79.66	43.33	46.67	55.93
Men	68.29	70.73	60.98	85.37	43.90	46.34	55.00
Women	47.37	52.63	26.32	66.67	42.11	47.37	57.89
By Hamlet							
Southern Slope	65.00	55.00	40.00	70.00	50.00	50.00	68.42
Stone Flower	50.00	55.00	40.00	84.21	25.00	30.00	45.00
Buddha's Peak	70.00	85.00	70.00	85.00	55.00	60.00	55.00

Table 15a. Odds Ratios from Logistic Regressions Predicting Concern about Future Needs by

Respondent Characteristics: Household Survey (N = 60)

	Future Housing	Future Food/ Nutrition	Future Clothing	Future Medical Care	Future Help with Chores and Personal Assistance	Future Physical Personal Care	Future Companionship
Respondent Characteristics							
Female	.467 (.337)	.792 (.594)	.661 (.522)	.417 (.354)	2.335 (1.755)	1.546 (1.102)	1.315 (.966)
Older Elder	.551 (.330)	.477 (.292)	.441 (.290)	.890 (.652)	1.704 (1.084)	1.478 (.889)	1.996 (1.232)
Junior High Education or Above	.959 (.707)	.755 (.574)	1.510 (1.149)	.887 (.844)	9.365** (7.532)	4.359* (3.187)	2.777 (2.032)
Married	1.030 (.717)	2.455 (1.721)	5.577* (4.178)	1.4601 (1.120)	1.780 (1.306)	1.017 (.703)	.947 (.684)
Likelihood Chi-square Ratio	3.44	5.79	15.73**	2.85	9.77*	4.52	3.10
Degrees of Freedom	4	4	4	4	4	4	4

Numbers in parentheses are standard errors. The omitted categories are male, young elders, those with less than a junior-high-school education, and those who are unmarried.

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$

Table 15b. Odds Ratios from Logistic Regressions Predicting Concern about Future Needs by

Household Characteristics: Household Survey (N=60)

	Future Housing	Future Food/ Nutrition	Future Clothing	Future Medical Care	Future Help with Chores	Future Physical Personal Care	Future Companionship
(Self-Reported) “Somewhat” or “Very” Well - Off	.208* (.153)	.187* (.121)	.367 (.260)	.197* (.186)	.537 (.374)	.547 (.376)	.737 (.547)
In Stone Flower Hamlet ^a	.562 (.426)	.200 (.181)	.321 (.232)	1.330 (1.320)	.308 (.221)	.345 (.244)	1.043 (.754)
In Southern Slope Hamlet	.963 (.732)	.156* (.143)	.293 (.207)	.321 (.309)	.952 (.628)	.782 (.526)	2.669 (2.075)
Number of Members	1.112 (.189)	1.361* (.272)	1.108 (.177)	1.226 (.262)	.930 (.145)	.847 (.134)	.660* (.118)
Number of Members Working Out	1.354 (.435)	1.534 (.612)	1.137 (.329)	2.858 (1.743)	1.064 (.293)	1.116 (.310)	1.800 (.554)
Number of Communist Party Members	.460 (.250)	.253* (.148)	.572 (.300)	.444 (.310)	1.240 (.637)	1.208 (.632)	3.142 (1.933)
Likelihood Chi-square Ratio	12.01	19.63**	9.30	13.37*	6.03	7.12	12.75*
Degrees of Freedom	6	6	6	6	6	6	6

Numbers in parentheses are standard errors; *p≤.05

^a Buddha’s Peak was the reference category for the hamlet variable, and those who were not from well-off households was the reference category for the household-socioeconomic-status variable.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Focus Group Questions (English Version)

"This focus group is part of my research for my doctoral degree in the United States. I am studying the experiences of aging in rural China and how rural elderly people and their families plan to meet challenges in the future. I hope to conduct 8 focus groups, and this is one of them. Information from these focus groups can help me understand family relationships and strategies in rural China, and I am grateful for your participation."

"Ice-breaker" Question: How long have you lived in Seven Mountains?

Opening question:

(1) China has experienced much social change and modernization in recent years. What do you think are the most important ways that Seven Mountains has changed in the time you have lived here?

Transitional question:

(2) What are some ways that the people in your household have been affected by these changes?

Key questions:

(3) How have these changes made your life harder or easier?

(4) Most older people in China live longer than their parents or grandparents. How do you think the larger size of the elderly population might affect China over the next 10 years? How will it affect this village and your lives?

Closing questions:

(5) Is there anything about the welfare and participation of elderly people in this village that you think I should know?

(6) Do you have any questions for me?

Appendix B: Survey Instrument (English Version)

HOUSEHOLD DEMOGRAPHY, CONDITIONS, AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS

1. How many people belong to this household? _____

Comments: _____

2. What are the years of birth, sex, and education level of people of all people living in this household? Please start with the person who is the head of this household.

	Sex	Year of Birth	Marital Status	Education* Level	Relationship to Head
Head					
Person 1	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Person 2	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Person 3	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Person 4	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Person 5	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Person 6	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Person 7	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Person 8	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Person 9	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Person 10	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

2a. Number age 55-69: _____

2b. Number \geq age 70: _____

2c. Number \leq age 5: _____

Codes for educational level

1. No formal education or less than primary
2. Primary
3. Junior high
4. Vocational school
5. Senior high
6. Community college (including "5 types of college")
7. Undergraduate f colleges")
8. Graduate

3. Researcher: Select type of household:

- ☐ Type 1. Elderly person as household head, accompanied by spouse and children
- ☐ Type 2. Elderly person as household head, accompanied only by spouse
- ☐ Type 3. Elderly person as dependent, accompanied by spouse and household head child(ren)
- ☐ Type 4. Elderly as dependent, with no spouse, living with child as head
- ☐ Type 5. Elderly as single parent living with children
- ☐ Type 6. Elderly as the single resident in the household.

4a. Often people who belong to a household must spend time away because of a job or other reason. Of the people we have just discussed, did anyone not sleep here last night?

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> Person 5 _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Head | <input type="checkbox"/> Person 6 _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Person 1 _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Person 7 _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Person 2 _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Person 8 _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Person 3 _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Person 9 _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Person 4 _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Person 10 _____ |

5a. Do you expect any changes in living arrangements in the next year?

1. Yes ► 5b. What changes? _____
2. No

6a. Which household members have a steady income? (*Check all that apply.*)

Who?	6b. Earnings per month (yuan)
<input type="checkbox"/> Head 1	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Person 2	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Person 3	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Person 4	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Person 5	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Person 6	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Person 7	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Person 8	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Person 9	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Person 10	_____

7. What was your average total monthly household income in 2005?

_____ Yuan

8. What was the approximate monthly income in your household 20 years ago, around 1985?

_____ Yuan

9. What do you think of the economic conditions of your household?

1. Very well-off
2. Somewhat well-off
3. Just enough income for spending
4. Not enough income for spending

10. What was your household expenditure per month on the following items during the last six months?

	Type of Expense	Monthly Expenditure (Yuan)
10a.	Food	
10b.	Water, electricity, coal, gas	
10c.	Telephone or telecommunications	
10d.	Transportation	
10e.	Education (adult and child education)	
10f.	Medical expenses	
10g.	Newspapers, magazines,	
10h.	Recreational activities	
10i.	Clan or lineage rituals	
10j.	Other	

11. How much money did the household spend last year on Spring Festival?

_____ Yuan

12a. Last year, how much household money comes from the following sectors?

1. Waged employment _____ Yuan
2. Business in the village _____ Yuan
3. Pension or govt. aid _____ Yuan
4. Farm work _____ Yuan
5. Other _____ Yuan



12b. If you had income from farm work, which crops do you sell?
(If not, proceed to question 13)

1. Rice
2. Tobacco
3. Fruit
4. Peanuts
5. Sugar cane
6. (other) Vegetables
7. Herbs or roots
8. Other _____

12c. Have you started planting any new farm crops in the past five years?

a. Yes ► 12d. What? _____

b. No

13a. Is anyone who belongs to this household a Communist Party member?

1. Yes

13b. Who?

13 c. Year of Initial Membership

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Head 1 | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Person 2 | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Person 3 | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Person 4 | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Person 5 | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Person 6 | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Person 7 | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Person 8 | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Person 9 | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Person 10 | _____ |

2. No

14. Does the household own any of the following?

	Yes	No
15a. A motorized fan?	1	2
15b. A gas or electric stove?	1	2
15c. A telephone?	1	2
15d. A cellular phone?	1	2
15e. A black & white television?	1	2
15f. A bicycle?	1	2
15g. A dish sanitizer?	1	2
15h. A water heater?	1	2
15i. A color television?	1	2
15j. A motorcycle?	1	2
15k. A refrigerator?	1	2
15l. An air conditioner?	1	2
15m. A car or truck?	1	2
15n. A computer?	1	2

15a. What is the main source of drinking water for the household?

1. Mountains, piped 2. Well, hauled 3. Well, piped 4.
Other _____

16b. Do you boil your drinking water?

1. Yes
2. No

16. What is the main source of water your household uses for washing and bathing?

1. Mountains, piped 2. Well, hauled 3. Well, piped 4.
Other _____

17a. What kind of toilet facilities does your household have? (*Select and count all that apply.*)

1. Flush toilet 17b.#: ____ 2. Floor toilet, inside 17c.#: ____ 3. Floor toilet, outside
17d#: ____ 4. Other _____ 17e#: ____

18a. What is the main source of lighting for your household?

1. Electricity 2. Other _____

18b. Is this the same source of lighting that this household used five years ago?

1. Yes (proceed to question 20)

2. No▼

18c. What was the source of lighting that this household used five years ago?

1. Electricity 2. Other _____

19a. How many rooms are in your household? _____

19b. Is this the same number of rooms that this household had five years ago?

1. Yes (proceed to question 21)

2. No▼

20c. How many rooms did this household have five years ago? _____

20a. What type of energy does your household mainly use for cooking?

1. Gas 2. Coal 3. Electric 4. Wood 5. Other _____

20b. Is this the same kind of energy that this household used for cooking five years ago?

1. Yes (proceed to question 22a)

2. No▼

20c. What was the kind of energy that this household used for cooking five years ago?

1. Gas 2. Coal 3. Electric 4. Wood 5. Other _____

21a. Type of house

1. Brick and steel
2. Newer earth and wood (built 1978 or after)
3. Older earth and wood (built before 1978)
4. Other _____

21b. Record observation:

Roof _____

Walls _____

Floor _____

22. Are you planning to buy some major equipment or decorations for the household?

1. Yes 23b. What?

2. No

23a. Does this household own any of the following livestock? (*Select all that apply.*)

- a. Chickens
- b. Ducks
- c. Pigs
- d. Rabbits
- e. Ox
- f. Fish
- g. Other _____

23d . Which of the animals that your household currently owns are sold or traded?

- a. Chickens
- b. Ducks
- c. Pigs
- d. Rabbits
- e. Ox
- f. Fish
- g. Other _____

23e. Which livestock did the household own five years ago? (*Select all that apply.*)

- a. Chickens
- b. Ducks
- c. Pigs
- d. Rabbits
- e. Ox
- f. Fish
- g. Other _____

23f. Which of the animals that your household owned five years ago were sold or traded? (*Select all that apply.*)

- a. Chickens
- b. Ducks
- c. Pigs
- d. Rabbits
- e. Ox
- f. Fish
- g. Other _____

24a . Approximately how much land does this household have rights to farm?
_____ Mu

24b. Is this more land or less land than this household had five years ago?

- a. More
- b. Less
- c. About the same

24c. Is any of this land irrigated?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No (proceed to question 26)

24d. Was it irrigated five years ago?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No.

TARGET RESPONDENT'S HOUSEHOLD ACTIVITIES AND CARE WORK

25. For the target respondent, check which activities they participate in on a daily or regular basis and approximately how many hours per day are spent on that activity.
(Additional sheets will be provided.)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bringing or Preparing Water _
<input type="checkbox"/> Childcare_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Cleaning_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Cooking_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Working for wages____
<input type="checkbox"/> Eldercare_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Farm work_____

<input type="checkbox"/> Other_____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Going to ancestral hall
<input type="checkbox"/> Buying at the market_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Selling at the market_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Managing household money____
<input type="checkbox"/> Raising animals_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Gardening_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Studying_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Washing Clothes_____ |
|---|---|

26. How many people living in this household "go out" for work? _____

27a. Who? 27b. How many
 km away?

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Head | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Person 1 | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Person 2 | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Person 3 | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Person 4 | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Person 5 | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Person 6 | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Person 7 | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Person 8 | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Person 9 | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Person 10 | _____ |

27. Which household members [are/will be] primarily responsible for care of the following children?

Child under 12's HH #	Cared for by
<input type="checkbox"/> Person _____	Persons _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Person _____	Persons _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Person _____	Persons _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Person _____	Persons _____

28. In the past 12 months, elderly household members (including yourself) have used health clinics in which locations? (*List member numbers and circle all that apply*)

Person	Shangxi	Longtan	Fushi	Kanshi	Yongding	Longyan	Other
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

29. Are the activities of any household member limited in any way because of a health condition?

1. Yes

29a. Who? 29b. Since when? 29c. To what extent?* 29d. Helped by whom ?

			very		slighty	
<input type="checkbox"/> Head	1	_____	1	2	3	Person(s) _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Person 2		_____	1	2	3	Person(s) _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Person 3		_____	1	2	3	Person(s) _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Person 4		_____	1	2	3	Person(s) _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Person 5		_____	1	2	3	Person(s) _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Person 6		_____	1	2	3	Person(s) _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Person 7		_____	1	2	3	Person(s) _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Person 8		_____	1	2	3	Person(s) _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Person 9		_____	1	2	3	Person(s) _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Person 10		_____	1	2	3	Person(s) _____

2. No

*coding for limitations

1. Very restricted, for instance, confined to bed
2. Restricted, for example, having difficulty walking several hundred meters
3. Slightly restricted, for example, unable to do heavy housework or haul heavy loads

30. Which household members have health insurance? (*Select all that apply.*)

- | | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Head | 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> Person 6 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Person 2 | | <input type="checkbox"/> Person 7 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Person 3 | | <input type="checkbox"/> Person 8 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Person 4 | | <input type="checkbox"/> Person 9 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Person 5 | | <input type="checkbox"/> Person 10 |

31. Who does (or is anticipated to) provide primary financial support to elderly family members? *(Select all that apply.)*

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> a. Son and daughter-in-law | <input type="checkbox"/> g. Self |
| <input type="checkbox"/> b. Daughter and son-in-law | <input type="checkbox"/> h. Sibling |
| <input type="checkbox"/> c. Male grandchild | <input type="checkbox"/> i. Friend |
| <input type="checkbox"/> d. Female grandchild | <input type="checkbox"/> j. Other |
| <input type="checkbox"/> e. Male spouse | <input type="checkbox"/> k. No one |
| <input type="checkbox"/> f. Female spouse | <input type="checkbox"/> l. Don't know |

32. Who does (or is anticipated to) provide primary physical care to elderly family members? *(Select all that apply.)*

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> a. Son and daughter-in-law | <input type="checkbox"/> g. Self |
| <input type="checkbox"/> b. Daughter and son-in-law | <input type="checkbox"/> h. Sibling |
| <input type="checkbox"/> c. Male grandchild | <input type="checkbox"/> i. Friend |
| <input type="checkbox"/> d. Female grandchild | <input type="checkbox"/> j. Other |
| <input type="checkbox"/> e. Male spouse | <input type="checkbox"/> k. No one |
| <input type="checkbox"/> f. Female spouse | <input type="checkbox"/> l. Don't know |

33. Who does (or is anticipated to) provide primary spiritual comfort to elderly family members? *(Select all that apply.)*

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> a. Son and daughter-in-law | <input type="checkbox"/> f. Female spouse |
| <input type="checkbox"/> b. Daughter and son-in-law | <input type="checkbox"/> g. Self |
| <input type="checkbox"/> c. Male grandchild | <input type="checkbox"/> h. Sibling |
| <input type="checkbox"/> d. Female grandchild | <input type="checkbox"/> i. Friend |
| <input type="checkbox"/> e. Male spouse | <input type="checkbox"/> j. Other |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> k. No one |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> l. Don't know |

34. How concerned are you that the following needs of household elders will not be met in the future?

		Very Concerned	Concerned	Not Very Concerned	Not at all Concerned	??
a.	Adequate housing	1	2	3	4	5
b.	Adequate food and nutrition	1	2	3	4	5
c.	Clothing	1	2	3	4	5
d.	Medical care	1	2	3	4	5
e.	Help with household chores	1	2	3	4	5
f.	Daily physical personal care	1	2	3	4	5
g.	Companionship	1	2	3	4	5

HOUSEHOLD AGGREGATION AND RELATIONS

35a. Do members of other households regularly eat their meals here?

1. Yes ▶ 35b. Who?

2. No

36a. Do members of this household regularly eat in other households?

1. Yes ▶ 36b. Who?

↓
36c. Where?

2. No

37a. When household members are sick or busy, do they ever receive help from other households?

1. Yes ▶ 37b. From whom?

2. No

38a. Does this household do business together with another household in the village?

1. Yes ▶ 38b. Which?

2. No

39a. Are there any households in this village with whom your household raises animals or crops?

1. Yes ▶ 39b. Which?

2. No

Now I would like to ask you some questions about aging and development.

40. How much do you agree with the following statements about elderly people and China's development?

		Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral/ Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
a.	The past few decades of development in this village have improved life for elderly people.	1	2	3	4	5
b.	Compared to younger people, elderly people play a less important role in local development.	1	2	3	4	5
c.	China's aging population will interfere with China's future development.	1	2	3	4	5

41. Do you have any additional comments or information regarding plans and concerns about the care of household members in their old age? *(Attach additional sheet if needed.)*

42. Do you have any other comments about the role of elderly people in the household? *(Attach additional sheet if needed.)*

TARGET RESPONDENT

INTERVIEWER: GO TO NEXT (PROXY) MODULE IF YOU ARE REPLYING
ON BEHALF OF TARGET RESPONDENT

A1. How much do you agree with these viewpoints on elderly people living with children and grandchildren?

	Having elderly live with their children and grandchildren:	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
A1a.	Makes a big happy family	1	2	3	4	5
A1b.	Saves some money	1	2	3	4	5
A1c.	Fosters supportiveness within families	1	2	3	4	5
A1d.	Helps elderly household members	1	2	3	4	5
A1e.	Helps younger household members	1	2	3	4	5

A2. How much do you agree with the following viewpoints on elderly people living separately from children and grandchildren?

	When elderly live separately from their children and grandchildren:	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
A2a.	Elderly and young people can both live according to their own wills.	1	2	3	4	5
A2b.	Elderly do not need to do housework for young people.	1	2	3	4	5
A2c.	Fewer conflicts will occur.	1	2	3	4	5

A3. How much do you agree with the following statements about status within rural Chinese households?

		Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
A3a.	Elders and younger adults are equal in the household.	1	2	3	4	5
A3b.	Men and women are equal in the household.	1	2	3	4	5
A3c.	Three or more generations living together is ideal.	1	2	3	4	5

A4. How would you rate your health at the present time?

- ☐ 1. Very Poor
- ☐ 2. Poor
- ☐ 3. Average
- ☐ 4. Good
- ☐ 5. Very Good

A5. How would you rate your memory at the present time?

- ☐ 1. Very Poor
- ☐ 2. Poor
- ☐ 3. Average
- ☐ 4. Good
- ☐ 5. Very Good

A6. Compared with 1 year ago, would you say your memory is better now, about the same, or worse now than it was then?

- ☐ 1. Better Now
- ☐ 2. About the Same
- ☐ 3. Worse Now
- ☐ 4. Don't Know

A7. Now I will ask you whether you have any difficulties in doing the following activities. Do you have no difficulty, a little difficulty, a lot of difficulty, or are you unable to do this activity?

	Activity	A8.Difficulty Level			
		None	Some	Much	Unable
a.	Shopping for personal items	1	2	3	4
b.	Walking 200 to 300 meters	1	2	3	4
c.	Lifting or carrying a 10 kilo item	1	2	3	4
d.	Standing for about two hours	1	2	3	4
e.	Getting on a bus	1	2	3	4
f.	Cooking	1	2	3	4
g.	Getting Dressed	1	2	3	4
h.	Other	1	2	3	4

A10. Is the help adequate? _____

A11. During the past 12 months, how often did you do the following recreational activities?

	Never	Rarely	Several times a month	Several times a week	Almost every day
Play <i>ma jiang</i> , cards, or board games	1	2	3	4	5
Go fishing	1	2	3	4	5
Watch television	1	2	3	4	5
Read newspapers or magazines	1	2	3	4	5
Visit relatives or friends	1	2	3	4	5
Go to the temple or ancestral hall	1	2	3	4	5
Do <i>tai ji chuan</i> or <i>qi gong</i>	1	2	3	4	5
Attend clan or lineage gatherings	1	2	3	4	5
Go to parks	1	2	3	4	5
Go to the market for fun	1	2	3	4	5
Travel to scenic places	1	2	3	4	5

A12. How much do you agree with the following statements about village life;

		Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral/ Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
a.	I would spend time in a EPAC if there were one in the village.	1	2	3	4	5
b.	Pollution from the factories has negatively influenced my household.					
c.	Pollution from the factories has negatively influenced my daily life.					

A13. Please tell me what illness or symptoms of poor health, if any, you currently have. How much influence has this illness (symptom) created for your daily activities?"
(Record up to five reported symptoms.) (From Sun 2004)

	Symptoms	Influence on Daily Activities		
		not at all	a little	a great deal
a.		1	2	3
b.		1	2	3
c.		1	2	3
d.		1	2	3
e.		1	2	3

A14. Do you smoke tobacco? ↓ 1. Yes 2. No (proceed to question A15)

A9b. At what age did you start to smoke tobacco? _____ years old

A15. Do you have difficulty with mobility?

1. Yes

a. If so, what is the primary reason?

- ☐ 1. musculoskeletal difficulties
- ☐ 2. weakness in limbs
- ☐ 3. respiratory difficulties
- ☐ 4. paralysis
- ☐ 5. fracture or old injuries
- ☐ 6. Confusion or anxiety
- ☐ 7. Other _____

2. No

A16. When you become sick, who makes the decision for obtaining medical care for yourself?

1. Myself only
2. Spouse only
3. Myself with spouse
4. Myself with others _____
5. Others only

A17. If your medical costs in one year were over 1000 Yuan, how would this bill be paid?

- ☐ 1. Use savings
- ☐ 2. Borrow money from family
- ☐ 3. Borrow money from others
- ☐ 4. Ask family members for financial support,
- ☐ 5. Ask others for financial support
- ☐ 6. Apply for government aid
- ☐ 7. Other _____

A18. Do you need to ask permission before you leave the house alone to go on an errand?

1. Yes ► 46b. From whom?

2. No

A19. Who in the household usually decides what TV programs to watch? _____

A20. For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you ever felt or behaved in this way. I'd like to know, during the past week, whether you *often*, *sometimes*, *rarely*, or *never* had this experience.

	STATEMENT	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
a.	I worried about little things.	1	2	3	4
b.	I did not feel like eating.	1	2	3	4
c.	I had trouble keeping my mind on what I was doing.	1	2	3	4
d.	I felt very happy.	4	3	2	1
e.	I felt lonely.	1	2	3	4
f.	I felt depressed.	1	2	3	4
g.	I felt life was pleasant.	4	3	2	1
h.	I thought my life had been a failure.	1	2	3	4
i.	I felt that some people disliked me.	1	2	3	4
j.	I felt full of energy.	4	3	2	1
k.	I did not sleep well.	1	2	3	4
l.	I could not find the energy to do things.	1	2	3	4
m.	I felt that everything I did was an effort.	1	2	3	4
n.	I felt this is the best time of my life.	4	3	2	1

A21. To what extent do you agree that the following needs of household elders are not currently being met?

	Elders' needs	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
a.	Housing is inadequate	1	2	3	4
b.	Food and nutrition is inadequate	1	2	3	4
c.	Clothing is inadequate	1	2	3	4
d.	Medical care is inadequate	1	2	3	4
e.	Help with household chores is inadequate	1	2	3	4
f.	Daily physical personal care is inadequate	1	2	3	4
g.	Companionship is inadequate	1	2	3	4
h.	Other	1	2	3	4

A22. How concerned are you that the following needs of household elders will not be met in the future?

		Very Concerned	Concerned	Not Very Concerned	Not at all Concerned
a.	Adequate housing	1	2	3	4
b.	Adequate food and nutrition	1	2	3	4
c.	Clothing	1	2	3	4
d.	Medical care	1	2	3	4
e.	Help with household chores	1	2	3	4
f.	Daily physical personal care	1	2	3	4
g.	Companionship	1	2	3	4

A23. How much do you agree with the following statements about elderly people and China's development?

		Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral / Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
a.	The past few decades of development in this village have improved life for elderly people.	1	2	3	4	5
b.	Compared to younger people, elderly people play a less important role in local development.	1	2	3	4	5
c.	China's aging population will interfere with China's future development.	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix C:
Structured
Guide (English)

Hamlet _____
Born: _____

A24. Presence of Others During the Interview

	Yes	No	#
Children Under Age 10	1	2	—
Female Parent	1	2	—
Male Parent	1	2	—
Other Males	1	2	—
Other Females	1	2	—

Semi-
Interview
Version)

Age/Year

Gender:_____ Children (sex and number)_____

1. What are some of your earliest memories living in this village? OR: What do you remember about your wedding day?
2. Can you describe a usual day in your life now? For example, when do you get up? Then what do you do?
3. If the village had an elderly person's activity center, what activities would you like to see there?
4. In surveys, some people said that village development has not really improved life for elderly people. Do you agree? Why or why not?
5. Do your sons or daughters go out for work? If they do, or if they did, what do you think about that? How does or would it affect your own life?
6. What is an ideal life for an elderly person?
7. Do you worry about the future? (Elaborate as much as possible.)
8. Sons usually care for their parents. Do daughters also care for elderly parents? In your family, do you think there are some daughters who will help their parents in old age? If so, how?
9. Some people think that siblings will take care of each other in old age. Do you think this is a realistic idea? Do you have siblings that can take care of each other in old age?
10. English does not have an exact word for "filial." Can you explain what filial means? What does a filial child do? What does a non-filial child do?
11. Do you think that these days younger people are less filial than in previous decades?
12. Overall, do you think your life is better now than it was 2 decades ago? Why and how is it better, worse, or neither?
13. Do you think your life will get better, worse, or about the same in the next decade or two? (Elaborate as much as possible.)
14. In your view, what do elderly men/women contribute to their households? What do they contribute to this village?
15. If you had three wishes, what would you wish for?

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