

Session A-4 Care in the Rural Settings

The Ethic of Conviction and Women's Participation of Elderly Care in Rural Families -----An Analysis Based on the Data from Field Research Carried out in a Rural Area Named Wentsing of China

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1. Introduction

Aging problem in China has become a pronounced social problem in recent years. The population in 2010 has reached about 1.33 billion, containing about 110 million old elders who were above 65 years old.¹ Obviously, the aging population rate has reached 9 percent. On the other hand, the rural total population had reached about 660 million containing about 66 million aging population. The rural aging population rate has astonishingly reached 10 percent in China. A concept extensively prevalent in China is that even though living on limited revenues, the rural elders can be taken cared by their offspring, namely "feeding-back" mode stated by Hsiaotung Fei in 1983.² To discriminate from the western mode of elderly care, he writes that the Chinese mode is a "feeding-back" mode based on the traditional consciousness of "hsiao"³ to parents. To repay parents' nourishing favor, when they grow up, they're to take care of their elder and feeble parents based on moral obligations. However, in recent years, a number of researches revealed that the inter-generational relationship has been increasingly losing. At worst, the elderly people could not endure offspring's apathy and decided to commit suicide to make an end of his or her whole life.⁴ If according to Fei's theory, the reason of young generation's absence of participation in elderly care could be attributed to the collision of "hsiao". However, it is a cultural perspective.

In previous researches, there is an obvious appearance that the elderly people are all in desperate need of being taken cared. Basing on this presupposition, the majority of scholars conduct their researches from the perspective of regarding the elders as object, rather than the one of regarding the elders as subject. Numerous researches are teeming with the topics regarding the construction of the mechanism of the elderly care in rural districts and rural old-age pension insurance system. Introduction of endowment insurance, construction of rural communities, the government's role in elderly care and the family model of caring for the aged are intensively debated in previous researches. However, the elders' attitudes in elderly care is neglected. Why do we have to discuss the elderly people's attitude before discussing the construction of mechanism of elderly care? Because the elderly people are the terminal subject in this program. Obviously, if the elders refuse to be taken cared by some of their offspring in the backdrop of losing inter-generational relationship, family's devotion to alleged elderly care could hardly be fulfilled. Therefore, this paper is to focus on the elder people's attitude in elderly care which will be defined as "the ethic of conviction" and debate its effects on rural young generation women's participation in elderly care.

Viewing elderly care issue from the elders' subject perspective is not innovated by me, it is first raised by Shanhua Yung⁵. He quotes Max Weber's "the ethic of responsibility" theory in his field research conducted in Beijing urban districts. He insists that the elder people's ethic of

responsibility made them be more voluntary to take care of their offspring but not being taken care of by them. The responsibility the elderly people perceive accelerates the degradation of the family's function of elderly care.⁶

In Yung's research, he underscores the urban elderly people's content with their living situations based on "the ethic of responsibility" without discussing their reactions of being faced with the outcomes of not being fed back by their offspring at all, such as no mental consolation or no economic support from their offspring at all. At worst, are they able to endure the long-lasting indifference of their offspring? What are the elderly people's reactions to this situation? But all of those questions haven't been discussed in Yung's research. The ethic of responsibility is dramatically possible to be challenged by unexpected consequence, such as long-term indifference or abuse from the offspring. Virtually, Weber's theory about the ethic of responsibility is related to calculation of consequence. The ethic of responsibility is not only about responsibility but also about calculations of consequence.

2. The ethic of conviction and the ethic of responsibility

2-1. Two ethics and consequences

"The ethic of conviction" and "the ethic of responsibility" are a couple of ethical worldviews stated by Max Weber. They are noted in a speech named "Politics as a vocation" in 1919 and the speech is later published as an essay. Weber writes that "We must be clear about the fact that all ethically oriented conduct may be guided by one of two fundamentally differing and irreconcilably opposed maxims: conduct can be oriented to an ethic of conviction or to an ethic of responsibility".⁷ It leaves us with a straightforward impression that the two ethics are irreconcilable. However, toward the end of the essay, contrarily, two ethics are not polar alternatives at all: "an ethic of conviction and an ethic of responsibility are not absolute contrasts but rather supplements."⁸ What does that mean? If they supplement each other, it means the actor who believe in ethic of conviction also has related responsibility for his rational social action. Yet, in this essay, Weber insists that "The believer in an ethic of conviction feels 'responsibility' only for seeing to it that the flame of pure intentions is not quenched: for example, the flame of protesting against the injustice of the social order".⁹ Just as Weber said the absolute ethic does not ask for consequences.¹⁰ Virtually, two ethics are related to two types of rational social action mentioned by Weber in his work, *Economy and Society*, value-rational and instrumental-rational action. According to Weber's statement in "Politics as a Vocation", it could be speculated that the ethic of conviction is leading to value-rational action without calculation and choice of means. Their social action is not oriented to effective achievements. And the agent's act begins and ends in accordance with obedience to the given values. Because the ethic of conviction presupposes the reality that the values are hierarchically ordered without conflicts of duties. As Bradley E. Starr points out that, "Both types of rational social action are present in both ethics. The ethic of conviction recognizes a given hierarchy of values as the context for moral endeavor. The ethic of responsibility acknowledges value obligations, but assumes the absence of any given hierarchy of values and the inevitability of value conflict as the context for moral endeavor."¹¹ As a result, the consequences of action are left out of

the deliberative process. Contrarily, the agent who believe in ethic of responsibility tend to be aware of balancing values conflicts and combining consistency in efficiency and consistency with values. ¹² In other words, the consequence of the action is certainly taken into consideration in the process, and the conduct is oriented to the most efficient set of ends, means, and results. That's why Weber appraise the ethic of responsibility toward the end of "Politics as a Vocation", " It is immensely moving when a mature man is aware of a responsibility for the consequences of his conduct and really feels such responsibility with heart and soul.....That is something genuinely human and moving." ¹³ Therefore, value-rational oriented actors is drastically possible to take irrational action leading to irrational consequence which are not previously calculated at all. The ethic of conviction believers tend to take this type of rational social action.They will be frustrated by the consequence and efficiency but not perplexed by the values they absolutely obey to.

2-2. Rural elderly people's ethic of conviction

If viewing from the perspective of ethic of responsibility, not only value-rational and instrumental-rational social action but also the value conflicts the elderly people will encounter in the process of offspring's absence of participation in elderly care should have been debated in Yung's research. More importantly, the consequence of their alleged rational action, exactly consequences of offspring's absence of participation in elderly care, also need to be discussed and supported by related evidence. Yet, Yung only emphasizes that the responsibility of elderly people perceive in Beijing is prevalent which makes them prefer to care for themselves rather than be taken cared by offspring and does not analyze the consequence of it and the value conflict in the process of it. That's the deficiency in his research. On the other hand, if we attribute the young-generation's absence of participation in elderly care to the elder's ethic of responsibility, it implies that all of the prospective consequences they encounter have already calculated before their moral deliberation and it should be interpreted that the elderly people's social action is effective. However, as a lot of evidence shows that not all of the consequences elders encounter are enduring and effective in rural areas. And the value conflicts in the alleged "ethic of responsibility" of elder generation are subtle just as Yung states, all they can feel is the responsibility for their children. On this basis, I will attribute it to the ethic of conviction but not the one of responsibility.

The ethic of conviction the traditional Chinese parents hold could be defined as a conviction that they must maintain consanguineous descendants incessant. Having offspring is a significant glory and inevitable obligation as for elderly people. Therefore, a given hierarchy of values embodies having offspring and make best efforts to satisfy the offspring's needs unconditionally without enforcing their offspring to care for them when they get old and taking the prospective consequences they'll encounter in future into consideration. That's why the Chinese grandparents are criticized of spoiling grandchildren. As for the offspring's future, what they can do is only to anticipate but not to enforce. If the offspring are full of promise, parents will only consider it as an surprise but not an imperative accomplishment. Therefore, all of the consequences they encounter are out of anticipation. When suffering the indifference or abuse from their offspring, seldom of them are going to charge them even those behaviors conducted by their offspring have violated the related laws.What they can only do is to reap the bad outcomes what they have sown by themselves with misery and sorrowfulness. Because charging offspring means that the descendants will be in

danger which is incompatible with the ethic of their conviction. Obviously, they won't take a risk of losing their treasure consanguineous offspring or putting them in danger. In other words, between the two or three generations in China, the parents devote more than do their offspring. Their active devotion to the inter-generation relationships is increasingly taken for granted by their offspring and indirectly induces offspring's passivity of the devotion to take care of their elderly parents. Not to mention caring for aged parents, more and more child-generation tend to demand more from their parents, just like monetary support and raising grandchildren. Viewing from the perspective of gender, the participation of younger female generation in elderly care also can not be deemed as what it has ever been before.

Differing from elderly people in urban districts, the rural elderly people living on a handful of incomes seem to encounter more difficulties than do their counterparts in urban. What are the performances of the rural elderly people's ethics of conviction? What is the consequence of the ethic of conviction in the rural area? And how do their ethics impact on elderly people themselves? In order to canvass these problems, I will conduct a field research in a rural district.

3. The data collection and research method

Endeavoring to approach those related questions, I conduct this field research in a rural area named Wentsing, a village in China. Selecting this area is due to my acquaintance with it as a hometown. Through methods of interviewing with the people face to face and sampling survey, I gather the first hand data. Moreover, some of the data is provided by the secretary of the village. Benefiting from a year long time staying at home to prepare my doctoral examination, before doing this research, I have obtained much materials deriving from constantly returning back to hometown and audible materials from fellow-villagers. Once beginning the research, I used several times of my vocations (from August to November) about 30 days to go to the village to get the data and verify the authenticity of the materials heard from others. Furthermore, the identity made me readily accessible to the materials needed. Additionally, some of the elderly people holding rural household registration were absent, so all the data is primarily based on the present elderly people in the village.

4. Wentsing elderly people's situation

4-1. The elderly people's economic situation

Wentsing village is located in southern of Hubei province, in the middle of China, belonging to the subtropical monsoon climate district. The primary agricultural crops are rice and lotus. Some of the households have several acres of lands to plant fruit trees, just like peach, kiwi, pear and so forth, but only as complement financial resources. A few of households keep fish farming as family's pillar industry. Generally, they sell fish to earn money at the end of the lunar year, because pickled fish is an indispensable tasty dish on every family's dining-table during the period of the most important festival of the whole year, namely the spring festival, lasting 15 days. In addition to fish, chicken, pig, duck are the most prevailing livestock in the village. From the perspective of function, they are the same as fish, but the quantity is not as much as fish. Only by these revenues can hardly satisfy the primary expenditure on daily lives, especially for the young generation. The secretary specified that in general family consisted of 4 family members, the annual minimal expenditure is about 30 thousand yuan (5 thousand dollar) including 20 thousand yuan daily expenditure and 10 thousand yuan humanity monetary gift.¹⁴ Certainly, the figure does not contain the expenditure of

raising children and medical care. Seldom of young people would like to remain in the village, a majority go to cities to earn much more money. Therefore, elderly people's figures are ubiquitous in village. What they can do is just continuing the farm works to feed on themselves. Meanwhile, more than a half of them undertake the responsibility of raising their juvenile grandchildren.

The total population of Wentsing is 2987, including 373 elderly people above 60 years old. Among these 373 people, 256 people are above 65 years old. The aging population rate has reached 8.5 percent exceeding the standardized 7 percent. The resident elderly people present in the village are 273 people. 100 elderly people are not present, 70 of them are invited by their offspring to raise grandchildren, while 30 of them are being outside for earning money as peasant-workers. Therefore, this field research is conducted based on the present elderly people and local women. According to the secretary, the elderly people's annual incomes per person are approximately 4000 yuan (667 dollars). The incomes derive from four avenues: the incomes of the grain and livestock, money given by offspring and relatives, government rural pension, and subsistence allowance. The subsistence allowance only serve the elderly people who's living situation is under the fundamental living standard level. In author's research, 121 people have the quality to gain the allowance 960 yuan annually per person. The government pension is distributed to all of the elderly people. According to age, they can get general incomes from 660 yuan to 960 yuan annually. The elderly people who are under 80 are able to receive 660 yuan annually, while the people above 80 can receive more 300 yuan. Besides, the main revenue is from grains or livestock and offspring's economic support. The acre of farmlands are limited with a small-scale scope, so the revenue is comparatively stable with about 2000 yuan. But the monetary support from offspring differs. During author's investigation process, among the 273 people, only 150 people can receive this support. Generally, each adult offspring will give 3000 yuan or 4000 yuan each year to their parents. If an elder has 6 children¹⁵, the money from their offspring will be far enough for them to expend.

But it seldom realized. Even the 150 people could constantly gain money from their offspring, but not all of their offspring offer to support them. There are 173 elderly households. I selected 20 samples as analysis data. Only 7 households elderly people could get money from all of their offspring. Most of them have to live on their fields and doing the farm work by themselves without their offspring's help. At worst, some elderly people without spouse only have a handful of farmland and could not survive on at all. According to the secretary, 121 elderly people are living on minimum pension from government about 900 yuan annually which is hardly to feed on oneself. An old widow, named Wu, who is 80 years old, having 9 offspring (5 sons and 4 daughters) could hardly receive money from her children. Because of her physical situation, there is no possibility for her to do the farm work. The economic resources are from the savings left by her husband and the government pension. When asked why not request her children to care for her, she answered that her daughters-in-law had an aversion to her, and she didn't want to add more burden to her sons. Even when she got sick this summer, no one of her offspring came to see her except for the last son. I told her that her offspring who did not care for her had breached related laws and she could go to charge them so that she could at least obtain deserved alimony from them. She drastically refused and said in a little bit agitated tone "such a stupid girl, no mother will go to charge her children, I couldn't send my sons to the prison." When I further asked why not go to ask daughters' to provide for her, she answered that daughters had been other families' people already, they had no responsibility to take

care of her. She thought she and her daughters had been relatives already but not family relationship. Another similar case was happened on an old man, named LI, who was also 80 years old living with his spouse. Unfortunately, he got cancer. As a normal peasant in Wentsing village, his revenue apparently could hardly afford his treatment. He has 4 sons and 4 daughters, but none of them paid attention to him except for the last son. When I went to visit him, he broke down and wept for his offspring's apathy. He said that he never thought he would be faced with this misery situation. He had ever thought that the more offspring he had the more blessing and felicity he would get in rest of life. However, the present situation thoroughly smashed his dream. Even suggested by author that he had the right to charge them so that he could get the statutory support from them, he waved his hands and rejected this suggestion, just saying that he deserved what he suffered.

4-2. The elderly people's life-style in the village

Living with offspring including child generation and grandchild generation together is always an ideal family image in accordance with traditional Chinese people's perception. "Four generations under one roof" is always complimented by its harmony and flourishing population. However, it is only an ideal sketch of family. Virtually, a number of families in Wentsing village exist in the form of core family. Among those 273 elderly people, 175 people are living alone and feeding on themselves. Namely, 64 percent of the elderly people in this village are living separately from their offspring. The rest 98 people are living with their offspring together, but half of them manage household chores for their offspring just like cooking and do a load of laundry for them.

Most of these rural elderly people have farm works to do. Seeding, fertilization, reaping and other works concentrating in several months of first half year. A large amount of time of a year they are at leisure. Even if in the busiest season, they also can find interesting leisure activities to do. Chatting with neighbors is a commonplace means of passing time. Moreover, they could find a more boisterous activity to do, namely playing mahjong¹⁶ or being an spectator of watching others playing mahjong. There are 16 mahjong parlors in Wentsing. Each parlor has no less than 8 tables. If the tables have been full, there also remains a number of people besides the table to watch the game. At most, the spectators doubles the players. Virtually, the game is somewhat a gamble with only a small amount of money. The elderly people even gamble much less. Sometimes, the game ends in a draw without any loser. And sometimes, there could be one to three winners. Whether win or lose, the money will not exceed 80 yuan which equals about 4 kilograms pork. Generally, 20 to 30 yuan is the limitation. One could not win or lose all the time, and the players are always identical. Therefore, they don't worry about money they gamble away at all. Because they believe every dog has its day. Mahjong parlor just undertakes the function of providing leisure venue for the elders. The elders are also fond of the venue, because they could find joy in the game and not feel lonely.

Even living on limited incomes, the elderly people's life-styles tend to be identical. Another common phenomena is that the elderly people incline to be fond of raising grandchildren. Except for the 70 people who go to cities to raise grandchildren, among the present 273 elderly people, 189 of them are bring up their grandchildren full time in the village. The grandchildren consist of infants and school age children. Bring up a kid is not an easy task because of the economic and educating pressure. Certainly, an absolutely large number of them do not need to worry about the economic pressure in the context of receiving nurturing fees from their children monthly. According to Chen, who is 68 years old, he gets 1000 yuan monthly from his son to nurture his little grandchild who's

only 3 years old. The money given by their offspring can only support the grandchildren's expenditure including milk powder, medical care, snacks, toys and etc. For the sake of grandchildren's growth, the elders tend to give the best ones to them and satisfy all of grandchildren's requirements. The money received from children are always deficient. In this case, they will supplement by themselves. Even though the situation is mentioned as above, the elders also consider raising grandchildren a great glory and obligation. Having grandchildren itself is a significant glory in the village. If someone who has grandchildren but not bringing up them will be criticized by their own children and other fellow villagers. It has become an obligation and consensus.

5. Women's participation in elderly care

The young generation women's participation in elderly care is far less than what we have ever speculated. Chinese women are usually considered "virtuous wives and benign mothers", which means the women in family undertake the main responsibility of caring for the elders. However, as what we have mentioned above, the elderly people care for themselves more than do their daughters or daughters-in-law. Generally, they have their own life-styles just like playing mahjong, chatting with neighbors, and so forth. Only in some important festivals in a year, spring festival¹⁷ or Tsingming festival¹⁸ alike, can they meet their daughters or daughters-in-law. When I asked the elders whether they want daughters or daughters-in-law to care for their daily lives, 156 people answered no. A majority thought that it was inconvenient to live with them because of the living habits. At the same time, they wouldn't like to become a burden on their offspring. On the other hand, if they get sick, they would like to be cared for by their daughters and daughters-in-law. More than a half of them tended to be cared for by daughters-in-law. Because they thought daughter is son-in-law's family's members while daughter-in-law is the one of his/her own family's. However, the reality is less than satisfactory. Among 173 elderly households, I chose 20 households which have 24 elderly people in total to conduct the research of women's participation in elderly care. The behavior of caring for elders contains two aspects: economic support and daily care. According to this rule, the statistics regarding the child-generation women's participation situation in elderly care in each household was shown as the tables below.

Table 1

women's participation rate offspring's gender component	daughters-in-law	daughters
no daughter but sons	3/4	0/4
no son but daughters	0/2	2/2
both sons and daughters	8/14	7/14

Table 2

Women's absence of participation rate offspring's gender component	daughters-in-law	daughters
no daughter but sons	1/4	0/4
no son but daughters	0/2	0/2

both sons and daughters	9/14	8/14
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Among the 20 households, 6 households' gender component of offspring is imbalance. The others have several sons and several daughters. There was an pronounced appearance that not every daughter or every daughter-in-law took part in elderly care. As a result, the participation rate and absence of participation rate is not exactly one. If we calculate the daughters' and daughters-in-law' participation rate in elderly care, it is separately 56.3 percent and 61.1 percent. Additionally, the absence of participation rate is separately 50 percent and 55.6 percent. Except for that, among the 24 elderly people, 11 elderly people have the experience of being insulted by their daughters-in-law.

6. Conclusion

The feeding back mode of caring for elderly people pointed out by Chinese sociologist Hsiaotung Fei exactly exists in a number of families. Yet, it should not be concluded as Chinese pattern. As mentioned above, no less than half of elderly people in Wentsing are self-reliance without being taken cared by their offspring at all. It indicates that the traditional function of caring for elders by family could not be counted on.

Asian women, especially Chinese women figures are always labeled as "virtuous wives and benign mothers". It contains two types of responsibilities, namely nursing children and assisting husbands. Additionally, it also recognizes women's role in elderly care. However, whether take care of aged parents or not is not the standardized virtue as a housewife. Instead of it, carrying on the family line indicates a more significant glory for them. As the proverb said, "mother is honored by descendants", the ethic of conviction within family significantly affects the women's conduct. It also impacts their participation in elderly care.

Generally, the degradation of the family's function of caring for elders may be attributed to industrialization and urbanization. But, the subject of elderly care, namely the elderly people's attitude is also an significant factor which should not be ignored. In this paper, I define it as the elderly people's ethic of conviction, but not the ethic of responsibility, quoting Weber's notion first published in his speech named "Politics as a Vocation". The ethic of conviction differs from the ethic of responsibility. The former is value-rational social action which is based on a given hierarchy of values without taking consequences into consideration. When encountering surprising outcomes, only can they regret and be mute. In Wentsing, the given hierarchy of values is just maintaining offspring incessant. The parent-generation tend to devote more to their offspring than do their offspring. Because of their ethic of conviction, the elderly people apparently incline to take more irrational social action, just like not asking for statutory economic support from offspring and even keeping silence when getting abuse from their daughters-in-law. Their activity indirectly leads to offspring's passivity of feeding back to them. Even if not being taken cared by their offspring or getting apathy, insult alike from their offspring, they hinder themselves to charge their offspring and endure the misery. They will not send their offspring to prison or place them in dangerous situation. Because it will endanger the succession of consanguineous descendants which is absolutely prohibited under their given hierarchy of values. Their unique responsibility is to maintain the flame of this conviction not quenched. Viewing from the perspective of gender, the recession of women's participation in elderly care is also inevitable. Constructing a plural elderly care mechanism, especially in rural areas, is imperative.

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Endnotes:

- 1 The data is based on the figures published by the National Bureau of Statistics of China. <http://data.stats.gov.cn>
- 2 It was explicated in Fei's seminar speech paper named "The elderly care problem in the variation of family structure" at The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1983.
- 3 Filial piety. It underscores the offspring's obligations to be obedient of parents and respect them.
- 4 "The variation of inter-generational relationship and elder people's suicide-----An empirical research on Jingshan in Hubei Province", Baifeng Chen, Sociology Research, 2009,pp157-245.
- 5 A sociology professor in Peking University.
- 6 The ethic of responsibility and the family support in Beijing,Shanhua,Journal of Peking University(Philosophy and Social Sciences),Vol.41.2004.pp71-84.
- 7 "Politics as a vocation" 1919 a,Weber 1946, p120.
- 8 "Politics as a vocation" 1919 a,Weber 1946, p127.
- 9 "Politics as a vocation" 1919 a,Weber 1946, p121.
- 10"Politics as a vocation" 1919 a,Weber 1946, p120.
- 11 The structure of Max Weber's ethic of responsibility, Bradley E.Starr .published in The Journal of Religious Ethics,Vol.27, No.3 (Fall,1999), p.407.
- 12 The structure of Max Weber's ethic of responsibility, Bradley E.Starr .published in The Journal of Religious Ethics,Vol.27, No.3 (Fall,1999), p.411.
- 13 "Politics as a vocation" 1919 a,Weber 1946, p127.
- 14 Humanity monetary gift means that expended in keeping relationships with relatives and friends,In rural area, it focuses on relatives.The monetary gift is sent to their relatives on birthday party, wedding,burial,festivals,and other forms of ritual.
- 15 In this village,most elderly people have more than 4 children, and some of them even have 9 children.
- 16 A traditional game in China with more than hundreds of years history. It consists of 136 tiles and must be played by four people.
- 17 The traditional most important festival in China is only held at the beginning of lunar year to welcome the coming of the new year.
- 18 It is a festival for offspring to visit the graves of ancestors.

Inter-Caste Marriage: Social Support and Family Care in Contemporary Rural Nepal

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1. Introduction

The caste system of Nepal is vague and complex structure which often denotes the social stratification of Nepalese people. The system is based on the degrees of purity and pollution with the lowest ranks being considered 'untouchable' or Dalit. The traditional Hindu mythology is the mother of caste system which categorizes all people into four (4) levels i.e. Brahmins (priests) are at the top, followed by Kshatriyas (rulers and soldiers) and Vaishyas (merchants and traders) whereas Shudras which are regarded as so called untouchables (laborers, cobblers, and manual scavengers) are positioned at the lowest level within the caste hierarchy. Caste is a unique feature of the Hindu religion, and as such, caste systems only exist in countries that practice Hinduism. There are two states that can be said to be Hindu states: India and Nepal. Thus the phenomenon of caste-based discrimination affects these two states primarily. States with large Hindu minorities also merit attention.¹ The caste system is also known as one of the oldest surviving social hierarchy in the world. It is believed to be nearly about 3,000 years old. Caste has not the same social significance for non-Hindus as it has for Hindus. Among non-Hindus, caste is only a practice, not a sacred institution. Religion compels the Hindus to treat isolation and segregation of castes as a virtue. Hindus observe caste not because they are inhuman or wrong-headed, but because they are deeply religious. People are not wrong in observing caste. In my view, what is wrong is their religion. Then the enemy is not the people who observe caste, but the Vedas that teach them the religion of caste.

Caste system is still practiced as a very rigid system in Nepal under which a person could achieve a special status and position not by qualities and expertise but by birth. It is the ascribed status in Nepalese society. The caste based discrimination has all round adverse effect in every level of socialization and cultural process in Nepal. According to Gurung (2005 B.S), 'caste discrimination and untouchability has remained a fact of everyday life in 'the world's only Hindu kingdom.' This is why caste based discrimination is one of the major social problem in Nepal. Marriage is one of the prominent and visible systems which have been significantly affected because of the ideology of Casteism. Casteism permits the endogamous practice in which the member marry within the limitation of their caste group and such concept is deeply entrenched in the mind of the majority of Nepalese parents despite of their higher level of education and understanding. This is why in Nepalese context, if somebody practices exogamy most of the Nepalese parents took it as a stigma in their family along with the fear of social demotion even though their children relation seems fine to them. Thus, Inter-caste marriage is one of the challenging practices and often serves as a key to conflict in the society and family.

2. Inter-caste marriage

Marriage is considered to a social, religious, spiritual, and/or legal union of individuals. It is an Institution in which interpersonal relationships (usually intimate and sexual) are acknowledged by the state by religious authority of both society and state. Marriage is a central family process in Nepal, as it is in many other countries of the world (Bennett 1983; Frick 1986; Watkins 1996).

Nearly everyone in Nepal marriages (“Nepal 1996” 1998) and a young person’s marriages is one of the most important events of his or her life. The ceremony among some ethnic groups requires a full seven days, and often drives the Bride’s family deep into debt (Bennett 1983). Marriage in Nepal historically has been under the strict control of the family (Barber 2004). An individual’s family decide when and whom he or she would marry (Folmar 1992). Therefore, Nepalese marriages, which are Inter-caste and inter religious in nature seems like a taboo to most of the people. But in order to eradicate the caste system and racial discrimination it is very important that Inter caste and inter religion marriages should be encouraged in a broader scale. Inter caste Marriages are regarded as the most important social custom and the best means to remove the barrier of the prevailing caste system. Inter-caste Marriage is mostly led by love marriage which is resistant by the traditional Society. It is taken as a characteristic of society where individuals take precedence over family and is thus moving away from the accepted norms of the society, the caste hierarchy.

Normally, inter-caste marriage means the marriage of two people from different caste group. However, the general convention of Inter-caste marriage usually denotes the marriage between Dalit and non- Dalit in Nepal. Nevertheless, in this paper I have attempted to define inter-caste marriage not only as the marriage between Dalit and non-Dalit but as a union of male and female from two distinct castes, indigenous and ethnic groups.

My field work experience during the month of May 11 to June 10, 2014 in Thosey Village Development Committee (rural community located in the Ramechhap district of Nepal) , conducted using in-depth case studies through ethnographic perspectives reveals that, even though inter-caste marrier found themselves in better conditions liberated from endogamous and orthodox practices of marriage they said that for the satisfied and healthy married life social support and family support from both natal home and in-laws home is crucial. Most of the families take inter-caste marriage as the blow of family honor and prestige so they hesitate to accept it even though they want to. But the level of social perception and social support they get are highly manipulated by their socioeconomic status and family income. By socioeconomic status and family income, I mean the amount of money they earn and to which class-whether ruling or ruled- they belong in that particular community. My research demonstrates that there are two strong independent variables: the notion of Casteism and socioeconomic status, determining the level of family care and social support of heterosexual inter-caste couple in the study area (since there is no any homosexual inter-caste married couple in the area). These two (2) variables seem to be overlapping in my paper. In the first part of my present paper, I will be focusing on inter-caste couples’ broader idea on marriage and marital satisfaction. Following this the indicators of family care and social support and its effect upon the life of married couple will be discussed. Another part simply deals with the analysis of findings and outcomes of the research. The last part proceeds with the State incentives and provisions towards inter-caste couples in Nepal. Thus, before going ahead, it is important to understand the inter-caste marriers’ opinions/views on marriage and marital satisfaction.

2-1. Respondents views on marriage and marital satisfaction

1. Inter-caste couples understand that marriage is the spending of life with other people in life.
2. Marriage is the exchange of life with known and unknown person.
3. Marriage is two (2) wheels of the chariot without one it cannot move.
4. Marriage is the natural rule to enter in conjugal life which ultimately forms the family.
5. Marriage is the kind of poison which you cannot take fearing the future of your children.

6. Inter-caste marriage is the end of your love relationship but the beginning of social conflict if you don't have money.
7. There should be regular interaction and communication between the spouses for healthy family life.
8. There should be single voice for family planning.
9. Husband must not involve in whoremonger and drinking habit to make his wife happy.
10. Wife should handle all round responsibility in family like: - cooking different kind of foods, serving guest, rearing child, being sexually loyal to her husband, remain in the family boundaries, speak less and remain in the home during the return of her husband from somewhere outside.
11. Any form of matriarchal move is the source of marital conflict which eventually leads to marital dissatisfaction.

3. Family care and social support

Inter-caste marriages that are not arranged by the families eventually counter against capitalist values of wealth, power and status. According to Baraili (2005), "marriages in Nepal are controlled by property, religion, casteism, social customs and traditions so they are feudalistic in nature and individual decisions and independent marriages are not tolerated. Inter-caste married couples are often taken as social deviants and usually punished for rejecting the prevalent norms of the society. Some couples may be barred from the participation in normal activities in family and society while other couples may be deprived of social relations and networks. Once a group is excluded from social relations, it will have debilitating conditions to command livelihood opportunities. These are found in both material and non-material condition. It is simply the debate upon the predominance of society versus individual. In this context, the perception of family members and variations in social support easily creates fluctuation in the life of the inter-caste married couple.

3-1. Sarita Pradhan and Rauthel Sherpa (Pseudo identity)

I asked one of my respondents: how has your life changed after your marriage? She answered surprisingly what do you mean by your question? Do you think I am happy? And she narrates her story like this- I was born in a middle class family in 2036 B.S (1979 A.D). When I was 16 years of age studying in grade 11 I fell in love with one of my senior college boy. We went deeper in our relationship and despite of knowing our unequal caste hierarchies we elope after two years in 2054 B.S (1997 A.D). When I came to my husband's home it seemed like I came to the hell. Getting support and inspiration was far more thing rather nobody even dare to look and talk to me. Unequal caste hierarchies was not the only reason for my ignorant/pitiable condition, I thought the Dowry system² was also the major reason since my family was totally unaware about my elope marriage.³ Later I realized I had become the victim of snap judgment⁴. How hard I passed my seventeen (17) years of marriage I cannot tell you everything (there are many more incidents which are not worthy to disclose here with you, she cried having said this). I had passed many days without food since I was not allowed to enter into the kitchen during the very first days of my marriage. I was considered Kulakshini⁵ in the eyes of my mother-in-laws and father-in-laws. Not even the single person from the society came to console me. Not only this, I was not invited in social ceremonies like: - marriage, Pasni⁶, Bratabandha,⁷ meeting and so on. Unable to tolerate those entire situations we left our home for one and half year (1.5 years) and return back when our first child turns six (6) months. My husband works as a manual worker in construction site and I am a housewife. Still today I don't

have good relationship with my husband's family and society. When I close my eyes and remember, I feel like, I had committed the blunder by abandoning my study and my natal home and having the inter-caste marriage. I had jumped into the pond of poison from which I cannot overcome even though I want to. All these things are making me weaker and obstinate days by days.

3-2. Mohini Tamang and Harikrishna Shrestha (Pseudo identity)

Now I am 41 years of age. I was born in 2030 B.S (1973 A.D) in a simple family. During that time my uncle usually came to our home regularly with one boy. Both of them work in the construction site. Gradually, we became friends and used to talk while I served tea and drinks. Our friendship became stronger and we fell in love when I was around 16. We did not have mobile and cell phones during those days so we used to exchange our handwritten letter as an expression of love. Unfortunately, we did not belong to the same social group which was the major social problem to turn our love relation into marriage. Our regular meetings and unusual gossips created suspicion to my Family and eventually I was caught. My family began to scold and threatened me time and again in the name of culture and tradition. I had faced physical punishment from my father regarding my affair. My parent's care and concerned for me had drastically changed after the identification of my love affair. The loving word "nanu"⁸ had been transferred into "oe"⁹ and "yeha au kanchhu"¹⁰ into "yeha mar"¹¹. The situation became so intense and I left my home and ran away with that guy (now my husband) in 2048 B.S (1991 A.D). We got married in the temple and went to the conjugal home. But the things were more critical that we weren't accepted easily by our family. Each day we had to face the unbearable word emerging in the name of casteism and traditional social custom. Even my mother-in-law without shame compared me with prostitutes. Failure to take all those blame and fiascos, we left our conjugal home as well right after the one month of our marriage and came to Kathmandu (capital of Nepal) and resided in rented room. After two (2) years we had our first child and we went back to home but nothing had changed in two years and father-in-law arrogantly told us, "ek tukra sampati diyechhu vaneta k ani thah paulas."¹² That statement led extreme dispute between my husband and my father-in-law which further led to police case and social gathering. However, panchayat¹³ decided in our favor but we got extremely limited property and resources than we should (only around 30 percent out of 100). Now it's been twenty three (23) years since our marriage but we still don't have good relationship both of our home: natal and conjugal. In this condition, you can surely guess are there any possibility of getting support from our society.

These cases signify who determines the marriage- whether individual or Society? On the one hand, you want to liberate from all those traditional endogamous practices of marriage which are highly supported by the certain doctrines of social customs and practices and eventually you decide to marry with your special one. But on the other hand, you are likely to be the part of family negligence and social annihilation if you cannot meet the certain standards created by the family members and society for marriage. The changes in marriages, family and divorces are believed to closely relate to modernization process. This is why the arranged marriage and the extended family system are supposed characteristics of traditional society where as love marriage and nuclear family system are considered characteristics of modern society in Nepal.

My experience shows that, the role of economic status and one's position in the society has the crucial role in determining one's marital happiness and the amount of social support and care they get from their society. I asked my respondents- have you ever faced any kind of problem or

negligence regarding your inter-caste marriage from your family and society. They answered in this way-

3-3. Arun Chhetri and Karuna Magar (Pseudo identity)

My name is Arun (pseudo name) and she is karuna, my wife (pseudo name). We knew each other and became friends, I still remember, when we were playing bhadakudi¹⁴ together (laughed), a long year back in our childhood. Luckily our friendship gets stronger and I used to visit her home within the interval of couple of days since it was only about half an hour walk from my home. Our regular meetings and interactions made our relationships stronger and we fell in love around our twenties. But the problem was that our society was guided by traditional monopoly which has certain restrictions on heterosexual forms of friendship which holds rigid mentality against premarital love and premarital intimacy between boy and girl. During my visit, I had to convince her parents that I am her “friend in image of her brother” or “brother in the image of her friend”. Luckily, both of us are from elite families who have certain control over our community people and resources. We belong to different social group even though we are in a strong relationship. Assuming the potential rejection of our affair, we never had courage to disclose our relationship with our parents and we decided to elope in 2040 B.S (1983 A.D). Fearing the prestige of our family and rejection of our marriage we did not went home for three (3) months. When we got back, we didn't have good understanding between both: conjugal and natal home but most of the community people showed deference towards our relationship. After all, my wife (karuna) was the younger daughter of her family and I was the single child in my family, our parents began to accept our relationship and situations began to come to the normal stage. More painfully, after two (2) years of our marriage, my father passed away because of high blood pressure (since I already left my mother when I was child) and all the properties and resources of my father had been transferred in my name. Eventually, we became more powerful and economically sound in our society. We are invited everywhere in our society and our society shows reverence towards us. We have always been the representative of various developmental programs in our society. We have prosperous relationship with our society. They love and care us very much.

3-4. Jamuna Shrestha and Mohandas Karki (pseudo identity)

I was born in a small village in 2025 B.S (1968 A.D). My childhood days passed in a middle class family. My father and mother love me very much since I was the most beautiful child in my village (smiled). I met my husband in my uncle's marriage. He was attending the marriage from the side of the bride's family. Gradually, we became closer and eventually, we fell in love. But unfortunately, we were not from the same caste group which compelled us to elope in 2050 B.S (1993 A.D) when I was 25. We didn't go to my natal home for one (1) year but thereafter my natal home accepted our marriage. I still remember there used to be minor dispute regarding our custom and tradition with my mother-in-law in my conjugal home but not intense. We didn't have bad relationship with our society since our family had accepted us without any struggle. Few years ago, my husband went for foreign employment and I am doing small tea shop here in my village. Occasionally, I provide some financial assistance to my neighbor as well. Even though my husband is not here with me, as of today, I don't have face any unpleasant situation resulting from my society. I am respectfully invited in different functions of my society. To be honest, I am really happy with my marriage and my husband never let me feel alone that he keeps in touch with me every day.

3-5. Harish Shrestha and Khuma Chhetri (pseudo identity)

We met each other in Parma¹⁵ where both of us went to help our neighbor. After the regular interaction and sharing, we fell in love after three (3) months of our first meeting. We tend to fear about different sort of things but we never feared about the rejection of our relationship from our family. I was always confident that I won't have any kind of restrictions to marry her. Since in my family, there was the prevalence of generational inter-caste marriage. My grandfather is Newar¹⁶ but my grandmother is Tamang.¹⁷ My father is Newar but my mother is Gurung.¹⁸ Similarly, my elder brother had tied his knots with the Gurung sister-in-law and my elder sister had married with the Chhetri¹⁹ guy. So I was only thinking now it was my turn. We get married from the consensus and full support from both of our parents. It seems like our love relation has been turned into marriage in an arranged way. We are getting different forms of care and support from our family like- advice, monetary assistance and cultural support whenever it is required. We have very good relationship with our society; we are always cordially invited in social ceremonies and community development program. Hadn't we had the generational inter-caste marriage in our family, right now we might still be fighting against the rigid traditional limitations and social customs along with the despise, hatred and social exclusion in our society.

3-6. Durgadevi Thapa and Ramesh Shrestha (pseudo identity)

I was born in 2025 B.S (1968 A.D) in a medium level of family. I fell in love with one of my village girls when I was around 15. Even though we weren't mature enough to get married we loved each other so deeply. We didn't have any problem to get married because my father and mother were not also from the same social group. With the blessings and permission from both of our parents, we get married in 2042 B.S (1985 A.D). Both of our family love and care us very much. They do have good relationship with our society. We are also invited in various social program and ceremonies. We too have respectful relationship with our society and family. In fact, we are really happy with our marriage.

Of six case studies, the first and second cases raise the question- whether marriage is a private or social (public) affair? Likewise, third and fourth case reveals the role of socioeconomic status and social position's connotation with marital happiness, social perception and social support one gets from their society and last fifth and sixth case demonstrates how the prevalence of generational inter-caste marriage reinforce and permit the inter-caste marriages without much hurdles and obstacles in Nepalese society.

The first and second case had to face the social exclusion and family annihilation not only because they fall under the category of exogamous practice but also of their lower property and less family income. Sarita didn't brought dowry (major reason for family conflict) and Rauthel works as a laborer who has lower income. The social image of Mohini and Harikrishna was already been underneath of inter-caste marriage, family exclusion and Police case for which they only received limited property by the decision of panchayat (which always counter against injustice and discrimination). Their family annihilation, poor income and low profile constructed their image as a less important person in their society.

The third case (Arun and Karuna) and fourth case (Jamuna and Mohandas) belong to the elite family who has certain control over community resources and occasionally provide some financial assistance to the villagers. Majority of the villagers are dependent to them for which they always

showed reverence although they are not satisfied with their marriages.

The fifth case (Harish and Khuma) and sixth case (Durgadevi and Ramesh) direct the unique feature of the continuation of inter-caste marriage in Nepalese society. It implicates how generational marriages and family dynamics and family structure manipulate social perception and social company.

However, there seems to be the contradicting view of that particular community perceiving inter-caste marriages. On the one hand, the notion of casteism and traditional social system seems to be deeply entrenched and as a result, some of the couples are neglected from the family and remain far away from social support and inclusion. On the contrary, when the same inter-caste marriage takes place in locally elite and economically sound family, the notion of casteism, social boundaries and traditional ritual automatically vanished and came underneath. Analyzing from the Marxist perspective, it seems like the social structure of that community is based on the two different classes- "The Haves" and "The Haves not". It looks like even the strong boundaries and limitation created by the social customs and casteism became submissive in front of the strong socioeconomic status and position. It clearly portrays that the bourgeoisie has the direct control and domination over proletariat class in that community.

4. State incentives

The major motivating factor for the commencement of incentives to inter-caste marriage was to abolish caste based discrimination. This is to say that the government started to provide incentives to the inter-caste married couples to bridge the gap that prevails among different caste systems. There has been a long debate in Dalit movement on whether or not inter-caste marriage can reduce caste based discrimination. The Interim Constitution 2063 B.S has spelled out that anyone discriminating on the basis of caste, lineage, community and occupation is punishable. A provision has been made in the law that he or she will be sentenced from three months to three years in prison or fined NRs 1000 to NRs 25, 000 or both. The victim will get compensation according to law. Another clause says that no one on the basis of his or her caste will be prevented from using public services, facilities or from accessing public place or temples, or from religious activities. However, this clause still seems quiet regarding discrimination practiced at homes and the punishments for those practicing it. To encourage inter-caste marriage, the Nepalese government on 13 July 2009 announced to provide a grant of 100,000 rupees (\$ 1,270) to the newly married inter-caste couple within 30 days of marriage registration. Besides this, there are no any other legal benefits and provisions declared by the government of Nepal. Most of the couples are not being able to get benefited by the provisions given by the state since they are compelled to face lots of taboos right after their marriage. But some of the couples are highly benefited by these incentives because those incentives helped them to get food and shelter after their marriage since they were displaced from their family members. It has been proved as the god gift for them.

5. Conclusion

During my study, I came to know that ganyamanya (local elite people) don't have to face any hindrances in their normal social life even though they get inter-caste marriage. They receive healthy family care and reverence from their society. But on the contrary, in the case of economically poor sections it is considered to be a blunder. That is why they are not only discriminated by their family members rather they are displaced from their society too due to which they have to face a terrible

and hazardous situation in their life. More interestingly, the prevalence of generational inter-caste marriage in the families of the study area gives new vision regarding the concept of inter-caste marriage. People are being liberal, their thoughts are altering. This shows the influence of Sanskritization in rural part of Nepal. People are accepting the changing pattern of behavior and culture with the passage of time. It illustrates the socialization process of rural Nepal is being dynamic. Moreover, my study articulately supports the changing pattern of marriage in rural Nepal. Before some years ago, inter caste marriage was considered to be a stigma in the family and culture for which couples have to struggle a lot. But it does not mean that the couples from distinct caste have no such obstacles now. Yes, they too are suffering but the concept is more or less changing now, people don't take it as an extreme issue as it was taken two decades ago.

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Notes

⁰ The author is thankful to the entire team members of Graduate School of Letters, Kyoto University for giving this opportunity. Author express deepest gratitude towards Professor Mrigendra Bahadur Karki and colleague Ms. Sumina Machamasi for their incessant suggestion and cooperation throughout the preparation of this paper.

¹ For example, the situation of caste in Bangladesh and Srilanka. However, there is a difference in scale between these states and India and Nepal that must be appreciated. Because they are not states with a majority Hindu population (Bangladesh is ten percent Hindu, while the Tamils in Sri Lanka constitute 18 per cent of the population), caste cannot be said to permeate all aspects of socio-economic life, as is the case in India and Nepal. The latter are the only predominantly Hindu states in the world and caste-based discrimination is systematic and endemic in these two countries).

² A system in which property, money and materials are given by Bride's father and her relatives to her husband on their marriage. Dowry system is regarded as an indispensable part of Nepalese marriage. Failure to bring dowry often serves as a marital conflict, family negligence, divorce, social dissatisfaction, suicides and murder cases to women in rural Nepalese societies.

³ A kind of marriage where couple run away secretly without letting their parents aware about their move and get married in the presence of third party like priests, temple and in front of friends.

⁴ Contextualizing this case, the condition when couple went to their conjugal home right after their elope marriage without dowry and letting aware to their family when groom parents do not have any idea what type of girl she was.

⁵ A typical inauspicious and cultural slang blow for daughter-in-law by their husbands' families and their relatives referring her as a reason of bad luck, unprosperity and sin of the family.

⁶ The ceremony of feeding rice to the children for the first time right after six month from their birth (son) and five month from their birth (daughter), but most of the time it takes place after six month of child birth in Nepalese society.

⁷ An ancient Hindu tradition carried out in Hindu families where a boy saves his head and performs various rituals.

⁸ A word used for calling young one with affection, baby; child; the pupil of the eye.

⁹ A disrespected word for calling and ordering somebody.

¹⁰ The loving sentence for inviting Nepalese female child with extreme love and affection to them.

¹¹ A disrespected and hatred word for inviting and calling someone without any interest and affection

¹² The furious and hatred sentence from the Nepalese father for not giving any means of property and resources (which belongs to them) to their son, which are often announced when children perform an activity or commit a mistake which leads to blow the family honor and prestige, undesirable and hatred for their family.

¹³ The village assembly where group of people gathers to settle a dispute and act against injustice of others. Such kind of system is the feature of traditional Nepalese society where they do not have an access to the police station to tell their problems. Now such system is believed to be extremely less into practice after the termination of civil war (Maoist insurgency) in Nepal.

¹⁴ A kind of game or playing in which actually there is no winner and loser, children around three to six years of age or sometimes even up to eight gather together for entertainment like playing with the mud, bringing utensils from their home and making imaginary family (Husband, wife, son and daughter), prepare imaginary meal and eat imaginary food in an empty plate on the basis of their imaginary story they have created for their playing, sometimes like moving the pots here and there. Such forms of playing are usually found in countryside of Nepal where children do not have an idea and access to computer games and video games.

¹⁵ Labor exchange among all ethnic/caste group of Nepal

¹⁶ One of the ethnic groups of Nepal

¹⁷ One of the ethnic groups of Nepal

¹⁸ One of the indigenous groups of Nepal

¹⁹ One of the caste groups of Nepal

Subjective Construction of *Yuezibing*: Illness Narratives of Two Elderly Women Who Once Lived in China's Collective Past¹

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1. Literature Review

1-1. Introductions on *Zuoyuezi* and *Yuezibing*

Generally speaking, after giving birth to children, women in China are asked to practice *Zuoyuezi*, or “sitting the month” literally, for a month, exempted from housework, protected from “wind” and “water”, fed with special but tonic diets (Shiuan Sanna Chen 2010). The use of this term can be trace back to *Liji neize* in Han Dynasty, which mentioned specific instructions for women's postpartum practices (Wen 1994). Postpartum confinement, a practice strongly related to today's form of *Zuoyuezi*, was recorded in traditional Chinese medical classics after Song Dynasty (Furth 1999). The most common type of *Yuezibing*, or the illness of *Zuoyuezi*, should be attributed to the entry of wind and water (or *feng* and *shui*) into women's body (bone gaps, or *gufeng*) during the period of *Zuoyuezi*.

1-2. Researches on *Yuezibing* and Illness

Medical researches on *Yuezibing* focus on relations between *Zuoyuezi* practices and physical health. From the view of modern western medicine, *Yuezibing* is aches throughout the body (You Caizhen, He Huiling and Wu Huaizhen 2008) caused by puerperal infections, which can be aggravated by unhealthy and unscientific postpartum practices (Zhang Tao 2011). This view point is refuted by practitioners and scholars of Chinese medicine, who argue that the validity of *Zuoyuezi* descends from traditional Chinese medical concepts (like wind, or *qi*) and logics (treating the not yet ill) (Zhu Yun 2011).

However, *Yuezibing* has diverse and complex meanings, which cannot be reduced to medical concepts. Shigehisa Kuriyama argues that the body and disease cannot be taken merely as objects of medical knowledge, but also lived experiences of individuals. He wants to explore what body expressed in different medical traditions through the study of perceptions of the body (Shigehisa Kuriyama 1999). Susan Sontag underscores metaphoric aspects of diseases. She contends that meanings of diseases such as cancer and AIDS are consequences of cultural and political construction (Sontag 1978). Nonetheless, her Symbolic study of diseases neglected embodied experiences of patients. Arthur Kleinman's studies of narratives of chronic illnesses emphasize that illness is biological, psychological and social experiences of patients (Kleinman 1989). Although individual narratives of illnesses are included in his medical anthropological studies, he ignores patients' subjective constructions of causes of illnesses. For many chronic illnesses sufferers, their own understandings of causes of illnesses mean a lot to them, but how causes of illnesses are subjectively constructed by them is still unclear.

1-3. Perspectives

Compared with previous studies on illnesses, my research on *Yuezibing* has a unique perspective of Subjective Constructivism. Proposed by Professor Pan Suiming, the perspective of Subjective Constructivism underscores individuals' interpretations of practices and their

understandings toward life. Informants are authors of their stories, and each of them has a distinctive comprehension on certain concepts; therefore, individuals' practices, emotions and attitudes should be analyzed in contexts of their own life histories, rather than understood merely as consequences of social, cultural and political constructions (Pan Suiming and Huang Yingying 2007). These stories are meaningful expressions of informants and the presence of these stories signifies their relative significance to narrators. The study of these narratives provides us with the chance to evaluate what these narratives mean to story-tellers and to comprehend how these stories are constructed by these narrators' subjective understandings. Hence, the perspective of Subjective Constructivism is adopted in this paper to examine how causes of *Yuezibing* are subjectively constructed by these women's recollections of their past experiences.

Because of the necessity of analyzing women's narratives of *Yuezibing* in contexts of their life histories, I introduced historical perspective into this research. Although *Zuoyuezi* practices are very personal and private, female informants once lived in the collective years practiced their *Zuoyuezi* quite differently from women in other historical periods, and the difference has implicit but concrete relations with their experiences of *Yuezibing*. Modes of production, distribution systems, political campaigns and life standards serve as historical backgrounds of their women's experiences of *Zuoyuezi*. Thus, *Zuoyuezi* should be treated as historical experiences of these women. As was put by Judith Farquhar, the body is the sediment of history (Farquhar 2002). As a result, the study of the collective years may enrich our understandings of how lives and bodies are shaped by history.

Nevertheless, history should not be circumscribed to written records. It was embodied in these women's practices, lived experiences, living circumstances and memories. Hence, history is no longer an external presence, but ways of being of these women. Inspired by *The Gender of Memory* written by Gail Hershatter, this paper examines the plasticity of memories (Hershatter 2011). Their inconsistent but enduring memories are rearranged into meaningful stories, with *Yuezibing* being the core of their historical narratives. Through the study of these women's retrospective narratives of their lives in the collective period, we may have a clear understanding of how the past is perceived by these women.

This research was conducted within the framework of research ethics, following requirements such as "informed consent", "equality and respect" and "no damage". Real names of my subjects will not be presented in this paper (Pan Suiming and Huang Yingying 2009).

2. *Yuezibing* and the "Body of *Zuoyuezi*"

2-1. Their Experiences of Illnesses

Instead of answering the question "What is *Yuezibing*", I'm going to explore how *Yuezibing* is experienced and understood by Sun Yanlian (74 years old) and Zhang Shufen (64 years old), two of my informants. Sun complained about her urinary incontinence and pains in head, legs and waist, while Zhang's joint pains, headache and tearing against wind harassed her a lot. Both of my informants reported that *Yuezibing* came to them in their old ages, and "seeds of their *Yuezibing* were planted" when they were practicing *Zuoyuezi* during the collective period.

As was reported by Sun and Zhang, *Yuezibing* is firstly related to age: it did not become apparent until they were old. In the second place, Sun and Zhang's *Yuezibing* came from their *Zuoyuezi* experiences in Maoist Era. However, *Yuezibing* is not scientifically defined. In fact, symptoms of *Yuezibing* are similar to those of rheumatism and arthritis, and Sun and Zhang did not have their *Yuezibing* diagnosed. Why do they call their illnesses *Yuezibing*?

2-2. Subjective Conception of “Body of Zuoyuezi”

That “seeds of their *Yuezibing* were planted” when they were practicing *Zuoyuezi* suggests not only that *Yuezibing* is related to their *Zuoyuezi* experiences in the past, but also that the “body of *Zuoyuezi*” is unique in their life courses. Specialties of “body of *Zuoyuezi*” can be traced back to traditional Chinese Medical cannons such as *Huangdi neijing* and *Nanjing*. However, I’m not going to introduce the “body of *Zuoyuezi*” from a theoretical perspective, though any analysis of it which failed to mention traditional Chinese Medical theories would be clearly incomplete. The body is not merely an object of knowledge, but also perceptual reality of these women and is subjectively narrated in special historical contexts. How the “body of *Zuoyuezi*” is perceived by Sun and Zhang has a great deal to do with their understanding of *Yuezibing*. What are the specialties of the “body of *Zuoyuezi*”?

As was put by Sun Yanlian, there are 240 gaps of bones (joints, or *gufeng*) in human body, and these gaps will expand after delivery. The expansion of bone gaps may facilitate the entrance of wind and water (*feng* and *shui*), which are hard to distract from the body. Eight pieces of gaps will heal per day for thirty days, and if wind and water are left in the body after the closure of bone gaps, women will be attacked by *Yuezibing* in their old age. Thus, women are forbidden from touching cold water or facing the wind for the fear of *Yuezibing* in the future. Likewise, Zhang Shufen mentioned gaps of bones: *Those gaps (of bones) were still open... if you touch cold water at this time, you’ll get sick afterwards.* Aside from this, they also told me that the body should not be overused during the period of *Zuoyuezi*. For Sun, women should not work for a month after delivery, while crying is dangerous for women, according to Zhang, since this may lead to eye illnesses.

But these specialties of “body of *Zuoyuezi*” should not be viewed as consequences of medical knowledge. As Csordas reminds us, “the body should be understood as the existential ground of culture—not as an object...but as a subject” (Csordas 1993). For instance, concepts such as wind and water originate from traditional Chinese Medical knowledge, however the anatomic image of number (though inaccurate) of bone gaps is definitely western medical. In addition, according to traditional Chinese Medical classics, women are subjected to “deficiency of wind and blood” (*qixue liangxu*) after delivery. Though the term of “wind” appeared in interviews of all my subjects, “blood” disappeared from reports of Sun and Zhang. These suggest that the “body of *Zuoyuezi*” was highly crafted in their stories. In fact, the construction of “body of *Zuoyuezi*” cannot be separated from their experiences of illnesses. For instance, they both reported that women should be protected from wind and water. This is correlated with their contact with these dangerous forces during the period of *Zuoyuezi* and their embodied experiences of *Yuezibing*, while Zhang’s emphasis on harmful effects of crying came in the same context of the description of her eye illness. The specialty of “body of *Zuoyuezi*” is intentionally expressed by Sun and Zhang to explain why they got sick.

Why did they connect their illnesses to their historical experiences in the collective period? Obviously, we should dig into this question by examining their experiences in the collectivist era in the first place.

3. *Zuoyuezi* and *Yuezibing* in the Collective Period

3-1. Brief Introduction of *Yuezibing* Sufferers’ Life History

Sun Yanlian, a seventy-four year-old rural woman who is now suffering from *Yuezibing*, married her husband and moved to the X village in southwest of Shandong in 1956. The Movement

of Collectivization of Agriculture was launched here in the dawn of 1950s, from Lower Producer's Co-op, Advanced Producers' Co-op to the People's Commune in 1958. "Work point" became the standing distribution system of the brigade for the next two decades, and, after the annual state purchase of surplus grains, the rest of grains would be allocated to members of the brigade according to the amount of work points they earned each year. Individual work points were calculated through the multiplication of two factors: worth of a day's labor in work points and attendance. Typically, male members of a brigade earned ten work points for a day's work, while women's were 2-4 less than men's. During the period of collectivism, Sun gave birth to four children.

Zhang Shufen, the fourth child in her once wealthy family, was born in 1950 in Tangshan City. Her family declined after the implementation of "Joint State-Private Enterprise" policy, when her fathers' grocery was confiscated by the state. At the age of 12, Zhang dropped out of school and sold ice creams to make a living. In 1966, the Tangshan government stipulated that each family should send an educated youth to rural areas or construction corps; as compensations, the government promised to provide jobs in work units to other siblings. Zhang chose to be sent down and lost her urban residency, or *hukou*, leaving opportunities to her brothers. Poor living conditions in village made her yearning for return. In order to come back to Tangshan, she refused the proposal of the brigade secretary's son and married a male educated youth in 1971, which ruined her first opportunity to return to Tangshan two months later. In 1978, she regained her urban *hukou* and was employed by a kindergarten in Tangshan. Zhang gave birth to two children, one in Tangshan and another in the village where she was sent down.

3-2. Experiences of *Zuoyuezi* in the Context of Collective Moment

3-2-1. Sun Yanlian's *Zuoyuezi* Experience

Sun Yanlian earned 8 work points per day in the brigade during the collectivist time. Her memory of those days was penetrated with hunger.

Sun: No grains were leftover! We female earned fewer work points! We have more family members to support, and food was always not enough. We had children. Who were willing to see their children starving? No! We had to borrow food from others. Sometimes, we had to dig wild herbs... Families with better labors [that means, more male labors] could get 400 jin of grains. In those days, we consumed more than now, because there was no oil in meals. We had to seize work points. Those farm works broke my back.

In this narrative, Sun had to "seize work points" to feed her family. On one hand, she highlighted the shortage of grains, and the shortage was further underscored by stating that people in socialist China consumed more grains than today. On the other hand, she stressed her contribution to her family by emphasizing that she not only had to earn work points but also take care of her children and do housework. To support her family, Sun said, she had no choice but to increase her attendance and this was vividly expressed as "seizing work points".

Sun: What should we eat if we were not "seizing work points"? Our living conditions were so poor that we [women] dared not to waste a whole month for rest [after delivery]. There was a ballad at that time, "father works with plough while mother

works with harrow, and passers-by should not mock. We are living in Advanced Agricultural Co-op, but we are left no other choices but suffering this sorrow”.

Besides the shortage of food, the major characteristic of the period of collectivization was the prolonged time of farming. Because of the pressure to feed the whole household, Sun had to undertake collective labor even in the period of *Zuoyuezi*. Therefore, *Zuoyuezi* in collectivist era had economic significance to Sun Yanlian. This is due to the poor living condition at that time, but it also signifies Sun’s sacrifice to her family: “seizing work points”, taking care of children and doing housework.

Sun: Who would take care of me when I was practicing Zuoyuezi? No one! I had to look after myself! My husband and other relatives were all busy in the field, who would take care of me? ... I even had to wash dishes and do laundry! If I didn't do it, who else?

Sun insisted that she should have been taken care of when she was in *Zuoyuezi*, but, in reality, she not only had to rely on her own but also undertake all sorts of labors, including organized agricultural production, housework and taking care of children. She even believed the poor condition at that time was not enough for her to experience a *Zuoyuezi*.

3-2-2. Zhang Shufen’s *Zuoyuezi* Experience

Zhang: Our [educated youths'] workloads were equal to local Commune members', but our work points were disproportionately less than theirs. I earned 3.2 work points for a day's work [compared to 10 for locale male members and 8 for local female].How could it be enough?

When asked whether they were enthusiastic at performing agricultural production at that time, Zhang replied:

Zhang: I was exhausted to death! How could I be enthusiastic? I could hardly have enough to eat! ... Later, the Large Canteen was canceled, and we educated youths didn't have kitchens for meal! Those [educated youths] who came from wealthy family return to the city, while I was left in the horrible village.

Zhang’s experience of “Down to the Countryside” was painful: heavy labor, meagre work points and hungry belly. The chasm between living conditions of urban and rural areas was presented in her story, which constituted her burning desire to return to Tangshan. However, it was impossible for her to get employed by urban working units for the sake of losing urban *hukou*, or permanent residency in Tangshan. She had to wait for the chance.

Zhang: The secretary of the brigade bothered me continuously by imploring me to marry his son. If I had said yes at that time, I would not have been able to come back

after the marriage and having children, I'm afraid of. I was so out of mind that I cursorily decided to get married with Old Qian in September 1971.

Accepting the proposal of the son of secretary might have significantly improved her living standards, since cadres in the brigade were in charge of the allocation of work points and welfares. However, Zhang's rejection suggests that returning to Tangshan meant more to her at that time. Her "cursory" marriage with Old Qian indicates that, from her own perspective, Old Qian was inferior to the son of the secretary. In fact, as was reported by Zhang, Old Qian was ugly as well as ill-tempered. The only reason for Zhang's acceptance of the unsatisfactory marriage was her hankering for her return. Two months after Zhang's marriage, the first silver lining came: sent-down youths could return to and be employed in cities. Ironically, it was ruined by Zhang's marriage.

Zhang: I got married in September, and sent-down youths were allowed to come back [to cities] in November 1971 for the first time. However, the only restriction was that you should not be married. ...I was shocked! I was too afraid of losing my face to divorce with Old Qian!

According to Zhang, the unhappy marriage was the origin of her life-long bitterness, and she looked down on Old Qian for a whole life. The crush of her dream also brought painful *Zuoyuezi* experiences to her.

Zhang: What I ate during my Zuoyuezi was only dough drop soup [a kind of course food]... I rested for only a week before I had to cook meals, make fire and wash clothes for other members in my mother-in-law's family [bitter laugh]. Who took care of whom? What a grieved month. I cried one night. However, my mother-in-law yelled at me, "We are not responsible if your crying ails you".

Zhang said that her *Zuoyuezi* should have been served by her mother-in-law, but this did not happen. On the contrary, she had to do laboring housework during the period. For her, her unhappy *Zuoyuezi* experience was the result of her unsuccessful marriage. Although Zhang could return to Tangshan and give birth in the hospital, and she could eat enough though inferior food during this period, she still felt that her first *Zuoyuezi* experience was unsatisfactory, compared to her second *Zuoyuezi* which was served by her own mother after she had a home birth in the brigade three years later.

Sun and Zhang's narratives of their bitter lives in the collective period serve as settings of their unhappy *Zuoyuezi* experiences. Their personal stories of *Zuoyuezi* were deeply embedded into the historical context: although *Zuoyuezi* was too trivial to be prescribed by the party-state in those days, the collectivist period had an obvious domination over class, identity and gender, which in turn left indirect but remarkable traces on *Zuoyuezi* through collective agricultural production, distribution system, Mass Movements (the Great Leap, or the Movement of "Go to the Mountainous Areas and Countryside"), social gender and status, concepts of marriage and familial relationships.

3-3. Causes of *Yuezibing*

Sun Yanlian believed that her *Yuezibing* originated from collective labor and housework she

did during the period of *Zuoyuezi*.

Sun: *We had to do farm work immediately after delivery. If you get sick because of this, it is impossible to be treated. Everyone had to go to the field to “seize work points”, or there would be nothing left to eat! My backache, leg numbness and headache all came from this. I had to wash clothes, make fire and cook dinner. No one would help and look after me.*

In the story of Zhang Shufen, she touched cold water and cried several times while practicing her first *Zuoyuezi*. These, according to her, contributed to her *Yuezibing*.

Zhang: *Several years ago, I had serious pain in my joints, and this should be ascribed to my touching cold water when I was practicing Zuoyuezi. I knew that I should not do housework at that time, but who else would help me? Yuezibing came to me in my old age. I'm now afraid of facing the wind. My tear will run down in the wind. While I was practicing Zuoyuezi, I felt aggrieved and I cried.*

Unlike women in modern time, Sun had to participate in collective labors and do housework after delivery while Zhang had to serve members of her mother-in-law's family and cried during the period of *Zuoyuezi*. These practices conflicted with requirements of “body of *Zuoyuezi*” by exposing them to the threat of wind and water and exhausted their bodies. Hence, it is reasonable to infer that, according to Sun and Zhang's narratives, their *Yuezibing* should be attributed to these *Zuoyuezi* experiences during the collective period.

Therefore, *Yuezibing* should not be circumscribed to a physical disease, but also embodied historical experiences of Sun and Zhang: effects of their practices decades ago are experiences by them at present. However, it is too cursory to believe that their narratives of the past are factual. Their stories are based on their memories which have significant relations with their experiences of *Yuezibing*. If Sun is not suffering from pains in her body, is it possible for her experiences of participating in collective productions after delivery to be presented vividly in her narratives? Or if Zhang is not tormented by her eye illness, would the story of her crying during the period of *Zuoyuezi* narrated in the same way? As a matter of fact, the relationship between the causes of *Yuezibing* and the experience of the illness is constructed in the process of their recollection of the history of their illnesses.

Hence, rather than historical facts, Sun and Zhang's narratives of *Zuoyuezi* experiences during the Maoist Era should be understood as interpretation of their life history. How the past is perceived by these women? How did these women pinpoint causes of *Yuezibing* with vague clues and decades of interval between their *Zuoyuezi* experiences and their awareness of *Yuezibing*?

4. Narratives of *Zuoyuezi* and *Yuezibing* in Different Historical Contexts

4-1. *Zuoyuezi* in Different Historical Contexts

The study of Sun and Zhang's *Zuoyuezi* experiences in the Maoist Era unravels how their bodies and lives were constructed by history. However, they are not only products of history, but also narrators and interpreters of their past experiences. How were their experiences of *Zuoyuezi* narrated by them?

4-1-1. Sun's Narratives of *Zuoyuezi*

Sun: *[When working in the field] I wore a scarf and covered my legs with cloth to prevent my body from wind attack. In those days, how could we stay in bed for a whole month like women now? Young wives these days are so picky! They ask for special Zuoyuezi clothes and have old people and moon-matrons taking care of them. While I was practicing Zuoyuezi, no one took care of me ... I gave birth to my first son in 1963, three years after the great famine. In the old society, what could we eat for Zuoyuezi? Nothing! No dry food! Only salty grainsoups. It was a time of hardship. Eggs were extravagant in those days. Once, I ate three eggs, and I vomited badly. Who will eat eggs for Zuoyuezi now? They are no longer good food in the new society. Young wives have chicken soups, fish soups, turtle soups, milk and sausages for their Zuoyuezi.*

“Those days” and the “old society” refer to poor circumstances in the collective period Sun once lived in, while terms such as “these days” and the “new society” refer to the happy life after the advent of economic reforms savored by young people. The misuse of the term “old society”, which was clearly defined by Chinese official voice as the period before the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, indicates that Sun’s memory of her experiences in the collective period is her interpretation of the past.

Sun’s narratives of her *Zuoyuezi* experiences in the “old society” did not come alone. Twisted with witness of happy *Zuoyuezi* experiences of young women, her *Zuoyuezi* experiences were expressed in a negative tone. She lamented for her pitiful life in the collective moment: the shortage of food, clothes and onerous collective labors and housework. Even though she had three eggs while practicing *Zuoyuezi*, this brought about not happiness but serious vomit to her. The underlying meaning of her narratives is that she could not savor the wellbeing that is common in modern time. Her life in Maoist Era was indulged in bitterness.

4-1-2. Zhang's Narratives of *Zuoyuezi*

Zhang: *At first, I felt lucky to come back to Tangshan to practice my Zuoyuezi. I gave birth to my first son in Tangshan Workers' Hospital. However, my mother-in-law was so mean. I took sixty jin of rice with me, but I ate none of it, let alone meat. I ate nothing but dough drop soup every day. Having my mother-in-law to serve my Zuoyuezi is no more than a daydream. I had to wash clothes, diapers and dishes for them with cold water. She was even not willing to give me wood to make hot water! How pitiful I was [bitter laughter]! I had no breast milk for my son and his weight was barely three jin two liang [1.6 kilograms]. I had conflict with my mother-in-law, so three years later, when my daughter was born, I decided not to return to Tangshan and practice my Zuoyuezi in the brigade. My mom came to the brigade and serve Zuoyuezi for me. I felt much better, because she is my own mother and concerned with my health. She said, “Don't move. Stay in bed. Cover your body with quilt. Rest more”. My breast milk was much better, and my daughter weighted five jin six liang [2.8 kilograms].*

Like Sun, Zhang Shufen's narratives of her experiences are also not purely based on facts. The chasm between her first *Zuoyuezi* in her mother-in-law's family and her second *Zuoyuezi* in the brigade implies her moral judgment on her mother-in-law: her mean mother-in-law was indifferent to her health and happiness. Although she could give birth to her son in urban hospital, this could not offset her intrinsic repugnance to her mother-in-law. She felt much better when she practiced *Zuoyuezi* in the brigade, not because of better living conditions, but because it was served by her mother. She did not have to undertake laboring housework and could have enough rest after she gave birth to her daughter. As is to be illustrated below, it is held by Zhang that her *Yuezibing* derives only from her first *Zuoyuezi* experiences.

The reason why Zhang mentioned her breast feeding and weights of her son and daughter is that these facts serve as evaluation criteria for the judgment of what is a good *Zuoyuezi*. Zhang ascribed her failure in breast nursing her underweight son to her unfortunate *Zuoyuezi* experiences in her mother-in-law's family. Though these facts have no direct relations with Zhang's *Zuoyuezi* experiences, they reveal how moral values are attached to Zhang's memories of her life in the collective period.

4-2. *Yuezibing* in Different Historical Contexts

For Sun and Zhang, *Yuezibing* was caused by their *Zuoyuezi* experiences in the collective period. However, as was said before, "body of *Zuoyuezi*" and their *Zuoyuezi* practices were intentionally expressed in their narratives, and causes of their *Yuezibing* were constructed to illustrate why they got sick from their past experiences. Therefore, *Yuezibing* is Sun and Zhang's meaningful historical experiences. How is *Yuezibing* understood by Sun and Zhang? What are they going to express through narratives of their *Yuezibing*?

4-2-1. Sun's Narratives of *Yuezibing*

When asked whether she served *Zuoyuezi* for her daughter-in-law, Sun answered: *She has everything. That is unnecessary.* Sun's narratives sound inconsistent. The lack of care once caused her *Yuezibing*. Nonetheless, from Sun's perspective, serving *Zuoyuezi* becomes an unnecessary practice in modern context. What is her explanation?

Sun: *Have you ever heard of any young women suffering from Yuezibing? None! They can give birth in hospitals and eat delicious food. How can they get sick? In those days, we were forced into the field immediately after delivery, hence planted the seed of Yuezibing. It is impossible to be treated. Nowadays, hospitals are filled with scientists. Even the most serious disease can be treated. This is called "New society, New idea". In the past, we dared not to face the wind during Zuoyuezi. Now, young women may even turn on air-conditioners when it is hot! How happy they are!*

In the past, exposing women to the threat of wind during the period of *Zuoyuezi* is dangerous, which disobeys the requirements of the "body of *Zuoyuezi*". However, the "New idea" is that, even facing the wind blown by air-conditioners is not problematic. Why? The answer is: young women are living in the "New society". In the context of the collective period, the "body of *Zuoyuezi*" is constructed by Sun only to justify her *Yuezibing*. When it turns to the modern society, this body construction is no more applicable for *Yuezibing* interpretation. In fact, according to Sun, *Yuezibing*

becomes irrelevant to women in this new era: even untreatable diseases can be cured by “scientists”.

Consequently, the aim of Sun’s narratives of her *Yuezibing* is not only to find out the exact cause of her illness, but also to endow her experiences in the collective period with the meaning of “origins of sufferings”. These sufferings have been eliminated by the improvement of living conditions, but they are still preserved in Sun’s memory and experienced within her body.

4-2-2. Zhang’s Narratives of *Yuezibing*

As was stated previously, it is argued by Zhang that her *Yuezibing* stemmed from her mother-in-law’s indifference to her health and happiness during her first *Zuoyuezi*. Is this the only reasonable explanation to her *Yuezibing*? Zhang’s narratives of how she served her daughter-in-law’s *Zuoyuezi* provide us with more information.

Zhang: When my daughter-in-law was in her Zuoyuezi, I didn’t permit her to go around the house for the fear of illnesses in the future. I ordered, “Don’t get out of bed! Don’t do anything but rest”. Meals and soups were cooked and sent to her room. Everything was prepared by me! What did I have while I was practicing Zuoyuezi? Nothing! My daughter-in-law loves reading, and I forbade her by saying, “Don’t read! This may ruin your eyes”! Who gave instructions to me in those days? Nobody! I also prepared hot water for my daughter-in-law to wash face and feet. I only had cold water in those days. This is the difference between the heaven and the earth.

Different from Sun Yanlian, Zhang described how she served her daughter-in-law’s *Zuoyuezi* in details, and these descriptions are one-to-one correspondent to her own *Zuoyuezi* experiences: rest, food, housework and the use of water. Paradoxically, in this story, she even prepared hot water for her daughter-in-law, which is contradictory to requirements of “body of *Zuoyuezi*” that women should be prevented from touching water. Apparently, Zhang Shufen concerned more about the temperature of the water, rather than water itself: a responsible mother-in-law should offer hot water to her daughter-in-law.

It seems unlikely for Zhang’s daughter-in-law to be harassed by *Yuezibing* in the future, since Zhang has prepared everything for her daughter-in-law: meals and soups, advices on *Zuoyuezi*, and hot water. In the past, the absence of these preparations caused Zhang’s *Yuezibing*; at present, the possibility of *Yuezibing* has been ruled out by Zhang’s meticulous care and services to her daughter-in-law’s *Zuoyuezi*. Again, Zhang’s narratives of this story is not simply based on facts, but endowed with moral significance: her daughter-in-law enjoyed *Zuoyuezi* in the “heaven” while Zhang suffered her own *Zuoyuezi* on the “earth”.

4-3. Narratives of Life History

At the end of interview, Zhang Shufen told me: *You are so kind to be willing to listen to me. When I told my son about these stories, he replied impatiently, “Mom, why are you still talking about these clichés?”* There is no doubt that life stories of these aging women have been recounted once and once again, to their children, friends, neighbors and researchers. Why?

When asked how she feels about her *Zuoyuezi*, Sun Yanlian sighed: *Hardships! How could I enjoy it? It’s too miserable to talk about it... You see, I’m now troubled by illnesses and they will bother me for the rest of my life... Young men in your age cannot understand the flavor of bitterness.*

During the interview, Sun kept on emphasizing that she knew that conducting collective labor and housework might ruin her body. But she had to do these for her family. *We had children. We had a whole family to support.* Whether Sun was actually aware of the requirements of “body of *Zuoyuezi*” cannot be substantiated by information I collected through oral history, but it is true that her narratives mean more than merely historical facts. What she did during her period of *Zuoyuezi* signifies her voluntary sacrifices for her family in the toughest time, the collective era, leaving painful experiences in her body and memory. She has tasted the flavor of bitterness for her whole life, and now she is calling for her sacrifices to be appreciated.

Is the history of collectivist China the only origin of Sun and Zhang’s sufferings? No. At least, their sufferings also come from their memories. For Zhang Shufen, she chose to be sent down for her brother, accepted the unsuccessful marriage and tolerated the aggrieved *Zuoyuezi* for her family and children. These hardships she endured denote her contributions to her family, while her *Yuezibing* represent that all her sufferings originated from the past. However, she felt upset when she realized that her wretched experiences could hardly be appreciated by her son, which denied meanings of all her sufferings. It seems to Zhang that her son is enjoying the fruit of her contribution to the family without recognizing its costs, her sufferings.

The collective period has become history, replaced by the Reform Era. Sun and Zhang appreciate the prosperity brought about by the economic reforms and feel sorry for their awful lives in the collective era. However, they do not refuse the recollection of the past. These aging women narrated their life stories from the vantage point of the present, profoundly affected by their experiences of illnesses, encounters with new life and ever-changing understanding of their personal history. Their vivid accounts shuttled back and forth between the past and the present, weaving their experiences into exquisitely constructed narratives of *Yuezibing*. These stories harbor their personal grievances, individual sacrifices and dissatisfactions they’ve felt for many years. They related their sufferings with their personal virtues: thrifty, the ability to “eat bitterness”, tolerance, kindness to family members and competence in working. There is no wonder that their narratives of *Zuoyuezi* and *Yuezibing* are endowed with their personal understandings of their own lives. The study of these narratives may reveal how these women embodied the history through their lived experiences, and how the past is memorized by them.

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Notes

¹ This paper is funded by the project of “Change and Reconstruction of Primary Life Circle in China’s Urban Areas” (11JJD840011), from the Ministry of Education of Humanities and Social Science.