

TOLD BY THE NEWFOUNDLAND CHINESE:
A TRANSLATION, CONTEXTUAL DESCRIPTION
AND ANALYSIS OF THE JOKES COLLECTED
FROM TWO GROUPS IN THE
ST. JOHN'S CHINESE COMMUNITY

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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**TOLD BY THE NEWFOUNDLAND CHINESE:
A TRANSLATION, CONTEXTUAL DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS
OF THE JOKES COLLECTED FROM TWO GROUPS
IN THE ST. JOHN'S CHINESE COMMUNITY**

BY

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B.A. (Yangzhou, China)

**A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate
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Master of Arts**

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Abstract

This thesis has as its chief aim the presentation of a corpus of jokes or humorous anecdotes collected from a sample of ethnic Chinese living in St. John's, Newfoundland. The corpus can be considered representative of that segment of the general repertoire of jokes, perceived by their narrators as 'Chinese' jokes (as opposed to Canadian or western jokes) circulating in the diverse Chinese milieus of St. John's.

The existence of different groups of Chinese in St. John's, as has been established both by library and field research, is presented with reference to the history of the Chinese in North America in general and in Newfoundland in particular. Given the existence of different groups of Chinese in St. John's, we are led to pose the following questions: to what extent, if any, do the joke repertoires of the respective groups differ, and if differences exist, what is the significance of such differences? What are the characteristics of the joke repertoire as a whole which allow it to be distinguished as 'Chinese'? What functions are served by the telling of 'Chinese' jokes by the different groups?

The main body of the thesis marshals the evidence, in the form of biographical notes on each informant together with his or her repertoire. The narrative and performance style of each narrator is noted, in the hope that meaningful distinctions may appear. Following this section, the general repertoire is analysed with a view to revealing differences of world view between the chief groups. A concluding section raises questions of continuity or retention and innovation deriving from these foundations, with speculation on the potential utility of such research.

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Introduction

China has a very ancient culture, but like any culture it undergoes change, sometimes slowly, sometimes rapidly. One aspect of Chinese culture which seems to have maintained its integrity is, not surprisingly, the art of storytelling. This thesis will focus on one particular sub-genre of traditional Chinese narrative, the joke or humorous anecdote, but in the context of an overseas Chinese community, that of St. John's, Newfoundland.

In colloquial Chinese, there is no clear boundary between storytelling and joke-telling. When friends get together, one of the most common ways to start a conversation is through *Chui Chui Nu*, meaning 'to crack some jokes' or to tell of some recent news or humorous events. A narrative told under such circumstance may be a joke, a legend, or even a personal experience. It is sometimes difficult, too, to distinguish a Chinese joke from a story, just as it is equally hard to define the colloquialism *Chui Chui Nu*, which has nonetheless long been a tradition in the life of all Chinese. In the light of this, I will proceed on the assumption that any humorous narrative I collected from my informants will be considered a joke in this thesis. It is necessary to point out that most of the jokes I collected did not arise in the context of *Chui Chui Nu*.

As far as the process of joke-telling is concerned, Chinese joke-telling sessions only take place in private circles. In other words, jokes are only shared between friends or among family members. I have been able to find no evidence of a 'public' storytelling tradition of the kind discussed by Gerald Thomas who, with reference to the Franco-Newfoundland minority, concluded that "If the public tradition of storytelling can be called dead, the private tradition is far from dying out."¹ The same is true for storytelling

¹See Gerald Thomas, "Stories, Storytelling and Storytellers in Newfoundland's French Tradition: A Study of the Narrative Art of Four French Newfoundlanders," Ph.D. thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1977, xxi, and *Les Deux Traditions* (Montreal: Bellarmin, 1983).

in the Chinese community in St. John's, the only difference being that the public tradition of storytelling seems not to have taken root here, although it still exists in China today. In this regard, therefore, this research is limited to the examination of the character of a 'private' storytelling tradition, one which has grown up in a particular historic context.

A survey of traditional narratives, jokes in particular, in the Newfoundland Chinese community, reveals something of the wealth of Chinese culture as it exists in and is reflected in a foreign country. The study also makes available a relatively substantial body of data which can be used in the field of ethnic studies and in general within the context of Chinese folklore in the Province of Newfoundland, Canada. The significance of this study lies not only in the fact that it is the first attempt to collect data in this area, but also that it will, to a certain extent, help preserve the 'exoteric' culture in a multicultural society. The data may also prove useful to scholars in other disciplines within the Humanities and Social Sciences.

This thesis comprises five chapters. The first is a survey of the Chinese community in Newfoundland seen within a historical, social, economic, and cultural framework. Two general groups of Chinese can be distinguished among the community's members as a whole. Facts allowing this discussion include social, economic and political elements, including the immigration status of individuals. This information is set within the broad context of Chinese immigration to North America, showing the slow but steady evolution from the hard life of the Chinese as coolies to a high professional status, but demonstrating ways in which traditional life styles have been maintained, specifically through social activities and ethnic celebrations, which are elaborated on in respective sections of this chapter. A special section is devoted to comparisons and contrasts between the two groups and their respective life styles.

Chapter Two describes and discusses the methodological framework of my research. Problems concerning interview techniques, research hypotheses, the establishment of rapport with informants are dealt with. Emphasis is also laid on the problem of translating jokes from Chinese into English, the jokes themselves being the

main focus of the work. Some problems relating to the academic study of Chinese jokes, dealing with the ethnic characteristics in Chinese jokes, and the scholarship of traditional Chinese jokes, are also discussed in this chapter.

Chapter Three is the main body of the thesis, which consists of two major parts. Each deals with a different group of immigrants within the community. All the jokes I collected from my informants are arranged in this chapter, and follow my discussion of each informant. An important part of the chapter is the discussion of the narrative style of each informant, because each also contains descriptions and analyses of the interview process. Illustrations and analysis are made in the light of the different styles, sources, and of the content of jokes, as well as their varying group narrative contexts. Some of the social functions of the jokes in the community are examined in detail, as well as the role of the jokes more generally in the life of the immigrant Chinese.

Chapter Four deals with the analysis of the joke-tellers' repertoires. This is directly related to the discussion of some typical Chinese joke stereotypes which are common to a number of my informants' repertoires. By contrasting the way of life and thinking of the two different groups of joke-tellers, an attempt is made to reveal the causes and nature both of cultural assimilation and 'conservation.' Based on this discussion, five points are made concerning the traditional characteristics of Chinese jokes.

The last chapter is a summary of the project, with some suggestions for potential further research.

CHAPTER ONE

The Historical, Social, and Cultural

Context of the Chinese Community in Newfoundland

A. Chinese Immigration to North America in the 19th and 20th Centuries

This chapter will survey the historical, social, economic and cultural contexts of the Chinese community in Newfoundland, in order to provide the necessary backcloth to the jokes and anecdotes which form the main part of this study. Before considering the different circumstances of Chinese immigrants in Newfoundland, however, it is useful first of all to provide a general introduction to the large scale Chinese emigration which started as early as the second half of the nineteenth century, and in which context the Chinese presence in Newfoundland can be placed.

It is a truism in this world that wherever there is land, there are Chinese. As Ban Seng Hoe has said, "Wherever the waters of the sea wash a distant shore, there are overseas Chinese."² Furthermore, this situation has a relatively long history. According to statistics (Census of China 1920), during the early years of this century some ten million Chinese emigrated to Southeast Asia, South Africa, North and South America, and Europe. Chinese, alone or living in groups, are found almost everywhere on the earth, in Newfoundland, Trinidad, Dresden, Paris, London, New York, and St. Helena, to name some obvious and some less obvious locations. They have seeped like water through rock, penetrating everywhere and living for all practical purposes without the benefit of consular protection, which they did not or could not seek. They knew that their best protection was good behaviour, hard work, minding one's own business, and thrift.

²Ban Seng Hoe. *Structural Changes of Two Chinese Communities in Alberta, Canada*. Ottawa: (National Museums of Canada, 1976); 1.

Armed with nothing but these virtues and sometimes a few relatives, they ventured forth all over the earth.

However, the Chinese were not historically noted for their nomadic tendencies. One must have very good reasons to leave one's native home and journey thousands of miles to toil in a foreign land. For the Chinese in the nineteenth century many such reasons existed, despite powerful ties of family, religion, and tradition which bound them to their native hearths. Indeed, a real disincentive to emigrate from imperial China was the threat of death by decapitation, because the Emperor considered all emigrants as traitors. As indicated by S. W. Kung in his *Chinese in American Life*: "... the Manchu throne did everything possible to discourage actual emigrations. Much less did the emperors adopt any positive emigration policy. In point of fact, the throne condemned every Chinese person living abroad. Section 225 of the imperial legal code asserted that emigration was illegal and that Chinese emigrants were punishable as traitors."³ This law was a real deterrent until 1860 and was only repealed in 1894. Yet thousands of Chinese defied this threat in order to seek their fortunes in other lands. The estimated number of Chinese emigrants from 1885 to 1898 was four million.⁴

In the mid-nineteenth century, China was a land in turmoil. One of the main reasons was foreign invasion,⁵ which put Chinese people throughout the country to great hardships. The outbreak of the Boxer Rising (1900) against foreign invasion was defeated by an eight-country alliance.⁶ China was in a state of great turmoil. Unrest and suffering were especially widespread in the southern maritime province of Guangdong,

³S. W. Kung. *Chinese in American Life*. Seattle:(University of Washington Press, 1962): 7.

⁴C. F. Remer. *The Foreign Trade of China*. Shanghai:(The Commercial Press, 1926): 228.

⁵One example of foreign invasion was the Opium War from 1840 to 1842 between Britain and China. It was precipitated by the confiscation by the Chinese Government of British opium stores in Canton and the murder of a Chinese by British sailors. The British victory was confirmed by the Treaty of Nanking in which five treaty ports were opened to British trade and residence. This opening led to demands by other western nations for similar rights, followed by Japan and its invasion, for example.

⁶The eight countries were: Britain, France, Germany, Japan, Italy, Austria, Russia and America.

and it was here that the hardy, adventurous, and desperate were best placed to try their luck overseas, given the relatively easy access they had to Western shipping. This ferment, due to both internal and external factors, prompted Chinese emigration in large numbers in the nineteenth century.

a. Causes of Chinese Emigration

There were two main factors--internal and external ones-- which caused the Chinese to migrate to foreign lands, especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. First, China was still a feudal state at the turn of this century. Due to the corruption and incompetence of the Qing government of the period, there were throughout the country constant civil wars, famine and disease as well as the problem of over-population. These were the internal disturbances which caused the Chinese to emigrate, while external attractions helped to accelerate the speed of such migration. Concerning this issue, the American scholar William Jennings offered a penetrating analysis:

... especially in China, where the Opium War of 1840 increased the taxes and the Taiping Rebellion in 1850, followed by famine and plundering, drove thousands out of the country. By far the most important causes, however, were the economic, which included inability to obtain and retain land, lack of employment, low wages, damage wrought by drought, flood, or other natural calamities, and over-population.⁷

Miriam Yu's account of the forces which induced numerous Chinese to migrate abroad is in line with William Jennings'. She points to two main reasons, and stresses that:

The main reasons for immigration from China to North America in the 1800s were political and economic. Politically, it was the weak and corrupt imperial government that imposed high tax and persecution on the peasants. Economically, it was caused by the paucity of land, natural catastrophes, population increase and open foreign trades in the South China seaports. As a result, most of the early Chinese immigrants were from provinces in the South China sea coast, and sailing was the single means of

⁷William Jennings, *A History of Economic Progress in the United States* (New York: Yale University Press, 1926) 227.

transportation to cross the Pacific.⁸

On the other hand, at the moment when the situation at home was so gloomy, opportunities abroad were very alluring. This was the external factor. The discovery of gold in the United States in 1849 and in Canada in 1898 drew a great number of adventurous Chinese. The immigration of Chinese to North America, for example, which was almost nonexistent before the middle of the nineteenth century, was immediately stimulated by gold fever in California after 1849. Thousands of Chinese came to the United States at the turn of this century. According to S. W. Kung, the number of Chinese in North America, which had grown to some four millions in the period 1885 to 1898, increased dramatically to seven millions from 1899 to 1913.⁹ The pioneer Chinese who ventured to Canada came at almost the same time, and were motivated by the same impulses which caused the first 'invasion' of the United States, namely, the discovery of gold in the Yukon. There were also, however, Chinese immigrants engaged in other businesses such as laundries, restaurants, and farming. In the U.S.A., Chinese laborers had contributed much to the building of the Central Pacific Railroad in the 1850s, and their compatriots in Canada between 1881 and 1885 provided sweat and toil towards the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railroad.¹⁰

b. Sources of Chinese Emigration

Chinese emigrants were mainly peasants. In China, the four traditionally recognized social classes are scholars, farmers (usually with land), laborers (having nothing except their physical strength), and merchants. Scholars never migrated to foreign countries, except the very few who sought, on a temporary basis, further education in western cities such as London, Paris or Boston. They did not want to migrate and they were not

⁸Miriam Yu, "Ethnic Identity: The Chinese in Newfoundland," *Multiculturalism* 9 (1986): 19.

⁹S. W. Kung. *Chinese in American Life*. Seattle:(University of Washington Press, 1962): 9.

¹⁰About 17,000 Chinese coolies were brought to Canada during the building period to work on the new railroad across the Rockies. See Foon Sien, "Peoples of Chinese Origin," *Encyclopedia Canadiana*, II(Ottawa: The Canadiana Co., 1957): 355.

compelled to do so, for they were economically well off. Besides, Chinese scholars had long had great pride in their country and culture (China--meaning Central Kingdom in Mandarin), believing their heritage to be superior to all others, and they did not think they had much to learn from non-Chinese culture. Chinese merchants, on the other hand, had migrated from time to time to foreign countries, though one cannot assume that all Chinese merchants living abroad had been merchants before they left their homeland. In fact, many of them had been farmers or laborers at home, subsequently forcing their way into the merchant class after years of hard work.

The largest contingent of Chinese immigrants was composed of peasants, including both farmers and laborers. At home they had tilled their own soil and supported their own families. While their income was small, their families were very large. Even when the harvest was good they produced barely enough to satisfy their hunger. In times of drought, which often occurred in winter in the southeastern provinces of Guangdong, Guangxi, and Fukien, they suffered from the failure of crops. In spring and summer when there was work in the field, they were farmers. But as soon as the harvest was over, they practiced a trade, becoming, for example, masons, carpenters, or blacksmiths. It was not only common for every farmer in China to have a trade, it was a necessity in order to support a family. But even so, their efforts to make both ends meet were often thwarted by natural disasters. So the only solution remaining was to move elsewhere. Naturally enough, such able-bodied young peasants aspired to something greater, a means by which they could better their own economic conditions and secure the ease and comforts of life. For these reasons, they moved across the seas to make a living. This explains why the peasant class so largely represents China in foreign countries.

One aspect of the uniqueness of Chinese immigration was the heavy concentration of immigrants, as mentioned earlier, from less than a dozen counties or areas in South China's Guangdong province. From the middle of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century, the main sources of emigration were the following four areas, all from the same province:

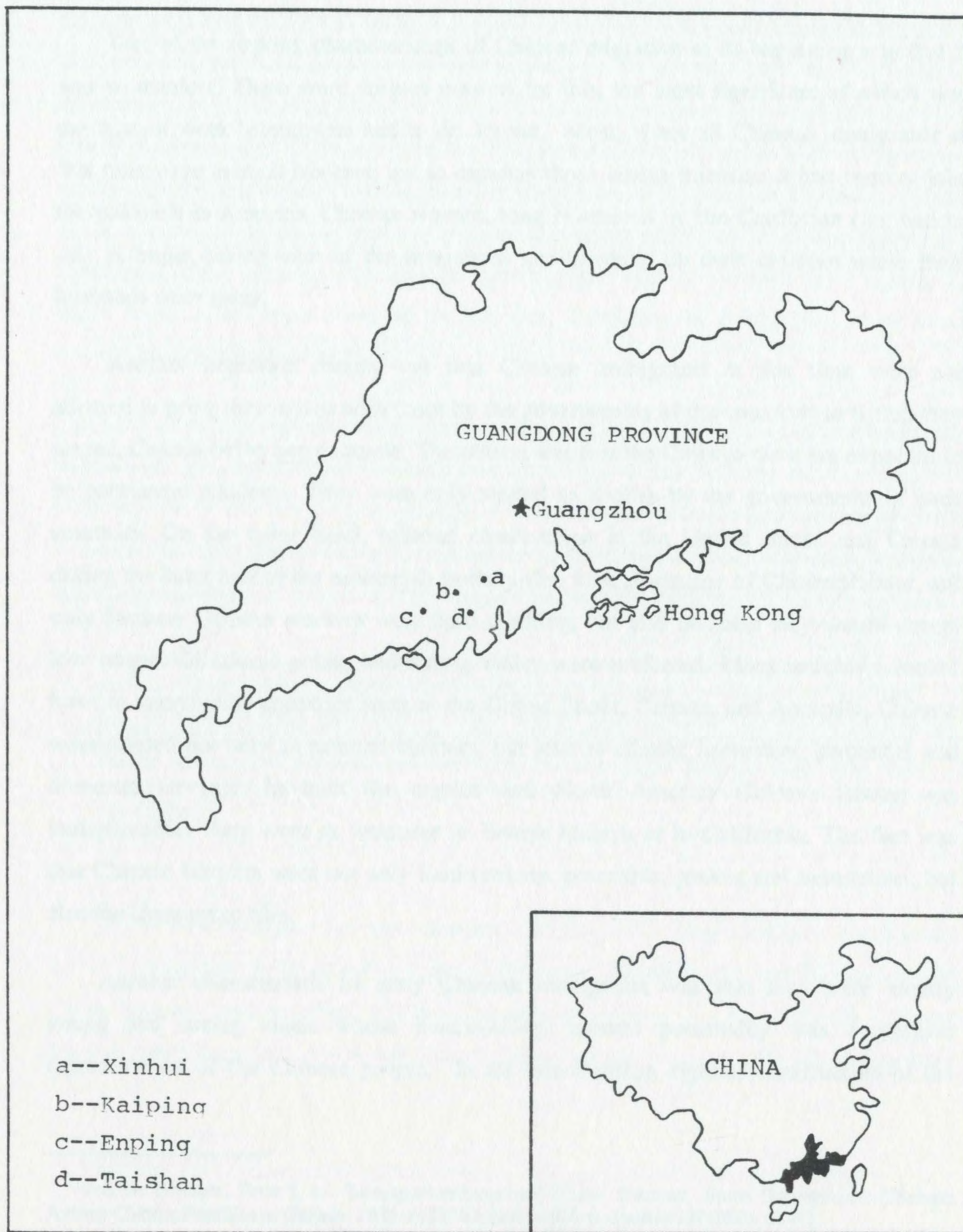
1. *The Sam Yup* (three counties): Nanhai, Panyu, and Shunde, including Canton (Guangzhou, the capital of Guangdong province), and its environs.

2. *The Sze Yup* (four counties): Xinhui, Taishan, Kaiping, and Enping. The early Chinese Newfoundlanders are mainly from the four counties which are shown in the map on the following page.

3. *Other areas of the province*: counties such as Hua Xian, Sanshui, Sihui, Qingyuan, Zhongshan, Zhongxin, Boluo, Dongguan, Baoan, Huaiji, Guangning, Gaohe, Yangchun, Yangjiang, Guanghai, Mei Xian, and Jieyang.

4. *Hong Kong* (Geographically, Hong Kong belongs to Guangdong Province although it became a British colony in 1890.)

A MAP OF GUANGDONG PROVINCE



c. Features of Chinese Immigration

One of the striking characteristics of Chinese migration at its beginning was that it was womanless. There were various reasons for this, the most significant of which was the type of work immigrants had to do abroad. Most, if not all Chinese immigrants at that time were manual laborers, not to mention those whose intention it had been to join the goldrush in America. Chinese women, long restrained by the Confucian rite, had to stay at home, taking care of the household and bringing up their children while their husbands were away.

Another important reason was that Chinese immigrants at that time were not allowed to bring their wives with them by the governments of the countries in which they stayed, Canada being one example. The reason was that the Chinese were not expected to be permanent residents. They were only treated as coolies by the governments of such countries. On the other hand, railroad construction in the United States and Canada during the latter half of the nineteenth century also took advantage of Chinese labour, not only because Chinese workers were hard-working, but also because they would accept low wages. Of course young and strong males were preferred. Many articles¹¹ record how, in many white countries such as the United States, Canada, and Australia, Chinese were needed not only as railroad builders, but also as miners, harvesters, gardeners and domestic servants. In both the tropics and North America Chinese labour was indispensable. They were as welcome in British Malaya as in California. The fact was that Chinese laborers were not only hardworking, peaceable, patient and industrious, but also the cheapest to hire.

Another characteristic of early Chinese immigrants was that they were mostly young and strong males whose hardworking, earnest personality was a positive representation of the Chinese people. In the late eighteen eighties construction of the

¹¹See, for example, Peter S. Li. "Immigration Laws and Family Patterns: Some Demographic Changes Among Chinese Families in Canada, 1885-1971" *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 12(1980): 58-73.

Canadian Pacific Railway began, by which the provinces of the Dominion were knitted together with transcontinental lines of steel. The era of railroad building brought the same problems to Canada as it had to the United States in the previous decade (1875-1885), and here again the Chinese, the cheapest but most efficient laborers in the world for such purposes, were called upon to make the transportation dream of Canada's statesmen a reality. Jack Chen notes in *The Chinese of America* (1980) that "the Canadian Pacific seized the chance to enlist veteran Chinese railwaymen from the Southern Pacific and Northern Pacific railroads and also brought Chinese workers directly from China. In 1880, some 1,500 were working on the line, increasing to 6,500 two years later. Casualties were heavy on this line."¹²

One of my informants in St. John's told me that his uncle had died building the railroad. In fact, hundreds of Chinese lost their lives while working on it. This was probably one of the two darkest periods in the history of Chinese immigrants in North America (the other period being the exclusion of the Chinese in the nineteen-twenties). Speaking eloquently in favour of Chinese immigrants, Oswald Garrison Villard says,

I want to remind you of the things that Chinese labor did in opening up the Western portion of this country.... (They) stormed the forest fastnesses, endured cold and heat and the risk of death at hands of hostile Indians to aid in the opening up of our northwestern empire. I have a dispatch from the chief engineer of the Northwestern Pacific telling how Chinese laborers went out into eight feet of snow with the temperature far below zero to carry on the work when no American dared face the conditions.¹³

There were little political and economic changes for Chinese immigrants in Canada in the first quarter of the twentieth century. However, during World War II, Canada and China became wartime allies, and the Canadian perception of China and the Chinese became more favorable. Since the United States was also one of the allied countries

¹²Jack Chen. *The Chinese of America*. San Francisco: (Harper & Row Publishing Co., 1980): 76.

¹³Oswald Garrison Villard, "Justice for the Chinese," *Christian Century* 6 (1943): 633-634.

during the war, the situation of the Chinese in the U.S. was basically the same as that in Canada. Summing up these changes in the United States, E. Elmo Roper reported that 85.8 percent of the whites then surveyed said they would accept Chinese as fellow workers, 72 percent as neighbors, and 77 percent as friends or guests. This more tolerant social environment, coupled with better political conditions, offered new educational and career opportunities to Chinese Americans, greatly improving their economic position. The 1950s saw a significant portion of Chinese easing into previously restricted areas of employment.¹⁴

With the eventual development of a Sino-Canadian relationship, there were major changes in the matter of immigration. Firstly, an act of the Canadian Parliament was passed in the early 1960s allowing Chinese to immigrate for the first time. Secondly, since the 1960s, most Chinese emigrants to Canada came not as 'coolies' but as professionals. In her article "Ethnic Identity: the Chinese in Newfoundland," Miriam Yu mentions a survey conducted by the Chinese Association of Newfoundland and Labrador in 1978, which noted that there were sixty-seven Chinese professionals in Newfoundland, of whom twenty-five were in health care. There were eighty-three business firms. Of this number seventy were restaurants, forty of which were in St. John's. Other business firms included nine confectioneries, one service station, one optician, and one engineering company. Only one laundry exists today; it is owned by Mr. William Ping who came to Newfoundland in 1931 and opened the laundry, *Snow White*, in 1946.¹⁵ This can be taken as representative of Chinese emigration in the period from the 1960s to the end of the 1980s in Newfoundland.

¹⁴Shih-Shan Henry Tsai. *The Chinese Experience in America*. Bloomington: (Indiana University Press, 1986): xii-xiii.

¹⁵Miriam Yu, "Ethnic Identity: the Chinese in Newfoundland," *Multiculturalism* 9(1986): 23.

B. The Old Immigrants in Newfoundland

a. *The Chinese Pioneers in Newfoundland*

Although Newfoundland is situated at the far eastern end of North America and surrounded by water, the Chinese have had their feet on this island for almost a whole century. The earliest accounts of the Chinese in Newfoundland appeared in two separate local newspapers, *The Evening Telegram* and *The Evening Herald*, which, in 1895, announced in the advertisement section the following news:

Sing Lee and Co. Chinese Laundry will be ready to receive work on Monday at their laundry, 37 New Gower Street, corner Holdsworth Street.¹⁶

According to other sources¹⁷ and oral testimonies¹⁸ from older members of the community, the first Chinese to come and live in Newfoundland was a somewhat adventurous and ambitious young man called Fong Choy.¹⁹ He was the owner of the above-mentioned Sing Lee Chinese laundry. However, the time of Fong Choy's arrival in Newfoundland is somewhat controversial. Two Chinese scholars, Miriam Yu and Margaret Chang, expressed in their respective articles²⁰ that Fong Choy came to Newfoundland in 1895 while the *Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador* indicates under the entry 'Chinese Community' that Fong Choy was already living in St. John's in

¹⁶*The Evening Herald* August 24, 1895.

¹⁷For example, Joseph R. Smallwood (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador* has the entry 'Chinese community' (Vol. I, p. 425.) in which some information about the Chinese can be found.

¹⁸An interview with William Ping. Tape number: 89002. The tape number used here and those used hereafter are only for the convenience of transcribing my fieldwork collection, they have not been deposited in MUNFLA.

¹⁹The name of Fong Choy should be, according to western culture, Choy Fong. Chinese traditions, however, require that family names are given first, then the individual names. In fact, not only in the early days, but now, many Chinese living in western countries still prefer to place their family names first, and be addressed in this way.

²⁰Miriam Yu's article: "Ethnic Identity: the Chinese in Newfoundland" in *Multiculturalism*, 9(1986): 19-26. Margaret Chang's article: "Chinese Pioneers in Newfoundland" in *The Evening Telegram*, 11 February 1978: 6.

1894. This minor difference is not of crucial importance; what is important is that Fong Choy was a historic figure--a real person in the history of Chinese Newfoundlanders. Fong Choy's landing in Newfoundland at the end of the 19th century symbolized the beginning of Chinese immigration to this province. There are a number of sources recording details about him and some other later Chinese arrivals.

Fieldwork research suggests that most of the older Chinese (68-82 years of age based on the people I interviewed) in Newfoundland to this day can still remember Fong Choy, whose name is more or less legendary amongst all the Chinese in the community. This is not only because they know he was the forefather of the Chinese in the province, but also because he was remembered as a somewhat larger-than-life figure, and the founder of a community. Margaret Chang, a former archivist in the Provincial Archive, has a more detailed story about Fong Choy in her article "Chinese Pioneers in Newfoundland."²¹ According to Chang's account, Fong Choy, having left his homeland, managed to board a ship for England and from there set out for Canada--to Montreal and Halifax. In both these places it is believed that he set up laundries, sold them to others, and ever restless, moved on to new opportunities. Leaving Halifax, he decided that Newfoundland presented yet another economic opportunity for him. So he settled down temporarily in St. John's where he set up a laundry. Not long after that he felt restless again, so he brought in a relative to run his laundry on a long-term basis and set out for Bermuda where the Fong family eventually became well established. It is in this way that the descendants of Fong Choy who reside in Newfoundland are thought to be related to the Fongs of Halifax and Bermuda.²²

One of my informants, Mr. William Ping, now the oldest member in the community, remembers Fong Choy as a very courageous, optimistic, and helpful 'countyfellow.'²³ It

²¹Margaret Chang, "Chinese Pioneers in Newfoundland," *The Evening Telegram* 11 February 1978: 6.

²²*Ibid.*

²³The word used by William Ping, referring to both Fong Choy and himself, who were both from the same county in Kuangdong Province--Kaiping.

was interesting that the two young Chinese met each other for the first time in Newfoundland rather than their hometown--Kaiping (Hoi Ping being the dialectal pronunciation). That was in 1931, when Fong Choy paid his second visit to St. John's from Bermuda where he had settled and had become most successful in business. Except for the oral records of Mr. Ping, there are very few documented materials available about how Fong Choy managed his laundry at New Gower Street and why he left Newfoundland. But he was not alone in running the laundry though his family was not then with him in St. John's. One item of evidence can be noted in *The Notable Events in the History of Newfoundland*²⁴ which says, under the date August 24th (1895): Tong Toi and Wang Chang opened laundry; first Chinamen in the country, 1895."²⁵ Here, the name Tong Toi refers to the same Fong Choy, the differences caused by different Chinese dialectal pronunciations. The former is the pronunciation of Kaiping county, the latter is the pronunciation in Taishan county; both counties are in the province of Guangdong--or Canton, in the Cantonese dialect. As for Wang Chang, there are very few people at present in the community who can provide any information about him. William Ping, who came to St. John's in the early nineteen-thirties, said that Wang Chang could have been a later owner of the Sing Lee laundry, who built up a solid business on the initial base established by Fong Choy and himself. This assumption is based on the fact that for more than thirty years the laundry and premises at the corner of Holdsworth and New Gower Street remained a Chinese stronghold.

In the same year of 1895, another Chinese laundry, the Kam Lung Laundry, was launched by three other Chinese newcomers named Hung Hic Kee, Lung Quon, and Song Dee. Due to their different cultures, it seems the local population had a lot of difficulty recognizing or understanding Chinese names and their other, directly translated (not by meaning) proper names. For example, both the Sing Lee and Kam Lung Laundries were

²⁴Patrick K. Devine. *The Notable Events in the History of Newfoundland*. St. John's: Devine & O'Mara, 1900.

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 159.

listed in the city directory of 1898 in which it is indicated that Sing Lee and Kam Lung were the names of individuals. In fact, they are the Cantonese pronunciation of *Xing Li* and *Jin Long* with certain Chinese meanings. Sing Lee means 'New interests' in Chinese while Kam Lung means 'Golden dragon.'

At the end of the last century there came another distinguished Chinese to Newfoundland who contributed much both to the Chinese community and to local government. Au Kim Lee came to Newfoundland in 1899, and eventually acted as liaison between the Chinese and such Newfoundland institutions as the justice system or Customs. The *Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador* has a similar account to the one William Ping told me during an interview,²⁶ that Au Kim Lee owned a laundry at first but in 1922 changed to the restaurant business (In 1981 his son was operating a restaurant and club service in Grand Falls). Kim Lee knew all the Chinese in St. John's and, since he was fluent in English and well-educated, helped them with letters and documents in English. During the Won Fen Game murder trial of 1922, Lee was a translator.²⁷ In 1905, having five years of residence, Au Kim Lee became the first naturalized Chinese in Newfoundland.

As far as occupations are concerned, there seem to have been no exceptions to the rule that all Chinese pioneers in Newfoundland, during the period 1895 to 1922, lived either by managing or working in laundries (there was no Chinese restaurant in Newfoundland before the 1920s). The reason is quite simple: managing a laundry in those days did not require much equipment or education. All one had to do was to work hard. Like Chinese immigrants elsewhere, the Chinese who came to Newfoundland came to work. Wherever the work was, there they went. As was recalled by some old Chinese Newfoundlanders, working in a laundry in those days was both tiring and boring. Here is an account by Mr. William Ping, the main character of 'The Last Chinese

²⁶The interview was conducted at William Ping's home, 21 Cairo Street, St. John's, on November 28, 1989. Tape #: 89002.

²⁷Joseph R. Smallwood (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador* (Vol. I) 1967: 425.

Laundryman'²⁸ in Newfoundland, when I interviewed him in December 1989:

...work in the laundry is very very hard and difficult. I come to Newfoundland to do the laundry in 1921. I was a teenager then, but had to work round the clock often... I began to work in the morning, say, eight o'clock in the morning till two o'clock the next morning. I did the laundry with my tears... I work in the Sing Lee laundry and never get a good sleep... sometimes I sleep on chairs... no leisure time, no... (Interview with William Ping on November 28, 1989. Tape number: 89002.)

However, as we can readily observe today, there have been both positive and dramatic changes in the occupations of Chinese Newfoundlanders. Aside from such 'blue collar' occupations as restaurant workers or even owners (many Chinese restaurant owners in Newfoundland are their own cooks, Magic Wok Eatery on Water Street in St. John's being one such example), waiters and waitresses, laundrymen and so on, there have appeared such 'white collar' occupations among the community members as professors, doctors, engineers, researchers and businessmen. Such changes took almost a century's struggle to bring about.

b. Coping With Racism in the Early Years

Racial discrimination has long existed in many western countries. As pointed out by Ban Seng Hoe, "Historically, the Chinese in Canada lived in a racially hostile environment in which they were legally excluded, economically discriminated against,

²⁸The Last Chinese Laundryman, dir. Fred Hollingshurst, MUN, 1988.

socially isolated and politically persecuted."²⁹

Dating back to the earliest time when large groups of Chinese began to migrate abroad, we see that in practically every white country a law was enacted prohibiting or restricting Chinese immigration. In Canada, "The Chinese Immigration Act," which came into force on October 2, 1923, had the effect of practically stopping the immigration of Chinese to Canada. The act abolished the system of admitting Chinese upon payment of a head tax, and limited admission to merchants and students.³⁰ Examining such documented materials reveals that during the early years of Chinese immigration, institutional racism through the passage of specific government legislation was a ready device that prevented or hindered the Chinese from engaging in particular occupations and participating fully in Canadian society. While some acts were overturned by Ottawa, others prevented the Chinese from, for example, buying land or diverting water for agricultural purposes.

The following facts and figures provide certain evidence about how Chinese immigrants were treated in the early years of entry to Canada. According to the Sessional Papers of the British Columbia Legislature of 1920,³¹ a fifteen dollar license fee was levied to deter the Chinese from mining for gold in 1884. Attempts by labour unions, politicians and the media were also made to systematically exclude the Chinese from certain occupations and from Canadian society. Until the 1930s, Chinese-owned businesses could not hire white women. In 1919, Ottawa imposed the first step leading to the eventual 1923 Exclusion Act. Any potential immigrants could then be denied entrance to Canada as a consequence of their customs, habits, mode of life, style of property holding, or their inability to become readily assimilated. This was directly aimed at the Chinese immigrant. According to the above-mentioned documents, the Chinese

²⁹Ban Seng Hoe, "Asian-Canadian Folklore Studies: an Interdisciplinary and Cross-cultural Approach." in *Canadian Folklore Perspectives*. (St. John's: Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1978):41.

³⁰Hopkins, J.C. *The Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs*, 1924-25: 195.

³¹British Columbia Legislative Assembly, Sessional Papers, 1902, Chapter 7-12. MUN microfilm 3199.

were denied the right to vote in federal elections in 1920. Early exclusions from provincial elections were made in British Columbia and Saskatchewan. Since they were not voting citizens, the Chinese were excluded from such professions as law, teaching, pharmacy, and the like whether they were educated or not. A Chinese professor at MUN told me during an interview that there were very few Chinese professionals even during the 1950s. Moreover, special laws were enacted to prevent white women from being employed by Chinese businesses, particularly in restaurants. One of my old informants, Mr. Au, recalled that his father's restaurant, formerly located on Water Street, developed slowly and with difficulty simply because his father could not by law hire a waitress as both a helper and a 'customer-solicitor.'³² Although Mr. Au could not explain why Chinese business could not hire white women in the twenties, I assume that the law was based on hostility and distrust toward the Chinese immigrants at that time. The consequence of the discrimination was not difficult to imagine. Likewise, it is easy to understand that, based on the fact that racial discrimination exerted its widespread influence, why the Chinese were forced to live in particular areas or Chinatowns in some of the larger cities such as Vancouver, Winnipeg and Montreal, and to establish such institutions as the Chinese Benevolent Association (particularly in Vancouver during the 1920s) for their own protection and survival. According to a survey conducted by a Chinese priest of the United Church on Gower Street, most of the local inhabitants were not inclined to have Chinese friends even before the 1950s.

Here, the point I wish to emphasize is that it was not the Chinese who could be completely blamed for not assimilating into Canadian society. They were unwelcome in the first place as members of the human race since white Canadians perceived the Chinese as an inferior species. In the words of Justice Gray, an American racist, the Chinese were merely "living machines."³³ With the doors barred to full participation in

³²It is believed, at least by many Chinese restaurant owners, that women are better than men in soliciting customers. Therefore, to make a restaurant business prosper, waitresses are necessary and important.

³³Persia C. Campbell, *Chinese Coolie Emigration* (Taipei: Chengwen Publishing Co., 1970) 45.

Canadian society, the Chinese had to retreat into their own communities. This perhaps also accounts for one of the reasons why Chinatowns grew up in relatively large cities such as Vancouver, Toronto and Winnipeg, where the Chinese were more densely populated.

The Chinese were not restricted to laundries or restaurants. According to the Sessional Papers of the British Columbia Legislature of 1902,³⁴ there was a time when the Chinese were engaged in other types of employment despite the many disadvantages facing them. For example, according to the Sessional Papers from the British Columbia Legislative Assembly, "the Chinese had once monopolized the market gardening business. Up to 600 were employed in the coal mines on the west coast. One thousand were working in Placer mines with about 100 working for themselves either on royalty or under lease, and 183 were in the single and bolt business. There were Chinese workers in the salmon canning industry. Of 14 Chinese tailor shops with 82 employees, 8 shops made clothes for White Canadians and the rest for Chinese monopolized by the Japanese. There were approximately 1,000 persons engaged in the laundry business and a few Chinese were also in the production of footwear and cigars among other small trades."³⁵ Many Chinese, therefore, were engaged in some entrenched and financially rewarding enterprises. But it was because of their competitiveness that racial discriminators sought to deprive them of a productive living and, at the same time, relegate them to such menial service jobs as washing and cooking.

In Newfoundland racial discrimination has always been felt by most of the older members of the community, especially during the early years following their arrival. My major informant on this topic, Mr. William Ping, recalled the appalling racism that prevailed at the time when, to prevent a flood of immigrants, an annual "head tax" was imposed on the Chinese. According to Mr. Ping's recollections this tax began at \$10,

³⁴British Columbia Legislative Assembly, Sessional Papers, 1902, Chapter 7-21. MUN microfilm 3199.

³⁵*Ibid.*

increased to \$50, then to \$100 and, by 1904, to \$500 a year. In 1923, the government passed the Chinese Exclusion Act to stop Chinese arrivals in Canada.³⁶ Not until 1947 was this highly discriminatory and unfair measure repealed. Mr. Ping himself came to Newfoundland in 1931 and had paid a \$300 head tax. During one of my interviews with Mr. and Mrs. Ping, Mrs. Ping, who is a white Canadian, told me that because Chinese women were not allowed into Newfoundland until 1949, the men led a very lonely, isolated existence, made even more desolate by intense bigotry and discrimination. Many men who came during the last years of the 19th century and the beginning of this century either remained single for many years during their stay in Canada or eventually went back to their homeland for marriage. Mr. Ping, a 'lucky man' as he called himself, had married a Canadian girl in the prime of his life. However, there were dozens of Chinese males who arrived at the same time as Mr. Ping came to this province (1930s), but very few of them were as fortunate as Mr. Ping, who had successfully established both his business and a family in Newfoundland. Many men of his age (Mr. Ping was 82 in 1990) had earned adequate money but could not endure the isolated life in a foreign land, and eventually went back to their homes in Guangdong Province.

Concerning the "head tax" issue, Newfoundland's *Evening Telegram* carried a report on April 19, 1985:

Chinese Man Seeking Refund on "Head Tax"

A 75-year-old China man in St. John's is still trying to get a refund on a \$300 "head tax" he paid to the government of Newfoundland to enter the province in 1921. William Ping said Wednesday Federal Justice Minister John Crosbie has informed him that he will be looking into the matter. Ping has also enlisted the aid of St. John's East MP Jim McGrath in trying to get back the \$300, which only Chinese or other Asian immigrants had to pay to immigrate to enter Newfoundland. The tax was first instituted in 1906 and was lifted when Newfoundland joined with Canada in 1949. Ping has said he is not asking for a refund for the sake of the money, but rather he is doing it for all the Chinese people who had to pay the "head tax."

³⁶Although Newfoundland did not enter confederation until 1949, the Chinese entering Newfoundland until then were also required to pay a head tax.

The pioneer Chinese in Newfoundland, seen as 'intruders' and called 'pigtails',³⁷ encountered racial problems almost from the moment they landed on this sparsely populated island. The earliest record which can be traced concerning conflict between the Chinese and local Newfoundlanders appeared in *The Evening Herald*, September 21, 1897, with the author speaking sympathetically about the 'celestials':

The Chinese here now are not to be tampered with and unless the police put a stop to the petty persecution of them a fatality might be possible. Crowds of urchins assemble round their premises and torment them beyond endurance. Yesterday evening boys pelted mud at their windows and the celestials issued forth in all their glory and as the boys fled there was a regular fusillade of flat irons sent after them.

It is not difficult to imagine what consequences there would be for the Chinese involved in such friction with the locals in a foreign land. In fact, the result of the above-mentioned incident was that two Chinese laundries were heavily damaged and two Chinese named Kam Lee and Kong Wing were arrested by the police. Another major recorded incident took place during mid-June of 1900, a period in which anti-Chinese sentiment was being stimulated almost daily by detailed newspaper reports. Even *The Evening Herald* showed its strong discrimination against the Chinese, for the former term 'celestials' used for the Chinese was substituted by 'pigtails.' With "An Act Respecting the Immigration of Chinese Persons" passed in 1906 by the Newfoundland Legislature, there began a period of hard times for the Chinese in Newfoundland as well as those still in China but wishing to emigrate to Canada. They viewed the year 1906 as the end of the era of an 'open' Newfoundland. No doubt, the effect of the discrimination was positive in that it stopped the Chinese from coming to the island, and for a couple of decades after 1906, the Chinese community in Newfoundland grew very slowly. Figures obtained from the fieldwork of four Chinese students at MUN show that during the 1920s there were only seventy-odd Chinese in Newfoundland, and twenty of these belonged to the Hong

³⁷Chinese men were pigtailed in the nineteenth century. I assume that this nickname for the Chinese was used not long after the Chinese immigrants came to the North America in the last century. Another word, 'celestial,' was also used referring to Chinese at the time. It probably derives from the phrase 'The Celestial Empire' which refers to feudal China, with a hint of irony.

clan.³⁸

However, it seems true that these early immigrants preferred to endure the many difficulties of living in a foreign land rather than stay at home with hunger and natural disasters. Thus, the question of understanding and dealing with racism tends to be complicated. For example, as far as I have been able to ascertain, a small number of immigrants in Newfoundland, in recalling the past, said that nothing disappointed them in Canada. From my observation, they did not want to talk about racial discrimination, not because they had not experienced it, or because its topic was too distasteful to talk about, but because they were not willing to squarely face reality. In other words, they tried to shun what they could not change, and when they had to face racism, they sought solace in traditional Confucianism³⁹ to console themselves and escape from the bitterness of life. These were the people who came to Canada with low expectations and ambitions and were quite satisfied with whatever they found in Canada. Here are some examples of their comments about racial discrimination:

Informant one: *I came to Canada for employment. Now I work as a mechanic and I don't care if I am not treated equally by the whites here. I work and then go home. I have some friends from my own country and they are nice people. Other things like discrimination or prejudice don't matter to me.* (Based on an interview with X, on October 11, 1989. Tape number: 89004.)

Informant two: *I don't have any university degree like your guys do. Now I work as a laborer in a big store. I work overtime sometime. I make some money and take care of my family. I am not disappointed with some whites discriminating against me, because I sometimes despise them too (laugh). So, that's equal. So, you don't feel discrimination...* (Based on an interview with Y, on October 16, 1989. Tape number: 89004.)

Informant three: *Life is comparatively better here than in my county in Guangdong. I work, earn money and take care of my family. My children get good education here. I didn't come here to look for equality. As long as I have a steady job and my family is alright, I don't care for anything else.* (Based on an interview with Z, on October 18, 1989. Tape number: 89007.)

³⁸Jane Hong et al. *Chinese Community in Newfoundland*. (unpublished project report, Centre for Newfoundland Studies, MUN) 1975.

³⁹One of Confucius' principal teachings is to exercise great restraint no matter how bad one's situation in life might be.

At present in the Newfoundland Chinese community, which is a comparatively larger community than that of other visible minorities, it might be said to some extent that the Chinese, though partly influenced by their root culture, are still barred from integration into the larger society more by economics than by ideology. Their low income results from the fact that as Chinese they still, to a certain extent, suffer from past discrimination and from disadvantages in education and especially occupational opportunity. My observation is that even for those who have made successful occupational adjustments, race is still a factor that cannot be ignored. It enters into social relations. For example, a successful engineer is still called a Chinese engineer, a highly respected physician a Chinese physician, and the like. Frequent reminders of their racial origin make many Chinese immigrants believe that they can probably never be seen as equals in a white country.

In general, anti-Chinese agitation in Canada, which culminated in the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1923 and resulted in decades of anti-Chinese violence, segregation, and discrimination, was a complex phenomenon. However, it is encouraging to note that the situation today is quite different from what it was yesterday, although people still expect improvements. With the help of provincial and federal governments and a 'multi-cultural' policy, the Chinese community has developed quickly. The Chinese in Newfoundland look forward to a further development of diversity, equality, and community in the province and to firmly establish their places in various institutions in the Canadian Mosaic. Just as Ban Seng Hoe remarked: "Post-war changes in the Chinese immigration law, and the reduction of racial discrimination have not only enabled Chinese family members to get together, but have also enhanced their opportunities to participate in national cultural life. At the same time, surviving folk traditions are given a functional and a Canadian justification. For example, the celebration of a Chinese New Year is used as an occasion to communicate with members of the larger society."⁴⁰

⁴⁰Hoe, Ban Seng. "Chinese Community and Cultural Traditions in Quebec City," *Canadian Folklore canadien*, 7(1985): 109.

c. Family Life and Social Activities

To begin, I think it necessary to emphasize the concept of family, which to every Chinese, whether living in China or anywhere else in the world, is vitally important. This is because most families still hold their 'home belief' (*Jiating Guannian* in Chinese, which means 'family is the centre') of family life, and even the family living pattern--the co-habitation of different generations. Take Albert Hong's family for example. There were eight people of three generations living in a large house in Mount Pearl, St. John's when I interviewed him on November 23, 1989. Albert, aged twenty-seven, was the oldest son in the family. When he married a Chinese in 1987, the girl came to live in Albert's home, which is a Chinese marriage tradition. Albert's father died in 1984, and his mother, according to Albert, will live with them for the rest of her life. Albert's younger brother got married in 1989 and, like Albert, also lives with his mother in the same house. Both Albert and his brother told me that it was not because they did not have money to buy another house, but because they "...were used to living with mum." The findings in this case are in accordance with traditional Chinese family life, that is, filial duty to parents being a major theme of family life for the Chinese. Although there are some Chinese families in Newfoundland whose younger generations, for one reason or another, after getting married, do not live with their parents, they do frequently visit the parents, and they consider such visits as their duty. It should be emphasized at the same time that no feature of Chinese traditional culture is more striking than the importance attached to the family. The family has, of course, always been basic to society throughout the world. But family relationships are worked out so elaborately for the Chinese that they tend not to change as they move from their homeland to other countries.

Even far from their homeland, as I have discovered in this community, the concept of family is solidly rooted in the mind of the immigrant Chinese in Newfoundland. The family is a tightly knit group. Each member has certain rights and obligations according to sex, age, and generation. The heavy stress laid upon loyalty to the family and, in particular, the loyalty of a son to his father, or filial piety, is the cement which holds the family together. Together the family shares work and hardships, if there are any.

Influenced by Confucianism, this is the tradition which every Chinese tries himself or herself to maintain wherever he or she goes. Only under this ordered principle (loyalty, fidelity, and sharing hardships in a family,) could there be the possibility of Chinese family life.

Another aspect of their way of life which excites comment is the Chinese sense of duty to families. In the early days, the ratio between males and females in the community was as many as hundreds to one or, until even as late as 1950 in this province, dozens to one. During that period, the vast majority of Chinese in Newfoundland were here therefore without their families, but the ties of family were no less strong. They had families back home in China; parents, brothers, sisters, and in more than fifty percent of cases, wives. Many of them would work hard, very hard in laundries, restaurants, mines, and fisheries so that they could regularly send money back to their aged parents or wives in China to bring up the children. This sense of family was what the Chinese took for granted.

A third feature of the Chinese family in Newfoundland is that marriages of the younger generation are no longer parentally arranged. It is true that parents are consulted, and parental consent is still very important, but parents no longer have the entire responsibility. In this also, the Chinese in Newfoundland are not different from their educated counterparts in the land of their ancestors. My comment on this feature of the Chinese family in Newfoundland is that younger generations have been influenced by and assimilated to western practice.

Community-based social activities mainly take place during major traditional

celebrations. The Chinese New Year,⁴¹ the Flower Service,⁴² and the Moon Festival⁴³ are the main occasions for members of the community to get together and share social activities. All these activities are now held under the auspices of the Chinese Association of Newfoundland and Labrador⁴⁴ which was formally established in this province in 1976. Celebration of the Chinese New Year is the most formal custom, with the Moon Festival being the next. A glance at the expenses spent on each of these occasions by the Association provides a more concrete idea. The New Year celebration expense in 1989 was \$8,593.19, the Moon Festival was \$2,136.00, and the Flower Service was \$948.17.⁴⁵ For the celebration of Christmas, however, the expense for the Association was only \$596.48. The Flower Service to Chinese Newfoundlanders is somewhat like All Souls Day for Christians. It is held on the Sunday after Regatta Day in August. On that day each year, descendants of the deceased would travel a considerable distance from other communities throughout the province to St. John's for this particular observance, and later attend a social gathering for the whole community. It is always a big occasion for members of the community.

⁴¹It is the most celebrated festival by Chinese. According to the Chinese lunar calendar, the Chinese New Year's Day may fall on any day in January or February in a given year. Traditionally, celebration of the festival lasts five days. There are hundreds of customs and rituals relating to this festival.

⁴²The ceremony of the Flower Service is equivalent to that of the Qing Ming Festival in China. The Flower Service in Newfoundland takes place on the first Sunday in August while the Qing Ming Festival in China always falls on the fourth day of April. The time difference is caused by Newfoundland's special climate, for the beginning of April in Newfoundland is still somewhat chilly while in southeast China greenery and flowers are already everywhere.

⁴³According to the Chinese lunar calendar, this festival falls on the 15th day of August when the moon is at its fullest. It is also an age-old tradition that everyone should have moon cake on this day.

⁴⁴During the early 1980s, the Chinese Association of Newfoundland and Labrador was a complete organization which set up seven committees: a Ladies' Committee, an Advisory Committee, a Supervisory Committee, an Entertainment Committee, a Recreation Committee, an Education Committee and a Planning and Development Committee. Executives are elected biennially. The first president was Dr. Kim Hong, a radiologist, succeeded by Dr. Miriam Yu, a professor of Educational Psychology, Mr. Daniel Wong, an engineer, Dr. Ni I-Hsun, a marine researcher, and Mr. Mel Hong, a high school principal.

⁴⁵The figures provided here are from the Statement of the Chinese Association of Newfoundland and Labrador in 1989.

There are other special group-based social gatherings aside from the aforementioned occasions. These are relatively informal social activities such as a tea-party after a church congregation on Sundays; a birthday or a wedding party of an individual within a certain group of people; or a table game of gambling between close friends during holidays. Here, I want to emphasize that the Chinese in the community also take an active part in the social activities of other races, including the whites'. Many of them have actually merged into the mainstream of society, and they are hardly recognizable as Chinese except by their appearance. These are some of the old immigrants and "CBCs" (Chinese Born Canadians)--the young generations of Chinese origin, and descendants of the Chinese pioneers in Newfoundland even though they have never been to China. I will talk about these groups of people shortly.

d. Traditional Belief and Religion

Religion, organized and unorganized, is an important part of the life of the Chinese community. Confucianism, with its quasi-religious aspects associated mainly with belief in the duties of the living towards the dead ancestors, permeates the life of all immigrants. Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism are usually spoken of as the major religions of China. However, underlying all three systems is what the folklorist would call folk religion, that is, the local or family beliefs and practices of the common people. My observation is that of these beliefs and practices, the most important is the expression of reverence through the worship of ancestors. Ancestor worship is the oldest and most widespread of Chinese religious practices. Whether at the ancestral shrine set in a special place at home or at the grave mound of the family, this religious practice is a demonstration of the belief that the living can talk directly with the dead, and that the dead, though living in another world, can influence the events in this world.

During the entire 'Qing Ming' period (roughly, from the beginning of the last week in July to the end of the first week in August), offerings of food and incense are made at the tombs in the Mount Pleasant Cemetery at the west end of St. John's by members of the respective families. Most Chinese in this province are buried in the Mount Pleasant

Cemetery. The reason, as I have indicated previously, is that most pioneer Chinese in the province were converted to Christianity not long after their arrival; further, most of them belonged to the United Church, which operates the Cemetery. So, there is a special corner which is provided for the deceased Chinese. In 1981, a monument was erected in the Cemetery on which was inscribed, "In memory of those friends and relatives who have gone before."

However, the ritual patterns in Newfoundland, as I found out during my participation in the Flower Service, have deviated somewhat from their counterparts in China. For example, it is a Chinese custom of long standing to have a picnic at the cemetery right after the offering is made. Usually some of the offerings are left on the graves or burned with paper money, but most of the offerings make up part of the picnic. Chinese Newfoundlanders no longer have such a picnic. Those who have a meal together following the visitation will drive back to one of their homes and have refreshments there. Usually, a general community party sponsored by the Association is held at another place right after the Flower Service. For example, the community party in 1988 after the service was held in the gym at Beaconsfield High School with various song and dance performances.

Concerning the issue of religion, one point is worth mentioning here. Chinese Newfoundlanders are very sensitive to their beliefs being exposed before non-Chinese. During my recent visit to the cemetery where the usual Chinese offerings were made to the dead, I met several Chinese professionals, one of whom was a Christian. They knew of my interest and discussed some of the ritual details with me. On separate occasions two of them said, "You know, I am kind of embarrassed to be seen by *haole* (Canadian) friends when we do this," referring to the food and paper money offerings. My feeling is that the average Chinese, whatever his ritual observances, usually feels little or no defensiveness towards other Chinese. He knows that he will not be the object of disapproval or contempt whether or not the spectators share his customs. On the other hand, he is only too aware of the hauteur with which the average white Canadian reacts to religious views and activities different from his own.

The aforementioned case is only one example of folk religion beliefs among the immigrants. On this topic, it appears that many older Chinese in Newfoundland have retained elements of what we might term 'superstitions.' They still keep many old beliefs and customs which were passed down to them from their parents' and grandparents' generations. For example, along with ancestor worship, the Chinese long ago developed a special reverence for nature--for the mountains and rivers and the soil which they believed had spirits and souls of their own. These powerful animistic forces, both good and evil, which they believe are present in the land and the waters, have to be appeased either by sacrifice or by being given thanks to in countless ways. For example, no marriage date can be selected or birthday celebrated without considering these spirits. The advice of experts who claim knowledge of the spirits should be sought before a building is erected or before a family grave is dug. The date and day of these decisions are all based on the Chinese lunar calendar. One of my informants told me that one of her daughters had a car accident which caused the death of the baby she was carrying in 1986. The reason is, she believes, that her daughter did not follow the appropriate date of her marriage as had been advised by the spirits, which had instead been set by the United Church, thus offending the spirits, whose punishment cannot be escaped once an offence has been committed in their sight.

Most of the early immigrants were either Buddhist or Taoist. But not long after they arrived in Newfoundland, most of them converted to Christianity. This assimilation is not without reason. As Joseph Smallwood notes in the *Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador*, the Chinese have had a long affiliation with Christian churches in Newfoundland. The first connection was made with the Wesley Church in St. John's in the mid 1920s when A.V. Martin set up a Sunday School for the Chinese. A former Memorial University student, Jane Hong, and her friends, indicated in their unpublished article that during the early years of immigration most Chinese did not know English at all and Mr. Martin set up a Sunday school to give the Chinese a chance to learn English. Classes were set up in the Wesley United Church and each Chinese was taught individually by a lady volunteer. Since a knowledge of English was essential for a

foreigner staying in an English-speaking country, it is very likely that the Sunday school attracted the Chinese people to the United Church. In the 1950s there was a shift for the Chinese to the Cochrane Street United Church when David Decker, Director of the Red Cross, formed the Young Chinese Christian Association. In the early 1960s, initiated by members of the St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, the United Church, and Chinese leaders, a Committee on social and cultural affairs was formed aiming to help the Chinese become a more integrated part of the community.

Aside from the help of Canadian clergy, the Chinese here also have their priest. A memoir from Miriam Yu recalled that in the early 1970s Rev. Levi Mehaney of the Gower Street United Church, joined by Rev. Bruce Gregersen in the early 1980s, developed many activities and worked very closely with the Chinese community. In 1986, after a need assessment study by Rev. David Wan of Calgary, the Chinese Outreach Ministry of the Gower Street United Church was established with financial support from the National United Church for a period of three years. Rev. Kim Wong, who came originally from Hong Kong, took office in August 1986. His major duties were to officiate Sunday worship service, funerals, weddings, baptisms, and home and hospital visits for members of the Chinese community.

While there are devotees and even fanatics among Chinese Newfoundlanders, I think it is true to say that for most Chinese, formal religion is a somewhat pragmatic activity. Folk beliefs, on the other hand, are dominant in the mind of Chinese immigrants. Maybe the gods, like the ancestors, will answer one's prayers or supplications, but it is better to accept those rituals as a perhaps necessary insurance in this life and in the life to come. In general, religion, be it Christianity or whatsoever, is an inseparable part of life to most Chinese in the community.

C. The New Immigrants in Newfoundland

a. Status of the New Immigrants

After 1949, direct migration from mainland China to Canada ceased due to the communist takeover of power. New Chinese immigrants now came from Hong Kong and former European colonies in Southeast Asia such as Brunei, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and the Philippines. These were the descendants of earlier Chinese settlers in Southeast Asia. They represent, as I classify them, the first generation of the new immigrants. Having been brought up in Westernized societies, and having received Western educations, they may not have had the sojourning mentality⁴⁶ of their forefathers.

In fact, many Chinese Newfoundlanders had decided to make their permanent homes in Canada even before they emigrated. A survey of the community conducted by Jane Hong and three other students at MUN in 1975 shows that during the mid-seventies there were 404 Chinese males and 376 females in Newfoundland, which was quite a change from the situation in the early years of this century when men made up the entire Chinese community in Newfoundland. Miriam Yu indicated in her article that Au Kim Lee's wife came in 1927 and "... was the first and only Chinese woman living in the colony before 1949 when Newfoundland became the tenth province of Canada."⁴⁷ So it is possible to argue that the gradual balancing of the sex ratio and the emergence of conjugal families between the 1960s and the 1980s reflect the different value system of the new Chinese immigrants from that of the old immigrants in Canada on the whole, and this is also true in the province of Newfoundland.

One prominent feature of the status of new immigrants is that in recent years students have constituted a large percentage of them. As Memorial University has

⁴⁶It refers to the most common feeling of the old immigrants that they were from China.

⁴⁷Miriam Yu, "Ethnic Identity: the Chinese in Newfoundland," *Multiculturalism* 9(1986): 21.

become better known internationally, it has attracted more and more Chinese students as well as scholars to Newfoundland. During the mid-seventies there were only forty Chinese students at MUN. But now there are two hundred and twenty-eight,⁴⁸ over one third of them in the School of Graduate Studies. Further, there are now about twenty⁴⁹ Chinese professors who are either teaching or doing research at MUN. A rough estimate shows that over ninety-five per cent of Chinese graduates are from mainland China while Chinese undergraduates are mostly from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, and Macao. Over ninety per cent of Chinese students at MUN hold student visas, with only a very small fraction the overall enrolment being Newfoundland-born Chinese.

Due to the different backgrounds of the students, there exist language gaps among them. It is true that everybody speaks Chinese, but given the numerous and often mutually incomprehensible dialects used, English tends to become the common language among them when communication is necessary. However, at the same time, many of them find it difficult to freely and adequately express themselves in English. Therefore, those who speak the same dialect usually stay together, forming many cliques--smaller sub-groups among the Chinese. This is so true that many Chinese students, at least those from mainland China, often deliberately communicate in dialects other than Mandarin or English, which is a compulsory language in Chinese universities. For example, those who came from Shanghai, Hunan, often stick together, to share a further sense of warmth and 'safety' themselves.

On the other hand, there are religious groups among the new immigrants. For example, many Christian students are grouped together under the Chinese Christian Fellowship Society which was founded by Dr. Tse many years ago. Dr. Tse himself is a medical doctor with a high reputation in the community. Through his encouragement and arrangement, there are about thirty students, mainly from Hong Kong, Malaysia, and

⁴⁸The numbers are provided by Student Affairs at MUN in June, 1990: 82 graduate students; 146 undergraduate students; 228 students in total.

⁴⁹The figure is provided by the School of Graduate Studies, MUN in June, 1990.

Singapore, as well as a certain number of immigrants from the community who regularly participate in church activities every week. Besides Sunday services and Bible study gatherings, there are many other social activities in the Society, mostly recreational entertainments such as outings, fishing trips and so on which are particularly fit for the young.

Aside from those with student status, there are others who are landed immigrants or permanent residents in the community. These are usually the ones who came to Canada to work rather than study. Many of them were sponsored by their relatives. Like their older generations, they are hardworking, ambitious, and diligent; most of them are educated, and capable of speaking English. These people usually do not have much contact with the students due to the fact that their work always keeps them busy.

b. Celebrations and Entertainment

Although I have already mentioned in the previous section some social activities in the community, it is still necessary to elaborate a few points which are related to their cultural heritage, especially with discussion of the ethnic aspects, so as to present an even clearer picture of the Chinese in Newfoundland. Concerning this point, the celebration of the Chinese New Year is what I wish to emphasize here.

The major celebration for the Chinese in the course of a year is the Chinese New Year; it is of course not exclusive to the Chinese in Newfoundland or those living elsewhere outside China. In Newfoundland, usually, the celebration can be viewed from two contexts: 1) the family circle and, 2) the community circle, which has always been sponsored by the official body--the Chinese Association of Newfoundland and Labrador, ever since its formal founding in 1976.

The new immigrants are more active in participating in celebration activities than their older generations. My observations suggest, however, that Chinese Newfoundlanders have few differences in the way they celebrate holidays or other traditional occasions from those who are in China.

1990 is the Year of the Horse for the Chinese. "Ma" (the pronunciation of "horse" in Mandarin) is the seventh animal in the ancient Chinese zodiacal system (The zodiacal order of succession is rat, ox, tiger, hare, dragon, serpent, horse, ram, monkey, rooster, dog and boar). The way a traditional festival is celebrated is largely based on a nation's folk beliefs. The Chinese New Year is the happiest and most enjoyable celebration for the Chinese in Newfoundland. Traditionally, employees during this time receive bonuses from their employers if both sides are Chinese, and debts and grievances are cleared. Families celebrate by visiting relatives and exchanging gifts. There are parties, family get-togethers. On New Year's Day, children receive special attention. They get new clothes, play games and eat their favourite foods to their heart's desire. In addition, they receive "red packets"⁵⁰ containing money (see sample on next page) from their parents, relatives, or from visiting friends and couples. The tradition of giving those "red packets" to children has the special meaning of bringing good luck and best wishes to them in the coming year. In fact, the customs practised on New Year's Day by most Chinese in Newfoundland, just like those in their homeland, are basically the same. the way of celebration is strictly observed according to tradition.

⁵⁰Red, in the traditional Chinese view, symbolizes luck, kindness, and success.

(A TYPICAL "RED PACKET")



My informant Susan Lee told me that her family has lived in St. John's for eighteen years, and every year the family celebrates the Chinese New Year just as it did in the original home in Guangdong. If they cannot buy a certain item (e.g. a special candle used on the shrine) which is necessary during the celebration, they will order it from Toronto or even from Hong Kong. This family's attitude, like most others in the community, leads me to conclude that Chinese become more sensitive to their own cultural traits and customs the longer they reside in a society in which most people practice different customs. The main reason is that, as I mentioned previously, Chinese are taught generation after generation that they should pay respect to their traditional culture which their ancestors passed on to them, so whenever and wherever they go they do not forget to keep their traditional culture and customs, especially in an environment in which their ethnic traits are otherwise easily lost. Perhaps a convincing argument concerning this is by illustrating the celebration of the Chinese New Year by Chinese.

During the 1990 celebration of the Chinese New Year, which traditionally lasts five days, I participated in the celebrations of a few Chinese families in St. John's. From our talks, I realized that most Chinese families I visited tried to maintain their traditions. Some parents urged their children born in Canada to particularly observe, participate in, and preserve their traditions. For example, during the festival in Susan Lee's home, ancestors and elders were honoured, and red scrolls inscribed with phrases of happiness, prosperity and longevity adorned the walls of the home. It is an age-old tradition to wish long life to the parents. Knives and scissors at home were put away temporarily so that no one would cut away the continuity of luck for the coming new year. Beliefs such as the requirement that brooms are to be hidden away are maintained, since they may 'sweep away good luck.' During New Year's visitations, one is obliged to say the traditional formal greeting 'Gong Xi Fa Cai' which means 'wishing you prosperity and happiness in your future.' An important New Year's tradition observed in St. John's is the Lion Dance. The history of this performance is a matter of speculation, but the Lion Dance usually involves a two man team in an exotic lion costume which dances and performs acrobatic feats to music. Such a dance was the prelude to the two big parties I attended in

the 1990 celebration. The Lion Dance is a traditional Chinese dance, and the Chinese here use its performance to emphasize their identity.

One important activity which should not go unnoted concerns the fact that almost all old Chinese immigrants are fond of gambling. They seem to gamble whenever they can find time to do so. This is also accepted by some new immigrants who come to work in Newfoundland. The habit of gambling has a long history for the old immigrants. It stems in part from their social position; and it also corresponds to a traditional belief that luck as well as effort play a major part in changing men's fortunes. However, it should be noted that gambling is a 'relic' which points to one of the few recreations available to the early immigrants who lived apart from their wives and children and who were denied opportunities for or access to other pastimes. Nowadays, gambling for the immigrants is largely recreational. Besides, the amount of money they put on the gambling table is relatively small, quite unlike the past, when every gambler hoped to make a fortune out of the game. Although it seems that gambling is closely associated with the Chinese, there are very few, if any, Chinese students who gamble during their leisure time. Instead, they prefer romantic parties, seasonal outings, and even nostalgic gatherings. Another reason for them to shun gambling tables is their economic condition.

c. Differences from the Old Immigrants

New immigrants in the Chinese community do have many distinguishing characteristics compared with the old immigrants in the province. As Dr. Miriam Yu described:

The contemporary immigrants are from the cities of Hong Kong or Southeast Asia. They were assessed as potential immigrants by the "point system" criteria on the same basis as all other immigrants from other parts of the world. Their education, training and sophistication allow them relatively easy entrance and adaptation into Canadian society and lifestyle. They engage in a broad range of occupations in a variety of contexts. They are professionals rather than service-oriented in laundries, restaurants, domestic labour or unskilled labour in mines and other industries. With the growing tolerance of the public and multiculturalism as national policy, Chinese Canadians in Newfoundland are able to participate fully in the social and economic life of the province and to enjoy equal rights. They are quite affluent and live very decent and

healthy lives. They are encouraged to assimilate Canadian culture and on the other hand, to preserve their cultural heritage. Their ethnic association aims not for separateness but togetherness with their own ethnic group and those who support them. Their activities are means of sharing culture and enjoyment with friends.⁵¹

Taking a closer look, I found that there are some other striking differences between the old and the new immigrants in the Chinese community. These differences are mainly caused by the age difference, which is most obvious, although not all old immigrants are necessarily 'old'; educational differences; and social environment differences.

First of all, most old immigrants are either retired or still busy with their business. Those who are retired are old and generally illiterate people. So, most new immigrants, especially the students, rarely find the time or suitable topics to talk about with them. For example, business, the household, and gambling are common topics the old immigrants often talk about, while the new immigrants are fond of talking about contemporary international and social issues such as the Meech Lake Accord, and changes in the communist world. Besides, new immigrants are interested in group and outdoor activities, quite unlike the old who tend to stay in their business or home most of the time. Therefore, the two different groups of people actually do not have much contact with each other in the community, each having a prejudiced attitude towards the other. For example, old immigrants often complain that new immigrants, especially students, are too ignorant, eager to pursue fancy things such as sports cars, blue jeans, girl friends, and the like; while new immigrants think the old immigrants are 'out-of-date,' and too miserly, because they save money only to buy houses and seldom buy a bottle of beer for themselves.

Secondly, most new immigrants are educated, have already had at least a high school education, while most of the old immigrants, who came before 1949,⁵² are illiterate. This situation is closely linked with their occupational ideology. It is true that

⁵¹Miriam Yu, "Ethnic Identity: The Chinese in Newfoundland," *Multiculturalism* 9(1986): 25.

⁵²I have mentioned before that Chinese emigrants during the last and the beginning of this centuries were mainly peasants. Due to their economic conditions in China, most of them were illiterate.

many students look down upon occupations such as owning a restaurant or a laundromat. Instead, medicine, dentistry, engineering, and physics attract them, according to their own testimony, because these fields offer occupational independence and prestige. Although there are some who wish to make a fortune in the future by entering the School of Business Administration, it is not generally preferred by most Chinese students. This is because they have to make sure that a career satisfies several crucial criteria before they will enter it. Usually, most Chinese students choose Engineering, Chemistry, Medicine, Physics, or Biochemistry as the order of their choices.

Thirdly, new immigrants feel proud of their social status which is different from that of the old immigrants. Most new immigrants, especially those undergraduate students who come from Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Singapore, are sponsored and supported by their parents who are relatively rich in their home regions. These students are mostly in their early twenties, and do not have much social experience; they tend to take things for granted. For example, they do not care about spending money unnecessarily, for they have a constant income from their parents. Some of them do not show enough respect to the older generation, nor do they think much of their elders' work and experience. The generation gap is obvious. One of my informants at MUN told me that he would like people to notice this gap. In fact, I noticed that many Chinese students wish to be differentiated from the old immigrants. They like to mention social differences, by which they mean their social status as students, that they will become doctors, engineers or researchers but under no circumstance will they become restaurant owners or laundrymen.

However, even within the new immigrant group there are differences. These mainly reflect the different social environments in which they have been brought up. For example, 'CBCs' (Canada born Chinese) and native-born students (those born in Taiwan, Hong Kong, mainland China, Singapore, Malaysia, Burma and so on) often find it hard to understand each other even though they are all of Chinese origin and of comparable age. Here, I place 'CBCs' into the new immigrant group simply because of their generation status. As students, native-born Chinese often find it difficult to identify with those

'CBC' fellow Chinese. Aside from the language barrier, 'CBCs' have cultural and political backgrounds different from native-born Chinese students. The native-born think of themselves as Chinese, and are so viewed by their professors and fellow students in the University. The 'CBCs', on the other hand, might look and eat like Chinese but talk and behave like Canadians. For instance, the 'CBC' students love hockey games and rock-and-roll music, hold bridal showers, and exchange Valentine cards and so forth, as Westerners usually do. However, native-born Chinese consider such customs strange and un-Chinese. I was told once by a 'CBC' at MUN that he did not mind challenging the authority of the university administration and confronting a professor in the classroom, behaviour which is certainly considered unacceptable by most native-born Chinese students who always display a proper Confucian piety toward their teachers. Besides, as I have discovered, there also exists some misunderstanding between the 'CBCs' and native-born students. For example, 'CBCs' often complain that Asians do not appreciate the historical struggle of Chinese immigrants against such racist policies as the Exclusion Acts and the hardships suffered by the early Cantonese laborers, while the foreign-born students complain that the 'CBC' youths are too narrow and clannish and that they lack knowledge of Chinese culture. On the other end of the spectrum, I discovered from my fieldwork in the community that most of the 'CBCs' did not seem to willingly acknowledge their Chinese identity. They wish to be taken, at least by native-born Chinese, as out-and-out Canadians. The fact is that most 'CBCs' consciously keep their distance from native-born Chinese, and they do not, either publicly or privately, have much contact with native-born Chinese. The simple reason is, as one of the 'CBCs' claimed, that "The cultural barrier and cultural difference make us have little in common, and we do not have much to say to each other..."⁵³ I strongly felt such a 'cultural barrier' at every attempt I made to elicit a narrative from them. In the light of these differences, it is no wonder that although they belong to one Chinese generation, there seems to exist little 'common language' and social contact between them.

⁵³ An interview with James Wong. Tape number: 89005.

In general, the new immigrants as a group do show many more differences from the old immigrants than those among themselves. Like the first group of new immigrants who came to Canada about thirty years ago, these new immigrants will continue making contributions to the construction of Canada. Overseas Chinese, be they old or new immigrants, have made real contributions to the host society. It is because of this that people generally recognize them as a group to have always been industrious, thrifty, law-abiding, and trustworthy.

There is another cultural thread, however, which is woven through the fabric of the Chinese community as a whole, and that is the Chinese sense of humour and, more especially, the jokes and humorous narratives they tell. It is these jokes, which occur in daily routine as well as in post-dinner tale-tellings, which carry the essence of Chinese culture. It is hoped that the jokes I collected hereinafter from the immigrants in the Chinese community, together with my analysis of them and the tellers, can at least help represent the ethnic characteristics of the Chinese people and their folk culture in this multi-ethnic society.

CHAPTER TWO

Chinese Joke Research in the St. John's Chinese Community

A. Origins of the Research

It was mainly because of the appeal of such humorous folk narratives, which represent at least part of the life of the Chinese immigrants, that my interest was aroused and I was prompted to make a thorough and careful study of them. The first time I heard a Chinese joke in Newfoundland was in October 1988, when I went on my first fieldtrip as part of the work for a graduate course in folklore methodology. In that course, taught by Gerald L. Pocius, we were required to make a small collection of folk narratives, with motifs provided for each of the narratives. To collect folk narratives, I first had to find informants. Luckily, I had by then made some friends in the Chinese community, so there was no major problem in finding an informant. I chose one informant and arranged an interview with him. But when we sat before the table after supper at his home and he told me a series of jokes, I was both surprised and disappointed. I felt surprised because he was so eloquent in his telling of his short but funny stories; I was disappointed at the same time because the jokes were quite short and not rich in recognized motifs, although personally I enjoyed listening to the jokes and humorous narratives. While I did not use the jokes I collected for that assignment, I was much impressed by my informant's joke repertoire; I also learned from him that there were quite a few individuals in the community known as storytellers.

After a growing amount of exposure in the community in which I participated, I gradually got to know a number of people who told jokes informally--in leisure talk and conversation. Some of the jokes, as I discovered, were the same as or slightly different from those I had heard or read when I was in China. I kept notes whenever I heard a new

joke. In February 1989 I received a letter from a friend in China who was an assistant editor with the Jiangsu Educational Press. He asked me to write an article on aspects of living, working and entertainment among the Chinese in Newfoundland. I did accordingly, emphasizing in the article the telling of humorous narratives by the Chinese, and also including some of the jokes which I had collected in the community. The response from China two months later was very good, and I was encouraged to do more work of similar nature.

To be sure, at that point I had only a vague idea about the possibility of writing my thesis on Chinese jokes collected in Newfoundland. It was not until August 1989 when I came back from England and the IFSBAC Summer School in Harlow that I seriously began thinking about my thesis topic. Meanwhile, I was required to submit a proposal to the Department of Folklore. Once again I thought about collecting jokes in the Chinese community in St. John's. Library research suggested that nobody had done such a study before. Moreover, there were very few printed documents and materials which dealt with overseas Chinese jokes. I talked to my supervisor, Gerald Thomas, about my initial plan, and was encouraged to pursue it. I quickly made a few trips to my potential informants' homes. It turned out to be quite feasible, as I discovered, to write an M.A. thesis on jokes collected in the Chinese community.

The initial aim of the thesis, then, was to illustrate, based on collection, the evidence of a humorous narrative tradition amongst St. John's Chinese. This modest aim is nonetheless valid, if one can accept the definition of 'hypothesis' proposed by Pertti J. Pelto. Pelto defines the term thus: "... a proposition about certain phenomena that (presumably) could be put to empirical test. Such a proposition is usually referred to as a *hypothesis*. Theoretical systems are often the sources for researchable propositions (hypotheses). On the other hand, hypotheses are also derived from individual empirical observations of phenomena."⁵⁴

⁵⁴Pertti J. Pelto & Gretel H. Pelto. *Anthropological Research*. Cambridge: (Cambridge University Press, 1970): 11.

My initial fieldwork also suggested to me that the jokes people usually told in the community fell into several discernible categories. For example, the many Chinese numskull jokes might be classified as 'jokes about occupations' (such as doctors, teachers, cooks and the like); as jokes of a sexual nature; as political jokes, many of which were topical, circulating among students after the June 4th massacre took place in Beijing in 1989; and as ethnic jokes.

As a folklore student originally from China, I was sensitive to my responsibility to record and preserve aspects of Chinese culture, tradition, and heritage visible in a 'multicultural' society, especially those orally transmitted forms such as folktales, jokes, proverbs, folksongs and so on. Obviously, there exists the danger that such folk narratives will soon disappear in a fast developing modern society if they are not collected and documented in time. Referring to the necessity to record and document orally transmitted American ethnic jokes, Alan Dundes, the prominent American folklorist, cautioned: "Unless such joke cycles are documented while they are current, they may be lost to posterity forever. Oral tradition can disappear without a trace if no one bothers to record it."⁵⁵ Therefore, research on jokes in the Newfoundland Chinese community would not only present Chinese cultural traits in a multicultural society, but also help to preserve them for future study.

Aside from these reasons, there was another important factor which strengthened my desire to pursue such a project in the Chinese community--the common belief among the Chinese that everyone could tell a few jokes at least. On September 14, 1989, I went to one of my informants' homes and recorded a number of political jokes. That was my second attempt, which again proved to me that I could collect as many jokes as I wanted if I spent enough time with my informants. Besides, my great interest in jokes ever since I was a high school student also helped me establish a basic framework of Chinese jokes in my mind. There was no doubt, I assumed before I started my regular fieldtrips, that I had the ability to do the job well in the community.

⁵⁵Alan Dundes. *Cracking Jokes*. California: (Ten Speed Press, 1987): vi.

B. Methodology

A few points concerned with the process of fieldwork are worthy of comment here. The first was the preparation for fieldwork, which included devising questionnaires for the interview. Before going to the field to collect the material, I first consulted authoritative books⁵⁶ on fieldwork by folklorists and tried to figure out a 'scientific' and professional way to cope with certain problems I felt I might encounter in the community. For example, concerning informants, I needed at least two kinds of people from both the old and the new immigrants: 1) those who could provide me with information on community history; 2) those who would be my major informants in telling jokes.

Due to the fact that I already knew quite a number of people in the community and had established good rapport with them, the next task was to pinpoint some informants and become familiar with the use of technical equipment. I needed to prepare two different questionnaires for each group of informants. One was used for collecting personal and community history; the other was used for collecting the lore--Chinese jokes. The two questionnaires were designed for use in actual interviews rather than by distributing or mailing them to my informants. This was because although most of my informants were educated, there were obviously some who were illiterate. Moreover, because of my own Chinese cultural influence, I could not consider mailing printed material to people, in order to obtain information, as either a polite or suitable method. A man who could not read or write would not be happy to receive a printed questionnaire which required his personal or community information. The questionnaires were for my own use in most of my interviews. They turned out to be very helpful and saved me a lot of time in the field. To ensure the smoothness and natural context of an interview, I always avoided 'reading' those questions in front of my informants. It should be

⁵⁶For example, Bruce Jackson's *Fieldwork*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987; Kenneth S. Goldstein's *A Guide for Field Workers in Folklore*. Hatboro, Pa.: Folklore Associates, 1964; Edward D. Ives' *A Tape-Recorded Interview*. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1974.

emphasized that the two questionnaires had nothing to do with any theoretical approach to the study of jokes in the community. Instead, they were simply one of my 'tools' used in the field. The basic structure of the two questionnaires is as follows:

Questionnaire One

1. How long have you been living in St. John's? Are you the first generation of your family in Canada?
2. What did you do when you first came here? Are you satisfied with your present job?
3. Do you go to church on Sundays? If yes, could you tell me your religion?
4. Christianity is a western religion, how did you become a Christian?
5. Did you find it difficult living in a strange place when you first arrived? e.g. finding a job, social activities, etc.
6. Do you have many white friends? Do you often contact each other?
7. Have you ever come across an unhappy event with a white? If yes, could you tell me something about it?
8. As you live in Newfoundland for years, do you think you still keep some Chinese customs? e.g. foodways, teaching children, and the way of spending New Year's Eve, etc.
9. How do you spend your spare time? Do you play *Mo-joh*⁵⁷?

Questionnaire Two

1. In your view, what is a (Chinese) joke? Would you consider a funny story a joke?
2. In what particular circumstance do you usually tell a joke?
3. Where and when did you get (hear or read a particular) a joke?
4. Have you ever read a joke-book?
5. How do you call this joke? e.g. political joke, dirty/nasty/sex joke, fools' joke, and etc.
6. Have you ever heard a dirty/Newfie joke?

⁵⁷A Chinese game of gambling.

7. Have you ever heard a joke about Hsu Wen-chang/Effendi?
8. Do you have special appeal to a certain kind of joke?
9. Does anybody else in your family tell jokes?
10. Do you think there are some jokes which can only be told within a certain group? e.g. family only, male/female only, close friends only, and etc.
11. Do you mean something when you tell a joke, or it is purely for amusement?
12. Could you tell me some jokes, any kind?

As I have already indicated previously, the use of the two questionnaires was vitally important to me. One of the reasons was that many of my informants could not effectively communicate with me in either Mandarin or English. My two questionnaires in fact, as I found out later in the field, served as a kind of 'intermediary' as George List has suggested: "Should the collector not have sufficient command of the language or dialect spoken by his informants to successfully communicate with them, he must find an intermediary to assist him. The intermediary or translator follows the collector's instructions, carries on interview either by means of a previously prepared questionnaire or by conveying the collector's questions to the informants...."⁵⁸

Luckily, I can understand Cantonese although I can speak it only a little. I was often laughed at benevolently by my informants when I communicated with them in Cantonese. In such circumstances, a questionnaire not only helped me be 'in charge' of an interview, but also helped my informants better understand what I was asking. This was because I wrote the equivalent Chinese beside each question, which could help when communication in Cantonese became difficult. On top of this, with the assistance of a tape recorder in such cases, I found it a lot easier when I came back to transcribe the jokes I collected in the field, because the sequence of what was on the tape was generally the same as the questionnaires. Under no circumstance did the questionnaires turn out to be a disadvantage to me during the interviews, since I never *read* questions to my

⁵⁸George List. "Recording Traditional Music." in Richard M. Dorson (ed.) *Folklore and Folklife*. Chicago:(The University of Chicago Press, 1972): 451.

informants. Instead, I used them as Kenneth Goldstein has suggested: "... the collector who uses them as a basis for his own interviews with informants adds the additional factor of flexibility, permitting him to follow up points raised by the informant which are not included in a questionnaire, and changing both the order and content of questions when the circumstances call for that."⁵⁹

The second point concerned the use of tape recorders. I had made up my mind not to use tape recorders in most of the joke collecting sessions. This was because, from my previous experience, most Chinese 'performers' were very much disturbed by a tape recorder, and it oftentimes led to the failure of a performance in a natural context. Nine of my informants strongly opposed my taping the joke-telling sessions. Sometimes, taping an interview might even cause misunderstandings. For example, one of my old informants once very cautiously asked me while I was testing the volume of my tape recorder at his home: *"I don't know if you will be angry with me or not, do you get paid from your school for recording all those tapes?"* I could see from his facial expression that he still remained somewhat suspicious when I told him that, on the contrary, I myself had to 'pay' for it.

I do not wish, however, to underestimate the importance and necessity of taping jokes when a joke is told in context. It is definitely useful and necessary in some cases to record joke-telling sessions, just as Suzi Jones has pointed out: "... because jokes are very often 'performances' and may depend for their humor on audio effects not evident in written transcriptions. A recording also contains the audience reaction which is valuable when analyzing the jokes and understanding the sequence in which they are told."⁶⁰ Such data were not completely omitted, however.

⁵⁹Kenneth S. Goldstein. *A Guide for Field Workers in Folklore*. Hatboro, Pa.:(Folklore Associates, 1964): 155.

⁶⁰Suzi Jones. *A Brief Guide to Folklore Collecting*. Oregon:(Archives of Northwest Folklore University of Oregon, 1974): 9.

Although I had not intended to record many of the joke-telling sessions before I went into the field, I did record, however, when a situation became favourable; in all, I made seven cassette tapes recorded in natural situations. My experience taught me that I should always bring a tape recorder with enough batteries and tapes when going into the field. I was especially careful to use batteries instead of using electric plug-ins when an interview took place at an informant's home. This is because it seemed to me that a tape recorder with a cord or sometimes a long extension cord, looks extremely ugly, and it often distracts my informants, causing a sense of uneasiness. I had the distinct impression that many Chinese informants seemed to be 'allergic' to tape recorders. If a tape recorder is made more conspicuous during the interview, e.g. with a long extension cord, things might well become worse. Moreover, a cord stretching along the floor might cause some inconvenience to other members of the family.

Another reason why I did not use a tape recorder in most collecting sessions is that many such sessions took place in natural contexts in which recording was difficult or impossible, such as informal socializing which occurs in cafeterias or week-end parties at a friend's home. Such places often put my informants at ease because there were no pads, pencils or tape recorders in view. Besides, he or she was not required to talk alone. An exchange of recent news and a few jokes would often occur in such a natural context, and were as useful and beneficial to me as my formal interviewing and collecting. All these factors accounted for my limited use of the tape recorder.

When collecting jokes in the community, especially when I did not use a tape recorder, it was all the more important to take notes. Notebooks and pads were therefore necessary accessories at all times. The use of shorthand was also very helpful to me during interviews, since I needed to concentrate so much on both my informant's speech and performance. I made hundreds of three-by-five cards based on collecting and interviewing in the field, which I found very handy and practical in use. Although jokes were easy to remember, I still wrote down a few key words to each joke during the interview. When a number of jokes were told, I could easily transcribe them in proper order with the help of the notes made on cards, with Arabic numbers next to the notes.

One important point relating to note-taking concerned the transcribing of collected texts which, as Kenneth Goldstein suggested, should be done as soon as possible upon finishing an interview in the field. I followed this rule throughout my fieldwork in the community, and it really helped me a lot in transcribing what I had taped and noted in the interview.

The third point concerned locating suitable informants, establishing, maintaining, and recognizing the rapport between informants and myself. I shall discuss in detail in the following chapter the manner in which I came to distinguish between group one and group two informants; it is enough to note here that my initial contacts were with representatives of both groups, and it was only later that distinctions between them became an essential part of my argument. As mentioned, I had already met some people in the community, and among them there were many potential informants from whom to collect jokes. It was no problem for me to quickly establish rapport between my informants and myself. At any rate, I never met anyone in the community who showed any hostility to me. I often told my informants that, as a Chinese, what I did would help present and preserve Chinese tradition and culture in a multicultural society, and that they could be of great help since they were from China, and clearly possessed many traits of its culture. The method turned out to be very useful. Just as Kenneth Goldstein suggested: "Nationalism may also assist in the establishment of rapport. In some countries the field worker who stresses that he is collecting old traditions so that a record may be kept for all time usually need not go any further, especially if he can show his affiliation with a national cultural body."⁶¹ My main problem, as I soon found out in the field, was more than just selecting suitable informants and establishing rapport with them; what was more important was to recognize and make use of the rapport in order to obtain the material I needed. Realizing the importance of this relationship between my informants and myself, I made frequent contact with those I was interested in over a period of months.

⁶¹Kenneth S. Goldstein. *A Guide for Field Workers in Folklore*. Hatboro, Pa.:(Folklore Associates, 1964): 53.

In the first two months, October and November of 1989, I only had eight interviews and collected about twenty jokes. From December to January, however, especially between Christmas and the Chinese New Year, I collected about a hundred jokes from my twenty-one selected informants. By the end of November, I had already finished locating my major informants.

In selecting major informants, I based my choice on the following three criteria: 1) their willingness to share jokes with others; 2) that they had lived in Newfoundland for at least two years, and often participated in community activities; 3) their possession of a substantial joke repertoire. I ruled out one criterion, that a joke should be confirmed by its teller as only having been orally transmitted, that is, that the informant heard it from someone rather than read it somewhere. The reason for this was that many of my informants were educated rather than illiterate. Matters often became confused when I asked: *Did you hear this joke from someone or read it somewhere?* Nine out of ten answers to this question would be: "I don't remember now, it could be I heard it from someone." I also considered the question of sex as an important factor in selecting informants, because I intended to record jokes from women as well as men whenever possible.

What I mean by 'recognizing the rapport between the informants and me,' is that, if there is a traditional taboo held by the informant, I should never break it. Out of the twenty-one informants who told me jokes, five were female. I must indicate here that I failed to record 'dirty' jokes from my female informants although I had planned to do so. The main reason was because of traditional influences on the minds of Chinese people. From my informants, I knew that although women did tell jokes, including sexual jokes, they were expected not to tell them in front of 1) men; 2) older and younger generations. A woman violating this traditional taboo would be considered coquettish or undisciplined. As for my failure to collect sexual jokes from women, I would discount the possibility that women I interviewed might think I had certain designs on them by collecting such jokes. This was because apart from the genuinely good rapport I maintained, they were all married and had children; and I always made sure that there

were some other members of the family or friends present when I asked a question concerning the topic, although I knew such a context was a disadvantage in obtaining materials from them. But it seemed that I had no other alternative, unless it was to abandon the attempt altogether. The purpose of collecting sexual jokes from women was to identify the similarities and differences between male and female repertoires. My original plan, to collect sexual jokes from women-folk with the help of my wife, turned out to be an illusory hope because of her tight schedule.

I never *requested* sexual jokes from any of my female informants; this was not only because I realized that the topic was a very sensitive one even among males, but also because, from our casual talks, one of my female informants once suggested that it was taboo for them to relate such jokes to a member of the opposite sex. As I found out later, some of them even denied that they knew or had ever heard any obscene jokes.

At the other end of the spectrum, however, there exists a potential psychological barrier concerning the telling of obscene jokes between two sexes. This is especially true for Chinese women who have been traditionally influenced by Confucianism. As I have already indicated, a Chinese woman will be universally considered coquettish and wicked by her compatriots if she, either publicly or privately before someone she is not familiar with, implies or refers to anything that is related to sexual matters. Although I knew that the women in the community also told sexual jokes, I did not directly collect any from them. Concerning this, however, the common assertion from my male informants was that women only told sexual jokes among women, or to their husbands if the audience was male. One more point to be added here is that none of my female informants agreed to have our interview sessions recorded; this left a deep impression on me for, from the traditional Chinese point of view, a woman who is good at telling jokes or tales would be readily associated with gossip and lying. Only one of my female informants showed some interest when I told her that what she had told me would be of certain value to scholarly research on Chinese folk narratives.

C. Collecting Different Types of Jokes

Methodologically, my study of Chinese jokes relied heavily on personal interviews with observation of each of my informants whose jokes eventually constituted the body of the present research data. My methodology in collecting jokes from my informants was to make myself an 'active' participant during each interview. That is to say I was not only an 'audience,' but oftentimes also a performer. From his collecting experiences in Kenya, Lee Haring came to the following conclusion about the interviewer as audience and contributor at the same time in the folklore performance:

The interviewer--anthropologist, historian, literary critic, folklorist--is inescapably a participant, not an observer, in an aesthetic transaction. He is the audience, or more likely a member of the audience, for the performance of aesthetically expressive items or pieces.... the items the interviewer receives and decodes are selected by the performer on the basis of their appropriateness to that audience at that moment. Such a process of selection, being one of the circumstances making the storytelling event unique, determines what the interviewer records; thus the presence of the "observer" determines the phenomenon observed.⁶²

Taking the role of a participant during an interview, I often first told my informant a joke or two, which I had previously recorded from other informants, in order to elicit some jokes from him or her. This method was particularly useful, as I found, to collect certain types of jokes. For example, having established a relatively good rapport with him, I discovered that Sinclair Gao, one of my major informants, indeed had a wide repertoire of jokes. He told me many kinds of jokes, such as jokes about Chinese numskulls, jokes about tricksters, and so on. From our earliest contact, I was so sure that he could also tell me 'dirty' jokes. After a few meetings, I noticed that he seemed to be deliberately avoiding the topic. This could have been due to the fact that the context was not suitable, for the first interview was conducted in the church when we celebrated the Chinese New Year.

⁶²Lee Haring, "Performing for the Interviewer: A Study of the Structure of Context," *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 36(1972): 387.

It was not until the end of January 1990, by which time I had already interviewed him on three occasions and collected dozens of jokes from him, when I conducted the fourth interview with him at a mutual friend's home, and I told him a dirty joke in the first place, that he then told me a similar one, before offering a whole series of the same type of jokes. This experience, I felt, was just what Kenneth S. Goldstein had in mind when he proposed that: "... in the collecting of certain materials (such as obscene folklore), the field worker will frequently be able to break down his informant's reserve by first performing such materials himself."⁶³ The following is the tape transcription of part of our fourth interview:

Zhu: ... I remember once in class our professor told us a very interesting joke... it's, it's called "Doing the Wash," it's about sex, as they call a dirty joke.

Have you ever heard of that?

Sinclair: Oh, no. Can you tell me? It's what? Doing the wash?

Zhu: Sure. Yeah. It's about a newly-wed couple. They mutually agree to adopt a phrase "doing the wash" to tell each other when he or she wants sex. So, one night when they went to bed, the husband told the wife that he wanted to "do the wash." But the wife said that she was too tired to do that. So the husband rolled over and went to sleep. The following night when the husband again urged the wife to "do the wash," the wife once again said that she couldn't, because she was busy working all day.

⁶³Kenneth S. Goldstein. *A Guide for Field Workers in Folklore*. Hatboro, Pa.: (Folklore Associates, 1964): 45.

So, the husband went to sleep again without "doing the wash." When the third night the husband wanted sex, the wife still said that she was working hard all day and still couldn't do that. The husband was very disappointed and rolled over. However, the wife thought that it was very inconsiderate of her to make her newly-wed husband suffer from some 'empty love,' so she turned to husband and said, "I think we can do the wash now, darling." But the husband replied: "Oh, that's OK, it's only a small load and I have already done it by hand (both chuckle)." That's the joke, have you ever heard of it?

Sinclair: Yeah, yeah, but, it's different one though (chuckle).

Maybe it's a Chinese one, no idea... (interrupted)

Zhu: Could you tell me about it?

Sinclair: Ok. It's a couple, a couple used "typing" or "to type" as a jargon to mean having sexual intercourse between them. So, when afternoon this husband came home and, he saw his wife in the kitchen, so he wants to have sex with her at once and said, "Darling, I want to type now, could you come and help me right away?" But the wife said that she would be with him in a while. (chuckle)

But the husband couldn't wait, and when the wife went to bed ten minutes later, the husband said to her:

"Sorry, I've done it by hand."

Zhu: (chuckle) Almost the same, eh?

Sinclair: Yeah. But I won't say it's a dirty joke.

Zhu: No? What do you think a dirty joke is.

Sinclair: I don't know. But...

Zhu: Can you tell me one which you would think is a dirty joke?

Sinclair: ... Yeah--. Let me see... well, well, yeah, ok. There

was a, a woman who often complains that her husband's

that thing, eh, penis, you know, and think that her

husband's penis is too small. So, when they went to bed

one night, the husband put a bottle on his penis and

push it into his wife's 'nest'. The wife felt good, but

didn't know, and thought it was his penis, so she

said to her husband: "If you'd treated me this good

before, I wouldn't play with Zhang Lai." This Zhang

Lai is their neighbour. But the husband was very angry

to hear what she said, and (chuckle) his little bird

could not hold that bottle, so the bottle lost its

control and dropped into the woman's big 'nest' (both

chuckle).

Zhu: Oh, my goodness. Yes, I would say it's a dirty joke.

Very interesting... thank you.... By the way, where

did you get this joke?

Sinclair: Eh, I don't know, ... eh, perhaps I got it from

someone... not sure.

Zhu: O.K. I see, you know some more of this kind of jokes,
don't you? Could you tell me another one? [...]

There is no doubt that collecting dirty jokes was the most difficult task of all in my fieldwork. It was quite unlike collecting other types of jokes where, in most cases, I would simply ask my informant if he had ever heard of such a fool's joke or a joke about a restaurant cook. But every time I intended to elicit a dirty joke from my informant, I had to take several factors into account, for example, my informants' age, sex, social status, mood as well as time, place, and audience when I approached the topic. Most of my Chinese informants would consider this topic as 'taboo' and thought that by telling a dirty joke they would disgrace themselves. Out of twenty-one informants, only four of them provided me with dirty jokes upon request. Besides, these four people were all young men who considered themselves more liberated and open-minded than most Chinese.

Even for those who told me dirty jokes, there were great differences between them in their choice of language and vocabulary when telling a joke, in addition to a variety of themes. G. Legman, emphasizing the 'styles' of the teller and listeners on this issue, made this helpful observation in my analysis of my informants' jokes:

In many jokes on themes more taboo than simple sexuality, the person 'denuded' by the joke is really the teller himself--or herself. In fact, most joke-tellers have their own personal styles, not only of treatment and vocabulary, but of preferred subjects. Many of their stories, or their favorite stories, circle insistently about a single taboo theme, such as castration or homosexuality, and it is not difficult to see that they are, in such stories, allowing their own conscious or unconscious problems a socially acceptable avenue of expression and pet-cock of release. Listeners also have their styles: the 'dirty' stories over which they invariably break up in gales of laughter, where jokes of other types leave them untouched and often contemptuous.⁶⁴

I was impressed enough by Legman's analysis to state axiomatically that a person's favorite joke is the key to that person's character. Obviously, the kind of jokes which one

⁶⁴G. Legman. *No Laughing Matter*. Bloomington: (Indiana University Press, 1968): 14.

wishes to get from one's informants is not only decided by the rapport between the interviewer and his informants, but also decided by the degree to which he knows the character of his informants. There are many other aspects about his informants that he should know of, from my field experience, marital status being one of the most important ones. For example, adultery is one of the most popular themes in Chinese dirty joke cycles, and one can easily collect such jokes if one's informant promises to tell a sexual joke.

But informant X (here I use X as a substitute for the identity of my informant) did not even tell me a single joke relating to adultery however hard I tried to elicit one. It was not because of his ignorance of the subject, on the contrary, he used to tell a lot of jokes, including dirty jokes, as I was told. I also collected quite a number of jokes on other themes from him. The reason he avoided telling sex jokes, as I later found out, was mainly because he had an unhappy marriage caused by the love affair of his wife with another man. In fact, I felt somewhat guilty about what I had 'enticed' him to tell after he told me of his unhappiness. I even regretted telling him a 'taboo' joke. When I came back from his home, I greatly regretted my tactlessness in the field.

My experience told me that an interviewer should always remain alert and sensitive while talking to his informants, and be quick to sense even a minor change in his informants' facial expressions, tones and gestures. I recalled my interview with my informant X, and felt that at that period he hated people even mentioning adultery, and was even jealous of it as I perceived from his facial expression after I told him a joke involving adultery. I only thought then that he, just like some of my informants in such circumstances, was pretending to shun or avoid the topic, and would soon come back to it shortly.

G. Legman made the following penetrating analysis: "The listener to unpleasant jokes and tales is allowed and expected to groan over the repulsive details engaged in, and to pretend to want the teller to stop. But in fact it is the essential feature of the social ordeal or 'test of strength' involved that the teller should *not* stop. And that the listener,

after hearing him out, should then 'top' him with an even more repulsive story if possible, everyone thus bathing gloriously in shit together."⁶⁵ My joke, obviously, did not make him laugh or feel interested. And, of course, I could not ask him to tell me any 'dirty' jokes from then on. But the sad thing was that I found it difficult to collect other jokes from him thereafter, because 'telling jokes' was not as interesting or undisturbing to my informant as it had been before. I found myself too busy with other informants. He was the only informant with whom, if I may make such an acknowledgment, I did not successfully cope in collecting folklore materials.

⁶⁵G. Legman. *No Laughing Matter*. Bloomington:(Indiana University Press, 1968): 34.

D. Comments on the Translation of the Jokes

One of the main tasks in this thesis involves the translation of the jokes collected in the community. More than ninety percent of the jokes I collected were originally told in Cantonese or Mandarin. The problem of translation therefore is very important and a few points should be explained.

Concerning the translation of the jokes, approximately two hundred in number, it should be noted that the collection included a certain number of jokes which are essentially 'untranslatable' into English. They are not included in the repertoire of their respective informants, rather, I will explain them in this section, in relation to the translation of jokes from one language to another. Further, a few special cases are also dealt with at the same time.

The chief problems arise where gesture or puns are integral parts of the humour. These jokes are rendered with all necessary explanations, even though such glosses may well rob the translations of their humour. The following joke is one such example: "There is a government official who has just transferred to a new department. He is illiterate. On his first day in the new department, he makes an 'inaugural speech' in the office meeting in which his first sentence runs like this: 'Comrades, I come here to be in charge of women--'s issues...'"⁶⁶ Both the joketeller and the audience at this point burst into laughter because the sentence *I come here to be in charge of women--'s issues*, even though the joke is as yet incomplete, is itself extremely funny. From a Chinese point of view, a man chosen to be the head (or "in charge of" in this joke) of a women's group will become a laughing-stock and is considered useless or good for nothing. There is no honour to a man to be in charge of women in China. When the joketeller told the joke, he imitated the pronunciation of the character in the joke by saying in Chinese what would be the equivalent in English of pausing between the word 'women' and its apostrophes:

⁶⁶This joke was collected from my informant Bin Zou on 26th of December, 1989. A complete version of the joke exists only in Chinese, due to the impossibility of proper translation.

"... I come here to be in charge women--'s issue...." This phonetic device has the effect of leading the audience to think that the man is "in charge of women." Furthermore, when the sentence as a whole is considered, it still sounds the same and can also mean "I come here to fool around with women" if it is not already inferred from the context. The joke is even more humorous and sounds especially authentic when it is placed in the mouth of a government official, whose image in the mind of the people is just the same as government officials have always been depicted in jokes and satires--as avaricious, sly, licentious, bureaucratic, and good-for-nothing individuals. When such a joke is translated from Chinese to English, it will either be totally meaningless (if directly translated), or the form of a joke cannot be recognized by giving too many explanations in English, just as an English joke, when translated into Chinese, loses something if no proper explanations are given. For example, the joke *Why do priests wear underwear when they take a shower? Because it is a sin to look down on the unemployed*,⁶⁷ is almost impossible to translate into Chinese, unless two different meanings of the phrase 'look down on' are conveyed. Even so, many humorous traits of the joke are lost in translation, e.g. the implication of 'the unemployed.' Therefore, these negative factors in translating jokes from one language to another must be taken into account in the English versions, which will not usually seem funny.

As I found out during the process of translation, there are, too, many allusions in a joke that a Westerner would not think laughable or humorous. To overcome this problem, I have provided explanations in notes following the text. However, the greater effort was put into the translation rather than the explanation. The basic criteria followed in translating these jokes are noted here. Firstly, the English translation should be as close as possible to the original joke told in Chinese. For example, direct, literal translation (word for word) was employed initially wherever possible. However, subsequent editing has ensured that the jokes are in correct and meaningful English. Secondly, all such

⁶⁷John L. Oldani. "Is the Pope Catholic? A Content Analysis of American Jokelore about the Catholic Clergy." in *Humor in Society*. (ed.) Chris Powell & George E. C. Paton. New York:(St. Martin's Press, 1988): 75.

inserts as "uh", "er" and unexpected interruptions in Chinese during the telling of a joke were not translated into the English text, unless they served a specific stylistic purpose. Thirdly, when a special Chinese allusion occurred in a joke, necessary explanations were given in the Notes. This was because, occasionally, some jokes seemed meaningless, due to cultural differences, even when translated, and it was unavoidable that some jokes would still not 'look' like jokes when read in English. Just as George Kao remarked almost half a century ago, when dealing with the same problem: "... for what appears funniest to the Chinese is oftentimes (1) outside the realm of writing, (2) untranslatable even if in writing, and (3) unfunny to the Westerner even if translated."⁶⁸ As mentioned before, when such a problem arises, I provide notes to supplement the translation of the joke. The whole point concerning this issue is that I include all the jokes I collected in my thesis, be they funny or not, for the sake of both present and future research.

Here follow some cases in which translation becomes really difficult or almost impossible. A part of the humour in a joke is almost always lost through translation. Since these jokes are not included in the section of jokes collected from individual informants in the next chapter, they are nonetheless part of my informants' repertoires. For the scholarly record, then, I provide them here with the necessary explanations and comments. Most of these jokes are related to usage in the Chinese language although there are cases which turn on cultural differences.

Case One: (Collected from Xin Chong)

There are two friend whose wives are going to give birth to at the same time. Unfortunately, one of the husbands was out of town when his wife gave birth to a boy. So the other came to help. However, the nurse cursed him: "Shame on you, scoundrel!"

This joke needs some explanation from the perspective of cultural differences. In China, it becomes everybody's business to condemn someone who has love affairs with

⁶⁸George Kao (ed.). *Chinese Wit and Humour*. New York:(Coward-McCann, Inc., 1946): xxvi-xxvii.

women other than his own wife. In the West, on the other hand, it is taken as a kind of interference in another man's private life. The nurse in the above joke mistakenly assumes the man has two 'wives' (one of them is not legitimately called 'wife') giving birth at the same time.

Case Two: (Collected from Ming Zou)

There was a farmer who was having a rest under a tree in the field. There came a monk and a scholar who started a casual conversation with the farmer. Then there came a beautiful woman. The three men began to tease the woman. The farmer said: "Don't say my cow is small, she plows fast in the field; the field she plowed turns out beautiful, so beautiful woman, please follow me." The monk then said: "Don't say I'm a small monk, I can chant scriptures fluently; people all love me when I'm chanting, so beautiful woman, please follow me." The scholar said: "Don't say I'm not a Number One Scholar (a title conferred on one who came first in the highest imperial examination in China), my handwriting is excellent; people all love me when I'm writing, so beautiful woman, please follow me." The woman realized that the men were taking advantage of her, and said: "Don't say my golden lotuses (a metaphor referring to women's feet) are small, they walk very fast; more capable are my two big springs in the front (breasts), the left one once fed a scholar and the right one once fed a monk; I parted my legs twenty years ago and there emerged a clever boy who is a little farmer now."

Although the humour of this joke remains, the original Chinese rhyme (especially through the conversation between the woman and the three men) which adds more humour to the joke is lost through translation.

Case Three: (Collected from Ming Zou)

Three men were drinking wine; one suggested they play *xinglin*,⁶⁹ the other two agreed. The first one again suggested that they should all use the same words, *xiang* (meaning each other) to start and *ren* (human being) to end the sentence. So he first said, "Xiang shi man tian xia, zhi xin neng ji ren." The sentence means 'I have acquaintances all over the world, but there are very few bosom friends among them.' The second man followed, "Xiang feng bu yin kong hui qiu, dong kou tao hua ye xiao ren." It means 'If men who meet each other do not have some wine together, then they will be even laughed at by women.' Then the third man said, "Xiang-yang you ge li hu zi" which means 'There is a man called Beard Li in Xiang-yang.' At this moment, the first man noticed that there was no required word at the end of the sentence, so he said to the third man, "You lost! Drink this wine." But the third man retorted back, "Li hu zi ru he bu shi ren?"

The joke's punchline is the last sentence. In English it simply means 'Beard Li is also a human being.' In Chinese, Beard Li is put at the end of the sentence. What the third man implies is that since Beard Li is a 'ren' (human being), there is no need to put another 'ren' there. This is, in fact, a Chinese play-on-words.

Case Four: (Collected from Dick Chen)

There is a boy from a rich family wanting to learn Chinese. He asked an old man how to write a 'one.' The man told him '一.' The boy asked the way of writing a 'two.' The man showed him '二.' Then the boy asked for a 'three.' The man wrote a '三.' The boy was pleased and thought learning Chinese was not difficult. Once the boy met another fellow, he asked the fellow's surname. The fellow said 'wan' (meaning million). Taking it literally, the boy exclaimed: "What! How can you write your surname to others? It takes at least a day to write it!"

⁶⁹A kind of language play when drinking wine in parties. One man first makes up a rhythmic and meaningful sentence, the next uses the last word said by the first to make up another sentence. The others, if there are any, do the same thing, until there is a loser who is required to drink a certain amount of wine as a penalty.

It is true we write the first three numbers with strokes in Chinese. In this joke, the boy takes for granted that all numbers in Chinese are written in strokes. The assumption is based on the first three numbers the old man taught him, thus leading to the joke.

Case Five: (Collected from Bin Zou)

Two men of the same age met for the first time. A asked B's surname. B said, 'Sun' (a Chinese surname, but one of its other meanings is 'grandchild'). B then asked A's surname. A said that he would rather not tell. B felt confused, and insisted on asking for it. So A said that his surname was 'Zu' (a Chinese surname, another meaning of which is 'forefather'). B at once said, "Jun zu wo sun, wo sun jun zu."

This joke is very humorous to Chinese. A had to tell B his surname which was 'Zu.' It naturally leads to the conclusion that B is a grandson and A is the grandfather. However, the punchline of the joke which B said had two different meanings even in Chinese. Superficially, it means "Yours is Zu (surname), and mine is Sun (surname); and mine is Sun, yours is Zu." The sentence can also be understood that "You are my grandson, my grandson is you."

Case Six: (Collected from Bin Zou)

A man always mispronounces words. One day when he was reading 水滸 (*Water Margins*, a Chinese classic which has a plot similar to *Robin Hood*); a friend passed by and asked him what he was reading. He said, "水 許." The friend said that he had never heard of the book before, so he asked who the main characters were in the book. The man said, "There is a man called 季 逵 who seems so impressive to me." The friend felt even more surprised and said, "I've read some classics, but never heard there was a man called 季 逵, could you tell me more about him?" The man said, "季 逵 always holds two 大 爹."

This joke will be totally meaningless to a Westerner without further explanations. Many Chinese characters which have similar structures have the same pronunciations.

However, this often confuses those who are not sure of a certain character, only knowing a similar one, which causes a character to be mispronounced. The above joke is one such example. All the words the man uses are different from what they are in print, although they share some similarities in structure. Except the last character 爹, which causes a serious mistake of logic, the rest of the misused characters are totally meaningless in the context. The misused character 爹 means 'father' while the original one 斧 means 'swords.' Therefore, the punchline should be literally translated into "Ji Da always holds two big fathers in his hands."

Case Seven: (Collected from Bin Zou)

There was a man who had only a little schooling but liked to show off before others. One day he told his neighbour that he knew the character 山 (meaning mountains). Fumbling with his book for quite a while, he cannot find it. He was about to apologize when he found a 三 (meaning three) at the end of a page. He exclaimed, "Oh, dear, I did not expect you to be lying here!"

The humour of this joke lies in the ignorance of the man who misunderstood the character 三 for 山 in Chinese. Except for structure, there is no connection between these two characters.

Case Eight: (Collected from Wang Shigang)

A scholar once went to visit his friend. He felt hungry at noon but was ashamed to ask for food. So he wrote a 心 and said to his friend, "I've a riddle about a character for you to guess." The friend thought for quite a while and could not get it. The scholar then said, "Shi nai wu dain xin ye." (literally, it means "it is a 'heart' without a 'point.'")

This joke is really difficult to translate. The character 心 does not exist in Chinese at all. However, there is a 心 in Chinese which means 'heart,' pronounced *xin*. So 心 can be said to be a 心 lacking a 'point' (a stroke in Chinese handwriting). If you say "It's a heart without a point" in Chinese, as the scholar did to seemingly describe the structure of 心,

it sounds exactly like "There's really a need for cakes." The humour of the joke is that the scholar hopes his friend can infer the implication of the riddle, but the friend did not get it. So the scholar has to speak it out.

Case Nine: (Collected from Sinclair Gao)

A student went to see his teacher's new-born twins. He asked the teacher's wife who held one of the babies, "Na ge shi xian sheng de, na ge shi hou sheng de?" (meaning "Which is the elder one, and which is the younger one?") The woman was displeased, and cursed him, saying, "Du shi xian sheng de, mei you hou sheng de." (meaning "Both are your teacher's, not yours.")

Many Chinese phrases have the same characters and pronunciations, but have different meanings. The above joke is one such example. The Chinese character 先生 pronounced *xian sheng* has both the meanings of Mister (e.g. Smith *xian sheng* means 'Mr. Smith', but *xian sheng* is also used to mean 'teachers') and 'first-born' (not a set phrase); while 後生, pronounced *hou seng*, has both the meaning of 'younger generation' and 'late-born' (not a set phrase). The woman in the joke misunderstood the student, thinking he says "Which is my teacher's son and which is mine?" *Xian seng* refers to his teacher while *hou seng* refers to him. The woman cursed him because she thought he was taking advantage of her.

The characteristics of the above jokes are discussed in Chapter Four.

CHAPTER THREE

Contextual Description of Joke-telling Sessions and Jokes Collected in the Chinese Community

A. Introduction

In this chapter, I shall describe and discuss the actual interviews on jokes with my informants. It will include information such as my informants' views concerning their jokes. I shall discuss each of these informants in relation to his or her joke repertoire and our joke-telling sessions. All the jokes collected in the community are in this chapter, following their respective joke-tellers. It has not been possible to consult an extensive selection of Chinese joke collections. Thus it has not been possible to provide documentary authentication of many of the jokes I have included. However, my informants certainly point to oral tradition as the source of their jokes, and my analysis of motifs suggests the jokes have long been current in oral tradition.

This collection comes from a total of twenty-one informants, four of whom were female. I have classified them into the two major groups identified in Chapter One, according to their different age, occupation, experience, and immigration status. That is, 1) those Chinese-Canadians having lived in Newfoundland for at least five years; and 2) those who came to Canada as students mainly from mainland China (including those from Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore). Although group two informants consisting mostly of students from China who have come to Newfoundland in the last three or four years, are not usually considered as representative of the Newfoundland Chinese, they do form a unique group in the community and in fact they do reside in Newfoundland over a period of some years and often participate in community activities. I therefore consider them to be Newfoundland Chinese, if only on a temporary basis. While most of these students originally intended to complete their studies and return to China, recent political

events make it likely that the majority of them will remain in Canada. Most of them (98% according to the Chinese Student Union at Memorial) have already applied for Canadian resident status. Thus, however marginal these students may have been initially, they will, eventually, undergo a degree of enculturation. Recognition of this distinct group is therefore necessary and important, and crucial for the comparisons of joke repertoires with those of the other group made in the following chapter. Further, group one informants I discuss here clearly do not fit into the category of the old immigrants as described in Chapter One.

However, there was no one among my joke-telling informants who was a 'CBC'. The first reason, it seems to me, was that they always appeared shy and were unwilling to respond to my request for a joke during the contact, the second reason was because of the 'cultural barrier' which I discussed at the end of Chapter One.

Such a classification is made because it will serve to underline the different joke repertoires of each group and incidentally, to suggest possible aspects of cultural assimilation to be observed in their jokes. For example, nobody in the former group ever told me a political joke. Everyone in the latter group, however, told at least a few political jokes during the interviews. Further, jokes told by the informants in group one might contain traditional Chinese jokes such as I had heard when I was in China, or read in joke-books published by scholars; whereas jokes from group two informants might contain modern elements such as aeroplanes or popcorn-machines, or have sophisticated literary elements such as puns, mostly absent from the repertoires of group one informants. I will elaborate these points in the next chapter.

The following includes basic information about each informant, and the number of jokes told during the interview.

GROUP ONE INFORMANTS:

Mr. Sinclair Gao, 38, restaurant cook, from Hong Kong. Eight years in Canada. Twenty-eight jokes. Four interviews.

Mr. Brian So, 35, restaurant owner, from Hong Kong. Over fourteen years in Canada. Five jokes. Two interviews.

Mr. Brian Winn, 57, businessman, from Hong Kong. Over twenty years in Canada. Five jokes. Two interviews.

Mr. Jia Au, 52, retired businessman, from Hong Kong. Twenty-one years in Canada. Fifteen jokes. Two interviews.

Mr. John Lee, 72, retired businessman, from China. Over twenty years in Canada. Three jokes. One interview.

Miss Louise Hong, 30, sales clerk, from Malaysia. Twenty-three years in Canada. Seven jokes. One interview.

Mrs. Margaret Lee, 47, housewife, from Hong Kong. Over seven years in Canada. Two jokes. Two interviews.

Mr. Xin Yan, 58, retired laundry-worker, from China. Over twenty years in Canada. Five jokes. One interview.

Mr. Yan Zan, 34, restaurant cook, from China. Over six years in Canada. Eleven jokes. Six interviews.

GROUP TWO INFORMANTS:

Mr. Ming Zou, 29, student, from Anhui Province, China. Four years in Canada. Twenty-two jokes. Five interviews.

Mr. Peng Zhengrong, 34, student, from Gansu Province, China. Four years in Canada. Eight jokes. Four interviews.

Mr. Robert Chang, 32, student, from Hong Kong. Three years in Canada. Five jokes. One interview.

Mr. Jin Xiao, 28, student, from Beijing, China. Three years in Canada. Three jokes. One interview.

Mr. Bin Zou, 26, student, from Shanghai, China. Three years in Canada. Twelve jokes. Three interviews.

Mr. Dick Chen, 39, student, from Hunan Province, China. Six years in Canada. Eleven jokes. One interview.

Miss Kim Lee, 26, lab assistant, from Hong Kong. Three years in Canada. One joke. One interview.

Mr. Liu Zhendong, 27, student, from Xiamen Special Zone, China. Two years in Canada. Three jokes. One interview.

Mr. Tong Yang, 27, lab assistant, from Sichun Province, China. Four years in Canada. One joke. One interview.

Mr. Wang Shigang, 32, student, from Guangdong Province, China. Four years in Canada. Five jokes. One interview.

Miss Xin Chong, 24, student from Beijing, China. Three years in Canada. Eighteen jokes. Five interviews.

Mr. Chao Changqin, 30(?), newspaper editor, from Shengzen Special Zone, China but now living in the U.S. Five jokes. One interview. Mr. Chao came to Newfoundland for a visit in January 1990, during which I collected some political jokes from him. He was not considered a Newfoundland Chinese, but since the jokes he told shared many similarities with group two informants, I include his jokes for comparative purposes.

Generally, there are three aspects to be discussed concerning each informant: a general description of each person, their joke repertoire, and their joke-telling contexts, with my comments. Following these are the jokes collected from each informant. Following each joke are notes which include the exact date and place where the joke was collected. When applicable, motifs are provided based on Stith Thomson's *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* (1955-58). Further, a few authoritative Chinese joke-books are consulted for any similar or parallel jokes to those I collected from my informants. When such a case occurs, I provide the parallel in the *Notes* following each joke for ease of comparison.

Concerning the informants, however, a few receive only brief descriptions due to limited fieldwork data, and are then followed by the jokes collected. There are also two informants, Tony Yang and Kim Lee, with whom I only conducted one interview and collected only one joke from each; I did not set aside special space to discuss them. This chapter is divided into two parts, based on the two different groups.

Part One: Joke-tellers, Their Repertoires, and the Joke-telling Contexts: Group One Informants

INFORMANT: SINCLAIR GAO

a. General Description

Sinclair Gao is thirty-eight of age, and works as a restaurant cook outside St. John's. He is an energetic, outgoing, and a talkative person. He was not married when I interviewed him in January 1990. He came to Newfoundland in 1983 directly from Hong Kong, where he received a high school education. Sinclair proved to be quite loquacious during the interview. He seemed eager to tell me everything he knew, not only his jokes, but also his work experience both in Hong Kong and Newfoundland. We got to know each other through a friend who knew both of us well. My four interviews with him were limited to January 1990 only, because he was extremely busy working as a cook. Physically, he is short, and somewhat dark complexioned when compared to most Chinese. He was more famous for his cooking skill than the telling of jokes, as he himself asserted. Among the twenty-one informants, he was nonetheless the one who told me the most jokes.

b. Joke Repertoire

Sinclair has a very wide joke repertoire. For example, he told jokes about sex, jokes about fools, jokes about different occupations such as cooks, laundrymen, farmers, and the like. The only category which he omitted was political jokes. This is due to his background, for he has never been to mainland China. The major element of his repertoire is numskull jokes.

The first time I talked to Sinclair was on the telephone. I was told by a friend at MUN that Sinclair was a humorous fellow, and was very good at telling jokes. My friend

also told me that Sinclair was willing to tell people jokes, but the problem was that I could hardly ever get hold of him, since he did not live in town; moreover, he was too busy working, seven days a week. The purpose of phoning him was to arrange a meeting for him to tell a few jokes. I told him that I had been told he knew a lot of jokes and asked if he minded arranging a time to tell me a few. To my surprise he refused, saying that he did not then have the time. He did however ask for my phone number and said he would phone me during the Chinese New Year.

Then, two weeks before the Chinese New Year, I unexpectedly met him at my friend's home. He was on an errand in town, and only stayed at the friend's home for a short time. I took the opportunity to have a casual talk with him. There were only three of us there; our host prepared coffee in the kitchen while I started talking with Sinclair. I asked him where he had heard the jokes he knew. He said when he was at high school, and added that "every boy at the school could tell some jokes." I asked him what kind of jokes they usually told. He said: "All kinds of jokes, but mostly about fools." He then told us the joke (#7),⁷⁰ and said, "Many kinds of this joke, about stupid girls. Interesting to students only." The following is the transcription of my interview with Sinclair on his joke repertoire:

Zhu: [...] where did you get these jokes? From your parents, or friends?

Sinclair: No, no, from everywhere. Of course, from friends, and my schoolmates, in Hong Kong, yeah, we told jokes each other every day, at school. So, every boy at the school could tell some jokes, yeah, we got jokes from elsewhere too, like--, eh, we drew pictures or cartoons, and showed to others, and told them jokes.

⁷⁰The number in brackets refers to the numbered joke appearing in the last section on each informant.

No worries at that time, because we were young, and didn't know things well.

Zhu: Oh, I see, what kind of jokes did you tell? Do you still remember some? Or, do you still tell jokes to people? When do you tell them?

Sinclair: It's hard to say, you see, I often tell them jokes because sometimes we feel bored in working, so we tell jokes or funny stories to each other, so time passed quickly.... oh, yeah, what kind, we tell all kinds of jokes, but mostly about fools, just for fun, you know.

Zhu: Could you give me one example?

Sinclair: Oh, (looking at watch) sure, eh, well, like--, eh, a boy and a girl... (*see* joke #7). Not very funny, it's an old joke, we used to tell these jokes, many kinds of this joke, about stupid girls. Interesting to students only....

Zhu: Oh, no. It's interesting. You really remember these jokes well. Could we arrange some time to talk about your jokes?

Sinclair: I don't have special time to talk to you, you see, I'm busy making money everyday (chuckle), or perhaps, we can talk about it during the festival, I will be here for a few days, eh, if you wish?

Zhu: Thanks. Good! That's about two weeks.... (Tape number: 89007)

My first impression of Sinclair as a joke-teller, and it was proved true later as we came to know each other better, was that he was trying to show masculinity through telling jokes. To Sinclair, females were often an object to be laughed at in jokes. Out of

twenty-seven jokes he told me, fourteen were 'anti-female' jokes, including, for example, a disliked wife in joke #17, a newly-wed but lewd wife in joke #4, an unmarried pregnant girl in joke #2, a sexually insatiable woman in jokes #24 and #2. On the other hand, a man, if he is henpecked by his wife, was also a laughing-stock in Sinclair's jokes, as shown in jokes #3 and #12.

Another proof of Sinclair's wide joke repertoire was the fact that he could tell different types of jokes according to the audience. For example, during the celebration of the Chinese New Year, on January 28, 1990, a concert was held in the Little Theatre at MUN. I took my son to see the performance. I made an appointment with Sinclair, and we agreed to go there an hour before the performance began, in order to let him tell me some jokes. At twelve Sinclair arrived, so we sat on a bench in the corridor and had a chat about jokes. My son soon got tired and wanted to leave, and I did not know what to do until Sinclair said to my son: "Come, let me tell you a funny story." Sinclair then told him a fable joke (#6) which really surprised me. The joke was the only one of all those I collected in the community in which animals rather than human beings appeared as the main characters. He told me eight jokes before we went into the theatre, including the fable joke.

c. Joke-telling Contexts

There were a number of different places concerning the context of the joke-telling sessions. As a joke-teller, Sinclair knew exactly 'where he was.' That is, he was very conscious of the context of telling a joke. During my interviews, Sinclair told some obscene or dirty jokes to me. But of the twelve jokes he told in the West End Baptist Church,⁷¹ there was not a single one of that kind. Although I have to confess here that the joke-telling contexts were artificial (I made appointments for every interview with Sinclair), some 'natural contexts' occurred during and within these otherwise artificial contexts.

⁷¹A party was held in the West End Baptist Church on the evening of January 27, 1990 to celebrate the Chinese New Year.

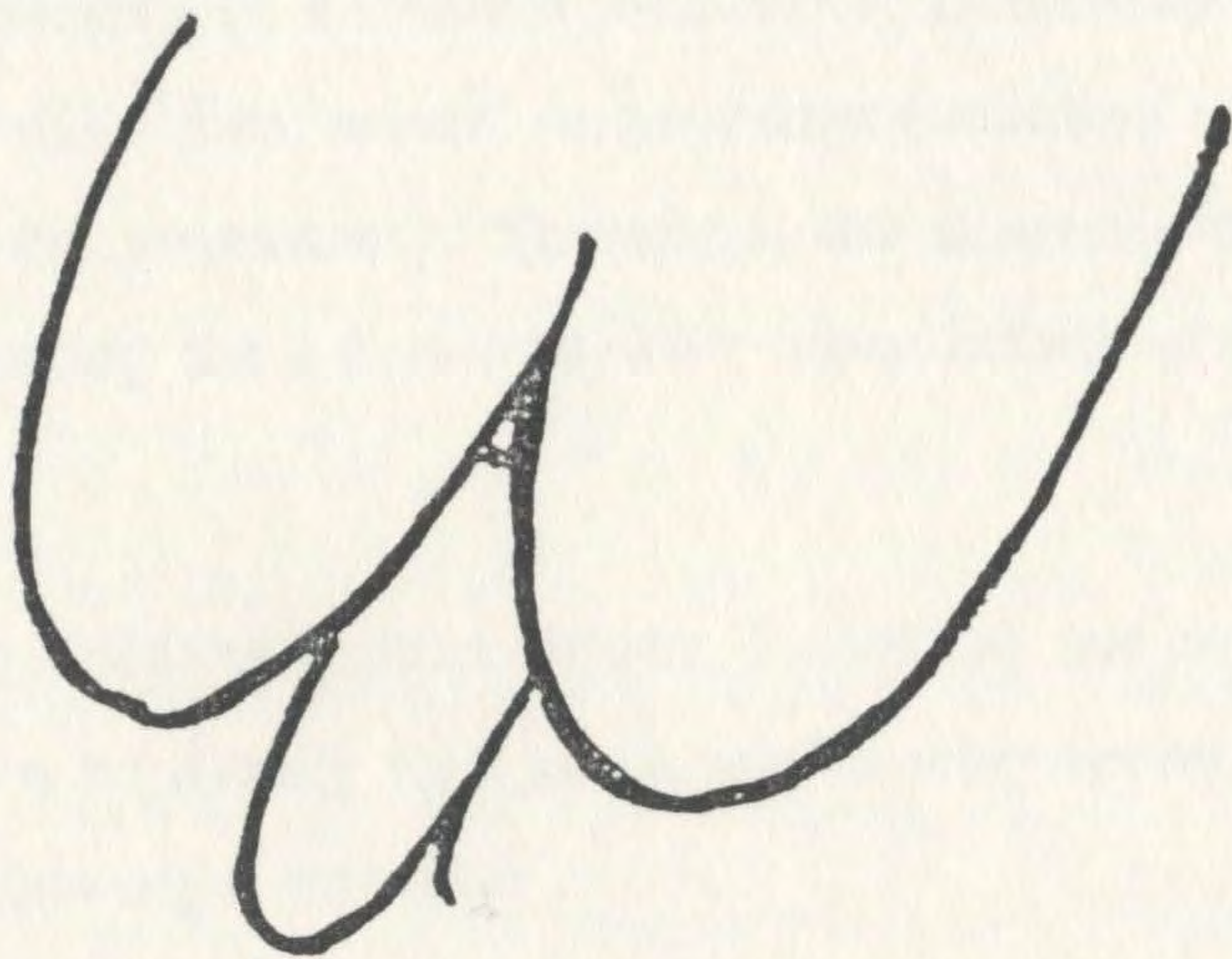
On this point, at least two cases can be illustrated here: first, when he told my son the joke, the context was not artificial, because the act was not pre-arranged. He was half way through telling me joke #23 when my six-year-old son began interrupting us, saying he wanted to go out and play snowballs. I felt a bit impatient but Sinclair did not, although I could see that he also wished to finish the 'assigned' work before the performance started. He patted the boy's head, and then coaxed him to stay in the corridor: "*Come on, it's very cold outside, and the show will start soon, and then you'll miss it... Do you like to listen to some funny stories? Come, let me tell you a funny story. You like tadpole? But you don't like a stupid tadpole, eh? Let's see how stupid this tadpole is.*" Seeing that the boy was paying attention to him, Sinclair continued: "A long time ago... (#6).

When he had finished, Sinclair was asked by my son to tell another one. Another couple we knew with a child we also knew came by. So I asked the two children to play together while Sinclair and I quickly moved to another corner to continue our talk about jokes. He told me successively six jokes before we went into the theatre. Quite unlike the day before, the jokes he told me were mostly related to themes such as adultery (#23), and teasing about sexuality (#16) although it was I who first suggested the topic. I could see that he was very pleased to show me his talented skills in telling jokes. Before we parted, he asked me if I would like to go to his friend's home on Rankin Street the following evening, where he stayed while he was in St. John's, to continue our chat about jokes. I at once agreed. To my surprise, he promised me to tell some more 'dirty' jokes there.

Another case in which a natural context occurred in an artificial context was during my last interview with Sinclair at the friend's home on Rankin Street. It was on the evening of January 29, 1990. The interview was pre-arranged, and Sinclair consented to tell some 'dirty' jokes. Best of all, he agreed to let me bring my tape-recorder to record the interview session. There were three of us in the house, drinking beer. The evening began with a discussion of beer and wine. Our conversation occasionally shifted from Mandarin to English, simply for our friend's convenience. We were all sitting on the

floor in the small living-room with the TV on, when I took out the tape-recorder and found a good place to place the microphone.

Sinclair, sitting next to me, did not seem to pay attention to what I was doing and said that he liked Qingdao Beer best, that he had an uncle in Qingdao, Shangdong province, who had paid a visit to his family in Hong Kong in 1982. This uncle told him that Qingdao Beer in Shangdong tasted different from beer sold elsewhere in the world because of the different water used in the process of brewing. Then we talked about life in different places such as mainland China, Hong Kong, and Newfoundland. Our friend, who had been in Canada for just six months, complained that he could not understand people talking in English because of their accent. He also mentioned that it was difficult for him to memorise English words since he was too 'old.' Sinclair at once laughed and said that he had heard many people (immigrants from mainland China) in Hong Kong talking about the difficulty of learning English. Putting down his beer bottle, Sinclair took a ball-point pen from on top of the TV, and then picked up a *People's Daily* (Overseas Edition) from the corner of the room. He asked the friend: "Do you know this?" while drawing a big sensuous-looking 'W.' "Yeah, so what?" the friend replied. "And this?" adding a 'U' right under the 'W.' Sinclair again asked. "It's letter U, right?" the friend answered. Sinclair smiled and continued to draw three A's below the 'U' and said, "So now you can see what these are all about, eh?" The friend did not answer. I had been trying to figure out what Sinclair wanted to illustrate, but I did not get it either. "Isn't this a picture?" Sinclair further hinted. We all at once realized what that picture was about. We laughed a lot (see insert on next page), and then I said to Sinclair, "It's really vivid. I consider it a joke, too." "Yes," he said, "we used to tell this joke about mainlanders learning English in Hong Kong...(#6)." Sinclair also told seven other jokes which were all related to sex that night. But I considered them told in an artificial context because we all knew it would happen.



A A A

"... the letter W is just like mom's buttocks, and when she is releasing her nature, that appears the letter U from her O (letter). When she finishes, there's always two or three A's (letter) left." (from Sinclair Gao)

Here, the reason why I stress the natural and artificial contextual distinction is because the natural contexts which I discuss above were the only occasions in which joke-telling sessions took place. They can help, to a certain degree, understand why and in what circumstances a Chinese joke-telling event may take place. The regrettable thing is that I did not either 'create' or experience much of the natural context of joke-telling sessions in the community. Therefore, the discussion of the context of jokes which follow, including the interviews with other informants, will be based on an artificial context.

Having finished a short supper, I directed our conversation to the jokes. I asked Sinclair when he usually told jokes, and in what social context he might tell a joke. He made the following comments:

I tell joke for fun, you know, so when I feel happy I tell jokes; but when I don't feel happy, I tell jokes too. Because, it can free me from unhappiness, see? I don't tell jokes everyday, like a professional story-teller or something, but when I feel tired, you see, and the other guys are tired, so we often say, hey, who's going to tell a joke. And I often tell them some jokes, because they know I can tell many jokes, rough ones, and they love them... yeah, sometimes when we are playing games, yeah, *mo-joh* game, we all tell jokes, you see, for fun, yeah. Nobody's going to blame you, for it's only for fun. I don't put aside special time to tell jokes, like I'm doing now, you see. (Tape number: 89007)

I asked him what he meant by 'rough ones.' He said, "Somewhat like I told you yesterday, it's the dirty joke that only men talk about." Then I asked him if he considered women to be an inappropriate audience when he was telling dirty jokes, and he replied:

Oh, yeah, definitely. You'll make yourself a fool if you tell those jokes before women. You see, first, you can't tell them for women alone, because they will curse you, you can't; second, if their husbands were present, they'll think that you're a bad guy, and perhaps want to seduce one of them (chuckle), so you see, it's ridiculous to tell those jokes before women. I don't tell any jokes to women. That's no way. (Tape number: 89007)

I approved his attitude on this point and said that I held the exact same opinion as

he. But I also asked him jokingly whether he had ever heard the popular Chinese saying: "To a man, his son is better than others'; but others' wives are better than his." He said he did. So I further joked: "So, don't worry about the husband will get angry with you if you tell a dirty joke before his wife, for it could be the case that he's tired of his wife." We all laughed. Then Sinclair said that he had a joke about a man who disliked his wife and said: "Let me tell you this joke... (#19)." I realized that he told the same joke he had told me two days before. I kept silent and let him tell two more jokes #13 and #22, both concerning sex. Then he asked me if I had any jokes to offer. I said I found most Cantonese could not pronounce certain English words distinctly, which eventually prompted a few jokes. When I was still in China, I heard a joke about a Cantonese who, when asked about his age, replied, "I'm dirty, and my wife is dirty too." What he in fact meant was "I'm thirty, and my wife is thirty-two." I then asked the friend who had been watching TV if he knew any jokes. He at once avoided my request and said that Sinclair could tell them better. Indeed, Sinclair was proud of his skills in telling jokes, for he at once followed with a few more jokes, #11, #23, and #24.

There are a few points worth mentioning concerning both Sinclair's joke repertoire and his joke-telling performance. First, most of Sinclair's jokes are concerned with either foolishness or sex. Further, these two themes are closely linked with women in his jokes. From our talks, I could perceive that Confucius' attitude⁷² towards women was deeply rooted in Sinclair's mind. I once asked Sinclair what the social setting of his jokes was. He said, "Oh, of course Hong Kong, or perhaps China, too." Based on this, I also found that at least some of Sinclair's jokes were traditional Chinese jokes. That is, a few jokes had been recorded in China at least half a century ago, for example, jokes #11, #12, and #15 are not only ones which I had heard before, but they have also entered commercial joke-books.⁷³ Therefore, his joke repertoire contained mainly Chinese jokes. Even in his

⁷²One of Confucius' famous sayings concerning women is: "Only women and children are difficult to rear up." It means simply that women are stupid. This partly explains why for centuries Chinese women have been looked down upon by men.

⁷³See notes to each of the above-numbered jokes.

jokes there were Chinese characters, such as a Buddhist monk in joke #17. The names of characters in his jokes were Chinese rather than English. I once asked Sinclair if he had picked up any jokes in Newfoundland; he said he had, but added that none of them struck him as much as those as he had learned in Hong Kong. Moreover, he said he seldom retold jokes which he heard here, simply because he did not think them very interesting.

Secondly, Sinclair's social position in the Chinese community is not prominent. This is for several reasons: first, he was still single when I interviewed him. A man without a family is not considered a responsible person from a Chinese point of view. Next, and more importantly, was the fact that he does not have much contact with other members in the community simply because he is busy working most of the time. Thirdly, those who know Sinclair, such as the other cooks, waiters and waitresses in the restaurant, know that he will not stay here long and will eventually go back to Hong Kong. During my interview with Sinclair, I asked him who was the usual audience for his joke-telling. He replied, *"People in the kitchen are all my usual audience. I'm their audience, too, because we often tell jokes in turns during working, so that nobody will feel too tired."* So, most of Sinclair's joke-telling sessions have taken place in work. As he said, he did not have special times for telling jokes.

Sinclair did not use many gestures during his joke-telling. Instead, he used different tones of voice to emphasize a point, e.g. the punchline of a joke. For example, when he almost finished telling my son the joke (see #6) and spoke the sentence *"Oh--, no--, what if the King finds out I used to have a tail when I was a tadpole?"* he not only imitated the sound of a frog by dramatizing the story, but also paid close attention to my son's reaction, making sure whether the boy knew or not that a frog used to have a tail. When he found that the boy understood what he meant, he smiled and added: "Yes, poor frog, he can't escape, can he?" I could see that he was pleased, because he successfully used his talent of telling the joke--one that was just right for the boy's age and intelligence. It is not only the punchline Sinclair wished to emphasized, some key words were also dramatized in his jokes. For example, when he was telling joke #10, he used the Chinese word 翻倍 to substitute the English equivalent *double* though he had been using

English to tell the joke. In this context, the Chinese words 翻倍 have stronger linguistic sense when used to express the difference of ages. That is to say, the punchline is more laughable when spoken in Chinese than in English, and Sinclair skillfully chose the Chinese words.

Sinclair was always the last to laugh when a joke was finished, and sometimes he did not laugh at all. Sinclair's view of a good joke was "... it's important a joke is laughable, that is to say, something really funny to you, so you laugh. I don't care what kind of jokes people telling me so long it's a good one...." (Tape number: 89007) He tried to ensure that all the jokes he told were interesting and laughable. Moreover, Sinclair kept making eye contact during his joke-telling in order to make sure that people understood his jokes. Sometimes, he would keep saying, "you see?" or "yeah?" to make the audience keep track of his jokes. He was very fluent in telling every joke, and never got stuck. Of all the joke-tellers I interviewed in the community, Sinclair was to me undoubtedly the most impressive one.

d. Jokes Collected from Sinclair Gao

1. Two boys are talking about memorizing English letters. One asked the other: "How did you memorize so many English letters so quickly, it's really a big effort for me." "It's not difficult for me at all," the other boy said, "You see, the letter W is just like mom's buttocks, and when she is shitting, the letter U appears from her O (letter). When she finishes, there's always two or three A's (letter) left."

Notes: Date: 29/2/90. Location: 30 Rankin St. The English letters in this joke are used pictographically. For example, W is used to symbolize a woman's buttocks, while O refers to her anus. A more detailed description, with a picture of this joke, can be found in the previous chapter. The following general motifs from Stith Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* (1955-58)⁷⁴ cover the joke: H607. *Discussion by symbols. Sign language.* H600. *Symbolic interpretations.*

⁷⁴The title of *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* (6 vols, Bloomington, 1955-58) by Stith Thompson is shortened to 'MI' hereafter for convenience.

2. Having examined a girl, the doctor said to her: "I've a bit of good news to tell you, Mrs. Lee." "No," the patient said at once, "I'm Miss Lee, not Mrs. Lee." "Oh," the doctor said, "then I've some bad news to tell you."

Notes: Date: 28/1/90. Location: Little Theatre, MUN. This joke fits under the general motif: T570. *Pregnancy*. According to Dr. Thomas, this is a classic 'good news, and bad news' joke. One such example can be found in Lewis and Faye Copeland's *10,000 Jokes, Toasts and Stories*, p. 624, which contains the following joke: *The boxer returned to his dressing-room looking drawn and haggard, for he had just had a terrific beating in the ring. He felt absolutely done, and looked it. He opened his eyes when the promoter approached. "Hard lines, Jack," said the promoter, as he gazed down at his battered charge, "but I've good news for you!" "Well, what's the good news?" "I've been lucky enough to fix a return match for you!"*

3. For the sake of saving money, a husband decided not to take a bus to go home. He ran all the way home behind a bus, and was happy to tell his wife that he had saved one *yuan* for the family. However, his wife still cursed him and said, "Stupid! Why didn't you follow a taxi instead when you were running back home, for that would have saved us ten *yuan* at least."

Notes: Date: 27/1/90. Location: West End Baptist Church. One Chinese *yuan* is about the half of a worker's daily salary in China during the 1980s; a *yuan* is equivalent to about 25c. In this joke, only the husband is taken as a fool, according to the teller. The wife's words "... for that would have saved us ten *yuan* at least." is but to mock the husband's foolishness. The following general motifs from the MI cover this joke: P210. *Husband and wife*. J1702. *Stupid husband*.

4. Having just made love to his newly-wed wife, a foolish man, all surprised, asked his wife: "How come, dear, that I made a hole under your belly? Are you in pain? Shall I call the tailor next door to mend it?" The wife knew that the tailor next door was a lewd man, so she consented. The tailor came in and certainly had a lot of fun with the woman. When he had finished, the foolish husband came in and checked, and then he cursed the tailor: "I asked you to mend it with thread, but you used glue instead! Are you fooling me? I'm not going to pay you!"

Notes: Date: 28/1/90. Location: Little Theatre, MUN. Thompson's motif K1315.2.3., *Seduction by sham process of repairing vagina*, is the closest to the main point of the joke, differing only in the fact that the tailor does not seduce the wife who

is, of course, a willing accomplice. Other motifs which are germane to this joke include: P441. *Tailor*. X220. *Jokes about tailors*. J1702. *Stupid husband*. T481. *Adultery*. K2213. *Treacherous wife*. T230. *Faithlessness in marriage*. T400. *Illicit sexual relations*. J1745. *Absurd ignorance of sex*. J2301. *Gullible husbands*.

5. A teacher asked his students to give an example illustrating 'coincidence.' One student answered at once: "Isn't it a coincidence that my daddy and mummy got married on the same day?"

Notes: Date: 28/1/90. Location: Little Theatre. The following general motif from the MI covers the joke: P340. *Teacher and pupil*.

6. A man goes out travelling, and he stays on an isolated island. At night, he hears something murmuring in the water: "Last night the king issued an order to kill all those in the water who have tails. I am a tortoise and have a tail, so I can hardly escape. What can I do?" The tortoise goes on crying. Then there followed another crying voice. The tortoise asked: "What are you crying for? Who are you?" There came a young frog's voice: "Oh, no, what if the King finds out I used to have a tail when I was a tadpole?"

Notes: Date: 28/1/90. Location: Little Theatre, MUN. The motif, B211.7.1. *Speaking frog*, fits the joke. Other general motifs which cover the joke include: B200. *Animals with human traits*. B210. *Speaking animals*. J1706. *Stupid animals*.

7. "May I come in?" Li Ming asked when he knocked at Lili's door. "No, because I've already put on my pajamas. My mother told me that it's a shame to wear pajamas in front of boys now I'm over fourteen." "OK. then, I'll see you tomorrow." Li Ming said. "Wait, you can come in now, because I've already stripped them off."

Notes: Date: 13/1/90. Location: 30 Rankin St. The two names in the joke, Li Ming and Lili are common names of Chinese, just like John and Mary in Canada. The following general motifs from the MI cover the joke: J2210. *Logical absurdity based upon certain false assumptions*. Compare: X52. *Ridiculous nakedness or exposure*.

8. Seeing that an old man's ball (i.e. testicle) was visible from his pants while he was sitting on the ground selling potatoes, a young woman tentatively said to the old man: "It's out." The man thought that the woman meant a potato from his bag, so he said,

in his strong Shangdong (a southeast province in China) accent, "Out for selling." The woman blushed and knew that he had misunderstood, so she further implied, "It's ugly." But the man said, "Try it, lady, must be tasty if it's ugly." Referring to the old man's ball, the woman went on even further and said, "There's too much hair." The man was impatient: "Do you want me to shave it before selling it to you?"

Notes: Date: 29/2/90. Location: 30 Rankin St. The significance of stressing the Shangdong accent in this joke is to dramatize the foolishness of the old man, because the Shangdong accent is considered vulgar, especially by the people in the southern provinces. This joke fits under the general motif: J1770. *Objects with mistaken identity*.

9. A farmer had a son who had a high fever. So the farmer asked a doctor to come to the house and cure the illness. But the doctor misdiagnosed the illness and the patient died after taking his medicine. the farmer was furious and went to the doctor: "Why did you kill my son? You stupid pig!" (Common way of cursing in Chinese) The doctor went back to the farmer's house and, having touched the patient's body, he scolded back: "You stupid pig! You asked me to stop his high fever. Look, it's already gone. Touch him, your son is cold now."

Notes: Date: 27/1/90. Location: West End Baptist Church. The following motifs are appropriate: K824. *Sham doctor kills his patients*. K1955. *Sham physician*. Compare also: X372. *Jokes on doctors*, especially X372.1., *Doctor cures palpitation of heart: patient stops breathing*.

10. A man called Qu Ren had a two-year-old daughter who was very lovely. One day, Qu's friend said to him, "I have a son who is very smart, what about letting my son marry your daughter when they both grow up?" Qu Ren said that was a good idea, but then he asked, "How old is your son now?" "Four," the friend replied. Qu was at once outraged and said, "How can you talk such nonsense!" The friend was very much surprised, so he asked: "What's wrong? My son is only two years older than your daughter." "Yes, I know that, and my daughter is only two years old now. Your son is *double* her age. So, when she is twenty-five of age and ready to get married, your son will be fifty. Isn't that ridiculous?!"

Notes: Date: 27/1/90. Location: West End Baptist Church. The following motifs cover the joke: J2213. *Illogical use of numbers*. J2200. *Absurd lack of logic*. J2210. *Logical absurdity based upon certain false assumptions*. and especially J2030. *Absurd inability to count*.

11. While a woman was having intercourse with her neighbour, her husband came home. Seeing that there was no window for him to escape through, she hid the man in a rice sack and ordered him not to move. The husband came in and asked what was in the sack, and the woman was so frightened she could hardly utter a word. Suspicious, the husband asked once again; the man in the sack could not wait for the woman to reply and shouted out: "It's rice."

Notes: Date: 29/2/90. Location: 30 Rankin St. A version of this joke is in Leonard Feinard's *Asian Laughter*, p. 24, under the title *Rice: A certain man had an affair with another man's wife. One day when they were making love to each other the husband returned, and the wife hurriedly hid her lover in a sack. The husband saw that the wife was a bit nervous and he began to look around and saw something moving in the sack. "What is in that sack?" demanded the husband. The wife couldn't find any ready answer. "What is in that sack?" demanded the husband again. In his desperation, the lover in the bag shouted on behalf of the wife, "Rice!"* The following motifs cover the joke: J2600. *Cowardly fool*. J2650. *Bungling fool*. J2666. *The bungling speaker*. T481. *Adultery*. T400. *Illicit sexual relations*. T230. *Faithlessness in marriage*. K1500. *Deception connected with adultery*.

12. A henpecked husband once picked up his courage to quarrel with his wife for a trifle, but was still beaten by the 'female-tiger' until he could bear it no longer and hid himself under the bed. When his wife ordered him to get out, he said, "A man is a man, when he says he will not get out, he will do that for sure."

Notes: Date: 27/1/90. Location: West End Baptist Church. A version is in Leonard Feinberg's *Asian Laughter*, p. 24, under the title *The Manly Way: A man was beaten by his wife and had to go and hide under the bed. "You come out this minute!" the wife commanded. "A man's a man," he answered. "When he says he won't come out, there's nothing you can do about it. He won't come out."* The following motifs cover the joke: P210. *Husband and wife*, and J2600. *Cowardly fool*. Cf. T251. *The Shrewish wife*, and specifically, T251.6. *The browbeaten husband from under the table: "The man always has a man's heart."*

13. A young man one day suddenly felt very sad to find out from a picture that his late father did not have a beard. His mother came to him and consoled him: "Don't

worry, my son. You have a beard because you resemble your mother." "But you don't have a beard, either." the son complained. "Yes, we do, but women's beards don't grow on their faces." the mother said.

Notes: Date: 29/2/90. Location: 30 Rankin St. I have been unable to find an appropriate motif for this joke, but compare: J1440. *Repartee--miscellaneous*.

14. Lee Si angrily said to his neighbour, "Hey, Zhang San, could you teach your son a lesson? He tried just to hit me with a stone, and even made fun of me." The father inquired carefully, "Really? Did he hit you?" Lee Si said that he had been lucky enough that it just missed him, to which the father at once said, "If the stone didn't hit you, the one you accused can't be my son!"

Notes: Date: 27/1/90. Location: West End Baptist Church. The following general motif covers the joke: J1500. *Clever practical retort*.

15. Once, a man asked a smith to install a lock on his door. But the smith placed the lock the wrong way around. The man was very angry and scolded the smith: "You blind stupid pig! Look what you have done!" The smith retorted, "It is you who is stupid and blind, otherwise, why else would you have hired me to do the job?"

Notes: Date: 27/1/90. Location: West End Baptist Church. A parallel can be found in Leonard Feinard's *Asian Laughter*, p. 34, under the title One Fool Makes Two: A carpenter made a gate, and by mistake put the bar outside. The owner of the house abused him, "You blind fool, you!" The carpenter retorted, "It's you who are blind!" the owner, taken aback, asked how that could be. "If you were not blind, you wouldn't have employed a carpenter like me!" The following motifs cover the joke: L113.6. *Smith as hero*. J1500. *Clever practical retort*.

16. Two men named Chang and Wang are boasting about each other's love affairs with women. Chang tried to make Wang believe that he had had more experience with women than Wang. But Wang said, "I think your wife will be, if she is willing to, the best judge to settle our argument."

Notes: Date: 28/1/90. Location: Little Theatre, MUN. It is implied that Wang had sex with Chang's wife before. The following general categories from the MI cover the joke: T400. *Illicit sexual relations*. P665. *Custom: boasting of sexual powers*. However,

a similar English joke bears some similarities: *There were two Welshmen both of whom claimed to be Swansea's most prolific lovers. As they were walking down Union Street a violent argument began as to which of the two had made love to the most women. To settle the row they hit upon an idea. They decided that they should walk down Kingsway and for every woman that the first Welshman had made love to he was to shout "Ping!" and for every woman that the second Welshman had made love to he was to shout "Pong!" The one with the most pings or pongs when they reached the end of Kingsway was to be the winner. So off they went--ping, pong--pong, ping, until they reached the end of Kingsway where they were exactly equal. To decide the contest they turned into High Street. On turning the corner the first Welshman saw his wife and daughter. Silently congratulating himself on his victory, "Ping" he shouted. "Pong! Pong!" was the reply.* This joke is published in *SLAG '66* [University College, Swansea (Wales) Rag Week Chasities Appeal] Glasgow, 1966, p.23, and I am grateful to Professor Gerald Thomas who provided me with the reference.

17. A Buddhist monk said to a group of visitors in the monastery, "Everything in this world made by Buddha is perfect, and it's our responsibility to take good care of it." Just then, a hunchback said to the monk: "Master, do you think that I'm perfect?" The monk thought for a while and then said, "Oh, I think you're the most perfect hunchback I've ever seen."

Notes: Date: 27/1/90. Location: West End Baptist Church. This joke fits under the general category of MI: J1250-J1499. *Clever verbal retorts (repartee)*. This joke is also told elsewhere in the world, as my supervisor Dr. Gerald Thomas indicated that: "I actually tell this joke--I first heard it in Wales, many years ago." The following version is provided by him: *There was an itinerant fire-and-brimstone preacher visiting a Welsh non-conformist chapel, and he'd chosen the theme of God's perfection for his Sunday harangue. He piled up image upon image, each more vivid and evocative than the last, demonstrating God's concern with the creation of perfection. As he concluded his climactic discourse, proclaiming that everything God made was perfection, a little voice piped up from the rear of the chapel: "Yes, but what about me?" The congregation as one turned to see the village humpback, his hump prominently facing the preacher who, without batting an eyelid, proclaimed, "The proof of God's handiwork revealed! You are the most perfect hunchback I've ever seen!"*

18. A girl wearing a miniskirt went to a laundromat, wanting to do some laundry there. The boss, who was quite an old man, kept peeping at the girl's sexy thighs, which made the girl uneasy, so she said haughtily, "Please behave yourself and do not show so much interest in the part which you're not supposed to." The boss looked away from the girl's legs and said, "What I'm interested in is the reputation of my laundromat, I don't think a skirt which is so badly shrunk was done here."

Notes: Date: 27/1/90. Location: West End Baptist Church.

19. The wife said to her husband, "Please don't see me off at the platform, for that'll save you three *yuan*." But the husband insisted on doing so and said, "It's worthwhile to send you away for just three *yuan*."

Notes: Date: 27/1/90. Location: West End Baptist Church. The following motifs from the MI cover the joke: P210. *Husband and wife*. T271. *The neglected wife*. The joke also fits under the general category of the MI: J1250-J1499. *Clever verbal retorts (repartee)*.

20. A certain person was very sophisticated and selfish. When his neighbour one day asked him for a cook-book in which to find the recipe for a certain dish, he said, "I never let my books be taken out of my house." The following week, when this selfish person went to his neighbour's house wanting to borrow his lawn-mower, his neighbour said, "I never let my lawn-mower be taken from my lawn, so you can use it on my lawn."

Notes: Date: 27/1/90. Location: West End Baptist Church. The following motif covers the joke: J1550. *Practical retorts: Borrowers and lenders*.

21. A group of students are talking about a restaurant owner who was so mean that he never invited anyone to have a free meal, not even his relatives and friends. "Whoever of you has ever had a free meal in his house?" one of the students asked his fellows. "Nobody, except the mice in his and my house," another student who was the restaurant owner's next-door neighbour answered.

Notes: Date: 27/1/90. Location: West End Baptist Church, Nfld. The joke sounds funny to Chinese because the man is depicted as being so mean that only mice can be his guests, and he then is compared to mice.

22. At midnight, the wife was aroused by her inner passion and could not sleep, so she pushed the husband beside her and said, "The doctor said that you should take medicine now." While she was saying this, she moved her soft body closer to him. But the husband said in his sleepy voice: "Too late. I don't want to take it today." At this, the

wife was greatly disappointed, and said, "You don't have this kind of medicine every day. Tomorrow there might be a tight cap (see Notes) on the bottle, and you won't be able to get it even if you want it."

Notes: Date: 29/2/90. Location: 30 Rankin St. The 'tight cap' the wife refers to is the protection used during her period. The joke fits into the general categories of the MI, P210. *Husband and wife*. T200. *Married life*.

23. Two young fellows were talking about luck. One said, "My father told me that if a woman has a mole around her nest, then she will be most fortunate in her life." The other one at once retorted, "Really? Then my sister-in-law is fortunate indeed, because she has that." "Well, how do you know your sister-in-law had a mole there?" the first one asked. "My father told me," came the answer.

Notes: Date: 28/1/90. Location: Little Theatre, MUN. The following motifs cover the joke: T400. *Illicit sexual relations*. T481. *Adultery*. T411.1. *Lecherous father*.

24. A certain woman often complained about the size of her husband's penis. One evening just before they began to make love, the husband put a bottle over his penis, and then inserted it into his wife's vagina. The wife felt really good, and said to her husband: "If you had been this good to me earlier, I wouldn't have had an affair with our neighbour Zhang Lai." No sooner had she said these words than the bottle lost its hold and fell into her 'bottomless hole.'

Notes: Date: 29/2/90. Location: 30 Rankin St. The following general motifs fit into the general categories of the MI: P210. *Husband and wife*. F547.5. *Extraordinary vagina*. T481. *Adultery*.

25. A husband said to his wife one morning that they had indulged themselves in too much sex, and from that day on, they should reduce the time spent making love. The wife nodded her head but said nothing. When the husband came back in the evening with a bottle of wine in his hand, the wife at once said, "Dear, I know you are drunk, so what you said today doesn't count."

Notes: Date: 29/2/90. Location: 30 Rankin St. The following general motifs cover this joke: P210. *Husband and wife*. T200. *Married life*. X800. *Humor based on drunkenness*. Compare: AT111* *A Drunkard's Promise*. A drunken mouse challenges a cat to fight. The cat is about to kill him when the mouse reminds the cat that, when the cat was drunk, he had promised the mouse never to kill him. "That was a drunkard's promise," says the cat. Kills the mouse.

26. A couple was so poor that they could not afford to buy groceries. One day the husband said, "Darling, can we just try to have three shoots (sexual intercourse) each day instead of our three meals?" The wife agreed. The next morning when the husband got up, all dizzy, he told his wife, "My sweet, I found that stuff is not just a substitute for meals, it's better, it has the same effect as wine."

Notes: Date: 28/1/90. Location: Little Theatre, MUN. The following general motifs cover this joke: P210. *Husband and wife*. T200. *Married life*.

27. A couple agreed to use "typing" or "to type" as the euphemism for having sexual intercourse. One afternoon when the husband came home, he saw that his wife was busy in the kitchen. He said to her: "Darling, I want to type now, could you help?" The wife said: "Just a minute, I'll be with you." When she went to her husband ten minutes later, he said sadly, "Sorry, dear, I've written it with my hand."

Notes: Date: 28/1/90. Location: Little Theatre, MUN. The following general motifs fit the general categories of the MI: P210. *Husband and wife*. T200. *Married life*. On the other hand, there are many jokes, apparently unclassified in the MI, which deal with euphemism for sexual intercourse. Compare informant Jia Au's joke #15 in this collection. A similar type of this joke, called 'doing the wash,' is also told in North America. The following version is taken from Thomas Burns' *Doing the Wash: An Expressive Culture and Personality Study of a Joke and Its Tellers*: *There was this man and this woman and they were newlyweds. The idea of sex was really new to them so they needed a word to call it by so they could tell one another if they wanted to have intercourse. So they decided to call it "doing the wash."* Well, one night the husband comes home and he wants to have sex with his wife. So they get into bed and he says, "Honey, let's do the wash," and the wife says, "No, I'm really too tired. I had a rough day." So the husband rolls over and goes to sleep. The next night the husband comes home and he wants sex maybe even a little more and so they get into bed and the husband says, "Let's do the wash," and the wife says, "No, we really can't. I'm just too tired. I was out in the sun all day and I'm just really tired." So the husband is unhappy but he rolls over and goes to sleep. The third night the husband comes home and now he really wants to have sex. They get into bed and the husband says again, "Let's do the wash," and the wife says, "I just can't. I was all day ironing the clothes and I'm simply exhausted." So the husband rolls over. After a while the wife begins to think that

she really shouldn't be refusing her husband. After all they had only just been married. So she thinks about it and then she leans over and taps her husband on the shoulder and says, "Honey, I've been thinking about it and it's all right, we can do the wash now," and the husband replies, "That's OK, it was a small load and I did it by hand."⁷⁵

⁷⁵Thomas Burns. *Doing the Wash: An Expressive Culture and Personality Study of a Joke and Its Tellers*. Norwood:(Norwood Editions, 1972): xvi.

INFORMANT: BRIAN WINN

a. General Description

Mr. Brian Winn is fifty-seven years old, and is a retired businessman in good health. Unlike most Chinese immigrants of his age, he speaks very good English, and could understand Mandarin. He was one of the very few Buddhists in St. John's (most Chinese Buddhists converted to Christianity not long after their arrival in the New World). He is not outgoing, and does not speak much. But there is often humour in his speech. He is kind, and always ready to help others in difficulty. I got to know him through a friend the first day I arrived in St. John's, because he was my landlord. We got to know each other much better not long after that through hours and hours of talk. He originally came from Burma, and had been a teacher of English in Hong Kong for six years. He had three children, two girls and a boy.

As I found out through frequent contacts with him later on, he was very talkative about religion--Buddhism in particular. He could relate to religion every topic one might possibly raise. He left me with the impression that a sick person could get cured through getting involved in religion, rather than consulting the doctor. This was indeed the message of his jokes which, though only a few in number, were about doctors as either useless or foolish persons.

I only had two interviews with him on the topic of jokes. This was because I knew that, as he claimed, it was true that he was not a 'literary-type' person. It seemed indeed that he was the last person to see if you wanted to collect jokes. But I still took him as one of my informants on jokes. This was simply because he was my close friend. Moreover, I wanted to prove the common assertion among my Chinese informants that 'everybody (referring mainly to Chinese) can tell a few jokes.' Concerning his jokes, at least, I would not say that he had a significant joke repertoire.

b. Joke-telling Contexts

The first time I interviewed Mr. Winn was in November, 1989. He owns a house on Military Road, and there were five Chinese students living there. He often came over after supper to talk to us. Every time he came, he would bring the *Evening Telegram* of the day for us. I told him the day before I interviewed him that I was going to ask him to tell me a few jokes. He promised to come on time the following evening, although he emphasized that I should not place much hope on him concerning joke-telling because he was not good at telling them. But I thought it was still worth trying. Before he arrived, I tested the recorder and placed the mike on the table. I had a kettle of water boiled, and anxiously waited for his coming, because I had not yet collected many jokes for my thesis. But everything turned out worse than I had expected. First, he said he did not like to have our talk recorded, because that would make our talk 'uncomfortable.' So, I changed my mind and put away the equipment. As usual, we sat in the sitting-room, and first talked about our daily life, such as the dishes we each cooked for dinner that day, and trifles in the house. Then, another two students came over, and talked with Mr. Winn about everything for a long time. I thought the plan was spoiled. But Mr. Winn did not forget his promise, and he said to one of the students that he was supposed to tell me a few jokes that evening. That at once aroused their interest, and the two said that they would like to listen to some jokes.

They also mentioned that they were going to buy some lotto tickets after that. So the topic turned to luck in gambling. Mr. Winn said that he had never bought a lotto ticket. We all felt curious, and asked why he did not. He simply said that he was a businessman, and he would rather rely on his wisdom. Buying lottery tickets, according to him, was the same as playing *ma-joh* which he strongly disliked. Then he said, "Let me tell you a story, or perhaps you'll take it as a joke, about gambling." And he went on to tell us the joke (#5). He said that he knew a lot of old-aged Chinese in St. John's were gambling. One of them once told him a joke about a beggar who turned out to be a man freed from gambling (#4). We all laughed, because the two jokes were quite different in their attitudes toward gambling. I took out a sheet of paper and a pen and quickly wrote down the gist of the jokes while they continued talking about the lottery.

Mr. Winn did not tell me any other jokes that night, but, before we parted, I said that I thought he must have some jokes, because I considered the stories he told about people who gambled to be jokes. I asked him if he would mind telling me some more jokes of that type. He promised again, though we did not set a precise date.

The second time I interviewed Mr. Winn was in January, 1990. The interview was not pre-arranged. Still in his house at Military Road, a couple of us were talking in leisurely fashion one week-end evening. Mr. Winn came by. After a few words of greeting, he spent more than two hours talking about all kinds of principles of Buddhism until, one after the other, the residents retreated to their respective rooms. I tentatively asked if he remembered any jokes. He thought for a while, and said, "... Du doesn't believe what I said (about Buddhism), I can understand, it's just like some people believe doctors and some don't... why? Then, how come people have so many stories about doctors, about teachers, about Christian priests? I don't mean mine (his belief) is the only right one, but it's a right one. In this society, nobody can force others to believe something.... like a doctor, he can cure people and kill people, either deliberately or accidentally. So, what would you do when you are ill? You've got to choose, anyway...." (Based on notes taken during an interview with Mr. Winn on January 12, 1990.) I knew he was a bit disturbed by what Du had said, that he (Du) did not think Buddhism was a religion which could make most people believers, so I asked him if he could give me an example about a doctor or some other occupation that illustrated his point. He at once said that there were many stories about sham doctors, and asked me, "Have you ever heard of a doctor who wanted his son to learn how to swim?" I told him I had not. So he said, "All right, let me tell you this one first, and....(#1)" To prove there were many such jokes about doctors, he followed with another two--(#3) and (#2)--immediately after he finished #1. During his telling, he was very excited, trying to make me believe that what he was telling was exactly what had happened. He kept smiling in order to induce me to laugh at the characters in his jokes. While telling a joke, he never paused to sip his tea, quite unlike his usual behaviour with people.

As I have already mentioned, I can hardly call Mr. Winn a joke-teller in the usual sense of the word, because his jokes were weapons to him to defend his religion, or to illustrate his point. In this sense, he never told jokes. He did not seem to like the term 'joke' in reference to his anecdotes. He would call it a 'story' instead. Whether a story or a joke, he did not seem to have many of them in mind. That was why I did not collect many jokes from him, even though we often saw each other.

The content of his jokes was restricted to two themes: gambling and sham doctors. Out of a total of five jokes which Mr. Winn told me, there was at least one (#1) which could be considered a traditional Chinese joke, because it has been documented in *Asian Laughter*⁷⁶ which contains a wide range of traditional Chinese jokes recorded over the centuries. Although Mr. Winn did not claim that his jokes were traditional ones, I would consider them to be so. This was because of the content of the jokes which revealed that they contained Chinese concepts. For example, it is a traditional Chinese custom, when a family moves away, that the head of the family--usually the father--gives gifts to his neighbours. This was expressed in Mr. Winn's joke #3. Also in jokes #2, #5, and #4, about gambling, itself often associated with Chinese, amounts of money were expressed by the Chinese *yuan* rather than by *dollars*. This perhaps also suggests that Mr. Winn's jokes are Chinese in origin.

c. Jokes Collected from Brian Winn

1. A doctor was tied to a tree by family members for his misdiagnosis of a patient which led to the patient's eventual death. In the night, the doctor managed to untie the rope and swam across the river to his home. When he found his son reading a medical book, he slapped his face and said: "You shouldn't read such books. Books are only secondary, for you should first learn how to swim."

Notes: Date: 12/1/90. Location: 162 Military Rd. A parallel to this joke is in Leonard Feinberg's *Asian Laughter*, p. 38, under the title The Art of Swimming: A

⁷⁶Leonard Feinberg. *Asian Laughter*. New York:(John Weatherhill, Inc., 1971): 164.

certain doctor had killed so many patients, their relatives rose up in arms and captured him, but he escaped during the night, dived into the river, and made his getaway. Reaching home he found his son reading Mochue, a book of medicine. He said hastily to him, "Don't be in such a hurry to study that book; what you need to do first is to learn to swim." The following motifs cover the joke: X372. Joke on doctors. K3. Sham doctor kills his patients. J1115.2. Clever physician. J2100. Remedies worse than the disease.

2. A patient had just had an operation and was being wheeled into the ward. Suddenly the doctor rushed in and told the patient that he was so sorry, but he had to do the operation once more. The patient asked why, and the doctor explained, "I've left my scalpel in your body." To which the patient laughed and said, "That's all right, leave it there, don't make a fuss about anything. Here's two *yuan*, and you can buy another one."

Notes: Date: 12/1/90. Location: 162 Military Rd. This joke fits in the general MI category: X372. *Jokes on doctors.*

3. Once, a certain doctor was going to move away. Before leaving, he thanked his neighbours for showing interest in his business for years and said: "I am leaving soon. You know I am still not well off and have nothing to offer you. Here are some medicines which I wish to give you to express my gratitude for the friendship we have shared as good neighbours." "Thank you just the same, Doctor," the neighbour said, "but I am not ill, so I don't think I need any medicine." "Oh, don't worry, just take it. After taking the medicine, I guarantee that you will be ill."

Notes: Date: 12/1/90. Location: 162 Military Rd. The joke fits the MI categories: X372. *Jokes on doctors.* J2100. *Remedies worse than the disease.*

4. A gambler lost all his money gambling and had not a cent left in his pocket. But he could still not bear to tear himself away from gambling. So he went to the House (the place for gambling) again and asked the other gamblers to let him try once more. "If I lose, I'll give you my wife," he said. So, they let him try his luck again. But once again, he lost five hundred *yuan*. "Now, your wife belongs to me," the winner said. "But my wife is worth more than just five hundred *yuan*!" the loser exclaimed. "Well, if your wife is a virgin, she could be worth more than that amount," the other one said. "Yes, she is!"

the gambler yelled. "How could that be?" the winner asked. "You see, I have never left the game table since we got married last week," the gambler said reassuringly.

Notes: Date: 16/11/89. Location: 162 Military Rd. Compare motif, T292.1. *Wives traded*, the nearest I can find to cover this joke.

5. A beggar stopped a rich man who wore a gorgeous suit and asked for a few coins to buy his lunch. The man said that he didn't have any cash, but he could buy him a glass of wine with a cheque. "No, I don't drink, I only need a *yuan* or two for a bowl of noodles," the beggar said. But the rich man asked if he would like to have a cigar; the man said, "Thank you, I don't smoke, either." The rich man then said, "Come with me to the Silver Building (gambling house) and I'll treat you to a bowl of noodles after that." But the beggar again showed his reluctance, and said that he did not gamble. The man thought for a while, and then said: "Let's go to my home where you can eat as much as you wish. But before doing that, I'll introduce you to my wife and show her what a non-drinking, non-smoking, and non-gambling man is like!"

Notes: Date: 16/11/89. Location: 162 Military Rd. There does not seem to be a precise motif to cover this joke, but compare X461. *Jokes concerning beggars*. P160. *Beggars*. P150. *Rich man*. J1332. *Beggar wants bread*.

INFORMANT: JIA AU

a. General Description

Jia Au is fifty-two of age, and retired four years ago. He was originally from Hong Kong. Jia Au has lived in Newfoundland for twenty-one years. He has three children, two boys and a girl. He is a very casual man, and easy to get along with. When I first met him and addressed him as Mr. Au, he immediately interrupted me and said that from then on I should never call him Mr. Au again. 'Au Bo' (meaning Uncle Au) was what he was ready to accept from a man of my age. He is short, dark--a typical man from South China. He is a heavy smoker, and whenever I met him, I always saw him with a cigarette in hand. He laughs a lot, like an energetic young man. Although his spoken English is somewhat poor, there were always some quips in his speech.

I got to know Jia Au through Yan Zan, a mutual friend of ours. I conducted two interviews with Jia Au on jokes, and it turned out that he really was, as Yan Zan had said of him, 'a man of jokes.' I collected about twenty jokes from him. Unlike other Chinese joke informants in the community, Jia Au's jokes included a variety of different cultural traits.

b. Joke Repertoire

One special characteristic of Jia Au's joke repertoire is that he tells all kinds of jokes. That is, jokes which are related to people and things both Oriental and Occidental. He is the only one in the first group whose joke repertoire turned out to be so broad. Based on Stith Thompson's classification in his *Motif-Index*, Jia Au's jokes range from clever persons and acts, clever practical retorts to fools and association with fools; from jokes about sex to jokes about different ethnic groups. However, numskull jokes make up eighty percent of those I collected from Jia Au.

More important is the fact that some of Jia Au's jokes are set in Canada rather than in China. For example, in joke #7, although the character of the joke is from China, the

event takes place in Toronto. This could be due to the fact that he has lived in Newfoundland for quite a long time, and could even tell 'Newfie jokes.' For instance, when I interviewed him for the second time, I asked him if he had ever heard of a 'Newfie joke,' and he at once said that he did, warning me not to tell the jokes to local people because it showed disrespect to them. 'Newfies,' according to Jia Au, are very kind, humble, and hospitable, and are not foolish at all, although there are many jokes which suggest that they are. He then gave an example, saying that once, one of his friends told him a Newfie joke about a Newfie who drove to Toronto; when he was about to reach the city, he saw a road sign which said 'Toronto Left.' So this Newfie drove back to Newfoundland and told people who planned to go to Toronto not to go because Toronto had already left. Here, what I want to emphasize is the fact that Jia Au's joke repertoire, significantly different from other Chinese joke-tellers in the community, contained 'exotic' elements which might not be considered Chinese jokes, let alone traditional Chinese ones.

c. Joke-telling Contexts

The first time I interviewed Jia Au was in December, 1989. Due to the inconvenience caused by the weather, he promised to come to my place to talk to me about jokes he knew. He came at about seven in the evening. We had some tea, and sat in the living-room talking about different topics for quite a while until my child went to sleep. The living-room was not big, but it was clean and comfortable. Jia Au asked me many questions about our daily life, such as eating habits and cooking styles. We chatted for half an hour or so. Then I changed our topic to the joke, and asked him what kind of jokes and stories he usually told, and to whom he usually told them. He said he used to tell a lot of stories to his children before they went to bed in the evening, or sometimes he just read some interesting stories and jokes which the children liked very much. There were now only the two of us in the sitting-room. I suggested that he tell some jokes. He was sitting side by side with me on a sofa. He asked me if he could smoke, and I replied that he should do as he wished. He lit a cigarette, paused for a while, and then asked me what kind of jokes I wished to listen to. I said I did not mind what kind they were so long

as they were jokes, but I preferred to have some jokes which were really interesting. I mentioned a joke about gambling⁷⁷ which another informant had told me. Jia Au was quick to react, and said that he knew a lot of jokes and stories about gamblers because the Chinese were fond of gambling, even young people were no exceptions. He stood up to reach the ashtray on the table and said, "Let me tell you a joke about this," and then he sat back and related a short, but very interesting joke about a young Chinese gambler, #11. After that, we talked for a while about gambling in the community. I then asked him to continue to tell me jokes.

Seeing that there was nobody else present, Jia Au said, "Since there is no one here, let me tell you some 'men's jokes.'" I at once asked him what he meant by 'men's jokes.' He said with a smile, "You'll know what they are after I tell you one." I kept quiet until he finished telling me a joke (#1) which G. Legman has categorized as a 'dirty joke.' The following is the translation of my interview with Jia Au concerning 'men's jokes':

[...]

Zhu: So, you call this a 'man's joke,' simply because it's not suitable for a woman to listen to, right?

Au: Yes, you see, men's jokes are of course only for men to share, not for women. That's it.

Zhu: I wonder if this is only your special term, or are there others who also use 'men's jokes' to mean this kind of joke?

Au: No, I use this term only, but I think everyone can understand what it means. Like, when we sit together, and tell each other some jokes, I say, 'I'm going to tell you guys some men's jokes,'

⁷⁷See joke #4 in the section *Jokes Collected from Brian Winn*.

then everybody understands what's going to happen. Do you understand?

Zhu: Oh, yes, I do. But, when do you usually tell jokes, like 'men's jokes?' What if there is a woman there? Do you still tell?

Au: No, no no. Like, when we playing *Mo-joh*, we often tell each other jokes. No woman present then. So, everyone is happy and can tell anything interesting he knew, or experienced. If there is a woman aside, nobody will tell a joke like that unless he is a fool himself.... There is always a moral in telling jokes, especially you do not tell this kind of jokes before children.

Zhu: If you don't mind, may I ask, what about your wife? Do you tell her? Why?

Au: Oh, that's no problem, because my wife is an adult. But only I myself can tell her. Otherwise, she'll get offended, because a woman is not supposed to listen to such jokes. I am sure you know that. It's Chinese tradition for a woman to be good, and avoid evils. To be frank, sometimes I tell my wife those jokes just for fun... everybody does the same.

Zhu: I see. Do you think women also have their special jokes or stories like this, perhaps we can call 'women's jokes?'

Au: Oh, I don't know. I've never heard of that...

Zhu: That's OK. I think your joke is really interesting. Do you have any other jokes like that, or any kind?

Au: Alright, let me tell you another one....

So, he went on telling jokes, and kept smoking. The next joke (#15) he told was somewhat like the 'Doing the Wash'⁷⁸ one told in North America. When he had finished, I asked him where he heard the joke. He said from a friend when they were playing *Ma-joh*. So, I told him the joke 'Doing the Wash.' He was interested, and asked me if I could tell him some jokes. I said I certainly could if he was willing to listen, at some time in the future, because the evening was arranged for him to tell me some jokes. Jia Au consented. It was about eleven o'clock in the evening by then, my wife came downstairs and helped us make some coffee, and placed some cookies on the table for us. After that, she went upstairs. Jia Au did not continue his joke 14 which was half told when my wife came downstairs. I could sense that he stopped to avoid embarrassing both my wife and himself, because he was telling a 'man's joke' at that moment. He did not finish the joke until my wife went upstairs.

I found Jia Au had a very good memory, for, unlike most people of his age, he did not say anything like 'Where did we stop just now?' after coming back to a joke which he had stopped at half way through earlier. When he was telling me jokes, he seemed excited and emotional, because he would unconsciously raise his voice when he came to a punchline. One specific feature about Jia Au's joke-telling was that he often imitated the characters' voices and tones in his jokes. For example, a dramatic effect was immediately achieved when he imitated the conversation of the two characters in joke #6, although the joke itself was relatively short. It was past midnight when he told me the next joke. My wife came down again and asked us if we needed a 'night-meal' (a meal served at midnight which usually consists of noodles and fried eggs and vegetables). Jia Au at once stood up and apologized for staying too late. A moment later, the three of us were having the noodles with fried cod fish which my wife had prepared. While eating, my wife asked about the jokes Jia Au had told me. Jia Au at once said, "You want to hear jokes, OK, let me tell you one... Have you ever heard of the Chinese popular saying 'a

⁷⁸See Sinclair Gao's joke #27 and its Notes.

man becomes wise by eating fish?'" Seeing my wife shake her head, Jia Au smiled and said that the saying was not only a belief held by many old-aged Chinese, but by many other peoples in the world. He emphasized that the belief was somewhat superstitious. The joke Jia Au then told (#10) was about an Irishman buying fish from a Jew, which in fact not only expressed his point of view about the belief, but also helped me get a better idea about his joke repertoire.

The second time I interviewed Jia Au was totally different from the first one. First, there were a relatively large audience (five people); secondly, due to the different audience, Jia Au's jokes were different from those told on the previous occasion. In other words, there were no 'men's jokes' in the joke-telling. Thirdly, although he had not been invited to come and tell jokes, the joke-telling session itself occurred more spontaneously. Lastly, although the time spent joke-telling was much shorter compared to the first time, there were more jokes told.

It was three days after the celebration of the Chinese New Year when Jia Au was again interviewed at my house. According to Chinese tradition, the celebration usually lasts five days. Many social activities and gatherings take place during these few days. As far as my second interview with Jia Au is concerned, I had not asked him to come and tell me jokes. He had been invited simply to have an informal dinner with three other good friends of mine. Each of us had some Chinese wine that night. After supper, we had a long talk about China, mainly about China's political and economic situation. Jia Au had kept silent for a while until I told my friends that he could tell a lot of jokes. Then my friends all insisted that Jia Au tell some jokes. My wife also came over at that moment to join us, leaving our child upstairs. Jia Au seemed pleased and proud of his joke repertoire. He at once told us two mother-in-law jokes (#12), and (#13). We all laughed because of the jokes' humorous content.

But my child heard our laughter, and came downstairs. One of my friends asked my son to let Jia Au tell some more jokes. Seeing the timid child, Jia Au held him in his arms, and asked him about his age and the grade he was in. "You don't play truant, do

you? Do you want to hear a story about a child playing truant?" Jia Au said to my son. He first told a joke (#3), and then, urged by my child and encouraged by our obvious interest, he continued to relate a number of jokes, mainly concerning teachers and students. According to their underlying themes, the jokes all fall into the categories J1750-1849 *Absurd misunderstandings* and J1730-1749 *Absurd ignorance* in Stith Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*. During the joke-telling, the child was so attentive that he did not fail to catch the real essence of the joke. On the other hand, Jia Au kept asking him: "You understand this?" or "Do you see what this means?" It seemed to us then that he was only playing with the child, although every second he would look at our facial expressions to make sure we were listening to him too. The jokes were interesting, but the child could hardly concentrate for long. When the child had heard about five jokes, he went upstairs again. Then the joke-telling ended with a short period of discussion of the source of the jokes Jia Au told. Once again, Jia Au emphasized that he got most of his jokes from friends with whom he played *Ma-Joh*. According to Jia Au, there were of course some he had picked up when he was still young. He did not get jokes from reading joke-books although in the past he often used to read funny stories to his children before they went to bed.

d. Jokes Collected from Jia Au

1. A young man once said to his friend: "My wife's sister is also very beautiful. When they sit side by side, I can hardly tell which is my wife and which is her sister." His friend asked: "How do you know your wife in bed, then?" "Oh, that's not difficult. My wife has a small red mole at that spot. If I can't find it, then it's her sister."

Notes: Date: 29/12/89. Location: 39 Spencer St. A similar joke is in Leonard Feinberg's *Asian Laughter*, p. 36, under the title A Birthmark on a Certain Place: A physiognomist said, "If a woman has a mole on a certain place, she will give birth to a noble child." Hearing this a man was very glad and said, "If that is so, my sister-in-law will have a fine son." "How do you know your sister-in-law has that mark?" "My father told my wife, and she told me." The following motifs from the MI cover the joke: T425. *Brother-in-law seduces (seeks to seduce) sister-in-law*. P264. *Sister-in-law*. T400. *Illicit sexual relations*. T481. *Adultery*. T92.8. *Sisters in love with same man*. H600. *Symbolic interpretations*.

2. A peasant went to see the doctor. Knowing that the peasant was an illiterate, the doctor said patiently, as he placed medicine into the peasant's hand: "When you go back, take the big ones four times a day, and the small ones twice a day. You understand?" "Yes, I see, doctor," the peasant said. But when he went back home, he called his two sons before him and let his oldest son take the medicine every six hours and the younger son every twelve hours.

Notes: Date: 31/1/90. Location: 39 Spencer St. The joke fits the MI categories: J1705.1. *Stupid peasant*. J1734. *Layman's ignorance of medicine*.

3. A teacher asked her students to answer the question whether the sun or the moon was more useful to human beings. A girl answered that it was moon, because, she thought, "The moon shines in the evening and helps people to see the road, while the sun only shines in the daytime."

Notes: Date: 31/1/90. Location: 39 Spencer St. The joke fits the MI categories: P340. *Teacher and pupil*. J2200. *Absurd lack of logic*.

4. A father asked his son to think about the question 'why people close one eye while firing a gun.' The son immediately answered: "If they close both eyes, they can see nothing."

Notes: Date: 31/1/90. Location: 41 Mount Royal Ave. The joke fits the following MI categories: P233. *Father and son*. J1122. *Clever younger generation*. J1113. *Clever boy*.

5. A mother asked her son to guess a riddle to which the answer was a quilt. But the son was dull and kept asking his mother for clues. So, the mother told him that it was something on the bed. "A plank," the son then guessed. The mother said no and suggested it might be something on the plank. The son said, "A mattress." Again the mother said no and told him it was something on the mattress. "A sheet!" the boy shouted, seeming a bit impatient. "You are close to it now, it's something on the sheet," the mother said. "Mummy," the son at once said. "Oh, my dear son, you almost got it! Think what's on the top of your mummy?" The boy was delighted and replied confidently: "Daddy!"

Notes: Date: 31/1/90. Location: 41 Mount Royal Ave. The following general motif covers the joke: J1745. *Absurd ignorance of sex.*

6. One night, a husband complained about their wooden bed to his wife: "Dear, it's really hard underneath." The wife at once responded: "Gosh, you haven't said that for years! Stick to it and I'll be right in bed with you."

Notes: Date: 29/12/89. Location: 39 Spencer St. The joke fits the general categories: P210. *Husband and wife.* X700. *Humor concerning sex.* Compare: J1750-1849. *Absurd misunderstandings.*

7. A child from China just settled in Toronto asked his father, "Are Canadian women very poor?" The father asked the son what had made him think that way, to which the son answered, "I saw many of them wearing very little and sometimes nothing on TV."

Notes: Date: 31/1/90. Location: 41 Mount Royal Ave. The following general motif covers the joke: J1745. *Absurd ignorance of sex.*

8. Xiao Bin was a student and one day he wanted to play truant. Pretending to be the parent, he picked up the telephone and spoke to the teacher: "Hello, Ms. Higgins, Xiao Bin is ill today, so he can't go to school." The teacher asked: "May I know who is speaking?" Xiao Bin at once answered, "My daddy."

Notes: Date: 31/1/90. Location: 41 Mount Royal Ave. The joke fits the general categories: J2210. *Logical absurdity based upon certain false assumptions.* and J2200. *Absurd lack of logic.*

9. A naughty boy once went to a barbershop. Pretending to be a grown-up, he required the barber to shave him. Then the barber let him sit on the chair, put some shaving cream on his face and went out. The boy waited and waited until at last he could bear it no more, so he shouted out to the barber: "When are you going to shave my beard?" The barber said politely, "I'm waiting for it to grow out, sir."

Notes: Date: 31/1/90. Location: 41 Mount Royal Ave. A precise motif from the MI is found: J1115.3. *Clever barber*. Also compare: J1560. *Practical retorts: host and guests*.

10. An Irishman asked a Jew why Jews were so clever. The Jew told him that he ate a kind of fish which made him become clever. So the Irishman bought a piece of fish from the Jew, for which he paid a lot of money. When he cooked and tasted it, he told the Jew that he thought the fish was almost exactly the same as a common salmon. "Yes, you're right, see, you've become clever now!" laughed the Jew.

Notes: Date: 29/12/89. Location: 39 Spencer St. The joke fits the following general categories of the MI: X610. *Jokes concerning Jews*. X650. *Jokes concerning other races and nations*.

11. A son lost all his money gambling. He then asked for money from his mother and said, "If you don't give it to me, I'll act as I've planned." Fearing her son might commit suicide, the mother gave him the money he wanted, and later asked him, "What if I hadn't given the money to you, my son?" The son smiled and said, "I had planned to quit gambling."

Notes: Date: 29/12/89. Location: 39 Spencer St. The joke fits the following motifs: J1115.1. *Clever gambler*. J1122. *Clever younger generation*.

12. Two lovers were going to get married but the girl's mother showed her disagreement. So the young man asked the girl the reason. The girl said, "My mom thinks that you lack masculinity, and if we get married you won't be able to protect me in time of need." The man said, "To be truthful, I can certainly protect you in time of need. As for masculinity, I regret to tell you that I'm really not my mother-in-law's equal."

Notes: Date: 31/1/90. Location: 41 Mount Royal Ave. The joke fits the following general categories of the MI: P262. *Mother-in-law*. and J1160. *Clever pleading*.

13. A poor man was engaged to a girl from a rich family, but he was afraid that she would change her mind. So, he asked a few of his relatives to kidnap the girl at night. But, they mistakenly snatched the girl's mother in the darkness. When they ran away

from the house, the girl was very worried and she shouted after them, "Stop! You've taken the wrong person." The mother said to the man who carried her on his back: "Don't listen to her, hurry up. You've got the right one."

Notes: Date: 31/1/90. Location: 41 Mount Royal Ave. The joke fits the general categories of the MI: P262. *Mother-in-law*. J414. *Marriage with equal or with unequal*.

14. On the very night they got married, the husband was overjoyed and said to his wife: "We're finally together now, despite your father's interference." So they made love. Then the husband said again: "We finally got married even though your mother didn't agree." And they did it again. When they had finished, the husband felt sleepy and exhausted. But the wife said: "Don't forget, dear, my brother also tried to interfere with our marriage."

Notes: Date: 29/12/89. Location: 39 Spencer St. The joke fits the following general categories of the MI: P210. *Husband and wife*. T200. *Married life*.

15. While going to bed one evening, the husband said to his wife: "My stock (referring to the penis) is rising." The wife said, "Sorry, too late today, the gate is already closed." "But my stock is hard." the husband said. The wife once more said that it was too late. A moment later, she said to her husband: "As a special case, I'll open the door for you." "No," the husband replied, "I've already sold out."

Notes: Date: 29/12/89. Location: 39 Spencer St. The joke fits the general categories of the MI: P210. *Husband and wife*. T200. *Married life*. Also compare informant Sinclair Gao's joke #27 and its Notes.

INFORMANT: JOHN LEE

a. General Description

John Lee is seventy-two years old and a retired businessman. He originally came from Guangdong Province, China. He has been living in Newfoundland for more than twenty years. He is short, white-haired, and in poor health. I got to know John Lee sometime after I had started my fieldwork in the community, so I did not know him very well. He was introduced to me by a student who did know him well. That student told me that John Lee could tell many stories, both funny and frightening ones. However, the jokes I collected from John Lee were not numerous enough to give me an overall picture of him and his narrative repertoire; I had only one interview with John Lee and collected only three jokes from him, largely because of his poor health.

b. Joke-telling Contexts

The first time I met John Lee was at my friend's home on Military Road in St. John's. I had received a phone call from my friend and it was he who told me to come at once, because John Lee was there. My friend did not think that I would be able to find a time to interview John Lee at his home. The reason, according to my friend, was that he was often in hospital, and besides, John Lee was not that hospitable. When I arrived, he was playing *Ma-joh* with three other Chinese. I had been watching their play for a while, and it was really boring to me since I did not know how to play the game. When they had finished, we all went to the dining-room downstairs where we had a quick lunch. My friend asked John Lee to tell us some stories. Seeing that I was there, the friend said, "He wants to collect jokes, tell us a joke first, OK?" I at once nodded my head to John Lee to express my agreement. But he said with a smile, "Wait until we go upstairs."

When we went upstairs, the four people went on again with their *Ma-joh*. I was a bit worried. My friend brought some coffee and asked us to have some. John Lee then seemed to remember his promise and said, "Any of you can tell a joke first?" Nobody said yes, but all said that he should tell one. "OK, my jokes are short, now you listen,

each of you later pay me five dollars." Everyone laughed. So, he began telling his joke #1, in a low voice. Everybody was listening to him attentively. We all laughed upon his finishing the joke. My friend said, "It's really stupid." "Good," John Lee went on, "let me tell you a clever one, then." With this, he told another joke (#3) to us. When he had finished, one of the players implied that they should continue their play. John Lee said, "OK, I can tell you a couple more while playing." While the other two players were arranging the cards, John Lee told us one more joke, #2. Then he was stopped by his partner, who wanted him to pay attention to the cards. So I had to move aside. Before leaving, I asked John Lee if he would have some time to tell me some other jokes he might know, but he did not agree and said, "Oh, sorry, my home is very far from here. Next time I call you if possible." I thanked him and gave him my phone number. But I never received a call from him thereafter.

c. Jokes Collected from John Lee

1. A stupid but very hardworking student grew some vegetables in his backyard. When the vegetables were ready to eat, the student sent some to his teacher and said, "These are very fresh vegetables which I have grown in my backyard. I'd like to let my teacher share them with me." The teacher said, "Very well, what are you going to do next?" "I'm going to feed my ass, Teacher." replied the student.

Notes: Date: 4/12/89. Location: 162 Military Rd. When the teacher says "What are you going to do next?" he simply implies that the student should go and read his books. However, the punch-line "I'm going to feed my ass, Teacher" depicts the stupid student in two different ways: 1) failure to get his teacher's implication; 2) unconsciously implies that he is going to feed his ass with the same kind of vegetables which he gave his teacher, which is, of course, a kind of insult to his teacher. But to the audience, it is the student's stupid answer that makes them laugh. The following general motifs from the MI cover the joke: P340. *Teacher and pupil*. Also compare: X350. *Jokes on teachers*.

2. A metrobus driver was tired of being frequently asked the time by the passengers, so he put a clock in the front of the bus. However, from then on the passengers would ask him whether the time was correct or not.

Notes: Date: 4/12/89. Location: 162 Military Rd. This joke, very clearly, is a 'non-Chinese' joke.

3. After a storm, there was a small pool in front of the restaurant. The owner of the restaurant phoned City Hall for help, but got no definite reply. So he erected a sign by the pool. Less than an hour later, the pool had dried up. This was because of what was written on the sign: No Fishing in This Pool.

Notes: Date: 4/12/90. Location: 162 Military Rd. It seems to me, though the teller didn't specify, that this joke might have had been set in any place such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, China and so on, rather than in Newfoundland. The joke, perhaps, is only funny to Chinese because of their cultural background. There is a joke prevalent throughout China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan which describes a fishing contest: A five-square-kilometer pond had dried up because there were too many people putting their fishing rods into the pond! The Chinese are fond of fishing, and the result of this is that there are not many ponds still with fish. In this joke, the owner of the restaurant wants to clear up the pool in front of the restaurant, because the pool inconveniences to his customers. Lacking help from City Hall, he thus erects the sign, which is of course a trick. Many people will come to fish but eventually will only dry up the pool for the owner.

INFORMANT: LOUISE HONG*a. General Description*

Louis Hong is thirty years old, and originally from Malaysia. Unlike most girls from Southeast Asia, she is quite tall, with a white complexion. She wears glasses, and is very pretty. She came to Newfoundland with her parents in 1968. When I interviewed her in December 1989, she was working as a sales clerk in the Woolco Store. I got to know Louise Hong in the United Church on Gower Street after one Sunday afternoon service. She has a very nice and friendly personality. She likes to talk to students, especially those who come from mainland China. This is because, according to her, her grandparents were originally from mainland China. Although she had never been to China, she has a broad knowledge of the geography and history of China. She reads a lot about China, and told me that she wanted to visit China one day when the opportunity became possible. Louise Hong speaks good English, and can speak a little Mandarin. As a girl who has grown up in Newfoundland, she also has a profound feeling for the people and nature of Canada. For example, she often told me how sincere and helpful Newfoundlanders are. She told me 'Newfie' jokes to illustrate her point that people in Newfoundland were once looked down upon by people on the mainland. Miss Hong emphasized that, with fast-developing technology, 'Newfies' have now largely gotten rid of their ignorance and backwardness, but still keep their virtues of honesty and sincerity. It was because Louise Hong told me some 'Newfie' jokes that I decided to include her amongst my informants.

b. Joke Repertoire

Louise Hong was the only one whose jokes showed a significant assimilation to Canadian culture. Of all the jokes I collected from her, I found two different categories. The first includes jokes she might have heard from her parents or read in Chinese joke-books. Jokes #1, #2, #5 and #7, for example, basically include Chinese cultural elements only. The second category contains jokes she has heard from both local people and her

Chinese compatriots in Newfoundland. For example, jokes such as #3, #4, and #6 are more or less tinged with Western cultural elements and contents.

Louise Hong does not often tell people jokes, but she had many jokes, as she herself claimed. I had only one interview with her. It was not easy to judge how big her joke repertoire was. However, she not only gave me the impression that she could tell a lot of jokes, but also many different kinds of jokes.

c. Joke-telling Contexts

The interview with Louise Hong was pre-arranged. The day before I interviewed her was a Sunday; after the church service, as usual, a dozen of us retreated to a big room at the rear of the church, and were talking about different topics over a cup of tea or coffee. I asked Louise if she could find some time to tell me some jokes, because she had told me a couple of 'Newfie' jokes on previous Sundays. She told me that she would be off the following day and asked me if I could meet her somewhere at the university, because she had an appointment in the Science Building at ten o'clock. So I suggested the Cafeteria at twelve o'clock, and she agreed.

I went to the Cafeteria in the Science Building the following day and waited for Louise Hong. She arrived ten minutes later, just at twelve. We had some coffee and donuts while talking, and although the room was a bit crowded, we were seated at a table. She first asked me if I had heard many traditional Chinese jokes and stories. She said she knew that many Chinese idioms and proverbs were derived from jokes and tales. She then told me a joke (#1), and asked me if I had heard it before. I said that I had not. I could see that she felt encouraged, and she quickly told me another one. I made some notes to each joke, telling her that the jokes were very useful to me. Meanwhile, I implied that she might tell some jokes related to life here, whether Chinese or not. She thought for a while, and told me the jokes (#6) and (#3), which she thought were jokes taking place outside China. I asked her why she thought so, and, she replied she just felt it was that way. Both of us had to speak loudly so that we could hear each other clearly in the

Cafeteria. She soon appeared tired, and her voice became a bit hoarse. I asked her if she would like to go outside, and I suggested the corridor. She said she did not mind. Having talked for a while about the recent weather, she continued her joke-telling and told me that almost all the jokes were from books she had read. According to her, she seldom told people jokes, because she felt more pleasure reading them. Louise also pointed out that a girl was not supposed to tell jokes to people whom she did not know well. Her point of view, of course, was influenced by the traditional Confucian view; Confucius thought that women were inferior to men, and when men are present, women should not talk. I pointed this out to Louise, who said it was true and that was how she had been taught by her parents, who insisted that Louise not forget her Chinese cultural heritage.

About a quarter past one, we walked out the Cafeteria. Before we parted, Louise said that she remembered a joke told by her father, and then told me the joke (#4) in the corridor. She also promised to have a good talk with me about Chinese jokes after Christmas. But due to my tight schedule in the field during January, I did not contact Louise Hong for a second interview.

d. Jokes Collected from Louise Hong

1. A man was shot by an arrow in his leg, so he went to the doctor. The doctor who was a surgeon sawed off the arrow immediately for the patient. The man was surprised and asked what about the other part of the arrow in his leg. "That--," the doctor said, "you should consult your internal doctor (see Notes). I am just responsible for the outer part."

Notes: Date: 11/12/89. Location: Science Bldg. Cafeteria, MUN. From a Chinese medical point of view, a internal doctor is responsible for diseases within a person's body, for example, of the liver, spleen, lungs, heart and the like, while a 'external' doctor is responsible for diseases on a person's 'outer' body, for example, skin disease. However, a Chinese external doctor is also somewhat like a Western surgeon. A similar version of this joke can be found in Leonard Feinberg's *Asian Laughter*, p. 28, under the title Nothing To Do with Me: *A surgeon once boasted about his ability. A soldier, returning from battle with an arrow penetrating his leg, came to him for treatment. The surgeon took a pair of sharp scissors and cut off the stem of the arrow close to the flesh, then asked for pay. "But you haven't taken out the head of the arrow," complained the soldier. "That's an internal matter. That's a physician's business, not mine," was the reply.* The following general categories of the MI cover the joke: X372.

Jokes on doctors. J1910. Absurd disregard of anatomy. X372.4. Foolish doctor performs useless operation.

2. A debtor said to his creditor: "I'm afraid my days are numbered in this world. I dreamed a dream last night in which I died." "Don't worry, my friend, whatever happens in a dream is always the opposite in reality," the man said to the debtor. "Oh, I see. Then I had another dream in which I thought I had not yet paid you your money."

Notes: Date: 11/12/89. Location: Science Bldg. Cafeteria, MUN. The following motifs cover the joke: J1380. *Retorts concerning debts.* and J1550. *Practical retorts: Borrowers and lenders.*

3. A certain young man offered a beautiful girl a ride after the party was over. The girl's home was only a stone's throw away, but the man drove for an hour round the town. When the car finally stopped at the door of the girl's house, the girl politely said to the young man, "Thank you very much. But, I'm afraid that you don't know this town very well. My home should have been only a two minutes' drive." "On the contrary," the man said confidently, "I know this place very well. Otherwise, how could I manage an hour's drive without passing your home once?"

Notes: Date: 11/12/89. Location: Science Bldg. Cafeteria, MUN. The joke fits the following general categories of the MI: T10. *Falling in love.* T50. *Wooing.*

4. A waitress often removes food ordered by customers. Once when she placed a one-clawed crab on the plate before a customer, she was asked why there was only one claw on the crab. "Oh, that--," the waitress said, "that's because crabs are fond of fighting. This one must have lost, so it has only one claw." At this, the customer said, "Very good, then, please give me the crab that won."

Notes: Date: 11/12/89. Location: Science Bldg. Cafeteria, MUN. The joke fits the following general categories of the MI: J1160. *Clever pleading.* J2233. *Logically absurd defenses.*

5. There was a trickster living on the first floor of an apartment and another trickster on the second floor. One day, the one living upstairs said to the other one: "I know you

like playing tricks on people, but is there any way you can make me go downstairs?" The one on the first floor thought for a moment and said, "That's really impossible, unless you were downstairs, and then I could easily make you go upstairs." The man on the second floor went downstairs and said to the other one, "OK, let's see how you can do that." Then, the trickster on the first floor said, "There is really no need to try it, I've already made you come down."

Notes: Date: 11/12/89. Location: Science Bldg. Cafeteria, MUN. The joke fits the general categories of the MI: K1600. *Deceiver falls into own trap*. J1510. *The cheater cheated*.

6. The husband asked: "Why did you buy those flowers, darling?" "You've forgotten! Today is your marriage anniversary. These flowers are just for you." "Oh, God! I really forgot." the husband said, "Thank you, dear, I promise to do the same when your marriage anniversary comes."

Notes: Date: 11/12/89. Location: Science Bldg. Cafeteria, MUN. According to the teller, both the husband and the wife are married twice. The sentences "... Today is your marriage anniversary." "... I promise to do the same when your marriage anniversary comes." all imply the opposite's first marriage. The following general MI categories cover the joke: P210. *Husband and wife*. T200. *Married life*.

7. "Hi, Wang, would you lend me your pen?" Li said. "Oh, sure. Here you are." "And a piece of paper?" "Yes, here it is." Wang gave Li a piece of paper. "Will you be passing the post office when you leave?" Li again asked, and Wang said he would. "Could you wait for me until I finish this letter?" "Sure," Wang said. "Now please give me a stamp." Wang seemed a bit impatient and handed Li a stamp: "Here you are." "Good, now please tell me your girl friend's address."

Notes: Date: 11/12/89. Location: Science Bldg. Cafeteria, MUN. I have been unable to find appropriate motif for the joke, but compare: J2347. *Occupational trickster*.

INFORMANT: MARGARET LEE

a. General Description

Margaret Lee is forty-seven years old, and from Hong Kong. She came to Newfoundland six years ago and is a housewife. She is very short, and very kind. Margaret is very friendly and is considered most 'open-minded' for her age by Chinese students who knew her. Although she is from Hong Kong, she shows great concern for students from China. She had frequent contact with them, and often takes good care of them in many aspects of their lives. Although she might not be considered a joke-teller, when she knew I needed some jokes for my thesis, she tried her best to help me. She speaks Cantonese, and can speak Mandarin, but with a strong accent. Her spoken English is not fluent. When she spoke to me, she used Mandarin most of the time.

b. Joke-telling Contexts

The jokes I collected from Margaret Lee were done so quite accidentally. In fact, I did not at first consider Margaret to be an informant. It was she who helped me on her own initiative. As I mentioned above, she shows concern for students from China, and she was eager to know of the situation in China. Whenever the Chinese students organised an activity of some kind, she was always ready to attend. When I got the news on January 18, 1990 that there would be a lecture to be given by Chao Changqin, the general editor of the *Press Freedom Herald*, I made a phone call to her. Margaret said that she would like to attend the following evening. I promised her I would pick her up at her place and drive her to the university, because the lecture was to be given in the Chemistry-Physics Building at MUN.

I went to her home on Anderson Avenue an hour before the lecture began. Margaret had just finished her supper. She offered me a glass of juice, and asked me about my child and wife. She then asked me if my thesis was going well. I told her that I was busy collecting data for the thesis. She said she had a couple of jokes to tell me, but was not sure if they were useful to me or not. I was interested, and encouraged her to tell them to

me. She then told me the joke (#2) which she said was passed to her by her late husband. The joke obviously contains elements of cultural assimilation, because it is a joke about a girl serving in the Salvation Army. The concept of the Salvation Army is not a part of Chinese culture. When she told the joke, she spoke very slowly, fearing that I might not understand her pronunciation. "Is it OK to you?" she asked me after finishing the joke. I said yes, and asked her if she had any more; she thought quite a while and said, "I think I have some jokes in my mind, but can't remember them right now." When she was sitting in my car, she suddenly told me that she had remembered another joke. I asked her to tell it if she could. So she told joke #1, slowly. It was an interesting joke. She said that she would tell me some more when she remembered them later. The second joke she told was different from the first one in content. The joke, as far as I could identify it, was in circulation in Northern China, indeed, it is a traditional Chinese joke. Altogether I collected two jokes from Margaret Lee.

c. Jokes Collected from Margaret Lee

1. A man went to a miser to borrow his donkey. The miser said, "Sorry, my donkey is not at home." Just then, the donkey began braying at backyard. So the man said, "Isn't that your donkey braying?" But the miser said, "Do you believe me or my donkey?" "Both." the man replied.

Notes: Date: 19/1/90. Location: 7 Anderson Ave. The joke fits into the following motifs: J1552.1.1. *The ass is not at home. A man wants to borrow an ass. The owner says that the ass is not at home. The ass brays and the borrower protests. "Will you believe an ass and not a graybeard like me?"* J1550. *Practical retorts: Borrowers and lenders.* K1600. *Deceiver falls into own trap.*

2. A girl serving in the Salvation Army met an old man in the street and she asked him to donate a dollar for the sake of God. The old man asked the girl how old she was. When she told him that she was only nineteen, the old man said, "I'm seventy-eight now. I'll see God before you. So, let me personally hand in that dollar to Him. By the way, if you have a personal donation, I can help you pass it to Him too."

Notes: Date: 19/1/90. Location: 7 Anderson Ave. The joke fits into the general category of the MI: J1580. *Practical retorts connected with almsgiving.*

INFORMANT: YAN ZAN

a. General Description

Yan Zan is thirty-four years old, and is from China. He had been a restaurant cook ever since he came to Canada in 1986. He works very hard and seldom has a day off. His wife is a graduate student at the university. Yan is a very humorous person. There are always some witty remarks in his speech. He likes to make friends with people and is very easy to get along with. He speaks Mandarin very quickly, but does not speak good English. He is very good at cooking. Yan Zan is tall, rather thin and looks bookish. He obtained his M.A. degree in Chinese literature before he came to Canada. He taught Chinese literature in Hunan Normal University for four years. He told me that his main problem was English, otherwise he would not be working as a cook in the restaurant. However, Yan Zan was not upset about the work he was doing, because, according to him, he would go back to China once his wife finished her studies in Newfoundland. Yan Zan is a good friend of mine, and I often go to his place and have talks with him about literature and Chinese history. Both of us are very interested in these subjects. Sometimes, we might argue over different views on a certain issue. Our friendship started from here.

b. Joke Repertoire

Yan Zan has a big joke repertoire and he tells all kinds of jokes. Among the jokes I collected from him are political jokes (#6), (#5); sex jokes (#8), (#10); fool jokes (#1), (#2); ethnic jokes (#9), and also jokes involving language play (#12), (#7). His ability to tell so many kinds of jokes, I assume, could be due to his academic attainments in literature. According to Yan Zan, he could both create jokes based on aspects of daily life, and adapt jokes from literary books. One important point is that many jokes collected from him are difficult to translate into English due to their special Chinese language features, for example, puns in Chinese based on words of the same pronunciation but different meanings. Yan Zan told me that he enjoyed telling Chinese

jokes very much, and in the past he often exchanged jokes with his friends when he was a student in China.

c. Joke-telling Contexts

It is difficult to estimate how many interviews I conducted with Yan Zan, because I had so many casual talks with him on jokes and each time I would get from him a few jokes. As to the performance and the process of his joke-telling, the point I want to emphasize here is that he tells typical Chinese jokes--ones which can hardly be translated into English. When he told such jokes involving language play in Chinese, he was a real master in the use of all the necessary language traits to present his jokes. He was always immensely proud of his ability to borrow from the broad Chinese language categories to illustrate his points. For instance, Chinese rhymes and puns are very well used in his joke #12. During the telling, there were always triumphant smiles on his face, and through the tone of his voice I could tell that he took it for granted that he was superior in telling jokes involving language play to anybody else.

For example, when I interviewed him on January 28, 1990, he said that he had a very interesting joke to tell me. He mentioned that to tell the joke he needed my participation. When he finished telling the joke, I thought it was somewhat like a riddle, because at the end of the joke he asked me if I could tell what had been referred to.

When I tried to answer and failed, he gave me the solution and seemed very complacent about it. He also used many gestures during his telling of jokes. One of them was to use his index finger of his right hand to knock the table when he wanted to emphasize a point. His eyes always stared at his audience when he was speaking. Concerning the joke mentioned above, I did not include it in the joke collection because of the lack of a proper translation. However, for the sake of scholarly study, I provide both the Chinese version and the English translation in the following to illustrate the point that some jokes told in Chinese will lose many humorous traits once translated into English, and thus will not be in any sense a joke if read in English.

紧 急 情 报 一 接 到，
立 刻 开 往 战 场，
进 入 位 置 跳 进 战 壕，
先 扫 机 枪，后 开 大 炮，
战 斗 结 束，贴 张 佈 告。

English translation:

Once I receive the urgent military information,

I set out for the battlefield;

Getting into position and jumping into the trench;

Firing machine guns first, and then the cannons;

Upon finishing the battle, put up a poster.

Not in any sense will the English be as humorous, if it is humorous at all, as its Chinese counterpart, because in Chinese not only is the content of the joke humorous, but there are also rhymes in each line which augment the degree of humor considerably.

Another prominent feature of Yan Zan's joke-telling is his use of political jokes. As he told those jokes, he would fill his voice with sarcasm and his face with cold smiles. My impression was that he was really like an actor playing on the stage while telling people jokes. Aside from his rhythmical tunes, there were frequent artistic gestures during his telling of jokes. For example, when he related joke #5 to me, he humorously turned his eyes down while also protruding his mouth to the lower part of his body, indicating 'the instrument for doing that!'

d. Jokes Collected from Yan Zan

1. A fool was fast asleep while his neighbour stole away his donkey, and then came in the house and woke him up. "What happened?" the fool asked. The neighbour told him that his donkey under the tree had been stolen. "Oh, how lucky I am I didn't sleep on the donkey. Otherwise, I would have been stolen too."

Notes: Date: 9/10/89. Location: 25 Mullock St. The joke fits the general category of the MI: J2210. *Logical absurdity based upon certain false assumptions.*

2. A teacher told his students in class: "One day when Newton was sitting under an apple tree, an apple fell onto his head, thus leading to Newton's discovery of the law of gravity." "No wonder we can't do anything so far," one student said, "because we come to school every day and sit in the classroom instead of sitting under an apple tree."

Notes: Date: 9/10/89. Location: 25 Mullock St. The joke fits the general categories of the MI: P340. *Teacher and pupil.* J2210. *Logical absurdity based upon certain false assumptions.* J2233. *Logically absurd defenses.*

3. A man just over forty wanted to adopt a 'little wife' (concubine). Traditionally, this little wife should be a virgin. But the man found it difficult to manage the matter, so he went to one of his friends. The friend told him to draw a picture of a penis. "If a lady can recognize that, she won't be a virgin, and if she can't, she must be," the friend said. So the man went home and drew a picture of his own penis. When he asked his first intended lady what it was, she said vehemently: "It's an unshaved carrot." The man got angry and thought the bitch even knew its nickname (see Notes below), so he dismissed her. When the picture was shown to a second lady, she blushed and then said slowly, "It's an old worm in the bush." The man again dismissed her for the metaphor she used was the same as he knew in his hometown. When a third lady was let in and asked about picture, she replied, "I really don't know." The man was pleased and adopted her as his concubine. On the night they got into bed together, the man told her that the picture was of a man's penis. She said, "What! I have never in my life seen such a small penis."

Notes: Date: 14/2/90. Location: 25 Mullock St. There are quite a number of nicknames or metaphors for the penis in Chinese, some are exactly the same as those used by Westerners, but mostly not. Here are some examples: sparrow, ball, carrot, cock, tortoise, old worm, cricket sausage, flesh gun, banana, magic stick, little canoe, the third leg, cucumber, six-thirty clock. The following motifs from the MI cover the joke: T137.2. *Bride and bridegroom conducted to bridal bed.* T237. *Old man married to young, unfaithful wife.* H607. *Discussion by symbols. Sign language.* H360. *Bride test.* T200. *Married life.* J445.2. *Foolish marriage of old man and young girl.* J2463.2. *Marrying a stranger.* D855.5. *Man marrying often: always looking for good wife.*

4. Once a man was writing a letter while someone was peeping at it over his shoulder. So, he continued writing: "... I have much to write, but now there is someone peeping at this letter, so..." At this time, the man behind shouted: "No, I did not peep at your letter at all!"

Notes: Date: 30/1/90. Location: 25 Mullock St. The following general category of the MI covers the joke: J2233. *Logically absurd defenses*.

5. A man who had been arrested in Tiananmen Square pleaded not guilty in court. But the judge questioned: "Why did you keep the ammunition at home? That's the instrument for killing!" "Then you can charge me with another crime." the man protested. "What?" the judge asked. "Rape, because I also keep the instrument for doing that!"

Notes: Date: 24/12/89. Location: 25 Mullock St. The joke fits the general categories of the MI: J1160. *Clever pleading*. J1124. *Clever court jester*.

6. A passenger on the bus said, "They have killed many of our students. Li Peng is really a pig! A butcher!" At this, the driver said, "How dare you say that in public? If a security man hears, you will be put into prison for eight years. The passenger said, "No way! Mine is no more than a verbal insult. According to our constitution, three years at most." "Right," the driver continued, "another five years for revealing a national secret."

Notes: Date: 24/12/89. Location: 25 Mullock St. The following general category of the MI covers the joke: J1160. *Clever pleading*.

7. A senior school teacher made a mistake in his teaching, as one girl student pointed out. But the teacher did not acknowledge his mistake and said: "You know nothing at all about it. For three years, I've been up and you've been down. I know how much there is in your stomach."

Notes: Date: 19/11/89. Location: 25 Mullock St. The sentence "... I'm up and you are down." means he is the teacher standing 'up' in front of the classroom, while she is the student sitting 'down' in the classroom. However, it also has the implication of sexual position. The last sentence "I know how much there is in your stomach." literally means he knows how much knowledge he has since she is his student. But it also implies that he knows if she is pregnant or not. The joke fits the general category of the MI: P340. *Teacher and pupil*.

8. A couple was eager to have sexual intercourse, but their five-year-old daughter was around and they felt hampered. So the husband said to his daughter: "My dear, please go next door and play with your little companions." The daughter went out, but came back a little while later and said: "I can't stay there either, because the mummy and daddy next door are doing the same thing as you."

Notes: Date: 28/1/90. Location: 25 Mullock St. The following motifs from the MI cover the joke: P210. *Husband and wife*. T200. *Married life*. and X700. *Humour concerning sex*.

9. A German student introduced his Chinese friend to his father, trying to make fun of him, "Father, this is my friend Lee Toi. He looks a bit stupid, but his heart isn't." The father said, "Yes, I see. But you're just the opposite of your friend."

Notes: Date: 30/1/90. Location: 25 Mullock St. The joke fits into the general categories of the MI: X650. *Jokes concerning other races or nations*. J1500. *Clever practical retort*.

10. While making love, a remarried woman asked her husband if he had already put his thing in. As soon as her husband said yes, the woman cried out: "Ouch, it hurts!"

Notes: Date: 28/1/90. Location: 25 Mullock St. The joke implies that the woman in fact has a big vagina. The joke fits the general categories of the MI: F547.5. *Extraordinary vagina*. P210. *Husband and wife*.

12. After the great massacre in Tiananmen square, a popular saying was circulating among Beijing residents: Bu(4) Guan(3) Yuan(2) Mu(4) Hai(2) Shi(4) Fang(1) Mu(4), Neng(2) Zuo(4) Guan(1) Cai(2) Jiu(4) Shi(4) Hao(3) Mu(4) which simply means whether wood is round or square, so long as it can be used to make coffins, it is good wood.

Notes: Date: 9/10/89. Location: 25 Mullock St. The arabic numbers shown in the brackets refer to the four different tones of Mandarin pronunciation. Yuan(3) Mu(4) is the spokesman of the Chinese State Council in 1989, the name has the same pronunciation as 'round wood' in Chinese. In this joke, the name is related to the 'wood' for making coffin. It expresses people's hatred towards Yuan Mu, who confounded black and white in the report of the incident. A motif is found in the MI: J1805.1. *Similar sounding words mistaken for each other*.

INFORMANT: BRIAN SO

a. General Description

Brian So is thirty-five years old and is from Hong Kong. He has been living in Canada for fourteen years. He owns a grocery store and a small restaurant. Brian was divorced some years ago, and now lives alone. He is very busy all day long with his business, because he cannot afford to hire many helpers. Brian is short and dark of complexion. He is also short-sighted. I got to know Brian during the student demonstration about the June 4th Massacre in 1989. He showed much concern for us students. He also gave us much material support such as the ink and paper used for the signs in the demonstration parade. After that, he had frequent contact with most of us students on campus, and we often went to his grocery store to buy Chinese food and spices. I talked to him one day in December 1989 about my thesis, and hoped that he could tell me some jokes. At first he said he did not have many jokes. I assumed that he knew some jokes, but the reason for him to say he did not could be because he was too busy with his two businesses. So, after Christmas, I told him that I did not have much to do at the moment, and if he was still busy, I could go to help him. I did voluntary work in his restaurant on New Year's Day and eventually got a few jokes from him.

b. Joke Repertoire

Brian's joke repertoire mainly contains the theme of foolishness. He told me about ten jokes, almost all of them fall into the categories of J1710-1729 *Association with fools* and J1730-1749 *Absurd ignorance* in Stith Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*. According to Brian, his jokes were basically about foolish persons' behaviour and thinking.

c. Joke-telling Contexts

I interviewed Brian twice on jokes in his restaurant kitchen while helping him wash dishes and cups. The first time was on the evening of New Year's Day. It was a very cold

day and there were not many people eating in the restaurant. When there was not much to do in the kitchen, Brian cooked some dishes and we (there were two other waitresses) had supper together at the last row of tables. During supper, I asked Brian if he could tell us some jokes or stories, and I further encouraged him to tell any kind of joke that would come to mind. Then, one of the waitresses jokingly asked Brian to tell us a story about a restaurant owner. We laughed. Brian thought for a while and said that he had a joke about a restaurant owner, and Brian emphasized that most of the restaurant owners in the past did not know how to read or write. Then he told us joke #3. At that moment a customer came in, one of the waitresses went to serve the customer, we all stopped talking and quickly finished our supper. When I went into the kitchen, I told Brian that his joke was very good, more than that, that it was the reflection of the real situation of early Chinese restaurant owners. I asked him if he had more of the same kind of joke as the one he had just told. He said he had to think it over before he could say yes. About ten minutes later, he told me another joke (#4) which was also related to restaurant life. It was a pity that he did not have much time to talk to me later that night because suddenly many customers came into the restaurant and Brian was busy cooking dishes for them. Before I left late at night, Brian thanked me for helping him. Meanwhile, he promised that he would tell me some jokes for my thesis next time. He said that he would call me when he had thought about some more jokes.

The second time I collected jokes from Brian was on February 22, 1990. He called me at noon, and asked me if I had time to go to his restaurant to help him in the evening, also mentioning that he had several jokes ready for me. We decided that I would go to his restaurant at six o'clock in the evening. The restaurant was really crowded when I went in. I helped Brian in the kitchen for five hours without stop. It was really tiring and boring. The restaurant closed at eleven, but it was not until twelve that we sat down and had our 'supper.' One of the waitresses said that she did not want to eat and went away. So there were four of us left for supper. Brian was pleased because the income was good that night. He was in high spirits and offered each of us a bottle of beer. To be honest, I was too tired to ask jokes from him, but I did not forget what I had gone there for. Brian

knew I was tired and he at once said that he would not let me go without a couple of good jokes. I waited for the supper, and he was preparing in the kitchen. I knew he was even more tired than I because he alone had cooked all the dishes throughout the evening. About ten minutes later, Brian came out with two hot dishes, and we had supper together. While eating, Brian said that he had thought about some jokes a few days ago, and he then told me the jokes (#5) and (#1). The first one was really new and interesting to me, but the second was a familiar one, both to the waitress and myself. In fact, the joke was derived from a Chinese idiom. The waitress, who was also from China, said that she had heard it before. Brian at once said that he had another one which we might not have heard before. So he told joke #2. It was a really long joke, and the waitress seemed satisfied. By then we had almost finished the supper, so Brian said that we should stop and clean the restaurant. He told me he still had some jokes for me next time. I left at about half past one in the morning.

d. Jokes Collected from Brian So

1. A stupid person had three hundred ounces of gold which he felt was unsafe to store anywhere at home. So, he went to a graveyard at midnight and buried the gold there. Then he erected a wooden sign on which was written: "Three hundred ounces of gold are not buried here."

Notes: Date: 22/2/90. Location: Magic Wok Eatery. The joke fits the following categories of the MI: J2091.1. *Fool hides treasure and leaves sign "Here it is." Thief leaves sign "Here it is not."* J2210. *Logical absurdity based upon certain false assumptions.*

2. There once was a foolish fellow who had a kitten which was very good at catching mice, so he named it 'Tiger,' and often boasted of it to other people. Then a young man said to him, "The name 'Tiger' is good, but it doesn't sound as good as 'Dragon.'" The kitten's owner thought he was right, so he changed 'Tiger' to 'Dragon'. One day, another man said to him, "Dragon is a good name, but a Dragon depends on clouds to fly in the sky, why not call your cat 'Cloud?'" He thought it was reasonable, so he changed 'Dragon' to 'Cloud'. The next time he was boasting about his kitten before a

group of children, a little boy laughed and said, "There is something better than your Cloud--wind, because it can blow clouds away." So the man changed 'Cloud' to 'Wind' and thought it was a perfect name. Just then, a little girl said that a strong wall could stop wind immediately. The man thought it was plausible, so he again changed the name from 'Wind' to 'Wall.' At that point, an old man came along and said, "Young man, you have changed your poor kitten's name so many times, yet she still hasn't got a decent name. Don't you know a mouse could easily gnaw a hole through the wall and it might therefore collapse?" "Yes," the young man said immediately, "I'll change her name into 'Mouse.'"

Notes: Date: 22/2/90. Location: Magic Wok Eatery. The joke fits the motif: J1530. *One absurdity rebukes another.*

3. Once, an illiterate went into a Chinese restaurant and asked for something to eat. When the menu was brought to the table, he said, "This one," pointing to a soup. "Which one? What's it called, sir?" the owner of the restaurant asked. The man said, "I don't read. Give me something you think delicious to eat." "Me neither." the boss said.

Notes: Date: 1/1/90. Location: Magic Wok Eatery.

4. A cook working in a restaurant often stole food or spice and then took them home. Once when he was cutting meat at home, he quickly put one piece into his pocket, but his wife caught sight of him. "What are you doing, dear?" she asked. "Oh, sorry, I forgot, that is already ours," was the husband's answer.

Notes: Date: 1/1/90. Location: Magic Wok Eatery. The same joke is in Leonard Feinberg's *Asian Laughter*, p. 23, under the title Cook's Holiday: *A cook was chopping meat in his own home. When nobody was looking, he hid a piece in his lap. His wife observed this and scolded him. "Why did you do it?" she asked. "This is your own meat." "Oh, I forgot," he said.* The joke fits the following general categories of the MI: P210. *Husband and wife.* J1702. *Stupid husband.*

5. A certain stupid man was particularly fond of asking questions. When his colleague gave birth to a child, he went to see her and asked: "Is it a boy or a girl?" "A girl," the mother said. Then the man asked: "Does *he* have a name yet?" "Yes, her name

is Sun Wei." was the answer. Again, the man asked: "How old is she now?" "Three weeks," the mother patiently answered. The man still seemed very curious about the child, and asked: "Is she your youngest child?"

Notes: Date: 22/2/90. Location: Magic Wok Eatery. The joke fits into the following general category of the MI: J2350. *Talkative fools*.

INFORMANT: XIN YAN

a. General Description

Xin Yan is fifty-eight years of age, and is from Kuangdong, China. He is a retired laundryworker. He has lived in Newfoundland for more than twenty years. Xin Yan does not look like an old man although he is well on his way to sixty. He likes to talk to young people a lot, and enjoys their company. Unlike many other old immigrants in the community, Xin Yan talks differently. He did not often talk to me about earning money or doing business. He always tells people that he is a happy and free man. It is true that whenever people see him, they see his smiling face. He is very proud of his son who at present manages the laundromat with modern technology. Xin Yan is of medium height and rather thin. His voice is high when he speaks. He takes an active part in all kinds of community activities, and shows much concern for the students from China. I got to know Xin Yan in June 1989 when the Chinese students and many Chinese immigrants gathered in front of the Arts and Culture Centre to mourn the death of the students in Beijing.

b. Joke Repertoire

I knew Xin Yan could tell jokes because I once heard him telling in 'Chinatown' (Guy 110 in Burton's Pond Apartments, where all residents were Chinese students). It is difficult to say how many jokes he has, because I only had one interview with him. However, there is a particular point I want to emphasize, which is that his jokes contain many complex elements. For instance, although he only told me five jokes, they involved traditional Chinese cultural elements (#2) as well as language traits in Canadian society (#1).

Another significant point concerns the content of Xin Yan's jokes. Most of the jokes he told are related to young people. For example, a young man teasing with a lady on the bus (#5), a man deserted by a woman taking another girlfriend within a week (#3). I assume that the content of Xin Yan's jokes is closely related to his personality and his

frequent contact with young people. It is also connected with his 'root' culture. For example, he mentioned *Tang Poems* in joke (#2) and *Zhejeidai* (known as 'chastity belt' to westerners) in joke #4, which are all historic Chinese 'products.' Xin Yan does not speak much English. When we talked to each other, we used Mandarin.

c. Joke-telling Contexts

Xin Yan was one of the last persons I interviewed in the community. The only interview with him took place at my home in February 1990. It was a weekend and I invited three friends to come and have a get-together. Xin Yan was one of them. I told him before he came that I would ask him to tell me some jokes, and he said that he would do his best.

The party started at about seven o'clock and there were only five people in the house, all males--Xin Yan, two of my friends from the university, my son and I. My wife was on her night-shift duty and she would not be back until eleven o'clock. We had beer and talked in the kitchen where one of my friends was cooking dishes. My son was watching TV in the bedroom. Xin Yan was reading a map of China (English version) on the wall. I asked Xin Yan if he was looking for his hometown on the map. He said yes, and told us that his hometown was in Hoiping County in Guangdong Province. Talking about his hometown, he seemed very interested and kept talking of many things, such as rice, fruit, rivers, and fields there. For about twenty minutes he talked alone, and occasionally we interrupted him to ask him to give more details to his descriptions. About twenty minutes later, dinner was ready and we all sat at the table and had the dishes just made. My son was sitting next to Xin Yan and he called him grandpa, which made everybody laugh because most of us did not think that Xin Yan belonged to our older generation, although he did. During dinner, I deliberately asked my son to ask for some tales from Xin Yan. Xin Yan promised that he would do so after supper.

About half an hour later when supper was finished, we all sat around the table talking. My son went away, so there were only four of us in the kitchen. Xin Yan

announced that he was going to tell us some jokes, and everybody at once agreed. So, almost without a stop, he told us the following jokes. His last joke was #2 which was a response to my son's request when he heard that we were listening to 'stories.' The joke-telling session ended after that.

d. Jokes Collected from Xin Yan

1. Having been settled for a couple of months in St. John's, one student from mainland China asked his landlord, a Chinese Newfoundlander, why some local Newfoundlanders often draw a breath after finishing each sentence. Believing himself at least as a half Newfoundlander, this landlord said confidently, "That's because the weather here is so cold that people have to speak fast."

Notes: Date: 26/2/90. Location: 53 Stamps Lane. Linguistically speaking, this is an example of ingressive speech and the pronouncing 'yup' by the local people in Newfoundland. The following general motifs cover the joke: X650. *Jokes concerning other races or nations*. J2496.2. *Misunderstandings because of lack of knowledge of a different language than one's own*.

2. A naughty boy was punished by his grandfather who made him recite *Tang Poems*⁷⁹ while standing in the snow. The boy's father saw this and he at once took off his overcoat and put it on his son's shoulders, standing beside him. The grandfather was puzzled: "I'm punishing your son, why are you standing beside him?" "I'm punishing your son too!" the father said.

Notes: Date: 26/2/90. Location: 53 Stamps Lane. The joke fits into the following general categories of the MI: P233. *Father and son*. N731.2. *Father-son combat*. P230. *Parents and children*. and J1500. *Clever practical retort*.

3. A man who was deserted by a woman is cursing women in front of his friends: "Women are the most poisonous things in the world. I advise you not to touch them!" A few days later, one of his friends saw him drinking in a bar with a beautiful lady. "Hi, fellow, didn't you say that women are the most poisonous things in the world? What are

⁷⁹Poems written in the Tang dynasty by famous poets such as Li Po, Tu Fu, and Po Chuyi.

you doing there?" "Yes, I did say that. You see, since I lost Fei Fei last week, I've been very sad. Now I'm thinking about taking poison."

Notes: Date: 26/2/90. Location: 53 Stamps Lane. The following motif covers the joke: J1500. *Clever practical retort.*

4. Two farmers were talking about their wives. One said, "Why do you always make your wife wear a chastity belt each time you go to the city? Your wife isn't young and beautiful enough to attract a man to seduce her." "I know that," the other said, "but I want to make her believe when I come back that I've lost the key to open it."

Notes: Date: 26/2/90. Location: 53 Stamps Lane. The following motifs cover the joke: T271. *The neglected wife.* T373. *Heavy chastity belt imposed on wife.* S62. *Cruel husband.* Also compare: S411. *Wife banished.*

5. A young man was sitting on the bus with his son on his knees. Just then a beautiful young lady got on the bus with a bag of rice. Seeing this, the young man at once said to his son: "Dear, please give your seat to auntie."

Notes: Date: 26/2/90. Location: 53 Stamps Lane. The young man is making fun of the young lady, because his son is seated on his lap. Compare: T50. *Wooing.*

Part Two: Joke-tellers, Their Repertoires, and the

Joke-telling Contexts: Group Two Informants

INFORMANT: XIN CHONG

a. General Description

Xin Chong is twenty-four years old, and came to Newfoundland as a student in 1988. She is from Beijing, China. She has the typical characteristics of a northern Chinese girl; she is earnest, outgoing, brave, and easy to get along with. Xin Chong often speaks naively and almost childlike, giving people the impression of girlish innocence. She likes singing songs, mostly Chinese folksongs. She has her bachelor's degree in biochemistry from China, and had been teaching in Beijing Normal University for about two years. Xin Chong was a biochemistry graduate student at MUN when I interviewed her. She reads a lot, especially about history, geography, children's literature and music. She is plain-looking, tall, and of white complexion.

Xin Chong is one of my best friends. With a couple of other residents, we had regular meetings and parties at week-ends when we lived in Burton's Pond Apartments. I did not give a second thought to choosing Xin Chong as my informant, not only because of her wide range of knowledge, but also because of our long-established friendship.

b. Joke Repertoire

Xin Chong had a relatively 'narrow' joke repertoire. Although she told me a couple of other jokes, there were two main themes in her jokes: jokes about a foolish or clever son, and jokes about the Chinese trickster Hsu Wen-chang. More than eighty percent of jokes I collected from her were related to a foolish or clever son. It seemed to me that her 'childish' personality was the cause of her special pleasure in telling jokes about children. I once asked her why so many of her jokes were related to children, and where she got

the jokes. She told me that her grandmother was the main source of her joke repertoire, and she had heard many jokes and legends from her when she was a child. Even up to the time Xin Chong left for Canada, her grandmother still told her jokes from time to time. According to Xin Chong, her grandmother was a very humorous person, possessing countless folk narratives. Xin Chong took to retelling her grandmother's jokes as a way of sharing her childhood happiness and pleasure with others, and also as a way of remembering her grandmother in China.

Beside jokes relating to a foolish or clever son and jokes about the trickster Hsu Wen-chang, Xin Chong also told me a couple of jokes concerning courting (#7), (#8), a newly-married couple (#13), and a 'grandmother' joke (#14). These jokes were largely 'modern' jokes compared to those she got from her grandmother, which were traditional. After the June 4th Massacre in Beijing, Xin Chong also told me a few jokes satirizing Chinese communist leaders.

c. Joke-telling Contexts

My interviews with Xin Chong were all informal ones. This was mainly due to our casual relationship. When I suggested to her that I would like to interview her about Chinese jokes, she immediately agreed. But when I said that I wanted to tape the interviews, she at once changed her mind, and threatened not to tell me a single joke if I insisted on using a tape recorder. "My voice is not beautiful when recorded, I know," was the only reason she gave. So I had to use pads and pencils to 'record' our interviews. I had heard many jokes from Xin Chong before I told her I wanted her to be one of my informants. It was a pity that I did not take them all down.

The first time I collected jokes from Xin Chong was on November 21, 1989. Because my family was in St. John's by then, I lived in the downtown area, but Xin Chong was still living in Burton's Pond Apartments. I telephoned her office at noon, telling her that I hoped to collect some jokes from her as soon as possible. She said any time was fine for her after four o'clock in the afternoon. But that time was bad for me

because my son came back from school at three in the afternoon, and I had to stay with him. Since neither of us had any means of transportation, I suggested seven o'clock that evening at her place, and she agreed. It was very cold that evening, and after walking to her apartment on the MUN campus, it was a little past seven o'clock. We sat in her cosy living-room. Her two other roommates were in the living-room, watching television. We talked casually for a while. Then Xin Chong asked me how many jokes I had so far collected, and wanted me to tell her some jokes first. Although both of us could speak English, we usually spoke Chinese when we communicated. So our conversation was totally ignored by her two roommates, who were not Chinese. They were concentrating on TV programmes, the noise from which did not disturb our conversation. So I told Xin Chong a numskull joke first. She was quite happy with it, and said that she could tell me one which was basically the same as that too. Before I had the time to take out my pads and pencil, she began telling joke #2. Having finished, she said, "Almost the same, isn't it?" I joked to her, saying mine was about an adult, while hers was about a child, so the difference was big. She smiled, and said that she had many jokes about children--foolish and clever ones. I did not ask her to tell another joke; instead, I asked her where she got most of her jokes, and whether there was any particular significance in her telling certain kinds of jokes. The following is a translation from my fieldwork notes on Xin Chong's joke repertoire.

[...]

Zhu: I've heard many jokes from you, but I still have no idea about where you got the jokes. Could you tell me a little about that?

Xin: Sure. My jokes are mainly those my grandmother used to tell me. They are so striking to me, so even after a long period of time has passed since the joke was told, I still remember it. I love my grandmother, and she was so kind to me, she told me

countless very funny jokes and stories. I think those jokes are not only interesting, but also educational, because I was a child then and needed the right education. But when I tell the jokes, it's only for fun, although they also remind me of my grandmother and my happy childhood....

Zhu: So, you think most of your jokes are educational? What about the joke you just told me?

Xin: Of course. Even a joke about a foolish child, it's not meant to laugh at the child, you get something from it. People always become clever by experiencing things, whether success or not. If you fail, you don't do that the next time, if you do, you're just fooling yourself. Don't you think? My grandmother used to tell me very good jokes. When she told me a joke about a stupid child, she used to say "...it's a little boy..." or "...it's a foolish son..." to keep me from thinking that it was me in the joke. But I always got it, I mean, what she really wanted me to get from a joke.... For example, my grandmother once told me this joke (#6)... I don't think the child is foolish or something, he has his reasons, and people can judge from the joke who, if there should be someone, is the foolish person to be laughed at....

I could not but agree with her, and we had some tea before going on with our jokes. One of Xin Chong's roommates went into her bedroom and the other one went out. Xin Chong then told me another two jokes. She totally told me seven jokes that evening, all

relating to foolish sons. Before I left, I asked her if she could tell me some more jokes the next time. She said she would when time permitted. I suggested she might tell me some other kinds of jokes in addition to the stereotype of foolish sons. She said she would have to have a good think before she could tell me other kinds of jokes. However, she mentioned Hsu Wen-chang jokes, and said that she could possibly recall some of those.

The second time I interviewed Xin Chong was two months later. Still at her place, I asked her to tell me some jokes. She said she remembered a couple of jokes about the trickster Hsu Wen-chang, and at once told me one (#11). She told me that there were many jokes about Hsu Wen-chang in her home town of Beijing, and she had heard many of her schoolmates and colleagues telling them. Quite unlike the way she told the jokes learned from her grandmother, Xin Chong told me jokes about Hsu Wen-chang as if she was reading from a book. There were no emphasizing tones or constant eye contact when she told me the jokes. Her attitude seemed to tell me that the jokes she was telling were not so interesting to her, and she told them just to help me out with data. I realized this and suggested she should tell any kind of joke she liked. I hinted that there were many jokes relating to marriage. She paused for a while and then said, "I once heard a friend of mine telling me such a joke. It's about hatred towards a mother-in-law... (#14)." We both laughed. She seemed very happy telling the joke, and asked me what I thought about my mother-in-law. I told her honestly that I did not like my mother-in-law. She said that although she was not married, she knew that no man praised his mother-in-law just as no woman would praise her mother-in-law. We had a good talk about Chinese family relationships. Xin Chong said that she did not like the traditional Chinese family pattern of the living together of generations. What surprised me was that she said that she did not want to get married, and have a baby, and then live with her husband forever--the usual and typical traditional Chinese ideal. To justify her point, she said that there were some 'modern' jokes about this idea in circulation among the younger contemporary generations in China. These jokes mocked the traditional Chinese way of life. As Xin Chong talked, she became quite excited. It seemed to me that she was trying to defend herself for not being married at the age of twenty-four. As a close friend, I knew exactly

what she was trying to express. So I said to her that she should at least have a boyfriend at her age. She said jokingly that it was very hard to find a suitable one. And then she added, "Let me first tell you this joke." (#8). When she had finished, she said, "There're a lot of jokes about young lovers, there's a joke about a young man swearing to his girlfriend. Let me give you this joke..." (#7). Xin seemed well prepared for the jokes she was telling me, for the following joke was about a newly-married couple (#13). She told me ten jokes that night.

d. Jokes Collected from Xin Chong

1. Once, George Bush and Deng Xiaoping were discussing the issue of disarmament. Bush said, "On this issue, I think your country should have more disarmament than mine, because your army needs only to cope with our two hundred million people, whereas my army has to cope with your 1.1 billion people." "No, no, no, you are wrong," Deng said sadly, "Mine has to cope with 1.3 billion people."

Notes: Date: 17/10/89. Location: 39 Spencer St. Deng Xiao-ping was the Chairman of the Central Committee of Military in P.R. China when the joke was told. The joke fits into the following general categories of the MI: P550. *Military affairs*. J2080. *Foolish bargains*. Also compare the following: J1280. *Repartee with ruler (judge, etc.)*. and X330. *Jokes on magistrates*. and J1678. *Settling the dispute*.

2. A father asked his son why he was busy pulling up a small tree. The son answered, "I want it to grow faster, because mom said that when the tree has grown so high, I will be a grown-up."

Notes: Date: 21/11/89. Location: Burton's Pond Apt., MUN. The joke fits into the following general categories of the MI: J2210. *Logical absurdity based upon certain false assumptions*. P233. *Father and son*.

3. A father promised his son five dollars as a reward for passing arithmetic at school. When the son came home, the father was ready to give the reward, but his son said at once, "Don't bother, daddy, I've saved that five dollars for you."

Notes: Date: 21/11/89. Location: Burton's Pond Apt., MUN. The joke fits the general category of the MI: P233. *Father and son*.

4. "Dad, I took the clock apart this afternoon." The father immediately asked: "God, did you lose some parts?" "No, on the contrary, there are some spare parts left now," the son happily replied.

Notes: Date: 21/11/89. Location: Burton's Pond Apt., MUN. The joke fits into the general category of the MI: F233. *Father and son*.

5. A son asked his father why mom was so afraid when she crossed the street. The father had no idea, so he asked the son what made him think so. The boy replied, "She always holds my hand tightly."

Notes: Date: 21/11/89. Location: Burton's Pond Apt., MUN. The joke fits the general category of the MI: F233. *Father and son*. Compare: J1750-1849. *Absurd misunderstandings*.

6. A mother taught her three-year-old son to read numbers. "This is one," while she was drawing a vertical line in a piece of paper. The son soon learnt. The next day, the mother drew a vertical line on the ground and asked the son: "What's this?" The son said he had no idea. The mother was angry and cursed him: "Don't you remember this is one? I taught you only yesterday." The boy stared at it for a while and then said: "But how come in only one night, this *one* has grown so long?"

Notes: Date: 21/11/89. Location: Burton's Pond Apt., MUN. The following motifs cover the joke: J1160. *Clever pleading*. and J1500. *Clever practical retort*.

7. A young man swore to his girlfriend: "If you see me smoking again, it's as likely you'll see the sun rise in the west and a snowstorm happen in June." The girl said at once, "Please, just for me, please smoke twice more." "Why?" the lad was greatly surprised. "Because I just want to see the sun rising in the west and a snowstorm coming in June."

Notes: Date: 13/1/90. Location: Burton's Pond Apt., MUN. The joke fits the general category of the MI: T50. *Wooing*. Also compare: X760. *Jokes on courtship*.

8. One day, Au Lee came across a friend in the street, and was surprised to know that his friend still remained single. So he asked: "Why didn't you get married?" The friend answered, "I've been looking for the perfect girl for my whole life." "And you've found her?" "Yes, I did. But she'd been looking for the perfect man." the friend answered.

Notes: Date: 13/1/90. Location: Burton's Pond Apt., MUN. The joke fits the general category of the MI: J1250. *Clever verbal retorts.*

9. There once was a dwarf whose name was Hong. When he was thirty-five years old, his height was still less than three feet. One day a play was performed in the village and Hong went to see the play with a cap on his head. Hsu Wen-chang decided to make fun of him, so he approached Hong and suddenly snatched up the cap and shouted in the crowd, "Look, I've found a beautiful cap!" "What are you doing?" Hong said very angrily. Pretending not to be aware of what had happened, Hsu said with a laugh: "I thought the cap was on the ground. I didn't think it was on somebody's head."

Notes: Date: 13/1/90. Location: Burton's Pond Apartment. Hsu Wen-chang was the most popular trickster in China in the Ming dynasty. There are many legends about him, mostly depicting him as a clever person. There seems to be a widespread association between a dwarf and a cap, whether in Oriental or Occidental tales and jokes. The following motif covers the joke: J2347. *Occupational trickster.* Also compare the following: F451.2.7.1. *Dwarfs with red heads and red caps.* F451.2.7.6. *Dwarfs wear peculiar caps.* F451.3.3.8. *Dwarfs made invisible by magic caps.*

10. One day three thieves entered Hsu Wen-chang's house. Hsu had seen them and hidden himself in a trunk. The thieves searched everywhere for something of some value. At last, discouraged, they opened the trunk. "What are you doing here in the trunk?" exclaimed one of the astonished thieves. "Excuse me," said Hsu politely. "Knowing that you wouldn't find anything valuable in my house, I was so ashamed I hid myself."

Notes: Date: 13/1/90. Location: Burton's Pond Apartment. The following motif covers the joke: J1392.4. *Owner laughs at thief who finds nothing in house.* India: Thompson-Balys.

11. There was a time when Hsu Wen-chang was a rich man, and everyone tried hard to become part of his circle of friends. One day somebody said to him, "Lord Hsu, what a great number of friends you have! How can you count them all?" Shaking his head, Hsu said, "Count them? Well, for the moment, that's impossible. Later, when I don't have a cent, will be the time to count them."

Notes: Date: 13/1/90. Location: Burton's Pond Apartment. The following general categories of the MI cover the joke: P150. *Rich man*. P310. *Friendship*. J401. *Scarcity of real friends*. and J401.0.1. *"A friend is known in need."*

12. There once lived in a monastery a monk who was very fond of eating. One day, he made fifty dumplings and then he bought a can of honey with which to spice the dumplings. While he was enjoying his delicious food, he was noticed by a small monk who didn't say anything for the moment. Having eaten about twenty dumplings he felt full, so he put the rest in a big jar and placed the jar as well as the can of honey under his bed. He told the little monk not to touch the jar and the can before he left the monastery: "The stuff in the two containers is very poisonous. Don't touch it under any circumstance!" After he had left, the little monk ate all the dumplings and drank all the honey, and then went to sleep. The monk came back and was very angry to see the empty jar and can. He woke up the little monk: "Where is the stuff in the jar and the can?" "I'm sorry, Master," the little monk said, "I was so tempted by the smell from the jar that when I opened it, I felt that I would rather die than leave those things there. So I ate them all and have been waiting for my death."

Notes: Date: 25/2/90. Location: 53 Stamps Lane. The following motifs cover the joke: J1144. *Eaters of stolen food detected*. J2311.2. *The "poisoned" pot*. X457. *Jokes on monks*.

13. A newly-wed couple is walking out of the railway station. The bride suggests they pretend to be an older married couple. "Good idea!" the bridegroom said, "Now please carry these suitcases and I'll follow you."

Notes: Date: 13/1/90. Location: Burton's Pond Apt., MUN. This joke fits the general categories of the MI: J1701. *Stupid wife*. J1541. *Husband outwits his wife*.

14. One day Zhang San's mother-in-law was unfortunately kicked by a horse owned by Zhang San himself and she soon died. On the day of the funeral, there were many people present, and, they were moreover all men from different villages. The priest said, "Oh, this lady must have been very kind when she was alive. Otherwise, there wouldn't be so many people coming to her funeral." On hearing this Zhang San said, "No, priest, they're not coming for the funeral. They've just come to buy my horse."

Notes: Date: 13/1/90. Location: Burton's Pond Apt., MUN. The following general motif from the MI covers the joke: P262. *Mother-in-law*.

15. Chang Fei felt alarmed when he heard the horn from a truck. His friend asked him why, he said, "Two weeks ago a truck driver ran off with my wife. Since then, whenever I hear the horn from a truck, I get frightened, because I'm afraid that that driver will bring her back."

Notes: Date: 13/1/90. Location: Burton's Pond Apt., MUN. This joke fits into the general categories of the MI: P210. *Husband and wife*. T271. *The neglected wife*. Also compare: S411. *Wife banished*

INFORMANT: MING ZOU

a. General Description

Ming Zou is twenty-nine of age, and is from China. He came to Memorial University as a medical student in 1987. He is married, but was alone when I interviewed him. His wife only joined him in April 1990. Ming is one of my best friends among the Chinese students on campus, and we lived together in the same apartment in Burton's Pond Apartments for over a year. He is frank, outgoing and very self-confident, but a bit hot-tempered. Ming is a very careful person with a marvelous memory. Although he is a medical student, he loves literature very much and can recite more than three hundred old Chinese poems by poets of different dynasties. He enjoys a high reputation among the Chinese students at MUN. This is not only because he used to be the treasurer of the Chinese Student Union at MUN, but because he is so sincere and helpful to others, especially in time of need.

b. Joke Repertoire

Ming is one of the best joke-tellers among the Chinese students I interviewed. He can tell all kinds of jokes, sexual jokes, political jokes, ethnic jokes, fools' jokes, and so on. But, there were two significant themes which I found in his joke repertoire--political jokes and sexual jokes. Over forty percent of his jokes which I collected contained sexual humor.

Ming's jokes were learned mainly from his friends and schoolmates in China. According to him, when he was in middle school, there were quite a number of boys in his class who were good at telling jokes. Most of the jokes I collected from Ming were those he told when he was a schoolboy. For example, jokes #2, #3, #10, and #1 were among those which were often told when he attended school in his home town in Anhui Province. These jokes are mainly about foolish persons. There were hardly any sexual elements in them. A lot of sexual jokes were learned when he was sent to the countryside and worked with peasants. Ming's joke repertoire also contains his personal experiences.

That is to say, some of his jokes were totally based on his own experience. I shall illustrate this point in the next section.

Another important feature of Ming Zou's joke repertoire is that he can adapt jokes. After the June 4th massacre in Beijing, there were many political jokes circulating among the Chinese students at MUN. The apartment I used to live in was commonly recognized as 'Chinatown' among the Chinese students. This was not only because the four residents in the apartment were all from China, but also because it was an unofficial centre for Chinese students. So there used to be many students in the apartment after supper, or even during the day. They came to talk about the situation and exchange views on happenings in their hometowns and in China. Ming once told us a joke about Deng Xiaoping who wished to make people happy by tossing bank notes from an airplane. This joke (#15), told by native Newfoundlanders to mock the former premier Joey Smallwood, was adapted by Ming. He told me that he had heard the joke from one of the laboratory assistants, and all he did was change the name and place in the joke.

c. Joke-telling Contexts

During the days we lived together in Burton's Pond Apartments, we often had a lot of leisurely talks after supper. We used to tell each other of our different experiences in China.

Those experiences, in the form of stories, became our happy memories, although some of them left a bitter taste in our mouths. When we shared them, we used to choose the most interesting and stimulating ones. We often told each other jokes, and Ming always took an active part in these activities. Concerning sexual jokes he related, Ming said, "Don't think that peasants are all humble and honest. Sometimes they are more wicked than you would imagine! Let me tell you a real joke. Once we were working in the field, and our brigade leader told a group of us a joke about a girl who had difficulty in urinating, and a lad who liked the girl once secretly followed her when she went to piss in the field; the lad suddenly held her in his arms from behind. The girl got quite a shock.

But then the girl recovered, and married the lad. This story caused a lot of trouble in the brigade, because lots of boys tried to follow the example in the legend. So there was a stupid guy who were still not married when he was about thirty-five. He loved a girl in the brigade, but the girl didn't love him because he was too poor. Once, when the man was working in the field, he found something red in the bush ahead of him. He thought it must be the girl squatting there and pissing, because the colour was the same as a shirt she often wore. So he carefully approached the object from the rear, and saw that it was indeed a person squatting there. He was overjoyed, and dashed to her and suddenly held her in his arms, saying, 'Sweetie, marry me, I beg you!' But while he was kissing her, he was shocked to find that the woman in his arms was none other than the girl's grandmother, whose shirt's colour was the same as her granddaughter's."

When I first told Ming that I needed some jokes for my thesis, he said that he could tell me as many jokes as I wanted. I believed it to be true, because the first time I collected jokes from him, he told me a joke (#15) he said was adapted by him. He said he had heard the joke from a Canadian colleague. So I made an appointment with Ming one day in February 1990. When I said that I would like to tape the joke-telling session, he did not agree and said that if that was required by my supervisor, he would let me do it simply to help me, but if not, he would prefer me to "...leave that fucking machine at your home." After supper I drove to the school residence and went into my previous apartment in which Ming still lived. It was in the early evening, and there were two other Chinese students in the apartment having supper. Ming invited me to his cosy bedroom where he started his jokes. I was sitting on the only chair in the bedroom, and Ming was lying on his bed, facing me. It was snowing hard outside, so Ming said that he was not going to the lab that evening. He went into the living-room, and brought back two bottles of beer. We started talking. He quickly told me a couple of short jokes #3, #10, #1 and #2 which, according to him, were the most common jokes told in his hometown by both adults and youngsters. They were all about foolishness. When he was silent for a while, I asked him for some 'dirty' jokes because he used to tell us that kind of jokes. Ming did not refuse, of course, but he thought for a while before telling me the joke (#19) about an

insatiable woman who desired too much sex from her husband. Ming used euphemisms in his joke to refer to the male and female sex organs. When he had finished, we discussed 'nicknames' for sex organs. He said that in his hometown, people used many nicknames for both male and female sex organs. Ming told me that 'cucumber,' 'sausage,' 'bird,' 'flesh rod,' were common substitutes for penis, while 'nest,' 'bottomless hole,' 'vase,' and 'lower mouth' were the common ones for vagina.

According to Ming, people used these nicknames as substitutes simply for the purpose of avoiding blunt usage or embarrassment with the opposite sex. On the other hand, the pronunciation of 'penis' and 'vagina' in Chinese sound extremely vulgar, because the words are considered taboo in Chinese. They are simply taboo words, and therefore were not to be pronounced, at least in public. Ming did not hesitate to tell me all the 'dirtiness' he knew, because we were very familiar with each other. He told me these in a flat tone, and did not seem to be excited at any stage of his joke-telling. The evening's interview was interrupted by a long distant call from his wife in China. We arranged another meeting at that weekend.

The following interview with Ming was on February 16, 1990. It was a Friday. I went to Ming's lab at the Medical School in the evening. There was nobody else in the lab. Ming was doing his research when I went into the room. Five minutes later he had finished his experiment, and led me into a common room. He made some coffee and we were sitting at a long table. It was very quiet. Ming seemed a bit tired, because his voice was a bit hoarse. He first told me that his wife had obtained her passport and was applying for an entry visa from the Canadian Embassy in Beijing. We talked for quite a while about the difficulties in dealing with all these matters in China. It was Ming who first turned to the topic of jokes, and said that he was going to tell me some more dirty jokes that night. He drank some coffee, and began telling me his jokes. He said that he was going to tell me a 'folklore' joke (Ming had some idea of what folklore was all about because I often talked to him about my subject when we lived together), and I felt very curious about it. When he had finished the joke (#4), I was really quite amused by it. But Ming did not waste a minute, and went on telling his jokes. All the jokes he told that

night contained sexual elements. We stayed together for two hours in the common room, with Ming taking up most of the time telling me jokes. He was very pleased, and felt relaxed telling me jokes, as he told me, because he could bring his past experiences back to mind, and he thought I was the most suitable person to talk to. I knew he meant that we had a slight age difference, but similar experiences. That night I collected about ten jokes from Ming.

d. Jokes Collected from Ming Zou

1. A man was walking slowly in heavy rain. His friend asked him to walk faster, but he answered, "Can't you see that it's raining ahead too?"

Notes: Date: 12/2/90. Location: Burton's Pond Apt., MUN. This joke fits into the following general category of the MI: J2210. *Logical absurdity based upon certain false assumptions.*

2. A man slipped and fell down while walking along the road, and cursed as he stood up. But, just as he started to walk, he fell down again. Standing up, he cursed angrily, "If I'd known that I was going to fall down again, I would not have stood up."

Notes: Date: 12/2/90. Location: Burton's Pond Apt., MUN. This joke fits into the following general category of the MI: J2210. *Logical absurdity based upon certain false assumptions.*

3. A horse dealer in Shanxi Province said to a buyer, "This is a really good horse, he can run one hundred *li* without stopping." "Oh, my God! How can I buy such a horse?!" sighed the buyer, "My home is only fifty *li* away. When he stops, I will have to walk back the other fifty *li* myself."

Notes: Date: 12/2/90. Location: Burton's Pond Apt., MUN. Shanxi Province is in the north of China. Cattle markets are very popular there. The *Li* is a Chinese measurement of distance. One *li* is about one third of a mile. The following general categories of the MI cover the joke: J1700-1729. *Fools.* and J1750-1849. *Absurd misunderstandings.*

4. When a married woman returned to her home after three days of marriage, she was asked by her mother to tell her about the different customs in her husband's village. The daughter answered: "I didn't see any difference, except that we use pillows under our heads while they use them under their waists."

Notes: Date: 16/2/90. Location: Medical School, MUN. This joke fits the general categories of the MI: J2463. *The foolish wife*. T200. *Married life*.

5. A man went to the market to buy a table. When he was half-way home with the heavy table on his shoulder, he suddenly realized that the table had four legs, so he angrily said to it: "Gosh! You've got four legs which I didn't notice before. You have two more legs than I do. Why didn't you walk instead of letting me carry you? From now on, you can go home by yourself and I'll go by myself." With these words, the man went away leaving the table on the road.

Notes: Date: 7/3/90. Location: 53 Stamps Lane. The following motifs cover the joke: J1881.1. *Object sent to go by itself*. J1881.1.1.4. *Table thrown out of the sledge; to go home by itself*.

6. One day a farmer went to the field, and suddenly a bear appeared. When the bear saw the man it began to attack him. The farmer cried for help. Just then a young man came along with a hoe and hit the bear right in its stomach, and the bear died. When the farmer saw what had happened, he scolded the young man who, being both surprised and angry, asked the farmer: "Why don't you thank me, instead of scolding me?" The farmer said, "I scold you because, you stupid fellow, you have spoiled the bear skin. Otherwise, we could have traded it for some money!"

Notes: Date: 12/2/90. Location: Burton's Pond Apt., MUN. This joke fits the general category of the MI: J1705.1. *Stupid peasant*.

7. There was once a very poor maid whose friend gave her a skirt on which there were printed scenic places and their names. She always wore it. One day when she was preparing dinner for her landlord, she accidentally burnt the skirt and started crying. "What's the matter?" the landlord asked. "Oh, I've burnt many places. If I hadn't

extinguished the fire in time, it would have burnt my Hairingate (see Notes)," the maid said.

Notes: Date: 12/2/90. Location: Burton's Pond Apt., MUN. The punch-line is based on a pun, "gate," usually used as a metaphor for the vagina. The word 'Hairingate' gives further implication of a vagina which is hairy. So the girl's words "... it would have burnt my Hairingate" can be understood (according to Chinese pronunciation and sentence meaning) in this way: "... it would have burnt my hairy vagina." The following general categories from the MI cover the joke: J1745. *Absurd ignorance of sex*. P360. *Master and servant*.

8. Two women were talking in leisurely fashion. One asked, "Why do women face heaven to cry for the death of their husbands?" "Because husbands are always up and the wives are always down, do you see what I mean?" the other women teased. "Yes, but if I die, my husband will face heaven to cry."

Notes: Date: 16/2/90. Location: Medical School, MUN. The last sentence the woman said implies that she has sex with her husband in the opposite position of normal sexual intercourse, which suggests her husband is not manly while she is overly masculine. The following general motifs cover X700. *Humour concerning sex*. T460. *Sexual perversions*.

9. Two newly-married women were talking about the substance of a man's penis. One said that it was made up of flesh and bone, otherwise it couldn't be that hard. The other said that it must be made up of first-rate muscles, or it couldn't be that flexible. Just when they found that each could hardly persuade the other, there came an old woman who said, "Both of you are right, that 'funny thing' (meaning penis) is just like an infant, when it is young, it has flesh and bones; but when it grows old, it only has skins."

Notes: Date: 12/2/90. Location: Burton's Pond Apt., MUN. This joke fits the general category of the MI: J155. *Wisdom (knowledge) from women*.

10. In ancient China, there was a general who was very cowardly. When his castle was surrounded by the enemy, he locked himself in a room. When the castle was taken by the enemy, he locked himself in a big box and ordered his servant to hide the key in a safe place: "Even if the enemy asks for the key, don't give it to them!"

Notes: Date: 12/2/90. Location: Burton's Pond Apt., MUN. This joke fits the general categories of the MI: J2600. *Cowardly fools*. P360. *Master and servant*.

11. A girl asked her boyfriend: "Can you tell which is the goose and which is the gander in that pond?" "Oh, that's easy," the young lad said, "you see, the one next to the gander is the goose and the one next to the goose is the gander."

Notes: Date: 16/2/90. Location: Medical School, MUN. The following general category of the MI fits the joke: J1110. *Clever persons*.

12. A man and a woman were waiting for a bus at the station. Suddenly there was a gust of wind which caused the woman's skirt to blow up. The man stared at the lady who said to him angrily: "I can see that you are not a gentleman." The man at once retorted back: "And I can see that you are no lady."

Notes: Date: 16/2/90. Location: Medical School, MUN. The following general categories of the MI fit the joke: J1350. *Rude retorts*. J1250. *Clever verbal retorts*.

13. A teacher asked a girl in his class to answer the question: "What part of the human body can expand eight times bigger than its original?" The girl blushed and could not say a word for a moment. "I know what you are thinking," the teacher said, "but, that's not correct. The correct answer to this question is a person's pupil. By the way, I wish to emphasize that before you get married, please don't expect too much."

Notes: Date: 16/2/90. Location: Medical School, MUN. This joke fits the general category of the MI: P340. *Teacher and pupil*. Also compare: "What is round, surrounded by hair, and always damp?" collected by Dr. Gerald Thomas at Cape St. George in 1972, where the riddle was posed to a young woman. She smiled and refused to answer. "It's your eye," she was told, and she laughed. Later, when she was asked the same riddle, she said, "It's your eye." "No," she was told, "it's what you were thinking of the first time." According to Dr. Thomas, this is a riddle of the 'double-entendre' type.

14. Yuan Mu, spokesman of the Chinese State Council, who had just given a news conference, wanted to have a friendly chat with a Hong Kong reporter. They talked about the greatest things in the world, the largest square, the longest wall and so on. Then, to show his interest, Yuan Mu asked the reporter, "What is the thickest thing in the world?"

"That's obvious, the skin on your face. You must have the thickest skin to tell that lie after the whole world witnessed what really happened in Tiananmen Square," the reporter answered.

Notes: Date: 24/12/89. Location: Medical School, MUN. The joke fits the following general categories of the MI: J1250. *Clever verbal retorts*. J1500. *Clever practical retort*.

15. Flying to Beijing in his personal airplane, Deng Xiao-ping, accompanied by Li Peng and Yang Shangkun, suddenly grew emotional and said, "I wish I could open the window and toss out a one-hundred *yuan* note so I can make one person happy!" "But you can make ten persons happy by tossing out ten ten *yuan* notes, comrade Xiaoping," Yang Shangkun said. Thinking that he had discovered a 'new world,' Li Peng burst out, "But, listen to me, comrades, why don't we toss out one hundred one *yuan* notes so that we can make one hundred people happy?!" At this, the steward overheard the conversation and said to the three: "I have an even better idea. Why don't all of you jump out of the window so that you can make 1.1 billion people happy?!"

Notes: Date: 24/12/89. Location: Medical School, MUN. A similar joke is found in Gerald Thomas' article "Newfie Jokes" in *Folklore of Canada*, p. 152, edited by Edith Fowke: *Mr. Smallwood and his wife were flying over Newfoundland in a plane. Mr. Smallwood began to talk about the poor, unfortunate people down below. Mrs. Smallwood said, "Why don't you give one of them a twenty-dollar bill and make them happy?" "I'll do better than that, I'll give two people a ten-dollar bill and make more people happy." "You can do better than that; give out four five-dollar bills and make four people happy." "I can make still more people happy if I give out twenty one-dollar bills." A little boy in the next seat said, "You can still do better than that because if you would jump out of the plane, then you would make everyone happy."*

16. Li Peng once went to a fortune-teller and wished to have his future predicted. Before the fortune-teller spoke, Li said, "I heard that you know everything in the future, and are even on good terms with the devil. Tell me first what the devil looks like?" "Sure," answered the fortune-teller, "look at yourself in the mirror."

Notes: Date: 24/12/89. Location: Medical School, MUN. The following motifs from the MI cover the joke: J1280. *Repartee with ruler (judge, etc.)*. J1500. *Clever practical retort*. Also compare: X461. *Jokes on fortune-tellers*.

17. An official in court one day went home and told his wife happily: "Dear, my rank has got bigger now." (meaning: He was promoted.) His wife then asked: "Did your 'fellow' (referring to the penis) get bigger too?" The husband felt displeased and said: "What's the use of requiring mine to be bigger since yours is always bigger than mine?"

Notes: Date: 4/3/90. Location: Burton's Pond Apt., MUN. This joke fits into the general category of the MI: H600. *Symbolic interpretations.*

18. A husband went home at midnight, and his wife was very angry and cursed him. So he said: "Every room is occupied tonight, except this one."

Notes: Date: 16/2/90. Location: Medical School, MUN. The punch-line implies that the wife is ugly and nobody wants to sleep with her. This joke fits into the general category of the MI: T271. *The neglected wife.*

19. A couple was lying in bed and teasing each other. The husband put his hand on his wife's nest (vagina) and asked: "What's this?" The wife said, "It's the court." and then she grabbed her husband's bird (penis) and asked: "What's this?" The husband replied: "It's an unemployed old man." "Why don't you let your old man get a job in the court?" the wife suggested. So the couple had intercourse. The following night the wife again wanted sex, and said: "Could that old man of yours come to work today?" The husband shook his head: "Oh, no. He can work at most only every other day. If you make him work too hard, he will soon have to retire."

Notes: Date: 12/2/90. Location: Burton's Pond Apt., MUN. The following general categories of the MI cover the joke: P210. *Husband and wife.* H600. *Symbolic interpretations.*

INFORMANT: DICK CHEN

a. General Description

Dick Chen is thirty-nine years of age, and is from China. He came to Memorial University in 1984, and is one of the oldest Chinese students at MUN. Dick is very hard-working, spending most of his time in his lab every day. He is a very helpful person and is always ready to help others. Dick is of medium height, and is balding. He was from Hunan Province, one of the southern provinces of China. Dick speaks very fast, both in English and Mandarin. I know Dick pretty well, because we often stayed together and chatted about all kinds of things when we both lived in Burton's Pond Apartments. From our contact, I knew he had many jokes and stories. When I started collecting jokes, he was glad to be one of my major informants in telling jokes.

b. Joke Repertoire

Dick really has a big joke repertoire and can tell all kinds of jokes. From all the jokes he told me, however, the main themes involved foolishness and puns. Although Dick told many kinds of jokes, there was not a 'dirty' joke among those I collected from him. According to Dick, he really enjoys listening to people tell interesting stories and jokes. Whenever he had heard a joke, he would easily remember it, and told jokes to others while enjoying listening to them. Dick told me that the 'golden age' of telling jokes was when he was working as an 'educated youth' (a term coined by Mao Tsetung to refer to high school graduates) in the countryside in China. They told each other jokes, searching hard for any interesting stories, legends or jokes that could come to mind while working in the field with the peasants. When he came to Newfoundland, he did not tell jokes as frequently as he did in China, because he was often busy doing experiments in the lab. He forgot some jokes in this way, as he told me when we discussed his joke repertoire. I had only one interview with Dick, and collected about eleven jokes from him.

c. Joke-telling Contexts

The interview with Dick was planned well in advance and pre-arranged because of his tight schedule. It was on January 7, 1990, which was a Sunday. The interview took place in the afternoon at his home on Albany Street. Most of the interview session was tape-recorded.

Before the interview began, Dick's only son was playing in the spacious living-room. Seeing that we were going to have a 'formal talk,' Dick's wife asked their son to go to his own bedroom. She put some fruit on the table and left. There were only the two of us, Dick and I. He was sitting on a single sofa not far from me, I sat on the floor before a small table to look after the tape-recorder. Although Dick promised to let me record the interview, he did seem somewhat nervous for the first five minutes or so, and did not know what to say. The following is part of the tape transcripts.

[...]

Zhu: Good, shall we start, Dick?

Dick: OK. Eh, start, what do you want to talk about?

Zhu: Anything, you know I'm interested in jokes, and I know you have a lots, could you first tell me where you got those jokes, and if possible, could you tell me in what circumstance the joke-teller told jokes and why he told them?

Dick: All right, I, I first tell you, I think, needless to say, when you've got time to kill, like when I was an 'educated youth' in the countryside, you would often tell people some jokes, stories, and legends, something that you need to kill time while you work. Otherwise, you'll feel bored. We used to tell countless tales, jokes, and everything that is interesting. If you were

there, and you can compile a set of books from us. Yeah, really interesting stories. For example, one guy once told us a joke about a 'couple' who went to get their marriage license...

(#4)... Yeah, it's funny, you know, we don't have anything else to say, sometimes, we just talked about some funny things happened in the village. Like eh, we males often worked together in the field, and females had their own groups. So, we often talked about a certain girl, or like some peasants, they liked to make up stories about a woman or a girl for fun, so that became jokes too. For example, males often talked about what the females were thinking about or talking about, yeah, of course, they're curious, and so some of us made up jokes. For example, I remember we had a joke like this, it's, a group of girls are talking about their ideal husbands in future... (#9)... and another joke is about a woman who is a country bumpkin, and her husband bought a parrot...(#8)...(chuckle). Jokes and stories like these.

Zhu: Very good. So you told jokes when you were working in the field. Did you tell jokes or stories during any other occasions?

Dick: Yeah, but mostly in the field. Like, picking up cotton, we lined up to work in the field, so we told each other jokes.

Zhu: So you think your jokes were obtained from the peasants and the other 'educated youths?' By the way, do you tell jokes now?

Dick: Right, right, I also told them jokes if I had one they did

not told. Now I don't tell jokes, because I don't have time for that, you know. But, sometimes, for my child I may tell a few jokes, or whatever you like to call them. It's only for child.

Zhu: I see, but if you don't mind, could you tell me one or two such jokes, just like those you normally told you son?

Dick: That's not interesting to you, I'm afraid....

Zhu: Oh, never mind, I don't care. Go ahead if you don't mind.

Dick: OK. Let me see. Eh, ok, I often tell my son some foolish children stories, like this one, (#6) [...] And another one like (#5), yeah, basically the same type, here is another one, (#7).

Then I asked Dick if he had heard jokes from other people in St. John's. He said he had, but not many. So, I asked him to recall any jokes he had heard in Canada. Having thought for a while, he told me the joke (#10) and said that the joke was told by another Chinese student from Hunan Province. Dick said that when he was at middle school, students often told jokes involving plays-on-words, just like the above one. However, Dick explained that the most common one among the students was to say 'I love general review' in reverse order, which in Chinese sounds exactly the same as when one says 'My daughter-in-law always loves me.' 'General review' was a familiar term to the students, because it appeared at the end of their textbooks. But, to say it in reverse produces another meaning altogether which to the person who speaks is something like saying that he has committed adultery with his daughter-in-law. Therefore, the character in the joke (#11) which Dick told me is taken as a foolish person. At that moment, Dick's wife came into the living-room and asked us to have supper. I turned off the tape recorder and went with Dick into the kitchen.

During supper, Dick's son asked Dick to tell him a joke when he learned that we had been telling jokes. To my surprise, Dick at once told him one (#2) which made us laugh a lot. Dick asked his son if he understood why we laughed, the son said he did.

After supper, the son insisted that Dick go with him to rent a video tape from Jumbo Video. Dick apologized and explained to me that they went to Jumbo Video every Sunday evening. Besides, he added, he could not remember any more jokes at the moment. So, we went out together, Dick and his son went to rent the video, and I went home.

d. Jokes Collected from Dick Chen

1. A boy said to his father: "Dad, today I saw a mouse at school which was as big as a cow!" The father was immediately displeased and remarked: "I've told you a million times that you should not exaggerate!"

Notes: Date: 7/1/90. Location: 2 Albany St. This joke fits the general categories of the MI: P233. *Father and son.* X1226. *Lies about mice.* X1227. *Lies about rats.* X1235. *Lie: remarkable cow.* X1235.1. *Large cow.*

2. A five-year-old boy said to a girl of the same age: "Let's get married. I'll be daddy and you'll be mummy, isn't that good?" "No," the little girl said earnestly, "We can't get married, because we do not belong to the same family. You see, only those who are in the same family can marry each other, like grandpa marries grandma, mom marries dad."

Notes: Date: 7/1/90. Location: 2 Albany St. This joke fits into the general categories of the MI: J1744. *Ignorance of marriage relations.* T50. *Wooing.*

3. The son asked his father to buy him a trumpet. The father wouldn't agree and said that he was noisy enough without a trumpet. Then the son promised, "I swear that I will not blow it until you go to bed."

Notes: Date: 7/1/90. Location: 2 Albany St. This joke fits into the general category of the MI: P233. *Father and son.*

4. A boy went to the Neighbourhood Committee to apply for a marriage licence. The man in charge asked: "Your name?" "Chang Ling," the girl replied. "And yours?" "Chang Lan," the boy answered. "What? Is there any relationship between the two of

you?" the man questioned. The girl at once blushed and slowly muttered: "Only twice, sir."

Notes: Date: 7/1/90. Location: 2 Albany St. *Chang* is the most common surname among Chinese. The two Changs in the joke were asked if they were from the same family, or 'related,' by the man in charge. The girl misunderstood him, thus leading to a joke. A similar joke is mentioned by G. Legman in his *No Laughing Matter: Rational of the Dirty Joke*, p.164, where the author indicates that "... a few relics of the anti-Chinese era of the 19th century are still to be found, but neither of these bulk very large in fool jokes. *A couple are applying for a marriage license. 'Your name?' 'Ole Oleson.' 'And Yours?' 'Lena Oleson.' 'Any connection?' The bride blushes. 'Only vunce. He yumped me.'* (Memorabilia, 1910. Also collected without significant change, in Minnesota, 1939 and 1946.)" The following general motifs from the MI cover the joke: T400. *Illicit sexual relations*. T100. *Marriage*. J1713. *Foolish married couples*.

5. When Ming came back from school, his father asked him how many words he had learnt that day, to which Ming replied that from now on, he did not have to learn anything else except the numbers one to seven. This father did not understand what the son meant, so he asked why. Ming answered, "When I grow up, I just want to be a composer, and my teacher said that a composer never bothers with number 8."

Notes: Date: 7/1/90. Location: 2 Albany St. "... a composer never bothers number 8." means that there is no note 8 in music scores, so he does not have to learn number 8 and the above. This joke fits into the general categories of the MI: P233. *Father and son*. J2213. *Illogical use of numbers*.

6. The son bought a box of matches for his father but his father complained: "You bought a box of damp matches, for I can hardly strike one." So the son remembered what his father had blamed him for. When he bought another box of matches two days later, the father asked: "Are you sure that you bought matches which can strike easily?" "Oh, sure," the son answered, "I've already tested each of them."

Notes: Date: 7/1/90. Location: 2 Albany St. This joke fits into the general categories of the MI: P233. *Father and son*. and specifically J1849.3. *Numskull strikes all matches in order to try them*.

7. A girl said to her boyfriend: "Sometimes you're masculine, but sometimes you're a bit girlish, I hope that you'll correct this before we get married." The boy said, "That's

almost impossible, for it's inherited from my parents. You see, my father is a male and, unluckily, my mother is a female. How can I be masculine only?"

Notes: Date: 7/1/90. Location: 2 Albany St., St. John's. The joke fits the following general categories of the MI: J1160. *Clever pleading*. J1500. *Clever practical retort*.

8. A man bought a parrot one day but his wife cooked it when he was not at home. "My goodness! You know what you've done. You killed a parrot that can talk!" the husband said. "Well, why didn't he speak if he could talk?" the wife retorted.

Notes: Date: 7/1/90. Location: 2 Albany St. This joke fits the general categories of the MI: J1701. *Stupid wife*. P210. *Husband and wife*. J1160. *Clever pleading*. J1545. *Wife outwits her husband*. J2233. *Logically absurd defenses*. J1540. *Retorts between husband and wife*.

9. A group of girls are talking about their ideal husbands in the future. One wants to marry a doctor, another says she would like to marry an economist. The third insists that a professor is the ideal husband. Just then, an old woman came by and overheard them talking, and she suggested that they marry a geologist. The girls asked why. The woman said, "Because when you are growing older, his interest in you will be more intense."

Notes: Date: 7/1/90. Location: 2 Albany St. The woman suggests that the girls marry geologists because a geologist is interested in 'old' things. So, when a girl takes a geologist as husband, she does not have to worry that her husband will not love her when she gets old. This joke fits into the general category of the MI: J155. *Wisdom (knowledge) from women*. Also compare: X760. *Jokes on courtship*.

10. When Chang bought a new house in Corner Brook, many of his friends came to congratulate him. When dinner was ready, Chang said to everybody, "Please help yourselves, since we're all close friends and nobody here is a *wairen*. (literally, strangers or outsiders.)" At this, a young lady was displeased, saying, "Do you mean we're all your *neiren* (meaning wives)?"

Notes: Date: 7/1/90. Location: 2 Albany St. In Chinese, *wai* and *nei* are two opposites. When followed by 'ren' (meaning human being), each has a new meaning. *Wairen* literally means strangers or outsiders while *neiren* only means wife. They do not necessarily mean opposite. However, by stressing the opposites *wai* and *nei*, the lady in

the joke brings about the effect of humour in the punchline. The following motif covers the joke: J1805.1. *Similar sounding words mistaken for each other.* Also compare: X111.7. *Misunderstood words lead to comic results.*

11. Xiao Chu asked his wife if she could say "I love general review" backwards. The wife tried a few times, but always stammered a bit somewhere in the sentence. Then, Xiao Chu said, "Now, listen to me, 'my daughter-in-law always loves me.'"

Notes: Date: 7/1/90. Location: 2 Albany St. The Chinese pronunciation of the sentence "I love general review" is Wo(3) Ai(1) Zong(3) Fu(4) Xi(2). When it is spoken backwards, the pronunciation is exactly the same as the Chinese pronunciation of the sentence "my daughter-in-law always loves me" although its written form may seem meaningless. This joke fits into the general category of the MI: P210. *Husband and wife.*

INFORMANT: JIN XIAO

a. General Description

Jin Xiao is twenty-eight of age, and is from Beijing, China. He came to Memorial University to study ocean engineering. Jin Xiao is very tall and thin. He is a very intelligent young man and studies very hard. He is always ready to help others, and most Chinese students who know him have high praise for him. He is frank, quiet and good-humored. He was my first informant for jokes although he was not good at telling them.

I collected jokes from Jin at the initial stage of my fieldwork in the community. In September 1989, when I had just developed the idea of writing a thesis on Chinese jokes, I went to Jin Xiao to find out whether it was true or not about the view that 'every Chinese can tell a few jokes'. I was convinced that it was indeed, after a casual talk with Jin. I did not have much preparation then, and only wrote down the gist of the jokes he told me. The following three jokes were collected from Jin Xiao on September 14, 1989.

b. Jokes Collected from Jin Xiao

1. While a companion with her husband on his visit to Pakistan, Mrs. Li Xiannian was asked by a Pakistani pupil, "Who was the first man?" Mrs. Li felt very embarrassed and surprised, yet she managed to speak in her natural tone and said, "Please don't interfere in my private affairs."

Notes: Date: 14/9/89. Location: Engineering Bldg., MUN. Li Xiannian was the former President of the P.R. China. In this joke, Mrs. Li misunderstood the meaning of "Who was the first man?" which the correct answer should be "Adam" and thus leading to a joke. This joke fits the general category of the MI: J2496.2. *Misunderstandings because of lack of knowledge of a different language than one's own.*

2. When Yang Shangkun was elected President of P.R. China, he asked a famous painter to paint a picture of him. But after the painting was finished, Yang and his wife were dissatisfied with it, and both said that it did not look like Yang himself and even insulted the painter, calling him an idiot. The painter was very angry and a few days later

he easily sold the painting at an art exhibition with the inscription beneath: *The Biggest Knave in China*.

Notes: Date: 14/9/89. Location: Engineering Bldg., MUN. The joke fits the following motif: J1110. *Clever persons*.

3. Two men met for the first time. One asked: "May I know your name?" "Yang," was the answer. Then the first one said jokingly: "Oh, Yang! Are you Yang Shangkun's son?" "Son-of-bitch!" the man answered angrily.

Notes: Date: 14/9/89. Location: Engineering Bldg., MUN. Yang Shangkun was the President of the P.R. China. The punch-line of this joke is the man's reply "son-of-bitch" which can be inferred that the addressee seemingly scolds the addresser, but is in fact scolding Yang Shangkun.

INFORMANT: PENG ZHENGRONG

a. General Description

Peng Zhengrong is thirty-four years old, and is from Gansu Province, China. He came to Memorial University as a graduate student in 1986. He is of medium height, thin, and wears glasses. Peng is a humorous type of person. Whenever he meets people he knows well, he always tells jokes to them. His sense of humour is well known among the Chinese students at MUN. Peng is also a political activist. He had taken an active role in all kinds of political, social and academic activities both on and off campus. He was the President of the GSU at MUN from 1989-1990. He is a very frank and out-going person. I never saw him get angry with anyone. He is often busy and seldom has time for a leisurely talk with others.

b. Joke Repertoire

Most of the jokes I collected from Peng were political jokes. I believe this is due to his interest in political issues. Ever since the 'June 4th Massacre' took place in Beijing in 1989, Peng has shown great concern about the incident. He organized Chinese student demonstrations, held parties, wrote petitions and made public speeches. He made great use of humour and jokes in his speeches, which eventually decided me to ask him to be one of my joke-telling informants. But when I first asked him to tell me some jokes for my thesis he was very hesitant, and said that what he had said might not be useful to my thesis. After I had explained to him the purpose of collecting jokes, he was convinced and agreed to tell me some interesting 'legends' about the Chinese communist party leaders. He claimed that he could tell me a lot. It turned out to be true, he did indeed have many such 'legends' in his mind. He was good at telling these jokes, and enjoyed telling them. Although he himself professed not to have many other jokes, I did collect from him a couple of ethnic jokes. Jokes #5 and #8 were such examples. There was only one joke (#2) which was neither political nor ethnic. I would say, therefore, that Peng's joke repertoire mainly consisted of political and ethnic jokes.

c. Joke-telling Contexts

The interviews I conducted with Peng Zhengrong were somewhat different from those I did with other informants. This was mainly because of his tight schedule. In fact, I had only one interview with him in which I collected only three jokes. The rest of the jokes, i.e. #4, #6, #1, #2 and #3 were collected at unexpected meetings or gatherings.

Knowing that Peng was very busy, I made a phone call the day before I went to his home to conduct an interview with him on jokes. It was on January 20th, 1990. I went to his place in the late afternoon. He was not back by the time we had agreed upon for the interview, I talked with his wife and the other two students who were sharing the house. About five o'clock, Peng came back. He told the rest of the people that I had come for his jokes, so the other three people, including Peng's wife, were very interested in what was going to happen and said that they would like to listen to the jokes. We were sitting in the big living-room ready for some jokes. Peng took some oranges from the fridge and asked us to help ourselves. He said that he was feeling a bit cold in the room, and he went to turn up the heating. His wife then made fun of him and said to us, "What kind of good jokes do you expect to get from him? He has none at all." Peng at once joked to his wife, "If you don't want to listen to, go and cook supper for us." We all laughed, and encouraged Peng to go ahead. Sitting on a sofa opposite to mine, Peng paused for a while, then said, "OK, let me first tell you a joke about our 'beloved' Majesty Deng (Xiaoping). I just got this joke on campus yesterday afternoon..."

Peng did not seem to pay any attention to me, instead, he now and then faced his wife who was sitting next to me. As usual, Peng's voice was loud, and he was always smiling while he spoke. When he had finished the joke #7, he challenged his wife, "What do you think? Can you tell us one like this?" Everybody laughed, and Peng quickly said that he had another old joke to offer. I asked him what an old joke was. He said when he told us, we would know, and perhaps we had already heard it before. So he went on telling joke #5. I asked him where he had got the joke, because I had heard the joke before I came to Canada. Some people used it as an anti-racism tool. Peng told me he

heard the joke from a friend who came to Newfoundland many years ago. I asked who that man was, and Peng told me it was Sinclair Gao. I asked him if he knew that Sinclair was very good at telling jokes. Peng said it was very true. Then we talked for a while about Sinclair, because I was going to interview him soon. The other three people had by then retreated to the kitchen to prepare supper. Peng suggested that I should interview Sinclair, and could get as many jokes as I wished from him. I asked him if he could tell me some jokes, but he said that he could not think of any good jokes to tell at that moment.

When I was about to leave, Peng said, "Oh, I have a good joke to tell you, then he quickly told me a joke involving implied sexual intercourse (#8). He deliberately lowered his voice when he told me the joke, because the kitchen was very close to the living-room, and Peng obviously did not want anyone else to hear it. Having finished, he said, "This one is also from Sinclair, you can get a lot from him. I'm sure." Peng left me with the impression that he did not 'own' many jokes, but enjoyed retelling jokes to others.

d. Jokes Collected from Peng Zhengrong

1. During his speech in a faculty meeting, the party secretary criticized Wang Dong, a young employee in the factory, Calling him a little rascal. "Because," this party secretary said, "I overheard him many times murmuring to himself: 'I love cunt when it is wet'."

Notes: Date:14/1/90. Location: 20 Smith Ave. The pronunciation of the English letter 'A' is exactly the sound pronounced in Chinese for 'love,' while 'B' is also the Chinese for 'vagina,' and 'C' the Chinese for 'wet'. So, when you pronounce 'ABC' in English, it sounds like 'love vagina wet' in Chinese. This joke fits into the following motifs: J2496.2. *Misunderstandings because of lack of a different language than one's own.* J1805.1. *Similar sounding words mistake for each other.*

2. A shortsighted man once got lost in town. So he asked a person, who was in fact a stone lion, the way to the station. There was no apparent reply to his question, other than a bird that had been perched on the lion's head flew away. The man was displeased and walked away from the lion, whispering to himself: "You won't tell me the way, I won't tell you that you've lost your hat!"

Notes: Date: 2/3/90. Location: 20 Smith Ave. This joke fits into the general category of the MI: X120. *Humour of bad eyesight*. Also compare: X124. *Nearsighted knight mistakes own servant for one of the enemy*.

3. The judge said to the accused, "You will be imprisoned for a month, or you pay one hundred *yuan* instead." The accused at once said, "What about giving me one hundred *yuan* and imprison me for two months?"

Notes: Date: 2/3/90. Location: 20 Smith Ave. The joke fits the following motifs: J1110. *Clever persons*. J1130. *Cleverness in law court*. J1170. *Clever judicial decisions*.

4. After the great massacre in Beijing, Canadian Immigration provided Chinese students with the opportunity to stay in Canada, to which one MUN student said: "Deng is really our best friend, for he helped us twice in our life--attending university in 1978 and making us stay in Canada as long as we wish in 1989."

Notes: Date: 15/10/89. Location: 20 Smith Ave. Attending university in 1978 was extraordinary to Chinese youth, because it was the first time since the Cultural Revolution (starting from 1966) that people could enter university by taking examinations rather than being 'nominated' by various levels of officials. This policy was made by Deng Xiao-ping in the year 1978 which was also the year he came to power in China for the second time. Therefore, many Chinese young people who entered the university were really thankful to Deng Xiao-ping, for their life would be totally different otherwise.

5. An English lady tried to make fun of an oriental in front of the guests at a party: "I say, are you a Chinese, or a Japanese, or a Javanese?" The man answered slowly, "I'm a Chinese, madame, may I ask you if you are a Yankee, a donkey, or a monkey?"

Notes: Date: 20/1/90. Location: 20 Smith Ave. This joke fits into the general categories of the MI: X650. *Jokes concerning other races or nations*. J1350. *Rude retorts*.

6. A security man went up to a girl lying on the beach, "Hey, I say, don't you know that we do not allow anyone wearing western 'three-cuts' (bikini) on the beach?" The girl was displeased by the interruption, so she mocked: "Then, sir, please tell me which 'cut' I should take off."

Notes: Date: 15/10/89. Location: 20 Smith Ave. The joke fits into the following general categories of the MI: J1250. *Clever verbal retorts*. J1500. *Clever practical retort*.

7. Once, Deng Xiao-ping went to the countryside to see the farmer's life. He asked one farmer, "I know you still live a hard life. But just tell me, if you have to choose between money and justice, which would you choose?" "Money," answered the farmer. "What?" exclaimed Deng, "I would choose justice. Money, after all, is not so rare. Justice, on the other hand, is very rare in this world." "Men always desire what they do not have," replied the farmer. "In fact, you only want what you have never had."

Notes: Date: 20/1/90. Location: 20 Smith Ave. The joke fits into the following general categories of the MI: J1250. *Clever verbal retorts*. J1500. *Clever practical retort*. and J1280. *Repartee with ruler (judge, etc.)*.

8. A young Vietnamese was riding a donkey while his wife was walking behind him with a bundle in her arms. Two tourists were very surprised to see this and one of them asked the woman why. The woman answered: "He was tired last night because I was up riding then, now let him have a good rest."

Notes: Date: 20/1/90. Location: 20 Smith Ave. The punchline "... I was up riding then," suggests that the woman was on the top while having sexual intercourse with her husband. The significance of applying a Vietnamese to this joke is due to the hatred towards Vietnamese who are known as an ungrateful and warlike nation by most Chinese. This joke fits into the general category of the MI: X650. *Jokes concerning other races or nations*.

INFORMANT: WANG SHIGANG

a. General Description

Wang Shigang is thirty-two years old, and is from Guangzhou, China. Wang is a very sincere person, and looks like a 'bookworm.' He is a Ph.D. candidate in the Linguistics Department at MUN.

Wang is my close friend. When we both worked in the greenhouse at Mount Pearl from October to December 1989, we often worked in the same workshop, picking cucumbers. During the breaks I often talked to him about my thesis topic. He was eager to help and told me the following jokes, indicating that he had heard them when he was in China, with the sole exception of joke #2. According to him, these jokes were all 'anti-socialism' jokes, which reflected the people's life and ideology in the socialist country. Wang emphasized that these were the only jokes he could tell, because he usually did not tell jokes.

b. Jokes Collected from Wang Shigang

1. During his visit in America, Deng Xiao-ping was amazed to see a popcorn machine in a shop turning small corns into bigger ones in minutes. Thinking this magic machine could solve the problem of feeding the big population in his country, Deng suggested that China import one hundred of these magic machines from the U.S. with one hundred *Bee* helicopters in exchange.

Notes: Date: 16/11/89. Location: Cabot Produce, Mount Pearl. Deng Xiao-ping was the Chairman of the Central Committee of Military in P.R. China. The *Bee* helicopter is a newly-developed helicopter made in China. It is also one of the most costly vehicles. This joke fits into the general category of the MI: J2210. *Logical absurdity based upon certain false assumptions.*

2. Since the 'June 4th Massacre,' many soldiers don't want to serve in the army. One day, a soldier asked for a two-month leave. "What for?" the commander asked. "My mother is going to give birth to a baby." the soldier said timidly. "But that's your father's business." "But my father died in the 'April 5th Movement,'" the soldier replied.

Notes: Date: 16/11/89. Location: Cabot Produce, Mount Pearl. The 'April 5th Movement' refers to the first democratic movement to take place since the founding of the People's Republic of China. The movement, which occurred in 1976, was put down by the army, and many people were killed.

3. When a worker was asked why he was not doing his best at his job, he answered, "The government is pretending to pay us, so I'm pretending to do my job."

Notes: Date: 16/11/89. Location: Cabot Produce, Mount Pearl. This joke fits into the general category of the MI: J1160. *Clever pleading.*

4. When the husband came home, he saw a birthday cake on the table with ten candles burning on it, so he asked his wife in surprise, "Whose birthday is it?" The wife answered, "My overcoat's. It's just ten years old today."

Notes: Date: 16/11/89. Location: Cabot Produce, Mount Pearl. This joke fits the general categories of the MI: P210. *Husband and wife.* T200. *Married life.*

INFORMANT: BIN ZOU

a. General Description

Bin Zou is twenty-six years old and is from Shanghai, China. He came to Memorial University to study ocean engineering in 1988. Bin is tall, fat, and wears a pair of glasses. Bin is a talkative and humorous person, and is very easy to get along with. He likes to joke with friends he knows well. I know Bin very well because he was one of the three residents who shared the same apartment with me in Burton's Pond. More than that, like Ming Zou, he was one of my best friends on campus. There was nothing that we did not talk about between us. He likes literature and music. Because of his personality and ability which I know very well, Bin Zou was naturally selected as one of my major informants for jokes.

b. Joke Repertoire

There were two major categories in Bin's joke repertoire. Bin was very good at telling 'dirty' jokes. More than eighty percent of the jokes I collected from him could be labelled 'dirty.' The main themes of these jokes were adultery (#1), sexual teasing (#10), incest (#4), and reference to sexual organs (#11). The other category of Bin's jokes related to the theme of foolishness. For example, buying a vase in joke #2, and a stingy father in joke #3.

c. Joke-telling Contexts

There was no problem at all for me to conduct an interview with Bin Zou whenever I felt it necessary. This was because we were so close and familiar with each other. In the past, whenever either of us was in need, the other would be sure to come and help. When I told Bin that I needed a lot of jokes for my thesis, he immediately said that he would help me with it. He told me that he had plenty of jokes for me to write about. On December 24, 1989, the day before Christmas, I went to his office in the Engineering Building to record some jokes. I telephoned him an hour before I went to his place, and

he said that it was quite all right if I would like to do it now. When I went to his office and took out the tape recorder and extension cord, he at once stopped me and said that his jokes were not worth recording, because they sounded vulgar. I did not insist on going ahead. So we sat in the small office, talking loudly as usual. His voice was really loud. It was about two o'clock in the afternoon. There was nobody around, and it was very quiet in the building. Bin offered me a Pepsi, and he said that he could tell me at least a dozen jokes in the afternoon. I said that I needed to take some notes. Bin put his legs on another chair and began telling jokes. He was very much at ease, and there was not any tension felt at all.

While he was telling his jokes, he seldom looked at me, and kept going all the way, one after another. Occasionally, he stopped and asked me if I had followed him or had any questions about what he was telling. He even asked me if I had written them down. I nodded my head and did not interrupt him during his talking unless I was asked to respond. He told me five jokes in succession, and then asked me, "Are you really going to put them into your thesis?" I said I would definitely do so. He then seemed a bit hesitant, and asked me, "Are you going to put my name in?" I said if he did not mind I would put his name in the jokes, and I deliberately asked him if he regretted telling the 'dirty' jokes. He at once denied it, saying he did not mind at all. I could see by then that he was more or less disturbed. I knew that he was not worried about the jokes he told me, but about the possibility that other Chinese students would know that the jokes were from him. I told him that in fact there was nothing to be worried about. I also collected the same kind of jokes from other Chinese students and the old immigrants here. He then felt better, saying that he actually did not care at all. He did not continue his jokes, however, and I realized that it was no longer suitable at that point to ask him to tell more jokes. We talked about the coming celebration of Christmas. Bin finally invited me to go to his home the following evening, promising that he would tell me some more jokes.

The second interview with Bin took place in February 1990. Somewhat different from the first time, Bin did not tell me many 'dirty' jokes although there were a few which might be so called. Instead, the main theme of the jokes was related to the

trickster. Like the first time, I did not use a tape recorder, only pad and pencil. Bin mentioned to me that there were in fact many Chinese jokes which were impossible to translate into other languages, at least English. He said that he had many such jokes, basically involving similar pronunciations with different meanings in his hometown dialect. We talked for a while about the proper translation of jokes, and Bin showed me a couple of examples which were indeed almost impossible to translate from Chinese to English. Here is one example: The pronunciations of the word 'editor' and that of 'profiteer' are the same in Bin's hometown dialect. When an editor goes to another county where a different dialect is spoken, he comes across a lot of difficulties. When he introduces himself to others, he is laughed at for his self-confession that he is a profiteer, a person who is normally hated by people. In fact, what he means is that he is an editor, who is a person normally respected by people in China. Bin told me a number of such jokes which I did not include in the following collection. However, I will discuss them in a special section.

d. Jokes Collected from Bin Zou

1. A man was committing adultery with a woman when suddenly they heard the woman's husband coming in the house. The man tried to escape, but the woman stopped him and put him on the bed. Then the husband came in and asked, "Who's that on our bed?" "Oh, please be quiet, my dear," the wife said, "that's our neighbour Han Kong. He's been badly beaten by his wife and came here to hide." At this, the husband burst into laughter and said: "Look at that black turtle (henpecked husband)! He is almost scared to death by his wife."

Notes: Date: 18/1/90. Location: 7 Anderson Ave. Han Kong was the name of the neighbour in the joke. The following general motifs from the MI cover the joke: T400. *Illicit sexual relations*. T481. *Adultery*. K2213. *Treacherous wife*. T230. *Faithlessness in marriage*. J1545. *Wife outwits her husband*. K1510. *Adulteress outwits husband*. J1702. *Stupid husband*. K1500. *Deception connected with adultery*.

2. A foolish person went to the shop to buy a vase. He held the vase upside down in his hand, and said, "Strange, why doesn't this vase have a opening?" Then he turned it over and said, "Funny, it doesn't even have a base."

Notes: Date: 14/2/90. Location: 7 Anderson Ave. The joke fits into the following general category of the MI: J1750-1849. *Absurd misunderstandings*.

3. A father and his son are both famous for stinginess. One day, when the two were crossing a river by boat, the father fell into the water by accident. Seeing his father struggling desperately in the river, the son yelled, "Help, help, Whoever saves my father will be rewarded!" One youth on the boat asked, "How much are you going to pay if I save your father?" "One hundred *yuan*!" the son answered. Hearing this, the father shouted from the water, while he was trying to keep himself afloat: "No, my son, that's too much. Fifty *yuan* at most, or you just let him go."

Notes: Date: 14/2/90. Location: 7 Anderson Ave. A version of this joke can be found in Leonard Feinard's *Asian Laughter*, p. 29, under the title Drowning: *A man had fallen in the water and was drowning. His son called for someone to come and save him, but the father raised his head from the water and cried, "If they will save me for three coins, all right, but not for more."* This joke fits the general category of the MI: J2130. *Foolish disregard of personal danger*.

4. When Au Keng went home from work, he found that his wife was having sex with his (Au Keng's) father. He was so furious that he picked up a stick and tried to beat the two of them. "Stop that!" the father shouted to his son, "Twenty years ago you had already slept with my wife, why can't I sleep with yours just once!"

Notes: Date: 14/2/90. Location: 7 Anderson Ave. This joke fits into the following motifs: T92.9. *Father and son as rivals in love*. T2213. *Treacherous wife*. T481. *Adultery*. T230. *Faithlessness in marriage*. T411.1. *Lecherous father*.

5. When a father returned back home at midnight, he found a note on the floor on which was written: "Dad, I'm sorry for making the room a mess, I'll clean it up tomorrow." The father could not wait another day, so he cleaned the room himself. When he went to bed an hour later, he found another note on his pillow: "Thank you so much, daddy."

Notes: Date: 14/2/90. Location: 7 Anderson Ave. This joke fits into the general category of the MI: P233. *Father and son*.

6. A fisherman's wife was not satisfied with her sex life with her husband because he often went to sea. So she started a love affair with a young man in the village. Whenever the young man came to the woman when the fisherman was not at home, he would first imitate a cat's meow. Once, the fisherman didn't go to sea but the young man didn't know. When he was meowing like a cat, the woman in the house cursed: "Damn you, bastard cat, my husband didn't go to sea, how and where can I get fish for you?"

Notes: Date: 14/2/90. Location: 7 Anderson Ave. This joke fits into the general categories of the MI: T400. *Illicit sexual relations*. T481. *Adultery*. Compare: K1549.5. *Unfaithful wife communicates with lover by pouring milk into stream*.

7. When he came home early in the morning, Lee Ping asked his wife: "Whom did you sleep with last night?" The wife asked: "At what time exactly do you mean?"

Notes: Date: 24/12/89. Location: Engineering Bldg., MUN. This joke fits into the general categories of the MI: P210. *Husband and wife*. X700. *Humour concerning sex*.

8. A man went home one night with a big piece of meat and happily reported to his wife that he had won it in a contest. The wife asked what the contest was about. The husband said, "A Japanese in the bar boasted that he had a bigger bird than most Chinese, so we had a contest and took out each of ours, and finally I won." The wife cursed the husband who continued pleading: "Don't worry. I just showed him half of it."

Notes: Date: 24/12/89. Location: Engineering Bldg., MUN. This joke fits into the following motifs: F547.3.1. *Long penis*. F547. *Remarkable sexual organs*. X650. *Jokes concerning other races or nations*. P210. *Husband and wife*. F547.3. *Extraordinary penis*.

9. When Li Si was shaving, he said to his wife, "Dear, every morning I feel I'm ten years younger after shaving." On hearing that, the wife was displeased and said, "Why don't you wait to shave until you are going to bed in the evening, then?"

Notes: Date: 24/12/89. Location: Engineering Bldg., MUN. This joke fits into the general categories of the MI: P210. *Husband and wife*. X700. *Humor concerning sex*. and T200. *Married life*. There is a similar story in Gerald Thomas' M.A. thesis, p. 160-161, where the wife says this to the man she loves.

10. Two women were talking to each other on the telephone. The first one asked: "What is the best thing in the world?" "Having sex with a man." came the answer. "I think so, too. But what is the next best thing?" The woman thought for a moment and then answered: "Doing it again."

Notes: Date: 24/12/89. Location: Engineering Bldg., MUN. This joke fits into the general category of the MI: X700. *Humour concerning sex.*

11. Two men were bathing in a river when one of them was bitten by a water snake on his penis. The other man came with a knife to help. The first one said, "Be very careful! The two-eyed one is the snake's head, and the one-eyed is my bird."

Notes: Collected from Bin Zou. Date: 24/12/89. Location: Engineering Bldg., MUN. This joke fits into the general category of the MI: H600. *Symbolic interpretations.*

INFORMANT: LIU ZHENDONG

a. General Description

Liu Zhendong is twenty-seven of age, and is from Fukien Province, China. He came to Canada as a graduate student in the Physics Department at MUN. He is tall and thin, and speaks Mandarin with a strong accent. He has been an activist among the Chinese students ever since the 'June 4th Massacre.' When he knew that I was writing a thesis on Chinese jokes, he insisted on including the following jokes in my thesis. According to Liu, these jokes exposed the real condition of life. He claimed that the jokes were made by himself just for me to use in my thesis. When I collected these jokes from him, there were two other Chinese students present. From my observation, the jokes could be adapted by Liu from the jokes or stories he knew before. This assumption is based on the fact that joke #1 was a familiar story type to me. I had heard it more than once when I was in China. The only difference was that Liu placed the joke in the contemporary Chinese social background.

I did not have much contact with Liu Zhendong. The collecting of the jokes did not take place in a formal interview, but purely accidentally.

b. Jokes Collected from Liu Zhendong

1. Nobody wants to be enrolled in the army nowadays in China. Many young men, however, are still forced by the government to serve in the army. One day, a soldier received a letter from his wife who complained in the letter that since he left, there was nobody at home who could plow the vegetable garden, except people either too old or too weak. The soldier wrote a letter to his wife in which he asked her not to plow the garden because he had buried some gold there. The letter was secretly checked by the secret police who with a gang of their men went to the garden and plowed it carefully for gold. A week later the soldier received another letter in which his wife thanked him for sending comrades to help plow the garden.

Notes: Date: 15/1/90. Location: Burton's Pond Apt., MUN. The joke fits the following general category of the MI: J1110. *Clever persons*.

2. On an official's birthday, his colleagues collected money and bought a gold rat for him, for the official was born in the Year of the Rat. The official was much pleased with the gift, and then he formally announced at the party that his wife's birthday was drawing near. "By the way," he said, "my wife was born in the Year of the Ox."

Notes: Date: 15/1/90. Location: Burton's Pond Apt., MUN. The following motifs of the MI: cover the joke: J514. *One should not be too greedy*. W151. *Greed*.

3. Having narrowly escaped a shipwreck, a man and a girl swam to an island where they spent a few days together before the man finally said, "I suggest we get married here and have as many children as we want in this island." The girl was shy at first, and then consented and said, "But there's no lawyer or priest here, not even a witness for our marriage." "Yes, best of all, there's no police and government either."

Notes: Date: 15/1/90. Location: Burton's Pond Apt., MUN. This joke fits into the general categories of the MI: T200. *Married life*. T10. *Falling in love*. T50. *Wooing*. T100. *Marriage*.

INFORMANT: ROBERT CHANG*a. General Description*

Robert Chang is thirty-two years old, and is from Hong Kong. He came to Memorial University as a graduate student to study medical science in 1987. He is very short and dark, wears a pair of glasses. He can speak both good Mandarin and English. Robert is very friendly and easy-going. I got to know him through Ming Zou, one of my friends studying at the Medical School. Due to limited contact with Robert Chang, I do not have much to say about him and his joke repertoire except that the only interview I conducted with him was on February 14, 1990.

It was on a Wednesday evening. As arranged, I went to Robert Chang's home with Ming Zou. In a small living-room, we started talking randomly. There was not much furniture in the room, so we all sat on the floor. About half an hour later I suggested that we had better talk about jokes. Robert was very smart, and he immediately said that he had some jokes ready for me. He told me that he recalled some jokes which were often heard when he was a child in Hong Kong. He first told us joke #2, and we all felt interested. Robert said that when he was a schoolboy, some students asked someone else to do their assignments for them. Seeing that I was taking some notes, Robert said humorously, "You don't ask someone else to do it for you, eh?" We all laughed. Then he continued telling us a couple of jokes, all with the theme of a child as the main character. Ming Zou then asked him if he could tell something different, because the jokes he told were too 'childish.' Robert thought for a while and then said he would really have to think hard before he could tell a different kind. He offered us some fruit, and then suddenly said that he had a good joke to tell us. So he quickly told us joke #4. The rest of the evening was spent in talking about other things rather than jokes because Robert apologized that he was not prepared to tell more jokes.

b. Jokes Collected from Robert Chang

1. A child whose family was very poor one day found a dead rabbit on the road, so he picked it up and brought it home to his mother. The mother cooked it and then covered it with her skirt, saying: "We'll have a feast when your father comes back from fishing, dear." So the son waited and waited until one day he saw his father's sail coming towards the harbour. He was so glad that he shouted in the street: "Great! I'm going to enjoy the delicious meat under my mom's skirt!"

Notes: Date: 14/2/90. Location: 41 Mount Royal Ave. The joke fits the following general category of the MI: J1745. *Absurd ignorance of sex.*

2. The teacher said to Hsiao Ning one day: "There are too many mistakes in your homework. I will have to tell your father about it." "Oh, please don't, teacher," Hsiao Ning implored. "But I have to. It's my responsibility," the teacher explained. "I don't mean that, I mean my father will get angry with you because he wrote the story."

Notes: Date: 14/2/90. Location: 41 Mount Royal Ave. Hsiao Ning is a common name in Chinese which is equivalent to the English name, Tom. This joke fits into the general category of the MI: P340. *Teacher and pupil.*

3. A son asked his father why their neighbour was so poor. The father asked him why he thought that was so. "Because I saw the whole family get extremely worried when their little baby swallowed a dime."

Notes: Date: 14/2/90. Location: 41 Mount Royal Ave. This joke fits into the general category of the MI: P233. *Father and son.*

4. A couple from Shanghai went sightseeing in Hong Kong. They stayed in a haunted room, and at midnight heard a strange cry from the ceiling. Both of them dared not speak a word at first, then the husband nudged his wife and whispered: "Talk to him, since you understand English."

Notes: Date: 14/2/90. Location: 41 Mount Royal Ave. The implication in the punchline is that the husband was a coward, and did not dare to speak to the ghost, so he found an excuse that he did not speak English. The ghost in Hong Kong is supposed to understand English. This joke fits into the following general categories of the MI: P210. *Husband and wife.* J2600. *Cowardly fools.* J1702. *Stupid husband.*

5. A careless sixteen-year-old daughter wrote a letter to her parents in which she said that she had not been sleeping well every night recently just because of 失眠 (insomnia). However, owing to her carelessness, she misspelled the word 失 into 夫, thus causing the meaning of the sentence: I couldn't sleep well recently because every night I want a husband to sleep with me.

Notes: Date: 14/2/90. Location: 41 Mount Royal Ave.

For a classification of the above jokes told by all the informants, please refer to Appendix at the end of this thesis.

INFORMANT: CHAO CHANGQIN

a. General Description

Chao Changqin is in his early thirties, and is from Shenzhen Special Zone, China. He was the associate general editor of *The Herald of Shenzhen Youth*. He was forced to resign the position in 1986 because he consented to publish an article which was entitled "I Agree That Deng Xiaoping Should Retire" in *The Herald*. He went to the United States thereafter to continue his career as a newspaper editor. He was the general editor of the *Press Freedom Herald*--a Chinese student newspaper in North America. The jokes I collected from Chao Changqin were all political jokes. These jokes were collected when Chao gave a lecture to the Chinese students at MUN on January 19, 1990. Since the political jokes he told have many common characteristics with those which I collected from other students at MUN, I include them in this collection for reference.

b. Jokes Collected from Chao Changqin

1. The former Chinese President, Li Xiannian, once had an interview with a group of intellectuals. He asked one of them: "You complained that the price of vegetables is too high, I wonder why you don't eat shrimps instead. I have shrimps every day and it is said that shrimps are very cheap." "Your Honour," one doctor replied ironically, "the price of shrimps is four times higher than that of vegetables!" (146)

Notes: Date: 19/1/90. Location: Chemistry Bldg., MUN. The following motifs cover the joke: J1280. *Repartee with ruler (judge, etc.)*. X330. *Jokes on magistrates*.

2. A MUN student once said jokingly to one of his friends, "In China, we used to be taught to say that there were two thirds of the world's population which were still suffering from hunger and cold. Not until we came out did we realize that most of that two thirds are living in China." (150)

Notes: Date: 19/1/90. Location: Chemistry Bldg., MUN. The following motif cover the joke: X330. *Jokes on magistrates*.

3. Wang Zheng, Vice-President of the PR China, has a pet phrase "Ta(1) Niang(2) De(1)" (meaning 'fucking') whenever he talks to people. Once, a Japanese guest asked the interpreter why Mr. Wang kept using that phrase and what it meant. Having found no better way to escape the embarrassment, the interpreter said, "That's a traditional way of showing courtesy when speaking to friends and guests." (144)

Notes: Date: 19/1/90. Location: Chemistry Bldg., MUN. The following motif covers the joke: X330. *Jokes on magistrates*. The Chinese phrase, Ta Niang De, may not necessarily refer to the four letter words. Literally, it refers to the elder lady's private parts.

4. After decreeing martial law in Beijing, Li Peng thought that there should be a day of peace. But the students and civilians went on demonstrating. At night, the Premier woke up from his dream and told his wife that he had a wonderful dream in which all the students and civilians in Beijing shouted: Support our government! Long live Li Peng! "Can you tell what that predicts?" Li asked his wife who answered drowsily: "That means you're really dreaming." (145)

Notes: Date: 19/1/90. Location: Chemistry Bldg., MUN. The following motifs cover the joke: J1280. *Repartee with ruler (judge, etc.)*. X330. *Jokes on magistrates*.

5. Before the great massacre took place, Li Peng went to Beijing hospital to see the students who had been on a hunger strike. Meeting a mental patient in the corridor, the Premier asked: "Do you know me? I'm the leader of 1.1 billion people, and the Premier of one fifth of the population in the world." The patient nodded his head and said, "Yes, I know you. Your condition now is just like mine when I first came here." (143)

Notes: Date: 19/1/90. Location: Chemistry Bldg., MUN. The following motifs cover the joke: J1280. *Repartee with ruler (judge, etc.)*. X330. *Jokes on magistrates*. Also compare: X541. *Jokes on lunatics*.

CHAPTER FOUR

Analysis of the Joke-tellers and Their Jokes in the Chinese Community

This chapter will discuss a few theoretical points connected with the joke-tellers and the jokes of the two different groups in the Chinese community. I will establish the nature and causes of differences and similarities in the repertoires of each group of joke-tellers. Questions such as how far both groups maintain characteristic 'Chinese' cultural features, how far either group show elements of assimilation, and to what degree, will be discussed. At the same time, I will refer to the relevant literature dealing with ethnicity and assimilation, which will give me a theoretical peg upon which to hang my material cap.

A. Comparison and Analysis of the Joke Repertoires of the Two Groups

As has already been indicated, I have divided my informants into two groups based mainly on their age, social status and length of time stayed in Canada. As far as their joke repertoires are concerned, there are many similarities and differences which must be pointed out before a discussion of assimilation into Canadian society can be made.

From my fieldwork research, I discovered that there were a few joke stereotypes which popularly existed in the joke repertoires of both informant groups. For example, there was a strong tendency among both group informants to tell Chinese numskull jokes, e.g. joke #1 from Louise Hong; joke #2 from Brian So; joke #3 from Sinclair Gao and so forth. In fact, Chinese numskull jokes make up over sixty per cent of the jokes I collected in the community. Most of these jokes, to judge by their content and function, are intended to teach and educate people, especially the younger generation. This is easy to

see since so many of the jokes include father-and-son as the only characters. The father, in most cases, is depicted as a kind of teacher and educator while the son is often the laughing-stock, although there are a few cases in which a reverse situation may also occur. The following comparison of the two jokes, one taken from my fieldwork collection, the other from a literary source, can serve as an illustration of this point:

A naughty boy was punished by his grandfather who made him recite *Tang Poems*⁸⁰ while standing in the snow. The boy's father saw this and he at once took off his overcoat and put it on his son's shoulders, standing beside him. The grandfather was puzzled: "I'm punishing your son, why are you standing beside him?" "I'm punishing your son too!" the father said. (*Collected from my group one informant, Xin Yan.*)

A father and son were chopping firewood together when the father's axe slipped and he hurt his son's hand. The son bawled out, "Big fool! Are you blind?" The grandson who was standing there and could not bear his grandfather to be abused, shouted to him, "You good-for-nothing! How dare you speak to your own father like that!" (An excerpt from *Oriental Humour* (1959) by R. H. Blyth, p.159.)

To a westerner, it is very likely that these two jokes are only mildly humorous, or at most more humorous than educational, whereas to a Chinese, the reaction is quite different. To a Chinese, the purpose of telling the jokes is to teach, or to set an example of what is right and wrong in family life. Chinese understanding of the first joke is that the grandfather is the educator. The father, however, is still the son of the grandfather who does not know how to properly educate his own son, but only shows his sympathy which is not right under the circumstances. The punchline of the joke "I'm punishing your son too!" in fact depicts the stupidity and stubbornness of the son (the father in the joke) in front of his father (the grandfather). In the same manner, the second joke also emphasizes the importance of family life--showing respect to older generations. Though humorous, the punchline of the joke "You good-for-nothing! How dare you speak to your own father like that!" intends to teach that those stupid beings (numskulls) who do not show necessary respect to the old generations will be regarded as "good-for-nothing." Therefore, to Chinese, the role of the 'head' in a family, usually the father, is very

⁸⁰Poems written in the Tang dynasty by famous poets such as Li Po, Tu Fu, and Po Chuyi.

important. He is a teacher and an educator at the same time. That is, the father not only should show the rest of the family what should and should not be done, but also discipline any one of them once there is a stupid 'offence.' This is indeed the family rule to the Chinese. In Confucian teachings and in real life, the only guide to a man's behaviour is that his family shall be honoured, at least not to be disgraced, by what he does.

For example, a child who steals brings social disgrace to his family, and it also shows that the family has no proper discipline. If a man is rude or discourteous in public, this, too, shows that he was badly raised at home when he was still a child. He is taken as a '*Bai Chi*' (meaning idiot or numskull). So, the blame is not so much on him because he has failed to learn, as it is on his father, who failed to teach him good manners. And the responsibility is on the father. On the other hand, being a good son is, by Confucian teaching, the first of all virtues. But the way of being a good son is through the teaching and discipline of the father. This can all be inferred from the above two jokes. The same is true that the Chinese numskull (stupid son) type has become one of the typical Chinese joke stereotypes which also represents the most typical characteristics of the joke repertoires from both groups in the Chinese community. I observed through my participation in joke-telling sessions that both group informants tell the same type of jokes with the same purpose, which obviously indicates a strong influence from traditional Chinese culture.

Another common theme in the jokes from both group informants is sex. Many of my informants' repertoires contain jokes involving sex, which they loosely call 'dirty' jokes. Many of these jokes are traditional Chinese jokes and can be traced in some anthologies of Chinese folk literature.⁸¹ However I never collected exactly the same jokes from my informants though there were cases in which they do bear many resemblances in content to published data. This is just as Legman has pointed out, "Few

⁸¹Howard S. Levy's *China's Dirtiest Trickster, Folklore about Hsu Wen-chang (1521-1593)* is one of many examples.

jokes are really ever exact duplicates, not only because of minor variations over the centuries, or from mouth to mouth but because of conscious refashioning by the tellers to suit their own psychological bent."⁸²

Although some group one informants have lived in Canada for quite a while, twenty years or over for example, they still keep many Chinese cultural traits in their daily life. For instance, during their leisure time, they often tell stories and jokes which are learnt or passed down to them from older generations. The use of sexual description is very popular in Chinese jokes. As I discovered during my interviews, many informants told the same kind of sex jokes, though in different versions, which they claimed were heard many years ago in China. They did not doubt that the jokes were Chinese in origin, though a few told me that they heard some from friends in Newfoundland. One of my informants once proudly said upon finishing telling me a sex joke, that the Chinese are good at making 'dirty' jokes too. My library research also indicated that those narratives are mostly traditional Chinese products although most of these informants' Canadian experiences have had certain influences on their life and thinking. The sex jokes I collected in the community basically fall into two broad categories. The first is committing adultery, the reference to male or female sex organs is the second. Jokes #3, #5 told by Yan Zan; #4, #8, and #11 told by Sinclair Gao; and #7, #9, #19 told by Ming Zou are only a few such examples. 'Dirty' jokes came up as a topic of conversation in several interviews. The following excerpt is taken from an interview with one of my group one informants, Xin Yan, and covers many aspects of a joke-teller's perception of the 'dirty' joke and the joke-telling in the Chinese community.

[...]

Zhu: Could you say something about the way you usually tell what you call 'dirty joke, for example, when and where do you usually

⁸²G. Legman. *No Laughing Matter: Rational of the Dirty Joke*. New York:(Bell Publishing Company, 1969): 36.

tell, and what kind of the jokes do you usually tell in such circumstance?

Yan: Well, we tell stories, as you say, dirty jokes too when we have time together ... we, yes, among friends but never in the family. All kinds of stories and jokes when we have time together ... but the kind of stories we tell will be different with the audience. I did not tell a dirty story to youngsters, because that's bad to them. But 'bad' stories are 'bad' jokes which we often shared in our work. At home we tell something different, yes, good ones.

Zhu: Oh, I see. What are your stories and bad jokes? I mean, are they traditional ones which you heard in the past from your older generations or non-traditional ones which, for example, you heard from Canadian friends and so on? I mean, eh, from your judgement, the jokes are traditionally Chinese jokes or non-Chinese, for example, you tell jokes which you heard from Canadians.

Yan: Oh, of course Chinese stories and jokes, yes, they're traditional ones ... I believe, yes ... but not from my older generations. I have friends, all kinds of friends from all walks of life, yes, so we can tell each other jokes which we know well ... yes, all Chinese, I don't have any Canadian stories though I heard many of them from friends or co-workers. I usually tell Chinese stories to them too.

Zhu: So, you told stories and jokes when you were in China too?

Yan: Yes, a lot of them

Zhu: Do you mean there is little change in your story-telling, from the content, style as well as audience and etc. which you were used to when you were in China?

Yan: Well, I don't know, maybe no change, because I always tell stories to people in my family or Chinese who worked with me. I never tell a joke to white Canadians because they don't understand our culture, what we laugh, they don't, besides, my English couldn't be understood by them... yes, you can't tell a dirty joke to them either because that could be offensive, just like they treat me in the same, they're just fine, I mean they never tell me a dirty story or joke ... yes, you're right, respect to each other because of different cultures. I don't mean I refuse to accept Canadian culture, the thing is we just have our limited social circles ... I know I was influenced by Canadian culture in many ways, but I am still used to the Chinese way of life because the people I work and live with are mostly Chinese

Zhu: Do you think you have still kept most of your Chinese traditions, for example, your way of life such as clothing, food habits, festival celebrations, and entertainments? If yes, could you tell me why you do so? Is that the same as your telling of jokes? Any relationship, I mean?

Yan: Oh, of course, because it's our culture and I'm used to it,

and I'm quite comfortable with it, everything. I think the same is true to westerners. If they go to China, they would find many things which they are not willing to accept. Eating, for example, is one of the most important things. I, in Canada, I still have Chinese way to live, and most of my associates are Chinese too. Like attracts to like, you know. So, you say what, yes, stories are those I knew when I was in China, and the people I know, they all tell Chinese stories, and jokes, too

Zhu: Oh, I see. You just told me the joke, did you say it's dirty joke, or what? Why?

Yan: Ah, that, you mean that, the chastity belt one? [...] Well, that's a dirty joke, yes, I said, because it can't be told before women. I call this sort of jokes dirty jokes. But you want traditional jokes, don't you? That's the right one, I heard it when I was in my home town a long time ago. It's very common, and everybody told this joke and everybody knew it. We used to tell a lots of this kind of jokes, [...] of course within men. Dirty jokes are usually very popular among men in my home town, and it's the same here too I believe, and there are usually certain stereotypes, the one I told you is an example. I used to tell a lot, but it's no good to you young guys, no good

(Based on the interview with Xin Yan, tape number: 90002).

I have noticed in the field that the theme of obscenity in the joke repertoire of group one informants is more popular and stronger than in that of group two informants. This could be explained from the point of view that the theme of obscenity is itself traditional

in Chinese folk culture, where, it has a long history. There are many documents and scholarly materials which support this point. For example, in his *Oriental Humour*, R. H. Blyth points out that "In the whole of the Chinese Classics there is nothing that could bring a blush to the cheek of any young female person ... *The Book of Odes*,⁸³ however, is full of a certain rustic humour that was later overlaid by unhumorous, antihumanistic, and political interpretations from at least the time of Confucius."⁸⁴ In addition, Howard S. Levy's *Chinese Sex Jokes in Traditional Times*, published in 1973, consists of over four hundred Chinese sex jokes from different times in Chinese history. The author indicates in his introductory remarks to the book that "Chinese sex jokes ... start[ing] with pre-Christian eras."⁸⁵ As my group one informants are mostly over forty years old and spent their childhood in 'Old China,'⁸⁶ their education, either from the home or from school, turned out to be more traditional in nature compared with group two informants whose education was manipulated by the Communist Party and who were even forced to keep away from traditional ideology, habits, customs and culture during the Cultural Revolution (1966--1976), not always successfully, of course, this is why some traditional lore, such as numskull jokes, was maintained. Therefore, it is necessary to emphasize at this point that although both group informants were brought up in their homeland China, the differences in their joke repertoires were due in part at least to the different historical periods they were raised, and in which the social mores, customs and education they experienced in China were necessarily different. Before the Communist revolution of 1949, obscene jokes were quite acceptable, whereas they were frowned upon by the post-1949 regime.

⁸³The earliest collection of Chinese folk poetry. It consists of three hundred and five poems which were written during the Chinese Spring and Autumn Period (770 B.C. to 476 B.C.).

⁸⁴R.H. Blyth. *Oriental Humour*. Nishikicho: (The Hokuseido Press, 1959): 21.

⁸⁵Howard S. Levy. *Chinese Sex Jokes in Traditional Times*. Taipei: (The Orient Cultural Service, 1974): 1-2.

⁸⁶It refers to China at the time prior to the founding of the People's Republic of China when China was still a semi-feudal, semi-colonial land.

More than these, Chinese sex jokes told by group one informants also have certain stereotypes and even particular folk 'heroes,' Hsu Wen-chang⁸⁷ being one such example. There are hundreds of jokes and legends about this folk hero and trickster, who is particularly known for being good at pulling women's legs in traditional Chinese narratives. During my fieldtrips in the community, I collected quite a number of jokes about this traditional hero from my group one informants. However, from group two informants, there is only one who told me such jokes. The reason is due to the fact that jokes about Hsu Wen-chang are traditional and usually contain sexual descriptions, and therefore were taken as 'forbidden products' during the Cultural Revolution. Most of my group two informants from mainland China experienced the Cultural Revolution when they were teenagers. So, there are not so many of them who could tell Hsu Wen-chang jokes.

Howard S. Levy's *China's Dirtiest Trickster, Folklore about Hsu Wen-chang (1521-1593)* is one of the many scholarly books about him. One point should not be missed here is that many of the sex jokes I collected in the community are of the same type as or similar to those in Howard Levy's *Chinese Sex Jokes in Traditional Times*, which helps support the argument that the jokes told by the Chinese in the community are mostly traditional ones. From the fact that most of the group two informants tell traditional jokes, it can be tentatively asserted from another angle that they have maintained certain characteristics of Chinese cultural features well while living in a multi-ethnic society.

Furthermore, the fact that group one informants' ages are generally older than that of group two members, and that they also have relatively little formal education

⁸⁷An historical figure (1521-1593) in the Ming dynasty. Having failed the Civil Examination several times, he developed a deep distrust and disdain for officialdom and for the highly ritualized and artificial life-style of his successful contemporaries. It is said that he killed his wife who had affairs with another man, for which Hsu was put into prison for seven years. Perhaps because of this, he became eccentric later in his life and loved to tease, embarrass, or humiliate women. But this was not always true of him. Sometimes he pulled a prank on a bet, sometimes to get even with a person who had annoyed him, but often just because he wanted to have a little fun. His tricks range from clever to merely crude.

compared to the group two informants, can also explain why group one informants have a wider obscene joke repertoire. On this point, Stith Thompson observed that the uneducated storyteller or listener always exhibited a greater interest in deceptions connected with sexual conduct than in any other deceptions. He indicated:

To the unlettered story-teller and listener, as well as to the writer of literary tales, there has always been a greater interest in deceptions connected with sex conduct than any other. Such deceptions may be of several kinds. They may result in seduction, in the discomfiture of unwelcome lovers, in the beguiling of cuckolded husbands, or in the discovery and punishment of adulterers by the outraged husband or by some trickster who profits by the exposure. Tales like these are very old, and they were especially popular with the writers of fabliaux, novelle, and jestbooks.⁸⁸

Taking a closer look, we can find that most of the 'dirty' jokes told by group one informants are mostly related to the subject of adultery. This is not without reason, but is closely linked with the social and psychological situations the old immigrants experienced when they first landed in the New World. As I indicated in the first chapter, many immigrants who came to Canada during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries came alone even they had married in China. During their leisure time, they missed their wives, children, relatives and homes in China, and hoped to earn enough money quickly and eventually go back to China. Throughout those tiring and monotonous days, they told stories and jokes to each other in order to kill time. Aside from the fact that some obscene stories had been passed down to them naturally during festival celebrations or birthday parties in China, it was equally natural for them in the reverse circumstances, when they lived alone and far from their kin and relatives, to tell or even to invent certain types of obscene jokes--jokes about adultery. As one of my group one informants told me, he believed some 'dirty' jokes have been told for generations among the male Chinese in Newfoundland. The telling of 'dirty' jokes during that period (early Chinese settlers in Newfoundland during the early twentieth century) not only helped to maintain their national culture in a foreign country, but also, more importantly, served as an outlet for anxieties about sexuality and marriage fidelity,

⁸⁸Stith Thompson. *The Folktale*. New York: (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1946): 202.

insofar as any individuals may have such anxieties. The second wave of what I call 'old' immigrants--those who came to Newfoundland in the 1960s--did not of course share the problems of racial discrimination and separation from their families endured by the first wave; but in other respects they have a great deal in common, as noted in Chapter One.

On the other hand, the wives at home also endured many hardships. In addition to the tasks they are supposed to perform well such as bringing up the children, they are also obliged by traditional ideology to satisfy their parents-in-law. Whether it is based on a real situation or not, adultery between a father and his daughter-in-law is very popular in traditional Chinese jokes. Chinese women, according to the widespread and popular interpretation and understanding of Confucianism, are often characterized as innately coquettish and evil, and therefore are generally treated as inferior to men. Although I had intended to collect some 'dirty' jokes from my female informants, I eventually failed to obtain even a single one, due to the lack of a proper helper. I cannot therefore be positive that there exist such jokes among them, although some of my male informants, while talking about the subject, assured me that women also had their own 'dirty' jokes. Considering their social and occupational environment in a foreign land, my only assumption is that, even though Chinese women do not tell 'dirty' jokes in front of men and women they do not know well, there must be certain ways to vent their anxieties, especially in a society which to them is not easily entered to. Based on this point, a tentative remark can be made that not only to the women, but also to most old immigrants in the community, the pattern of 'dirty' joke repertoire would be none the less different from what Ethelyn G. Orso analyzed in her *Modern Greek Humour* about the two different groups:

Men and women in Greece and in Middle America reinforce the machismo complex by their adherence to the stereotypical roles. Women in both areas expect their husbands (and sometimes even their lovers) to be unfaithful. The infidelity of their men allows many women to play the martyr role and to undergo dramatic suffering, making life anything but dull. The Christian image of the suffering Madonna is a primary role for women in both of those machismo-dominated areas to emulate. Men in both areas worry considerably about the possibility of being cuckolded; thus men also suffer

anxiety. Such anxiety is reflected in the jokes that deal with adultery.⁸⁹

I am not going to discuss the topic further because it is beyond the scope of this thesis. But there is another obvious difference of joke repertoires between the two groups of informants that I wish to point out. That is, there was a strong tendency for group two informants to tell political jokes during my fieldwork in the community, while group one informants had next to none at all. In other words, group two informants tell many more political jokes--anti-socialism, anti-government and its leaders--than group one informants. According to my notes, almost all group two informants told me at least a couple of political jokes, some of them, like Peng Zheng-rong and Liu Zheng-dong, told only political jokes, while there were very few group two informants who did not tell any political jokes. In this context, Legman has pointed out, "Most joke-tellers have their own personal styles, not only of treatment and vocabulary, airs and graces, but especially of preferred subjects."⁹⁰

However, the real cause for this is historical. Just as Charles E. Schutz pointed out: "Political humor may have certain universal elements because of its very political nature. But a country's political humor will also reflect its particular history and circumstances."⁹¹ Group one informants do not have much knowledge about the present Chinese situation due to their many years in Canada. Neither do they show as much concern about China as group two informants because they have their whole families and even their relatives in Canada. As for group two informants, however, things are quite different. Firstly, most of them came to Canada only in recent years as students and they are, and will be, expected to return to China eventually. Many married students still have their spouses in China. Secondly, most of them are from China and know what are the

⁸⁹Ethelyn G. Orso. *Modern Greek Humour*. Bloomington: (Indiana University Press, 1979): 226.

⁹⁰G. Legman. *No Laughing Matter: Rationale of the Dirty Joke*. New York:(Bell Publishing Company, 1969): 16.

⁹¹Charles E. Schutz. *Political Humor: From Aristophanes to Sam Ervin*. Rutherford:(Associated University Presses, 1977): 14.

real causes of the social and economic differences between China and the developed countries such as the United States, Canada, France and the like. When they were in China, they were not allowed to criticize government and its leaders. Although there were hundreds of jokes which satirized the bureaucratic government leaders and the socialist system, they had to circulate secretly among them. Once they come to Canada, where they feel they can 'unseal' their mouths, numerous political jokes are told and exchanged in casual talk about China's present and future situations. This state of mind is moderately elaborated by Charles Schutz: "Because political humor is often a reaction to the greatest concentration of power in society, it exemplifies humor as a sublimation of aggression, a safe release for aggressiveness against superior force. Because government is the authoritative institution that enforces society's taboos, we use political humor against it to vent our resultant frustrations on it in a form that allows us some release for the suppressed urges."⁹²

During the student democratic movement which took place in 1989, they took an active part in various ways, in supporting the students in China. During the summer of 1989, there were not only many political jokes circulating among the Chinese students at MUN, there were also lots of them coming through various forms of mass media, for example, posters, student newspapers, computer mail, to name only a few. The reasons why these students are very concerned about China is not only because they were brought up in China, but also because they will eventually return to China. What China will be like is extremely important to them. They try every possible way to help reform their motherland, hoping China will catch up with the advanced countries within, possibly, a short period of time. They also hope there will be big changes in government, getting rid of those bureaucrats who slow the development of the country. Thus, there has developed a range of jokes directly pointing to all kind of social evils inherent in socialism. All this explains why group two informants tell more political jokes than group one informants do. In this regard, it can be said that the repertoires of group two

⁹²Charles E. Schutz. *Political Humor: From Aristophanes to Sam Ervin*. Rutherford:(Associated University Presses, 1977): 8.

informants contain certain creative elements which most group one informants do not have at all.

B. Cultural Assimilation and Its Influence on the Joke Repertoires

There are a few group one informants who have almost the same experience and opinions as Yan on the subject of story-telling. But comparatively, they do not seem to have absorbed Canadian cultural traits as quickly and readily as group two informants--those who came to Canada as students and with the intention of learning western culture. Although most old immigrants in the community have lived in Canada for more than twenty years, they have in fact had little contact with the real essence of western culture, especially with the life of white people due to their poor command of English; some of my informants, of course, do have a good command of English; they are in business, dealing daily with whites. However, most of the old immigrants know very little about the western way of life and thinking, due to their social and educational background. Although there is no Chinatown in Newfoundland, most old immigrants actually still live in their special 'Chinatowns,' that is, they cling together in a certain place where they can make a living and freely communicate among themselves (e.g. the kitchen in a restaurant). In such a place they do not have to deal with native Canadians. Therefore, they do not have to master English in order to make a living while working in Canada. In the summer of 1989 I surveyed seven Chinese restaurants in Newfoundland, and found that four of them have completely Chinese cooking staffs. Except for the owners of these restaurants, none of them could speak fluently or even completely understand everyday English, although they have been in Newfoundland for at least ten years. They love to work and enjoy keeping to their old way of life which they were used to in China. Their working place in fact becomes their real Chinatown. It is here that many Chinese traditions are performed and preserved, for example, traditional entertainments such as telling jokes during work to reduce fatigue and playing *mo-joh* during weekends and holidays.

Due to these facts, it is not surprising to find that most group one informants show little assimilation and acculturation in their joke repertoires. The reason for this is largely due to their educational background and social status. For example, most, if not all, group one informants did not even have a secondary education before they came to

Canada, and their jobs in Canada are therefore mostly 'blue-collar.' However, this is not to say that there is no exception among them. My fieldwork data suggest that there is, though it is small, a certain percentage of jokes from group one informants bearing the signs of cultural assimilation. For example, my informant Jia Au's joke repertoire contains many Canadian cultural elements, and a few North American joke stereotypes such as 'Doing the Wash' can be observed.⁹³

Another group one informant, Louise Hong, also presents certain elements of assimilation in the jokes she told. Some concepts, such as buying flowers for the wedding anniversary or the Salvation Army, are only found in western culture. These informants have often had more direct contact with Canadian society and its people compared to the rest of group one informants. But they still show some differences from group two informants who are comparatively more open-minded and inclined to accept western culture due to their age and social experience. Therefore, while there are traditional Chinese elements in their joke repertoire, there also exist many western cultural traits, and this offers a significant difference from most group one informants.

As for the joke repertoire of group two informants, it is firstly worth emphasizing that most informants also possess a large percentage of traditional Chinese jokes and their stereotypes. The main reason for this is because most of them were brought up in China. Although they came to Canada at various ages (usually from twenty-three to thirty-five), they all spent their childhood in China. Further, there are other social factors which decide their joke repertoire. For example, in China it is a custom for all members of the family to live under the same roof, and this naturally provides the youngest generation with easy access to folklore items such as stories, proverbs, riddles, beliefs and so on. It also helps maintain these cultural traits. Folklore items regularly performed at home, such as riddles or narratives, are often old and traditional. My informant Xin Chong, for instance, told me a few jokes about Hsu Wen-chang, which according to her were all obtained from her grandmother. On this point, a detailed description can be found in the appropriate section of the previous chapter.

⁹³ A detailed description of this is found in the previous chapter.

Another reason why group two informants also possess many traditional elements is because of the fact that many of them were once 'educated youth' in China, and have had several years' experience working in the countryside with peasants. It was there that they heard many folktales and jokes from the peasants. As Dick Chen told me, working in the fields in those years provided them with ample time to tell each other interesting stories, legends and jokes, and it was then that they learnt many traditional Chinese narratives from the peasants.

Although most of the group two informants have not been in Canada for long (usually no more than five years because of their student status), they have already become, more or less used to life in Canada. In other words, their adaptability in a foreign land is very strong compared to that of group one informants. In addition, they have much more exposure to, and frequent contact with Canadian culture and society, and this enables them to become more quickly familiar with many aspects of the people and culture. As they are students in most cases, they are very eager to learn and ready to accept western ideology and culture. Besides, because of their age, they always keep an open mind. These, I believe, are the real causes leading to the differences in the repertoires of the two groups in the Newfoundland Chinese community.

C. Ethnic Characteristics of the Chinese Jokes

Although we can find some common traits in jokes from all over the world, from every nation, or even from every ethnic group, each has its own jokes with special characteristics different from others' in logic, syntax, stereotype, length, and so on. These 'national' jokes can illustrate to a certain extent, a nation's history, culture, customs, language features, and way of thinking. Chinese jokes that I collected from the Chinese community, possess the following five characteristics at least:

One of the most important characteristics of Chinese jokes is that most of them are both philosophically and educationally oriented. A joke for the joke's sake is rarely a valid reason for telling one in the view of my informants, especially group one informants who treat the question of educating younger generations as one of their life-long duties. That is, you can hardly find any joke the intent of which is solely to induce laughter. However short in form or vulgar in content, there is always something meaningful and philosophical in a joke.

Just like numskull jokes in North America, most people who tell them not only mean to amuse, but also to avoid being labelled a 'numskull.' Therefore, a joke which contains good and traditional ideology will be repeatedly told for generations. Many of my group one informants claimed that they had jokes which were passed down from older generations. These jokes are often the true reflection of Chinese traditional culture. As time went by, many highly refined jokes from folk culture passed on by word of mouth would eventually enter elite culture as idiomatic phrases and proverbs, and thus come to be used more by educated people than by the uneducated. In fact, there are hundreds of Chinese idioms and proverbs which are related to or simply derived from certain jokes and legends.

For example, most educated Chinese know a popular and traditional Chinese joke (of the numskull type) which depicts a man of the *Song* (dynasty) who wanted to buy a pair of shoes. So, he measured the length of his feet before he went to the market, but he

discovered when he was in the market that he had forgotten to take the measurements with him. So, he told the cobbler that he had to go back and get his measurements. But as he returned to the market with the measurements, the market had already closed. "Why didn't you try the shoes with your feet?" someone asked him. "I'd rather trust my measurement than my feet," was his reply. Thus, there is a Chinese idiom, *Song Ren Mai Lu* (Man of Song buying shoes), which is directly derived from this joke and is used in daily life to apply to those who are dogmatic in managing things. Another example of this sort is the Chinese proverb *Ke Zhou Qiu Jian*, depicting a man from Chu accidentally dropping his sword into the water while crossing the river. He hastens to place a mark on the side of the boat, telling his companion: "This is exactly where the sword fell." When at last the boat comes to shore, he steps out and wades through the shallow water there, groping around for his sword just below the mark he had made on the side of the boat. Again, the joke is meant to teach people to think rationally rather than just laugh at someone who cannot rationally think.⁹⁴

There are in fact countless such each examples in Chinese jokes, and not only in the classics; more examples can be found in the jokes I collected in the community. For instance, jokes such as #1 from Louise Hong; #1 from John Lee; #3 and #4 from Jia Au; #5 and #6 from Dick Chen. As we can see, the purpose of telling such a joke is more than just to induce laughter, because the joke itself is not only humorous, it is also educational.

The second characteristic of Chinese jokes is that jokes tell and reflect certain events in history. This is especially true if we look back to the student democratic movement which took place in Beijing in the summer of 1989. Since then, I have collected many jokes which are related to the subject. Most of these jokes circulated among students, by Chinese students in China or abroad, and are centered on the political and international situations of the time. The government, the party, the bureaucratic leaders are mocked and attacked in the jokes. The content of the jokes is largely

⁹⁴This, in fact, is a very common tale type--**AT1278** *Marking the Place on the Boat*. An object falls into the sea from a boat. Numskulls mark the place on the boat-rail to indicate where it fell. [J1922.1.].

concerned with democracy and freedom, which is the main theme of the movement. Actually, large number of Chinese jokes I collected from group two informants in the community also provide and reflect certain events and contexts in a certain period of history. The following joke, for example, is one of the political jokes I collected in St. John's a few months after the June 4th massacre took place in Beijing in 1989:

On the tenth day when Premier Li Peng declared martial law, one passenger on the bus said, "They (the PLA soldiers) have killed many of our students. Li Peng is really a pig! A butcher!" At this, the bus driver said, "How dare you say that in public? If a security man hears, you will be put into prison for eight years. The passenger said, "No way! Mine is no more than oral insult. According to our constitution, three years at most." "Right," the driver continued, "but another five years for your revealing a national top secret."

As we can see, the above joke can at least provide people with the information: 1) in June of 1989 Beijing was under the martial law; 2) Li Peng was the Premier whom people wanted brought down; 3) anyone insulting government leaders in public would be put into prison for three years according to the national constitution; 4) many students were killed. The punchline of the joke "... another five years..." also informs that the penalty for revealing a national secret is five years. Here, the point I want to stress is that Chinese jokes are often more informative in details of an event, especially in comparison with other types of jokes such as Polack and Jewish jokes, although some western jokes such as Dead Baby jokes and Elephant jokes also reflect the time and even the place in which they were told.

The third feature of Chinese jokes is that, unlike a folktale or even a folksong, most of the jokes do not have titles. However, this is not to say that the length of the joke is therefore short, e.g. a couple of sentences. From all the jokes I collected in the Chinese community, none of them possessed a title from the joke-teller. My observation is a joke-teller usually introduces a joke to his audience by saying "Let me tell you a joke about ..." or "The joke about ... is really funny because" One of the reasons for a joke lacking a title could be that the joke-teller is often so eager to share his joy with his audience that the presence or absence of a title is not important at all. Once, when I asked one of my

informants who had just finished telling me three jokes in succession, if there were titles for these jokes, he answered, "No, what's the use of titles? This is joke and intended to make you laugh, there's no need to add a title to it ... or if you like, you can put any title according to the basic meaning of the jokes." However, when a joke is put down in written form, it gets a title. This can be seen from many published Chinese joke-books such as *Oriental Humour* by R. H. Blyth, *Chinese Wit and Humour* by George Kao. Those titles, I assume, are usually provided by joke collectors or translators for the purpose of classification or categorization rather than by the joke-teller.

Frequent use of linguistic features such as puns, homonyms, metaphors, jargons, and even rhymes is the fourth characteristic of Chinese jokes. These 'ethnic' features, however, really cause many difficulties when one tries to convey them into their English equivalents. Talking about the use of language play in Chinese jokes, R.H. Blyth indicated in his *Oriental Humour* that perhaps "... the Chinese language lends itself more than any others to puns, cryptograms, proverbs, and parody. One example begins in this way:

李翠蓮要吃齋，
她丈夫勸她開。

Li Tsuilien would keep her vow of fasting;

Her husband urged her to break it.

Li Tsuilien was a famous Buddhist woman of the Tang Dynasty, whose husband strove to make her desist from her asceticism. After a final domestic quarrel she hanged herself. The first lines of the book relating to her martyrdom were turned into children's nonsense rhymes. Puns in other, unknown languages are not very interesting, but just bear with this one:

'Priests, do you eat meat?'

'Priests do not eat.'

(written or heard 生不吃, it means 'I do not eat it raw.')

'Priest, do you drink wine?'

'I certainly do not!'

(punned into 醉不喝 it means 'I don't drink when drunk.')"⁹⁵

The Chinese jokes I collected in the community which employ puns as punchlines are really numerous. These jokes are often very difficult, or sometimes even impossible, to translate into another language, English, for example. I have already discussed this point in relevant sections of Chapter Two.

The fifth characteristic of Chinese jokes is that, due to the fact that 'fool jokes' outnumber other kinds of jokes in the whole corpus of Chinese jokes, there appear in them certain regional heroes whose names eventually become a kind of stereotype in the mind of the people. For example, Hsu Wen-chang is always a trickster while Effendi⁹⁶ a forever witty and resourceful man. I once lived in Xinjiang Autonomous region for six years and heard many Effendi jokes which all depicted him as a man with the fine qualities of the working people, being industrious, brave, optimistic and humorous. I well remember the days in Xinjiang when I was still a teenager, almost every evening upon finishing my homework after supper, I always rushed to the next door, where an old Uygur couple lived, and listened to 'grandpa' telling us a series of laughable jokes and legends about Effendi. The following is one of the most impressive Effendi jokes from my memory:

⁹⁵R. H. Blyth. *Oriental Humour*. Tokyo: (The Hokuseido Press, 1959): 15-16.

⁹⁶The name of Effendi has become a household word in Xinjiang Autonomous Region of China. He was probably introduced to China by way of the Silk Road. Jokes about him have spread throughout the Muslim world, in north Africa, the Balkans, Asia Minor, and Central Asia. The Turks called him Nasreddin Hodja and affirm that he lived in the thirteenth century. Today in many parts of Xinjiang, the Uygur people allege that their forefathers met him. There is no denying the fact that those transplanted foreign jokes have taken root and flourished in the fresh Uygur soil. Over the centuries they have been tinged with local colour, and the Effendi has become an important and unique character in Xinjiang's humorous narratives.

The Effendi opened a small dyeing shop. One day a wealthy man asked him to dye a piece of cloth for him. "What colour do you want?" Effendi asked. "I want to dye it a 'non-existent' colour." The wealthy man deliberately made things difficult for him. "What is 'non-existent colour'?" "That's neither red, nor black, nor blue, nor green, nor white. Do you understand?" "Yes, I'll do as you said." "When shall I get it back, then?" "On a 'non-existent' day," Effendi answered, "That's neither Monday, nor Tuesday, nor Wednesday, nor Thursday, nor Friday, nor Saturday, nor Sunday. Do you understand?"

There are, of course, hundreds of such humorous narratives about Effendi still passed on by word of mouth in China. Moreover, there are also many published collections in China about Effendi, but all based on orally circulating jokes among the masses. One point that should be made clear is that, unlike jokes about Hsu Wen-chang, I did not obtain any Effendi joke from the informants of either group in the community.

As mentioned early, jokes about Hsu Wen-chang, on the other hand, are more widespread compared to those of Effendi in China. He is known by almost everybody, everywhere in China, while Effendi is only a regional hero. Stories about Hsu Wen-chang were even on the silver screen when I was leaving China for Canada in early 1988. He is famous for playing tricks on, or making fun of others, especially women. However, as a trickster, Hsu's 'cleverness' had once or twice turned to his disadvantage. The following is such an example:

One day Hsu Wen-chang was riding a horse outside the city, and he met a woman picking mulberries along the way. Hsu Wen-chang said, "Miss, how many hundreds and thousands of mulberry leaves have you picked?" The woman was very clever, and she quickly answered, "How many hundreds and thousands of steps has your horse taken?" Hsu Wen-chang coughed up a mouthful of phlegm, and holding it in his mouth asked the woman, "Miss, am I going to spit out this phlegm, or am I going to swallow it?" The woman loosened her trousers and said, "Sir, am I about to pee or shit?" When he realized what she was comparing his mouth to, he was so angry he could not speak. He had been defeated in teasing.⁹⁷

⁹⁷Howard S. Levy. *China's Dirtiest Trickster*. Virginia: (Warm-Soft Village Press, 1974): 147-148.

Generally, the stereotype of Hsu Wen-chang is that he makes fun of others rather than vice versa. Perhaps the point of Chinese jokes having certain stereotypes within the framework can also be shown from the fact that most jokes we hear or read lead us to reach the conclusion, as Jon Kowallis has pointed out, that "every cook is a thief, every monk a hypocrite, every doctor a charlatan, every official a tyrant, every drinker a sot, every in-law a boor, every host a miser, and every guest of a miser a hideous glutton."⁹⁸

⁹⁸Jon Kowallis. *Wit and Humor from Old Cathay*. Beijing: (Chinese Literature, 1986): 8.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

This study began with an overview of Chinese emigration to North America, with a focus on the origin and development of the Chinese settlement in the Province of Newfoundland. At the core of the project is an overall study and analysis of jokes largely collected in the context of the geographical setting of the Chinese community in St. John's--the capital of Newfoundland.

The research has attempted to fill a gap in the field of the folkloristic study of Chinese humorous narratives with an emphasis on those of Chinese Newfoundlanders. It has also been an attempt to document the fullest possible body of jokes circulating among the Chinese in the community, since no one had ever undertaken such research before. The thesis has gathered ample evidence to prove that traditional Chinese jokes not only circulate widely among the Chinese in the community, but also play a significant role in the cultural process of recreational life.

The general theme of the thesis is to describe and analyze a body of humorous narratives--jokes--collected from the Newfoundland Chinese community by employing fundamental folklore methodology and theory. This study of traditional verbal folklore originally began with an enquiry into the proper collecting, translating, and contextual analysis of a possibly exhaustive body of jokes circulating among the Chinese immigrants in the community of St. John's--an old but still living folklore which may be facing imminent loss, due to modern life and the technology people experience today. An attempt was made to collect as many jokes as possible from as many Chinese informants as I could find in the community. The major process of each interview was recorded, and therefore described and analyzed in the thesis in the light of cultural assimilation and ethnicity.

As the number of Chinese Newfoundlanders is growing steadily, as there is an equally steady increase of Chinese coming directly to this Province from mainland China or Southeast Asian countries such as Singapore and Malaysia, and as indeed the whole community consists of different groups of people in the light of age, immigration status or social experience, an attempt was made to divide the informants into two major groups taking these factors into account, and there was a discussion of their joke repertoires, their styles of joke-telling, and the contexts in which joke sessions habitually take place among the Chinese. Particular questions were dealt with concerning the nature and causes of differences and similarities in the repertoires of each group of joke-tellers as well as the characteristics of Chinese joke stereotypes.

By examining a list of more than twenty Chinese informants who told jokes, as well as a factual and data analysis of their respective joke repertoires, it was discovered that, out of over two hundred jokes collected, more than sixty per cent of them have their 'roots' in the native land. That is to say, they are Chinese in origin. This illustrates the point that most Chinese joke-tellers told Chinese jokes, be they traditional or not. The outcome of the research further suggests that there exist certain elements of cultural assimilation in the repertoires of some joke-tellers, especially amongst group two members who are made up of new immigrants in the community, and who came to Canada as students only in recent years. As a result, this research is significant in that it brings to light how the Chinese maintain their traditional culture in a plural society, while absorbing and assimilating aspects of western culture to their way of life. However, this research makes no claims to being an exhaustive work. As a matter of fact, there are many aspects related to this study which still wait to be explored. Another area worthy of study, for example, would be the actual process of acculturation which eventually leads to the enculturation of new immigrants, as revealed in their joke repertoires and evolving life styles, such a study would show which traditional Chinese features are retained, and which western features have been absorbed.

In addition, to obtain fuller data and a more complete body of Chinese jokes from all Chinese communities of the province, a even more large-scale and thorough

geographical survey and field collection would be desirable. Present research and collected data have been mainly restricted to the St. John's Chinese community. It is therefore hoped that this research may at least stimulate further study on the question of Chinese humorous narratives, and of jokes in particular, in Newfoundland.

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