Long before I first met Lisa in 1986, her name had a particular resonance for me. It was a name that was at once inspirational and daunting, even intimidating: inspirational because Lisa was one of that small group of pioneering scholars, that included Delia, who introduced women into studies of the People’s Republic of China, at a time when few considered women’s lives a legitimate theme for scholarly enquiry. And daunting, because, as a pioneer in her field, her name seemed to put her in a category of scholars to which few could ever hope to aspire. As I got to know Lisa, first as her PhD student, then as a friend and colleague, the qualities I associated with her name expanded. That she could write new books apparently every year, while holding down a job, acting as consultant for major international agencies, and travelling extensively—all alongside her domestic and family responsibilities—seemed to me to indicate an almost alarming organisational efficiency. The advice she gave me as a PhD student, her consummate skills as a public commentator on social change in China, and her confidence in chairing debates and committees, and even the speech she gave at a party with her girlfriends, as she called us, to celebrate her sixtieth birthday, all demonstrated the same superb ability to be able to organise her ideas in lucid and accessible ways.

By the end of her life, Lisa had published 35 books. She began, as Rubie and Woody Watson have informed me, with a little known report on Student Accommodations in the
School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London in 1969, now held in Harvard’s Widener Library. She soon moved on to bigger topics, however, from the historical study of women in twentieth century China, to the themes that lay at the heart of their gendered experiences—reproduction, family, and food—and to the experiences of discrimination and development that linked women across Asia. These texts were based on analysis of wide-ranging materials, from newspaper reports to village surveys, and were written for general as well as specialised readers. Other scholars subsequently gave more detailed treatment to some of the themes that Lisa’s work opened up, and could benefit from methodological opportunities to which Lisa did not have access. Yet, Lisa must be remembered for the innovative quality of much of her work as an academic and policy consultant. So, here, I want to celebrate her life and work for the inspirational insights she brought to her field through the new directions she explored.

I think of the new directions that Lisa’s work took under four headings. Her early work, linking feminist and scholarly concerns: key concepts and arguments she developed as she moved from history, through anthropology to development studies; her broadening regional focus from China to Asia through her consultancy work for major international agencies, and her commitment to engaging with Chinese officials and scholars in heightening awareness about gender discrimination.

Lisa began her work as an anthropologist of China long before it was possible to conduct ethnographic fieldwork there. Indeed, her first visit to China was in 1973 as a member of a delegation for the Society for Anglo-Chinese Understanding (SACU)—the only way in
scholars from the UK could gain entry into what was then a distant and closed world. In retrospect therefore, the interviews she conducted for *The Politics of Marriage* were remarkable for the data they provided. Through the 1980s repeated short-term visits to rural fieldwork sites, often undertaken for consultancy work for international research and development agencies, gave her a breadth of knowledge about diverse rural settings and their people that few western anthropologists or sociologists of China possessed.

Lisa’s early work was inspired by a dual interest in feminist and socialist ideas emanating from the women’s movement in the West, and the experience of women in China across decades of revolutionary change. *Feminism and Socialism*, published in 1978, explored the strategies to redefine the social and political position of women in China through the twentieth century. In the process, she identified many of the contradictions between China’s brand of socialism and feminism that later scholars were to revisit in their studies of women, family and social change. *The Politics of Marriage in Contemporary China* (1981)—a book of extraordinary prescience—offered a more focussed analysis of the cultural and political factors influencing marriage arrangements that impeded women’s struggle for equal recognition. Looking particularly at the role of household and family in the negotiations of marriage, she argued that the official policy of free choice marriage and gender equality conflicted with the interests of both state and the older generation, embedded within expectations and requirements of the patrilineal family.

Other titles followed, with extraordinary speed, including *The Family Rice Bowl, Chinese Women since Mao* (1984), *China’s One-Child Policy* (1985) *Women and Rural*
Development in China (1985). Through these and papers she published at the time, she again developed a number of ideas that demonstrated unique insights. At a time when data about the imbalance in sex ratio as an effect of the new singe-child policy was only just beginning to emerge, she argued, for example, together with Delia Davin and Penny Kane, that the restoration of the household as the basic unit of rural production, distribution and consumption clearly conflicted with the aims of the birth control policy.

Then, into the 1990s, more works explored themes that focussed not so heavily on changing policies and their effects, but increasingly on the interplay between these and gendered experiences of life. Hence in From Heaven to Earth (1994), and Changing Identities of Chinese Women (1995), she called attention to the place of gendered concepts of memory, time and space, at a time when, even though debated within anthropological circles, such ideas rarely appeared in works on related issues in China. She contrasted the continuous linearity of male experiences of time, embedded in and engendered by their expectations and experiences of family, marriage and ancestry with women’s experiences of separation and rupture, to argue that social and cultural interpretations of reform and revolution were embedded in distinctive gender realities.

Lisa’s work during this period began to move in another new direction, towards issues of change and development and gender in Asia. In this, her remarkable and widely cited work, Endangered Daughters pointed to commonalities of social, economic and cultural practice that, disturbingly, linked women’s and girls experiences of discrimination in different parts of Asia. One clear argument came through this that was of key significance for policy makers and scholars who held to the ‘modernisation’ model of change in
developing societies, namely that increased production and consumption, higher standards of living and education, do not, in themselves, diminish gender discrimination. Based on analysis of demographic data and ethnographic reports, this groundbreaking book demonstrated that in cultural worlds where girls could not substitute for sons, despite improved economic development, availability of reproductive technologies increased daughter discrimination through infanticide, abandonment and neglect. In one of her last works, based on ethnographic studies of East, Southeast and South Asia, (“The Inter-generational Contract in the Changing Asian Family”, 2006), she further argued that in contrast to the common argument that ‘modernisation’ erodes collective familial interests in favour of the individual’s, the ‘family contract’ is being renegotiated across generations as a major source of individual well-being, creating inter-generational resources that subsidise larger development strategies.

Lisa’s interest in comparative studies of gender and family Asia grew significantly through the work she did for international agencies and Chinese ministries, working on poverty alleviation, agricultural labour supply, investment and migration. She excelled in this work, and much of the fieldwork that contributed to her later writings came from her role as consultant academic and policy advisor to major UN and international agencies: amongst others, the ILO, UNRISD, FAO, UNDP and UNICEF and Oxfam; the World Bank, The Ford Foundation, and the British government’s Department for International Development (DFID). In 1998, she was appointed to the United Nations Council in Tokyo, where she was elected Vice-Chair and then Chair in 2002-4. Recognition of her contribution to work on gender in Asia led to a hectic schedule of opening addresses and keynote speeches at international conferences on gender, sex trafficking, endangered girls in China and Asia. At home (as others have already noted) acknowledgment came
through her appointment to the board of the Royal Society of Asian Affairs, as Vice-Chair of the Great Britain-China Centre, as member of the Academy of Learned Societies for the Social Sciences, and as member of the China Task Force, set up to foster cooperation between the British and Chinese governments. Sadly, the award of CMG ‘for services to Higher Education, especially in promoting understanding of China’s social development’ came too late for her to collect.

Lisa’s public achievements, however, never obscured her feminist commitments. She worked relentlessly to raise awareness of gender discrimination in China, not only through her writings but also through her engagements, not infrequently through gender training workshops, with officials from the Women’s Federation to the Ministry of Agriculture. Indeed, her understanding of the socio-economic and cultural dimensions of gender discrimination in China and Asia made her a forceful spokesperson for women. In late 2000, the Chinese edition of *Women of China*, the Women’s Federation’s journal, published a lengthy article on her work on endangered daughters. That readers of this journal could become acquainted with her work was testimony to her extraordinary status as an advocate of women’s and girls’ rights across China and Asia as a whole.

In ending, people from China, America, Australia and Europe have written to me with apologies for their absence here today. They would want to join me in honouring Lisa for her foresight and resilience in bringing to the agendas of scholarship and policy making many issues and concerns, mundane and distressing, that characterise the lives of women across China and Asia as a whole. I have noted but a tiny part of them here, but Lisa reached out to many, not only through the words she spoke and wrote, but also through
the pictures she got young girls to draw of themselves, and through the exhibitions of such work she organised. Speaking for myself, I feel privileged and honoured to be associated with her, as her student, and in a sense as one of those in a position to ‘inherit’ her legacy through the work we do. Lisa was still full of ideas when she died. There was a lot more to come, that tragically she cannot undertake. It is up to others to continue to explore the issues she raised and identified, and to develop them in their own new directions.