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The Registers of Fatherhood in Fieldwork Among Men

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In many regions in the world, men doing fieldwork achieve access to knowledge and activities through socializing predominantly with other men. In patriarchal settings, these bonding interactions are often marked by rituals involving drinking, dining, smoking, late-night activities, and specific linguistic styles. The presence of a child in the field alters this dynamic, affording new forms of socializing and, at times, different interlocutors altogether. Based on fieldwork in China, this chapter describes access to fieldsites and the registers formed within fieldsites through the presence of my daughter. While fatherhood in the field limited my capacity to partake in some male-dominated activities—thereby preventing me from engaging with gatekeepers—some interlocutors saw my active fatherhood as an opportunity to share parenting experiences, initiate activities that included their own children, or socialize with my daughter. As foreigners in China, our father-child presence also induced my interlocutors' reflections on cultural differences through greater attention to child rearing practices and child behavior. Thus, fatherhood in the field overall nullifies many rituals of masculinity while prompting interactions where fatherhood—as a social role and les through with to view the world—becomes dominant.