

CHINESE FAMILY AND KINSHIP

HUGH D. R. BAKER

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**To my parents
B R B (JP) and Fairy
with love and gratitude**

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	xi
1. THE COMPOSITION OF THE FAMILY	1
The Ideal Family	1
Simple, Stem and Extended Families	2
Poverty and Family Size Limitation	3
Pro and Con the Extended Family	10
Male versus Female	21
2. THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE FAMILY	26
The Continuum of Descent	26
Entering the Family	28
Birthdays	31
Betrothal and Marriage	32
The Aged and the Family Head	37
Death	39
The Woman and the Family	40
3. THE LINEAGE AND THE CLAN	49
The Lineage	49
The Lineage and the Ancestral Trust	50
Organization and Leadership of the Lineage	55
The Lineage and the Village	64
The Higher-order Lineage and the Clan	67
4. ANCESTOR WORSHIP	71
The Mutual Dependence of Ancestors and Descendants	71
Non-ancestors	74
Ancestor Worship for the Living	79
Ancestor Worship and the Family	82
Ancestor Worship and Larger Kin Groups	91
Ancestor Worship and 'Chinese Religion'	97
<i>Xiao</i>	102

5. THE FAMILY IN STATE AND SOCIETY	107
The <i>wu-fu</i>	107
The Family in the Law	113
Positive Sanctions Behind the Family	118
Family versus State	121
Family and Affines	124
Family and Neighbours	130
Families in Competition	131
6. THE LINEAGE IN SOCIETY AND STATE	136
The Lineage Territory	136
Inter-lineage Relationships	144
Inter-lineage Hostility	146
Lineage and State	152
7. NON-KIN AS KIN	162
Terms of Address	162
Quasi-kinship Organizations	164
The State as a Family	167
Kinship and the Overseas Chinese	169
Kinship and Distance	173
8. KINSHIP IN THE 20TH CENTURY	175
Milestones of Change	176
The Composition of the Contemporary Family	189
The Individual and the Contemporary Family	192
The Fate of the Lineage	204
Ancestor Worship in Contemporary China	206
The Family in Contemporary Society	211
The Family of the State	213
<i>Appendix I</i> The Sacred Edict of the K'ang Hsi Emperor	218
<i>Appendix II</i> Feng-shui Fighting	219
<i>Appendix III</i> Anti-lineage Law and Statutes	226
<i>Notes</i>	229
<i>List of Works Cited</i>	234
<i>Glossary</i>	239

Table of Maps

1. Liao Territory	139
2. China (physical)	155
3. China (political)	155

Table of Figures

1. Generation-Age-Sex Hierarchy	16
2. Family Division	18
3. Second Generation Family	18
4. The Continuum of Descent	27
5. Cousin Marriage	43
6. Trust and Private Inheritance	51
7. Trust Distribution	54
8. Differentiated Generation Depth	57
9. Liao Lineage Segmentation	63
10. The <i>Wu-fu</i> (Mourning Grades)	108
11. Patrilineal Mourning Grades	109
12. Matrilineal Mourning Grades	110
13. Mourning for Married Out Females and their Children	111
14. Married Woman's Mourning for her Natal Family	127
15. Married Woman's Mourning for her Husband's Family	128
16. Mourning for Wife's Natal Family	129
17. Lineage Territory	138
18. Liao Territory—First Abstraction	140
19. Liao Territory—Second Abstraction	140
20. Liao Territory—Third Abstraction	141
21. A Lineage Landscape model	142
22. Conflicting Alliances	145

Preface

Kinship was not the only principle of social organization in traditional China, of course, but it was important enough to merit treatment as a full topic in its own right, and I have made no attempt to stray into other fields in this book. For the most part I talk in terms of 'traditional' China, which is a convenient shorthand for 'pre-twentieth century' China. For this reason I have used the past tense in all but the final chapter, sections of which pick up on the titles of previous chapters for ease of reference and comparison with the present.

Much of tradition is still evident in contemporary society, and especially so in Chinese communities outside the People's Republic. Tradition no more stopped dead in 1900 or 1911 than did modernity begin in 1912 or 1949. So, in trying to assess kinship in action I have been able to indulge unrepentantly in chronological sleight-of-hand, using twentieth-century field-work studies to illustrate features of the traditional scene, and using history to back up analysis of more recent times. This is not ideal, but material must be sought where it can be found.

Out of this has emerged, I hope, a clear picture of the family and its place in Chinese society. It is only a *general* picture, however, a basic account of the stock of kinship principles from which the Chinese could draw. I have dealt with rural China, barely mentioning the city, and I have not attempted to point the differences between areas of China or between the various Chinese sub-cultures. Nor have I gone into much detail on the 'mechanics' of family life—ceremonial, division of labour, child-rearing, day-to-day living, and so on. For such details the reader may go to the many sources quoted in the book. I have used quotations freely: first, to show my debt to the ideas of others; and second, as a means of introducing all the major English-language writings on the Chinese family to the attention of the reader new to this field. The quotations in many cases serve to advance the argument of the text; they are not merely for confirmation of points already made.

Despite the constant reference to other writings, this is my own idiosyncratic view of Chinese kinship. I am perhaps open to the criticism, for instance, that I have given too much space to discussion of the lineage: but it seems to me that the lineage brings most sharply into focus the major features of the system. Ancestor worship, too, occupies no small part of the book: again, I feel that the light it throws on kinship organization warrants such attention. It is my hope that with this book as a basis the reader may more readily understand the complexities of detail which he will meet as he goes on to look more deeply into the subject.

I have held mainly to English-language sources but, where Chinese sources have been used, the translations are my own unless otherwise stated. Chinese terms have been kept to a minimum. Romanization is in the official Chinese *Pinyin* system, except where another form is in conventional use (e.g. Mao Tse Tung). And of course I have not interfered with the romanizations used in direct quotations from other authors.

I should like to record my gratitude to Dr James L. Watson and Mrs Rubie S. Watson for their comments on four of the chapters; and to Mr Dick Wilson, editor of the *China Quarterly*, for his advice on Chapter 8. The late Professor Maurice Freedman read and criticized some of the early chapters. No-one working in the field of Chinese kinship can be out of his debt, myself least of all, for I owe gratitude for his teaching, his guidance, and his friendship too.

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H.D.R.B.

I

The Composition of the Family

THE IDEAL FAMILY

The following quotations from different works on China are apparently contradictory, though all are talking of the family in the twentieth century:

The Kwock and Cheung families are very nearly of equal size, having an estimated 500 to 750 members each, while the smallest unit is Choy with about 200 to 300 members.¹

The average size of 5.21 persons per family may be taken as representative.²

The family multiplies as the children grow up and marry. It is not uncommon for the joint household to consist of four or five generations.³

Clearly the authors of these statements were using the word 'family' in different ways. But why the confusion? How big was the family?

The confusion seems to have arisen largely through the Chinese belief in an 'ideal family'. The ideal family consisted of some five generations living together as one unit, sharing one common purse and one common stove, and under one family head. The Chinese called this the 'five generation family' or 'five generations co-residing'.

Unfortunately, some Western observers seem to have accepted the ideal as the actual. Indeed, it is not unlikely that many Chinese people also were beguiled by their own culture into seeing the ideal where in fact it little existed: for the truth is that the five generation family was a rarity and was by no means the most common form of the Chinese family.

But this family form is a useful model to bear in mind, for if we accept the ideal form as having been the ultimate aim of all family growth, then instead of looking at the various types of family as unconnected forms which happen to have existed in Chinese society, we may see them all as points in one development cycle. That is, instead of having a number of different family types to describe, we have one family model which was realised to a greater or lesser extent by all Chinese families.

SIMPLE, STEM AND EXTENDED FAMILIES

The family was founded by the marriage of a man and woman, and enlarged by the children to which they gave birth, or which they adopted. In this, often called the *simple* (or *nuclear* or *conjugal*) *family* we recognize precisely the ingredients which make up our own families in the West. At its smallest it consisted of two people, a man and his wife. It expanded according to the fertility of the couple, or perhaps according to their ability to adopt children. It might further expand by the addition of one or more concubines and their children.

But the simple family is only the first point in the cycle. Differences from the Western family begin to show most clearly when we look at what happened to the children on marriage. While some when they married moved out from the parental home to set up new homes of their own and thus to establish new simple families, this was by no means always the case. Daughters, it is true, almost invariably did leave the parental home on marriage, but sons often brought their wives into the family and continued to live with their parents rather than set up new households and new families elsewhere.

The most common instances of this type of family were where an only son brought his wife into the family, and where only one son amongst several did so. When the son and his wife produced children, there was then a three generation family. But of course this kind of family, often called the *stem family*, was limited in duration—sooner or later the parents would die off, leaving behind a simple family once more, composed this time of their son, his wife and children. A variant of this type was found where the parents might live in rotation with the families of their sons, creating a series of temporary stem families.

Between them the simple family and the stem family accounted for a very high percentage of Chinese families. But what if more than one son married and brought wives into the family? Then quite a different kind of group began to emerge. While by definition the simple family and the stem family were bound to be of small size and to prohibit growth, a family which was to grow and follow the road to the ideal must discourage its sons from setting up separate families elsewhere. They must all bring their wives home to the family, and their sons in turn must do the same.

Once a family burst the barrier to expansion which the simple and stem family pattern constituted, there were all manner of possible permutations of size and generation depth which it could attain. It might go on expanding until the death of the parents, when the sons might decide to split the estate and set up separate families. The sons might, on the other hand, continue to stay together after the death of their parents. In some cases fertility in the group might be low, or mortality high, and keep family size down despite its not losing any sons through division of the estate. In others the family might be huge after only three generations or so. All these variants in which in one generation more than one married son was part of the group we can conveniently parcel up in the term *extended family*—and the ultimate extended family was the ideal family.

The simple family was a common factor in each of the other two types, so that either of them might be broken down into component simple families. There was a progression from simple family to ideal family, and a newly married couple was potentially the germ of any of the three types.

POVERTY AND FAMILY SIZE LIMITATION

As we shall see later, the birth of a son was of the greatest importance to a family, not only in order to provide for the parents in their old age, but also in connection with ancestor worship. A daughter being of no help in either direction her birth was not a matter of such joy or importance.

All families, therefore, did their utmost either to beget a son or, if that were impossible, to adopt one. Ideally a family would have more than one son, thus both multiplying the blessings and insuring against accident. The common expression of good

wishes 'May you have a hundred sons and a thousand grandsons' may have exaggerated the issue [sic] but it faithfully represented Chinese feelings about the importance of male descendants.

The following quotations are fairly cautious versions of what might be found in almost any description of rural China in the past two centuries:

It seems safe to conclude that the imperial countryside was 'overpopulated', in the sense that the total amount of cultivated land was not sufficient to give the average peasant adequate means of livelihood.⁴

The economic forces tending to pauperize the farmer are clear. The extent and seriousness of indebtedness varies throughout the country. In numerous places the owner tends to lose possession of his land to the money lender and, at best, to become a tenant on his own farm. The tenant sells most of his crop immediately after harvest to pay his debts and is almost at once in need of further loans.⁵

For a poor family struggling for survival in such conditions there can have been little hope of raising a large number of sons, and many perhaps would count themselves fortunate if they could raise even one.

It is immediately obvious, then, that wealth or the lack of it was most important in determining family size. The ideal family could not be achieved by the majority for the simple reason that they could not support sufficient children to begin the necessary expansion.

The factors limiting family size were numerous. Some of them, such as a high infant death-rate and a high rate of general mortality, were the direct consequences of under-nourishment, over-work, inability to afford medical care, and other conditions attendant upon poverty. It may even have been that there was a connection between poverty and infertility, so that fewer live children were born to poor parents. In the 1930s it was found that:

The mortality in childhood and early adult life is exceedingly high, higher than that in every country listed except India . . .

The terrific mortality of the early years of life in China and India is brought out dramatically by the survival figures. In these countries less than 60 per cent of the persons born alive survive the tenth year, while at age 10 in England and Wales and the United States about 90 per cent, and in New Zealand about 95 per cent of those born are still living. One-half of the people born in India scarcely attain their majority and one-half of those born in China die before they are 28 years of age.⁶

Other factors might be called 'indirect consequences' of poverty, in that they were not the physical results of poverty itself, but rather the social results of what Chinese custom dictated should be done in conditions of poverty. Infanticide, for instance, may be called an indirect consequence of poverty, as opposed to the direct consequence represented by, say, the death of a child from malnutrition. Among indirect consequences we can point to the killing, abandonment, selling and out-adoption of children, non-marriage, late marriage, and birth control.

A poor couple who had produced as many children as they could support—perhaps just the one son—might practise total abstinence from sexual intercourse in order to guard against further pregnancies. This method of birth control was certainly common among older couples:

Husbands and wives sleep in the same room as long as their sons are not married. After the latter's marriage, some parents continue to sleep in the same room; others do not. After the birth of a grandchild, it is definitely more desirable for the older couple to live in different rooms; it would be considered disgraceful for the older woman to become pregnant after such an event.⁷

Abortion as a form of birth control is reported by some writers.

Despite these practices (and we do not know how common they were) many children were born into families which could not support them. Infanticide was one method of dealing with the problem. It was probably not as widespread or frequently practised a custom as has commonly been supposed, but there is no doubt that it did go on, particularly with regard to girl babies:

Li Tsung-hsi, *chin-shih* of 1847 and governor-general of Kiangsu and Anhwei in the mid-1860s, said of his native Shansi:

I have learned of the prevalence of female infanticide in all parts of Shansi, but particularly in such southern counties as P'ing-ting, Yü-tz'u, etc. The first female birth may sometimes be salvaged with effort, but the subsequent births are usually drowned. There are even those who drown every female baby without keeping any . . .

The poor regarded the practice as an almost legitimate means of maintaining their minimal standard of living and, in any case, as a dire economic necessity.⁸

Drowning was the most common form of infanticide, but there were others, such as smothering and burying alive. Estimates of the extent of the practice vary considerably:

Authorities such as Dr. Dudgeon, Dr. Lockhart, Prof. Giles, Bishop Moule, Dr. Martin and Dr. G. E. Morrison believe it is not more practised than in Europe. On the other hand, Sir J. Barrow stated that in Peking alone 24 infants daily were thrown out to die and were collected by carts at night; Mr. Douglas asserts that in Fukien 20 per cent of the female infants were destroyed; Mr. Michie stated that it was of very common occurrence among the poor; missionaries in Kuangtung have said that in certain districts only one out of three females is allowed to live; parents in those parts are obliged to go to other places to purchase wives for their sons. Places specially mentioned in connection with the crime are Canton, Foo-chow, Hinghua, Amoy, Tsung-ming, Ningpo, Hankow and Kiangsi province.⁹

Abandoning of children was also resorted to, often with a real hope that they would be saved from death and given a home:

At the prefectural city of Ch'ao Chau, near Swatow, the author saw, outside the walls of the city, a basket hanging against a wall, looking from a distance something like a cradle. A piece of matting was fastened above it, forming a sort of

pent-roof to shelter it from the rain and sun. In this basket, is put any baby whom its parents do not care to preserve, and should any charitable person be so disposed, he, or she, may lift out the forsaken infant and take it home. Failing such rescue, the child ultimately meets the fate of so many of the inhabitants of babydom in China.¹⁰

Babies were often abandoned on the doorsteps of wealthy families or large businesses, inviting the charity of the inmates. In more recent years banks in Hong Kong have been much favoured in this respect. Orphanages did exist, but they tended to come into active life only in response to pressing initiatives of influential men or hard times:

The effectiveness of orphanages in lessening the incidence of female infanticide varied from place to place and from time to time. An orphanage adequately provided with funds in nineteenth-century Hsiao-Kan county in Hupei was said to have saved the lives of some ten thousand female babies within the first three years of its founding.¹¹

Children could be sold. There was a ready market for girls to act as servants, concubines and prostitutes, but parents had first to raise them to an age when they could be useful, and this they could not necessarily afford to do. One nineteenth-century account goes so far as to give the established prices in Peking, so common was the practice:

At the present day a young girl of ten or twelve is worth, at Peking, from thirty to fifty taels, and young women commonly fetch from two hundred and fifty to three hundred taels. Poverty is the prime cause of the full markets; and especially in times of famine, drought, and pestilence, it is common for men who at other times would shrink with abhorrence from the deed, to sell their wives and daughters to the highest bidders. Gambling is also responsible for much of the poverty which produces this state of things; and in all large towns there are recognized brokers who deal in these human wares.¹²

It was generally understood that a girl sold to be a servant would

eventually be found a husband and allowed to marry out of servitude at the expense of her masters. Girls sold as servants were:

handed over by a poor family against a customary indemnity in money to a well-to-do family who will feed, clothe and house the child until she is of marriageable age, when a husband will be found for her. In return, she works in the household. Her position, however, is better than that of a mere household servant. She eats at the family table and is considered something between a servant and a modest member of the family. Her parents are supposed by custom to be allowed to visit her from time to time, in order to be at ease in their hearts as to the child's fate.

This custom, which prevails in South China, seems to have given rise to a certain amount of abuse . . .¹³

Boys too were sold as servants, though this was much more rare. Once purchased, the boy was likely to remain with his masters throughout his life. He would probably be found a wife by them, but, in contrast to the case of female servants, marriage did not release him from his position. Instead it was likely that his sons also would remain as servants in the same household. A kind of hereditary retainership was thus set up, to be broken sooner or later by manumission or the failure of the fortunes of the master house. The treatment of servants was in general good, relations between master and servant frequently being quite informal and unhampered by social barriers of avoidance or non-communication. Reluctant as parents might have been to part with their children, there was often a better life ahead of the sold than of the sellers.

Infanticide, abandonment and selling were most often practised in the case of daughters. Sons might fall victim to one or another of these methods of family limitation, but they were more likely to be adopted out of the family which could not support them. With high child mortality rates the heirless were common, and adoption necessarily played a most important role. Ideally it was confined to transactions between close agnatically related kin—that is to say, the most favoured kind of adoption was where a man adopted the son of his brother—but in practice regard for

the ideal was probably less than nice. An adopted son lost all rights in his natal family in return for full rights in his family of adoption. As with selling, there was a good chance that the son would profit by the move.

The children raised by a family might reasonably expect marriage as their eventual lot. In the case of a girl in particular, it seems that recognition by the parents of the obligation to marry off their daughter was implicit in their raising her to adulthood. The concept of 'spinster' might be said to be alien to traditional Chinese society—indeed there is no separate term for it in Chinese, the usual translation being not 'unmarried woman' but 'girl not yet married', a significant distinction. That the Chinese system of ancestor worship failed to cater for deceased unmarried females is a related fact which need not surprise us. But for very exceptional circumstances, then, grown daughters were invariably married off. A report of a field-study made in the 1930s tells us that in a village of the Yangtze Plain:

The sex ratio which results [from female infanticide] actually makes it difficult for poorer boys to get a mate. If we take 16 as the lower age limit for marriage, we find that there are 128 marriageable men, or 25 per cent of the total, who are still single. On the other hand there are only 29 women above 16, or 8 per cent of the total, who are unmarried. Not a single woman above 25 is a spinster. But there are still 43 bachelors above 25.¹⁴

Sons might be raised and not later married. Thus, a poor family which had with difficulty managed to procure a wife for its eldest son might be incapable of financing the wedding of a second son or, indeed, of supporting another wife if it did. In such cases the unmarried sons might continue to live with the family, or they might leave to seek better fortune elsewhere. Under the traditional inheritance pattern a man's estate was divided more or less equally between all his sons. If an already barely economic estate had to be divided in this way, then clearly the shares would be viable for none of the sons. Non-marriage of all but the eldest son, however, meant that it was probably unnecessary to divide the estate, since the third generation must in any case re-unite the shares in one parcel. With the traditional Chinese view of the

family as a long-term continuing entity, one may interpret the marrying of only one son as a paring down of the family to a slender thread which had both a chance of survival and the best hope of revival of family fortunes.

Poverty could also delay the marriage of sons while the necessary wealth was gradually built up. The longer the delay the greater the limiting effect on the family, not only because of the more imminent death of the parents, but also because of the reduced reproductive span of the couple whose marriage was delayed, and because of the pile-up effect on younger sons, who were expected to wait their turn for marriage.

Naturally enough the majority of Chinese families were poor and, if poverty implied inability to expand the family, it follows that the simple and stem forms of the family must have been the most common in China. But what of wealthy families? Were they necessarily different in form? We are led on to a series of considerations which are not all economic.

PRO AND CON THE EXTENDED FAMILY

There were both idealistic and practical reasons for advocating the extended family.

On the idealistic side it may be pointed out that the family was seen as the basic unit of society. From at least as early as the fifth century B.C. (that is, about the time of Confucius) there had existed a list of the important relationships by which man's life should be ordered, and family relationships always figured large in this list. In the *Doctrine of the Mean* (*Zhong-yong*), a work traditionally held to have been written by the grandson of Confucius, appears the following:

There are five universally applicable principles . . . that of the relationship between ruler and minister, that of father and son, of husband and wife, of elder and younger brother, and of friend and friend.

Mencius, another philosopher of the same period, comments:

There should be affection between father and son, righteous sense of duty between ruler and minister, division of function

between man and wife, stratification between old and young, and good faith between friends.

The list of relationships most commonly found in more modern works is:

1. Ruler/minister
2. Father/son
3. Elder brother/younger brother
4. Husband/wife
5. Friend/friend

Now these Five Human Relationships (*wu-lun*) were arranged in order of priority, and with the exception of the last one were all superior/inferior relationships too; and so they were intended to give guidance as to the correct weight to be put on any relationship. Properly observed there could be no conflict or friction within Chinese society or within the family group, for every member of the family and of society was held tightly in check by the duty and obedience which he owed to another. Properly observed there could be no conflict, because there was no area of human intercourse not covered explicitly or implicitly by one or another of the five clauses.

The order of those priorities dealing with the family was such that the group could continue to grow indefinitely without friction arising between any of its members. Indeed, if the duties and respect required of each member were to be properly observed, then the group *must* continue to grow indefinitely, for it would not be possible to carry out one's duty of service to one's parents, for instance, if one were not living with them.

From the point of view of Confucian political philosophers there was much to be said for the extended family. As the acknowledged basis of Chinese society the family was in any case very important; and it would clearly be socially advantageous if its stability, conservatism, and mutual responsibility could be spread wider through the expanding of the group. From the viewpoint of the individual in society, membership of such an expanded family enabled him to realise an ideal of human relationships which satisfied both his own desire for tangible stability and also the culturally implanted yearning for just such an extended kin group.

We have records showing that 'five generations co-residing' families existed and were applauded at least as far back as the Tang dynasty, over a thousand years ago. But the vehicle which transmitted knowledge of the ideal and which bore the doctrinal influences which made its attainment possible was the written word, and literacy and education were largely confined to the wealthy. So we must expect that even in this idealistic sphere wealth was of some importance.

The practical reasons for advocating the extended family were mainly economic ones.

Again the tradition of equal inheritance between sons must be considered. Whereas in the West great families contrived to preserve whole their estates by a system of primogeniture which prevented younger sons from inheriting land, the Chinese system worked to ensure the rapid breakdown of estates. A large estate divided between x number of sons might yield x number of viable units, but the chances of those x estates eventually dividing up among the succeeding generation into yet more still viable units were less good—unless more land were added each generation (or unless only one son per generation was born) the original estate was reduced to multiple uneconomic parcels in a short space of years.

Let us suppose a comfortably off family of father, mother, three married sons, their wives and children, and let us endow them with a house and an estate of three rice-fields, the fields being of equal size though separated from each other by an hour's walk. Now, on the death of the father, the three sons decide to divide the estate. Since no two fields are ever considered to be of exactly equivalent yield, the three rice-fields will each be divided into three portions—the sons have immediately lost a certain amount of land, for physical divisions must be driven through the fields. Worse, where one plough and one piece of each farm tool were sufficient before, now three of each are required—there is a capital outlay involved. Again, where before it had been perfectly reasonable to walk a few miles to work in one of the fields, now each son is faced with the prospect of a long hike with a heavy plough to work on only a very tiny patch of land at the end of it. And what about the house? That perhaps cannot be divided. One of them must agree either to have the house and take less land than the others, or buy their shares in the house

from them, or they must all sell the house and divide the money (or they must try to live together harmoniously despite the economic separation). But with the capital outlay involved in setting up new households and the small size of the share of each son, none of them is able to make a livelihood from his inheritance. An extreme example, perhaps, but hopefully illustrative of the effects of the equal inheritance system.

But the extended family was a case where the estate was not divided, where land and property remained whole, and where the income from them was used for the benefit of the total group:

In the peasant household all sons who could work went to these markets to seek employment, and no distinction was made between the eldest or youngest son working out of the village. Because the land was to be divided equally between the sons, the eldest was not favored as would have been the case if the inheritance dictated the land revert to him. The sons gave their wages to the household head, who pooled it with the income earned from the harvest.¹⁵

Land was the basis of family wealth and the most important form of property in traditional China. It had symbolic as well as economic value, and families would relinquish their holdings only when there was no other option for survival left to them:

Mortgages were more common than sales and were redeemable at any period after the original mortgage so that land need not pass outside the clan for ever. . . . A sixty year old mortgage . . . which was discovered in the land registers when succession was being determined, was honoured by the mortgagees, though grudgingly, the real point at issue being the *amount* of compensation and not the return of the land, as no figure was stated in the original entry.¹⁶

Let us look at our example family again. The three sons decide that they will not divide the estate, but will carry on as before their father's death, and live and budget as one unit. They are not faced with any extra capital expenditure on house purchase or farming equipment; they do not lose precious land through dividing bunds; at the very busy planting and harvest times they are a sufficiently large labour force that they do not need to hire outside help in order to get the work done; they find that with

help from the wives and children just two of them are capable of running the farming side of the estate while sparing the third, who is then able to go to the nearby market town to work in or perhaps open a shop, and so they can diversify and increase the income of the group; they are able to support the education of the brightest of the youngest generation; and so on:

The group of which Lin Shang-yung was the *chia-chang* [family head] consisted of forty-two persons. In the oldest generation only Lin himself survived. In the second generation the marriage of each of his three sons had led to the formation of as many *fang* [conjugal families]. The first of these had twenty-two members: in addition to the father and mother it included five sons and two daughters, the wife and seven children of the first son, and the wife and four children of the second. The second *fang*—twelve persons in all—consisted of a father, a mother, four sons, four daughters, and the wife and child of the first son. In the third *fang*, with the father and mother there were five young children. The Lin *chia* [family] had established four households, each associated with a part of the estate. There were the buildings and fields that had been obtained (and later expanded) by Shang-yung when he separated from his brother. In an adjoining village . . . the *chia* owned a rice mill, and in yet another nearby settlement it operated a shop selling fertilizers and animal feed. About twenty-five miles to the south, additional land and buildings had been purchased. In the management of all these holdings, a common budget was maintained. Funds and goods were transferred as needed, and expenditure by the manager of a given enterprise was scrutinized by other group members.¹⁷

With all these economic advantages goes the political advantage of being a large united group vis-à-vis the rest of society—they are much less vulnerable to intimidatory pressures of all kinds.

Both ideally and practically the extended family seems to have immense advantages. Given sufficient wealth to sustain the group, it seems the obvious form for a Chinese family to have taken. Indeed:

I would suggest that the tendency to diversify was also found

among the peasantry, but was less obvious. Peasants were prone to marry at a later age and have fewer children survive to maturity, so that in many cases available labour must have been absorbed in the cultivation of family lands. Among the very poor, with little or no land, the effort was to obtain minimal subsistence by any means available. But given a land base of some sort, the hope of economic advancement through diversification might enable the poor to rationalize their desire for many sons.¹⁸

Yet the incidence of extended families was apparently not high even among the comparatively wealthy. We must now look at the divisive as well as the cohesive features involved.

In a nutshell these divisive features could mostly be summed up in popular phrases such as 'human nature' or 'personality clash'. We have already talked a little of the Five Human Relationships and have hinted at their importance for society and family. The more broadly social aspect will be taken up again in a later chapter, but for now let us isolate from the five the three which deal specifically with the family, namely the father/son, elder brother/younger brother, and husband/wife relationships. Each of these is to be taken at face value primarily, but each also may be extended to include a wider group. Thus the father/son relationship may be taken to include the mother/son, father/unmarried daughter and mother/unmarried daughter relationships, while further extension governs the relationship between senior and junior generations. The elder brother/younger brother relationship holds good for the various permutations of brother/unmarried sister, and may be extended to cover the relationship between age and youth, or elder and younger. The husband/wife relationship extends of course to husband/concubine, but also shows the proper relationship of the two sexes.

Remember that all these three relationships are ones of superiority/inferiority, and that they are listed in order of priority. Therefore the pecking-order which results from this is:

1. Generation
2. Age
3. Sex.

Theoretically, then, any one person should know precisely where

he stands in the family by referring to this order: there is a watertight chain of relationships which makes clear to whom each owes respect and obedience. We can illustrate this point with a diagrammatic representation of our example family of father, mother, three married sons and their unmarried children, as in Figure 1:

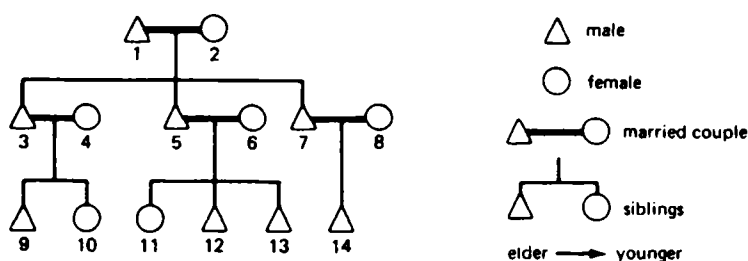


Figure 1. Generation-Age-Sex Hierarchy

Everyone owes obedience to the father (1) because he is superior in Generation, Age and Sex. Everyone but the father owes obedience to the mother (2) because she is senior in Generation and Age. The eldest son's wife (4) owes obedience to her father-in-law and mother-in-law because of Generation and Age, and her allegiance to her husband is only a secondary concern because it is founded on the less important Sex superiority. The youngest son (7) owes obedience to his elder brothers' wives, his elder brothers, his mother and father. The youngest grandson (14) has to obey all the others. The unmarried girls (10) and (11) are only temporary members of the group, because they must eventually be married out of it.

Now, there is a structural conflict involved in this model, because while Generation is clearly superior to Age, it is not the case that Age is clearly superior to Sex. That is to say, (7) can easily see that he owes obedience to (1) and (2) and to (3) and (5), but he may well feel that he is superior to (4) and (6) on Sex grounds, and that these should override the Age consideration. Especially might this be true where (4) and (6) could be wives or concubines considerably younger than himself, though their Age ranking is in accordance with their husbands' not their own ages.