

Prepared for “The Family Model in Chinese Art and Culture” conference volume, Tang  
Center for Asian Art, Princeton University, November 6-7, 2004

### **Families in China: Ties That Bind?**

Rubie Watson, Harvard University

Draft 2-22-07

Filial piety, considered by many to be a foundational value in Chinese society, has been examined, extolled, deconstructed, attacked, defined, and re-defined for the last century. Filial piety (the usual English translation of the Chinese word *xiao*) can be understood as a set of interlocking principles that emphasize a son’s duty to respect, obey, and support his parents. By extension, these principles provided a model for proper relations between wives and their husbands’ parents, junior and senior, as well as subject and emperor. The sociologist Martin Whyte puts it this way: “In imperial China filial piety was a central value of family life, and the centrality of family life in Confucian statecraft made filial piety a lynchpin for the entire social order. Down through the centuries parents constantly stressed to their children that the way they treated their elders was a central measure of their moral worth.”<sup>1</sup>

For generations and certainly during the Qing dynasty (1644-1911) and Republican period (1911-1949), filial piety was supported by public and private rituals, an ancestral cult, patrilineal descent, patriarchal authority, patrilocal residence, and an androcentric property regime. Sons owed practical support to parents as well as obedience, which was performed, elaborated, and internalized in an annual cycle of regularly occurring rituals and daily actions. Daughters were good daughters if they were obedient to their parents and successfully transferred that devotion to their husband's parents when they married. Death did not extinguish a son's obligations. For many Chinese, the ancestral cult elevated the bonds between deceased father and his sons to a kind of religion, which taught the living that they were responsible for the thread of generational continuity. The ancestral cult provided dramatic and recurring reminders of the heavy duties borne by male offspring.

The roles of sons, daughters, and daughters-in-law were highly developed within the discourse of filial piety. Parental responsibilities, however, received considerably less attention. *The Classic of Filial Piety (Xiao Jing)* and *The Twenty-four Examples of Filial Piety*, in sometimes shocking and often exaggerated detail, provided models of behavior for obedient children who were exhorted to place their parents above all else. As Harrell reminds us in Chapter XX, China's patrilineal, patrilocal, and patriarchal values and practices – what Harrell calls the orthodox model of Chinese kinship – were neither uniform in articulation or in practice. Variations within and alternatives without abounded, but still the preeminence of relations traced through males and a belief in the superior authority of males held sway.

### **Qing and Republican China**

In Qing and Republican China, the cult of filial piety placed a premium on families living in large, three or four generational households, even though such households were by no means the norm, especially among the poor. Unfortunately, we have few data on household composition for the pre-revolutionary era.<sup>2</sup> Although millions of Chinese lived alone or in small, conjugal families, households consisting of three or more generations (stem and joint families) were deemed to be better, more virtuous.<sup>3</sup> Sons, who were responsible for the care of elder parents, inherited equally from fathers. Sometimes, a portion of a father's or grandfather's property was set aside in the form of an ancestral estate, which guaranteed care of the deceased in the afterlife. In many parts of China, these estates were numerous and large; and, once ancestral offerings and tomb upkeep were secured, descendants might receive substantial income from ancestral property.<sup>4</sup>

Daughters, who remained jural minors throughout their lives, did not have inheritance rights to family property nor were they shareholders in ancestral estates, although they might receive dowries when they married. Formal responsibility for a woman's upkeep resided first with her father, was transferred at marriage to her husband and his family, and if she were widowed, her sons were held responsible for her support. Although women were key to the patriline, they were not part of the patriline. One could argue that China came very close to achieving a patrilineal descent system – at least at the formal level -- that dispensed with women altogether. Nevertheless, marriage was a pivotal event in the life of a family. Most grooms “married-in a wife” who resided with her husband and his family (that is, post-marital residence was patrilocal). The newly married couple had three basic responsibilities: to continue the husband's descent line, to

contribute to the economic success of the household, and to care for family elders in life and death. Marriage rituals, which highlighted the transfer of the bride from one family to another, were full of drama, color, and expectation. They were also very expensive; for many households, the cost of a son's marriage strained budgets and could plunge families into serious debt.

During the Qing and Republican period and probably earlier, groom's families provided gifts of various kinds as well as money (bridewealth) to the bride's family. The bride's family usually spent some or all of this money on their daughter's dowry.<sup>5</sup> The ultimate source of the bride's dowry, therefore, was often the groom's family. There is some justification for arguing that the groom's family was endowing itself, because ultimately the bride and groom and their sons would control the bridewealth-cum-dowry that was transferred with the bride.

"Respectable families" strived to supplement the bridewealth that they received with their own money and gifts. In well-off households the bride's family might make a substantial contribution to their daughter's dowry.<sup>6</sup> The groom's parents bore the lion's share of the wedding expenses including wedding feasts, sedan chairs, musicians, and ritual fees, although some of these expenses were recouped through monetary gifts from wedding guests.<sup>7</sup> The ability to pull together the funds needed to marry testified to the groom's solvency, and thus provided proof of the groom's (and his household's) financial fitness.<sup>8</sup>

Senior males were caretakers of family resources rather than their absolute owners. Myron Cohen has pointed out that the roles of family head (*jiazhang*) and family manager (*dangjia*) were distinct, although the same person usually assumed both.<sup>9</sup> This

arrangement allowed considerable flexibility and made it possible (at least theoretically) for the practical management of family finances (*dangjia*) to reside with the best-suited man, father or son. Unlike many other parts of the world (including Europe), offspring did not have to wait for a parent's death to inherit. The marriage of a son or disputes -- involving sons, or daughters-in-law, or father and sons -- could and often did occasion a division of family property. If household division preceded the death of parents, responsibility for parental support was usually specified during the settlement negotiations, sometimes in the form of a written contract.<sup>10</sup> Often, after division involving pre-mortem inheritance, parents would take up residence with one son, who, in recognition of his continuing responsibilities, received an extra share of the family's property. Household divisions were often discussed in terms of setting up a new stove and domestic ancestral altar. Although families did not always reside in one house -- they might be scattered in a number of separate houses spread over two or three village lanes - - family members were understood to form a single household when they shared a common stove or kitchen (i.e., they had a common budget) and kept one ancestral (domestic) altar where family ancestors were honored.

Within the family regime I have just described, affines (relatives by marriage) and matrilineal kin (relatives traced through one's mother) were not as significant as agnates (relatives traced through the patriline), although in individual cases and in some regions they may have been important.<sup>11</sup> When daughters married, most left their parental homes and in rural areas usually their natal villages as well.<sup>12</sup> Once married, they belonged elsewhere and were expected to serve their husband's parents rather than their own with visits to natal homes often restricted to once or twice per year. A daughter could not

expect financial support from her natal family should her husband die (or if she should suffer abuse from her husband or members of his family). Nor, it should be noted, could her parents presume financial support from a married daughter. Because marriages were thought to be for life and extended beyond the grave, divorce and widow remarriage were rare.

Until recently, it has been possible to argue that, families, not individuals, were the basic social unit in Chinese society.<sup>13</sup> Families and extended kin groups (e.g., lineages, clans) offered a framework – a vocabulary – for organizing and thinking about human relationships in general. Children were raised, ancestors were honored, production and income were managed, the elderly were cared for, business enterprises were conceived and developed, and security sought within the family. For centuries, the language of family, kinship, and filial piety permeated Chinese society.

Cultural expressions of filial piety could be simple or elaborate. From the rigid etiquette of seating hierarchies to the daily care of ancestral tablets, there were hundreds of ways in which a son showed respect for his father. Marriage rituals began with a report to family ancestors and village gods, grandfathers were entreated to give grandsons an auspicious name, Spring and Autumn Festivals were devoted to family and lineage ancestors, and New Year celebrations were marked by elaborate visiting and gift giving among kin. Sons honored parents during their lifetimes by giving them “face;” and, in death, sons owed fathers and mothers honorable burials and continuing care in the afterlife. Outside the realm of ritual, people retold legends, sang folk songs, recited poetry, and witnessed elaborate opera performances that highlighted sacrifices to parents

and family devotion. They also commissioned, displayed, and honored ancestral portraits (see Chapter XX), which in some regions were key elements in the ancestral cult itself.

It is important to remember, however, that not everyone lived in families. Bachelors, abandoned women, orphaned children, and prodigal sons were well represented in China as elsewhere. Wealthy households might contain indentured laborers, slaves, concubines, and servants. Some families had no sons; Bernhardt points out that in imperial times “something on the order of one out of every five families did not have sons who survived to adulthood.”<sup>14</sup> Poverty, illness, violence, and demographic chance all played a role in creating living arrangements that did not resemble the model outlined above. Of course, there were ways of getting around some of these problems. Sonless families had recourse to adoption or uxoriocal marriages (calling in a son-in-law for their daughter). Abused women and daughters, who refused to marry, could join Buddhist convents or vegetarian halls; they could become healers, servants, or prostitutes (eventually factory work became an option). Abandoned widows could remarry, and prodigal sons could return to their families. In any case, not everyone lived in large families where ancestors were revered and parents were honored. Regional and class differences were significant. In southeastern China, for example, patrilineages were big and powerful, but migration and women’s paid employment offered alternatives to Confucian hierarchies and the sometimes harsh dictates of kin. In some parts of China and Taiwan, “little daughter-in-law marriage” (in which families took infant girls into their households to raise as future wives for their sons) or uxoriocal unions in which husbands joined the wife’s household were prevalent.<sup>15</sup> And, among China’s elite,

concubines joined households as quasi-family members – that is, they were capable of producing kinsmen but were not themselves kin.<sup>16</sup>

It is also worth noting that co-residing families might harbor special relationships that while crucially important to kin dynamics, were unnamed and “unrecognized.” Writing in 1972, Margery Wolf describes for rural Taiwan, mother-centered uterine families – families within families – which were created by daughters-in-law, whose lowly place in the household hierarchy could only be alleviated by the production of sons.<sup>17</sup> Generation after generation, Wolf argues, mothers created physical and emotional security for themselves in an often hostile, or at least uncaring, environment by developing close emotional attachments to their sons. The success of these groups meant that mother-son bonds was often pitted against ties between husband and wife. Mothers sought emotional support from their sons rather than their husbands; and, in disputes with daughters-in-law, because mothers of newly married sons held most of the cards, sons were expected to side with their mothers rather than their wives. It is well to remember that uterine families were bound not only by affect, but also by economic ties. Women, for example, might use their dowry goods or income from small projects (money lending, peddling, livestock sales) to provide special treats, school fees, or travel funds for sons.

To summarize (and, inevitably, oversimplify), in an ideal world fathers were responsible for the upkeep of their wives and unmarried offspring, while mothers were expected to nurture offspring who would become filial sons and daughters-in-law. Sons owed unconditional obedience and respect to their parents, upkeep of their parents in old age and death, and reverence for family ancestors. They were also responsible for producing descendants who could continue the descent line, and finally, they had a duty

to outlive their parents. Daughters owed unconditional obedience and respect to their parents. As daughters-in-law they were expected to transfer this obedience to their husbands' parents, to produce sons, and to contribute to harmonious households. Lest one become too caught up in the perfection of a world where the young honored, obeyed, and cared for the old, it is important to remember that many individuals struggled against and resisted the responsibilities of filial piety.

Elizabeth Johnson and I have written about the terrible strains and contradictions of being good daughters, daughters-in-law, and wives as expressed in women's laments.<sup>18</sup> Songs and popular stories about star crossed lovers, operas about evil mothers-in-law, and costly ritual cycles that performed and so externalized filial piety attest to the demands of a code of conduct that exacted a high degree of individual commitment to elders. There was indeed resistance to this code. Daughters chaffed -- and sometimes rebelled<sup>19</sup> -- against arranged marriages that forced them to live among strangers. Desperate daughters-in-law killed themselves because of menacing mothers-in-law, and sons sometimes followed personal goals rather than meet parental demands. The code itself, however, remained a cherished ideal.

During the twentieth century there have been recurrent attacks on filial piety itself and most especially on its life support system. Beginning with the May Fourth Movement (1919), critiques of "the Chinese family" were formulated by writers, artists, politicians, and intellectuals of all kinds. The traditional family and the relationships it engendered, it was argued, were responsible for China's ills. How could China become a modern nation if fathers were tyrants, women were servants in their own families, and young people were expected to blindly obey their seniors?<sup>20</sup>

Chinese communists reiterated and sharpened these critiques. Some of Mao Zedong's earliest writings dealt with family conflicts over arranged marriages.<sup>21</sup> During the 1920s, the oppression of women was singled out for special attention as were elaborate ancestral and religious rituals. However, as gender equality met peasant resistance and came into conflict with the Party's need for male recruits to the communist cause, these policies were often softened or placed on the back burner.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, from the 1920s to 1949, communist leaders and rank-in-file party members developed a critique of Chinese family life, experimented with new policies, and created an incipient counter ideology in which the needs of the nation took precedence over the privileges of family elders. During the early years of the revolution, party activists produced laws and policies that would make a difference to the way family members interacted, to the roles that they played, and the behaviors they exhibited. As outlined below, changes in family life during the Maoist era (1949-1976) were the result not only of overt attacks (the political campaigns of the 1950s and 1960s), but also of industrialization, urbanization, educational reforms, and wide-ranging ideological transformations.

Before turning to family change in the People's Republic of China, it is important to have some understanding of how the Nationalist Party (or Guomindang, GMD) dealt with "the family problem" prior to 1949. As a political party and a government, the GMD sought to reform Chinese family practices and many of the values that supported patriliney and patriarchy. A "Resolution on the Women's Movement," which was passed at a Nationalist Party meeting in 1926, declared that women were "locked in a prison of heavy oppression." The resolution called for the liberation of women<sup>23</sup> and proclaimed that the GMD had made it possible for women to participate in national revolution. The

New Life Movement was an attempt to change people's thought and actions. Arranged marriages and concubinage were attacked, educational reforms were encouraged, and women were admonished to nurture "modern" families. Under the Republican Civil Code, women (*nuzi*) were given inheritance rights, but as Bernhardt points out in her book *Women and Property in China*, the Code failed to target (premortem) household division and so allowed major transfers of property to continue as in the past – from father to son. Bernhardt writes: "their [GMD] Western-derived inheritance theories took effect only upon the death of the property owner, with women inheriting equally only postmortem...A father could disinherit his daughters simply by parceling out his property as gifts before his death. As a result, daughters did not gain the inheritance rights the lawmakers had intended for them."<sup>24</sup>

### **Mao and After**

In 1949, the Chinese Communist Party came to power and began a program of state-directed change that eventually enveloped the entire nation. The Marriage Law of 1950, which was one of the CCP's first large-scale legal initiatives, gave women formal rights to choose their mates, to divorce husbands, and to hold property rights equal to those of men.<sup>25</sup> The Land Reform Campaign (1950-1952), which coincided with efforts to implement the Marriage Law, was, however, considerably more intense and of longer duration than efforts to reform marriage. Land Reform and later collectivization campaigns dramatically altered China's property regime by first limiting and later eliminating nearly all forms of private property (especially family and ancestral property). These changes were coupled with concerted attacks on "bad classes" and reactionary thinking. Ancestral lands were collectivized, temples and ancestral halls

became administrative offices or factories, ancestral tablets were destroyed or hidden, and religious as well as ancestral (and family) rituals were forbidden.

As townships and villages were reformed into brigades and work teams, new administrative units and new leaders were required. When the Chinese Communists came to power, they found tens of millions of rural households that were functioning as primary economic and reproduction (both social and biological) units.<sup>26</sup> Land Reform (1950-53) followed by the Great Leap Forward (1958-1960) undercut and eventually removed most production resources and decisions from the control of individual families. The confiscation of most forms of private property, experiments in communal dining, rationing, and the emergence of a “shortage economy” (the hall mark, some argue, of state socialism) further undermined the family’s power to make consumption decisions. Eventually, during the Reform period of the late 1970s and 1980s, state efforts to control reproduction moved to center stage as the Party’s birth limitation policy (the one-child-family policy) took the country by storm. This push, however, coincided with significantly greater economic opportunities for many especially the young, and as state control over economic decisions loosened, making one’s way in the world and consumption (one might say a cult of consumption) became primary preoccupations for many individuals and families.

Did the Chinese Communists radically alter family relations and thus undermine traditional principles of filial piety? Were patriliney, patriarchy, and patrilocality overturned? Responses to questions about family change in the People’s Republic of China (PRC) vary depending on region and population density, but I believe that the answer to the first question posed above must be a resounding yes! During the last twenty

years there have been many fine studies of Chinese family life in the PRC,<sup>27</sup> and these studies give us a remarkably detailed (although not comprehensive) account of family and household change in post-1949 China. Recently and fortunately, for our purposes here, two edited volumes have been devoted to the subject of filial piety and intergenerational relations in China and East Asia.<sup>28</sup>

Researchers report that during the 1970s and 1980s most urban residents were living in conjugal or three generational (stem family) households. Whyte and Parish, based on their 1970s survey of China's urban population, found that 68 percent of surveyed households were conjugal, 22 percent stem, 2 percent were joint, and 8 percent were designated as "single, other."<sup>29</sup> According to Unger, data from the 1980s suggests that urban families preferred to live in conjugal (nuclear) family households, but "persistent housing shortages and intergenerational obligations...overrode the desire to establish nuclear households."<sup>30</sup> For the city of Baoding, 100 miles southwest of Beijing, surveys conducted in 1994 found "an underlying pattern in which most unmarried children continue to reside in the parental home until married, but most married children do not remain in joint residence with parents for prolonged periods." However, the proportion of stem families was not negligible, especially for elder parents. Whyte and his colleagues found that 32 percent of parents between ages 50 and 59 "have a married child in the home," and for those over 70 years the percentage increases to 40.6 percent. The rate for all parents over 50 years (living with a married child) was 34.8 percent.<sup>31</sup> Ikels reports that in 1987, 60 percent of elderly parents living in Guangzhou (in southeastern China) were co-residing with one or more married children.<sup>32</sup> The differences between Baoding and Guangzhou are intriguing; Guangzhou's higher

proportion of stem and joint family households might be due to many factors including differences in age of respondents, city size, local patterns of economic development, and housing policies.

Reporting on a rural household survey of five villages in the Pearl River delta in 1986, Graham Johnson found that 11.9 percent of households were made up of a single individual, 48.8 percent consisted of nuclear (or conjugal) families, and stem families accounted for 35.6 percent. Joint families were rare making up only 5.8 percent of the 521 reported households.<sup>33</sup> Cohen found that 72 percent of all village households in Yangmansa, Hebei (in 1987) were conjugal, 22 percent were stem, 5 percent were single, and 1 percent were joint.<sup>34</sup> In a Hubei village, Zhang reports that in 1994, 23 percent of elders over 60 years were living with a spouse or alone and in 2002 the percentage had nearly doubled.<sup>35</sup> In the Heilongjiang village of Xiajia, Yan found that in 1998 among those households that included an individual over 60 years, 25 out of 83 (or 30 percent) consisted of an elder living alone or with a spouse.<sup>36</sup> Based on his Yangmansa data, Cohen provides a good summary of many issues regarding family and household change after 1949. He argues that from 1950 to the late 1980s, one finds a “simplification of household structure” – a trend toward more conjugal or nuclear households.<sup>37</sup> This is an important trend not only in rural Hebei but also in China generally. Cohen also points out that parents and married sons as well as groups of married brothers may continue to maintain special relations “characterized by casual and diffuse economic ties” even when they live in independent households.<sup>38</sup> Clearly, although household composition is an important indicator of the intensity of intergenerational bonds, increases in the numbers of elders living alone or with a spouse does not necessarily imply (as Cohen cautions) an

increase in elder neglect. Nevertheless, differing rates of household types notwithstanding, in rural areas some general trends are emerging. Due in part to migration, a preference for conjugal households, and, at least in some areas, the wherewithal to support that preference, increasing numbers of elderly are living independently of their children.

Some researchers, who conducted rural fieldwork in the 1990s, have made the interesting observation that newlyweds tend to live with the groom's parents immediately after marriage, but these stem families are often very short-lived (usually less than a year and some exist only for a month or two). Wang argues that these brief periods of patrilocal residence are primarily ritualistic, involving a "performance" of filial piety.<sup>39</sup> Cohen writes about the trend of "going it alone" (*danguo*), a pattern in which newly married couples expect to live in a new house built expressly for them.<sup>40</sup>

Most observers agree that China's rural elderly have not done well since 1949 and have especially suffered since the reforms of the late 1970s. In the Maoist period, changes in who controlled property and how it was controlled and a cult of labor, which placed a high value on hard, physical work, loosened the hold of seniors over juniors. While the family remains the primary and often only means of support in old age, since 1980 migration plus the greater earning power of the young, neolocal residence for the newly married, and the lack of pensions have all made the care of the elderly by their children necessary and, at the same time, highly problematic. Based on research in a village in northeastern China, Danyu Wang writes: "Land is no longer the major component of family wealth or the basis for children's economic reliance on their parents. In addition, early household division has enabled children to acquire a substantial

amount of parental wealth at the beginning of their marriage. While the younger generation has increasingly gained its socioeconomic independence at a younger age, the older generation has been economically depleted due to heavy expenses for its children (especially their weddings), being left with little or no savings by the time the children are all married. With no state retirement pension, social security, or savings, parents in rural China have had no choice but to rely on their children in their old age.”<sup>41</sup> Zhang found villagers in Hubei who felt enormous pressure to invest significantly in their children’s weddings and to invest in their daughters’ educations. The one-child family policy has produced many singleton daughters or families with a daughter and son whose parents endeavor to make an equal commitment to their children regardless of sex.<sup>42</sup> According to Wang and others, the rural elderly have found themselves in a bleak situation as their needs increase but their ability to satisfy those needs remains distressingly meager.

The high rate of suicide is one indicator of distress among China’s elder population. Reviewing research on suicide in China, Lee and Kleinman report that China has the “third highest rate among the elderly” in the world.<sup>43</sup> They refer to a 1998 study of more than 1000 elder suicides in Changde County, Hunan which gives the causes of these suicides as: “chronic disease (23.6 percent), desertion by family members (20.3 percent), anger due to abuse by children (12.2 percent), and pessimism caused by children’s gambling (9.4 percent).”<sup>44</sup>

Under the Deng reforms, rights to farm land were allocated in the 1980s, but it is important to note that this change did not signal a return to private property. In most villages, these rights cannot be transferred from one person to another, but are reallocated

by local officials when an individual leaves the village permanently (at the time of marriage, for example) or dies. This allocation system, which makes it impossible for children to inherit agricultural land from their parents, coupled with a decline in agricultural earnings, an increase in wage labor, and a steady devaluation of elders' contributions to household resources has created a situation in which parents hold few economic cards (or, for that matter, it would appear cards of any kind).

Dowries and bridewealth continue to be given and received, but since the Maoist revolution they are vastly different phenomena from their pre-1949 namesakes. Bridewealth (or “marriage by purchase” as labeled by the communists) was explicitly banned in the 1950 Marriage Law. Nevertheless, because party cadres appear to have concentrated on checking rather than eradicating bridewealth, payments to the bride's family were widely given (and even strengthened) during the Maoist years. Parish and Whyte explain the tenacity of bridewealth after 1949 by arguing that land reform and collectivization increased women's labor contributions to (and, therefore, the value of their labor for) individual households. Given an already existing bridewealth complex and patrilocal residence, they argue, a bride's family demanded compensation for the loss of a valuable worker.<sup>45</sup> It should be noted, however, that brides did not leave their natal families empty handed: a few clothes, some bedding, and household goods made up most dowries in this period.<sup>46</sup>

From the 1960s, we find more sizeable bridal payments including dowries, more discretion in choosing dowry items by the new couple especially the bride, and more emphasis on neolocal residence. By the 1960s, Yan reports a small change for rural Heilongjiang Province (North China) when the groom's family started giving gifts of

clothes and bedding (trousseau) directly to the bride rather than to her parents.<sup>47</sup> In the late 1960s, a monetary (cash) gift was added and, like the trousseau, this too was given directly to the bride. Eventually, the trousseau gift was converted into money, which made it possible for the bride to purchase the items she wished rather than depending on the groom's mother to buy what she thought her daughter-in-law should have. During the 1960s and 1970s, many more items were added to the "gift list" – furniture, radios, bicycles – and the transfer from senior to junior generation increasingly came to look like an endowment of the couple rather than the bride alone. Since the mid-1980s, Yan writes: "all monetary gifts were subsumed under a new category, *ganzhe*, which refers to the conversion of material goods into monetary terms."<sup>48</sup> He goes on to add that *ganzhe* is now given directly to the bride herself, who "as understood by both families, represent[s] the new conjugal unit."<sup>49</sup> More recently, the stakes have increased enormously as houses have become part of the marital endowment. As noted above Zhang reports that in the Hubei village where she conducted her research, parents went to extraordinary lengths to produce funds for their children's marriages. Zhang writes: "If parents fail to do their part in contributing adequately to their children's marriage, they can later suffer the consequence of inadequate filial support."<sup>50</sup>

Yan's and Zhang's discussions are grounded in specific villages and regions; nevertheless, I believe that their general arguments, which speak directly to filial piety, apply well beyond the borders of any one village. Like many other students of Chinese village communities,<sup>51</sup> Yan argues that the care (both practical and emotional) of the elderly is in crisis in rural China, and maintains that Maoist policies<sup>52</sup> had the unintended

and long term effect of creating a society where individualism and the quest for individual interest, privacy, romantic love, and close conjugal ties were enhanced.

Based on research in China during the 1990s, there appear to be significant generational differences among rural peoples regarding both the meaning and practice of filial piety. Although everyone agrees that filial piety is important, the ways in which people describe good sons and daughters varies. According to elders in Yan's Heilongjiang village, parents have given their children the greatest gift – life itself – which can never be repaid.<sup>53</sup> Young, married children, on the other hand, believe that “giving birth and raising children are parental duties...The idea that human reproduction is sacred is no longer accepted by younger villages. Consequently, unconditional filial piety, which was based on the sacredness of parenthood, no longer exists. For younger villagers, intergenerational reciprocity, like other types of reciprocity, has to be balanced and maintained through consistent exchange. If the parents do not treat their children well or are otherwise not good parents, then the children have reason to reduce the scope and amount of generosity to their parents.”<sup>54</sup> Yan refers to the “demystification of parenthood” with a new stress on social parenting rather than biological connection.<sup>55</sup> As we have already seen Zhang concurs in this appraisal as does Miller, who, based on research into family contracts in rural Shandong during the late 1990s, reports that “villagers tended to view filial piety in practical, not theoretical terms.”<sup>56</sup>

Because many urbanites have pensions and greater access to health care, it appears that urban elders are better off than their rural counterparts. For those who remained in their privately owned dwellings after 1949, the value of their property during the Reform period has escalated. Ikels points to the dilemma facing many Chinese elders

who were lucky enough to own their houses and apartments. Since the reforms, she writes, “changes in housing policy have converted privately owned housing from an inconsequential asset to one of great value, while wage reform, mandatory retirement, and increasingly restricted health-care coverage have lowered the relative economic position of the elderly and made them more dependent on the young and middle-aged.”<sup>57</sup> Ironically, Ikels notes, the ownership of a valuable house or apartment can become a serious point of contention among siblings. As Heilongjiang parents told Yan, it is important but difficult “to balance a bowl of water evenly” lest one child resent perceived slights and refuse to shoulder their share of the upkeep of aged parents.<sup>58</sup>

Based on 1994 survey research in Baoding, as noted above, Whyte reports that less than 40 percent of surveyed elders (over 60 years) lived with one or more married children, but the majority lived in conjugal (nuclear) families. Those living with a married child were three times more likely to live with a married son than a married daughter. Whyte notes, however, that a high rate of nuclear family residence among Baoding elders does not imply that they are isolated from their married children. Whyte refers to “networked families” and describes arrangements in which parents live “near several grown children who cooperate in providing support and assistance.”<sup>59</sup> In general, Whyte argues, “there are no signs of a ‘crisis’ of filial support for the Baoding elderly in our data.”<sup>60</sup> Other researchers, however, have found, if not a crisis, at least a high level of insecurity among urban elders, who, like their village counterparts, increasingly are becoming economically disadvantaged vis a vis their children.<sup>61</sup>

### **One Child Families**

Reporting on research among families in the Chinese city of Dalian in 2000, Fong argues that enforced, early retirement and the prevalence of only children (94% of the 2,273 teenage students she surveyed had no siblings)<sup>62</sup> has created a great deal of insecurity about old age. “By enforcing mandatory retirement,” she writes, “while leaving retirees without the means for economic self-sufficiency, the Chinese state practically guaranteed that most people would spend the final decades of their lives dependent on their children.”<sup>63</sup>

The Dalian parents that she studied were finding it difficult to support their elderly parents even though many shared the burden with siblings, and they feared that their own (singleton) children would be unwilling or unable to fulfill their filial duties.<sup>64</sup> At a Spring Festival family reunion in 2000, Fong collected this interchange: “‘It won’t be so bad in a nursing home,’ said Second Uncle. ‘We could all go to the same nursing home, and play poker all day. It’ll be like Spring Festival every day!’ ‘I would never put you in a nursing home!’ Second Uncle’s daughter protested. ‘What we have to do is exercise so that we’ll always be healthy, and never need our children to take care of us!’ Third Aunt’s husband said. ‘But everyone gets old, no matter how much you exercise,’ Fifth Aunt said. ‘The best we can hope for is an early death, so that we never get to the point where we’re a burden on our children.’”<sup>65</sup> It is worth noting that Zhang has found a significant increase in residential homes for the elderly in China.<sup>66</sup> If Chinese children and their elder parents are moving toward a system of “calculated reciprocity,” the inability of elders to “keep up” with their children could indeed undermine parental claims for support. Many parents, it appears, are suffering from the social consequences of these calculations.

Because of the changes described above (educational, economic, and ideological), ideas about daughters – what they are and should be – are in transition and have been for some time. Obviously, the existence of millions of singleton daughters is making a difference in the ways they are valued. Some parents, researchers report, believe that daughters are more caring and more reliable than sons. And, although the percentages are not high, some elders do live with their married daughters.<sup>67</sup> Writing in the early 1990s, Deborah Davis offers a cautionary note, however. A bias in favor of sons, she maintains, remains strong due to “cultural preferences and discrimination against women.”<sup>68</sup> Because of a wage differential that favors men, a tendency for men to have greater access to housing, and for women to leave the labor force more often and earlier than men, in the post-Mao era it appears that sons remain the safest (and most strategic) bet.

The impact of large numbers of singleton children has yet to be fully registered and appreciated in China. Fong reports that singletons have been “empowered by the expectation of parents’ future dependence.” She notes that many parents told her that when they were young they were forced to compete with their siblings for their parents’ favor. Their own children, however, were in a very different position.<sup>69</sup> As in other parts of China, Dalian residents believe in the importance of filial piety, but they worry about the future and the elderly complain about their treatment. A Dalian grandmother, for example, compared herself to a piece of garbage being shifted from child to child in the popular “meal rotation” system.<sup>70</sup> Increasingly, as already noted young couples are setting up their own households and parents fear that they will lose support. Fong quotes a popular song (first nationally broadcast on a Spring Festival variety show) that encourages married children to be loyal to both the wife’s and husband’s families:

“Find some time,  
Find some time.  
Take your child,  
And return home often  
Wear a smile,  
Bring good wishes.  
Together with your spouse,  
Return home often.  
Mama has prepared some *nagging*;  
Papa has prepared a table of good food.  
The troubles of life  
Discuss with Mama.  
The things at work  
Discuss with Papa.  
Return home often,  
Return home often,  
If only to help Mama wash the bowls and chopsticks.  
The old people haven’t asked their sons and daughters for much;  
Their lives have not been easy; they have just wanted the family to be together.  
Return home often,  
Return home often,  
If only to massage Papa’s back and shoulders.  
The old people haven’t asked their sons and daughters for much;

They've worried all their lives, just wanting peace.”<sup>71</sup>

In contrast to Davis, Fong reports that the Dalian residents she met believed that the “baggage” of patriliney has been discarded. According to her informants, a good daughter-in-law is better than a son but a good daughter is best of all.<sup>72</sup> Female singletons, Fong argues, are enjoying “unprecedented parental support” and daughters are growing up in a socioeconomic system that is providing them “with the means to follow the cultural model of filial duty once reserved for sons.”<sup>73</sup> In Fong’s view, urban daughters can now earn money to fulfill filial obligations, and therefore can redefine the role of a filial daughter who, in contrast to young girls a generation ago, is capable of supporting parents (presumably as well as parents-in-law). The contrast between Davis’s findings and the views expressed in Dalian may be due to a variety of differences, including the greater impact of the one-child family policy in 2000 when Fong was doing her research. What is clear is that the role that daughters play in families – natal and conjugal – is changing and that “good daughters” are looking increasingly like “good sons” in terms of their responsibilities, rights, and privileges. Of course, in contrast to sons, daughters may well be entrapped by the double burden of responsibility for parents and parents-in-law, which may be lurking in the wings.

## **Conclusions**

In conclusion, it appears that over thirty years of revolution involving property transfers to state ownership (1949-1978), a huge growth in migration, the decline of state welfare, and the one-child family policy have had a significant impact on intergenerational relations in general and in the expression and practice of filial piety specifically.

It is instructive to conclude with some comparisons to the European experience. During the European demographic transition, families became smaller with fewer children, while neolocal residence at the time of marriage was preferred and widely practiced. As industrialization ushered in economic changes, education became more important and the period of time during which children were dependent on their parents lengthened. In this process, children were transformed from economic resources into economic liabilities. Parents became responsible for establishing their children in the world by means of educational investments and for saving (with state assistance) for their own old age. As life expectancy increased, husbands and wives were spending many years together without children and, in old age, spouses rather than children were often the primary caregivers. Gradually, scholars have argued, these trends enhanced the importance of individual expression, rights, and interests, which in turn came to be seen as fundamental to a healthy society and family.<sup>74</sup>

In my view, one of the most significant contrasts between Euroamerican, perhaps especially American, family dynamics and those we find in China is the ways in which parents invest in children. In China, instead of making large education investments, the evidence suggests that parents (especially rural parents) save and eventually spend large amounts of money for their childrens' marriages. As Wang, Yan, Zhang, and others point out, banquet expenses as well as endowing a new couple – with money, houses, travel – leaves parents with few if any financial resources for their own old age. Interestingly, although many parents make significant contributions to establish their married children, they appear to receive little recognition for their efforts.

In China, the demographic transition took place a century or more after Europe's transformation and has been both short and dramatic. There is no doubt that the Chinese state has failed to keep up with pensions or with the health care and educational needs of its citizens. School fees are increasing and the family remains the bulwark against unemployment, bad health, disabilities, and the infirmities of old age, especially in rural areas where 70 percent or more of the Chinese population resides.

The anthropological and sociological literature on families in China points in some clear directions. A domestic revolution is occurring in which the ideological apparatus and practice of filial piety – of respect and care of elders – is moving toward a more formal, contractual (often written) recitation of specific responsibilities for elders by grown children. This move, which has been described as a trend away from generalized toward calculated reciprocity, in which seniors are disadvantaged *vis a vis* their more affluent adult children, is well underway. These changes give new meaning to the “intergenerational contract” that Ikels has described for China.<sup>75</sup>

There is no doubt that the Chinese party state needs families to provide what, in many other societies, is the responsibility of tax-funded institutions, while at the same time, the Chinese state has been responsible for an unprecedented attack on the life support system that underpins filial piety. When life support systems fail, patients die. In China, the idea of filial piety still has rhetorical power, but the hundreds of small actions – the practices – that once underpinned filial piety are being transformed, and this transformation in turn is redefining filial piety itself. A new revolution founded on rising expectations of affluence among many of China's newly retired and their young, married children is evident. The consequences of these rising expectations for a generation of

singleton children are likely to keep the issue of filial piety and elder care on the boil for years to come.

Finally, we must ask is filial piety being eradicated or transformed. I think that it is the latter for a variety of reasons but two stand out. Ideas about daughters are changing. Daughters are now receiving more support from parents while they are young, and they are shouldering more responsibility for the care of their parents as they age. Perhaps, the biggest change is the way in which parental duties and responsibilities are being defined as never before. In contemporary China, “proper parenting” is being written into a changing discourse of filial piety that would have been inconceivable only a few decades ago. Once, filial piety was a matter of a child’s investment in parents. As families become smaller and children fewer, a concern, one might argue a preoccupation, toward greater parental investment is taking center stage. How the elderly fare in this new environment remains to be seen.

---

<sup>1</sup> Martin Whyte, “Filial Obligations in Chinese Families: Paradoxes of Modernization,” in *Filial Piety: Practice and Discourse in Contemporary East Asia*, ed. Charlotte Ikels (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2004), p. 106.

<sup>2</sup> For rural Taiwan, where Japanese colonial authorities kept detailed household records, we find that in 1906 just over 26 percent of married couples were residing in households made up of stem families and just over 49 percent were living in joint family households Source: Arthur Wolf and Chieh-shan Huang, *Marriage and Adoption in China, 1845-1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1980), p. 69. Class and status were important factors, however. Sa reports that in 1906 in the city of Taipei, elementary (or conjugal) family households predominated, although stem and joint (or grand) family households accounted for more than 60 percent of the households among high status families Source:

---

Sophie Sa, "Marriage among the Taiwanese of Pre-1945 Taipei," in *Family and Population in East Asian History*, eds. Arthur Wolf and Susan Hanley (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1985), p. 288. For Taiwan generally, the proportion of stem family households (among all households) remained remarkably steady (at about 35 percent) from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s. The proportion of joint family households declined significantly, however, from 30 percent in 1965 to eight percent in 1985 as the percentage of conjugal family households increased from 35 percent to 56 percent during the same period. Myron Cohen estimates (based on 1964 census data from the Hebei village of Yangmansa) that in 1950 nearly 64 percent of village households were conjugal (or nuclear) and 27 percent were stem Source: "North China Rural Families: Changes during the Communist Era," *Etudes chinoises*, vol. 17, nos. 1-2 (1998), pp. 132-133. For further information see Jonathan Unger, "Urban Families in the Eighties: An Analysis of Chinese Surveys," in *Chinese Families in the Post-Mao Era*, eds. Deborah Davis and Stevan Harrell (Berkeley: University of California Press 1993), p. 33.

<sup>3</sup> Stem families are made up of parent(s), unmarried offspring, and a married son or daughter. Joint families are made up of parent(s), unmarried offspring, and two or more married sons or daughters. In China, the vast majority of stem and joint families consist of married sons rather than daughters. Conjugal (elementary, nuclear) family households include parent(s) and unmarried children. It is important to note that family (*jia*) and household are not synonymous. A household may contain single individuals or unrelated people, and a single family may be residentially dispersed with family members living in separate households. Families with migrant members are an example of this phenomenon.

<sup>4</sup> For example, in the Hong Kong village where I lived in the late 1970s, about 50 percent of the land owned by village residents was tied up in ancestral estates. Rubie Watson, *Inequality Among Brothers: Class and Kinship in South China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1985), p. 61.

<sup>5</sup> The anthropological term for this arrangement is "indirect dowry." For comparative analysis see Stevan Harrell and Sara Dickey, "Dowry Systems in Complex Societies," *Ethnology*, vol. 24, no. 2 (1985), pp. 105-120.

<sup>6</sup> The content of dowries varied from region to region, from village to city, and from class to class. In Hong Kong's New Territories where I did my research during the 1970s and 1980s, dowries consisted of clothing, bedding, personal effects for the "new room" (the bedroom prepared for the bride and groom in the groom's parents' residence), and jewelry. In other parts of China and especially in wealthy households, dowries might include furniture, indentured servants, money, and occasionally real estate (land, houses, commercial property).

<sup>7</sup> For discussions of marriage payments in China (especially in pre-1949 China) see Rubie Watson and Patricia Ebrey, eds., *Marriage and Inequality in Chinese Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1991).

<sup>8</sup> It is easy to forget that during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, even in pro-natalist China, some men could not afford to marry. See James L. Watson, "Self-Defense Corps, Violence, and the Bachelor Sub-Culture in South China: Two Case Studies," *Proceedings of the Second International Conference on Sinology, Section on Folklore and Culture* (Taipei: Academia Sinica 1989), pp. 209-221

---

<sup>9</sup> Myron Cohen, *House United, House United* (New York: Columbia University Press 1976), p. 363; see also Myron Cohen, "Family Management and Family Division in Contemporary rural China," *China Quarterly*, vol. 130 (June 1992).

<sup>10</sup> For discussion of family contracts see Myron Cohen, "Family Management and Family Division," *China Quarterly* (1992), especially pp. 357-377; Myron Cohen, "North China Rural Families," *Etudes chinoises* (1998), see especially pp. 114-125; Eric Miller, "Filial Daughters, Filial Sons: Comparisons from Rural North China," in *Filial Piety: Practice and Discourse in Contemporary East Asia*, ed. Charlotte Ikels (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2004).

<sup>11</sup> For discussions of kinship and family in late imperial China see Patricia Ebrey and James L. Watson, eds., *Kinship Organization in Late Imperial China, 1000-1940* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1986).

<sup>12</sup> For exceptions see e.g. Janice Stockard, *Daughters of the Canton Delta: Marriage Patterns and Economic Strategies in South China, 1860-1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1989); Arthur Wolf and Chieh-shan Huang, "*Marriage and Adoption*" (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1980).

<sup>13</sup> For a critique of this perspective see Yunxiang Yan, *Private Life under Socialism: Love, Intimacy, and Family Change in a Chinese Village, 1949-1999* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2003), pp. 3-16.

<sup>14</sup> Kathryn Bernhardt, *Women and Property in China, 960-1949* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1999), p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> See Arthur Wolf and Chieh-shan Huang, *Marriage and Adoption* (Stanford 1980). For discussion of uxorilocal rates of marriage in twentieth century Hubei see Hong Zhang, "Bracing for an Uncertain Future: A Case Study of New Coping Strategies of Rural Parents under China's Birth Control Policy," *The China Journal*, vol. 54 (2005) pp. 53-76.

<sup>16</sup> Rubie Watson, "Wives, Concubines, and Maids: Servitude and Kinship in the Hong Kong Region, 1900-1940," in *Marriage and Inequality in Chinese Society*, eds. Rubie Watson and Patricia Ebrey (Berkeley: University of California Press 1991).

<sup>17</sup> Margery Wolf, *Women and the Family in Rural Taiwan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1972).

<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth Johnson, "Grieving for the Dead, Grieving for the Living: Funeral Laments of Hakka Women," in *Death Ritual in Late Imperial and Modern China*, eds. James L. Watson and Evelyn S. Rawski (Berkeley: University of California Press 1988), pp. 135-163; Rubie Watson, "Chinese Bridal Laments: The Claims of a Dutiful Daughter," in *Harmony and Counterpoint: Ritual Music in Chinese Context*, eds. Bell Yung, Evelyn Rawski, Rubie Watson (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1996), pp. 107-129.

<sup>19</sup> Marjorie Topley, "Marriage Resistance in Rural Kwangtung," in *Women in Chinese Society*, eds., Margery Wolf and Roxane Wilke (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1975); Janice Stockard, *Daughters of the Canton Delta* (Stanford 1989).

<sup>20</sup> For further discussion see Susan Glosser, *Chinese Visions of Family and State, 1915-1953* (Berkeley: University of California Press 2003).

<sup>21</sup> See e.g., Mao Zedong, "To Change the Institution of Marriage," (originally published in *Da Gong Bao* Nov. 19, 1919), in *Mao's Road to Power*, Vol. 1, ed. Stuart Shram (Armonk NY: Sharpe 1992).

---

<sup>22</sup> Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China* (Chicago: Chicago University Press 1983), pp. 40, 46-57, 66-67; Judith Stacey, *Patriarchy and Socialist Revolution in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1983), pp. 126, 178.

<sup>23</sup> Kathryn Bernhardt, *Women and Property* (Stanford 1999), p. 134.

<sup>24</sup> Kathryn Bernhardt, *Women and Property* (Stanford 1999), p. 198.

<sup>25</sup> See Jonathan Ocko, "Women, Property, and the Law," in *Marriage and Inequality in Chinese Society*, eds. Rubie Watson and Patricia Ebrey (Berkeley: University of California Press 1991), pp. 313-346.

<sup>26</sup> Millions of Chinese were deeply embedded in a household economy system, although money and commodity markets were certainly well entrenched throughout China.

<sup>27</sup> See for example, Myron Cohen, "North China Rural Families," *Etudies chinoises* (1998); Myron Cohen, "Family Management and Family Division," *China Quarterly* (1992); Deborah Davis, *Long Lives: Chinese Elderly and the Communist Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1983); Deborah Davis, ed., *Urban Spaces in Contemporary China: The Potential for Autonomy and Community in Post-Mao China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1995); Deborah Davis and Stevan Harrell, eds., *Chinese Families in the Post-Mao Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1993); Vanessa Fong, *Only Hope: Coming of Age under China's One-Child Policy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2004); Charlotte Ikels, *The Return of the God of Wealth: The Transition to a Market Economy in Urban China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1996); Charlotte Ikels, ed., *Filial Piety: Practice and Discourse in Contemporary East Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2004); Jun Jing, *The Temple of Memories: History, Power, and Morality in a Chinese Village* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1996); Ellen Judd, *Gender and Power in Rural North China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1994); William Parish and Martin Whyte, *Village and Family in Contemporary China* (Chicago: Chicago University Press 1978); Martin Whyte, ed., *China's Revolution and Intergenerational Relations* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Center for Chinese Studies 2003); Martin Whyte and William Parish, *Urban Life in Contemporary China* (Chicago: Chicago University Press 1984); Yunxiang Yan, *The Flow of Gifts: Reciprocity and Social Networks in a Chinese Village* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1986); Yunxiang Yan, *Private Life Under Socialism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2003).

<sup>28</sup> Charlotte Ikels ed., *Filial Piety* (Stanford 2004); Martin Whyte ed., *China's Revolution and Intergenerational Relations* (Ann Arbor 2003).

<sup>29</sup> Martin Whyte and William Parish, *Urban Life* (Chicago 1984), p. 154.

<sup>30</sup> Jonathan Unger, "Chinese Families in the Eighties," (Berkeley 1993), pp. 56-57.

<sup>31</sup> Martin Whyte, "China's Revolution and Intergenerational Relations: Introduction," in *China's Revolution and Intergenerational Relations*, ed. Martin Whyte (Ann Arbor 2003), p. 36.

<sup>32</sup> Charlotte Ikels, *The Return of the God of Wealth* (Stanford 1996), p. 130.

<sup>33</sup> Graham Johnson, "Family Strategies and Economic Transformations in Rural China: Some Evidence from the Pearl River Delta" in *Chinese Families in the Post-Mao Era*, eds. Deborah Davis and Stevan Harrell (Berkeley: University of California Press 1993), p. 115.

- 
- <sup>34</sup> Myron Cohen, "North China Rural Families," *Etudes chinoises* (1998), pp. 126-7.
- <sup>35</sup> Hong Zhang, "Bracing for an Uncertain Future: A Case Study of New Coping Strategies of Rural Parents under China's Birth Control Policy," *The China Journal* Vol. 54 (July 2005), p. 74.
- <sup>36</sup> Yunxiang Yan, *Private Life under Socialism* (Stanford 2003), p. 164.
- <sup>37</sup> Myron Cohen, "North China Rural Families," *Etudes chinoises* (1998), pp. 127, 136; see also Yunxiang Yan, *Private Life* (Stanford 2003), pp. 88-9. .
- <sup>38</sup> Myron Cohen, "North China Families," *Etudes chinoises* (1998), p. 125.
- <sup>39</sup> Danyu Wang, "Ritualistic Coresidence and the Weakening of filial practice in Rural China" in *Filial Piety: Practice and discourse in Contemporary East Asia*, ed. Charlotte Ikels (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2004), p. 17.
- <sup>40</sup> Myron Cohen, "North China Families," *Etudes chinoises* (1998), p. 110.
- <sup>41</sup> Danyu Wang, "Ritualistic Coresidence" (Stanford 2004), p. 23.
- <sup>42</sup> See Hong Zhang, "Bracing for an Uncertain Future," *The China Journal* (2005), pp. 62-68.
- <sup>43</sup> Sing Lee and Arthur Kleinman, "Suicide as Resistance in Chinese Society," in *Chinese Society, Change, Conflict and Resistance*, eds. Elizabeth J. Perry and Mark Selden (London: Routledge Curzon 2003, Second Edition), p. 293. On recent suicide rates in China see also Jianlin Ji, Arthur Kleinman, and Anne Becker, "Suicide in Contemporary China," *Harvard Review of Psychiatry*, vol. 9, no. 1 (2001), pp. 1-12; M. Phillips, H.Q. Liu, and Y.P. Zhang, "Suicide and Social Change in China," *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry*, vol. 23 (1999), pp. 25-50; Wu Fei, "The Elegy for Luck: Suicide in a County of North China," Ph.D. Dissertation, Anthropology Harvard University, 2004.
- <sup>44</sup> See Sing Lee and Arthur Kleinman, "Suicide as Resistance in Chinese Society," (London 2003) p. 307.
- <sup>45</sup> Parish and Whyte, *Village Life* (Chicago 1978), p. 187.
- <sup>46</sup> Parish and Whyte, *Village Life* (Chicago 1978), p. 185. See also Yunxiang Yan, *Private Life under Socialism* (Stanford 2003) p. 152; Myron Cohen, "North China Rural Families," *Etudes chinoises* (1998), pp. 81-84. In the 1950s, payments to the bride's family looked more like the classic African pattern in which the bride's household kept a sizable portion of the bridewealth in order to marry a son.
- <sup>47</sup> Yunxiang Yan, *Private Life* (Stanford 2003), p. 152.
- <sup>48</sup> Yunxiang Yan, *Private Life* (Stanford 2003), p. 152.
- <sup>49</sup> Yunxiang Yan, *Private Life* (Stanford 2003), pp. 153-154.
- <sup>50</sup> Hong Zhang, "Bracing for an Uncertain Future," *The China Journal* (2005), p. 64.
- <sup>51</sup> See Eric Miller, *Filial Daughters, Filial Sons: Comparisons from Rural North China*, in *Filial Piety: Practice and Discourse in Contemporary East Asia*, ed., Charlotte Ikels (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2004); Danyu Wang, "Ritualistic Coresidence," (Stanford 2004); Hong Zhang, "'Living Alone' and Rural Elderly Strategies and Agency in Post-Mao Rural China," in *Filial Piety: Practice and Discourse in Contemporary East Asia*, ed., Charlotte Ikels (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2004).
- <sup>52</sup> For example, young men were promoted over older men both in work units and in local party organizations, work points were calculated on an individual basis, women's status was enhanced, and the labor and education of daughters-in-law increased in value.
- <sup>53</sup> Yunxiang Yan, *Private Life* (Stanford 2003), pp. 171-175.

- 
- <sup>54</sup> Yunxiang Yan, *Private Life* (Stanford 2003), pp. 177-178.
- <sup>55</sup> Yunxiang Yan, *Private Life* (Stanford 2003), p. 188.
- <sup>56</sup> Eric Miller, "Filial Daughters, Filial Sons," in *Filial Piety*, ed. Charlotte Ikels (Stanford 2004), p. 36.
- <sup>57</sup> Charlotte Ikels, "Settling Accounts: The Intergenerational Contract in an Age of Reform" in *Chinese Families in the Post-Mao Era*, eds. Deborah Davis and Stevan Harrell (Berkeley: University of California 1993), p. 310
- <sup>58</sup> Yunxiang Yan, *Private Life* (Stanford 2003), p. 176.
- <sup>59</sup> Martin Whyte, "Filial Obligations in Chinese Families: Paradoxes of Modernization," (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 111-112. Whyte reports that 90 percent of grown children interviewed in the Baoding survey lived in Baoding (p. 110). For general discussion of networked families see also Jonathan Unger, "Urban Families in the Eighties," (Berkeley 1993).
- <sup>60</sup> Martin Whyte, "Filial Obligations in Chinese Families," (Stanford 2004), p. 115.
- <sup>61</sup> Vanessa Fong, *Only Hope* (Stanford 2004); Charlotte Ikels, "Settling Accounts: The Intergeneration Contract in the Age of Reform," in *Chinese Families in the Post-Mao Era*, eds. Deborah Davis and Stevan Harrell (Berkeley: University of California Press 1993); Charlotte Ikels, "Introduction," in *Filial Piety*, ed. Charlotte Ikels (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2004).
- <sup>62</sup> Vanessa Fong, *Only Hope* (Stanford 2004), p. 5.
- <sup>63</sup> Vanessa Fong, *Only Hope* (Stanford 2004), p. 128.
- <sup>64</sup> Vanessa Fong, *Only Hope* (Stanford 2004), pp. 151-152.
- <sup>65</sup> Vanessa Fong, *Only Hope* (Stanford 2004), p. 152.
- <sup>66</sup> Hong Zhang, "Family Care or Residential Care? The Moral and Practical Dilemmas Facing the Elderly in Urban China," *Asian Anthropology*, vol. 5, 2006, pp. 57-83.
- <sup>67</sup> See for example, Yunxiang Yan, *Private Life* (Stanford 2003), pp. 164-165; Hong Zhang, "Living Alone," (Stanford 2004), p. 66; Charlotte Ikels, *The Return of the God of Wealth* (Stanford 1996), p. 131; Martin Whyte, "China's Revolution and Intergeneration Relations," in *China's Revolution and Intergenerational Relations* ed. Martin Whyte (Ann Arbor 2003), p. 37
- <sup>68</sup> Deborah Davis, "Urban Households: Supplicants to a Socialist State," in *Chinese Families*, eds. Deborah Davis and Stevan Harrell (Berkeley 1993), p. 68; Jonathan Unger, "Chinese Families," (Berkeley 1993), pp. 63-64.
- <sup>69</sup> Vanessa Fong, *Only Hope* (Stanford 2004), pp.152-153.
- <sup>70</sup> Vanessa Fong, *Only Hope* (Stanford 2004), p. 150.
- <sup>71</sup> Vanessa Fong, *Only Hope* (Stanford 2004), p. 133-134.
- <sup>72</sup> Vanessa Fong, *Only Hope* (Stanford 2004), p. 133.
- <sup>73</sup> Vanessa Fong, *Only Hope* (Stanford 2004), pp. 130-131.
- <sup>74</sup> For general discussion of European demographic transition see William Goode, *World Revolution and Family Patterns* (New York: Free Press 1963); Peter Laslett and Richard Wall, eds, *Household and Family in Past Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1972); Michael Mitterauer and Reinhard Sieder, *The European Family: Patriarchy to Partnership from the Middle Ages to the Present* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1982, Trans. By Karla Oosterveen and Manfred Horzinger).

---

<sup>75</sup> Charlotte Ikels, "Settling Accounts," (Berkeley 1993); Eric Miller, "Filial Daughters, Filial Sons," in *Filial Piety* ed. Charlotte Ikels (Stanford 2004).

Who are the characters in *Ties that Bind, Ties that Break*? Tao Ailin, Hanwei Liu, Second Sister, Amah Big Uncle, Miss Gilbertson, Miss Scott, Zhang Xeuyan, Grace, Billy, James Chew, Imogene Warner, Mr. Warner, Houseboy, and Little Brother. What is the major conflict that takes place in this novel? Internal: Ailin vs. Herself What is the Conflict? Since Ailin did not have her feet bound she could not have many choices in the future. What is the difference between homeschooling and public school at this time in China? Only boys can go to public schools and you learn Science, English, and Astronomy also you have lunch with your friends and it is taught by real teachers. At homeschooling it is at your house you hire a teacher and you learn myths and you have lunch without your friends. Family ties are taking over now that the central government has relaxed its grip on rural economies--and Marxism no longer answers the question, What does it mean to be Chinese? Clan power is making a comeback, and kinship ties are back in vogue. That's clannishness at its extreme. More intriguing--and more critical to China's future--is the effect that large local families are beginning to have on grass-roots politics: specifically, the village elections that are the country's only institutional form of political pluralism. Some Chinese-government officials regularly cite the deeply entrenched clan culture as one reason why Western-style Jeffersonian democracy cannot be transplanted wholesale to the People's Republic. In *Chinese Family and Kinship*, Hugh Baker observes, "In the West we see the family as an institution which exists in large part to provide an environment in which the individual can be conveniently raised and trained. But the emphasis in the traditional Chinese situation was reversed -- it was not the family which existed in order to support the individual, but the individual, but." Hsu concludes that "a man in China does not marry so much for his own benefit as for that of the family: to continue the family name; to provide descendants to keep up the ancestral worship, and to give a daughter-in-law to his mother to wait on her and be, in general, a daughter to her" (Barker, 1979, p. 42). In the end, the marital relationship was bound more by practical "love" filled only with duties...