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CHAPTER 5

Chinese Families

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1. INTRODUCTION AND DESCRIPTION

For most Chinese people, family (*jia* or *jiating*) is a simple as well as a complex concept. It is simple because everybody has a family (or families) and thus knows what it is. It is complex because different individuals have different explanations about families. Quite often, the answer to the question, "What is a family?" is "it depends. . . ." In traditional Chinese society, family was another name for a patriarchal clan, including not only its current members but also its ancestors enshrined and worshiped in clan halls, and a set of feudal orders and ethical codes among kinships, based on Confucian doctrines. In contemporary China, the meanings of family may vary from person to person. From the perspective of politicians (such as Mr. Yaobang Hu, former leader of the Chinese Communist Party), family, rather than the individual, is the "basic cell" of the society. In the view of administrators, a family is a household within which a group of people live at a given period of time for resident registration or census. Meanwhile, a rural peasant may think of his house, land, and livestock as part of his family, and family in the mind of an urban dweller may include the networks of direct kinship spreading outward in the city. In addition, family may mean mom, dad, and a playground to a little child; a small but warm, comfortable, and affective home to a young newly married couple; raising up children and supporting the aged to a middle-aged person; or all her children and grandchildren to a retired senior.

Despite these variations, Chinese academics have commonly accepted a more institutionalized concept of family—"[F]amily is an essential unit of social life, which is tied through relationships of marriage, blood, and adoption" (*Chinese Encyclopedia: Sociology*, 1991, p. 102)—and taken the "household" approach to operationally define family in their empirical studies. From a rigorous scientific point of view, by highlighting the instructional feature of family only, this definition is too general to cover other natures of family, such as biological (MacIver, 1937), cultural (Lowie, 1934), interactional (Burgess & Locke, 1960), and structural-functional (Parsons, 1955). Moreover, the "household" approach underrepresents the real cultural connotations of Chinese families, given that most Chinese people consider family as something more than a household. Therefore,

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I will adopt these family definitions with caution in this chapter by emphasizing the following: (1) the continuity and change of the cultural traditions of Chinese families, and (2) the diversity of contemporary Chinese families, particularly the significant differences between urban and rural families.

Background

China is a country of 1.3 billion people, 31 regional areas, and 56 nationalities. About 40% of Chinese people live in urban areas, while the remaining 60% live in rural areas, according to official statistics (National Bureau of Statistics, 2001a). As is shown in the 5th National Population Census data, in the year 2000, the average family size (persons per household) of China was 3.44 (p. 93) with a standard deviation of 0.39, representing a moderate variation among 31 provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities in the country. In general, families are smaller in metropolises and larger in rural and autonomous regions. For instance, the average family sizes in Beijing, Shanghai, and Tianjin were 2.91, 2.80, and 3.09, respectively, while the numbers in Tibet, Hainan, and Xinjiang were 4.77, 4.07, and 3.68, respectively.

Obviously, with this average size of families, the typical Western notion that most Chinese people live in joint or large families is thoroughly discredited (Cohen, 1978). Although the descriptions of large patriarchal families have long been a major focus of classical Chinese literature (e.g., *The Red Chamber* and *Four Generations Under One Roof;* Cao, 2002), large families with several generations under one roof have never been the dominant family pattern in Chinese history. By analyzing 71 available household registration records ranging from 2 A.D. to 1911, Chinese historians found that the average family size across Chinese history was 4.95, with a standard deviation of 1.61 (R. Pan, 2002). It appears that, throughout history, the dominant family size was four to seven people (55 times), accounting for 77.5% of the 71 records. "With a local community of 4 to 7 people," as Fei pointed out, "it is absolutely impossible to form those large families" (1981, pp. 85–86). Practically, maintaining large families needs certain social and economic conditions (Cohen, 1978). With a poor agricultural economy, high fertility and high mortality rates, low life expectancy, and frequent wars, pestilences, and famines, ancient China provided very limited ground for large families to develop, although favored by its cultural traditions.

As argued by Laslett and Wall (1972) and Hareven (1977), the industrialization and modernization processes served as a main engine for speeding up the process of downsizing of families, reducing the number of stem-families, as suggested by a functionalist modernization hypothesis (Christensen, 1964). In the past century, industrialization has changed the Chinese demographic structure dramatically. At the beginning of the 20th century, the rural population accounted for more than 90% of the total Chinese population. However, as more and more people moved into the industrial sectors, the rural proportion declined to 88.00% in 1953, 80.61% in 1980, 73.59% in 1990, and 63.78% in 2000 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2001a, p. 93). Accordingly, the average urban household size fell from 3.89 in 1985 to 3.50 in 1990, 3.23 in 1995, and 3.13 in 2000 (p. 305). Similar rural trends have taken place also, although they are not as dramatic. The average household size of rural residents decreased from 4.80 in 1990 to 4.48 in 1995 and 4.20 in 2000 (p. 322).

In addition to the processes of industrialization and modernization, the population control campaign launched in the1980s has also been responsible for the rapid shrinking of Chinese families. As China's population policy requires that couples have only one

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child, the national birth rate declined rapidly from 22.28 in 1982 to 15.23 in 1999 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2001a, p. 91). Given the fact that the one-child policy was more successful in urban areas than in rural areas, the current birth rate is slightly lower in urban areas than in rural areas (13.18 compared with 16.13). As a result, the three-person families consisting of a father, a mother, and an only-child have become one of the major patterns of Chinese families, especially in urban areas. According to the Fourth National Census, these three-person families accounted for 23% of total Chinese families, 30% of urban families, and 20% of rural families (adopted from Y. Ma, Wang, Sheng, & Shinozaki, 1994).

Family studies conducted in recent decades confirmed that Chinese families have experienced a smooth transition to smaller and nuclear families. With data collected from 5,075 married women in Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, Nanjing, and Chengdu, the Five Cities' Marriage and Family Study was the first large-scale research project on Chinese families conducted since sociology as an academic discipline was reconstructed in China in the early 1980s (Y. Liu & Xüe, 1987). By investigating the patterns of respondents' original families at the time of their marriage, this study was able to trace the changes in family patterns since the 1930s. Findings from this study showed that the nuclear family had long been the dominant family pattern in Chinese cities, and its proportion increased gradually from 55.6% in or before the 1930s, to 57.9% in the 1960s, 67.1% in the 1970s, and 69.28% in the early 1980s (Five Cities' Marriage and Family Study Project, 1985, p. 484). The proportion of stem-families as the second major family pattern, however, remained roughly the same or decreased slightly across the last century, from 25.7% in the 1930s to 21.0% in the early 1980s (p. 484). Another study of 1,920 Beijing residents in the early 1990s (Y. Ma et al., 1994) presented similar findings: The proportion of nuclear families was 65.4%, while the proportion of stem-families was 20.3% (p. 100). As far as family patterns in rural areas are concerned, two large-scale social surveys conducted in the late 1980s revealed a trend similar to the one in urban areas. A study on current rural families in China collected data from over 7,000 rural families in 14 provinces across China, and showed that, from 1978 to 1986, the proportion of nuclear families increased from 64.4% to 68.7%, while the proportion of stem-families decreased from 25.8% to 19.7% (Y. Liu et al., 1993). Similarly, by surveying 2,799 rural families in six city suburbs and provinces, another project (J. Lei, Yang, & Cai, 1994) found that, during the same period of time, nuclear families increased from 69.3% to 74.1%, while stem-families decreased from 24.7% to 23.7% (p. 79).

As yet, Chinese cultural attitudes favor large families, although most Chinese people are actually living in separate, small households. This is not only reflected in Chinese literature, but also in ordinary peoples' ideas about family. As revealed by *A Study on Life and Consciousness of Contemporary Urban Families in China*, even though not necessarily living together, 40.4% of the respondents tended to consider their married children (son or daughter) as family members, 75.5% of them thought their parents or in-laws were family members, 23% of them reported their brothers or sisters as family members, and 16.9% of them included their grandchildren as family members (Y. Ma et al., 1994, p. 105). A large family is still an ideal, if not a reality, in contemporary Chinese society.

2. PAIRING UP

Traditionally, a marriage in China was based solely on "the command of parents and the

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good offices of a matchmaker," which emphasizes matching socioeconomic statuses between the two families. Thus, marriage is actually an issue of connecting the political, social, and economic resources between the two families, rather than a result of love and affection between the two married parties. In most cases, the married parties did not choose their spouses, and they were not supposed to meet each other until the wedding.

In contemporary China, however, the arranged marriage has become all but obsolete. According to the Five Cities' Marriage and Family Study (1985, p. 307), through the 50 years from the 1930s to the 1980s, the percentage of arranged marriages in urban China dropped off from 54.7% to 0.9%, and the percentage of married couples that were introduced by relatives decreased from 24.4% to 15.8%, while so-called free courtship, including married couples introduced by friends and by oneself, increased from 15.3% to 50.8% and from 4.99% to 32.8%, respectively. In addition to these historical trends, findings from a study on women's status in contemporary China revealed some diversity in mate selection between over 9,000 urban and rural respondents. While the percentages of absolute arranged marriages were very low in both urban and rural areas (1.09% and 2.01%, respectively), more urban mates were selected "by oneself" than rural (41.09% compared with 14.86%), while more rural mates were selected by the "introduction of parents and relatives" than urban (49.07% compared with 16.02%) (Institute of Population Studies, 1994, p. 99). As far as the final determination of the marriage is concerned, although the majority of marriage decisions in China were made "by myself with parent permission" (urban: 33.00%; rural: 23.77%) or "by myself with the permission from parents and parents-in-law" (urban: 58.86%; rural: 48.68%), rural respondents were more likely to report the decisions made "by parents with my agreement" (20.20%) than were urban respondents (3.17%) (p. 114). It seems that, compared with urban parents, rural parents still have more involvement and more power over their children's mate selection.

This women's status study also found that, instead of emphasizing the matching of socioeconomic statuses between the two families, in contemporary China more consideration has been given to mates' personal factors such as educational level, occupation, appearance, moral standing, and temperament. However, while the majority of respondents (50.29%) placed "moral standing" as the main consideration for their mate selection, urban respondents tended to give more weight to educational level (15.31%) and occupation (8.71%) than did rural respondents (3.72% and 3.08%), and male respondents were more likely to select their mates based on "appearance" (urban: 15.02%; rural: 26.94%) than were female respondents (urban: 6.60%; rural: 18.52%) (Institute of Population Studies, 1994, p. 123). This urban-rural difference reflects the reality that educational level and occupational prestige gradually become more important indicators of personal socioeconomic status in urban areas than in rural areas due to the rapid development of modern technologies in urban China.

China used to be a country that encouraged early marriage. Throughout the history of ancient China, the most common lawful age of marriage was 16 years old for boys and 14 years old for girls. During the period of the Republic of China (1912–1949), the lawful marriage age was raised to 18 for boys and 16 for girls, although early marriages were still very common at that time (P. Zhang, 1993). In 1950, the new republic's first marriage law raised the lawful marriage age to 20 for boys and 18 for girls, and the marriage law published in 1981 again raised the lawful marriage age to 22 for boys and 20 for girls. Along with legal enforcement, there have been developed governmental policies that

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strongly encourage "later marriage, and later childbirth" in the past 50 years in China. As a result, the average first marriage age in China has been increased substantially. According to official statistics, the average first marriage age of Chinese women has risen from 18.57 (urban: 19.16; rural: 18.44) in 1949, to 22.66 (urban: 24.93; rural: 22.07) in 1982 (Research Institute of All China Women's Federation and Research Office of Shanxi Provincial Women's Federation, 1991). In 1996, the average age of first marriage (for both men and women) in China was 24.02 ("The Age of First Marriage," 1998). Early marriages have largely been eliminated, though they have resurged somewhat since the 1980s in some poor rural and minority areas (R. Li, 1992; Yan & Shi, 1995; P. Zhang, 1993) due to the loosening of social control resulting from the dissolution of the commune system.

The marriage ceremony was one of the most important ceremonies in traditional Chinese society. Until the end of the Qing Dynasty (1911), China had practiced the civil marriage ceremony system. In the period of the Republic of China, both the civil marriage ceremony system and the marriage registration system were applied (Tao & Ming, 1994). Since 1949, the marriage registration system has become the major practice in Chinese marriage. In addition to official registration, the most common marriage ceremony in contemporary Chinese civil society is the wedding dinner party, where relatives and friends are invited to celebrate and recognize the marriage. The size of the wedding party is dependent on the social and economic status of the marriage couple and their families. Since the 1990s, there has been a growing concern about the rapidly increasing cost of marriage in China, including the expenses of purchasing furniture, clothes, and a wedding party. A survey conducted by the Zero Point Survey Company showed that in Chinese metropolises such as Beijing, Shanghai, Wuhan, and Guanzhou, the average expense of marriage increased from 161.43 RMB Yuan in the 1930s and 1940s, to 1,282.71 RMB Yuan in the 1970s, 5,486.51 RMB Yuan in the 1980s, and 21,082 RMB Yuan in the 1990s ("The Match of Wedding," 1997). This survey also reported that more marriage expenses were paid by married parties themselves (44%) and less of them were supported by parents (31%). Other studies conducted in Tianjin (Hao & Wang, 1994), Shanghai (Luo, 1992), and Chengdu (H. Ma, 1997) revealed a similar trend of increase in marriage expenses. The cost of a new marriage has risen rapidly in recent years, according to official reports. The current average cost for a young couple's wedding in Shanghai is 150,000 RMB Yuan (US$18,000), excluding the cost of an apartment ("Wedding Costs on the Rise in Shanghai," 2002). In general, the increase in marriage expenses, on one hand, reflects the growth in people's living standards. On the other hand, the sense of competition in marriage cost often makes a young couple spend most of their and their parents' savings at the beginning of the marriage and may cause potential troubles for their future family lives.

To some of the young couples, marriage means the beginning of a new family household, while for others it is just an addition to their parents' family households. The study on women's status in contemporary China (Institute of Population Studies, 1994, p. 107) presented dramatic differences in residential status at marriage between urban and rural wives. While a majority (58.39%) of urban wives lived alone with their husband, only 27.91% of rural wives did so. In contrast, 65.40% of rural wives lived in their parents-in-law's home, while only 31.67% of urban wives did so. It appears that urban couples tend to be more independent after marriage than are rural couples, and the patriarchal family norm is still stronger in rural areas than in urban areas. However, this is only

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partially true. Many living arrangements may, in fact, be made under some practical considerations. For instance, the overcrowded housing conditions in large cities often force young couples to live apart from their parents if they can find their own houses, while the same reason may force others to crowd into their parents' home for a period of time until they find somewhere to stay. In rural areas, because family properties such as land, productive materials, houses, and livestock belong to all family members, living apart from the parents' home means separating family properties and will eventually weaken the family's productive capabilities. Thus, the married sons (along with their wives and children) normally stay with their parents for a period of time until something (e.g., the death of parents, major family conflicts, employment mobility of some members, etc.) happens in the family that forces them to separate (Z. Liu, 1996). Although most married couples will have their own houses near their parents' homes, and they may also officially be registered as individual households, they do not normally consider themselves as separated from parents' families.

3. FERTILITY AND SOCIALIZATION

China has experienced a remarkable transition from a country with high fertility, high infant mortality, and low life expectancy to a country with low fertility, low infant mortality, and high life expectancy over the past 50 years. These trends can be attributed to the development of the social economy, the popularization of modern techniques of maternal and child hygiene, the viability of reliable contraception, and the enforcement of government policies and legislation related to population control. Until the end of the 1940s, China held a gross fertility rate of 5.813, an infant mortality rate around 20%, and a life expectancy of 34 years (29.8 years for men and 38.3 years for women). The same indexes have been changed dramatically since the 1950s, to 1.9, 3.2%, and 70.1 years in 1999, respectively (Research Institute of All China Women's Federation and Research Office of Shanxi Provincial Women's Federation, 1991). A direct consequence of these trends in the Chinese population is the transition from high birth rates, high death rates, and high natural growth rates to low birth rates, low death rates, and low natural growth rates.

It is widely recognized that the well-known one-child policy has played a critical role in the dramatic decline of population growth in China, along with other factors. Although the championing of population control began as early as 1962 in China, its impact was not substantial until the one child per couple policy became fully operational in the early 1980s (Kallgren, 1985; Wolf, 1986). The policy was enforced mainly through administrative channels and work units, resulting in a great diversity in actual practices of implementing the policy among provinces, cities, and work units (The Research Project on the Efficiency of Implementing Family Planning in China, 1996). The amount of penalties for extra births and rewards for couples with one child has varied greatly from one area to another (G. Feng & Hao, 1992). In general, the one-child policy has been implemented more successfully in urban areas than in rural areas, and in minority areas even more (Bianco, 1981; X. Chen, 1985; Poston & Gu, 1984), with the result of reducing the population by an estimated total of 250 million at the end of the last century. The population represented by only-children climbed to 50 million in the early 1990s, accounting for one-fourth of the Chinese population aged 0 to 9, according to the 1990 census data. In 1995, about 95% of the preschool children in urban China, more than 90% of children in kindergartens, and 60% of the university freshmen

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were from only-child families. One negative outcome of the policy results from the Chinese preference for male children over female children. Consequently a large number of female children have been abandoned or gone unregistered (Ching & Penny, 1999). In the year 2002, China published its first law of family planning, and birth control was for the first time put into legislation.

The potential implications of the one-child policy for family life are significant. The policy has reduced the size of Chinese families. Another long-term consequence of this policy has been the formation of a 4-2-1 pattern of kinship in China (Sheng, 1992). That is, in the foreseeable future, a child's kinship would include only his or her parents and grandparents without any other relatives such as brothers, sisters, nephews, or cousins. It also means that a couple would have to support or care for two, four, or even six older couples as well as their own child without support from other relatives. In addition, the one-child policy also creates a generation of "little emperors," children who have not had to share with siblings the attention of their parents and grandparents. With the expectation of succession of family lines and of support for later life, parents and grandparents tend to devote a great deal of their resources to their only-child or grandchild. This provides an unprecedented and advanced developmental opportunity for the new only-child generation. However, these children could be easily spoiled to the point of selfishness and self-centeredness, with little sense of family obligation and expectation of caring for others (K. Chen, 1986; "China's Lifestyle Choice," 2001; Huang, 1992; Ji, Jiao, & Ring, 1993; Jiao, Ji, & Ring, 1986, 1996; Wan, Fan, & Lin, 1994; Wan, Fan, Lin, & Jing, 1994).

Chinese parents, who are deeply influenced by the Confucian tradition, consider education as the major means of socializing young children and have high expectations for their children's academic achievement. Over the past 50 years, the Chinese education system has been expanded substantially. In 1950, there were only 193 universities/colleges, 5,123 secondary schools, 384,000 primary schools, and 1,799 kindergartens (similar to preschools in Western society) in China. With a half-century's efforts, these numbers have increased to 1,041 universities/colleges, 93,935 secondary schools, 553,622 primary schools, and 175,836 kindergartens in 2000 (National Bureau of Statistics, 1999, 2001b). Now, about 45% of Chinese children aged 5 or younger are in kindergarten, about 60% of rural children are in 1-year preprimary school classes, 99% of school-age children are in schools, and almost all of them will go to secondary school (*China Education Yearbook*, 1998). The remaining 1% represents the children living in poor, remote, rural and mountain areas who are still struggling for educational opportunities. Although the one-child policy has taken some pressure off of the school system at the primary level, the needs for postsecondary opportunities are expanding for several reasons.

Higher education has long been very competitive in China. To send their children to universities or colleges so that they can eventually find good jobs, build up successful careers, and have a good future, Chinese parents start preparing their children from birth. Thus, the typical picture is that, as soon as the mother is pregnant, the father starts looking for fetus education tapes for his baby to hear. After the baby is born, the parents begin to follow the suggestions for toys for the baby and check his or her developmental situation all the time. When the baby is 2 or 3 years old, they begin to send him or her to kindergarten. The parents begin to think about early intellectual development. Some parents start to buy such things as musical instruments and intellectually

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stimulating toys, and look for tutorial classes for their children. After children are of school age, the parents have more worries. They pay money for their children to enter a good school. They help children with homework. They take care of everything in their children's daily lives to allow them to study and achieve. In general, only-children's parents try to do everything they can for their children, all the time.

However, compared with this great devotion, the techniques of parents training their children are critical. A survey by the Zhejiang Academy of Social Sciences (Zhu, 1992) shows that 55% of the parents consider the school achievement of their children as the most crucial thing for their families. More than one-half of the parents report that they are likely to beat their children if they fail an examination. Most (68%) of the parents want their children to obey whatever the parents ask of them. In addition, parents of only-children push very hard on their child to study. As one survey conducted by the *Beijing Daily* (Man, 1993) shows, besides studying on weekdays, about 80% of the interviewed pupils are asked by parents to take certain spare-time training classes during the weekend—including classes in math, writing, computer, piano, arts, and so on. One sixth-grade pupil said that on Sundays he had to take math class at 7:30 A.M., and then take his music and piano class at 10:15 A.M.; in the afternoon, he had to take his English class and orchestral music. At the end of the interview, he said that his biggest wish was to have a good sleep on Sunday. His situation is not unusual in urban China, according to this survey.

Chinese families now provide only-children with superior training, compared with the training of older generations. However, they push them toward intellectual achievements more than toward the development of appropriate social values and norms or the cultivation of initiative and creativity. Thus, one should not be surprised by the fact that the only-child generation seems more advanced in intellectual development but is more problematic in personality development. To have a better outcome in terms of individual development of the only-child generation in China, improvement of social and family environments must be seen as an essential step.

4. GENDER ROLES

Since ancient times, the Chinese have thought that the idyllic division of gender roles at home was so-called "men plough the fields and women weave" and "the husband sings and the wife follows." However, this was hardly a reality over the 2000 years of feudal society in China. From Confucianism to the feudal ethical codes developed in the following dynasties, Chinese ideology and ethics were built on patriarchy and man's domination and on the oppression and subordination of woman, characterized by the rules of "three obediences and four virtues" (obedience to father before marriage, to husband after marriage, and to son after husband's death; morality, proper speech, modest manner, and diligent work) (G. Liu & Zhao, 1994). The Confucianism ideology and ethics were not challenged until the beginning of the 20th century by the "May Fourth" movement of 1919, an anti-imperialist, antifeudal, political and cultural movement, and liberation of Chinese women has only been gradually reached in recent decades.

In contemporary Chinese society, women, by law, have the same rights as men in political, economic, educational, and social and family life. At the social level, pursuing equality between men and women has long been one of the main goals of the Communist Party and government. One of the remarkable changes in women's social status has

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been the rapidly increasing participation of women in the labor force since the 1950s. Until the end of the 1940s, the majority of Chinese women were excluded from the job market, and it was estimated that there were only 610,000 female workers in China, accounting for 7% of the total labor force (S. Lei, 1995). This proportion has increased to 40.5% in 1960 and 45.2% in 1999, according to World Bank statistics (National Bureau of Statistics, 2001b). Most women are currently working in agriculture (76.1%, compared with 69.1% for men), while another 13% of them are in the manufacturing industry, and the remaining 10.6% are in the service industry, based on the statistics of 1995 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2001b).

In terms of family life, women have gained freedom to choose a marriage, use their own surname, and inherit family properties, which could ensure them equality with their husbands at home. With universal full-time employment in urban areas, wives are able to be independent economically from their husbands and to become important contributors to family income. As shown in the study on women's status in contemporary China (Institute of Population Studies, 1994), although most wives had a slightly lower income than their husbands, working wives shared equally or had even more power over family matters. In terms of economic control, 76.25% of the respondents reported, "husband and wife control and arrange the income together," whereas 10.35% of them reported "wife controls the income," and only 3.79% of them reported "husband controls the income." Also, more sharing was found in decision making about consumer goods, helping children with their education, employment, and mate selection.

Compared with the sharing of family decision making, however, there is more gender segregation between wife and husband in doing housework. Wives seem to dominate more in tasks such as purchasing food and cooking (65.73%, compared with 17.51% of husbands), shopping (66.06%, compared with 20.48% of husbands), washing clothes (80.23%, compared with 9.95% of husbands), cleaning rooms (73.63%, compared with 13.38% of husbands), and taking care of children (54.72%, compared with 6.40% of husbands). Husbands are more likely to handle such heavy jobs as purchasing coal and changing gas tanks (for cooking) (64.22%, compared with 5.53% of wives) and purchasing grain (65.58%, compared with 21.72% of wives). Another study (Y. Ma, Liu, Sheng, & Meng, 1992) on working mothers of 2,000 kindergartners in Beijing, Shanghai, and Xian revealed similar findings of gender roles in Chinese cities. By sharing power in family decision making, wives have more control in managing the family economy (29.4%, compared with 9.4% of husbands) and saving and investment (18.1%, compared with 8.5% of husbands).

It appears that current gender roles of urban Chinese couples are preconditioned by the universal employment policy and characterized by the increase of women's power in family decision making. However, women's liberation has never been without a price—the dual burden of employment and family life (Stockman, Bonney, & Sheng, 1995). The fact is that urban wives have to do the major domestic labor while they are engaged in full-time employment outside the home. As the society has been making the transition from a socialist planned economy to a capitalist market economy since the 1980s, jobs have become more competitive and unstable, and women have become the main targets (70%) for layoffs or early retirement (Zhong, 1994). Thus, concerns about women's gender roles inside and outside families have long been and continue to be a hot topic for debate in Chinese public and academic circles (Tan, 1995).

In rural China, there is no clear distinction between whether or not a person is employed,

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because at some level all work contributes to the overall economic effort. Because the old collective economy of the people's commune was replaced by the economy of contracted farmers in the 1980s, productive activity became a private matter of individual families. The only distinction in agricultural activities, therefore, is working on the land and working at home. According to the study on women's status in contemporary China (Institute of Population Studies, 1994), 71.08% of rural husbands (compared with 30.15% of wives) were working mainly on the land, while 69.87% of wives (compared with 7.80% of husbands) were working mainly at home. Even though working in different areas, a majority of husbands (84.83%) and wives (87.81%) contributed all of their income to their families. Rural husbands are mainly responsible for the land, including plowing, seeding, fertilizing, irrigating, and harvesting. Rural wives take the major responsibilities of housework, compared with their husbands. These include cooking, washing, taking care of children, feeding chickens and ducks, feeding pigs, and purchasing daily necessities in town. With this gender division of labor, rural couples also seem to share in family decision making in such matters as house building, purchasing household durable consumer goods, when to have a baby, when to start the children's education, and purchasing betrothal gifts or dowry for daughters.

In recent years, more and more rural migrants have gone to urban areas to look for jobs. This occupational migration has created a large number of living apart together (LAT) families in rural China. Normally, the husbands and older children (both sons and daughters) work temporarily in construction, service, and light industries in nearby towns and cities to bring cash back to support their families, while women and seniors stay on the land. There has been an emerging pattern of gender roles among rural families; that is, "husband works in town and wife plows in the field." Some researchers (e.g., Meng, 1995) suggest that this pattern provides women more opportunities to control productive activities (because of the absence of husbands); this, in turn, raises women's sense of self-esteem and independence. However, I would argue that it is a greater challenge for women to handle both land work and household tasks than it is an opportunity for independence.

5. MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS

Although major family surveys conducted in past decades frequently reported that the majority of Chinese couples considered their marital lives as happy, there has always been a question about the criterion of happiness that people are applying. Similarly to people in other societies, Chinese husbands, as "main breadwinners," are expected to bring more money home, and Chinese wives, while also working outside the home, are supposed to perform as a "good wife and loving mother." However, ideas regarding how good an income a man should gain to be a good husband and how nice a woman should be to be a good wife and mother vary significantly from one respondent to another. Thus, having a mutual understanding, care, and adjustment between wife and husband is critical for healthy marital relationships.

Available research data on marital relationships (Institute of Population Studies, 1994) showed that in urban areas 20.85% of wives and 31.12% of husbands expected their spouses to improve mutual understanding, and 18.32% of wives and 15.94% of husbands wanted their spouse to show more consideration and care. The same data for rural couples are 17.69% (of wives) and 23.37% (of husbands) for the former, and 11.28% (of wives) and 12.92% (of husbands) for the later. This implies that

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about two of every five Chinese couples have problems in their mutual understanding and mutual caring for each other.

These problems may be seen as a side effect of current expectations of gender roles, which can lead both wives and husbands into a vicious circle of unhappy relationships. That is, the more the husband and wife focus on their gender roles, the more they demand understanding and caring from each other, but the less they are actually able to give them to each other. As shown in a study of 2,170 couples in Beijing (J. Liu, 1991), mutual understanding and caring were highly correlated with marital satisfaction ($r = 0.37$), and lack of mutual understanding and caring was a major reason for dissatisfaction in conjugal relationships. It was suggested by some scholars (e.g., Wu, 1995; Stockman et al., 1995) that traditional gender role expectations need to be replaced by some more equalitarian, flexible, and realistic expectations for roles of husband and wife, to balance the contradictions between work and family life.

Need of sexuality is an important part of mutual understanding and caring. In general, sexual and affectionate expression and intimacy are considered basic characteristics of a successful marriage (Michael, Gagnon, Laumann, & Kolata, 1994). Until recent decades, sexuality had been a closely guarded secret of married couples, and most Chinese people felt ashamed to talk openly of sexuality. Sex education was poorly developed before the 1990s in China, the assumption being that people learn sexual behavior by themselves. Recognized as an important turning point, the so-called China Kinsey report (cf. Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948) was the first large-scale survey on sexuality and was conducted by D. Liu (1992). He collected information on sexual perceptions and behaviors from 23,000 respondents across 15 provinces in China. According to this study, Chinese husbands initiated sexual behavior and wives were likely to be more passive. For the question "Who usually initiates sexual intercourse?," 63.7% of husbands and 71.9% of wives reported "husband initiates." The percentages answering "both (wife and husband) initiate together" were 20.8% for husbands and 15.4% for wives. Although 55.5% of urban couples and 66.6% of rural couples were "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with their sexual life, the credibility of these satisfaction rates are open to question, given the fact of men's normative domination in sexual behavior in China. As reported in a study conducted in northeast China in the 1980s, among 1,000 divorced couples, 47% of husbands and 17% of wives listed an "unharmonious sexual life" as a primary reason for the divorce. Similarly, another analysis of divorce cases in Shanghai in 1983 reported that 23% were caused by unharmonious sexual life. Available evidence also showed that an unharmonious sex life reduced the likelihood of pregnancy and quite often led to marital conflicts. By analyzing more than 40,000 clients of a pregnancy consultation service over 5 years, a study in the early 1990s reported that about a quarter of the sterility cases resulted from problems in sexual behaviors (data adapted from R. Pan, 2002).

Effective communication between husband and wife is another way to increase mutual understanding and caring. It includes spending time together, frequently exchanging ideas, caring about spouse's feelings, and so on. By collecting information from 1,985 married couples in Beijing, J. Liu's study (1991) reported that about 67.5% of couples frequently spend leisure time together, about 58% of them frequently exchange ideas, and about 80% of them care about each other's feelings. This study also showed significant correlations between a couple's communication and their marital satisfaction. G. Zhang, Lei, and Liang's study (1996) suggested that

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efficient communication between wife and husband was heavily influenced by their perception of gender roles. Traditional views of gender roles were negatively associated with frequent communication ($\beta = -.169$), whereas modern views on gender roles tended to increase communication between wife and husband ($\beta = 0.035$).

Mutual understanding and caring may also be expressed in arrangements such as sharing housework and pursuing a more egalitarian power structure at home. As discussed previously, with certain kinds of specialization, Chinese husbands are generally willing to share some household tasks and powers in family decision making with their wives. Available evidence shows that sharing housework and family power equally is an important factor for marital satisfaction, especially for dual-employment couples. According to J. Liu's study (1991), among the three patterns of housework division—wife does more, husband does more, and couple equally shares—the proportions of both wife and husband satisfied with marriage are 27%, 30%, and 36%, respectively. Equally sharing couples, therefore, had higher satisfaction rates than couples in the other two patterns. Instead of husbands' dominant power in family decision making, a current concern focuses on a wife's power over her husband in some large Chinese cities such as Shanghai, Beijing, and Guangzhou. A study in Shanghai reported that wives tended to have more power than their husbands in managing the family economy (wife control: 30%; husband control: 7.5%) and on overall family decision making (wife control: 31.1%; husband control: 8.7%) (Xu, 1992). Wives in this emerging pattern of marital relationships were called "strong women" who tend to bring in more money and carry on more housework in their families. It appears that the traditional pattern of gender roles inside the family is being challenged.

6. FAMILY STRESSES AND VIOLENCE

Family life is never without stresses. Adapting and managing stresses properly leads the family to a new stage of life with a stronger set of ties. According to the study on women's status in contemporary China (Institute of Population Studies, 1994), slightly less than one-third of Chinese couples reported no stresses, and the others reported three main conflicts between wives and husbands in their family lives: children, housework, and family economy. About 44% of urban couples reported children's issues as the main reason for conflict, compared with 30% of wives and 3.5% of husbands in rural areas. About 12% of urban couples reported housework as their main reason for conflict, while 20% of wives and 17% of husbands did so in rural areas. About 4% of urban and 10% of rural couples reported family economy as the main reason for their arguments.

To some couples, the birth of a new baby means love and happiness, while to others, it means burden and responsibilities. A survey of parents of newborn babies showed that by the time husbands heard the news of their wives' pregnancies, 52.8% of them felt their lives coming into a new turning point, 22.8% of them felt their burden becoming heavier, 18.8% of them felt very happy, and 4.1% of them felt they were unprepared. Because of the one-child policy, many Chinese families have only one child, especially in urban areas. The only-child naturally becomes the focus of the family, influencing the couple's daily interaction, communication, division of housework, and daily life arrangements. Misunderstandings and disagreements among family members regarding children may become a source of family stresses. Based on this survey, the conflicts between urban wives and husbands around children's problems increase as the child grows older and

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decrease as the child becomes a young adult. In rural areas, because wives take the major responsibility of raising children, they reported many more conflicts about children than their husbands. Another feature of rural couples is the low percentage of both wives and husbands who report the child(ren) as the main reason for conflicts: 1.14%, compared with 32.64% of urban couples.

Issues about housework are another important source of stress, especially for husbands and wives who both work full time outside the home. The problem includes conflicts between wife and husband on who should do what and how to do it. The same study (Institute of Population Studies, 1994) also reported that in the first few years of marriage, urban couples met greater challenges on housework. After this period of time, conflicts around housework seemed to decrease. In rural areas, conflicts around housework seemed consistently low across the life span. However, the proportions of rural wives and husbands who perceived housework as a major source of conflict were very low, indicating that normative patriarchy kept complaints from being expressed.

The family economy seemed less likely to be a source of stress for urban couples (wife: 3.45%; husband: 3.91%) than for rural couples (wife: 9.09%; husband: 9.85%), according to this survey. This may simply be because urban residents are generally better off than rural residents in terms of family income. Besides this factor, there have been some social changes in the past years in both urban and rural China that may create stresses for families and require adjustment between wives and husbands. In urban areas, due to widespread layoffs in state-owned businesses (where most urban residents worked), thousands of urban families have faced challenges regarding their economic well-being. Instead of continuously waiting and looking for jobs in state-owned business, about 23% of urban families are taking a "one family, two (employment) systems" approach. That is, one person keeps working in a state-owned business and the other one looks for a job in private enterprise (Nan & He, 1997). The advantage of this approach is that families can benefit both from state-owned businesses for their stability of employment and from private businesses for their higher salaries. In rural areas, as the prices of agricultural products remain low in China, more and more rural husbands go to nearby cities to look for jobs, while their wives remain on the land and take care of homes and farms. This strategy functions in overcoming some of the economic stresses on rural families, but may create other tensions between wife and husband because of long-term separation.

Family violence may be seen as an extreme solution to family stresses. Although reports about family violence often appear in the mass media, very little serious scientific research has been done on this in China. Jun's survey (1994) in some coastal cities revealed that 80% of the surveyed families had at least one experience of family violence, 40% of them serious or very serious violence, including couples fighting with each other, physical abuse of wife (or husband), and the beating of children. The cases of wife abuse accounted for about 50% of family violence. In another survey conducted by the Beijing Marriage and Family Association (Y. Li, 1995), 21.3% of husbands reported having beaten their wives at least once, and 15.2% of wives reported having beaten their husbands at least once. These studies suggested that marital violence in China happens in a great proportion of families.

Besides marital violence, child abuse is another widespread problem in China. A survey conducted by the Zhejiang Academy of Social Sciences (Zhu, 1992) revealed that more than one-half of the parents of young children reported that they were likely to beat their children if they were being lazy in

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their studies or failed an examination, and 68% of the parents reported they used force to make their children obey whatever the parents said. In addition to general abuse, in rural areas many girls and disabled boys, if not aborted, face orphanages or second-class lives concealed from the world and with reduced chances of schooling and healthcare because of the widespread preference for boys and the demands of labor on the land (Ching & Penny, 1999).

One of the important reasons for widespread family violence in China is the acceptance of traditional cultural and civic values. In traditional China, people believed that "a family should have rules, as a country should have laws." Deeply rooted in Confucian ethics, these family rules set up standards for regulating family members' behaviors (R. Wang, Li, & Shao, 1993). Punishment would be applied in the case of any family member breaking these rules. Therefore, physical abuse was considered a family matter rather than a public issue. The victims of family violence usually felt hesitant to report these cases because of the widely accepted idea, "don't give publicity to scandals of your family." The public tends to avoid becoming involved in family conflicts even when they are aware of the violence. As shown in a study on marital violence, in only 15% of marital violence cases was there outside intervention (Jun, 1994). Physical punishment of a child is commonly recognized as a way of discipline, "a filial son comes under sticks." Abusive parents have not been seen as criminals but as responsible. Some parents even give schoolteachers the right to punish their children in case they perform badly in school. Although there are a number of laws developed in recent years against family violence, the general public still holds the idea, "don't bother to advise a fighting couple, because they will get along and have dinner together soon." It seems that changing attitudes and behaviors around the issue of family violence will need a long-term campaign in China.

7. DIVORCE, SEPARATION, AND REMARRIAGE

In traditional China, divorce and remarriage were men's privileges and monopoly, characterized by the joint enforcement of feudal ethics and laws. The historic ethics about divorce were built on the beliefs that "husband is the sky while wife is the land" and "the land has no reason to leave the sky away." According to *Baihutong: Marriage,* "even if husband is bad, wife is not allowed to divorce him." Associated with these moral principles, feudalist marriage laws prohibited women's rights to divorce and separate. For instance, *Tang's Statute: Family and Marriage* (Tang Dynasty: 618–907 A.D.) stipulated the following: "wife who leaves without the permission of husband, two years' imprisonment; who, as a result, remarries, double imprisonment." In contrast, a man can legally have several wives and divorce them at any time without any penalty, but only if he follows certain legal procedures or civil customs. The most important divorce pattern that existed in China for thousands of years was the so-called *chuqi* (divorces wife), which allowed a man to divorce his wife for any of the following seven reasons: disobeying parents, no sons, licentiousness, jealousy, foul disease, talkativeness, and stealing (Tao & Ming, 1994). With only a few exceptions (e.g., mourned husband's brother/sister for 3 years, husband is richer now than at the time of his wedding, and the wife has no one to rely on after divorce; *Tang's Statute: Family and Marriage*), men have had the absolute right of divorce.

In addition, the Confucian view of chastity required women to "marry only one man for life-long." Thus, after the divorce or death of a husband, women were not encouraged

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to get remarried, even when they were in financial difficulties. The phrases "good woman does not serve two husbands" and "hungering (because of losing support from husband) is a small thing but losing chastity is a big thing" were the moral models set for widows at that time. Although feudal laws did not prohibit the remarriage of ordinary women (but did prohibit wives of officials from remarrying), they, to a certain extent, served as enforcement of the Confucian ethic against women's remarriage. For instance, according to Ming Comprehensive Law (1358–1644 A.D.), "civil widows, whose husband died 30 years ago and who were over 50 years old without remarriage, will be rewarded with a silk banner as praise, and released their families from corvée." In practice, the association of laws and ethics prevented a large number of women from remarriage for thousands of years in China.

Contemporary Chinese women have gained equal rights with men for divorce and remarriage. However, because China had long practiced a fault system of divorce, until the end of the 1970s, an actual divorce was rarely approved without long-term intervention and mediation by work units, and with complex court trials aimed at identifying the guilty party. This set of barriers explains why China's divorce rates were so astonishingly low at that time, accounting for only 2% of all marriages (adapted from Nass & McDonald, 1982). A substantial change in the Chinese divorce system occurred in 1980, marked by the publication of the new marriage law, which replaced the fault system with a no-fault system by adding "emotion come to rupture" as a key reason for no-fault divorce and by developing effective divorce registration agencies.

As a result of this amendment to marriage law and other social changes caused by the introduction of a market economy (e.g., the growing awareness of independence among women, increasing social interaction, the acceleration of employment mobility, the introduction of Western values toward marriage and divorce, etc.), China's divorce rates have increased dramatically in recent decades (H. Zhang & Tong, 1997). According to official statistics (Ministry of Civil Affairs of China, 2002), the crude divorce rate (number of divorces vs. number of population) increased from 0.35% in 1978 to 1.2% in 1988, and to 1.98% in 2001. The increment of general divorce rates (number of divorced couples vs. number of new married couples) was even more remarkable: from 4.76% in 1978 to 7.28% in 1988, and to 15.53% in 2001. In other words, there was one divorce for every six new marriages in 2001, compared with one divorce in 20 new marriages 20 years ago. In general, urban divorce rates are much higher than those of rural areas. For instance, the divorce rates of Beijing and Shanghai were 34.87% and 33.83%, respectively, in 2001, while the rates in Henan, Anhui, and Shandong were 11.10%, 7.80%, and 9.10%, respectively.

There have been two well-documented features of current divorce in China (Xu, 1994; P. Zhang, 1995). One is the increasing percentage of court cases and decreasing percentage of administrative registration cases. This trend reflects a wilder awareness of using legal means to protect one's rights in marital dissolution. Another trend of current divorce is that about 70% of all divorce cases were initiated by females, showing the increase in women's awareness of independence and control over their marital life (Y. Liu, Wang, & Hao, 1992; Xu, 1994). It seems that, unlike before, in most cases, women divorce their husbands rather than being divorced by their husbands. Data on the causes of individual divorces vary from one study to another. By analyzing available studies, P. Zhang (1995) generalized some common reasons leading to divorce in China, including the following: (1) conflicts in character traits between wife and

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husband, (2) wife abuse, (3) long-term conflicts on domestic tasks (e.g., controlling family finance, division of housework, educating children, etc.), (4) out-of-marriage affairs, (5) husband's failure to support the family, (6) husband's bad habits or crime, (7) disharmony in sexuality, (8) disharmony with other family members, and (9) husband's discrimination.

Accompanying the increase of divorce rates has been the growth of remarriage rates since the 1980s. According to official statistics (Ministry of Civil Affairs of China, 2002; Z. Wang, 1999), the total numbers of remarriage registration have increased from about 500,000 in 1985 to 1.12 million in 2001. Accordingly, the proportion of remarriages in total marriage registrations has increased from 3% in 1980 to 14% in 2001. There were more remarriages in urban than in rural areas (e.g., Beijing: 29.93%; Shanghai: 28.84%; Tianjin: 25.69%, in comparison to Anhui: 5.26%; Henan: 9.02%; Guizhou: 6.08%), based on the statistics of 2001. Available data also show that divorced women are more likely to get remarried (3 out of 4) than are divorced men (1 out of 3) (P. Zhang, 1995).

Although divorce and remarriage have been widely accepted by Chinese society, it is more difficult for senior citizens to get remarried than for the younger generations. There have been two major obstacles to remarriage of the elderly: the influence of traditional ethics and the opposition of adult children (Lu, 1994; S. Ma, 1991; Q. Wang, 1988). Many female elderly refuse to get remarried because of the traditional idea of "being faithful to one's husband to the end." Many others feel shame to be remarried because of the belief that courtship and sexuality are something belonging to young people; thus, remarriage causes a senior to lose face with children, relatives, and neighbors. Many adult children oppose having their parents remarried because they are afraid to be ridiculed for not taking filial responsibility seriously. Many others oppose it because of inheritance. Among remarried senior families, conflicts between two sides of children and relatives on various family issues often push the new marriages toward dissolution.

8. KINSHIP

In traditional Chinese society, kinship was included in the patriarchal clan system—a social group held together through blood and geological relationships and feudal ethics and functioning as a social control and management agency in rural areas. Usually, there were one to several clans in each village, each of which was titled by the same family name and might include several kinship groups. Tao and Ming (1994) outlined three important characteristics of traditional Chinese kinship. First, it placed patriarchal clan relatives in the superlative position above all kinship ties; second, it favored father's kinship and neglected mother's kinship, distinguished as direct and indirect relatives; third, it emphasized the ethical codes among relatives, which focused on the absolute authority of the older and the responsibilities of the younger. In general, kinship includes clan relatives, outside relatives, and wife's relatives. Clan relatives are the most significant, including parents, brothers and sisters, and wives, along the patriarchal line. Outside kinship refers to the relatives of the mother's clan, including mother's parents, brothers and sisters, and nephews and nieces. The wife's relatives are mainly the wife's parents, brothers, and sisters (Tao & Ming, 1994).

The socialist revolution marked by the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 fundamentally destroyed the feudal clan system in China through land reform and socialist industrialization. Then,

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the political power of the clan system in rural society was taken over by the new local and grassroots governmental agencies, such as people's communes, production brigades, and production teams. By gaining freedom from the feudalistic clan system, Chinese kinship abandoned its dominant patriarchal features and became more egalitarian between father's and mother's relatives.

In contemporary China, kinship performs some important functions in the household economy, mutual communication, and mutual support in people's family lives. By summarizing recent research findings, R. Pan (2002) generalized the following major functions of kinship in urban areas today: (1) economic exchanges; (2) daily life support; (3) care of elderly, children, and patients; (4) emergency services and life security; (5) communication and emotional support; and (6) services on important family events such as weddings and funerals.

Economic Exchanges and Transfers

Economic exchanges and transfers occur mainly between direct relatives (parents and children), including upward and downward flow of money and materials. In a family survey conducted in 27 provinces and cities in 1991, 64.5% of respondents reported supporting parents economically with an average of 30 Yuan per month, and 37% of them reported receiving economic support from their parents regularly (25 Yuan per month on average), plus some informal support such as paying rent, electricity, and phone (6%), eating at parents' home without payment (18.7%), often receiving materials from parents (25.5%), and receiving special payment from parents for important events (23.8%). In contrast, the economic support from indirect relatives took place only during such important family events as weddings, funerals, illness, and childbirth.

Daily Life Support

According to a survey of 181 families in Tianjin, to save time and costs, about 86% of adult children often go back to their parents' home for meals; most parents cohabiting with adult children often help children with daily household tasks; in return, adult children usually help their parents with such difficulties as buying heavy items, travel, and taking medication.

Care of Elderly, Children, and Patients

As reported in a study of 17 families with a hospital bed at home for elderly with chronic diseases, there was always kinship care and a support network in each family, including cohabiting members (2.31 per family) and separated members (5.06 per family), composed of adult children and grandchildren.

Meanwhile, the survey of 181 families in Tianjin reported that 20% of adult children sent their children to the grandparents' homes for daily or weekly care, with 12% of the childcare in the husband's parents' homes and 8% in the wife's parents' homes.

Emergency Services and Security

Kinship can also be a resource for emergency services and security, represented in disaster and emergency situations when kin provide help and support. In a survey of 27 provinces and cities, 19% of families reported that their relatives had helped each other to deal with emergency situations, and 4.6% of them felt that kinship gave security to their lives.

Communication and Emotional Support

Communication and emotional support were more common among kin than among other relationships. About 76.8% of the

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respondents in the survey reported having frequent communication and emotional support with their kin, according to the survey of 27 provinces and cities.

Services at Important Family Events

Services at important family events usually are time and labor jobs, and kinship members are normally the major source of such support. Twenty percent of the respondents in the survey reported experiences of providing these kinds of services for their relatives. (Preceding data are adapted from R. Pan, 2002).

Other Aspects of Kinship

In addition to these general functions, kinship has played an increasingly important role in productive activities in rural China since economic reform started in the 1980s. As the right of land use was assigned to individual families after the reform, production became a critical task for the survival of rural families. The demands of labor and cooperation during busy times have strengthened kinship ties and increased the importance of indirect kinship. A study of families in Tangdong village of Fujian province (Mai, 2002) revealed that, once there is need of support, people are most likely to ask close relatives for help before asking far relatives and friends. About 48% of financial support, 41% of help on public relation, 78% of labor support, and 42% of information support were from cousins of the father's side, while the percentages of these four supports received from cousins from the mother's side were 25%, 34%, 14%, and 29%, and from friends were 27%, 25%, 8%, and 29%. These supports will, on one hand, benefit rural families in their productive activities. On the other hand, they encourage the reemerging of the old clan system in rural China, given the current loosening of governmental control of rural areas as the result of the weakening of the commune system (Mai, 2002).

The separation and inheritance of family property is another aspect of the kinship system. Traditional Chinese culture placed the inheritance of status first and the inheritance of property second. Family properties, including both movable and unmovable, belonged to all family members, and the head of a family had only the right of using the properties. Thus, if no family member was separated until the parents died, there was no such thing as private property for parents to give to a specific individual. In terms of inheritance, traditional Chinese society emphasized inheritance by law more than inheritance by will, reflecting the intervention of government and feudal ethics in inheritance behaviors (Tao & Ming, 1994). In general, traditional inheritance law and ethics had two important principles. First, family properties were only divided and inherited along patriarchal lines, normally by brothers and their sons. Second, women had no inheritance rights from their parents or their parents-in-law.

In contemporary China, these feudal laws and ethics were abandoned. The marriage law published in 1950 stated, "Husband and wife have right of mutual inheritance." The new inheritance law published in 1985 declared, "male and female have equal right of inheritance" and "spouse, children, parents, brother and sister" all have rights to inheritance. Along with these law enforcements, there have been great changes in people's values and practices of inheritance. By analyzing the data from the study on women's status in contemporary China, Sun (1996) pointed out three characteristics of inheritance in China. First, the traditional idea of male-only inheritance has weakened. As evidence, about 40% of urban respondents and 27% of rural respondents agreed with the idea of dividing family property equally between sons and daughters. Second, more

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people tended to relate inheritance to aged support (properties "should go to whom are willing to take more responsibilities for aged parents": 50% of urban and 35% of rural respondents). Third, rural respondents were more traditional than urban respondents. For instance, 36.63% of rural respondents agreed with "mainly give to sons," while only 6.8% of urban respondents did so.

In practice, urban residents are likely to use the new laws to protect their rights of inheritance because of their higher level of education and their easier access to legal consultants and court services in cities. In rural areas, where the general education levels are lower and lawsuits and consultants are not often available, local custom and traditional ethics still play important roles in inheritance. According to Z. Liu's study (1996) in Xinleitou village, Hebei province, the division and inheritance of family properties were still based mainly on customs and traditions, even though the new law was 10 years old. As Z. Liu described, once married adult children decide to be separate from their parents, family property has to be divided among sons (not daughters). There normally was a ceremony held during the slack season, when seniors of the clan, close relatives, or officials of the village were invited as witnesses. Starting from the oldest son, sons in turn picked up their own part of family property through drawing lots that were carefully discussed among relatives and were supposed to be equal. Then, they had to sign a formal lease for this division, and witnesses had to sign as well.

Commonly, the leases of this village contained two major parts: (1) the detailed division of family properties including house, house-base, saving, production materials (land, machines, and livestock), and debts; (2) special agreements such as the dowry for unmarried daughters, fees for caring for the disabled or for schooling of younger family members, the temporary property of parents and its inheritance after parents' death, the ways of supporting aged parents (including daily life, housing, medications, funerals, etc.), and so on. To villagers, this lease is one of the most important law documents, which should be kept very carefully and passed from generation to generation (Z. Liu, 1996).

9. AGING AND DEATH

In recent decades, the Chinese population has accelerated its pace toward becoming an aging society. According to official statistics, the proportion of Chinese people aged 65 years old or above increased from 4.41% in 1953 to 6.96% in 2000, close to the definition of an aging society (7% or above). Actually, some developed Chinese cities and provinces, such as Shanghai (11.53%), Beijing (8.36%), Tianjin (8.33%), Jiangsu (8.76%), Zhejiang (8.84%), and Chongqing (7.90%) have already gone far beyond this international standard for an aging society (National Bureau of Statistics, 2001a). This trend is expected to be more significant in the foreseeable future, reaching an overall aged proportion of 16.8% by 2020 (United Nations, 2003).

Along with this aging trend, there has been an increasing concern about old people's lives, both inside and outside families, given that the rapid industrialization, modernization, and other socioeconomic changes in the past decades have challenged the traditional values and practices for later life and for family support to the aged. Deeply rooted in the traditional agriculture economy, Chinese culture favored the aged for their political and economic power, their specialized knowledge, and their experiences of life. Filial piety, as one of the important family norms, has dominated Chinese families for thousands of years. The elderly expect to be spiritually respected and materially supported by their offspring, and

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family has long been the major resource for supporting the aged in Chinese society. However, in recent decades we have seen: (1) the shrinking pool of family support to the aged caused by the implementation of the one-child policy and by the speeding up of occupational mobility; (2) the devaluation of old techniques and skills because of the innovation of new technology and the development of new industries; (3) the instability of pensions and employment-based welfare benefits in urban areas, caused by the transition from the socialist planned economy to a market economy; and (4) the loss of collective welfare benefits for elderly in rural areas, resulting from the dissolution of the commune-based welfare system. Overall, we have seen an increase in the relative poverty of the aged population and an underdevelopment of the social welfare system for the aged in China (Tang, 2002; "What Shall We Do About Supporting 40 Million Old Women?," 2001).

Nevertheless, the majority of Chinese elderly are still living with their children, as reported by several national sample surveys (e.g., Hu & Ye, 1991). According to the *Survey of Chinese Aged Population*, in 1988, 82.2% of old people (aged 60 years old or above) were living in two- (29.2%), three- (50%), or four-generation (3%) families (Tian, Xiong, & Xiong, 1991). More specifically, the nine-city survey of old people (Hu & Ye, 1991) reported that, among 7,000 urban aged respondents, 17.6% of them were living in husband-wife families, 15.9% in nuclear families, 42.1% in stem-families, 7.2% in grandparents-grandchildren families, and 2.3% in extended families (Hu & Ye, 1991). Among those who were living with adult children, 67% were married sons staying at their parents' home, and 14% were married daughters staying with parents. It is noticeable that not all elderly cohabiting with their adult children were being supported or cared for by children. Instead, 28.3% of them lived together because married children did not have their own houses, 15.7% were helping married children with housework, and 4.4% of them were together because children needed financial help from them. While 44.8% of the elderly preferred to have married children living with them, another 35.1% of them would like to live separately, but close to their children's homes.

It appears that as coresidence continues to be the emotional core of support relationships between parents and adult offspring in mainland China, there are tendencies to live closer to and keep in frequent contact with each other even when not living together. As Unger (1993, p. 40) argues, Chinese "parents who live apart from their married children still tend to maintain very close mutual contact, more than would be the norm in most Western societies." A commonly held ideal in China for the distance between parents and children is "a distance that keeps a soup warm." Bian, Logan, and Bian's study (1998) in Shanghai and Tianjin found that 9% of non-coresident children live in the same neighborhood (3 minutes walk) as the parents, and 48% live within at least the same district (20 minutes walk). The usual frequency of intergenerational communication is that about 25% of parents have at least daily contact with their children, most parents (80%) see their children at least every week, and there is only a small difference between the contact with sons and daughters. According to this study, the intergenerational assistance flows still mainly upward rather than downward. About 55% of the parents reported receiving regular help from offspring, whereas about 25% of the children received regular help from parents. Similarly, the nine-city survey of old people (Hu & Ye, 1991) has shown that, while there was an upward flow of financial support (41%), there also was a flow of cash transfers (21%) from the older to the younger generations.

These studies have also revealed that the elderly were highly respected by their

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offspring (over 80%) and there were very few reporting no respect or abuse (Tian et al., 1991). In terms of the older generation's authority inside the family, urban elderly seem to have more power in the family economy than rural elderly (Tian et al., 1991). It appears that older people's economic power inside families is associated with their contribution to the family economy. The more income the elderly bring into the family, the more control the elderly have. Most urban elderly have their pensions to contribute to the family, whereas most rural elderly have no pension and make fewer contributions to productive activities after they become older, thus having less power over the family economy. Besides family economy, Chinese elderly also have a certain power in a variety of family issues. According to the nine-city survey of old people (Hu & Ye, 1991), 42% of urban elderly have decisive power over important family issues, and 43.2% of them have a word to say about those issues. Another 60% of urban elderly report playing a great role in family issues in general. A noticeable change in the family power of the elderly is that only 8.2% of respondents reported having decisive power over their children's marriage, and 10.8% reported having decisive power over children's studying and professional development.

According to the sampling survey on the Chinese aged population (Tian et al., 1991), 16.3% of Chinese elderly were in "very good" health in 1988, 28.3% were in "good" health, 27.9% were "just so-so," 17.6% were "worse," and 9.3% were "worst." In general, women were more likely to report a "worse" or "worst" condition than men, and urban elderly were more likely to report a "worse" or "worst" condition than rural elderly. However, this does not necessarily mean rural elderly have good nutrition (or proper food) and better medical conditions. Actually, rural elderly tend to have more serious problems with their medication than do urban elderly. While 68% of urban elderly reported "no problems" with medication, only 5.27% of rural elderly did so. The fact is that, without social welfare, almost all rural elderly (94.69%) have to pay all of their medication fees by themselves, while only 26.73% of urban elderly do so.

Malignant tumors, cerebrovascular disease, heart trouble, respiratory disease, and trauma and toxicosis were ranked in 2002 as the five major reasons for death of Chinese elderly, accounting for 83% of the total deaths (National Bureau of Statistics, 2001a). There were significant differences between urban and rural elderly in terms of the ranks of these diseases. The rank for the urban elderly was as follows: (1) malignant tumor, (2) cerebrovascular disease, (3) heart trouble, (4) respiratory disease, and (5) trauma and toxicosis. In comparison, the rank for the elderly in rural areas followed this pattern: (1) respiratory disease, (2) malignant tumor, (3) cerebrovascular disease, (4) heart disease, and (5) trauma and toxicosis. The differences again reflect the fact that medication is less available in rural areas than in urban areas. While the urban elderly mainly deal with more complicated diseases, common and frequently occurring diseases such as pneumonia, bronchopneumonia, emphysema, and asthma are still the major killers of rural Chinese elderly.

10. FAMILY AND OTHER INSTITUTIONS

The Chinese family, as a social institution, is interdependent and interactive with other social institutions such as social politics, economics, and education. China is one of the countries in the world in which families were heavily influenced by the dynamics of social politics in the 20th century. The successive political struggles and national and international wars in the first half of the

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century drove out hundreds and thousands of families, while the endless political movements and social reforms in the second half of the century intervened in people's family lives a great deal. Under the control of radical politics during Mao's time, families were divided based on their class origins. While the communist party cardholder's families, workers' families, and poor peasants' families were favored by politics, families of landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionists, bad persons, and right deviationists were oppressed by society, and their members often faced difficulties in job searching, gaining education, and other aspects of social and family lives.

As part of the social and political control system, household registration (*hukou*) has been used for centuries in China since imperial times (Duttom, 1992). Initially, this system was developed mainly for tax and convée purposes. However, it has been institutionalized since the middle of the last century by the development of a series of household registration-based measures that catered to the demands of socialist social control and the planned economy through regulating population mobility, employment, education, and food and goods supplies (Cheng & Selden, 1994). Under this system, families were identified as either "agricultural" or "nonagricultural," and the approved resident locations were classified as either "urban" or "rural" in specific cities, towns, or villages (Christiansen, 1991; Mallee, 1995). As a result, residential mobility was severely restricted. Only a very small group of people and their families could make an official transition from rural to urban or from towns to large cities by joining the army, or by gaining a place in higher education or governmental agencies. Thus, urban or rural registration became hereditary, inherited from the mother, and could only be changed under limited and specific conditions (Q. Zhang, 1988; Chan & Zhang, 1998; Stockman, 2000). Fundamentally, this system deprived numerous families of their right to pursue a higher standard of living. For example, many couples and families had to live-apart together for many years, because their members came from different resident registration areas (L. Pan, Yuan, & Hu, 1992). Although current social changes, resulting from socioeconomic reform and the rapid growth of the economy in China, have eliminated some functions of the resident registration system (e.g., coupons for food and goods, local registration-based employment, etc.), some of its regulations are still in force and continue to influence people's family lives (Stockman, 2000).

In addition to the institutional systems such as resident registration, innovations in social policy have long been an important force of political intervention in family lives. One of the most influential social policies in the late 20th century has been the one-child policy. Since this policy became fully operational in the 1980s, Chinese family size has rapidly become smaller. By the year 2000, China held a family size of 3.13 for urban and 4.20 for rural families (National Bureau of Statistics, 2001a). This policy has caused discussion recently of the possible shrinkage of the family support pool of relatives for the aged (Sheng, 1992). Another concern resulting from this policy has been developmental issues of the single-child generation. It is widely noted that this group of children has had better conditions for advanced cognitive achievement but has some weaknesses in their personality development (X. Feng, 1993, 1994; Gao, 1992). More serious problems related to the policy have been the strong opposition from peasants in rural areas, which resulted in a widespread phenomenon of abandoning, abusing, and killing baby girls and disabled children (Ching & Penny, 1999).

Chinese families have also been tied strongly with their members' employers. Until

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recent years, rural families were organized as the members of production teams of communes. They had to rely on the teams or brigades for their production, income, housing, education, welfare, and medication (Stockman, 2000). Usually, all of the families in one village belonged to a production team or brigade. In fact, a commune and its suborganizations (brigade or production team) served not only as an economic unit but also as a grassroots governmental agency in rural areas, communicating with families intensively on a daily basis. This joint unit of government and production currently has been replaced by a village government agency due to the dissolution of the communes since the early 1980s. The new agency has released itself from the productive functions of the commune and given rural families more freedom to control their economic lives. Similarly, each of the urban working units (e.g., companies, factories, schools, etc.) had been a comprehensive organization that covered production, business, education, housing, childcare, welfare, and medication, serving its employees and their families. These functions, however, have been gradually transferred to other social institutions in recent years because of the introduction of the market economy. In general, both communes in rural areas and work units in urban areas used to have strong control over their members' family lives in the past, but their influence has decreased recently due to ongoing social and economic changes.

Due to the heavy involvement of women in the labor force (43%), public childcare and educational facilities such as day-care centers, preschools, and kindergartens have been well developed in China in the past decades. The absolute numbers of these facilities have increased from 1,799 in 1950 to 181,368 in 1998 (National Bureau of Statistics, 1999). A large part of these facilities were run by work units and communes before the 1980s and have been gradually transferred to public institutions since then. The popularization of childcare and education institutions has partially released Chinese working couples from their daily childcare tasks and enabled them to devote themselves to their careers. Nevertheless, in recent decades Chinese parents have tended to make more and more investments in their children's education, starting from primary schools, because to most Chinese, education is the only channel to obtain good jobs and to develop careers in an increasingly competitive society (X. Feng, 1993). Universally, the child's education has become a daily routine and a central topic in most Chinese families, including regular contact with schoolteachers, helping children with homework, looking for additional tutorial classes and interest groups, sending children to and picking them up from school, and so on (Man, 1993; Zhu, 1992). As Chinese education has gradually transferred from a welfare-based system to a market-based system in recent years, Chinese parents have begun to worry about their children's education fees, especially the cost of higher education. This will likely change the consumer structure of Chinese families in the foreseeable future.

CONCLUSION

Family as a social institution has never developed in a vacuum. The dynamics and variations of Chinese families can, to a certain extent, be seen as reflecting the fundamental changes in Chinese society across the 20th century, and the current geocultural, geopolitical, and geosocioeconomic conditions of China in a global context. For thousands of years, Chinese families had remained "super stable" structures dominated by patriarchal clan ideology and Confucian doctrines (Z. Wang, 1999). The historical events taking place in the 20th century, such as the collapse of the Qing feudal dynasty, the

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establishment of the republic, the successive wars, the new republic, the radical communist movements, and the recent social and economic reforms, all had a profound influence on the development of Chinese families. As China has been changing from a poor feudal agricultural society to a modern industrial society involved in globalization, Chinese families have gained more flexibility in their lives and shown a new face to the world.

Understanding Chinese families from a life-course perspective (Hareven, 1977) will allow us not only to distinguish the current trends but also to predict the possible future directions of Chinese families. Given the fact that China is currently experiencing the transitions from a socialist planned economy to a capitalist market economy, from a rigid political and ideologically controlled society to an increasingly open-minded and lawful society, and from a poor Third World country to a fast-growing, developing country, it is reasonable to expect that Chinese families will present the following features in the foreseeable future:

- A gradually improved living standard. Being aware of the remarkable difference in living standards from Western society, the demand for higher living standards will continue to increase among Chinese families. This will stimulate families to seek out more of such things as better housing, motor vehicles, electronic equipment, nutritional food, proper medicines, and a beautiful environment. This will eventually raise the general standard of life in Chinese families.
- An increasing diversity in family structures. While nuclear families and stem-families will still be the dominant patterns of Chinese families, the proportion of other family patterns such as single-person families, empty-nest families, single-parent families, cohabitation families, reconstituted families, and gay and lesbian families will increase constantly as they tend to be more tolerated and acceptable to the society.
- An increasingly active family network. Although families are becoming diverse and smaller, the connections and interactions among generations and direct kin will become more active because of the availability of modern communication technologies (e.g., telephones, Internet, etc.), public and private transportation, and the increasing demand for cooperation in daily lives and economic activities.
- A greater accessibility of choices in mate selection, marriage, divorce, and remarriage. While love and affection will still be the basic criteria for a desirable marriage, the importance of educational level and occupational privilege will increase. Marriage, divorce, and remarriage will become easier, and the rates of divorce and remarriage will continue to increase.
- A more realistic division of gender roles. Because of the rapid growth of private enterprises and family businesses, the distinctions between housework and employment will become less clear. More couples will divide their gender roles based on the practical needs of family lives rather than biological or ideological considerations.
- A more flexible support system for the aged. Family will likely perform as a main mediator rather than a main agent for supporting the aged. This will involve using family networks, paid social services, and available institutions to share the responsibilities for elderly care.

It is expected that China will experience many great social changes in the first part of the 21st century—as will Chinese families. It seems that, in this increasingly globalizing world, Chinese families will share more commonalities with families in other societies, as well as continue to perpetuate some fundamental characteristics rooted deeply in Chinese cultural traditions. Thus, I close this chapter with my best wishes for more healthy, harmonious, and happy families in China in the future.

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