Chinese Family Family and Lineage

Social Change in Asia
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Dagongmei 打工妹 in globalized China

- Pun Ngai asks, “What kind of working class is created when globalized capital turns China into ‘the world’s workshop’?”
  - Note: 2005 publication, fieldwork 1990, 1993, 1995-6 (Introduction, footnote 2)

- Girls are constrained by:
  - Changing social regulation and political engineering by the party state—especially regulations on residence and migration
  - Marketization and globalization formed by the collaboration of local authorities with foreign capital
  - Patriarchal family system where they are treated by the state not as autonomous individuals, but as gendered holders of a particular social status

- Before we get into dagongmei (female contract factory workers), then, I want to introduce you to the Chinese family, and the changing PRC regulatory environment and decline of the work unit (danwei 单位) as a social identity
Charlotte Ikels on Chinese Family

- Traditional ("feudal") Chinese family "well-regulated" p98
  - Whole more important than any part (e.g. any individual)
  - Each person’s status defined according to generation, relative age, and gender
    - 大哥，大姐，二哥，小弟，小妹
  - Descent traced through the male line
  - “living members of a family were regarded as crucial links between its past and its future, and the failure to perpetuate these links (by failing to produce sons) was regarded as the ‘most unfilial act’.”
  - Ideal of “five generations under one roof”, but actually most families small
Maurice Freedman on Chinese joint family

- Chinese joint family—”where parents and all married sons maintained a common unit of living was in a minority . . . occurring mainly among the wealthy” p43

- “Poverty and disease kept the families of the humble villagers down to small numbers.”

- Due to poverty the poor would not bring in two daughters-in-law, but send all but one son out into the world to live separately

- NB—analysis of the family system is different from the question of how demography and possession (or not) of property interacts with the family system
Non-corporate families

- Merry White in *Perfectly Japanese* comments that the expression “starting a family” in the US means “have children” whereas children in Japan are seen as “continuing” a family.

- Both attitudes are accurate for the countries in question because folk terminology generally accurately represents how people in a society think about their institutions.

- Americans say “starting a family” precisely because each newly married couple is a new family starting out, and such a family become complete with children—this is how a non-corporate bilateral family system works.

- Japanese (Chinese, Koreans, Vietnamese) say children “continue” a family, because families are not created and die off each generation (as in the US) but truly continue as successors are found to continue roles in the same family.
Non-corporate family cycle (beginning)

1. Nuclear stage
   - Family A

2. After marriage of eldest son
   - Family A
   - Family B
Non-corporate family cycle (continuation)

3. After marriage of all children

4. Extinction of family A after death of parents

Figure 4.5
Non-corporate Family Cycle
Criteria of Family Corporateness

- **Boundaries**
  - I belong to one and only one corporate family (and I know exactly who the members of my corporate family are)—Japanese *koseki* and Chinese *hukou* registrations define this

- **House head**
  - There is a house head to this family with power and authority over other family members (this has changed for post-1947 Japan), and a female can be house head only if there are no eligible males

- **Succession**
  - When a house head dies the family is continued by a *successor*—a new family is not created, but rather the exact same family is perpetuated with a new head who steps into the shoes of his father (normally) and has authority over unmarried siblings as a consequence

- **Corporate families ideally have property**
  - This property typically belongs to the *family* (not just to the individual members of the family). This family property is divided according to the family system, rather than according to the will of the owner. (The details vary somewhat by country)
  - Individual family members may *also* have small amounts of personal property that is not family property.
Chinese joint family system

- So-called not because the majority of families are ever joint families
  - Ideal of brothers not dividing the family until after the death of the parents is rarely achieved
  - As Freedman notes it is achieved more readily among the wealthy than the poor (partly because wealthy more likely to have two sons to survive to adulthood and bring in a wife)

- However joint family is the most complex and prestigious form a Chinese family achieves over the family cycle

- Most Chinese families go through joint form for at least a short period of time even though most of the time they aren’t joint—so it is still correct to call the Chinese system a “joint family system”
Stages of traditional Chinese family cycle

- Corporate family (jiā 家) with male house head (jiāzhāng 家长) who determines the marriage of children (cf Ikels p100)

- Marriage patrilocal—”the gates match the family is right” mendang hudui 门当户对
  - Married woman incorporated into the man’s family—Man “takes wife” (qǔqī 娶妻), woman “marries a husband” (jiàfu 嫁夫)
  - Each son’s nuclear family a fáng 房 within the jiā 家

- Hypergamy—money as a consideration for marriage was abolished in marriage law of 1950 but continues informally in the PRC (and is still common in Taiwan and Southeast Asia)
  - Bride price (pìnjīn 聘金)—from groom’s family to bride’s family
    - In poor families used to procure a bride for a son
    - In rich families used for wedding expenses or sent back with bride as “indirect dowry”
  - Dowry (jiàzhuāng 嫁妆)—bride brings into her marital family as much as 1-3 years income in goods
Alternative forms of marriage

- Uxorilocal marriage (zhāozhuì 招赘, zhāoxù 招婿)
  - “call in a useless parasite” “call in a son-in-law”—this would be done only if a family has daughters and no sons
  - There is no custom of “adopted son-in-law” 婿養子 as in Japan, so everything must be done by contract (what names the children will take, etc.)

- If no children may adopt one and contract a marriage
  - Since sons were expensive, poor families might adopt a daughter and bring in a son-in-law

- Child marriage—daughters given away at young age to be married (saves bride price and dowry)
Stages of family form

- Elementary (nuclear)
  - Married couple (and their children)

- Stem
  - One married son lives together with his parents

- Joint
  - More than one married son living together with a common budget before partition

- Partition, the “rooms” (fang) of the joint family become independent corporate families (jia)
Nuclear to Stem

1. Nuclear stage

2. Stem stage after marriage of eldest son and daughter
Joint family and partition

3. Joint stage after marriage of second son

4. Beginning of new cycle after fen jia

Member of same jia are boxed. Jiazhàng is represented by a solid symbol.

Figure 4.1
Chinese Patrilineal Joint Family Cycle
Partition (分家 fēnjiā)

- In the Chinese family the partition is a legal act in which the property is divided between brothers, and they form separate jia (corporate families).

- Usually a third party (outside the corporate family) is involved:
  - A legal document is written up specifying what property each brother gets.
  - In the rural PRC the document specifies each child’s responsibility for his parents:
    - Because land is no longer inherited filial piety is more difficult to enforce.
    - If parents have a house co-residence is possible (2/3 with 1 son, 1/3 with daughter) 60%.
    - 23% live alone with or without “meal rotation” chī lún fàn 吃轮饭.
    - 4% physical rotation lánliú gōngyǎng lǎoren 轮流供养老人.
Demography and family

- Age at marriage, and age at partition determine the complexity of Chinese family
  - Ideal—four generations under one roof—rarely achieved in the PRC anymore because nobody has the property to support this life style, and housing is allocated by the state
  - Real—in most families partition is shortly after the marriage of the last son
    - Daughters-in-law agitate for partition so their families will be independent
    - Period of joint family organization tends to be short
  - Real—in some families each son partitions when he marries
    - Such families resemble the stem family system of Korea or Japan (although siblings did not used to be treated equally in Korea or Japan)
Critical roles in Chinese family

- Freedman’s view structural
  - Father and son—father dominates sons in rich family, but is weak in poor families
  - Brother and brother—competition and partition
  - Husband and wife—strong tie in poor families, but weak in rich

- Margery Wolf emphasizes “uterine family” of mother and her children
  - Mother in a structurally weak position in patriarchal family, so she secures her position by tying her children to her emotionally
  - Mother will often intercede with father for children, or spirit the children a little bit of her private money (candy for children, tuition for daughters)
  - Father-son tie often distant and formal
Class, demography, and family

- Before 1949 women and children were considered “family property” and could be sold if necessary.

- Systematic hypergamy—men generally sought brides from families of slightly lower wealth (so the wife wouldn’t be extravagant)—evidence for this continuing even into collectivized economy (women move to richer communes).

- Expenses of bride price mean rich men could marry early (and often), and poor men might marry late (if at all).

- Inheritance was equal and partible among sons (daughters got dowry at marriage).

- Rich families tended to break up over the generations as property is split among many children—”rags to riches to rags in three generations”
Bilateral kindreds are ego-centred and overlapping. Each person begins calculating his personal kindred starting with himself (ego). For each number of degrees only the kindred of full-blooded siblings will be the same. In the above figure the bilateral kindred up to four degrees of 20 and 21 (siblings) is marked by a solid enclosure. The bilateral kindred up to four degrees of 24 and 25 (also siblings) is marked by a dotted enclosure. The kindreds of these two sets of cousins overlap, but are different.
Patrilineal kinship groups
Confucian ancestor worship

- Family ancestor worship
  - On death day of individual up to 4 generations removed
  - Wooden death tablets displayed on household altar where worship takes place
  - Each family worships its own patrilineal ancestors—daughters’ children “outside grandchildren” 外孙女 who do not belong to the lineage (Ikels 98)

- Lineage ancestor worship
  - Done once or twice a year at ancestral tombs, or at a lineage hall
  - Distant ancestors worshiped
  - In cases of a lineage hall, usually a substantial donation to the hall association is required to enter a tablet into the hall
Patrilineal kinship groups

- Genealogical lineages without corporate organization
  - Village neighborhoods tended to consist of patrilineally related cousins
  - Might own a burial ground together, and do group ancestor worship a couple of times a year
    - Lunar New Year
    - Qingming 清明 Lunar 3/15
  - This kind of lineage common in North China

- Minimally segmented corporate lineages
  - Usually a lineage estate has been set aside to financial ancestor worship and charitable activities for lineage members (schools, self defense)
Asymmetrically Segmented Patrilineages

- Found chiefly in Fujian, Taiwan, Guangdong, and rural parts of Hong Kong and Macau (see Ikels p99)

- Within a deep lineage substantial estates have been set aside for various ancestors
  - It is asymmetrical because in any generation one line may have an estate, and another may not

- In some villages of Fujian and Guangdong most of the land was owned by lineages, and there would be numerous endowed lineage halls dedicated to a variety of intermediate ancestors

- This is the kind of lineage that would have been found in Pun Ngai’s “Blue River” Hakka village—combines kinship principles with control of wealth