

CHAPTER 6

Filial Obligations in Chinese Families:
Paradoxes of Modernization

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In imperial China filial piety was a central value of family life, and the centrality of family life in Confucian statecraft made filial piety a lynchpin for the entire social order. Down through the centuries parents constantly stressed to their children that the way they treated their elders was a central measure of their moral worth. Obligations to defer to parental wishes, tend to parental needs, and provide attentive support in old age trumped children's personal desires and preferences. Socialization of children in filial piety was reinforced by the larger culture and the state. Examples of such official reinforcement include the "twenty-four tales of filial piety" that honored extreme examples of sacrifice by grown children in the service of parental needs and whims, and the severe penalties that could be imposed on an unfilial child.¹ As in other agrarian societies, grown children provided the only source of support for most aging parents. Filial obligations extended even beyond the grave, with careful tending to the needs of deceased parents and earlier kin through ancestor worship seen as essential to the fates of surviving family members.

Available ethnographic evidence from nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Chinese communities indicates that these filial obligations were widely honored. The great majority of aging Chinese lived with one or more married child, and given the patrilineal nature of the kinship system, in most cases this meant living with a married son or sons. Sons, daughters-in-law, and grandchildren provided the physical, emotional, and financial support that parents needed to face old age on at least tolerable terms. Daughters provided such support as well until they married, but after that their primary support obligations were transferred to their husbands' parents. Even grown children who lived elsewhere (sons as well as unmarried daugh-

ters) shared in these obligations, with cash remittances from earnings, holiday visits, and other filial acts expected.² For most Chinese the main threat to security in old age came not from unfilial grown children, but from high mortality rates that left some of the elderly without any grown sons to provide old-age support.

The PRC and Taiwan: Two Contrasting Development Paths

What has happened to this system of familial support for the elderly in the wake of the tumultuous changes of the twentieth century? How did obligations of grown children toward their aging parents survive the collapse of the imperial system, the chaos of the warlord period, the attacks against Confucianism of the May Fourth movement, World War II and the Civil War, and the political lurches and rapid pace of economic change after 1949? Since 1949 China has been divided into two antagonistic political regimes: the People's Republic of China (hereinafter PRC) on the mainland, and the Republic of China on Taiwan (hereinafter Taiwan). In which Chinese setting has the traditional system of filial support for the elderly been eroded, or altered, the most? In this chapter we present comparative survey data from urban areas in the PRC and Taiwan in an effort to answer these questions.

These two political systems have pursued modernization in quite different ways. Broadly speaking, Taiwan pursued development in a market-based capitalist framework throughout, with close cultural and economic integration into the global system dominated by Western societies. Until the 1980s, Taiwan's economy grew much more rapidly than the PRC's, and today the island still has a much higher level of development (industrialization, urbanization, universalization of education, and so on) than does the mainland.³ But in certain respects Taiwan's development took on a "traditional" cast, as in the ROC portraying itself as a defender of Chinese traditional values and Confucianism, and in the dominance of family-run enterprises in the island's economy.⁴

In contrast, the PRC largely closed itself off from economic and cultural involvement with the outside world until the end of the 1970s, and its leaders regularly denounced traditional values, and Confucianism in particular, as "feudal" remnants that should be eliminated. In addition, the commitment of Mao Zedong and his colleagues to socialism led to a socialist trans-

formation campaign in the mid-1950s that eliminated private property and family businesses and made all citizens of the PRC dependent on work and other organizations controlled by the state. Furthermore, although the ruling parties of both the PRC and the ROC shared similar, Leninist origins, by the final decades of the twentieth century they operated in quite different ways, with the Chinese Communist Party under Mao imposing totalitarian controls on society in the mainland, while the Guomindang on Taiwan had evolved into a more conventional authoritarian party.⁵

The implications of these contrasting development paths for family change in the two Chinese societies are not entirely clear. The classic theoretical treatment of how modernization affects family life is William J. Goode's book, *World Revolution and Family Patterns* (1963).⁶ According to Goode, modernization leads to a shift away from vertical family and extended kinship obligations, and toward the priority of the conjugal bond between husbands and wives. The stress on the conjugal bond and the nuclear family has a large number of consequences in Goode's theory, including a weakening of the patrilineal nature of kinship ties and obligations in favor of an increasingly bilateral emphasis on kin ties on both sides of the family. As a consequence of this weakening of the patrilineal principle, sons and daughters would increasingly be treated equally and seen as of equal value to the family.

Given these expectations, an initial prediction might be that, since Taiwan is much more modernized than the PRC and has been more deeply affected by Western cultural influences (including the Western idealization of conjugal families), families on that island should exhibit more weakening of traditional filial obligations than families in the PRC, and more of a shift toward an equal role of daughters and sons in meeting any remaining filial obligations. However, the state championing of Confucianism and other traditional values and the continued primacy of family firms and property on Taiwan may have offset these forces for change and helped preserve the traditional system of filial support for the elderly.

For urban areas of the PRC there also are contradictory influences at work. On the one hand, the PRC's denunciation of Confucianism and other elements of traditional culture, totalitarian imposition of a modern doctrine (Marxism-Leninism), and elimination of family firms and assets might be expected to erode filial obligations. However, the substantially lower levels of modernization achieved and the near total exclusion of Western cultural in-

fluence until recently might have retarded such changes. Given these contradictory forces in each case, it is no longer clear whether we should expect the filial support system to be more eroded or altered in Taiwan than in the PRC.

Survey Data from Two Chinese Societies

In the following pages we seek to answer the question of which set of conditions produced the greatest erosion of the traditional Chinese filial support system by examining survey data from both the PRC and Taiwan. The strategy followed here will be to examine first a range of data from a survey of family patterns and intergenerational relations conducted in Baoding, Hebei, in 1994. That survey resulted from a collaboration between the Department of Sociology at the University of Michigan, the Department of Sociology at Beijing University, and the China Research Center on Aging.⁷ The Baoding parent sample consisted of a probability sample of 1,002 individuals over age 50 living in the three main urban districts of that city. We also included a grown child survey, which involved randomly selecting one adult child living in Baoding for each parent interviewed. The resulting child sample consisted of 753 grown children.

After this initial consideration of the Baoding results, we will then present selected comparisons with data derived from two surveys conducted in Taiwan, in 1989 and 1993. Those surveys were jointly sponsored by the Population Studies Center and the Institute of Gerontology at the University of Michigan and the Taiwan Provincial Institute of Family Planning. The 1989 survey involved a probability sample of 4,049 individuals over age 60 living in Taiwan. In the 1993 survey 3,155 of those respondents were reinterviewed, and then all children of a randomly chosen one fourth of the 1993 parents were interviewed, yielding a child sample of 662. Although the 1994 Baoding survey was not a full replication of the Taiwan surveys, an overlap in researchers in both survey projects led to the inclusion in the Baoding questionnaire of exact or close replications of selected questions used in the Taiwan surveys.⁸ This overlap in researchers and questions makes possible a rare comparison of data on family changes in the PRC and Taiwan.

Given differences in the sampling plan in the two projects, it is necessary to make some adjustments before comparing the results from these two sur-

vey projects. Primarily this means only using parents over age 60 in Baoding, to conform to the age limits of the 1989 Taiwan survey, and only using parents residing in the five large cities in Taiwan (Taipei, Keelung, Taichung, Tainan, Kaohsiung), in order to make comparisons with urban Baoding. So when we shift later in this chapter to an examination of comparative results, the resulting sample sizes will be 509 parents in Baoding and 1,149 in urban Taiwan, and 731 grown children in Baoding and 662 grown children in Taiwan.

Family Patterns and Filial Support of Baoding Parents

In examining the situation of our sample of Baoding parents, the first feature to note is that a high proportion (81 percent of those over age 60; two thirds of those over age 70) are still married. This relatively high percentage means that for most Baoding elderly there is a spouse available to provide emotional, and sometimes financial, support, perhaps making the need to rely on grown children less than if widowhood were the norm.

Another characteristic of the Baoding sample is that most have several grown children available to potentially provide old-age support. Although many commentators are worried about the implications for old-age support of China's "one child policy," most Baoding parents we interviewed had completed their families before that policy went into effect (in 1979). In fact the average number of grown children per Baoding parent is 3.2. Perhaps even more important in terms of the potential impact on filial support is that a very high percentage (about 90 percent) of all grown children we interviewed still live in Baoding. As a consequence, the average parent we interviewed has about three grown children living in the same city and thus potentially available to provide support on a regular basis.

This relative geographic immobility of grown children is largely a legacy of the bureaucratic job assignment system and lack of labor and other markets in China's form of socialism. Specifically, in the Mao era the urban young were assigned to jobs by the state, and it was very difficult to change jobs or residences on their own volition. Except for special circumstances (for instance, for graduates of keypoint universities), such assignments were almost always local.⁹ Indeed, during the 1970s and well into the 1980s, a bureaucratic procedure was followed that allowed a parent to retire early from a job in a state enterprise in order for his or her child to be assigned a job in

that same enterprise. Under this procedure (termed the *dingti* system), adult children ended up not simply living in the same city, but working and usually living in the same work-unit complex with their parents. In sum, despite the anti-Confucian rhetoric of the Chinese Communist Party during the Mao era, the workings of Chinese socialism and the absence of a labor market actually kept most grown children tied closely to their aging parents. The economic reforms launched in China after 1978 had not altered this immobility very much as of the time of our Baoding survey in 1994.

When it comes to the household arrangements of Baoding parents, however, things look decidedly less traditional. It is true that about 64 percent of Baoding parents live with one or more grown child. However, a substantial proportion of this coresidence involves relatively young parents living with an unmarried child or children. (The reader should keep in mind that our Baoding parent sample included individuals as young as 50.) Only about 35 percent of Baoding parents were living in extended families with one or more married child. Even of those over age 60, less than 40 percent live in such extended families. The predominant family form of the Baoding elderly is thus nuclear—residence either only with a spouse, or with a spouse and one or more unmarried children. In other words, it is not obligatory, and furthermore it is not even the most common situation, for an older Baoding parent to reside in an extended family with a married child. While we will examine the comparison with Taiwan later, it appears that the Baoding situation in 1994 represents a substantial decrease in extended family living for the elderly compared to the past (and to the situation in contemporary rural China).¹⁰

When they do live in an extended family unit, it is almost always a stem family structure with only one married child, rather than the traditionally favored joint family involving two or more married children and their families. In such stem families in Baoding it is still much more common to live with a married son, rather than with a married daughter. Specifically, it is about three times as common to live with a married son as with a married daughter. The departure from traditional arrangements revealed in our Baoding data involves the propensity of elderly Baoding residents to live separately from all of their married children in a nuclear family, rather than any tendency to coreside with a married daughter instead of a son.

It should be emphasized once again that Baoding parents do not end up in nuclear family structures because there are no grown children available to live with. As noted earlier, most have several children available, and for the

older parents in our sample, most of those grown children are married. But coresidence with a married child does not seem to be necessary, and it may not even be preferred. (See Chapters 1 and 4 for discussion of the preferences of rural elderly for living arrangements.) While an interpretation of this pattern must await the presentation of data on other aspects of intergenerational relations, the figures just presented seem to point to an increasing acceptance of a new pattern some have termed "networked families" (*wangluo jiating*), with parents living near several grown children who cooperate in providing support and assistance, but without the need to coreside with any one such child in order to find old-age security.¹¹

Financial security is a concern of the aged in any society, and in agrarian societies that security comes from having grown children to support you. In China in the past it was said that one had sons to guard against old age, and that the more sons one had, the more prosperous one would become (and presumably remain as one became elderly). What is the situation in contemporary Baoding? The first point to stress is that most of the Baoding parents we interviewed had earnings of their own and did not have to face total dependency on their children. Overall, about 85 percent had some earnings, with 25 percent having wage income only, 51 percent having pension income only, and 9 percent enjoying both pensions and wages. Men are favored over women in this realm, both in terms of continuing to work and receive wages until a more advanced age, and also by being more likely to have met the qualifications for pensions from their work units.¹² However, given the low figures on widowhood presented earlier, most parents who do not have any income of their own (primarily mothers) often have a spouse who does. In other words, for the great majority of Baoding parents, there is no need to rely totally on support from grown children to obtain financial security. For most Baoding elderly, financial contributions from children are supplementary, rather than primary and essential.¹³

To what extent do grown children provide financial support to their parents, even if such support is not essential? We inquired about such financial support in two forms—both cash assistance and the provision of food, clothing, and other material goods. Overall, only about one fourth of Baoding parents were receiving cash assistance from their children, while a little over one third were receiving material goods, with the proportions increasing with the age of the parent. We had expected that at least token cash or other

material assistance would be given by most children, but that turns out not to be the case. Most parents in the sample were not receiving financial assistance from their children, and the provision of such assistance reflects parental needs more than simply customary expectations. As noted above, most Baoding parents do not have strong financial needs, and quite a few (about 19 percent) even follow the more modern pattern of providing cash regularly to one or more grown child.¹⁴ Furthermore, very few Baoding parents (less than 3 percent) reported that they needed financial assistance but were not receiving it, or needed more than they were receiving. In other words, the relatively low proportions of grown children who are providing regular financial support to their parents is not a testimony to growing neglect of parents and decreased filial sentiments, but rather to the supplementary and nonessential nature of child financial assistance for most parents.

What is the state of relations between aging parents and their grown children in other realms besides finances? In our Baoding survey we included questions for both parents and children about many aspects of intergenerational relationships. The picture provided by these questions is quite consistent and positive. In general, parents and their grown children are embedded in a rich variety of mutual exchanges and frequent interactions. For example, while only 42 percent of our child respondents were living with a parent, another 30 percent claimed they were in daily contact with their parents, and many of the remaining 28 percent of grown children were in only slightly less frequent contact. Very few parents (only about 4 percent) were receiving physical help from any of their children with activities such as going to the bathroom or getting dressed, but about one third were receiving some regular assistance with household chores. As with finances, very few parents reported that they needed assistance in these realms but were not receiving it from their children. And by percentages ranging from 75 percent to 95 percent, parents reported that their grown children listened to their advice, treated them with respect, and were filial or very filial toward them. More than 95 percent of parents reported they were satisfied or very satisfied with the emotional support they were receiving from their own children. (However, 60–65 percent of both parents and children we interviewed claimed that in Chinese society in general, respect for elders had suffered a decline.) (See Chapter 8 for a similar disparity between personal performance and perception of others' in Korea.) Even discounting these figures somewhat for any

tendency of respondents to put the best public face on family relationships for our interviewers, there are no signs in our data of any serious erosion of filial obligations and how the elderly are treated.

Even if the net flow of intergenerational exchanges is upward, from adult children to parents, this is by no means a relationship only of benefit to the elderly. Parents have in the past provided assistance in multiple ways to their growing and adult children—in such realms as helping them get into good schools or acquire a favorable job, financing their weddings, and providing housing in a scarce market. For many grown children the assistance from parents continues in multiple ways as well—through providing childcare assistance in particular, but also (as noted earlier) in some cases by providing financial assistance, help with shopping and household chores, and through advice and the mobilization of personal contacts (from the parents' *guanxi* network) to help solve particular life problems. In a social order that until recently was not designed to stress services and convenience for consumers, and in which full-time jobs for both husbands and wives are the rule among young couples, it has been very difficult to cope with the demands of daily life without the extra assistance that parents and other kin can provide.

We had expected, nonetheless, to find signs of generational conflict in the attitudes and values of the parents and grown children that we interviewed. The popular literature on Chinese social trends stresses that the rapidity of social and cultural change as well as China's tumultuous political shifts have produced marked contrasts between the life experiences and views of young people today and earlier generations. Indeed, when we examined a range of social and political attitudes of Baoding parents and their grown children, we found consistent differences. In general, the parents expressed more support for both traditional socialist and age-old Chinese values than did their grown children, who voiced somewhat more support for individualistic views.¹⁵ In tastes for music, films, television shows, and reading matter, there are also clear signs of a generation gap, with parents again more likely to favor traditional forms (for example, traditional Chinese opera) and socialist genres (for example, films about revolutionary battles) than their children, who tend to favor music, films, and other cultural products with a contemporary popular or international flavor.

However, when it comes to attitudes about family obligations and filial support, there is no sign of any such generational conflict in our Baoding data. Indeed, where there are differences, it is generally the case that grown

children feel that they should make more sacrifices to serve the needs of their parents than their parents feel they should. Similarly, it turns out that both parents and grown children tend to see the advantages of coresidence between the generations as outweighing the disadvantages, and both generations rank specific advantages and disadvantages in very similar ways. Furthermore, when asked to provide an overall assessment of the benefits and problems of coresidence between aging parents and their grown children, 92 percent of the Baoding adult children cited the benefits, compared to 82 percent of the Baoding parents we interviewed.¹⁶ Once again we may wonder whether an ethic of "family altruism" leads both parents and children to report levels of intergenerational amity that are somewhat higher than the reality.¹⁷ However, the data reviewed earlier suggest that there is something lying behind these kinds of results beyond simply a desire to portray family relations positively to the outside world. The multiple forms of assistance and support given by both parents and grown children to each other provide firm structural support for continued cooperation and obligation even when parents and grown children do not see eye to eye on many "outside" issues.

What interpretation can we give to the results we have reviewed thus far, in terms of our research question concerning the relative weakening and/or alteration of the pattern of filial support for the urban elderly? The absence of comparable data from Baoding in the past, or for that matter from other Chinese settings, makes it difficult to speak definitively about whether filial obligations have weakened over time or not. What seems clear, at least, is that there is little sign in our Baoding survey data that Baoding parents feel that their needs are being neglected, or that their own children are lacking a strong sense of filial obligation. There are no signs of a "crisis" of filial support for the Baoding elderly in our data.

When it comes to the question of whether the form in which such support is provided has altered, however, we see many signs of change, rather than simply continuity. Already we have noted several significant changes in comparison with the past. Most aging parents in Baoding in 1994 had some income of their own as well as other resources (for instance, subsidized public housing, medical insurance coverage), making reliance on their grown children in most cases supplementary, rather than essential. As a consequence, the proportion of Baoding parents who are regularly receiving financial, household chore, and other assistance from their grown children is less than 50 percent for each kind of assistance we inquired about.¹⁸ We also have noted that

only a minority of aging Baoding parents live in an extended family with one or more married children, a situation that suggests a substantial reduction in such intergenerational coresidence in comparison with the past.

In addition to these departures from the patterns of the past, we discovered that for most of the kinds of assistance to parents we inquired about, adult children who do not coreside provide their parents with about as much regular assistance overall as do coresiding children. To be specific, not surprisingly, coresident children provide their parents with significantly more help with household chores than do children who live elsewhere. However, for physical care (help with going to the bathroom, getting dressed, and so on), financial assistance, and the provision of regular gifts of food and clothing, children who live elsewhere provide somewhat more assistance than do those who live with the parents (although these latter differences are not statistically significant). In sum, the pattern of relations we referred to earlier as a "networked family" (*wangluo jiating*), involving aging parents living on their own, but with several nearby grown children providing assistance as needed, seems to have increasingly replaced the traditional pattern of parents binding at least one married son to them in a coresidential arrangement in order to obtain old-age security.

Has the nature of the network aging parents rely on also changed? Have grown and married daughters increased their role in supporting their own parents, as well as the parents of their husbands? Our Baoding data yield multiple signs that the traditional patrilineal basis of filial support for the elderly has broken down. In response to questions about filial attitudes, married daughters voice as much support for filial obligations (toward their own parents) as do married sons. Among married children who do not coreside with their parents, daughters visit their parents just as often as do sons. In terms of the kinds of support given to aging parents included in our Baoding survey (physical care, help with domestic chores, financial assistance, and the provision of material goods), on balance married daughters do as much or even slightly more than do their brothers.¹⁹ Although the interpretation of this shift toward equal reliance on daughters as well as sons will be deferred until the conclusion, these findings are particularly striking. Although Baoding parents generally report that they are being well cared for by quite filial children, the specific ways in which their support needs are being met have altered quite dramatically in comparison with the past. Filial daughters, even after they marry, are now just as important as filial sons in providing support.

Filial Support in Chinese Societies: Baoding and Urban Taiwan Compared

As noted earlier, by restricting our Baoding sample to parents aged 60 and above, and the Taiwan survey data to parents living in the five largest cities on that island, we are in a position to make selective comparisons of the patterning of filial support in urban areas of Taiwan and Baoding. We are presuming that in at least a rough way, Baoding can represent the situation in medium- and large-scale cities in the PRC generally. We begin our review by comparing and contrasting key features of the situation of the parents in these two distinctive Chinese societies.

To begin with, fewer urban parents in the 1989 Taiwan survey were still married, in comparison with the situation in Baoding (61 percent versus 81 percent of those over age 60). The Taiwan urban parents had a somewhat higher number of living children than their Baoding counterparts (4.3 versus 3.7), but fewer of them currently lived nearby (70 percent versus roughly 84 percent). The net result is that the Taiwan and Baoding parents have about the same number of adult children living nearby (3.0 versus 3.1).²⁰ Parents in Taiwan's five largest cities were substantially less likely to live on their own or with a spouse only than their counterparts in Baoding (19 percent versus 47 percent), and substantially more likely to live in a stem family with a married child (50 percent versus 38 percent).²¹ If we exclude the demographically unusual Mainlanders from the Taiwan sample and focus only on the Taiwanese, then the contrast in family structure is much greater—only 13 percent of the Taiwanese live on their own or with a spouse only, while 63 percent live with a married child.²² Here we see one intriguing hint of greater family traditionalism in urban Taiwan than in Baoding.

Slightly more of those over age 60 in urban Taiwan than in Baoding were still employed (25 percent versus 20 percent). However, those who have retired are much less likely to receive pensions in urban Taiwan than in Baoding (27 percent versus 77 percent). If we again exclude the Mainlanders, who are the ones most likely to benefit from continued state employment into old age and from pensions when they retire, we see that for urban Taiwanese the comparison with Baoding is even more dramatic. Overall 21 percent of urban Taiwanese over age 60 were still employed, but only 13 percent were receiving pensions. Here we see another indication that Taiwan, despite its higher level of economic development than the PRC, is not a more mod-

ern society in all respects.²³ It is entirely likely that the urban elderly on Taiwan have more need to rely on their grown children or other family sources for old-age financial support than do their Baoding counterparts.

The data we collected on four key types of support from grown children in Baoding (physical care, household chore assistance, financial support, and the provision of material goods) are exactly comparable to data in the Taiwan surveys, and a comparison of the figures yields somewhat mixed results. Urban elderly in Taiwan were substantially more likely to be receiving financial assistance than their Baoding counterparts (69 percent versus 32 percent), and they were also much more likely to be receiving assistance with household chores (65 percent versus 38 percent). However, they were slightly less likely to be receiving physical care (4 percent versus 7 percent) and also to be receiving material goods (30 percent versus 45 percent). Across all types of assistance, Taiwanese are more likely than Mainlanders on Taiwan to be receiving assistance. Specifically, the proportion of urban Taiwanese receiving assistance was 77 percent for finances, 69 percent for household chores, 5 percent for physical care, and 41 percent for material goods (versus 48 percent, 57 percent, 3 percent, and 20 percent for Mainlanders). If we take into account the fact that for most parents, financial and chore assistance are more important than physical care and material goods, and also focus on the demographically more "normal" Taiwanese, on balance we conclude that regular assistance from grown children is more frequent and important in urban Taiwan than in Baoding.

There are also important differences in who is providing the various kinds of assistance that parents receive. The clearest contrasts are visible in a comparison of the *main providers* of physical care and household chore assistance, as displayed in Table 3. If we focus on the contrast between Baoding and urban Taiwanese, we see that in regard to physical care Baoding spouses are most often reported to be the main providers, much more often than spouses are mentioned in this context by the Taiwanese. The person next most likely to be named as the main provider of physical care is the daughter in Baoding, and she is twice as likely to be portrayed in this role as a daughter-in-law. Among the urban Taiwanese, in contrast, daughters-in-law are equally as likely as daughters to be reported in this role. The contrast is even more marked in the case of household chore assistance. Again the spouse is most often reported as the main provider of chore assistance in Baoding, while the spouse only takes second place among urban Taiwanese.

TABLE 3
Percent Distribution of Main Provider for Physical Care
and Household Assistance in Baoding and Urban Taiwan

	<i>Physical Care</i>			
	BAODING	URBAN TAIWAN		
		<i>Taiwanese</i>	<i>Mainlander</i>	<i>Total</i>
% Receiving Support*	6.7	5.0	2.9	4.2
Distribution of Main Provider				
Spouse	41.2	16.2	66.7	28.6
Son	17.6	13.5	0.0	10.2
Daughter	23.5	21.6	0.0	16.3
Daughter-in-law	11.8	21.6	0.0	16.3
Other relative	2.9	5.4	0.0	4.1
Combination**	0.0	10.8	0.0	8.2
Non-relative	2.9	2.7	8.3	4.1
Formal/government	0.0	8.1	25.0	12.2
N*	34	37	12	49
	<i>Household Assistance</i>			
	BAODING	URBAN TAIWAN		
		<i>Taiwanese</i>	<i>Mainlander</i>	<i>Total</i>
% Receiving Support*	35.8	66.9	54.0	62.3
Distribution of Main Provider				
Spouse	35.7	30.1	71.0	42.7
Son	23.1	4.4	2.3	3.8
Daughter	23.1	6.5	1.8	5.0
Daughter-in-law	11.5	48.7	14.9	38.2
Other relative	6.6	2.6	1.8	2.3
Combination**	0.0	5.3	2.3	4.5
Non-relative	0.0	0.0	2.8	0.8
Formal/government	0.0	2.2	3.2	2.4
N*	182	495	221	716

* Represents number receiving support and identifying main provider.

** Represents combination of two or more relatives of different type (e.g., daughter and son-in-law). Those responding "sons" or "daughters" without specifying a specific child were included with the category named.

The person most often reported as the main provider of chore assistance among urban Taiwanese is the daughter-in-law, who is far more likely to be in this role than either sons or daughters. In contrast, Baoding parents rate sons and daughters equally as the next most important in providing chore assistance after the spouse, with both nominated about twice as often as daughters-in-law as main providers of chore assistance.²⁴ The contrasts between Baoding and Taiwan in the patterns of main providers of financial and material goods assistance are not as striking (details not shown here), but in both realms daughters play a more prominent role in providing support in Baoding than in Taiwan.

We presume that a major contributor to these contrasts between the role of daughters versus daughters-in-law in providing support for the elderly (particularly in the realm of household chores) is the much higher levels of urban full-time employment of young wives in the PRC than in Taiwan (roughly on the order of 90+ percent versus 40 percent). In Baoding, daughters-in-law, like daughters, are almost all working in full-time jobs in bureaucratic organizations, and when they have any free time to provide such assistance, they direct their support primarily to their own parents. In fact, in regard to household chores the direction of assistance is sometimes downward, from retired parents to their busy adult children. In Taiwan, in contrast, many more households of the elderly contain a daughter-in-law, and a much higher proportion of those daughters-in-laws are either not employed full time, or are working in the family's own business, where they may more readily also help out in other realms. Here we see another indicator of greater traditionalism in urban Taiwan than in Baoding.

We conclude this selected comparison by examining some family attitude questions that were asked in comparable or similar forms in the two Chinese settings. We collected data from both the grown children and their parents, and the results were broadly similar. We present only the parent data here. In Table 4 we show the responses parents gave to four such questions in Baoding and urban Taiwan (with the results of a fifth question asked only in Taiwan also displayed). What do these figures indicate?

Although the somewhat different wording of the initial question shown in Table 4 complicates the comparison, it appears that Baoding parents voice substantially more support in general (70 percent versus 38 percent) for old people living on their own. This contrast is not all that surprising, in view of the greater actual propensity of the Baoding elderly to live independently in

TABLE 4
Comparison of Attitudes of Taiwan Elderly and Baoding Elderly

ATTITUDES	QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS	
	<i>Taiwanese</i>	<i>Baoding</i>
Living Arrangements	Do you think an elderly couple is better off living with a married son or daughter or living alone? Or do you think there is another better arrangement? Married Child = 62.5% On own/other = 37.5% (N = 809)	As long as health permits, an older person should live independently and not depend on (his/her) children. Disagree = 30.0% Agree = 70.0% (N = 509)
	If an older person is widowed, do you think he/she is better off living with a married child, living alone, or living in another arrangement? Married Child = 67.0% On own/other = 33.0% (N = 801)	An older person who is widowed should not live alone. Agree = 72.7% Disagree = 27.3% (N = 487)
	If a couple has no sons, do you think they are best off to go live with a married daughter, live on their own, or move to a senior citizens' home? How is it best arranged? Married Daughter = 31.8% On own/other = 68.2% (N = 803)	N/A
Widow Remarriage	If an older woman has been widowed for some time, do you think that it is appropriate for her to remarry? No = 61.2% Yes/depends = 38.9% (N = 803)	If an older woman has been widowed for a period of time, it is all right for her to remarry. Disagree = 7.6% Agree = 92.4% (N = 503)
Inheritance and Respect	Do you think it is important for old people to keep property to make sure that their family treats them with respect? Yes = 77.9% No/depends = 22.2% (N = 790)	Do you think it is important for old people to keep property to make sure their family members treat them with respect? Yes, important = 41.4% No, unimportant = 58.6% (N = 490)

a nuclear family unit, as described earlier. However, in the case of a widowed older person, we find that a high proportion of parents in both societies prefer living with a grown child, with Baoding parents even slightly more likely than their Taiwan counterparts to express this view (by 73 percent versus 67 percent). The next panel in Table 4 shows that Taiwan parents have a sufficient aversion to living with a married daughter that they would prefer to live on their own if no son is available (by 68 percent to 32 percent). Unfortunately we did not ask this question in our Baoding survey.

The remaining figures in Table 4 show contrasts that are much more dramatic, based upon question wording that is identical or very nearly so. In China in imperial times a wife whose husband died was expected and pressured not to remarry, and in some instances memorial arches and other symbols were erected to honor particular examples of "chaste widows." In the PRC, the 1950 Marriage Law contained a provision denouncing this custom, and prohibiting interference with the remarriage of widows. Contemporary attitudes on this question in these two Chinese societies are strikingly different. Among the elderly in Taiwan 61 percent disapprove of the remarriage of widows, while 92 percent of the elderly in Baoding voice *approval*. Finally, we see from the bottom of Table 4 that a much higher percentage of the elderly in Taiwan (78 percent versus 41 percent) feel that they have to maintain control over some important property in order to induce their families (presumably their grown children in particular, as the expectant heirs) to treat them well in their old age. Where there are differences, the figures in Table 4 indicate that some familial attitudes are strikingly more traditional in urban Taiwan than in Baoding.

Conclusions

A number of important conclusions emerge from our comparative consideration of survey data on filial support for the elderly in Baoding and in urban Taiwan. Overall, as of the mid-1990s, there was little sign of any crisis or sharp erosion of filial sentiments in either setting. Aging parents in both Baoding and in urban Taiwan generally expressed satisfaction with the support they were receiving from their grown children, and with the strength of filial obligations that those children expressed. Thus, at the most global level our data lead us to conclude that filial support obligations have survived

quite well despite the hectic pace (and contrasting paths) of social change in these two Chinese societies.

When we look at the patterning of the filial support system in the mid-1990s, however, we see some marked differences between Baoding and urban Taiwan. These differences fit a predictable pattern in which urban Taiwan looks more traditional, while Baoding looks more modern. To be specific, we have seen evidence that:

- Baoding elderly are more likely to live in nuclear families; urban Taiwanese elderly are more likely to live in extended families with a married son.
- Baoding elderly are more likely to retain earnings of their own, with many depending upon pensions; urban Taiwanese less often have pensions or other sources of income, making them more dependent upon money provided by their children.
- Baoding parents are less likely to receive financial and chore assistance from their grown children; urban Taiwanese are more dependent upon these kinds of assistance.
- Intergenerational exchanges are more balanced in Baoding; in Taiwan they are more likely to involve a predominant flow of assistance upward from adult children to aging parents.
- Coresidence with a married child is of relatively little importance in shaping support for the elderly in Baoding; coresidence with a married child (usually a son) continues to provide an important structural basis for support of the elderly in urban Taiwan.
- Daughters and spouses play very central roles in the provision of support for the elderly in Baoding, with the structuring of support increasingly bilateral; daughters-in-law and sons remain more central to the provision of support for the elderly in urban Taiwan, reflecting the continuing centrality of patrilineal kinship in the filial support system on the island.
- Family attitudes in Baoding are more modern in realms such as the desirability of independent living for the elderly, widow remarriage, and the lack of a need to use family property to insure filiality; in urban Taiwan family attitudes in these realms are more traditional.

At first sight it seems paradoxical that the filial support system in urban Taiwan, a much richer and more highly developed society than the PRC, should be more traditional. How can we explain this paradox? In order to answer this question, we need to decompose the notion of modernization.

This is a global term that encompasses many different aspects and changes—rising income per capita, expanding educational attainment, industrialization, urbanization, secularization, and many other things. A central component of modernization is the decline in the family as a production unit, and the rise of employment in nonkin-based bureaucratic firms and agencies. Similarly, modernization generally involves the decline in the family's ability and/or desire to command resources to supply its own needs and reduced salience of family property and inheritance as a basis for the social placement of children. Wages, benefits, and resources supplied by employers or made available through markets or by state benefit programs increasingly replace family-controlled resources.

In Taiwan these aspects of modernization have been “held back” by the continuing centrality of family-run firms and assets and the resulting reliance on family employment and resources (but more so for the Taiwanese than the Mainlanders on the island). In Baoding and other cities in the PRC, in contrast, these aspects of modernization were substantially “accelerated” by the socialist transformation of the mid-1950s. That major change eliminated the family as a production unit, made family property ownership and inheritance inconsequential, made social mobility dependent upon education and bureaucratic allocation to jobs, provided secure wages and a range of fringe benefits (including pensions) for most urbanites, and made cramped public housing available at nominal cost through bureaucratic allocation. Other aspects of the socialist system made full-time employment of urban women between the ages of 20 and 50 almost as common as for men, at well over 90 percent. In other words, a detailed examination of these “microinstitutional” features of Chinese socialism versus Taiwanese capitalism leads us to reverse our initial conclusion. In these particular respects, it is Baoding and not urban Taiwan that is the more modern social order.

However, the microinstitutions of urban China after the 1950s also contained certain features that supported filial support of the elderly. In particular, the extreme shortages of urban housing in the PRC made at least temporary coresidence of married children with their parents very common. Furthermore, the lack of a labor market and the system of state allocation of jobs kept a higher percentage of grown children close at hand than was the case in urban Taiwan. The sustained high fertility of the 1950s and 1960s combined with the “iron rice bowl” of secure jobs and benefits enjoyed by

parents also made the burden on any particular grown child of providing filial support in the 1990s fairly bearable in most cases.

As a result of all of these contrasts, Baoding families differed from their Taiwan counterparts in multiple ways despite their common cultural roots. Baoding parents were much less likely to have family businesses or other property available to structure the patterns of family relations. Instead, Baoding families were much purer versions of the “consumption units” that Talcott Parsons (1971) and others tell us are typical of modern societies, in which families pool and manage the wages and benefits available to various members in order to meet their needs. The absence of family businesses and property to inherit helped to undermine the patrilineal structure of family relations, as did the high external employment rates and secure incomes of unmarried and married daughters. The failure of the socialist system to provide substantial public or commercial services to meet family needs for childcare, laundry, food preparation, or other needs reinforced the tendency of hard-pressed urban families in the PRC to draw on the assistance of other members of their family network in order to cope with the pressures of daily life. For adult children, intergenerational relations were much more a mutually beneficial exchange, rather than primarily a one-sided return by children of the assistance provided by parents in the past. In sum, the complex set of institutions and practices developed in the PRC after the 1950s helped to preserve strong filial obligations and intergenerational exchanges even as it altered the patterning of these exchanges into more modern forms. Taiwan, despite being a richer society, retained family-based microinstitutions that tended to pattern intergenerational exchanges along more traditional lines emphasizing patrilineal kinship and coresidence.

At this point the reader may find it puzzling that the discussion has stressed the impact of Chinese socialism after the 1950s. China launched its market reform programs in 1978, and it might seem that by the time our Baoding survey was conducted sixteen years later, in 1994, that set of socialist practices would have substantially eroded in favor of market-based practices shared with capitalist societies like Taiwan. Such a supposition would be incorrect. As of 1994 Baoding and most other cities in the PRC had been transformed in some ways by the reforms, but in other realms relatively little change had occurred. The microinstitutional features that we have focused on in explaining the Baoding–urban Taiwan contrasts in this chapter,

in particular, had not yet been much altered. For example, very few of the Baoding parents or grown children we interviewed in 1994 worked in private enterprises, none acknowledged owning or running a private business, and relatively few rented privately owned housing from others.²⁵ The great majority were still working in or retired from socialist state or collective enterprises and living in "unreformed" public housing that was cramped but cost very little; pensions were being paid; medical insurance coverage was still intact; and few had lost their jobs.

It was only in the late 1990s, in fact, that a new state reform effort designed to eliminate the "iron rice bowl" of socialist job and benefit security was launched, coinciding with efforts to create commercial markets in housing, labor, medical care, and other realms. So in some sense we were observing in 1994 the family consequences of institutional practices that were set in place during the 1950s, but whose days appear to be numbered.

The generally optimistic cast of our findings must therefore be qualified. We have stressed the generally positive features of the lives of the Baoding elderly in 1994. Most of the aging parents we interviewed felt quite secure and satisfied with their lives. Such feelings were a product of two main features of the social order: the socialist practices built during the 1950s that provided them with substantial security and made them less than totally dependent upon their grown children, combined with other practices that kept most of their grown children nearby and ready and willing to provide supplementary support as needed. Since 1994 both of these key sources of a sense of old-age security have been threatened.

To begin with, the dramatic reduction of urban fertility rates since 1970, and even more so the imposition of the one child policy after 1979, mean that most future elderly will have only one, rather than three or even more, grown children available to provide support. Also, the dismantling of the bureaucratic system of allocation of youths to jobs and the rising importance of labor, housing, and other markets means that it is not so certain that most grown children will remain close at hand where they can provide regular assistance. At the same time, young and old urbanites are being confronted with multiple threats to the security that they formerly enjoyed from work units and the state. Some state work units are going bankrupt, while many others are laying off substantial portions of their employees and failing to pay promised pensions to former employees. Medical insurance coverage and benefits are being cut back in favor of co-payment and deductible

schemes, while public housing is being privatized, making housing costs a much more substantial factor in family budgets. Market-based reforms are making family-run and other private firms more common and increasing the possibility of family asset accumulation, although for most urbanites family property inheritance is not yet a major consideration. We do not yet have a clear picture of the varied ways in which urban families have adapted to these post-1994 changes.

To sum up, we have seen that in Baoding in 1994 a set of institutional practices fostered a high level of security for most elderly persons and a rich web of intergenerational exchanges that produced satisfaction for both parents and grown children. We also have learned that the patterning of the filial support system in Baoding was in many ways more modern than existed roughly contemporaneously in urban Taiwan. The contemporary strength of this filial support system cannot be attributed simply to China's ancient traditions of filial piety and strong family obligations. Rather, in key ways the filial support system owed its vitality and shape to the socialist institutions and practices created in the PRC in the 1950s. Those institutions are now being threatened or dismantled, with uncertain consequences for the filial support system that we have described. Filial obligations of grown children to their aging parents have survived multiple waves of social change in China (and in Taiwan) in the past. We will have to await the results of future research to learn whether or how well the filial system of support for the elderly survives this latest assault.