
CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN URBAN CHINESE FAMILY LIFE

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How much have traditional patterns of Chinese family life changed since the revolution of 1949, and how much has not changed? Did revolution and socialism affect family patterns in distinctive ways in the PRC, so that families there are recognizably different from their counterparts in places such as Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong? If there are distinctive patterns observed among families in the PRC after 1949, how can they be explained? Did the economic and other reforms launched in the PRC in 1978 undermine the distinctive stamp that revolutionary socialism placed on families, producing increased convergence toward the family patterns found among Chinese outside the PRC? These are some of the important questions that intrigue a sociologist when examining the impact of China's "two social revolutions", launched in 1949 and after 1978.

In a single paper it is not possible to do justice to the broad topic of continuity and change in Chinese family life, given the considerable importance of the rural-urban gap, regional and local variations, as well as contrasts across classes and time periods. My approach here is much more narrow. I will mainly be summarizing key results from a recently concluded project examining continuity and change in one particular dimension of family life (intergenerational relations) in one particular city (Baoding, Hebei Province) in the mid-1990s, along with selected comparisons with the same aspect of family life in urban Taiwan.¹ I will be concerned with analyzing the similarities and differences in urban family patterns in the 1990s in two ethnically Chinese societies that originally followed quite different development paths—the closed-door revolutionary socialism of the PRC and the market capitalism of Taiwan. I will be arguing that the patterns of family life in Baoding were still shaped, as of the mid-1990s, more by the legacy of socialist institutions and practices of the Mao era than by the post-1978 market reforms. Therefore only at the end of the paper, and somewhat speculatively, will I deal with the question of any post-1978 "convergence" toward the family patterns of capitalist Taiwan.

¹ See Martin K. Whyte (ed.), *China's Revolutions and Intergenerational Relations* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Center for Chinese Studies, 2003).

Theories of Family Change

The family is such a basic, emotion- and tradition-laden institution that most theories assume that it cannot be quickly and dramatically changed. However, at the same time there are a variety of existing theories that attempt to explain how, and how much, some of the primary forces of change in the modern world may alter existing family patterns. It is worth briefly considering the major hypotheses that have been published about how economic development, cultural diffusion from advanced Western societies, the state's social engineering, and socialist institutions may alter patterns of family life.

The most powerful and influential attempt to answer the question of how economic development affects family life is a work published more than forty years ago: William J. Goode's *World Revolution and Family Patterns*.² In Goode's theory, the family norms of a society are shaped primarily by the level of modernization a society has achieved (essentially, its level of economic development), rather than by a particular form of property relations or even whether a society is socialist or capitalist. Thus, an initial reading of his theory leads to the conclusion that Taiwan, as a much richer and more modern society, should have family patterns that have evolved further away from "traditional" Chinese family patterns than is the case in the PRC.

Goode recognized that economic development is not the only force promoting family change in the modern world. His classic book stressed that over time the small romantic-love-based conjugal families of Western societies have come to be seen as the essence of modernity by much of the world (with some notable exceptions, such as fundamentalist portions of the Islamic world). An originally Western family ideal has become a force for family change in the Third World through cultural diffusion.

This second social-change mechanism, cultural diffusion, also leads us to expect greater family change in Taiwan than in the PRC. During the period after 1949, cultural diffusion from the West was much more pervasive in Taiwan than in China, where it was largely held at bay from the early 1950s to 1978,³ when the "open door policy" reintroduced influences from the West and more directly from places like Hong Kong and Taiwan. So family changes that result from the cultural diffusion of the norms of modern family life of advanced Western societies should again be more evident in Taiwan than in the PRC.

However, a third social-change mechanism also needs to be considered—state social engineering, which was clearly much more interventionist in the PRC than in Taiwan. The enthusiasm within the KMT in the 1920s for

² William J. Goode, *World Revolution and Family Patterns* (New York: The Free Press, 1963).

³ It should be noted, however, that one particular type of Western cultural influence, as conveyed through the Soviet Union and China's state promotion of "learning from the Soviet Union", had a deep impact on Chinese society during the 1950s, up until the Sino-Soviet split in 1960. So the period of fairly total isolation from all Western cultural influences was roughly from 1960 to 1980.

modernizing Chinese family life was distinctly muted by the time the Nationalists took refuge on Taiwan in 1949. The authorities in Taipei denounced the PRC for undermining cherished Confucian family traditions through social engineering, while proclaiming that the ROC was an ardent defender of those traditions. Even the distinctive form that economic development took in Taiwan, and particularly the dominant role of family businesses in the economy,⁴ can be seen as helping to reinforce traditional family patterns and values, rather than to engineer changes to them.

In the PRC, by contrast, social engineering by the state was an ongoing feature of life. Those efforts took two different forms: direct and indirect. By direct family change efforts I mean such things as the enactment of new family laws and regulations (such as the 1950 Marriage Law and later revisions), campaigns designed to mobilize the population in pursuit of family change goals (such as the Marriage Law implementation campaign of 1950–53 and the family planning campaigns launched in waves beginning in 1970) and propaganda and educational efforts designed to foster family changes (for example, to promote gender equality, simpler weddings and funerals, and so on).

Indirect family change efforts were arguably at least as important as these direct change efforts. Indirect change refers to the situation in which state social engineering produces alterations in some other institutions for other purposes, with the resulting changed institutional environment then fostering changes in family patterns and attitudes. For example, even though the conclusion of the Marriage Law implementation campaign in 1953 led to a sharp reduction in official propaganda devoted to family change efforts and signs of a more conservative turn in family life in some realms (for example, a reduction in the number of divorces),⁵ the socialist transformation launched in 1955 indirectly affected Chinese families in profound ways, particularly by depriving them of meaningful property and family businesses and making all citizens much more completely dependent upon the bureaucratic structures of state socialism. As a result, the power of parents to arrange the marriages of their children was sharply undermined, even as regime propaganda in favor of free mate choice became less prominent. Another example of indirect family change with similar implications is that, by promoting universal school attendance in coeducational schools, the authorities also fostered greater freedom of mate choice by drawing young Chinese away from their families and giving them increased opportunities for casual contacts with the opposite sex, even though this was not the primary reason for promoting school attendance.

⁴ See the discussion in Susan Greenhalgh, “Families and Networks in Taiwan’s Economic Development”, in E. Winkler and S. Greenhalgh (eds), *Contending Approaches to the Political Economy of Taiwan* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1988).

⁵ This shift toward a more conservative atmosphere regarding the family has been the subject of a number of studies, including C. K. Yang, *The Chinese Family in the Communist Revolution* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1959); and Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); although the particulars are disputed by Neil Diamant in his book, *Revolutionizing the Family* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

In this latter example, pursuing a different goal (more education for the young) indirectly helped foster an officially approved family change—the shift from arranged to free-choice marriages. However, many indirect family changes are unintended and may work at cross-purposes to the state's official family policies. For example, the successful effort to socially engineer increased female participation in collectivized agriculture's labor force had an indirect consequence that was contrary to official family policy. The young women's earning power led to increased bride price payments as a part of the rural marriage process, even though these payments were illegal under the 1950 Marriage Law, condemned as tantamount to "buying brides."⁶ Thus, the precise mixture of change and continuity in family life produced by the PRC's social engineering depended upon a specific combination of direct and indirect change mechanisms, as well as on whether the actual indirect changes reinforced or undermined traditional family patterns. Another way of stating this is to observe that the institutional structures of Chinese socialism that were erected during the 1950s had mixed indirect effects on family life, in some realms promoting family change (for example, enhancing the ability of young people to choose their own spouses) while in other realms (such as rural marriage financial negotiations) reinforcing traditional patterns.⁷ Still, on balance we would expect social engineering, in both direct and indirect modes, to have produced more changes away from traditional forms of family life in China than in Taiwan.

We thus end up with contradictory expectations in trying to understand patterns of family change in China versus Taiwan. The diagram of analytically distinct change mechanisms in Figure 1 tracks the variety of processes of change at work in both places. Insofar as the level of economic development and of cultural diffusion from the West are the major mechanisms producing family change, urban families in Taiwan should exhibit more changes away from traditional family patterns, and mainland Chinese families more continuity. However, insofar as social engineering and the indirect effects of socialist institutions are the major change mechanisms, the reverse pattern is more likely, with families in urban China displaying greater change and those in Taiwan greater continuity.

⁶ The details of this strengthening of bride price negotiations during the collective era are spelled out in William L. Parish and Martin K. Whyte, *Village and Family in Contemporary China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp.183-89.

⁷ It should be noted that the institutional consequences of China's actual socialist institutions are different and much more complex than assumed by socialist theory. The primary text in which classical Marxist predictions about family life in a future socialist society are discussed is Friedrich Engels's *On the Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (Chicago: Charles Kerr, 1902). In Engels's account, marriage in a future socialist society becomes an entirely voluntary and perhaps temporary union unconstrained by economic, religious or legal restrictions. It will be obvious that this sounds much more like family life in advanced capitalist societies today than like the family patterns of contemporary China.

Figure 1: Mechanisms that Foster Changes in Family Patterns

Economic Development

Economic development → Changes in social institutions → Family change
(industrialization, urbanization, etc.)

Cultural Diffusion

Conjugal family ideal → Changes in family norms → Family change
and other Western ideas

State Social Engineering: Direct Change

New family laws, propaganda, → Changes in family norms → Family change
family change campaigns, etc.

State Social Engineering: Indirect Change

State plan for → Socialist institutions → Family change
socialist transformation

Note: Both economic development and socialist transformation are seen as primarily changing families indirectly, as individuals and families react to the changed institutional environment in which they live. In contrast, cultural diffusion and direct state social engineering are seen as having a direct impact on individuals and families by altering their ideas about proper and desirable forms of family life, which then lead them to change their family behavior. This distinction between direct and indirect change forces corresponds roughly to the conventional contrast between “cultural” and “structural” explanations of family change.

In order to test these contradictory predictions about contemporary patterns of family life, I rely on survey data focusing on inter-generational relationships that were collected in Baoding, Hebei, in 1994,⁸ and on the urban portion of similar surveys conducted in Taiwan in 1989 and 1993. The research team for the Baoding survey included the organizer of the Taiwan surveys, Albert Hermalin, and the questionnaire used in Baoding included some of the same questions used in Taiwan in 1989, although it was not a full replication.⁹ The availability of identical or very similar questions in Baoding and in urban Taiwan and of similar sampling designs provides an unusual opportunity to examine contemporary Chinese family patterns in a comparative context. In the pages that follow I will focus first on providing a general picture of what our Baoding survey data tell us about the situation of the randomly selected 1,002 residents over age 50 interviewed in that city and their relations with their grown children. Subsequently I will present systematic comparisons with the situation of older residents in urban Taiwan.

Family Patterns and Filial Support of Baoding Parents

In examining our sample of Baoding parents, the first feature to note is that a high proportion (88 per cent overall, and two-thirds even of those over age 70) were still married. This relatively high percentage means that for most Baoding

⁸ Baoding is a fairly ordinary industrial city on a major railway line about 2 hours southwest of Beijing. Its urban population in 1990 was about 600,000. No claim is made here that Baoding is typical or representative of all of urban China. However, at the same time there is nothing we know about Baoding that leads us to expect that the family patterns there would be particularly distinctive compared to other medium-sized and large cities in China. It should also be noted that, although the sort of detailed analysis presented in this paper is only possible because of the post-1979 opportunity to conduct sample surveys in China, the primary conclusions about patterns of contemporary family life in Baoding drawn from our survey are in all respects consistent with the conclusions of earlier research conducted from Hong Kong as ethnography "at a distance", see Martin K. Whyte and William L. Parish, *Urban Life in Contemporary China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), chapters 5–7. In other words, for the Chinese family, at least, research conducted earlier at the Universities Service Centre has stood the test of time, even if such research could not yield the sort of detail and statistical precision of more recent survey work inside China.

⁹ The Taiwan 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 survey of 4,049 individuals over age 60 living in Taiwan. In the follow-up survey conducted in 1993, 3,155 of those respondents were re-interviewed, and then all children of a randomly chosen one quarter of the 1993 parents were interviewed, yielding a grown child sample of 662. The Baoding survey was jointly sponsored by the Department of Sociology and Population Studies Center at the University of Michigan and the Department of Sociology at Beijing University and the China Research Center on Aging. That 1994 survey involved a probability sample of 1,002 registered residents of the three main urban districts in that city over age 50, and one randomly selected adult child residing in Baoding of each interviewed parent, with 753 of these grown children interviewed.

elderly there was a spouse available to provide emotional and sometimes financial support, perhaps making the need to rely on grown children less than if widowhood and divorce were more common.

Another characteristic of the Baoding sample is that most of the elderly had several grown children who could potentially provide old-age support. Although many commentators are worried about the future impact of China's "one-child policy" on old-age support, most Baoding parents sampled in 1994 had completed their families before that policy went into effect in 1979. In fact, the average number of grown children per Baoding parent was 3.2. Perhaps even more important in terms of the potential impact on filial support is that a very high percentage (almost 90 per cent) of all grown children of the parents we interviewed still lived in Baoding. As a consequence, the average parent had 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 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 example, for graduates of the best universities), such assignments were almost always local.¹⁰ 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 their 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 as their parents. In sum, despite the anti-Confucian rhetoric employed by the 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.¹¹ The economic reforms launched in China after 1978 had not altered this immobility very much as of the mid-1990s.

When it comes to the household arrangements of Baoding parents, however, things look decidedly less "traditional". It is true that 64 per cent of Baoding parents lived with one or more grown child. However, a substantial proportion of this co-residence involved relatively young parents living with an unmarried child or children. (The reader should keep in mind that our sample of

¹⁰ One major exception to this generalization occurred during the Cultural Revolution decade (1966–76). Millions of urban secondary school graduates were mobilized to settle down in the countryside and become farmers. However, after Mao's death and the launching of China's economic reforms in 1978, almost all of these "sent-down intellectual youths" were allowed to return to their cities of origin. So even in this case the end result was an eventual job in the city where the parents resided.

¹¹ These ties were also reinforced by Chinese law. Both the 1950 and 1980 versions of the Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China legally obliged grown children to contribute to the support of their aging parents. In extreme cases the wages of an unfilial child could be docked in order to provide a needy parent with such support. This same provision was included in the revised Marriage Law adopted in 2001.

Baoding parents included individuals as young as 50.) Only about 35 per cent of Baoding parents were living in extended families with one or more *married* child. When they do so, 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—about three times as common, in fact.

Yet fewer than 40 per cent of those over age 60 lived in any form of extended family. The predominant family form among the Baoding elderly is nuclear—residence either only with a spouse, or with a spouse and one or more unmarried child. In other words, it is not socially obligatory, and is not even the most common situation, for an older Baoding parent to reside in an extended family with a married child. Indeed, more than 60 per cent of elderly Baoding residents live separately from all their married children. 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).¹²

It should be emphasized once again that Baoding parents do not live separately because they lack grown children with whom they could live. As noted earlier, most have several children available and, for the older parents in our sample, most of those grown children are married. But co-residence with a married child does not seem to be viewed as necessary, and often is not even preferred. The figures appear to point to an increasing acceptance of a new pattern some have termed “networked families” (*wangluo jiating*), with parents living near several adult children who cooperate in providing support and assistance, but without the need to co-reside with any one such child in order to find old-age security.¹³

The reduction in the likelihood of aging parents living with a married child again is related to particular features of Chinese socialism, in this case the institutions regulating access to urban housing. After the 1950s there was no housing market and very little privately owned housing, even as late as 1994. Rather, most urban people obtained public housing largely through their work units, with resulting cramped space and poor quality but nominal rents, as in

¹² One compilation of estimates provided figures of 56–71 per cent of parents over age 60 on Taiwan living with a married child, and 38–52 per cent for parents over age 60 in urban areas of the PRC. See John R. Logan, Fuqin Bian and Yanjie Bian, “Tradition and Change in the Urban Chinese Family”, unpublished paper, Table 1. Figures on the elderly residing with their extended family in rural China are generally even higher. For example, an ethnographic study of a village in Heilongjiang shows that 64 per cent of those over age 60 were living with a married child in the mid-1990s. Figures computed from Yunxiang Yan, *Private Life under Socialism: Individuality and Family Change in a Chinese Village, 1949-1999* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), Table 7.1.

¹³ See the discussion of the growing acceptance of “networked families” in urban China in Jonathan Unger, “Urban Families in the Eighties: An Analysis of Chinese Surveys”, in Deborah Davis and Stevan Harrell (eds), *Chinese Families in the Post-Mao Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

other state socialist societies.¹⁴ The parents' apartment could not readily accommodate the marriage and co-residence of a grown child, but when they got married grown children were normally entitled to enter the queue for new housing allocations from their own work units. There was a surge in such housing construction during the 1980s and 1990s and, when a new apartment became available, both parents and grown children generally welcomed the chance to reduce extreme crowding by establishing separate residences. Given the nature of China's socialist housing institutions, co-residence in an extended family often was seen not as a cherished goal but as a temporary, cramped necessity.

Financial security is a concern of the aged in any society, and in agrarian and many other societies this security derives from having grown children to support you.¹⁵ In China in the past it was said that one had sons to guard against old age, and that the more sons you had, the more prosperous you would be as you aged. What is the situation in contemporary Baoding? The first point to stress is that most Baoding parents had earnings of their own as well as subsidized public housing and medical insurance coverage and did not have to face total dependency on their children. Overall, about 85 per cent had some earnings, with 25 per cent having wage income only, 51 per cent having pension income only, and 9 per cent enjoying both pensions and wages. Men are favored over women in this area, 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. For example, of the respondents between ages 50 and 59, 82 per cent of the men were still employed, but only 30 per cent of the women. At the other end of the age scale, 96 per cent of the men over age 70 were receiving pensions, but only 29 per cent of the women. These disparities stem from various features of the employment system of socialist China, including the adoption of Soviet-style earlier retirement ages for women and the fact that more women were either not regularly employed or working in small collective enterprises that did not provide pensions. However, given the low figures on widowhood presented earlier, most of the women who do not have any income of their own have a spouse who does. Only 3 per cent of the Baoding parents had no income of their own and no income from a spouse. In other words, for the great majority of Baoding parents, there is no need to rely primarily on support from grown children to obtain financial security. For most Baoding elderly, financial contributions from children are supplementary, rather than essential.

To what extent do grown children provide financial support to their parents, even if such support is not essential? We inquired about two forms of

¹⁴ The housing space available to the average Chinese urbanite actually declined by 20 per cent from 1952 to 1978, to a measly 40 square feet per person. See Martin K. Whyte and William L. Parish, *Urban Life in Contemporary China*, pp. 76-85.

¹⁵ In one particular agrarian society, recent social changes have made support from grown children increasingly unreliable—the contemporary Chinese countryside. On this see Lihua Pang, Alan de Brauw and Scott Rozelle, "Working Until You Drop: The Elderly of Rural China", *The China Journal*, No 52 (July 2004), pp. 73-94.

financial support—both cash assistance and the provision of food, clothing and other material goods. Overall, only about a quarter of Baoding parents were receiving cash assistance from their children, while a little over a 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 this turns out not to be the case. When financial assistance was provided, it reflected parental needs more than simply customary expectations. About 19 per cent of Baoding parents even follow the more “modern” pattern of providing cash regularly to one or more grown child.¹⁶ At the same time, very few Baoding parents (under 3 per cent) 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 non-essential nature of children’s financial assistance.¹⁷

What is the state of relations between aging parents and their grown children in other realms besides finances? In the 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 wide variety of mutual exchanges and frequent interactions. For example, while only 42 per cent of our sample of grown children were living with a parent, another 30 per cent claimed to be in daily contact with their parents, and many of the remaining 28 per cent were in only slightly less frequent contact. Under 1 per cent of parents aged 50–59 to about 11 per cent of those over 70 were receiving physical help from any of their children with things such as going to the bathroom or getting dressed, but about a 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.¹⁸ And by percentages ranging from 75 per cent to 95 per cent, parents

¹⁶ One generalization from gerontological research around the world is that in developing countries the flow of assistance between generations tends to move upward from grown children to parents, while in developed countries it more often flows downward, from aging parents to grown children. This shift in the intergenerational flow of resources with economic development is the central focus of John Caldwell’s theory of the demographic transition. See his book, *Theory of Fertility Decline* (New York: Academic Press, 1982).

¹⁷ The likelihood of cash assistance to parents was responsive to both parental need and a child’s ability to pay. Parents with lower family income were more likely to receive such assistance, and grown children with higher incomes were more likely to provide it. See Shengming Yan, Jieming Chen and Shanhua Yang, “Living Arrangements and Old-Age Support”, in Martin K. Whyte (ed.), *China’s Revolutions and Intergenerational Relations*, Table 6.5.

¹⁸ If we cumulate all of the various forms of assistance, then more than 50 per cent of Baoding parents are receiving at least one kind of specific assistance from their grown children—in fact, about two-thirds. But that still leaves a substantial minority of 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 per cent of parents reported that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the emotional support they were receiving from their children. However, 60–65 per cent of both the parents and children whom we interviewed claimed that, in Chinese society in general, respect for elders had suffered a decline over the previous two decades. From their experiences with their own grown children, though, Baoding parents provide no evidence of any serious erosion of filial obligations.

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 in the past have provided assistance in multiple ways to their growing and adult children—in such realms as helping them get into good schools or acquire a desirable job, financing their weddings, and providing housing in a scarce market.¹⁹ For many grown children, the assistance from parents continues in multiple ways—through providing childcare assistance in particular, but also (as noted earlier) in some cases by providing financial assistance, helping with shopping and household chores, and through advice and the mobilization of personal contacts 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 is very difficult to cope with the demands of urban life without the extra assistance that parents and other kin can provide.

We had expected, nonetheless, to find signs of strong generational differences in the attitudes and values of the parents and grown children. The popular literature on Chinese social trends stresses that the rapidity of social and cultural change and China's tumultuous political shifts have produced marked contrasts between the life experiences and views of young people today and of older generations. Indeed, when we examined a range of social and political attitudes among Baoding parents and their grown children, we found some consistent differences. In general, 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.²⁰ In

the remaining third—who do not report receiving from their grown children any regular support of any of the types about which we inquired.

¹⁹ On this point, see also the evidence presented in Yanjie Bian, “*Guanxi* and the Allocation of Jobs in Urban China”, *The China Quarterly*, Vol. 140 (December 1994), pp. 971-99.

²⁰ See Martin King Whyte, “The Fate of Filial Obligations in Urban China”, *The China Journal*, Vol. 38 (July 1997), pp. 1-31 and especially Table 3. To cite some specific examples, parents more than their adult children agreed with the view that public property is superior to private and that comradeship is a higher form of relationship than friendship, but at the same time they were also more likely to agree with a statement that there would be chaos unless society is ruled by a single set of common values and that the family is happiest when the man works and the wife takes care of the family. Adult children not only spoke more in favor of private property and friendship, but also were more likely

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 toward family obligations and filial support, there is no sign of any such generational differences in our Baoding data. Indeed, where differences exist, it is generally the grown children rather than their parents who feel they should make more sacrifices to serve their parents' needs. Similarly, it turns out that both parents and grown children tend to see the advantages of co-residence between the generations as outweighing the disadvantages, and both generations rank specific advantages and disadvantages in very similar ways. Overall, 92 per cent of Baoding adult children cited the benefits as predominant, compared to 82 per cent of Baoding parents.²¹ We may wonder whether an ethic of "family altruism" leads both parents and children to report levels of intergenerational amity that are somewhat greater than the reality, in a desire to portray family relations positively to the outside world.²² However, the data we have just cited suggest that both parents and grown children genuinely offer multiple forms of assistance to each other.

What interpretation can we give to all of these findings? The absence of comparable data from Baoding for previous times 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 parents there feel that their needs are being neglected, or that their own children lack a strong sense of filial obligation. As noted earlier, there are no signs in our data of a "crisis" of filial support for the Baoding elderly.

We discovered that, for most kinds of assistance to parents, adult children who do not co-reside provide their parents with about as much regular assistance overall as do co-residing children. To be specific: not surprisingly, co-resident children provide their parents with significantly more help with household chores than do children who live elsewhere. However, for physical care (help with bathing, getting dressed and so on), financial assistance, and the provision of regular gifts of food and clothing, children who live elsewhere provide as much assistance as (or even somewhat more than) do those who live with the parents (although these latter differences are not statistically

than their parents to say that either a man or a woman could have a happy life without marrying.

²¹ For further details see *ibid.*

²² Research on intergenerational relations in the United States has found a similar tendency for each generation to stress their obligations more than their needs in relation to the other generation. See John Logan and Glenna Spitze, "Self-Interest and Altruism in Intergenerational Relations", *Demography*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (August 1995), pp. 353-64.

significant).²³ 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 co-residential arrangement in order to obtain old-age security.

Has the nature of the “network” that aging parents rely on also changed? Have 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 co-reside with their parents, daughters visit their parents just as often as do sons. In terms of the kinds of support given to aging parents (physical care, help with domestic chores, financial assistance and the provision of material goods), on balance married daughters do as much as or even slightly more than do their brothers.²⁴ Although the interpretation of this shift toward equal reliance on daughters and 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 this support is delivered have altered quite dramatically in comparison with the past. Filial daughters are now just as important as filial sons in providing support, even after they marry, and having a live-in daughter-in-law is, as a consequence, less important.

Filial Support in Chinese Societies: Baoding and Urban Taiwan Compared

How do these contemporary patterns of intergenerational relations in Baoding compare with those found in urban Taiwan? In order to maximize comparability I will now restrict my attention to Baoding parents over 60 to conform to the age-limits used in the Taiwan survey in 1989, and for the same reason I will restrict the Taiwan sample to residents of the five largest cities on that island (Taipei, Keelung, Taichung, Tainan and Kaohsiung). Thus the comparisons that follow are based on urban residents over 60 in both settings.

²³ For details, see Shengming Yan, Jieming Chen and Shanhua Yang, “Living Arrangements and Old Age Support”, Chapter 6 in Martin K. Whyte (ed.), *China’s Revolutions and Intergenerational Relations*.

²⁴ Before controlling for other variables, it looks initially as if married sons are more likely to provide cash assistance to parents than are married daughters, and that they give somewhat larger amounts of cash when they do. However, when you control for other variables (and particularly for the fact that males have higher incomes than females and married sons are more likely to co-reside with parents than are married daughters), it turns out that the net effect of being a daughter on financial assistance is negligible. On the other hand, married daughters are more likely to provide material goods (for example, food and clothing) to their own parents, and this is still the case even after statistical controls have been applied.

Where relevant I will also include data from the grown children in both locales whose parents were interviewed. The resulting sample sizes are 509 parents in Baoding and 1,149 in urban Taiwan, and 731 grown children in Baoding and 662 grown children in Taiwan. I am presuming that, at least in a rough way, Baoding can represent the situation in medium-sized and large cities in the PRC generally, and that through these survey comparisons I can derive some generalizations about the nature of family change patterns in the urban areas of these two Chinese societies.

This comparison is also based upon an assumption that prior to the 1940s family patterns in the Baoding area and in urban Taiwan were not radically different, so that any contrasts observed in recent years reflect primarily the impact of diverging patterns of social change after 1949. The evidence upon which this assumption is based can be found in the larger study from which the present article is drawn.²⁵

However, in the discussion that follows I will sometimes distinguish between the family patterns of Mainlanders and of Taiwanese on Taiwan and focus primarily on the latter for purposes of comparison with Baoding. Mainlanders, about 15 per cent of Taiwan's population, were originally predominantly male migrants who fled to the island with Chiang Kai-shek in 1949, most of them without their families. Even today older Mainlanders have demographic profiles that are rather unusual. For example, in addition to exhibiting an excess of males (78 per cent of Mainlander elderly in the 1989 survey are males, compared to 47 per cent of the Taiwanese elderly), more aging Mainlanders either did not have spouses (if you discount wives left behind in China) or were married to much younger women. They also had fewer children than the Taiwanese (again, disregarding any children left behind in China), but were more likely to have unmarried children. For reasons such as these, I see the Taiwanese (native speakers of Minnan and Hakka dialects, rather than Mandarin), who are descendants of earlier Chinese settlers on Taiwan and constitute most of the remaining 85 per cent of the population on the island, as providing a more "normal" basis for judging the impact of family change processes since 1949.²⁶

²⁵ See the discussion in Martin K. Whyte, Albert Hermalin and Mary Beth Ofstedal, "Intergenerational Relations in Two Chinese Societies", Chapter 9 in Martin K. Whyte (ed.), *China's Revolutions and Intergenerational Relations*. Where the existing literature indicates differences in dominant family patterns in early twentieth-century Taiwan compared to mainland China, for the most part these are features that should work against the argument being presented here that Baoding family patterns are more "modern" today than the patterns found in urban Taiwan. For example, distinctive features of Taiwan families in earlier times included a more frequent remarriage of widows than on the mainland, and smaller and shallower lineages.

²⁶ Mainlanders differ from Taiwanese in other ways beyond demography. For example, many more Mainlanders had careers in the military or the government bureaucracy, and fewer of them ran family businesses, than is the case for the Taiwanese. In general on the contrasting family patterns of Mainlanders and Taiwanese on Taiwan, see Arland Thornton and Hui-sheng Lin, *Social Change and the Family in Taiwan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

One additional point of clarification is required before I present the results of a comparison of family patterns in Baoding and urban Taiwan. In both locales, and indeed in any society, the specific patterning of intergenerational relations will be affected by the characteristics of the individuals involved—such things as the age and health of the parent or parents, the number and genders of grown children, the relative incomes of parents and grown children and so forth. However, such traits of parents and grown children are not the only factors shaping the specifics of intergenerational relations. The social institutions in which families live also matter a great deal and help produce distinctive norms which affect the choices families make about whether to live together or not, how much support to provide, and other particulars. To state this point in another way, we should expect that a given set of family members with any particular constellation of individual characteristics (age, gender, income and so forth) would organize their family lives in different ways if confronted by the prevailing institutions of the PRC than if operating within the institutions of contemporary Taiwan. For this reason, in the pages that follow I will concentrate on the contrasts in the modal or average family patterns in Baoding and urban Taiwan, rather than on variations in those patterns reflecting the backgrounds of the individuals involved. I will begin by comparing and contrasting key features of the situation of the parents.

To begin with, it is interesting to note that fewer urban parents in the 1989 Taiwan survey still lived with a spouse (61 per cent of the parents over 60) in comparison with Baoding (81 per cent).²⁷ In 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 within the same city (70 per cent versus roughly 84 per cent). The net result is that in Taiwan and Baoding parents have about the same number of adult children living nearby (3.0 versus 3.1).²⁸ Parents in Taiwan's five largest cities were substantially more likely to live in a stem family with a married child than parents in Baoding (50 per cent versus 38 per cent) and were substantially less likely to live on their own or with just a spouse (19 per cent versus 47 per cent).²⁹ If we exclude the demographically unusual Mainlanders from the Taiwan sample and focus on

²⁷ This substantial gap in the proportion of the sample of elderly parents who are married rather than widowed or divorced remains a puzzle we cannot satisfactorily explain. We suspect that fear of cremation (mandatory in China's cities, optional in the countryside) may induce a substantial number of widowed Baoding elderly to return to their native villages, but we have no way to check on this possibility. There is no comparable rural-urban policy difference in Taiwan. Perhaps a slightly higher rate of divorce in Taiwan also contributes to this gap.

²⁸ The reader should bear in mind that the figures provided for Baoding in this section differ somewhat from those presented earlier, since now we are restricting our attention to only those parents aged 60 and over, not the full sample of parents above age 50.

²⁹ The remainder of the cases involve living with unmarried children (23 per cent in Taiwan; 13 per cent in Baoding) and in some other arrangement (8 per cent in Taiwan, 2 per cent in Baoding).

the majority Taiwanese, then the contrast in family structure is even greater—only 13 per cent of Taiwanese urban elderly lived on their own or with just their spouse, while 63 per cent lived with a married child. Here we see a clear sign of greater family “traditionalism” in urban Taiwan than in Baoding. Presumably the contrast between Taiwan’s vibrant private housing market and the stingy bureaucratic allocation of public housing that still prevailed in Baoding in 1994 plays a major role in explaining this difference in the likelihood of parents living with a married child.

Slightly more of those over 60 in urban Taiwan than in Baoding were still employed (25 per cent versus 20 per cent). However, those who have retired are much less likely to receive pensions in urban Taiwan than in Baoding (27 per cent versus 77 per cent). If we again exclude the Mainlanders, who are most likely to benefit from continued state employment into old age and from pensions when they retire, the comparison between urban Taiwan and Baoding is even more dramatic. Twenty-one per cent of indigenous urban Taiwanese over 60 were still employed, but only 13 per cent were receiving pensions (versus 77 per cent in Baoding). Here we see another indication that urban Taiwan, despite its higher level of economic development than the PRC, is not a more “modern” society in all respects.³⁰ Thus the urban elderly in Taiwan have more need to rely on their grown children or kin for old-age financial support.

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.³¹ The urban elderly in Taiwan were more than twice as likely as their Baoding counterparts to receive financial assistance from children (69 per cent versus 32 per cent), and they were also much more likely to be receiving assistance with household chores (65 per cent versus 38 per cent). However, they were slightly less likely to be receiving physical care (4 per cent versus 7 per cent) and material goods (30 per cent versus 45 per cent). Across all types of assistance, the indigenous Taiwanese are more likely than Mainlanders on Taiwan to be receiving assistance. Specifically, the proportion of indigenous urban Taiwanese who receive assistance is 77 per cent for financial help, 69 per cent for household chores, 5 per cent for physical care, and 41 per cent for material goods (versus 48 per cent, 57 per cent, 3 per cent and 20 per cent for Mainlanders). If we take into account the fact that for most parents, financial

³⁰ To be sure, if we had data on the rural elderly in the PRC we would find that very few of them are receiving pensions. Still, these data for Taiwan provide a striking indication that much of the employment even in *urban* Taiwan does not occur through modern corporations and public agencies that provide retirement pensions and other “modern” fringe benefits. Since 1989, policy changes have led to greater availability of pensions to the elderly in Taiwan generally, so that if we conducted our surveys today we would presumably find a somewhat smaller pension-coverage gap between these two populations.

³¹ The results presented here are drawn from Albert Hermalin, Mary Beth Ofstedal and Shiauping Shih, “Patterns of Intergenerational Support in Urban China and Urban Taiwan”, Chapter 10 in Martin K. Whyte (ed.), *China’s Revolutions and Intergenerational Relations*.

assistance and help with chores are more important than physical care and gifts of material goods, and also focus on the demographically more “normal” indigenous Taiwanese populace, on balance we can conclude that regular assistance from grown children to elderly parents is more frequent and important in urban Taiwan than in Baoding.

There are also important differences in terms of who is providing the various kinds of assistance that parents receive. The clearest contrasts between Baoding and Taiwan are visible in a comparison of the *main providers* of physical care and household chores, as displayed in Table 1.³² 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—mentioned much more often than spouses by the Taiwanese in this context. The person next most likely to be named as the main provider of physical care in Baoding is the daughter, and she is more than twice as likely to be portrayed in this role than as a daughter-in-law. Among the urban Taiwanese, in contrast, daughters-in-law are equally likely to be reported in this role as are daughters. The contrast is even more marked in the case of assistance with household chores. Again, the spouse is most often reported as the main provider of assistance with chores in Baoding, while the spouse takes second place among urban Taiwanese.³³ The person most often reported as the main provider of assistance with chores among urban Taiwanese is the daughter-in-law, who is far more likely to fill this role than either sons or daughters. In contrast, Baoding parents rate sons and daughters equally as the next most important after the spouse in providing assistance with chores, with both nominated about twice as often as daughters-in-law as main providers of such assistance.³⁴ The contrasts between Baoding and Taiwan in the patterns of main providers of financial and material assistance are not as striking (details not shown here), but in both areas 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 (particularly in performing household chores) is the fact that the PRC has much higher levels of urban full-time wage employment of married women than

³² Of the four kinds of support inquired about in our questionnaires, physical care and domestic chores are most appropriate for focusing on the roles of married daughters versus daughter-in-law because these tasks were traditionally performed by women of the house.

³³ We suspect that this disparity in naming the spouse as main provider of assistance results from a combination of the fact that more parents in Baoding than in urban Taiwan have living spouses, as well as the job demands on children and children-in-law in Baoding. As a result of the latter, there is less likely to be a grown child or child-in-law in Baoding who has enough free time during the day to provide substantial and regular assistance.

³⁴ Mainlanders in Taiwan show an even more prominent role for the spouse than do Baoding parents, but a much less prominent role for the daughter (as well as the daughter-in-law), in comparison to the indigenous Taiwanese.

Table 1: Percent Distribution of Main Provider for Physical Care and Household Assistance in Baoding and Urban Taiwan

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

*Represents number receiving support and identifying main provider.

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

does Taiwan (more than 90 per cent versus about 40 per cent).³⁵ In Baoding, daughters-in-law are almost all working in full-time jobs in bureaucratic organizations. In addition, fewer Baoding than urban Taiwan parents are living with a married son and daughter-in-law (28 per cent versus about 37–46 per cent for the Taiwanese specifically). Even when they live with their husband and his parents, when Baoding daughters-in-law have any free time they tend to direct their support and assistance at least as much to their own parents as to their husband's. In fact, in regard to household chores, the direction of assistance is often downward, from retired parents to their busy adult children (whether co-resident or not). In Taiwan, by contrast, 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 businesses, where they may more readily also help out in other areas. Here we see another indicator of greater "traditionalism" in urban Taiwan than in Baoding.

To conclude this selected comparison, let us examine 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. I present here only the results for the parents. Table 2 shows 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 slightly different wordings of the initial question shown in Table 2 complicates the comparison, it appears that Baoding parents voice substantially more support (70 per cent versus 38 per cent) for old people living on their own. This contrast is not particularly surprising, in view of the greater propensity of the Baoding elderly to live independently as a couple, as described earlier. However, we find that a high proportion of parents in both societies think a *widowed* parent should live with a grown child, rather than on their own, with Baoding parents actually slightly more likely than their Taiwan counterparts to echo this sentiment (by 73 per cent versus 67 per cent). The next panel in Table 2 shows that Taiwan parents are so averse to living with a married daughter that they would prefer to live on their own if no son is available (by 68 per cent to 32 per cent). Unfortunately we did not ask this question in the Baoding survey.

The remaining figures in Table 2 show contrasts that are much more dramatic, based upon a wording of questions that is identical or very nearly so. In imperial times, a wife whose husband died was expected and pressured not to remarry, and in some instances memorial arches were erected to honor particular

³⁵ Island-wide in Taiwan, about 45 per cent of married women work outside the home between marriage and the birth of their first child (for wives married in the early 1980s). However, after the birth of children this rate drops markedly. See Arland Thornton and Hui-sheng Lin, *Social Change and the Family in Taiwan*, pp. 142-44.

Table 2: Comparison of Attitudes of Taiwan Elderly and Baoding Elderly

ATTITUDES	TAIWAN ELDERLY QUESTION	BAODING ELDERLY
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? <i>Married Child = 62.5 %</i> <i>On own/other = 37.5 %</i> (N = 809)	As long as health permits, an older person should live independently, and not depend on (his/her) children? <i>Disagree = 30.0 %</i> <i>Agree = 70.0 %</i> (N = 509)
	If an older person is widowed, do you think he/she is better off living with a married child, living alone, or other arrangement? <i>Married Child = 67.0 %</i> <i>On own/Other = 33.0 %</i> (N = 801)	An older person who is widowed should not live alone. <i>Agree = 72.7 %</i> <i>Disagree = 27.3 %</i> (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? <i>Married Daughter = 31.8 %</i> <i>On own/other = 68.2 %</i> (N = 803)	N/A
Widow Remarriage	If an older woman has been widowed for sometime, do you think that it is appropriate for her to remarry? <i>No = 61.2 %</i> <i>Yes/depends = 38.9 %</i> (N = 803)	If an older woman has been widowed for a period of time, it is all right for her to remarry. <i>Disagree = 7.6 %</i> <i>Agree = 92.4 %</i> (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? <i>Yes = 77.9 %</i> <i>No/depends = 22.2 %</i> (N = 790)	Do you think it is important for old people to keep property to make sure their family members treat them with respect? <i>Yes, important = 41.4 %</i> <i>No, unimportant = 58.6 %</i> (N = 490)

examples of “chaste widows”. In the PRC, the 1950 Marriage Law (as well as its later revisions) contained provisions denouncing this custom and prohibiting interference with the remarriage of widows. Current urban attitudes on this question in the PRC and Taiwan are strikingly different. Among the elderly in Taiwan, 61 per cent disapprove of the remarriage of widows, while 92 per cent of the elderly in Baoding voice *approval*. This contrast is particularly striking in view of the evidence that in earlier times remarriage of widows was more common in Taiwan than in mainland China.³⁶

Finally, we see from the bottom of Table 2 that a much higher percentage of the elderly in Taiwan (78 per cent versus 41 per cent) 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. This contrast again is not particularly surprising, in light of the general absence in Baoding of inheritable property (a legacy of socialism), in contrast with the prevalence of inheritable family-owned housing, businesses and other assets in Taiwan.³⁷ The figures in Table 2 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 sentiments that those children displayed. So at the most global level our data lead us to conclude that obligations to provide filial support have survived quite well despite the hectic pace (and contrasting paths) of social change in these two Chinese societies.

When we look at patterns of filial support in the mid-1990s, however, we see some marked differences between Baoding and urban Taiwan. These differences fit a consistent 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; elderly urbanites in Taiwan (particularly the indigenous Taiwanese) are more likely to live in extended families with a married son.

³⁶ See the evidence on remarriage of widows in Taiwan before 1949 cited in George Barclay, *Colonial Development and Population in Taiwan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954).

³⁷ For a thoughtful account of how Baoding parents try to encourage filiality in their children in the absence of meaningful inheritable property, see Jieming Chen, “The Effects of Parental Investment on Old-Age Support in Urban China”, Chapter 8 in Martin K. Whyte (ed.), *China’s Revolutions and Intergenerational Relations*.

- Baoding elderly are more likely to retain earnings of their own, with many depending upon pensions; the urban elderly in Taiwan 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 assistance and help with chores from their grown children; the urban elderly in Taiwan are more dependent upon these kinds of assistance.
- Intergenerational exchanges are somewhat more balanced in Baoding; in Taiwan they are more likely to involve a predominant flow of assistance upward from adult children to aging parents.
- Co-residence with a married child is of relatively little importance in shaping support for the elderly in Baoding; co-residence with a married child (usually a son) continues to provide the primary structural basis for support of the elderly in urban Taiwan.
- Married daughters (as well as spouses) play 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 important in the provision of support for the elderly in urban Taiwan, reflecting the continuing centrality of patrilineal kinship in the filial support system there. This centrality is reinforced by the continued salience of patrilineal inheritance of family property and businesses on the island.
- Family attitudes in Baoding are more “modern” in areas 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 areas remain more “traditional”.

In other words, the actual contrasts in contemporary family patterns in Baoding and in urban Taiwan are contrary to what we might expect on the basis of simple indicators of modernization—levels of industrialization, urbanization and so forth—as well as what we would expect in terms of the influence of cultural diffusion from the West. In order to explain these contrasts in contemporary family patterns, we need to examine what might be termed the “micro-institutional context” in which families operate in these two Chinese societies. Broadly speaking, the form of development experienced in Taiwan produced an urban social structure in which an extended family economy remained unusually central in comparison with other societies at the same level of economic development. As Goode suggested in the case of Japan in an earlier era, the centrality of family firms and property may have “slowed” changes in family patterns.

In China, by contrast, the development path pursued for several decades produced cities in which families were much less central to one’s economic well-being than in most other societies at the same level of development. Thus the structural transformations introduced in urban China in the 1950s—toward bureaucratic allocation of jobs, employment in non-kin-based socialist firms, bureaucratic allocation of public housing at nominal rents, retirement pensions, wage employment for virtually all adult women, and so forth—probably

accelerated changes in family patterns. However, because the form of development in China was bureaucratic-socialist rather than market-capitalist, the implications for intergenerational relations were somewhat contradictory. Grown children and their aging parents became more independent of one another economically and residentially than their counterparts in urban Taiwan, but bureaucratic controls over job assignments guaranteed that a higher proportion of grown children than in Taiwan would remain close at hand. On balance, families in urban China look somewhat more “modern” than their counterparts in Taiwan, but still substantially less so than most families in Western societies.

This discussion indicates that, in interpreting the contrasts between families in urban Taiwan and China, the variant of modernization theory introduced by Thornton and Fricke may be useful. They focus on the reduced structural centrality of the “familial mode of social organization” as a key force producing family change in three dispersed regions of the world.³⁸ Our analysis in these pages suggests that socialist transformation in China dramatically and relatively quickly undermined the familial mode of social organization compared to other societies of the same level of economic development.

Another way of looking at this is by comparing the institutional consequences of economic development versus socialist social engineering. Generally speaking, economic development produces institutional changes, such as the decline of the family as the primary organizer of economic production, gradually over many decades. This decline has been delayed even more in a case such as Taiwan, where a form of capitalism sustained the centrality of the familial mode of social organization. Socialist transformation in China, by contrast, produced a much accelerated version of this transition to non-familial, bureaucratic production activity, as well as other associated changes, including the development of pensions for state employees, near-universal employment of adult women and so forth, but without the labor and other markets that accompany the decline of the familial mode of social organization in capitalist societies. These changes took place in China through social engineering during a single decade, the 1950s. This accelerated but non-market transition helps us to understand, not only the features of urban family life in China in the 1990s that are more “modern” than in Taiwan, but also those features that are less “modern” than the family patterns of Western societies.

At this point, the reader may wonder why, in discussing the micro-institutions of urban China, we have focused on the results of the transformations of the 1950s, while largely ignoring the market reforms introduced after 1978. Since the Baoding survey was conducted in 1994, sixteen years after the launching of those reforms, it might seem that the set of socialist practices rooted in the 1950s would have been substantially dismantled

³⁸ Arland Thornton and Thomas E. Fricke, “Social Change and the Family: Comparative Perspectives from the West, China, and South Asia”, *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (December 1987), pp. 746-52.

in favor of the sorts of market-based practices characteristic of Taiwan. Such a supposition would be incorrect. As of 1994, Baoding and other cities in China had been transformed in some important ways by the post-1978 market reforms, but in many respects little had changed. The micro-institutional features that we have focused on to explain the contrasts with urban Taiwan, in particular, had not yet been much altered. For example, very few Baoding parents or grown children whom we interviewed in 1994 owned or even worked in private businesses, and relatively few owned private housing or rented such housing from others.³⁹ The great majority of our respondents were working in or retired from state- or collectively-owned enterprises and living in “unreformed” public housing that was cramped but cost very little; pensions were still being paid; work-unit-funded medical insurance coverage was still intact; few had lost their jobs. It was only in the late 1990s that the Chinese government launched a major effort to eliminate the “iron rice bowl” of socialist job and fringe benefit security, and to foster labor, housing and other markets.

We have used the institutional practices dating from China’s socialist transformation in the 1950s to explain family patterns in Baoding in 1994, but those practices are now being attacked and dismantled. The generally optimistic tone of our conclusions about the well-being of the elderly in Baoding must therefore be qualified. Most of the aging parents we interviewed in that city felt quite secure and satisfied with their lives. Such feelings were a product of two main features of the urban social order—the socialist practices that provided them with substantial security and made them only partially dependent upon care and support from their grown children, and the bureaucratic controls that kept most children close at hand and ready and willing to provide supplementary support as needed. Since 1994 both of these key sources of old-age security have been threatened.

To begin with, the dramatic reductions in urban fertility rates since 1970, and even more so since the imposition of the “one-child policy” in 1979, mean that most urban parents in the future will have only one child upon whom they might rely for old-age support. Also, the dismantling of the bureaucratic system of allocation of youths to nearby jobs and the rising importance of open labor, housing and other markets mean that it is not so certain that aging parents will have even one grown child close at hand to provide support. At the same time both young and old urban people are confronted with multiple threats to the security they formerly enjoyed from work units and the state. Some state-owned firms are going bankrupt, while many others are laying off substantial portions of their employees and failing to pay pensions to former employees. Medical insurance coverage and other benefits are being cut back in favor of

³⁹ To be specific, only 2 per cent of parents and 3 per cent of the adult children we interviewed were either self-employed or working for (or retired from) a private firm. Similarly, only 1 per cent of parents and 5 per cent of children were renting privately owned housing from others, with an additional 5 per cent of parents living in private housing of their own.

co-payment and deductible schemes, while public housing is being privatized, making housing costs a much more substantial factor in family budgets. Market reforms are also making family-run and other private firms more common and increasing the possibility of family asset accumulation, although for most urban people the inheritance of family property is not yet a major consideration. We do not yet have a clear picture about the ways in which Chinese urban families have adapted to these post-1994 changes. However, there are reasons to expect that the patterns of family change in the PRC will continue to reflect the distinctive institutions and policies of that society and not “converge” in any simple way toward the family patterns of Taiwan, which in turn reflect not simply “universals” of modern industrialized societies, but the distinctive history and institutions of that island.⁴⁰

To sum up, in Baoding in 1994 a set of institutional practices whose roots lay in the 1950s fostered a high level of security for most elderly people and a rich web of intergenerational exchanges that produced satisfaction for both parents and their grown children. The patterning of filial support and the micro-institutions that structured these patterns are both more “modern” in key respects than their counterparts in Taiwan in the same period. The strength of the modified filial support system in urban China in the mid-1990s is attributable in large part to socialist institutional practices that are now under assault. We will have to await the results of future research to learn whether or how well urban Chinese families and the support system for the elderly adapt to these latest transformations.

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⁴⁰ For example, there is nothing comparable in Taiwan to the strictly enforced one-child policy of the PRC after 1979, and China's market reforms to date do not seem to be leading to the proliferation of urban family firms of the sort found in Taiwan.

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