

[Charles Stafford](#)

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Chinese patriliney and the cycles of yang and laiwang

Charles Stafford

As James Watson observes, anthropologists have tended to view Chinese society through a 'lineage paradigm'--in part mistakenly derived from the seminal work of Maurice Freedman, and thus, by extension, from the work of his Africanist colleagues--which assumes that in China 'the ideology of patrilineal descent takes precedence over all other principles of social organization' (J. Watson 1986:274). They have also often drawn, again following Freedman, a distinction between the study of Chinese 'kinship' (primarily meaning formal descent groups such as lineages) and the study of the Chinese 'family' (primarily meaning the informal business of everyday family life):

We can show without much difficulty that kinship bound together large numbers of people in Chinese society and exerted an important effect on their political, economic, and religious conduct at large. Family is another matter. Essentially, its realm is that of domestic life, a realm of co-residence and the constant involvement in affairs of the hearth, children and marriage. Kinship is something different (Freedman 1979:240-1).

In short, while the 'lineage paradigm' assumes that the ideals and realities of descent-based kinship are paramount in Chinese social organization, family life and the 'affairs of the hearth' have generally been, as a matter of definition, explicitly excluded from kinship, and thus from this central organizing role.

Whatever its analytical strengths and weaknesses--and Freedman's contribution to the study of Chinese kinship is beyond question--this formalist approach is liable, I think, to obscure in anthropological accounts the lived experience of Chinese kinship, and to misconstrue the relationship of 'affairs of the hearth' both to formal kinship and to other kinds of relatedness in China. I should stress that the term relatedness, as I use it in this paper, refers to literally any kind of

relation between persons--including those seemingly 'given' by biology and/or 'produced' via social interactions--and is thus obviously intended to encompass formal and informal relations of kinship and much else besides. The justification for using such a decidedly general term is the fact, illustrated in most of the contributions to this volume, that the boundaries between various categories of human social relations (including those defined as 'formal kinship', 'informal kinship', 'fictive kinship', and 'friendship') are often very malleable indeed. This is why it is useful to question these categories together, and in particular to examine the boundaries between them, under the encompassing category of relatedness. When this is done in the Chinese case, we discover, not surprisingly, a wide range of indigeneous or popular notions of relatedness, and two of these will be set out below. These are not the ones classically associated with China, and they therefore help challenge some of our preconceptualisations about Chinese kinship (e.g. about the status of women within it).

I would suggest that the 'lineage paradigm' of Chinese anthropology, when placed in comparative perspective, has helped sustain the impression that Chinese kinship is, in essence, an extreme and non-fluid version of patriliney: a male-dominated system of rigidly defined agnatic groups, of kinship given by birth, of immutable connections, of exclusion, and of women who have power only as disruptive outsiders. (This impression is the product of a particular definition of kinship, and what this definition excludes.) The implicit and potentially misleading comparison is with seemingly less rigid, less exclusive systems of kinship: those portrayed as fluid, negotiable, incorporative and processual, and in which the roles of women are seen in a positive light. Here I have in mind recent discussions of 'fluid' Austronesian kinship and identity (e.g. Carsten 1995aa, 1997; Astuti 1995; and the contributions to this volume by Astuti and Middleton). The mutability of kin relations portrayed in these accounts--their creative production and transformation over time--

seems almost directly at odds with the supposedly 'given' nature of Chinese patrilineal descent.

In this essay, however, I want to stress precisely the processual and creative aspects of Chinese kinship and relatedness. I will suggest that alongside patriliney, which undoubtedly does carry a great force in China, and alongside affinity, which in recent years has received greater attention in sinological anthropology, we find two other equally forceful, and relatively incorporative systems of Chinese relatedness. In an attempt to remain close to informants' models, I'll tentatively gloss these as 'the cycle of yang' (which centres mostly on parent-child relationships) and 'the cycle of laiwang' (which centres mostly on relationships between friends, neighbours and acquaintances). In both cycles, the production of relatedness (often through rather everyday and/or domestic transactions) is clearly seen; and I will argue that in China 'rigid' patrilineal descent is crucially articulated with these distinctly fluid, creative and incorporative systems.

The contributions by Lambert and Hutchinson to this volume, which draw on Rajasthani and Nuer material, similarly stress the articulation of patriliney with other bases of relatedness. Lambert, for her part, discusses the significance of 'fictive' Rajasthani kinship--ties based on co-residence and commensality--within a strongly patrilineal and virilocal setting. Hutchinson discusses 'substances' (money, guns, paper) which have become, in recent decades, increasingly salient in Nuer social life. She argues that these have become new 'media of relatedness' for the Nuer--thus transforming, and being transformed by, longstanding conceptions of 'blood' and kinship. In all three cases--Nuer, Rajasthani and Chinese--patrilineal ties of blood and descent, however defined, must be seen in the context of other notions of relatedness, notions which themselves change in the flow of history.

In what follows, I will first describe a wedding in rural north China in order to illustrate what is meant by the cycles of yang and laiwang, and in order to show how they coexist and partly merge with patriliney and affinity.¹ Then I will turn to the

literature on Chinese kinship in order to ask why the patrilineal image remains dominant in our understandings. Finally, by way of conclusion, I will return to the more general question of Chinese relatedness in comparative perspective. I should perhaps stress at the outset that the paradigmatic examples of Chinese patriliney have been drawn from the powerful lineages of South China, whereas my material comes from communities in northeastern China and southeastern Taiwan where lineages, as such, are not elaborated. I would however suggest that these two cycles of relatedness are certainly found within even the most 'exclusive' Chinese descent groups, and that my argument is supported by existing ethnography from all regions of China.

The wedding

The setting is the courtyard of a brick farmhouse at the end of a dirt path in Dragon-head, a small farming village in northeastern China. Here a crowd of local people (about fifty of them) have gathered to watch over and to participate in various preparations for a wedding which will take place tomorrow. Noisily joking amongst themselves, women squat in a make-shift tent outside and prepare food for what they say will be a 40-table (i.e. about 300-guest) wedding-banquet. The mother of the groom seems very agitated, and the father looks distinctly ill, as if he may shortly have a heart-attack. A large pig has been slaughtered and its carcass dragged, on the back of a cart, into the middle of the courtyard. Now an elderly man and his wife carve up big chunks of pork, and weigh and sell this meat to a circle of standers-by, mostly women. Young men loiter around the edges, smoking cigarettes and talking, while children race in and out of the house and the courtyard.

In the midst of this preparatory activity, a friend suggests that I should be introduced to the groom. I'm taken up to the house and led into the 'new room' (xinfang), i.e. the newly-prepared bridal chamber. Here I'm left alone with a young man who sits in splendid isolation, smoking nervously, not allowed to help with the

preparations for his own wedding. Through the window we observe the activity outside. The room itself is in striking contrast with the rest of the austere farmhouse. The floor is newly painted a shiny red, and guests are expected to remove their shoes on entering. The kang (i.e. the fire-heated brick platform-bed) on which he sits is surrounded with new lace curtains, and piled high with pink and red quilts. (I'm reminded of Emperor Pu Yi's observation about his own wedding chamber: 'it all looked like a melted red wax candle'.) A 'cute' (ke'ai) poster of a baby boy and girl adorns the wall. The room is equipped with a series of new appliances: an electric fan and a small washing machine from the bride's family; and a colour television, stereo and VCR from the groom's family.

The young man explains that his parents have spent about 20,000 renminbi, i.e. over #1600, on this event, including the preparation of the xinfang. This amount--now an average sum for the 'groom's side' (nanfang) to spend on a wedding--represents (very roughly) from two to ten year's income for a rural family.ⁱⁱ Getting married in this way, he says, is of course a lot of trouble (mafan), but (as has often been explained to me) it is almost impossible to get by in rural China with a simple, inexpensive wedding. This is partly because, for rural families with sons, wedding-related expenses are unavoidable in a market which favours the 'bride's side' (nufang). In order to attract a bride, as one man put it, 'even a poor groom's side still has to spend a lot of money--and if they're rich, they must spend even more!' By contrast, these days 'the ones raising daughters strike it rich' (yang guniang de dou facai).

The groom tells me that he and his fiancée, a young woman from a village about 2 Ω hours away by bus, were 'introduced' (jieshao) by an intermediary, and now they know each other fairly well. Tomorrow morning he will collect her from her parent's home, and before leaving she will eat pork, literally 'departing-mother-meat' (liniangrou), 'so that she will not miss her mother' (weile ta buhui xiang mama). Then bride and groom will be transported, along with some 40 of her relatives, by taxi and

bus back to this very room. Various wedding-day activities--including yakang ('pressing the kang' with a baby boy), and naofang (in which the bride and groom are roughly teased about sex while sitting on the kang)--will then highlight the hope that this outsider woman will quickly provide her husband's family with a new descendant, and the hope that her first or second child will be a son.ⁱⁱⁱ

Although this is a wedding--and by definition a moment for celebrating affinity--the expense, the bother, and the symbolism of the event also seem fairly clear manifestations of an elaborated Chinese concern with patriline and descent. Of course, the new affinal link to the bride's family is acknowledged and celebrated. The respected guests at the wedding banquet will be her parents and elder kinsmen, all of whom will eat in the place of honour (the kang-room of the groom's parents), while the groom's parents will themselves eat outside. In the coming years, the newlyweds will continue to have important ties to the bride's natal home. But the centre-piece of the wedding is precisely her separation from this home, and her installation in her new family's bridal chamber, the purpose of which--producing children to continue a patriline--is made very clear. The woman is 'marrying out' (chujia), the residence is virilocal, her children will belong to her husband's family and take his name, and she will respectfully serve (fengyang) her husband's parents now and in their old age. From the perspective of the groom's parents the expense of the marriage, however inflated, is necessary: it is essential to attract a good daughter-in-law, because a daughter-in-law is a crucial element in their hoped-for future.

Childhood and the cycle of yang

In any case, the emphasis in the wedding on descent and on affinity is made explicit. But there are at least two other systems of relatedness which impinge on this wedding, the first of which I have discussed elsewhere, and have glossed as 'the cycle of yang' (Stafford 1995:79-111). Yang is a very common Chinese expression,

meaning ‘to raise’ or ‘to care for’, e.g. to ‘raise flowers’ (yang hua), to ‘raise pigs’ (yang zhu), or to ‘raise children’ (yang haizi). In the case of children, the provision of yang--a kind of all-encompassing nurturance--is, of course, very complex. It is also productive of an almost inescapable obligation: once they have grown up, children are heavily obliged to yang, ‘care for’, or fengyang, ‘respectfully care for’ their parents in old age. More specifically, the receipt of yang from one’s parents during childhood obliges sons to return yang to their parents later in life. But while old-age provision for parents is often discussed as if it were only a son’s business, most daughters effectively transfer their ‘debt of yang’ to their parents-in-law upon marriage, while in many cases still providing some care to their own mother and father. Indeed, contrary to popular perceptions, the cycle may have as many implications for daughters as for sons, and it arguably has more practical implications for women than for men. This is because it is women who normally shoulder (often ‘on behalf of’ their husbands) the actual process of providing yang: in many cases for their parents-in-law, their parents, their children and their grandchildren.

But what is the detail of this provision? People often mention that parents provide their children with housing, clothing, education, money and food, but on examination none of these categories is very straightforward. For example, in my account of Angang (in Taiwan) I described how the category of food could arguably include the popular remedies and traditional medicinal foods which parents provide for their children. It could also include the expensive magical charms (fu)--slips of paper on which possessed spirit mediums write divine script--which children swallow for protection against evil spirits. Through providing food, medicines, magical charms, etc., parents ‘protect and strengthen the bodies/persons’ (hushen, bushen) of their children (Stafford 1995:97-100). And the expense and bother involved in providing this kind of ‘protection and strengthening’ to children--which goes on for many years--is not thought to be a waste because, as I have said, it is these very

children who will be relied upon in the future. Their eventual 'respectful nurturance' (fengyang) of their parents may include the provision of material assistance-- primarily money, food and housing (cf. Hsieh 1985)--but also emotional support, e.g. affection.

The 'cycle of yang' is, then, a very involving system of mutual obligations between parents and children, which centrally entails the transfer of money and the sharing of food. This cycle is also closely linked to the provision of care for ancestors, who similarly receive food and money from their (heavily obligated) descendants. For this and other reasons, the idea of a 'cycle of yang' may appear to effectively overlap with the notion of patriliney, and with the Chinese emphasis on descent and on xiao, 'filial obedience'. But I would suggest that it does not entirely do so, for three reasons. First, it is possible to produce, through yang, relatedness with children who are not one's own 'natural' descendants. Children raised by foster-parents (called yang-mothers and yang-fathers) are obliged, because they have received yang from them, to care for their foster-parents in old age. This might simply be seen as a way of imitating descent: adults without children 'produce' them through yang. But I think it is wrong to assume that descent, as such, is the point, or to assume that yang cannot have a force--or a desirability--of its own (as I have tried to show). Second, it is possible to have a 'cycle of yang' where descent, in the normal sense, is not a consideration. For example, in Dragon-head I know a woman who, after the death of her mother, raised and cared for her younger brothers; they now provide her with yang in the form of money and food as if they had been her descendants. But they are not her descendants, and she has her own husband and children. Her brothers say that they support her because she raised them (yang), and many other examples suggest that yang may produce its own return (i.e. 'without descent'). Third, there are many cases in which a failure in the 'cycle of yang' is what provokes the termination of relations of descent. Sons who fail to provide their parents with yang may be dropped from family estates, ties of blood

notwithstanding. In sum, yang may produce kinship where there is no 'natural' tie of descent, and the absence of yang may end kinship where a 'natural' descent tie exists.

Here I have only provided a cursory outline of this cycle, but there are two further observations I would like to make. First, I would suggest that in informal Chinese kinship--i.e. the kind of kinship one observes in everyday life in a Chinese community--idioms related to the cycle of yang are as salient, and perhaps even more so, than idioms related to patrilineal descent, as such. In other words, the lived experience of Chinese kinship is closely connected to the cycle of yang. And this cycle--through its emphasis on feeding, nurturance and care--is comparable (as I have mentioned above) to the processual, fluid and transformative forms of kinship which anthropologists do not generally associate with China. Second, I would suggest that if we paid as much attention to the cycle of yang as has been paid to patrilineal descent, our view of the role of women in Chinese kinship and society might be considerably transformed. It may be true that from the perspective of formal kinship ideologies Chinese women are 'dangerous' and sometimes even 'polluting' outsiders. But women are at the centre of the most important processes in the cycle of yang, and it is through their everyday engagement with this cycle that they play, and are seen to play, a highly-valued role in Chinese kinship.

Now, what has this cycle to do with the wedding I have been describing? Forget, for a moment, the idea that the wedding shows how interested people are in honouring ties of affinity, or in generating descendants for a patriline. Instead, note that a wedding is one of the key elements in the parent-child cycle of yang. The last great, and often very expensive, obligation of Chinese parents to their children--having provided them with food, clothing, housing, education, etc., throughout childhood--is to arrange for them to be properly married off. Until this has happened, the work of parents is not done. As much as the son, sitting in the 'new room', is obliged to marry for the sake of his parents, his parents, rushing about making final

arrangements, are obliged to provide him with a wedding. They do this knowing that their son, along with his wife and their children, will eventually provide them with support and care (yang). The bride, coming into this new family, effectively transfers her obligations to her parents-in-law: they are the ones she will live with and yang. And the marriage itself partly compensates her own parents for the expense and trouble of having raised her, while an in-coming daughter-in-law (assuming that they have a son) will hopefully provide them with the yang they are due in old age.

Notice however, and this is an important point, that the bride and groom are also involved in providing themselves with a wedding. Once young people (both sons and daughters) are old enough to work and earn money, they usually hand over most of their income to their parents. But this is not yet 'support for parents'. A good proportion of this money is usually spent to cover future wedding expenses, including the preparation of the 'new room' (in the case of the groom), or the provision of a dowry for the bride (cf. Chen 1985). The fact that children in this way effectively subsidize their own weddings may seem to diminish what I have been saying, that the wedding manifests a parental obligation which is part of the cycle of yang. But in fact this flowing back and forth of support (my assistance makes it easier for you to assist me) is at the very core of Chinese notions of parent-child reciprocity.

Neighbours and the cycle of laiwang

A somewhat similar notion of mutual support is at the core of the other cycle I have mentioned, the cycle of laiwang. In certain ways--not least because it involves many similar processes and idioms, especially transfers of money and food--this cycle could be characterised as the extension of yang to the outside world. In the anthropological literature on China it has most often been discussed in relation to the question of social 'connections' or guanxi (see especially Yang 1994 and Yan 1996).

I will briefly illustrate this cycle by again returning to the wedding in Dragon-head village, and by presenting a different, and rather cynical, view of the proceedings.

On the night before the wedding I visit the home of an elderly friend, Mr. Zhang, who really cannot understand why I should be so interested in attending tomorrow's celebration and banquet. He warns that they will expect money from me, and is very concerned that I'll try to give more than necessary. When attending wedding banquets, he notes, most neighbours (assuming they are farmers of average income) normally give 20 renminbi (#2.50), and Mr Zhang repeatedly stresses that I should not give more than this amount. (His own annual income is only about 2000rmb.) Relatives and friends often give 50 to 100rmb for wedding banquets, and the well-to-do are expected to give even more. Mr Zhang notes that he does not himself intend to go, because of the expense and also because the kinship connection is 'distant' (yuan): the groom's family are merely the relatives of his wife's sister-in-law. Beyond this, he disapproves of the practice (much expanded in recent years) of having very elaborate banquets for weddings and other occasions. According to him, cadres with 'advanced thinking' (sixiang jinbu) set a good example by not being wasteful in this way. He points out that in the case of this wedding the groom's family are quite poor, and they have gone heavily into debt in order to have a celebration which will 'look good for the guests' (dui keren haokan). They have borrowed 14,000 renminbi, a sum he says they will never manage to repay.

Late the next morning I go to the house where the wedding is to take place. The groom has long since departed to collect his bride, and it is raining on and off--a potential disaster given that they are hoping to feed some 300 people outside. Most of the activity centres on food-preparation (inside the house and under a small tent). But a small crowd has also gathered on the porch where the village head (cunzhang) and an assistant are collecting money. Arriving guests hand over cash, and their names and the amount given are written in a book; in return they receive six pieces

of candy wrapped in auspicious red paper. Some women point out to me that this is a good thing: you give money, it is registered, and then if you later have some 'matter' or 'business' (shi) of your own, this family will come and help you (cf. Potter & Potter 1990:210, Pasternak 1972:64).

Then I am spotted by my friend Mr Zhang, who after all has decided to attend. He immediately drags me off to the furthest corner of the courtyard where he and a group of laotou (old men, literally 'old heads') have staked claim to the place of least honour. Around a wooden table set close to the ground, we squat on bricks which are sinking in the mud. We fiddle with bowls and chopsticks, chatting about the weather and the wedding, and impatiently wait for the food to be served. Meanwhile the number of tables around us and in the neighbouring courtyard has expanded to 50. Because nothing can happen, and no one can eat, until the bride arrives, there is much discussion of the bad arrangements which have been made for her transportation (she might, after all, have been lodged close by last night). After a while this conversation focuses on the possibility that she might not arrive at all, in which case, as everyone agreed, we would certainly still need to eat. One old man knew of just such a case in which the bride-bringing bus had broken down, and the guests at that wedding had definitely eaten.

Then, belatedly, the bride and groom and her family arrive in cars and minibuses which make their way slowly through the muddy village lanes. The guests step out, and the bride and groom approach the house, making their way through a volley of firecrackers. In front of the assembled hungry crowd, they bow to their elders, and then to each other, before walking into the house. As far as the guests outside are concerned, that is the end of the ritual, and now the food should be served. But there is further delay, and people keep coming out from the house and looking anxiously up the village lanes. A rumour goes around that the bride's mother has not yet arrived, and one of the old men at my table says to forget the mother, the banquet should begin (kaixi). But it is not the mother who is missing, and after a few

more moments the banquet does begin--sixteen dishes are served, and we get down to the serious business of eating and drinking. I am told that the meal probably cost about 3000 rmb--for Mr Zhang 1 Ω year's income--but that this expense is more or less offset by the cash gifts collected in the morning. The consensus is that the food is only very average (yibande). At the weddings of rich people, I am told, the food does not include vegetables (cai) and is instead all meat dishes (rou): chicken, pork, beef and very big fish.

From Mr Zhang's perspective, it may seem that this particular wedding is a waste of time, an unwelcome economic burden. He is indifferent to the fate of the groom's patriline, and to its affinal network. As I noted, he measures this kinship connection as a distant one. Furthermore, much of the ceremonial associated with weddings is private (i.e. not displayed to the crowd), so in effect Mr Zhang is only there for the meal, which he concludes is nothing special. So what, in the end, is the reason for going? Later he reiterates that contributing to these ceremonies of various kinds is expensive and burdensome, especially in communities such as Dragon-head where everyone is an acquaintance, friend or relative. But he also quickly stresses that 'attending ceremonials' (ganli) is important because it is part of laiwang, literally 'come and go'. The expression laiwang describes the reciprocal movement, back and forth, between people who have a relationship of mutual assistance. (Thus the expression wo gen ta you laiwang: 'I have laiwang with him', meaning 'to have relations'.) As Mr Zhang puts it, 'when you have some business, I'll come to you, when I have some business, you'll come to me' (ni you shi wo lai, wo you shi ni lai). In our discussion, Mr Zhang also refers to the Chinese idiom li shang wang lai--'courtesy demands reciprocity', which could be translated as 'ceremonial generates back-and-forth', i.e. laiwang. The point is that the cycle of laiwang, which often consists of seemingly minor or 'ceremonial' transactions, is a crucial element in the building-up of relatedness between those who are not related (or not closely related) by kinship.

The example Mr Zhang spontaneously gives is this. He had recently been forced to build a new home--for him an almost unimaginably expense undertaking--because his old one was literally collapsing. At that time, many relatives, friends and neighbours had offered assistance (both in the form of gifts and loans). The father of the groom at today's wedding had given Mr Zhang some help, albeit small, and it was only right that Mr Zhang should therefore 'attend the ceremonial' (ganli) for the man's son, thus helping to pay for a banquet which would 'look good' for the affines: 'courtesy demands reciprocity'. For the bride and groom, and for their families, the wedding banquet is important not least because it manifests a community of support. As with the cycle of yang, the cycle of laiwang is built up through small actions and interactions, and it often similarly involves commensality, transfers of money, and the sharing of responsibilities. And although laiwang, like yang, is sometimes conceived of as a transaction between men, this view is once again very misleading; the actual burden of producing everyday laiwang--and even that of special occasions--is often undertaken by women.

The source of the lineage paradigm

In sum, the cycles of yang and laiwang--these two idioms of relatedness--carry a great force in China, and any Chinese 'family history' inevitably includes them, as surely as it includes a history of descent and inter-marriage. They stand alongside patriliney and affinity, but are not reducible to them. However, as I said at the outset, Chinese kinship seems almost inevitably to stand, within anthropology, for a strong version of patriliney. One reason for this is undoubtedly the influence, within sinological anthropology, of a Freedman-inspired lineage paradigm. (Freedman's ongoing influence is highlighted in a volume on 'the Chinese family' published in 1985 in which, as Arthur Wolf notes, fully 13 of the 15 articles address Freedman directly [A. Wolf 1985:3-4].) Freedman's work, in turn, must be seen in the context of the central themes of British social anthropology, and the development in the 1940s

and 1950s of an Africanist 'lineage theory' which stressed the overriding significance of lineage and descent in certain kinds of societies, and especially in non-state 'homogeneous' societies (Kuper 1988:190-209).

Freedman was clearly influenced by this literature and addressed it directly in his own work (e.g. 1958:126-40), while always trying to stress the unique characteristics of Chinese society and history. (For example, by rather drily pointing out that 'however we define the category "homogeneous societies" we can scarcely say that China falls within its scope' [1958:136].) Indeed, Watson notes that Freedman himself had serious misgivings about an overly lineage-oriented view of China, and also notes that the lineage paradigm has been subject, over the years, to many critical studies. But he suggests that even these critiques (focusing, e.g., on affinity, ethnicity, class, and gender) have tended to be structured around the lineage paradigm (J. Watson 1982, 1986:274-5). Thus, as recently as 1995, David Faure and Helen Siu were again commenting--in a work which relates south China lineages to land and ethnicity--that 'Maurice Freedman's seminal works on Chinese kinship and descent are so influential that many scholars have long taken for granted the lineage paradigm for understanding Chinese social life' (Faure & Siu 1995:210).

But this comment seems to me slightly misleading. What is striking is not that scholars have taken for granted the lineage paradigm (and I would guess that most of them have not done so), but rather that in spite of their best critical efforts, including those of Freedman, we often still sum up Chinese kinship and social life with reference to patrilineal descent. The impression still lingers that patrilineal descent (i.e. the 'essence' of Chinese kinship) does take 'precedence over all other principles of social organization' in China. Why should this be the case? I propose four interlinked explanations within the history of the anthropology of China: the use of a formalist definition of kinship (which excludes 'family life' and informality); an emphasis on regional analysis (which tends to emphasize the role of formal descent groups, and the 'public' roles of men, while overlooking the significance of local

processes of kinship and relatedness, and the 'private' roles of women); an emphasis on historical sources (which often take a male-dominated view of kinship, and therefore tend to reinforce the 'lineage paradigm' view of China); and an under-emphasis on participant-observation fieldwork. That is, the emphasis on regional and historical analysis has tended to devalue, within sinological anthropology, the role of village-based participant-observation fieldwork, and this has perhaps been further compounded by the practical difficulties of conducting village-based research in the PRC. One result is that Chinese ethnography is sometimes difficult to compare with ethnography from settings where 'intimate' fieldwork is more common. I would suggest we have partly missed the 'fluid' nature of Chinese kinship because we have not always done the kind of fieldwork in which the production of relatedness is there to be seen.

Perhaps a more prosaic reason for the ongoing influence of the lineage paradigm is simply that much of the best work in sinological anthropology has focused on descent groups, often based on ethnography in south China where such groups were very strong. This material (which after all originates in the concerns of Chinese informants) is sometimes very striking. For example, James Watson notes (in a review article which stresses precisely that Chinese kinship is not all about descent) that a Chinese lineage can be 'a remarkably closed corporation' in which absorbing outsiders is a messy business (1982:598-9). He points out that 'one of the commonest forms of slander among the Cantonese is to assert publicly that one's rivals have sunk to such depths that they have had to recruit outsiders' (1982:599).^{iv} A similar principle is arguably shown again in the images, equally striking, of the incorporation of 'dangerous outsider women' into the patrilineal system. As Watson observes, 'viewed strictly in formal terms, Chinese women stand outside the male-dominated kinship system altogether' (J. Watson 1982:615). Based on research in Taiwan, Emily Martin Ahern (1975) suggests this may help to explain, at least in part, Chinese religious ideologies of women's spiritual pollution. For example, in giving

birth (something obviously necessary to the continuation of patriline) women are contaminated with their own pollutedness and this follows them to their graves. Ahern suggests it is partly the ambiguous status of women--as outsiders who produce insiders--which makes them simultaneously powerful and polluting (Ahern 1975, cf. Seaman 1981). Rubie Watson notes that in Ha Tsuen (New Territories), a community where 'patrilineal values dominate social life', married-in women are 'suspect' (R. Watson 1986:620). This is partly reflected in naming practices which implicitly devalue (or, more accurately, ignore) their status. While men during the life-course acquire various names which mark important social transitions and roles, and which are often linked to the classical scholarly tradition, women progressively become nameless. In the end they are simply called 'old woman', and this implies that they 'do not, indeed cannot, attain full personhood' (1986:619). Selective readings of these kinds might (however wrongly) give the impression of a kinship system in which outsiders are almost impossible to absorb, and in which women (defined as outsiders) are polluters and non-persons. More generally, the image has perhaps been given of a society dominated by kinship^v and dominated specifically by the ideology of patrilineal descent.

Towards a new paradigm of Chinese relatedness

But consider some of the work which might be said to show otherwise. Anthropologists have increasingly shown the importance attached in China to relationships which are not based on kinship. Some recent examples include DeGlopper's work on 'voluntary association' among the residents of Lukang in Taiwan (1995), the discussions by Mayfair Yang and Yan Yunxiang of personal guanxi networks in post-Mao mainland China (1994), and my own work on the relationship between teachers and pupils in Taiwan (Stafford 1995:56-68). Without question, in many Chinese contexts ties based on mutual assistance, co-residence, friendship, and discipleship may be more significant than ties of kinship.

Historians and anthropologists have also shown that Chinese patriliney only ever operates within a wider politico-economic context (see e.g. Gates 1996). That is, they have problematised the notion of pan-Chinese, timeless principles of kinship, and shown that descent, as such, never 'stands alone'. The volume edited by Siu & Faure (1995) addresses, among other things, the mutual impact of ethnicity, state-building and lineage development in a single Chinese region, suggesting that the political-economy of land control, and considerations of ethnic differentiation, may be as significant in lineage development as considerations of kinship in the narrow sense. Rubie Watson (1985) examines the interrelation of patrilineal ideology and class, and shows how patriliney may underpin class exploitation within lineages. The volume edited by Davis & Harrell (1993) analyses the (often paradoxical) impact of state intervention and official ideology on kinship practice in post-Mao China. In short, in terms of Chinese history, and even within the history of Chinese kinship, ethnicity, class and state intervention must be viewed as equal players with 'patriliney'.

Anthropologists have of course also stressed the significance, within Chinese kinship, of marriage and of affinal links (e.g. Pasternak 1972:60-94, R. Watson 1985:117-136, Goody 1990:21-51, Watson & Ebrey 1991). James Watson observes that for most Chinese people, agnates have probably been 'no more significant than affines, matrilineal kin, and neighbours' (1982:606). Freedman himself stressed, for instance, the significant and ongoing involvement of 'married-out' sisters and daughters with their natal families (1979:295), while Bernard and Rita Gallin have argued that matrilineal and affinal ties are often characterised by informants in positive (and utilitarian) terms, and should therefore not be analysed as if they were simply negative (Gallin & Gallin 1985). This work on marriage and affinity coincides with a reexamination of Chinese gender relations, which has also transformed the anthropological view of Chinese patriliney and kinship. Not surprisingly, ideologies of female subordination are often contradicted by fieldwork observations, and several

writers have tried to address the ensuing paradoxes (e.g. M. Wolf 1974, Ahern 1975, Martin 1988).

From this perspective came the model which, in my view, came closest to genuinely challenging the dominance of the lineage paradigm, Margery Wolf's notion of the 'uterine family' (M. Wolf 1972). It is interesting that Wolf's original fieldwork focused precisely on informal kinship and on an intimate understanding of everyday life within several rural Taiwanese households (i.e. it was initially based on intensive participant-observation in one community). She came to the conclusion that, from a woman's perspective, work on behalf of a uterine family (comprised of a woman and her children) was more important than work on behalf of her husband's patriline. Through developing strong emotional ties with sons in particular, a woman could solidify her current position and protect her future security. So the uterine family stood both inside and alongside the male-dominated patrilineal family, potentially as a powerful competitor for loyalties.

The processes Wolf describes (e.g. those relating to child development) are very much part of what I have described as the cycle of yang, but the uterine family model clearly has some weaknesses. One is that it characterises the position of Chinese women in largely negative terms: women, as marrying-in outsiders, had to develop ties because otherwise they were without power. The power they developed was a threat to the unity of patriline--and seen to be so.^{vi} These views undoubtedly come from the statements of informants, and from situations Wolf observed during fieldwork, but I think they under-represent the positive evaluations of women, and are thus potentially misleading. Another weakness of the uterine family model is that it implies a distinctive 'female consciousness' and distinctive 'women's strategies', useful notions which may, nevertheless, be problematic in the Chinese context, as elsewhere (cf. the discussion by Martin 1988).

In any case, Wolf has tended to withdraw the 'uterine family' model from serious consideration, in part perhaps because she accepts Freedman's formal

definition of kinship which excludes informal family life, and thus excludes the processes she herself has described (M. Wolf 1985:204). She suggests that ‘...China was--and still is--a patriarchy’, and has suggested that the uterine family was only ever a coping strategy:

Women, in their struggle for some security in their day-to-day existence with the all-powerful male-oriented family and its larger organization, the lineage, worked like termites hollowing out from within places for themselves and their descendants ... Uterine families were in fact only a way of accommodating to the patriarchal family (M. Wolf 1985:11).

Furthermore, she suggests that in mainland China the uterine family has now disappeared (‘...because the need for it has disappeared’)^{vii}, although reciprocal parent-child obligations have not (1985:207-8).

I am certain, however, that Margery Wolf had (and has) something right. What she is pointing out is the profound significance in China of relatedness constituted through the small interactions of daily life (e.g. between mothers and children), and the significance of this kind of relatedness for our understanding of formal Chinese kinship. In this paper I have proposed the cycle of yang as a more inclusive and positive way of viewing this processual relatedness, one in which the idiom of yang is raised to the significance of ‘descent’. I have also suggested that another, somewhat overlapping process, the cycle of laiwang, is equally important, and helps us to understand Chinese ties which are not based on kinship. These two cycles, in combination, help to place Chinese patriliney and affinity in perspective. They (the cycles) are also already documented in the ethnography of China^{viii}--our difficulty is in grasping what this ethnography has been trying to tell us.

Conclusion

In comparative perspective, as I said at the outset, Chinese kinship has often been assumed to be of the rigid and non-incorporative kind. I have suggested that such a

view is, however, partly the product of a particular definition of kinship, and of particular ways of doing anthropological research. Not surprisingly, the reality is that in China, as elsewhere, people make kinship--it is, of course, never simply 'given' to them by birth--and patrilineal ideologies, however powerful, are forced to compete in a crowded field of ideas about the ways in which relatedness is produced. This is not to say that people in China ignore or devalue what are seen to be 'natural' connections between kin. It is rather to stress the social malleability of such connections: the ways in which they are both reinforced and cut (e.g. due to successes or failures in the cycle of yang), and also extended (e.g. through adoption, or the extension of yang-like reciprocity to the outside world).

By comparison with the 'lineage paradigm', the cycles of yang and laiwang are rather homely folk-models of Chinese relatedness, and ones in which kinship and friendship are seen to be hard work, the product of everyday human interactions. But this perspective has at least three advantages. First, it allows us to see Chinese relatedness as a continuum--comprising everything from the most formal relations of descent, to the least formal relations of, say, secret friendship--and to see how certain idioms of reciprocity effectively link the elements in this continuum. Second, it helps us unravel the complex roles of Chinese women in a system of relatedness which often seems, at least formally, to devalue their contributions. Finally, it has the virtue of making Chinese kinship--or more precisely Chinese relatedness--seem less strange, less distant from the kind of 'fluid' or processual relatedness anthropologists encounter elsewhere, e.g. among the Vevo of Madagascar, or in Malaysian fishing villages. Of course, Chinese patriliney has been, and remains, a remarkable socio-cultural institution. And when seen against the background of the two cycles discussed in this paper, it is, in my view, more rather than less remarkable.

i .

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ii .

Household incomes now vary quite dramatically in this community. Well-to-do families make as much as 10,000rmb per year (some even more); average families (and workers in the city) make about half that amount, while others make do with 2000rmb or less per year. School-teachers make about 2400rmb per year.

iii .

Under birth control regulations, a rural woman who first gives birth to a daughter is then allowed a second child (i.e. given another opportunity to have a son), but if her first child is a boy she must stop. Ideally, most couples would prefer to have two children, i.e. 'one of each', and so are quite happy to have a daughter first. But ending up with two daughters is considered, by most people, to be a misfortune.

iv .

In another article he discusses in detail the adoption rules for one lineage: 'any adopting father who attempts to bring an outsider into the village must submit to an initiation ceremony [nominally for the son] during which he is humiliated by his peers'. This involves an expensive banquet for village elders and leaders, who, unusually, do not bring gifts of cash to the event. Instead they eat and drink, and then insist on borrowing money from the host, all the while shouting insults at him for

failing to produce a son. Finally he pays them to sign a banner which confirms his son's position in the lineage (J. Watson 1975:293-306). The point of Watson's article is that many people actually prefer to go through this ritual humiliation rather than adopt an 'insider' son (who may be more difficult to control if segmentary rivalries get out of control).

v .

So it is perhaps surprising to read the following comments by anthropologists of China. Maurice Freedman: 'The Western literature... is full of variations on the theme that the family was the basic unit of Chinese society... But this is not significantly truer of China than of most other societies...' (1979:240). Donald DeGlopper: 'To be sure, most people belonged to families and family membership was a very significant aspect of every person's identity, but I fail to see what is so distinctively Chinese about this' (1995:24). Fei Xiaotong: 'I do not think that [in China] kinship possesses any force of extension by itself and is valued as such' (1946:6).

vi .

In another article, Wolf discusses the power of women's gossip--again a negative formulation of women's power (M. Wolf 1974, cf. Ahern 1975:199-200).

vii .

In this she is contradicted by Hill Gates, who suggests that women in mainland China 'still marry principally to establish uterine families' (1996:202). To my mind this is an extremely odd characterisation of why Chinese women marry. I would suggest that they generally must marry in order not to be left out of the cycle of yang.

viii .

On the cycle of yang (to cite only a few examples) see discussions of the ongoing relationship of yang between the living and dead (J. Watson 1988, Thompson 1988),

and discussions of 'meal-rotation' as a way of providing yang to one's parents (Hsieh 1985). Also see Cohen on the process for sons of becoming (as opposed to being born as) coparceners in estates (1976:70-85), and Chen on the contributions of daughters to their own dowries (1985). On the cycle of laiwang, see, e.g., Pasternak's discussion of the ongoing system of reciprocal obligations between non-agnates (Pasternak 1972:64; cf. Yang 1994, Yang 1996, and Potter & Potter 1990:210).