BOOK REVIEWS

Chinese Family and Kinship

Hugh D.R. Baker

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The rationale for reviewing a book on Chinese Kinship in a journal devoted to Southeast Asia should not be too difficult to appreciate. The large numbers of people of Chinese ethnicity within the region who still adhere to forms of custom and social organization closely related to or derived from those of southern China make it imperative that the sociologists and social anthropologists of Southeast Asia have a firm grounding in the principles of East Asian kinship patterns. Hitherto, for the non-China specialist, this has been difficult to do, and it has long been a problem to find suitable reading material to recommend to students which is not either highly technical or exclusively concerned with matters only of interest to the sinological anthropologist. There are of course the literary (as opposed to fieldwork) studies of lineage organization conducted by Maurice Freedman, and there have in more recent years been a spate of studies on kinship in Taiwan and in the New Territories of Hong Kong. But most of these works, for all their excellence, have been concerned either with particular ethnographic case studies or with analytical problems (and especially lineage and/or lineage village organization) which have no real counterparts in Southeast Asia amongst the Chinese populations living there, thus rendering them of little direct value to the scholar or research worker concerned with the Nan-yang. The book under review however to a great extent overcomes these problems: it is concerned with principles and is thus of general interest and application.

Dr. Barker's volume is accordingly organized around the central analytical themes of Chinese kinship—subjects which he takes for his chapter headings—The Composition of the Family; The Individual and the Family; The Lineage and the Clan; Ancestor Worship; The Family in State and Society; The Lineage in State and Society; Non-Kin as Kin; and Kinship in The Twentieth Century. Such an approach lays out clearly and succinctly the major problem areas; added to this is the virtue that each topic is well illustrated with examples drawn from the anthropological literature, from the author's own fieldwork in a lineage settlement in Hongkong, and from the Chinese written sources themselves. The book is also well and clearly written and is a pleasure to read: by no means a heavy and ponderous anthropological tome!

We might now turn to an examination in greater detail of Dr. Baker's thesis. It is well known that the Chinese family (certainly in China if not overseas) is often re-
garded as an extensive extended unit: ideally "five generations under one roof". Baker begins his study with an analysis of this idea of the "ideal family", proceeding on two fronts— one being a discussion of the semantic confusion that has arisen within the literature as a result of using the word "family" in a variety of ways—including regarding it as a synonym for "lineage"; the other being an account of the actual family structures that can be reconstructed in pre-revolutionary China. Such research actually points to the fact that, whatever the ideal, the normal family was much smaller—often being the simple (nuclear) or at the most, the stem family, and even these of course often decayed into simple families with the death or departure of some of their members. The expansion and consolidation of the stem family into the extended family—and ultimately perhaps into a lineage—is one of the problems to which the author devotes a good deal of space in the course of which he ranges over a number of interesting issues—the effects of poverty on family size limitation, female infanticide, abortion, birth-control, adoption, child-selling, personal relationships within the traditional family, the generation/age/sex principles of hierarchy in the family and descent systems and the position of women within a patriarchal and patrilineal kinship group. He later develops some of these themes by exploring them from the angle of the domestic cycle from birth to death, and from the angle of relationships as influenced by the significant concept of Xiao—filial piety.

One of the keys to the understanding of Chinese kinship is of course descent, and especially as it is institutionalized in the form of the lineage. As Dr. Baker correctly perceives the lineage is intimately connected with land and with land-tenure (which incidentally is one of the reasons why the lineage is weak amongst the mainly urban Nanyang Chinese)—in terms of the principles of descent, power, exogamy, and indeed of the conditions under which a lineage could arise in the first place. One of the most interesting sections in the book is the part where the prerequisites for the emergency of a lineage—the willingness of a kin-group to co-operate in labour and personal relations and their willingness not to split up family land, but to retain it as a single parcel, together with the "macro-conditions", i.e. the political and economic conditions in China which allowed the consolidation of territorial and even military power in the hands of non-governmental kin—groups (primarily in southern China)—are discussed and analyzed. Relationships between lineage and village are also analyzed, including the conditions for the emergence of one-surname villages, and between lineage and the clan, the highest order kinship group. Here again there is an item of specific interest to the Southeast Asian sinologist, since clans (even if entitled Kongsi or whatever) are a major feature of Chinese kinship and political organization in the Nanyang, even though lineages are often weak and lineage-settlements usually non-existent. It is unfortunate that Baker does not pursue themes such as this, as discussion of such situations throws great light on the Chinese kinship system "proper". In the Nanyang for example lineages are weak because of residential dispersal, because of the recognition that kinship based on shared surnames is actually often fictive (a fact complicated by dialect differences whereby two individuals who write their surname with the same character may pronounce it quite differently etc.) and lack of any landed property. The Clan however—as the repository of