

Changes in Clan Culture in the Rural Areas of Southern Anhui

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皖南乡村的宗族文化变迁

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Abstract

Using data collected from fieldwork in five administrative villages in southern Anhui, our research explores changes to clan culture in the course of modernization and urbanization. The research reveals that, although the visible component of the clan system has diminished, the invisible part, or clan culture, continues to exert a strong influence on villagers. More than half of the respondents in our survey expressed traditional viewpoints concerning issues of clan interests, ancestor worship, *xiao* (filial piety), clan rituals, and clan genealogy, thus reflecting historical continuity of traditions. Nevertheless, traditional influence is declining, especially among young and middle-aged villagers with urban work experience. Cultural changes in these villages bear strong Chinese characteristics. While the sentiment of patriarchal authority is receding among the young and middle-aged villagers, the general principle of *xiao* is still respected by all groups. *Jia*, being the foundation of Chinese society and Chinese culture, continues to be of more importance than individuals.

Keywords

clan culture, ideological modernization, rural areas, southern Anhui

摘要

采用在皖南5个行政村进行田野调查所收集的数据，本文探讨了在现代化和城镇化过程中宗族文化的变迁。研究表明，尽管宗族体系的显性结构已经消失，其内在的宗族文化依然对村民们发挥强烈的影响。调查中，在涉及宗族利益、祖先崇拜、孝道、族祭、以及修谱活动等问题上，超过半数受访者的回答带有强烈的传统

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色彩，体现了文化的历史延续性。虽然如此，传统的影响力在农民工尤其是中青年中，仍在不断减弱。在所调查的乡村，文化的变迁具有强烈的中国特色。一方面，中青年村民的宗族意识在不断淡化。另一方面，孝的道德准则依然得到了不同年龄阶层的尊崇，家庭的集体利益还是高于个人利益，个人主义依然为家庭所束缚。

关键词

宗族文化、意识现代化、农村地区、皖南

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In textbooks, *lineage* is defined as demonstrated descent and *clan* as stipulated descent. That is to say, while lineage members can trace the actual generational links between themselves and ancestors, clan members cannot (Parkin, 1997; Kottak, 2010). Freedman (1966) challenged this definition and provided his own explanation. He located the critical difference between the two in common wealth. Lineage members retain common wealth, while clan members do not. This new interpretation generated a debate among anthropologists between the 1960s and the 1970s. Fried (1970) insisted that the only difference between clan and lineage was still the genealogical, or descent, system. His standpoint essentially reflects the opinion expressed by most textbooks.

In all English-Chinese dictionaries lineage is translated as *zongxi* or *xuetong*, implying blood relationship or descent, and clan as *zongzu* or *jiazu*, referring to an organized group of families sharing the same ancestor.¹ Therefore, the two terms in Chinese represent different but interrelated perspectives. The former focuses on descent relationship among group members, and the latter emphasizes an entity or community that is built upon blood relationships. In a broad sense, clan is considered a social system, and lineage is a component or a characteristic of the system. Perhaps it is due to the above reasons that Chinese scholars, in papers written in English, especially during the period between the 1930s and the 1940s, used the term *clan* and paid more attention to socioeconomic characteristics and group patterns (Fei, 1939; Lang, 1946; Lin, 1947; Hsu, 1948).

In this paper we will use *clan* to represent a social system or a traditional rural community whose members share a common surname, clear descent links, and common wealth. It is close to Hugh Baker's definition of clan as a federation of lineages with one surname, or a higher-order lineage containing

¹ For instance, see *Niujin gaojie yinghan shuangjie cidian* [Oxford Advanced Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); *Xin yinghan cidian* [A New English-Chinese Dictionary] (Shanghai: Shanghai Dictionary Press, 2009).

more members and covering larger geographic territories than does an ordinary lineage (Baker, 1979). It also approximates a Type Z lineage in Freedman's categories.

China's clan system has attracted attentions from scholars not only in anthropology but also in other fields. Because of the great number of publications in this domain, we are not going to provide a comprehensive review of the literature. Chronologically research can be classified into three stages. The first stage, ranging from the 1930s to the 1940s, was characterized by the work of Wu Wenzao and Fei Xiaotong, two pioneers in introducing Western anthropology and ethnographic methods into China. They, and many others, primarily engaged in the so-called late imperial clan pattern that dominated the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) (Fei, 1939; Lin, 1947; Wenzao Wu, 2010). The second stage, ranging from the 1950s to the 1970s, was strongly influenced by the work of Maurice Freedman (1958, 1966, and 1970). He initially raised the "corporate model," seeing clan or lineage as a separate entity with an economic focus. Inspired by his work, Western and Chinese anthropologists (in Taiwan) made great efforts to explore the late imperial pattern, searching for evidence of the corporate model through fieldwork in Taiwan (as an alternative to Fujian) and the New Territories in Hong Kong (as the alternative to Guangdong) (Skinner, 1964-65; Baker, 1979; Watson, 1982; Feuchtwang, 1992). During that period Elisabeth Croll was one of the few Western scholars able to carry out fieldwork in mainland China. Her work was mainly concerned with women and married life in rural China during the transformation era of clans between the 1950s and the 1970s (Croll, 1978 and 1981). The third or current stage started in the early 1980s. Following Deng Xiaoping's open-door policy, Western and overseas Chinese scholars resumed their fieldwork on the mainland. At first they continued to concentrate on Fujian and Guangdong, although some studies shifted to northern and eastern China and to clan status in the collective era (Siu, 1989; Chan, Madsen, and Unger 1992; Dean, 1993; Lamley, 1990; Wang, 1995; Zheng, 2001; Szonyi, 2002; Cohen, 2005; Faure, 2007; Brandtstädter and Santos, 2009). Next, researchers turned away from the classical model and shifted their attention to contemporary rural China. Some showed interest in exploring specific issues, including family, marriage, the status of women, gender relations, filial piety, reproductive norms, and private life that are embedded in accounts of the clan system (among others, Judd, 1994; Whyte, 1995; Wu, 2003; Yan, 2003; Sun-Pong Yuen, Pui-Lam Law, and Yuk-Ying Ho, 2004; Ikels, 2004; Rosenlee, 2006; Cong and Silverstein, 2008; Friedman, Pickowicz, and Selden, 2008; Zhang, 2008; Shi, 2009).

Clan studies in China, terminated in Mao's time, have flourished since the 1980s. The subject is mainly treated as a branch of history, and the focus is placed on archival research and the imperial pattern between the Zhou and Qing Dynasties. Entering the 1990s, economists and sociologists began to join in. Like many Western scholars, they put the emphasis on interactions between modernization and clan culture, aiming at the role of traditional values in economic development and ignoring changes brought by modernization (among others, Wang, 1991; Xu, 1992; Feng, 1994; Qian, 1999; Chang, 1999, 2007; Li, 1989, 2008; and many more recent ones). But they noticed that during the 1980s and the 1990s clan power enjoyed a revival in many rural areas as the contracted responsibility system was carried out and class power waned (Wang, 1995; Huang, 2003; Ren, 2004; Song and Zhang, 2009).

Starting in the late 1990s, a widespread movement from rural areas to urban regions rapidly changed China. Now more than 150 million peasants live and work in cities and towns, and the number increases by the day.² The largest migration or urbanization in human history caused by industrialism will probably lead to an end of the clan system, since geographic mobility will undermine the common residence—a structural foundation of the clan (Braudel, 1992; Kottack, 2000). Under the circumstances what changes have already taken place or will come to China's clan system? Will the system continue to revitalize or will it die out? Since to date studies have focused on such issues as the socioeconomic status of migrant workers and their impact on local economy, these larger questions are still waiting for answers (Xiang, 2004; Guang and Zheng, 2005; Jacka, 2005; Chen, 2006).

During the 1960s and 1970s some Western and overseas Chinese scholars detected certain changes in the New Territories, brought about by urbanization. In his research on the Deng lineage Jack Potter reported a change in value orientation. Traditional values, loyalties, and sentiments were not as important as they had been before (Potter, 1968). On the contrary, according to Selina Ching Chan's observation of the Peng lineage, traditional clan values continued to flourish in the 1990s, and the group's common wealth also increased, though it was transformed into a clan trust fund of land (Chan, 2001). Never-

² According to China's State Bureau of Statistics, there were about 253 million peasant workers in 2011. Of these, about 94 million were engaged in non-farming occupations but lived in their local villages or towns, and about 159 million worked and lived in cities outside their local towns. See China's State Bureau of Statistics, *Statistical Bulletin of National Economic and Social Development, 2011*, (published on February 22, 2012, http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjgb/ndtjgb/qgndtjgb/t20120222_402786440.htm). For socioeconomic characteristics of peasant workers, see Xin Meng and Chris Manning (eds.), *The Great Migration* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2010).

theless, these scholars' work by no means indicates that there is no room left for further exploration. While clan authority was respected and traditions were preserved in the New Territories, clan power was totally destroyed in Mao's China. When rapid urbanization arrived, clans on the mainland were situated differently from those in the New Territories and would therefore manifest distinctive features in the course of modernization. Moreover, being complex systems, clans in China are exceptionally rich in regional flavor. The New Territories, as a part of southern China, cannot represent the whole country.

To observe and report changes in rural clans, the authors and assistants conducted fieldwork in five administrative villages located in southern Anhui between 2009 and 2011. Southern Anhui is well known for its solid Confucian tradition and grounding. Zhu Xi, the most important initiator of the Song-Ming Rationalist School, was born and discoursed on his teachings there. Clans for two contemporary presidents, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, are located in that region. In comparison with Guangdong and Fujian, southern Anhui, being a mountainous inland area, was less affected by wars and less influenced by Western culture during either the late Qing or the Republican eras. Thus, it is an ideal window through which to watch clan traditions. Since the mid-1980s clans in southern Anhui have attracted the interest of Chinese scholars. With the tremendous amount of historical documents (including genealogical records, business contracts, travel notes, and literary works) discovered in that region, those scholars have principally engaged in archival research and the imperial model of the Song, Ming, and Qing Dynasties (Ye, 1995; Zhao, 2004; Tang, 2005; Bian, 2006; Zhu, 2006; Zheng, 2008, among many others).

Today southern Anhui is a cardinal region for exporting peasant laborers to flourishing urban areas. In the villages we visited, peasants who were living and working in cities and towns made up about 60 percent of the local labor force. Southern Anhui is therefore also an ideal window through which to observe changes.

Our fieldwork investigated a number of issues, including clan history, organization, culture, descent links, peasant economic status, and migrant workers. This research intends to examine changes in clan culture, focusing on clan identities, relationships between clan and family, filial piety, ancestor worship, descent relations, patriarchal power, and rituals, all of which have been long neglected by the pioneer studies.

There was an intense debate on the role economic development plays in the process of cultural change. Some have argued that economic development or modernization would bring pervasive cultural or ideological changes and that traditional values and religions will fade away gradually (Marx, [1859] 1973;

Bell, 1973). Others, including Max Weber ([1904] 1958) and Samuel Huntington (1993), questioned this statement, claiming that traditional values and religions possess an enduring and autonomous impact on human behavior; this impact would not diminish with time. Using data from the World Values Surveys covering 75 percent of the world's population, Ronald Inglehart and Wayne Baker (2000) discovered evidence of both massive cultural changes and the persistence of distinctive traditional values. Our research attempts to examine whether China's modernization is accompanied by this type of duality.

Clan culture, being a foundation of traditional Chinese ideology, covers a wide range of subjects, including clan norms, ethics, traditions, customs, rituals, and practices that are based on principles in dealing with blood relationships in a patriarchal society. On the one hand, Confucianism, the Song-Ming Rationalist School in particular, was built on clan culture and practices. On the other hand, clan culture exhibits detailed applications of general Confucian doctrines. From this perspective, discussions of clan culture inevitably involve traditional ideology in general.

Research Methods and Data

Fieldwork was conducted in five *xingzhengcun* (administrative villages), including Fengcun, Xiongcu, Hanmudu, Changxi, and Xitou. An administrative village generally consists of a few natural villages or hamlets. Fengcun is located in Jingxian (or Jing county), and the other four are located in Shexian (or She county).³ According to the 2009 census, the population was 2166 in Fengcun, 2485 in Xiongcu, 1742 in Hanmudu, 2979 in Changxi, and 2549 in Xitou. The six clans are all *daxing*, or primary-descent groups in their villages. With the longest history, the Ye clan has been settled in Xitou for over a thousand years, followed by the Feng clan in Fengcun and the Wu clan in Changxi, which are more than 800 years old; the Zhou clan in Changxi has existed for more than 650 years; and the Cao clan in Xiongcu and the Cheng clan in Hanmudu have both been in existence for more than 550 years.

Our research strategy is a combination of ethnographic methodology and sociological survey. Direct data were first collected by observing villagers' daily lives and behaviors. During the time of fieldwork a series of traditional festivals with great importance to clan culture occurred, including the Spring

³ From the Qing dynasty until the 1950s most regions in southern Anhui were called *Huizhou* (徽州). Shexian (歙县) was the capital city of Huizhou at that time.

Festival (or Chinese New Year) and the Qing-Ming Festival (or the Festival of Pure Brightness), giving us plentiful chances to observe clan ceremonies, rituals, religious activities, traditions, and customs. To collect information on clan ethics, norms, history, organization, descent structure, and other socioeconomic variables, we arranged deep conversations and group interviews with key and senior figures in these clans and government officials at various levels, including village, township, and county. Meanwhile we implemented a sample survey. Using proportional stratified sampling techniques, we randomly selected 226 households from the six clans based on their population sizes; we visited these households, and interviewed household heads. If the household heads were not present at visiting time, we interviewed other family members who were at home. In any situation the interviewee had to be an adult 18 years old or older, capable of answering questions that a household head could answer.

Using our composite design, we were able to collect more variables in a broader region and conduct quantitative analyses as well. Meanwhile the face-to-face interviews and ethnographic approaches including observation and conversation allowed us to carry out nuanced and deep explorations of how the villagers themselves think contextually and therefore to detect socioeconomic factors behind the villagers' responses to the survey questions. In this way we could make use of the advantages and at the same time avoid the disadvantages of ethnographic approaches and sociological survey.

The survey-questionnaire contains questions regarding (1) socioeconomic characteristics and descent links of the family and family members, (2) socioeconomic characteristics of *nongmingong*, or migrant workers, in that household, and (3) participants' attitudes toward clan traditions and ethics. Analyses in this research are primarily based on responses to questions in the third section. Of the selected households some were not willing to be interviewed, and some did not want to answer certain questions or did not provide complete answers to some questions. Finally, we completed 203 successful household interviews. Because the interviews included the families' married children, coverage actually goes beyond 203 households.

The mean age of the respondents was 42. Of these, males made up 64 percent and females 36 percent. Young villagers (aged 19-39) accounted for 43 percent, middle-aged villagers (aged 40-59) 38 percent, and the elderly (60 and over) 19 percent. As many as 83 percent of the respondents were married. The mean years of schooling were seven, with males being better educated than females (7.2 versus 6.8 years). Up to 46 percent of respondents engaged in

farm work, while 54 percent practiced nonfarming occupations. The following sections illustrate the research results.

Jia and Geren

In traditional Chinese culture, *qun*, or group, was mainly understood as *jia*, a combination of a small *jia*, or family, and a big *jia*, or clan (Tang and Zuo, 1997). Zhu Xi (1130-1200 A.D.) viewed *zhong* (loyalty), *xiao* (filial piety), *jie* (moral integrity), and *yi* (fraternal duties) as the principles that should govern human relations. The first two (*zhong* and *xiao*) regulate relations between individuals and groups, and the others (*jie* and *yi*) operate on individual interactions. *Xiao* is the foundation of *zhong*, and *zhong* is built upon *xiao*. *Xiao*, or filial piety, states that the younger generation should be obedient to the elder generation of a family and a clan and that the interests of individuals must be subservient to the interests of the family and the clan. Through this arrangement individual interests are replaced by family interests and, finally, by clan interests.

There was therefore no room for *geren*, or individuals, in traditional clan society. Clan members were always taught that they should sacrifice themselves to clan interests. To examine villagers' clan identities and attitudes toward clan interests, our survey asked whether the respondents agreed with the statement that the needs of the clan take precedence over individual requirements (see Question 1 in Table 1). Since there are no common economic interests for clan members now, clan needs are recognized for the most part as clan reputations, loyalties, and other duties clan members are required to undertake; 51 percent of respondents agreed with the statement, while 35 percent of them disagreed and the remainder were neutral. Then we asked if they agreed with the statement that the needs of the family take precedence over individual requirements (see Question 2 in Table 1). Those who strongly agreed and those who agreed with the statement reached 98 percent of the total, while 2 percent remained neutral, and nobody disagreed with the statement.

Responses to the two questions demonstrate two interesting facts. First, *qun*, or group, as represented by the clan and the family, are still of greater importance than are individuals, reflecting strong traditional influences on peasants. Second, villagers are more likely to be in favor of family interests than they are of their clan's. In other words, the family is more important than the clan, or clan influence is giving way to family concerns. This change can be perceived as progress toward modernization. Different from the West's, however, this modernization shifts villagers, not to individualism, but to the family, or the

Table 1. Villagers' Attitude Toward Traditional Values

Questions	Attitudes					Total (%)
	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	
1. Clan is over individuals.	7	44	14	31	4	100
2. Family is over individuals.	61	37	2	0	0	100
3. <i>Xiao</i> is the most important family value.	82	17	0	1	0	100
4. Parents should be obeyed absolutely.	2	10	2	75	11	100
5. Ancestors should be worshiped.	57	35	4	4	0	100
6. Clan ritual should be resumed.	18	46	22	14	0	100
7. Genealogical books should be amended.	31	46	15	9	0	100
8. Relations with relatives are not good.	8	44	16	32	0	100
9. In-clan cadres are more worthy of trust.	2	14	15	64	5	100

small *jia*. Stated in a different way, the content of *jia* alters, but, the importance of *jia* does not change. Villagers are emigrating from the big *jia* (the clan) and retaining the small *jia* (family). We can thus see that this kind of modernization is imbued with strong Chinese traits.

Some other researchers arrived at similar findings. In a survey conducted in 2007 about 69 percent of participants, all of whom were female migrant workers, stated that the purpose of working in cities was to make money to help their families rather than for their own use (Myerson, 2010). Nevertheless, some argued that with rising individualism, individualization of the family was becoming a trend. This trend will impose changes on the rural family. In that process the primary role of the rural family will shift "from a corporate group to a haven for individual private lives." (Yan, 2011)

We should realize that individualism is not always in conflict with the family if the individual and the family pursue a common goal. In our fieldwork we asked villagers what they would do when a difference of opinion occurred

among family members. They said that they would arrive at a new consensus or reduce friction to a minimum by making concessions. Indeed, rapid urbanization has generated a lot of problems for peasant families. In our investigation married couples made up 44 percent of the total migrant workers, and many couples worked and lived in separate cities. In some families one of the married couple stayed in the village while the other worked in a city. Most of them could not see each other until the break during Chinese New Year. Despite these problems only one marriage among the couples we interviewed ended in divorce. Further, we found no evidence to indicate that the rural family had lost its function as a unit of reproduction, consumption, emotion, and economic security, even though all our respondents considered family to be the haven for private lives. The corporate model is not dead but shrinks back to the family.

An Increasing Sense of Independence Among the Old Villagers

Villagers may understand the small *jia* either as the nuclear family, consisting of two generations, or the traditional family, consisting of three generations. Actually, our fieldwork found three types of *jia*: the one-generation family (accounting for 39 percent of the total households interviewed), the two-generation family (accounting for 35 percent), and the three-generation family (accounting for 29 percent) (See Table 2).

Of the one-generation-family households, based on the age of the household head, the young group (under the age of 39) accounted for 11 percent of the total, the middle-aged group (aged 40-59) accounted for 30 percent, and the old group (aged 60 and over) accounted for 59 percent. It can be seen that as villagers age, they are very likely to live by themselves. In these villages, about 77 percent of the old villagers (aged 60 and over) lived in one-generation families, 13 percent in the two-generation families, and 10 percent in the three-generation families.

These old villagers live in diverse economic conditions. Some in the one-generation families are capable of supporting themselves, even saving money for their children. Some of these elderly require some economic assistance. And some depend largely on their children. The seniors in the three-generation families for the most part fall into two groups: 1) widows and widowers and 2) retired government employees (including teachers) and entrepreneurs. In the absence of living spouses, seniors in the first group have to live with their

Table 2. Types of Peasant Families

Family Type	Family Head's Age							
	less than 44		45-59		60 +		Total	
	Counts	%	Counts	%	Counts	%	Counts	%
One-generation	6	3	22	11	45	22	73	36
Two-generation	45	22	21	10	6	3	71	35
Three-generation	24	12	26	13	8	4	59	29
Total	75	37	69	34	59	29	203	100

married children. Seniors in the second group live with their children because they have money desired by their children's families.⁴

Our fieldwork asked seniors whether they preferred to live by themselves or whether they preferred living with their married children. Most of them said that they would rather live by themselves. Living with married children made them feel as if they were living under someone else's roof. This situation to some degree reflects an increasing sense of independence, which is accompanied by increasing economic independence, supported by the contract responsibility system and the social security system. In these villages, when *fenjia* or dividing family property, is under way, the contracted land, or the responsibility land right as defined by the government, is equally divided among male children.⁵ Generally parents will keep their own land share for farming if they do not lose their ability to work, or for renting out if they cannot work anymore. In some cases parents give their share to their children in exchange for a yearly income in money or in grain. In this way, they can retain a certain level of economic security and reduce their dependence on their children. Compared with the pre-Reform Period, the current responsibility system provides the elderly with better economic conditions for retirement. The elderly can

⁴ We found that seniors in the three-generation families were not happier than those living independently (that is, in the one-generation families). In addition to economic reasons (generally seniors in the one-generation families are in better financial conditions), because of living with their partners, seniors in the one-generation families provide greater emotional support for each other.

⁵ Generally female children, or daughters, no matter whether they are married or not, do not share in the contracted land because they have married or will marry someone with a different surname.

also expect financial assistance, about 1780 yuan (RMB) a year, from the local government through *dibao* (the minimum social security), which allows them to enjoy a minimum standard of living.⁶ Additionally, the elderly can obtain 60 yuan of the monthly pension from the local government if they do not have other pensions.⁷ The amount of financial assistance and pension is subject to changes in the inflation rate. Health care, a big financial burden on the elderly, has improved recently. Under the New Corporative Medicare Service System, if a villager is hospitalized, 60-70 percent of his expenses for medical treatment can be reimbursed. Individual villagers' premium for this medical insurance is only 50 yuan a year.⁸ These measures have significantly enhanced the old villagers' self-reliance and granted them greater freedom in choosing a family pattern.

The fact that the elderly are unwilling to live in three-generation families illustrates not only an increasing feeling of independence but also a declining sentiment of patriarchal authority. We observed that the elderly, especially those who depended largely on their children for economic maintenance, lost their decision-making power in three-generation families. This circumstance makes a striking contrast to their status in traditional society and further explains why they are unwilling to live with their children. In Fengcun a senior whose father had been the butler of the Feng clan for decades before the 1949 Revolution was living with his son's family. He told us that old people's present status as compared with the past was like something between Earth and Heaven. He said, "It is totally two different worlds, and it is much worse now."

To examine villagers' attitudes toward patriarchal authority, we designed two questions in our survey. The first states that *xiao* is still the most important family value today; 82 percent of the respondents strongly agreed with this statement, 17 percent agreed. Nobody took a neutral stance. Only two persons, or less than 1 percent, disagreed (see Question 3 in Table 1). This result did not surprise us, as we had already recognized the significance of *xiao* to the

⁶ The standards are set by the provincial government. According to our investigation, a family of three in the villages investigated in 2011 needs at least 4500 yuan (RMB) to maintain the minimum standard of living, including the necessary consumption of grain, clothing, health care, transportation, electricity, and children's schooling. In other words, it takes at least 1500 yuan for one villager to maintain a minimum standard of living. Therefore, with the annual assistance of 1780 yuan, a villager would be able to satisfy his basic needs.

⁷ The amount is determined by the local government and varies by regions. This new policy or system started in 2003. By 2011 it had covered 98 percent of the total area.

⁸ Medical expenses that can be reimbursed primarily apply to hospital treatment. Some additional expenses are not covered. There are limitation regarding deductibles and ceilings that vary by region.

residents of Huizhou, where the first thing that strikes anyone walking into a *citang* (ancestral hall) is a huge Chinese calligraphic *xiao*.⁹

In the traditional society *xiao* is directly related to absolute patriarchal power in both the family and the country. Since the Han Dynasty all rulers without exception emphasized the importance of *xiao* and governed the country in the name of *xiao*. The next question asked villagers if they agreed with the statement that parents should be obeyed absolutely (see Question 4 in Table 1); 2 percent of the respondents strongly agreed, 10 percent agreed, 2 percent remained neutral, 75 percent disagreed, and 11 percent strongly disagreed. A great majority of villagers, even the older people, do not approve of absolute patriarchal power. Our observations revealed that today villagers see *xiao* mainly to mean two things: respecting parents and supporting them. The two things all depend on conditions. This conditional *xiao* fleshes out Western influence and keeps villagers away from the content of the original. Parents can no longer expect unquestioning obedience from their children, perhaps indicating reduced support of a social system built on absolute patriarchal authority.

Although villagers will no longer do whatever their parents require, as shown by our survey, they still respect the general principle of *xiao*. However, one's deeds do not always match one's words. In fieldwork we learned that many older people did not receive sufficient maintenance from their children. Under most circumstances older people with an only child received better care than those with multiple children, as brothers and sisters often shift responsibility onto each other. As the old saying goes, if there are three monks, there will be no water to drink. The worst scenario is that parents get nothing from their children. Sometimes these parents live with their children in rotation. If one brother reduces support, the others will immediately follow suit. It is very rare to see these children competing to increase support. Conditions are often used as an excuse for their unfilial conduct.

Our investigation has shown that the poorest households all consist of one-generation families with the elderly head aged 70 or over. Their average annual cash income was less than 1000 yuan per person; four of these old people had no income of any kind and lived with their children in rotation. Of the 27 elderly households investigated, 21 received monthly or yearly economic support from their children. The highest amount was about 3000 yuan a year, and the lowest was only about 200 yuan. The rest totally depended on financial

⁹ It is said that all the representations of *xiao* in all ancestral halls in Huizhou are copies of the original calligraphic work by Zhu Xi.

assistance from the government. Today the elderly are the weakest rural group. Even so, we were told that the situation had greatly improved over the last decade, due to the booming economy, rapid urbanization, and factors discussed previously. Our respondents said, "How can we show filial piety without money?"

From the Han to the Qing Dynasties, *xiao* was treated not only as a moral principle but also as a law imposed by government at various levels as well as by clans. Anyone charged with unfilial conduct would be convicted of a felony. Under the circumstances nobody dared to challenge the principle. Such legal and political conditions do not exist today, though improvements have appeared only recently.¹⁰ Without enforcement, practicing *xiao* will largely depend on individual consciousness. To some degree a villager's devotion to his parents today is determined by his relations with his wife and his wife's good will.

Ancestor Worship and Rituals of Ancestor Worship

Ancestor worship, a religious principle in clan culture, was viewed as the spiritual pillar of the Chinese patriarchal society. Schwartz (1985) described "the orientation to ancestor worship" to be the "centre to the entire development of Chinese civilization." Different from primitive totems in other cultures, ancestor worship in China evolved into a religion with philosophical interpretations rendered by Confucianism.

Ancestor worship conveys two things or meanings to the Chinese. First, ancestors are the origins of life. In the classic book *Li Ji (Record of Rites)*, Confucius and his disciples stated, "As everything originates from heaven and earth, so the people are reproduced by their ancestors. The contribution made by ancestors is parallel to heaven and earth." From that point the second meaning is derived: as do deities, ancestors possess supernatural powers.

Two questions were designed in the survey to examine villagers' attitudes toward ancestor worship. The first question addresses the statement that ancestors should be worshiped; 58 percent of respondents strongly agreed with this statement, 34 percent agreed, and 4 percent expressed neutrality.

¹⁰ One example is the 2013 Law for the Security of the Elderly (老年人权益保障法). According to this law, parents cannot be allowed to fall into neglect. If they do not live with their parents, family members must visit their parents a few times a year. The 1985 Law of Succession (中华人民共和国继承法) stipulates that the amount of property a family member may inherit mainly depends on the amount of support they offered their parents.

Respondents who disagreed with the statement accounted for only 4 percent (see Question 5 in Table 1). Villagers considered ancestors as being both specific and universal. They could be close or remote forebears of a family, a clan, or a nation. Villagers' responses clearly demonstrate the fact that the foundation of Chinese culture has not changed during the course of modernization. Even today few people dare or are willing to deny "ancestor worship," a theme that is sacred and inviolable.

In the villages we investigated, *jiaji* (family rituals of ancestors worship) and *zuji* (clan rituals of ancestors worship), which were all prohibited during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (GPCR), have come back since the early 1980s. *Jiaji* is usually held three times a year; it includes sweeping the graves during the Festivals of Pure Brightness and Solstice and offering sacrifices to ancestors on the Chinese New Year's Eve. As we observed, when the time came, families were bogged down with activities.

We asked villagers to name their primary interest in *jiaji*. They said that it was to cherish memories and to express gratitude to ancestors for having given them life. Basically they put the first significance as mentioned above into practice. Villagers display great enthusiasm for *jiaji*, though they pursue neither religious nor utilitarian goals. Those who were respected in *jiaji* were largely limited to three generations in descent. Few families offered sacrifices to ancestors as long as five generations. No attention was paid to remote ancestors, not to mention the common ancestor of a clan.

Jiaji is thriving everywhere, but *zuji* is still rare. Of the villages we investigated, the Zhou clan is the only one that yearly engages in *zuji*. The Feng clan held *zuji* in 2007 but has not held one since.

To explore villagers' attitudes about this issue, the next question explored their support of *zuji* (see Question 6 in Table 1); 18 percent of them strongly supported, 46 percent supported, 22 percent expressed neutrality, and 14 percent disagreed. Although 64 percent of respondents supported *zuji*, this percentage was significantly lower than that for those who approved "ancestor worship."

If a majority of villagers supported *zuji*, why was such an activity rarely seen? The circumstance can be traced to a number of reasons. First, since most *citang* or ancestral halls were completely destroyed or seriously damaged between the 1950s and the 1970s, most villages now lack buildings ready to hold clan rituals.

Second, clans are short of the necessary financial resources. Before 1949 a clan's common wealth yielded a stable and sustainable income for supporting *zuji*. During the campaign of land reform in the early 1950s all the common

wealth and property was confiscated and redistributed to poor villagers. Because the economic base was removed, ceremonial life could not be sustained, and clans collapsed almost immediately (Baker, 1979). Without established funding, clans would find it difficult to carry *zuji* out normally. A possible solution is to ask for donations from households one by one, like the Feng clan did in 2007. This might be done occasionally, but it cannot be sustained.

Third, few villagers are willing to organize or coordinate clan rituals. In rural areas it is not difficult to find organizers and volunteers for many activities, including local religious ceremonies, folk custom celebrations, and so on. However, it is not easy to find organizers for clan rituals. Why? The key lies in governmental attitudes. Concerned with the possibility of generating factionalism and instability in their administrative regions, officials in local government keep vigilant eyes on collective activities based on blood ties. Without permissions from the government few people are willing to take the political risk.

Since ancestor worship conveys two things to the Chinese, clans attempt to achieve two goals in rituals: expressing gratitude to ancestors for giving them life and imploring ancestors to bless their descendants. The latter delivers religious and utilitarian orientations. With the sacred code of ancestors fading, an increasing number of villagers no longer perceive their ancestors as superpowers, giving *zuji* less prominence in asking for blessings. Lacking religious and utilitarian initiatives, villagers would feel no enthusiasm for taking part in *zuji*.

In the villages we investigated, the only ancestral hall that had been reconstructed in the last two decades is owned by the Zhou clan. The reconstruction was done in 1998, funded by a clan member, a successful businessman in Hong Kong. Since then, clansmen could get together in the hall every Chinese New Year's Eve. The other clans are not so lucky and have no money to rebuild or repair their ancestral halls. This circumstance perhaps explains why the Zhou clan is the only one that engages in *zuji* yearly. Another possible factor is clan size. The Zhou clan is the smallest of the six, consisting of only about forty households. It is relatively easy for this clan to organize a collective activity. The small size also produces strong cohesive forces among clan members. Even so, to avoid intervention from the government, clan members never admitted that they held an organized *zuji*. "It is just spontaneous behavior by individuals," they told us.

It does not require great effort to carry out a *jiuji*, nor does it depend heavily on money, space, or organizational skills. To some degree that ease explains why *jiuji* is thriving everywhere. However, the situational difference between

jiaji and *zuji* may be further evidence of a trend breaking away from clan and turning toward family. Villagers are treating rituals of ancestor worship as part of domestic life rather than belonging in the public sphere.

Updating Genealogical Records and Current Descent Relations

In Chinese history, when a population matured, clan branches appeared with increasing complexity, and descent relations became increasingly blurred. Consequently solidarity in the community was weakened. Under the circumstances, clans were required to update or recompile genealogical records in order to clarify hierarchic descent links and rebuild cohesive forces. From the Republican Era to Deng's time few clans in southern Anhui were able to accomplish this work for various reasons. In the past, as the saying goes, it would have been considered unfilial conduct if the updating work were not done over three generations. In such a case, the clan tree became disordered, so that a clan member could not identify his position in a genealogical chart.

We asked villagers if they supported updating genealogical records; 31 percent of respondents expressed strong support, 46 percent expressed support, 15 percent expressed neutrality, and 9 percent did not support the idea. Altogether, 77 percent expressed support (see Question 7 in Table 1). Many older villagers were actually enthusiastic about engaging in this work. In spite of the tremendous support, the Cheng clan is the only one that has successfully completed a new genealogical book.¹¹ Why is this work at a standstill in other clans? A shortage of funding is probably the answer, but the truth is more complicated. Like many others in southern Anhui, the five clans under investigation have not updated their genealogical records in over a century. Descent disorders have already emerged and have become a serious problem. In our fieldwork we found no one who was able to tell us how they were related to each other genealogically beyond five generations. Few of them could clarify what *fangzhi* (or clan branch) they belonged to. Under the circumstances, it is extremely difficult to recover the missing links. Moreover, a number of villagers have moved on over the last century, and many of them have lost contact with native clans. Without them a clan tree cannot be complete.

Dunfutang, a branch of the Feng clan, resides in a big building. Before 1949 all the branch members of more than twenty families and five generations

¹¹ In southern Anhui, Cheng is a very common surname and is well known for possessing a complete genealogical book.

lived together in that building and ate from the same big rice-pot. When we visited this building for a household interview, we found to our surprise that only four families still lived there. A woman told us that all the others had moved to cities and towns. Some came back for an occasional visit, and some never returned. The same situation prevailed in other villages, where we saw many vacant houses with locks on the door.¹² Two *zirancun* (natural villages), one in Fengcun and another in Changxi, were almost totally empty. Each village had been occupied by more than thirty households.

In conversations with local officials and villagers we learned that many clans demanded new genealogical books. After the first attempt, however, most of them discontinued their work because they did not know how and where to start. When the genealogical link becomes unclear over a long period of time, clan members lose their identity in the order of descent. As a result, a clan will split into piecemeal lineages consisting of families only within five or so generations. Correspondingly, the cohesiveness and centrality in that clan will be gone, and the clan will finally disintegrate.

Descent and kinship relations can be viewed as an indicator of existing clan cohesiveness among villagers. We designed two survey questions to explore this issue. The first question postulates that villagers have gradually drifted apart from their relatives over the last ten years (see Question 8 in Table 1); 8 percent of them strongly agreed with this statement, and 44 percent agreed. Altogether, 52 percent of the respondents believed that their relations with relatives were not as good as they had been ten years earlier. As many as 16 percent of the participants showed neither approval nor disapproval, while 32 percent expressed disagreement.

Why did these villagers feel that their descent relations were worse than before? From observation and conversation we acquired the following explanations. First, Deng's policy enlarged the income gap between clansmen. The rich began to look down at their poor relatives, while the poor were unwilling to beg for mercy from their rich relatives. Accordingly, they drifted away from each other. Second, most of the young and middle-aged villagers were working in cities. The only time for them to visit relatives was around the Chinese New Year, when they were rewarded with a break. This new lifestyle

¹² This situation cannot be attributed simply to the recent migration. Between 1949 and 1957 many villagers worked and lived in cities and towns. Almost all of them gave up their rural residence and chose to stay in urban areas when the government carried out a strict policy of the double residence system in 1958, which did not allow peasants to change their rural residence status.

decreased migrant workers' contact with their kin. Moreover, urbanization led many peasant families to stop being productive units and turn into merely consuming objects, effectively cutting them off from their relations with kin networks when it came to production. As for families still engaged in farming, machines and technology that had begun to be employed in agriculture over the last few decades made the villagers more able to work independently and less dependent on cooperation. In the countryside now, when villagers need help, for instance in building a new house, they must pay helpers wages at market rate even if the helpers are their relatives. Blood relations have thus become commercialized and stink of money.¹³

Some respondents expressed different opinions, believing that their relations with relatives were not worse but better than before. Why? According to them, money was required for visiting relatives and participating in such events as weddings and funerals. In the last two decades peasant income has grown rapidly, thanks to the booming economy, providing a great chance for villagers to improve kinship relations. Based on our investigation, the average amount spent on such activities (*renqing kaizhi*, as it is called) was about 1,350 *yuan* for a family in 2011. To a certain degree money has kept kinship active. The more money spent, the closer the relationship. It can be seen that economic development has imposed both positive and negative changes on kinship relations.

It should be noted that, for villagers, relatives refer only to *benjia qinqi*, or near kin (kinship within five generations). In interviews and conversations, all participants agreed that their relations with remote kin or the kinship beyond five generations became definitely estranged from each other in recent years.

The second question in the survey states that in-clan cadres are more worthy of trust than out-clan ones (see Question 9 in Table 1). Only 16 percent of participants accepted this statement, 15 percent were neutral, and 69 percent, or a majority, disagreed. They explained to us that the primary task for cadres was to encourage villagers to lead better and fairer lives. Logically, the most important consideration for villagers in electing cadres was the candidates' ability and morality rather than their surname. Even those who were in favor of in-clan cadres used the term "in-clan" to refer to their kin within five generations. "Clansmen beyond five generations are not worth the same trust as friends," they said. Their attitudes can be further illustrated by the fact that the leading officials, including the village heads and the party secretaries, in all the

¹³ Some researchers reported on a new cooperative movement in rural areas. But there is no such movement in the region we investigated.

administrative villages investigated except for Hanmudu were not from these dominant clans but, according to the 2009 census, came from others. In other words, most of them were out-clan cadres.

Nevertheless we cannot say that the clan does not play a role elsewhere. A report states that villagers in some regions are more likely to give their vote to candidates with common surnames (Su, Ran, Sun, and Liu, 2011). In our fieldwork we heard a few stories. For instance, in Dingjiaqiao, an administrative village in Jingxian, *cunmin weiyuanhui* (the villagers' committee) was always controlled by the Ding clan, the primary descent group in that village. An out-clan cadre was hardly able to gain a foothold there. We talked with officials at the county governments in Jingxian and Shexian. They admitted that conflicts between clans did exist in some places. But they emphasized that it held true in just a few cases. Conversations with villagers and local officials at the village and township levels informed us that clan conflicts were minimal historically and currently in the two counties. In Changxi we stayed in a hotel run by a local peasant who was a member of *xiaoxing*, a small or nondominant clan. His ancestors had served as *zhuangpu* (clan servants) for the Wu clan, the dominant clan in that village, before 1949. In the early days of the Reform Period, he had a long-standing conflict with the Wu clan members on economic affairs and other matters. "The Wu clan dominated everything. They gave me the worst land and the worst location during land redistribution. They looked down on me and bullied me," he said. "But it is much better now that everyone is busy at their own business."

Attitudinal Differences by Groups

Above we discussed villagers' attitudes toward a number of issues. However, men and women may have different attitudes toward the same issue. These attitudes may also alter with age and other demographic-socioeconomic factors. To analyze these differences, we calculate the average scores for each statement or item in Table 1 by age, sex, and occupation. We assign the number 1 to "strongly agree," the number 2 to "agree," the number 3 to "neutral," the number 4 to "disagree," and the number 5 to "strongly disagree." As each statement illustrates a clan value or an activity, the lowest score demonstrates the strongest traditional attitude. Conversely, the highest would indicate the least traditional or most liberal attitude. The only exception is Item 8, which interprets a situation and does not involve a value judgment.

Table 3 shows that the gender difference for each item is not significant, indicating that women hold very similar opinions to men. However, slight differences still exist between the two groups. Women possess higher scores on almost all items. As compared with male villagers, females on average are less likely to accept traditional values or less likely to support activities that could rebuild clan loyalty. But, their lower score on item 9 suggests that female villagers would be more likely to trust in-clan cadres.

We divided participants into three age groups: the young people aged between 18 and 39 (Group 1), the middle-aged people aged between 40 and 59 (Group 2), and the old people aged 60 or more (Group 3). For most items the youths, or Group 1, show higher scores than do the other two groups, indicating their lower likelihood to accept these traditional values or activities. On Item 7 they show the same score as Group 2 but higher than Group 3, indicating their similar attitude to the middle-aged villagers but showing less enthusiasm than the old group about the issue regarding the reconciliation of genealogical records. For most items Group 2 is in the middle rank, showing lower scores than the scores for young people but higher than the old. On item 8 both Groups 1 and 2 show higher scores than the old, indicating that they are less pessimistic on relations with relatives. As we know, most of the young and middle-aged villagers are migrant workers, who might receive assistance from kin networks when looking for jobs or working in urban areas in spite of the decreased necessity of solidarity in the countryside. Some told us that they experienced stronger feelings of valuable kinship relations when they lived in a strange city.

Participants' occupations were classified into two categories, farming and nonfarming. Nonfarming refers to people whose income primarily comes from nonfarming occupations, mostly from urban jobs. As shown in Table 3, respondents with nonfarming careers generally possess higher scores than do those engaging in farming work. It is possible that the urban experience leads to attitudes that are less traditional. This group's higher score on Item 8 suggests that they harbor less pessimism on relations with relatives. As discussed above, when they undergo hardship in cities, help would probably first come from their kin.

However, group roles cannot be exaggerated. Let us take a look at the magnitude of scores. For a group, an average score lower than 3 would denote a case in which a majority of villagers are in favor of that statement. Shown in Table 3, all groups hold scores less than 3 on Items 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, and 7 (in addition to Item 8, which does not involve a value judgment) in spite of differences existing

Table 3. Attitude toward Clan Culture by Age, Gender, and Occupation

Statement	Age			Gender		Occupation	
	18-39	40-59	60 +	Male	Female	Farming	Non-Farming
1	2.96	2.69	2.71	2.76	2.83	2.64	2.95
2	1.67	1.38	1.34	1.43	1.44	1.39	1.49
3	1.28	1.20	1.11	1.13	1.33	1.19	1.20
4	3.96	3.85	3.65	3.79	3.87	3.78	3.86
5	1.89	1.57	1.26	1.44	1.79	1.48	1.64
6	1.96	1.93	1.91	2.02	2.12	1.88	2.00
7	2.00	2.00	2.03	1.91	1.94	2.01	2.10
8	2.73	2.79	2.68	2.70	2.84	2.75	2.77
9	3.07	3.03	3.01	3.29	3.00	3.01	3.05

among them, telling us that these traditional values and activities received a considerable support from villagers regardless of age, sex, and occupation.

An average score higher than 3 represents a different situation, indicating that a majority in that group disagrees with the statement. This situation appears on Items 4 and 9, suggesting that these values did not receive sufficient support from villagers even accounting for group differences. These findings lead us to identify two trends. First, most villagers adopted modern views on certain parts of clan culture, including patriarchal power and clan role in cadre election, reflecting an increasing sentiment of independence and awareness of civil obligations. Second, the core values and traditions including *xiao*, ancestor worship, family, clan identities, clan rituals, and clan genealogy, continue to remain dominant influences on villagers, even on young migrant workers. Group differences are not large enough to change the basic features of the trends.

Modernization and Clan Culture

Above we discussed attitudinal differences by age, sex, and occupation. Generally people's attitudes concerning traditions are affected by their socioeconomic status, which to a large extent reflects the construction of socioeconomic development or modernization at the macro level. To extend the discussion of the previous section and to examine correlations between people's socioeconomic status and their attitude, we established three regression models,

in which a person's socioeconomic status is represented by five independent variables, including Sex (X_1), Age (X_2), Occupation (X_3), Education (X_4), and Income (X_5) (See Table 4). Three dependent variables are: "Individual attitude about clan interests," or Y_1 in Model 1; "Individual attitude about obedience to parents," or Y_2 in Model 2; and "Individual attitude about clan rituals," or Y_3 in Model 3. The three dependent variables represent statements 1, 4, and 6 in Table 1 separately. Villagers' attitudes about other issues are not considered because of very small variations between categories.

Of independent variables, age, education (years of schooling), and income are ratio variables. Sex and occupation are nominal variables and need to be transformed into quantitative measurements. For the variable of sex, we code males as 1 and females as 2. For the variable of occupation, we code those who engage in farm work as 1 and those who engage in nonfarm work as 2. Because most of the villagers engaged in nonfarm work are migrant workers in cities and towns, the variable of occupation can be regarded as an indicator of urbanization. To measure the three dependent variables at the ordinal level, we once again assign the number 1 to "strongly agree," the number 2 to "agree," the number 3 to "neutral," the number 4 to "disagree," and the number 5 to "strongly disagree." The results of our calculations are shown in Table 4.¹⁴

Table 4. Regression Analyses

Variables (X)	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	B	Standard Error	B	Standard Error	B	Standard Error
Constant	1.712	0.722	3.43	0.577	3.34	0.624
Sex	0.054	0.201	-0.023	0.161	0.059	0.173
Age	0.005	0.007	-0.012 *	0.006	-0.015 *	0.006
Occupation	0.451 *	0.217	-0.038	0.173	-0.013 *	0.188
Education	0.051 *	0.026	0.016	0.021	0.043	0.023
Income	0.0004	0.0002	-0.0001	0	-0.0001	0.00004
F test	F = 14.02	Sig = 0.000	F = 14.45	Sig = 0.000	F = 14.41	Sig = 0.000

Note:

*: Independent variables are statistically significant at the 5% level

¹⁴ SPSS is the statistical software used in calculation.

The following discussions will be simplified in order to make statistical analyses understandable to the majority of readers.

The *F*-test shows that all three models are statistically significant (at the 0 percent level). In Model 1 two independent variables, including occupation and education, are statistically significant (at the 5 percent level), so we discuss the two variables only. Regression coefficients, or *B*s, for the two variables are all positive, indicating that respondents who engage in nonfarm work and those who are more educated would be more likely to disagree with the statement that clan interests are more important than individual interests. In other words, increasing urbanization and education would reduce their loyalty to clans.

In Model 2, age is the only independent variable that is statistically significant (at the 5 percent level). The regression coefficient, or *B* value, for age is negative, showing an attitudinal gap between age groups. As compared with the old villagers, the young and middle-aged ones seem less likely to support the traditional value of parents' absolute power.

In Model 3 two independent variables, including age and education, are statistically significant (at the 5 percent level). The regression coefficient, or *B* value, for age is negative, once again showing an attitudinal gap between age groups. The older villagers tend to be more likely to support *zuji* than holds true for other age groups. The regression coefficient, or *B* value, for education is positive, indicating that those who are more educated appear less likely to support *zuji*.¹⁵

In brief, socioeconomic development represented by the three independent variables including age, education, and urbanization (or occupation), as a whole, generates effects in reducing traditional influence. Those relatively well-educated young and middle-aged villagers with urban experience are more likely to embrace the new world. This finding is consistent with discussions in the previous section.

The impact of socioeconomic development can be further observed from the following facts. Villagers in Fengcun worship the Great King of Cishan in what is essentially a local religion.¹⁶ Ten days after the Chinese New Year believers shoulder sedans carrying sculptures of the king and his three sons to tour

¹⁵ Actually the variables of sex and income play significant roles in other models that are not discussed in this article.

¹⁶ In local legend, Cishan was a mid-level official in the Han Dynasty who made a great contribution to local water conservancy projects. To express gratitude for his meritorious service, the people in a few counties in southern Anhui honored him as a Great King. Gradually he became a superpower who can protect the people of that region.

Fengcun and nearby villages. When the sedans arrive at a village, people light firecrackers, set up incense altars, and prostrate themselves. We happened to see this event during our fieldwork, and we discovered that participants in these activities chiefly consisted of two age groups: the old and the teenagers. The young and middle-aged migrant workers were rarely seen, though they were visiting their families and enjoying a holiday break at that time. When we interviewed these migrant workers, who were very much urbanized in their dress and verbal expression, we asked them why they did not participate in such activities. Some told us that they did not believe in it. The rest said that they were not interested.

Before coming to these villages, we initially expected to see a series of traditional festive performances around the Chinese New Year and the Lantern Festival. However, when we were there, we did not see anything except for *jiqiji* and rituals of the local religions.¹⁷ Villagers told us that the most lavish time for festive ceremonies was between the 1980s and 1990s. Once the young and middle-aged laborers left for urban areas, these festivities diminished over the years. "Without them, these activities cannot sustain," local officials told us.

Discussion and Conclusions

Clan power enjoyed a revival between the 1980s and the 1990s. During that period these villages returned to traditional individual farming. With the ending of the people's communes and the state's retreat from rural areas, villagers could ask for assistance and leadership only from kinship networks and from clans with regard to cooperation in production and mediation in civil affairs. Clan power was therefore partly restored and villagers' clan mentality reawakened. However, this "renaissance" was limited in both scale and time as clans in all the villages we investigated did not obtain legal status in managing economic and public affairs, nor did they reestablish the administrative offices and common wealth.

Beginning in the late 1990s, a number of socioeconomic changes occurred. Small-scale production and labor-intensive farming started to move toward modernization. Peasants appeared to rely more on technology, machines, markets, and banks. Kinship and clans once again lost their importance to

¹⁷ In Shexian people in many villages, including Xiongqun, Hanmudu, Changxi, and Xitou, worship Wang Hua and his sons. Wang Hua (586-649 AD) was the governor of Shezhou (歙州) in the Tang Dynasty. According to local legend, he protected the local people from chaos in wars between the Sui and Tang dynasties.

villagers. Meanwhile, after many tries the government rebuilt and stabilized authority in rural areas through *cunmin weiyuanhui*, which effectively took administrative responsibility on public and civil affairs. No longer was there a void in political power at the village level, reducing the need for leadership from clans.¹⁸ Moreover, large-scale migration to urban areas eroded the land of common residence and generated a centrifugal force. These changes finally put an end to the “renaissance.”

When we visited these villages, we did not find any remains of clan organization and administration. The visible part of the clan system had already crumbled. Clans, especially those of large size and with a long history, had departed greatly from the late imperial pattern, eventually changing to “local descent groups” composed of small or low-order lineages. These lineages are built upon demonstrated descent, but, relations among members are limited to five generations or fewer. Different from classical patterns, in these lineages no one plays the role of a lineage head. Families in these lineages do not pursue a “common goal” and do not own any “common wealth.”

While the visible part has largely disappeared, the invisible part, or clan culture, still retains a strong influence on villagers. As our research revealed, more than half of the respondents expressed traditional viewpoints concerning issues of clan interests, ancestor worship, *xiao*, clan rituals, and clan genealogy, showing the persistence of traditions and historical continuity. Once class struggle was no longer stressed by the Communist Party, villagers quickly returned to traditional values. As a fruit of the revival period, this “cultural renaissance” has a longer-range effect and possesses an enduring and autonomous impact on villagers’ behavior. However, the resurgent traditions and values have been meeting with challenges from the rapid pace of economic development and urbanization. Peasants, especially young and middle-aged migrant workers, are adopting modern views on certain parts of traditional clan culture. We are not sure whether this modernization, which is caused by intrinsic factors and distinguished from the Cultural Revolution initiated by Mao, will continue when these people grow older and come back to their villages. However, as

¹⁸ The villagers’ committee is the legal representative of villagers’ land. The area under the administration of a villagers’ committee is similar to the administrative area of a production brigade (生产大队) in the period of the people’s commune. Under a villagers’ committee there are certain villagers’ groups (村民小组). A villagers’ group administers an area similar to a production team (生产小队) in the period of the people’s commune. It is said that the villagers’ committee is an agency of villagers’ autonomy. According to our observation, it is strongly controlled by the local government.

long as peasants continue to migrate to and work in urban areas, this process will not stop.

In addition, we observed that clan subculture, or the culture related to a specific clan—for instance, ethics and rules in governing the relationship between individual members and their specific clan—was withering away. Few villagers, including the old, were able to tell us the special rules for their clans. Clan culture that still retains its strong influence consists for the most part of general ethics that can be applied to any clan in that region. Clans in a region share a common local religion, common ethics, and common customs. Regional subculture is replacing clan subculture, reflecting a cultural convergence. It may be considered a part of modernization.

Most questions in our survey involve villagers' attitudes. An attitude does not always lead to the corresponding behavior. Our research has discovered a distance between the two on certain issues. There is always a gap between guidelines and practice of the guidelines because of intervention variables, which can be personal, psychological, economic, legal, or political. These variables can come from society, family, and individuals affected by contemporary socioeconomic developments. However, in any situation, it does not deny the importance of attitude in affecting behavior.

We must stress that Chinese characteristics are deeply engraved on the cultural changes in these villages. Although the sentiment of patriarchal authority is declining among the young and middle-aged villagers, the general principle of *xiao* is still respected by all age groups. *Jia*, being the foundation of the Chinese society and Chinese culture, continues to be of greater importance than are individuals. As many have observed the growth of individualism in China, a question arises: Will individualism defeat family one day? Before answering this question, we need to understand the nature of individualism. Basically individualism in a broad sense bears three features or levels: First, it promotes individual goals and desires and advances such values as independence and self-reliance.¹⁹ Second, it holds that the interests of the individual should take precedence over the needs of groups. Third, it is a doctrine or conception that all values, rights, and duties originate in individuals.²⁰

The first segment of individualism does not necessarily conflict with family interest if the individual and the family pursue the same goal. Since the May Fourth Movement, Chinese intellectuals have advocated and marketed this value continuously; practicing it has become a fashion in today's China.

¹⁹ See Webster, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/individualism>.

²⁰ See Free Dictionary, <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/individualism>.

Many times when talking about individualism, the term refers to this segment, which we may call individualism in the narrow sense. The second segment of individualism, involving the relationship between *geren* (individuals) and *qun* (group), has been long suppressed by mainstream opinion and resisted by the ordinary people from the Republican Era to the present, for it directly challenges the interests of the state and the family. As our research shows, almost all the peasants under investigation took a firm stand on traditional family values, believing that the interests of the family take precedence over the needs of individuals. If the second segment of individualism cannot be accepted, and if individualism cannot breach the defenses of the state and the family, the third segment of individualism can have no chance of being achieved in China.

We admit that Western influence is growing rapidly. It has changed many aspects of peasant life. As far as appearances go, a trend of Westernization seems irresistible. However, as our research shows, even though peasants divested themselves of some traditions, they held firmly to core values. Changes in dress, which are readily apparent, do not necessarily mean internal changes. As we know, Chinese traditional culture suffered heavy blows during the 1949 Revolution and the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. It is the people rather than the government that started to rebuild traditional culture in the 1980s. They restructured it literally from nothing. Core values and traditions take deep root in the masses and provide the Chinese with a kind of religious solace and happiness. Being full of vital power, these values and traditions, transmitted generation after generation through family, are not likely to alter with time. Given China's economic success, the Chinese people will have greater confidence in their culture and history. In the early twentieth century Chinese elites talked about abandoning Chinese characters and attempted to replace them with the Western writing system. Now they are talking about the beauty of their language, and nobody wants to give it up. We are confident that economic development and urbanization will not finally turn China into a Western society. As Philip Huang noted, China's modernization "is very different from the West's, and not just economically, but also politically and culturally" (Huang, 2011: 460).

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