Connected by surname

These Chinese characters represent the names of the four families holding conventions in Chinatown. Below each is a brief summary of the principles of the family.

YEE

The patriarch is an ancient Chinese philosopher who stressed striving for a common good and strong family bonds.

WONG

The family follows the words of an ancestor who told his children in 950 A.D. to never forget their parents and homeland when they move away.

CHAN

Descendants of one of the first Chinese emperors, the Chans are the largest of a three-family association that gives high priority to respecting their elders. The other related families are the Woos and the Yuens.

NG

This family looks to an ancient warrior who avenged his father's death. Above all, this family values filial piety.

CALLIGRAPHY COURTESY OF KLYSER YEN

GLOBE STAFF CHART

CHAPTER IX

The Ancestors' Shadow

WE ARE now in a position to summarize the culture which we have described and analyzed in the preceding chapters. The first and foremost element is the father-son identification. This identification is at the root of and based upon two general principles which govern the entire kinship structure: patriliny and generation.

The term identification is applied to the father-son relationship because, far from being one-sided, the responsibility and privileges of the relationship are quite mutual. The father must provide for the sons when they are young, educate them in the ancestral tradition, and get them suitably married. The older man is obliged to do these things not so much because he owes it to the youngsters, but because he is obligated to their common ancestors. The son owes to his father absolute obedience, and he must support his parents, mourn for them,[1] bury them according to social station and financial ability, provide for their needs in the other world, and take all necessary steps toward insuring the male line. The younger man is obliged to do these things not only because of his duty to his parents but also because he is indebted to his and his father's common ancestors.

Thus, from the point of view of the kinship organization as a whole the father-son identification is merely a necessary link in the great family continuum, with numerous ancestors at one end and innumerable descendants at the other.

[1] A son wears mourning for two years for his father, but three years for his mother. This longer mourning for the mother, it is expressly stated, is because of her greater hardship in giving birth to him and bringing him up. But a woman's role is on every occasion regarded as subsidiary to that of her husband and even that of her son.

The second element is what I call estrangement between the sexes. On the one hand this pattern prescribes sex inequality, and on the other it necessitates the elimination of all erotic expression. Both measures are means for subordinating the husband-wife relationship and enhancing the father-son relationship. In West Town we see an outright superiority of men over women. Not only are husbands above their wives, but brothers are also superior to their sisters. This inequality is implied in the life of the people and clearly stated and recognized by both sexes without reserve or hesitation. Only when a relationship involves two generations is the principle overshadowed. Inequality means that punishment for sexual offense is much more stringent for women than for men and that the remarrying widow is in a much poorer position than the remarrying widower. In fact, the latter is encouraged to remarry, while the former is told that to do so involves disgrace. The remarried female has, therefore, seriously lowered her social prestige. This being the custom, there cannot be any preference for levirate, which very rarely and informally occurs among the poor in some parts of China.

Elimination of erotic expression affects a wide range of behavior. Men and women may not meet preliminary to marriage, for romantic love has no place in this configuration. Marriage, since it is instituted in order to acquire daughters-in-law for the husband's parents and to continue the father-son line, is parentally arranged according to customary rules, including those governing preferred or disfavored matches. The emphasis on the continuation of the father-son tie means that the behavior and the ideas of new or prospective members of the family must be predictable so as not to sever this tie. Romantic love is, in theory at least, unpredictable, and the emphasis is on individual attachment between the spouses. That is why gestures of

intimacy in public, even between man and wife, are socially disapproved.

The third element is the big-family ideal. From the point of view of the smooth functioning of the father-son relationship and its continuation, this ideal is important for obvious reasons. In any given family and in any given generation there is likely to be more than one male born of the same parents. This being the case, it means that the father-son relationship in any given instance probably refers to a father and several sons. It is easy to see how constant disharmony between the latter could interrupt the interplay of authority and duty inherent in the father-son identification. If the sons quarrel so that they disperse, the father-son line might even be in danger of extinction.

To promote this big-family ideal, it is necessary to develop two factors: on the one hand, there must be an esprit de corps, and on the other, unity of purpose. The esprit de corps is brought about by sharing honors and maintaining harmony. That is why there are displayed the ranks, virtues, and other achievements of remotely related individuals of the same clan in family homes, ancestral temples, graveyards, and on all ceremonial occasions. That is why if a fight among the children under the ancestral roof comes to the notice of the adults, according to the social ideal the parents will show greater consideration for children other than their own. The unity of purpose is expressed in a community of interests and of material goods. That is why before the division of the family all incomes and earnings go to a common household pool, and any significant deviation from the rule is a sign that the household can no longer be held together. That is why the ideal family is one in which its property is undivided and its members all live under the same roof for many generations. During the late imperial dynasty, sons who broke away from their parents or divided the common property without the older people's consent could be criminally punished. Needless to say, once the emphasis on the big-family ideal is established for two generations of lineally

related individuals, it tends to extend to larger and larger collateral groups.

The fourth element is the pattern of education, which for lack of a better phrase may be described as education for old age. Differences between the psychology and behavior of the younger and those of the older members of the society are recognized. But whether the member in question is five years old or twenty years old, the keynote in his or her training in life is the same. Children are not trained to develop as children, but at every turn they are encouraged to imitate and to participate in the ways of the adults, which are, in turn, ways of the ancestors. The sense of kinship continuity, the big-family ideal, ideals of harmony with members of the clan and community, and the conservatism of the spirits are imparted to the young as early as they can absorb them. There is very little intention on the part of the parents to encourage differences in temperament among their children. On the contrary, the more the youngsters conform to the ancestral tradition, the better. This process makes it clear to the young that it is not very desirable and comfortable to be young, but that it is advantageous and dignified to be old.

This education is built on the supposition that all the living are in the shadow of their ancestors. Death does not sever the relationship of the departed with the living; but merely changes it to a different level. Far from being characterized by fear, the attitude of the living toward departed members of the family or clan is one of continuous remembrance and affection. In fact, the custom requires for a departed relative a considerable heightening of the kinship sentiments along established lines, at least for a short period of time. As might be expected, custom requires the greatest demonstration of these sentiments for parents and the least for wives. The amount of demonstration required lessens in intensity in direct proportion to the closeness of the recognized kinship relationship, both lineally and laterally. The dead need the same things to which they have been accustomed in life, and it is up to those whose duty

(3) big family ideal
(4) education

it has been to support them before their death to continue doing so afterwards.

The attitude of the dead toward the living is completely in line with that of the living toward the dead. There are, in all, four classes of spirits: (1) spirits of members of the same kinship group and of the group of relatives by marriage; (2) spirits of persons not related by kinship or marriage; (3) officials and functionaries in the worlds of spirits; and (4) spirits of dead persons from unknown or unfamiliar racial or cultural groups (such as those of the Mohammedan dead). The fourth group of spirits are regarded as being irrelevant; they simply do not count, and they are neither harmful nor beneficial. The third group of spirits may be benevolent, benign, or malicious. Most of them control or are in some way related to the destiny, good fortune, bad luck, sickness, disaster, or death which may occur in the life of every individual; many of them are known by name and nature. They are part of the spiritual order, just as magistrates, provincial governors, cabinet ministers, emperors, generals, soldiers, and policemen are part of the social order. The individual can secure their favor or refrain from offending them, but cannot completely get away from their rule. The disposition of the second class of spirits is uncertain; those who have living descendants are usually happy and content and, therefore, not dangerous at all. The dangerous ones are those who have died an unnatural death or are no longer worshiped at any family altar or clan temple. They may become so extremely jealous of the happier living members or so destitute that they will be out to harm everybody and everything on which they can lay their hands. These spirits must be propitiated with offerings and incense and kept at a distance. The first class of spirits differs from all others. They are always well disposed and never malicious toward the members of the families to which they are related. In fact, the question does not arise at all. Their good will is so taken for granted that any inquiry on that point appeared to my West Town informants as pointless and ridiculous.

The ancestral spirits will help their own descendants whenever they can. They are the spirits upon which the living may depend without any question and to which the living are related, for better or for worse and without any possibility of change. Their behavior in life, as well as in the world of the dead, exerts influence on the fate of their descendants. In turn, their fate is also influenced by the behavior of their descendants. They are never offended by their descendants, and they never cause disasters to befall the coming generations. In fact, it is their natural duty (for they do not have to be invoked for such purposes) to use every possible means to protect their descendants in case the latter get into trouble with spirits of the second and third classes.

(5) It is clear, then, that the attitude of the living toward the dead and that of the dead toward the living are functionally one. The relation of the living with the dead is essentially modeled upon that of the living with the living. It is, however, more than that. By glorifying the dead it both idealizes and sets the standard and pattern for kinship relationship. This pattern determines, it seems, the worldly attitude of all spirits, and the worldly orientation of the majority of West Towners. The majority of West Towners are interested in accumulating spiritual "goods" by prayers, observance of taboos and offerings, but they do so largely because they desire certain tangibles: to be free from disease and want and to have living heirs, proper burials, adequate graveyards, prosperous descendants for many generations to come, and honored places in their clan temples. These things, it should be noted, are also objectives desired by ancestral spirits, either for themselves or for their progeny.

The world of spirits is approximately a copy of, and strictly a supplement to, the world of the living. West Towners, like all Chinese, deduce the existence of the world of spirits from the existence of the world of the living, but

not vice versa, as in Christianity.[2] By the same token, the cult of ancestors derives its existence from that of the family organization. The cult as it is found in West Town is not primarily a matter of belief. A belief is usually accepted by some and denied by others within the same culture. The cult of ancestors, as it is found in West Town, is more nearly a matter of plain everyday behavior. It is not accepted by some and denied by others. It is a fact to which every sane West Towner subscribes as a matter of course and which no sane West Towner ever challenges. No question of belief ever arises. The ancestors of West Town literally live among their descendants, not only biologically, but also socially and psychologically. Therefore, this family religion requires no validation by means of miracles, as was once asserted by Bronislaw Malinowski, for the miracles are inherent in the family continuum, through birth and death, which are an integral part of the configuration. The family is a part of the religion; the religion, a part of the family.

The five elements of the culture outlined thus far have a common denominator: *authority.* Authority is centered in father-son identification, expresses itself freely in relationship between the sexes, big-family ideal, and education, and is backed up by the wishes of dead ancestors.

However, equally important in the culture is the factor of *competition.* Where there is authority there is no equality. But authority in West Town culture only applies to relationships which involve two generation levels, to those which involve both sexes, to those which involve widely different ages, and to those which involve men of different statuses (the rich or higher officials versus the poor, commoners, or lower officials). Manifestly it does not apply to relationships which involve related persons of the same sex and the same generation level (for example, brothers) or to certain others (for example, common citizens of the community who have no official titles). Among these groups equality in large measure prevails.

[2] It is, therefore, wide of the mark to say that the Chinese are animistic. See the absurd arguments of J. J. M. De Groot, *The Religion of the Chinese,* Leiden 1910.

Between those whose relation with one another is marked by the authority-submission pattern there cannot be competition. But between those whose relation with one another is marked by equality, there can and is bound to be competition. In a family organization which prescribes that all sons, regardless of age, have equal claims to the ancestral inheritance, that all sons have opportunities to head independent family units, and that every son may become the favorite son of parents and ancestors because of personal achievements, this drive for competition tends to receive additional encouragement. It is responsible for the struggle for more wealth, for larger family homes, for more "advantageous" graveyards, for bigger clan temples, for costlier ceremonials, and for a host of other measures which are calculated to increase the welfare and prestige of the living and of the dead. It is also responsible for the weak condition of the clan. Theoretically, the stronger the paternal authority, the more remote the ancestors worshiped, and the stronger the family-unity ideal, the more cohesive the clan organization will be. The sense of competition has, however, destroyed any chance for solidarity of the clan. The individual family cohesion is so strong that even the joint household has difficulty in maintaining its existence. The clan, being composed of members who are much larger in number and much more remote in relationship than the joint household, finds the difficulty greater.

SAFETY VALVES

It is generally acknowledged that every culture selects and emphasizes certain psychological drives and potentialities on the part of the individuals living in it and that every culture eliminates or curbs others. Such selections and emphases express themselves in cultural patterns. While a good many observations have been made on the variability

of cultural patterns,[3] no conclusion has been reached concerning the total range or nature of the psychological drives and potentialities which cultures select and emphasize or eliminate and curb.[4]

If we possessed conclusive evidence on the range and the nature of all psychological drives and potentialities, some of the anthropological investigator's work would be greatly simplified. He would be able, for instance, to ascertain the probable areas within which a conflict between cultural and psychological forces will occur, by comparing the cultural demands with the psychological needs.

In the absence of conclusive psychological evidence, I have used an alternate, but less exact, method to determine some of these conflicts. First I ascertained the basic orientations of certain cultural patterns. Then I looked for customs and conditions which are contrary to such basic orientations, but nevertheless somehow function smoothly as a part of these cultural patterns. Wherever such customs and conditions operate in this manner, my inference is that they correspond to certain psychological needs which have to be satisfied in a roundabout way. I call these secondary customs and conditions "safety valves," in the sense that they prevent the culture pattern from breaking down due to inner conflicts.

The first of these safety valves is found in the pattern of parental authority. West Town culture admonishes the male, as soon as he is able to understand, to obey his parents, especially his father, to the fullest extent; that it is bad behavior to question his wisdom or decisions; that it is good to do whatever he wants done without the slightest regard for one's own feelings; that it is not desirable to commit oneself to any independent line of action; that it is sinful to do anything which disturbs his father in any

[3] See Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture*, New York, 1934; Margaret Mead, *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies*, New York, 1935. Ralph Linton, *The Study of Man*, New York, 1936.

[4] See discussion by Otto Klineberg, *Social Psychology*, New York, 1940, pp. 55–165, and Gordon W. Allport, *Personality*, New York, 1937, chap. iv.

way; in other words, that he is to keep himself ready at all times, as long as he lives, to please him, to agree with him, and to be of all possible service to him. What is more, socially the son will never become mature as long as his father lives.

The basic orientation of this pattern is that sons, as long as their parents live, will have little, if any, opportunity for self assertion. Whether we agree with Alfred Adler that self-assertiveness is all important, the observable fact is that instead of following through its basic demands, the pattern of parental authority is coordinated with the custom of division under the same roof, which drastically modifies the authoritative position of the parents. It may be recalled (see Chapter V) that West Towners, while not encouraging division of the family, look upon it as inevitable. Under this custom, as soon as the sons are married, or when one or more children have been born to the younger wives, the household is divided with regard to living quarters, daily meals, and property or the income from the common property, but the household remains united in religious matters and in social relationship with the clan and the outside world.

The most important consequence of such a division is that real power of decision may then pass from the father to the sons. In this respect a great deal of diversity of behavior is observed. In some cases fathers who appear to be more capable than their sons retain the power. The old father of a Tuan family effectively prevented his sons, who are heads of individual families under the same roof, from gambling. In other cases, a father who appears to be inferior in ability will relinquish the power to his sons. He may be consulted on important issues and may maintain his authority on the surface, but his sons have unlimited freedom of action. The Ch family, cited earlier, conformed to this pattern. Between these extremes there are families which show various intermediate adjustments between the old and the young.

In this way, although the prescriptions concerning pa-

ternal authority are severe, there is room for the mature individual who does not subscribe to them. Such an individual may find his place without causing a breakdown of the existing system. The custom of division under the same roof, in a cultural pattern which stresses the lifelong authority of the father over the son, thus serves the function of a safety valve. Its existence is indicative of the individual tendency to self-assertion against overexacting parental authority.

The second safety valve is found in the cultural pattern of estrangement between the sexes. The culture says to the male: No upright man shows signs of intimacy in public with any woman, not even his wife; your primary duty in life is toward your parents; if a quarrel occurs between your mother and your wife, there is no alternative for you but to take the side of your mother against your wife; you may have to divorce your wife if your parents cannot be pacified; you must *love* your parents with all your heart and must show them every consideration, but you must be stern with your wife and make her defer to you.

It says to the female: To be attractive to men is unnatural; in fact it is a crime of the worst order, for such attraction is equivalent to sexual offense, and sexual offense would end your life; it is shameful to be sexually attractive, even to your husband; it is good manners to avoid talking to him intimately in public; your main duty is toward your parents-in-law, for if you must choose between serving your husband or your parents-in-law, you must serve the older persons; you are to be obedient to your parents before marriage and to your parents-in-law and husband afterwards.

The basic orientation of this pattern is that, while the gratification of sex in the physiological sense is not barred, all possible awareness of it is to be eliminated, and all secondary expressions, such as tenderness of feeling and mutual possessiveness which are normally associated with sex, are to be banned. While there is no evidence that these secondary expressions of sex are necessary accompaniments to the conjugal relationship, we must also observe that once again the basic orientation of the cultural pattern is not consistently followed through.

First, division under the same roof serves here also as a safety valve, because it tones down the severity of the restraints on husband-wife relationship. Since the several individual families of a household live, feed, and manage their economic affairs separately, they have obviously much greater scope for conjugal intimacy than would otherwise be possible.

Of greater importance in this connection is the economic factor. Generally speaking, the husband-wife relationship in poor families fails to conform to the cultural ideal. In such families there is, to be sure, no public expression of conjugal intimacy as Americans understand the term, but the two spouses are undoubtedly closer to each other than either is to the husband's parents. The reason is simple. To begin with, in a poor household the husband as well as the wife has to work hard. This means that husband and wife often have to work cooperatively on the same project. In a rich household, while the wife has to work as hard as any woman in the community, the husband does not have to work at all.

In the matter of treatment of the wife, the rich and the poor also differ. We do not know what West Town wives think of the idea of their husbands giving them less consideration than they do their mothers, but we have observed a good deal of variation in behavior. Some wives take their socially ordained position without a murmur. Others fight back in a number of ways. One may start an open quarrel with her husband. In such a case, the man could beat her up, but that would by no means settle the argument. She may refuse to cooperate with him, by neglecting his clothing and food, or if she is really angry, she may return to her mother. In extreme cases she may even commit suicide. When we consider that parents usually do not care to give their daughters to the poor and that marriage of a daughter is in any case a serious economic problem for the