CHINESE FAMILY AND KINSHIP

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To my parents
B R B (JP) and Fairy
with love and gratitude

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Preface

Kinship was not the only principle of social organization in traditional China, of course, but it was important enough to merit treatment as a full topic in its own right, and I have made no attempt to stray into other fields in this book. For the most part I talk in terms of 'traditional' China, which is a convenient shorthand for 'pre-twentieth century' China. For this reason I have used the past tense in all but the final chapter, sections of which pick up on the titles of previous chapters for ease of reference and comparison with the present.

Much of tradition is still evident in contemporary society, and especially so in Chinese communities outside the People's Republic. Tradition no more stopped dead in 1900 or 1911 than did modernity begin in 1912 or 1949. So, in trying to assess kinship in action I have been able to indulge unrepentantly in chronological sleight-of-hand, using twentieth-century field-work studies to illustrate features of the traditional scene, and using history to back up analysis of more recent times. This is not ideal, but material must be sought where it can be found.

Out of this has emerged, I hope, a clear picture of the family and its place in Chinese society. It is only a *general* picture, however, a basic account of the stock of kinship principles from which the Chinese could draw. I have dealt with rural China, barely mentioning the city, and I have not attempted to point the differences between areas of China or between the various Chinese sub-cultures. Nor have I gone into much detail on the 'mechanics' of family life—ceremonial, division of labour, child-rearing, day-to-day living, and so on. For such details the reader may go to the many sources quoted in the book. I have used quotations freely: first, to show my debt to the ideas of others; and second, as a means of introducing all the major English-language writings on the Chinese family to the attention of the reader new to this field. The quotations in many cases serve to advance the argument of the text; they are not merely for confirmation of points already made.

Despite the constant reference to other writings, this is my own idiosyncratic view of Chinese kinship. I am perhaps open to the criticism, for instance, that I have given too much space to discussion of the lineage: but it seems to me that the lineage brings most sharply into focus the major features of the system. Ancestor worship, too, occupies no small part of the book: again, I feel that the light it throws on kinship organization warrants such attention. It is my hope that with this book as a basis the reader may more readily understand the complexities of detail which he will meet as he goes on to look more deeply into the subject.

I have held mainly to English-language sources but, where Chinese sources have been used, the translations are my own unless otherwise stated. Chinese terms have been kept to a minimum. Romanization is in the official Chinese *Pinyin* system, except where another form is in conventional use (e.g. Mao Tse Tung). And of course I have not interfered with the romanizations used in direct quotations from other authors.

I should like to record my gratitude to Dr James L. Watson and Mrs Rubie S. Watson for their comments on four of the chapters; and to Mr Dick Wilson, editor of the *China Quarterly*, for his advice on Chapter 8. The late Professor Maurice Freedman read and criticized some of the early chapters. No-one working in the field of Chinese kinship can be out of his debt, myself least of all, for I owe gratitude for his teaching, his guidance, and his friendship too.

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H.D.R.B.