FAMILY AND HOUSEHOLD: WHO LIVES WHERE, WHY DOES IT VARY, AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Burton Pasternak
And Ruth said: “Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.” (Ruth: 1:16)

One consequence of the incest taboo is that people everywhere must find mates outside the immediate family. Since wives and husbands most often live together, one or both must move from the home of their parents. When Ruth married, in accordance with custom she went to live with the family of her husband. Even after his death, as the citation indicates, she remained with her mother-in-law. Why should Ruth have been the one to inconvenience herself? Why didn’t her husband leave everything and everyone to join her family? Or, for the sake of fairness, why didn’t they simply go off to live independently when they married, as we do?

Because our custom is for married couples to live on their own, we tend to think that ours is the natural way. But in societies where people are more dependent on kin than on employers or government when it comes to making a living, defense, and support in old age, newlyweds more commonly live with or near close relatives.

In most societies (Table 1) custom recommends the way of Ruth—a bride leaves home to live with her husband with or near his family (patrilocality). In fewer societies, men live with or near the families of their wives (matrilocality), and even less often do couples live with or near either set of parents (bilocality). Our own preference for independence of the married couple (neolocality) is actually rarer still. Nearly as common as neolocality is a custom that has newlyweds live with or near the groom’s mother’s brother (avunculocality). There are even a few societies in which duolocality is the preference, where husband and wife live apart after marriage. Although we might imagine still other arrangements, they do not occur. There are no societies in which residence at marriage is with the groom’s father’s sister, for example. Why do people marry the way they do, why are some practices more common than others, and what difference does it make if people marry one way rather than another?

### Table 1 Prevailing Rules of Residence, by Frequency*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rule of Residence</th>
<th>Percent of All Societies Coded for Residence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Patrilocality</td>
<td>68.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matrilocality</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilocality</td>
<td>8.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neolocality</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avunculocality</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duolocality</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total No. Societies</td>
<td>858</td>
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</table>

**Marital Residence: Causes and Consequences**

What have we learned about the factors likely to induce people to adopt one residence option rather than another? If we can answer that general question, will we better understand why the majority of societies prefer patrilocal residence? Whatever one might think of male chauvinism, we can hardly suppose that our remote male ancestors, at some regular cave meeting, conspired to inconvenience women, and that the decision then passed from generation to generation and people to people. The mere existence of other practices argues against that. Why, indeed, do some people reject patrilocality?

And why should we care? Because the decision we make on this issue may shape the composition of our families, determining who the insiders and outsiders are. Which kin live together or nearby in turn affects the nature of whatever larger kin groups we might form—and indeed most societies organize functional groups on the basis of descent from a common ancestor. Further, the nature of residence can even influence the status of women and gender relations.

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**Residence, Family, and Kin Group**

If men stay put at marriage, over time the local group comes to include a core of men related through their fathers. If families coalesce into groups based on common descent, they are likely to trace descent through males since only they have a common ancestor. Women are outsiders from different places and blood lines. But if men live with or near the parents of their wives, descent will more likely be traced through women because the men come from different localities and blood lines. Avunculocality, like patrilocality, localizes males (a maternal uncle and his sisters’ sons) who are related through their mothers rather than their fathers. When avunculocal peoples form descent groups (and most do), they trace descent through females.

Because bilocality and neolocality create local groups in which some people are related through females and others
through males, these customs are not conducive to tracing descent exclusively through one sex. In bilocal societies people trace descent through either sex, or provide some other basis for organization apart from common descent. Neolocal residence by its nature emphasizes independence of the married couple, and societies with that preference rarely have descent groups of any sort.

Even kinship terms are affected by marital residence because they reflect the kinds of families and descent groups people have. In our own society, for example, we refer to the brothers and sisters of our parents as uncles and aunts, without distinguishing those on our father’s and mother’s side. Similarly, we distinguish cousins from brothers and sisters without regard to whether they are on our father’s or mother’s side. But in many more societies people refer to uncle on the father’s side as father, and mother’s sister as mother. The children of such fathers and mothers are, as we might expect, brothers and sisters.

Such usages are not the product of misunderstanding. Even when paternity is uncertain, people usually know who their mothers are. The terms have sociological rather than purely biological meaning; they signal the presence (or past presence) of extended families and descent groups. Thus, father may simply indicate a male in father’s generation and descent group, and mother can be any woman of mother’s generation and descent group, or a woman eligible to marry one of one’s fathers.

It is because kinship terms reflect kinship organization that anthropologists are attentive to them. In some cases they may even provide a window on the past. If rule of residence has changed, for example, it may have produced adjustments in family composition and descent but not yet in kinship terms. In that event unexpected terms can provide a hint about forms of organization now superseded.

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**Residence and the Status of Women**

Apart from its impact on family, descent, and kinship terms, there is another reason to be attentive to marital residence, and especially to the circumstances that account for a predominance of patrilocality. So long as women leave their families (and often their communities as well) when they marry, they are considered
losses. Their labor and reproductive contributions ultimately belong to others. Patrilocal residence thus has profound implications for the status and well-being of women. There is also cross-cultural evidence suggesting that women enjoy higher status in some respects in matrilocal, matrilineal societies.¹

In most societies people rely on offspring for care in old age. Rarely can they count on welfare, pensions, or public institutions like old age homes, nursing facilities, or hospices. If marriage transfers daughters to others, parents have little motivation for investing heavily in them. They are more likely to favor sons when it comes to food, attention, and education and, if resources are in short supply, females may even be at higher risk of early death.

Norma Diamond highlighted the problem in a study of early Communist transformation in China.² From the outset the Communists had promised to liberate women and break the constraints that the traditional patriarchal family and descent group imposed on modernization. But the Communists fell far short of their goals; their failure was commonly attributed to wrong thinking—to the persistence of “feudal patriarchal ideology.” The hope was that enlightened reeducation would correct the situation. Yet, despite many campaigns designed to alter traditional notions, preference for sons has persisted and people still commonly assert that “boys are precious, girls worthless.” It is not that they do not want daughters (they do), but sons still constitute “large happinesses,” daughters only small ones.

Ultimately, the problem has less to do with ideology than with economic reality. Despite all the transformations—land reform, collectivization, drawing women into the labor force, etc.—the rule of post-marital residence remained unchanged. Ironically, when land was collectivized—transferred from families to collectives and then later to teams, brigades, and communes—the persistence of patrilocality meant that land was still vested in groups of men related through the male line. Despite their concerted attempt to undermine descent groups and to politically emasculate their wealthy leadership, the Communist transformation actually recreated and incorporated de facto patrilineal descent groups. Even with recent privatization of the economy, women continue to be losses. Without altering the rule of post-marital residence the situation is unlikely to change in China, and wherever else marriage requires the bride to move. The popularity of patrilocality in human societies is a matter of considerable consequence.
Why One Way Rather Than Another?

What does cross-cultural research tell us about the circumstances that lead people to adopt one residence practice rather than another, and why is patrilocality especially preferred in so many societies? Are we to suppose that it reflects a basic and inevitable human condition—male dominance? Were that the case, wouldn’t all societies be patrilocal? As it turns out, moreover, beyond the family itself males are politically dominant in all societies, even in matrilocal and avunculocal ones.

Some have proposed that perhaps the societal propensity for patrilocality reflects the fact that, in most societies, men do most of the subsistence work. Another suggestion has been that the popularity of patrilocality may have something to do with the fact that male activities more often require cooperation, especially where there is a potential for violence. Perhaps that provides a reason for keeping men who know each other and their territory well together.

Cross-cultural research indicates that neither the division of labor by sex nor male cooperation in hunting or war help us predict whether people will be patrilocal or matrilocal. We find no relationship between contribution to subsistence and residence, or between frequency of fighting and likelihood of patrilocality over matrilocality.3

How then might we effectively anticipate the likelihood of patrilocality or matrilocality? One suggestion is that we must simultaneously consider the nature of warfare and the division of labor. Indeed, it turns out that where fighting occurs only among people with different cultures and languages (external warfare), the division of labor alone predicts quite well whether patrilocality or matrilocality will prevail. If men contribute most to subsistence the society will be patrilocal; where women contribute most it will be matrilocal. But if people fight among themselves, even occasionally (internal warfare), residence will likely be patrilocal regardless of the division of labor.4

Why should the division of labor be relevant when warfare is purely external but not if fighting is internal? Since men normally do the fighting, it may be particularly advantageous to localize them, regardless of the division of labor, if there is a possibility of sudden attack from nearby (more likely with internal warfare). But where the enemy provides earlier warning (more commonly the case with
purely external warfare), keeping sons together may be less vital and the division of labor might then be more important.

Perhaps because childbearing and menstruation periodically remove women from labor outside the home, men normally have principal responsibility for crucial tasks that must be completed at specific times. But if fighting periodically requires men to be away when those tasks need doing, women may assume a greater role and localizing them may be preferred. This would explain why matrilocality is so rare—we expect it only in relatively rare situations where we find purely external warfare of a sort that imposes heavier obligations on women.

Internal warfare discourages matrilocality regardless of the division of labor, and there may even be a structural incompatibility between matrilocal residence and internal warfare. Consider some salient characteristics of matrilocal societies. When they form larger kin groups they are likely to trace descent through women. While succession and property pass through females, however, authority is still vested in men (their brothers). Because they play an important authoritative role in matrilocal, matrilineal societies, brothers rarely move far when they marry. The situation is quite different in patrilocal societies, where women are neither channels for descent nor sources of authority. Daughters are dispensable; there is no need for them to remain close after marriage.

Consider now what might happen were neighboring matrilocal communities to begin fighting among themselves. The danger of sudden raids would increase, as would the desirability of keeping brothers together. And since men exercise authority in their sisters’ homes and villages even after marriage, they might have to defend a sister’s group in a conflict involving members of their own local group! We might well expect people in that situation to change to a post-marital residence option that localizes males rather than females.

There are only two ways that could be accomplished. A matrilocal people without important matrilineal descent groups could simply shift to patrilocality. To do that might be highly destabilizing if they had functional matrilineal descent groups, however. In that case it would be better to find a way to localize males without disturbing the matrilineal descent groups. Only avunculocality meets the need, by localizing men related through the female line.

We can appreciate now why patrilocality is so much more common than matrilocality. Rarely do people fight only externally and never among themselves, and even more rarely is the division of
labor matrdominant. We can now understand also why avunculocality is even less common than matrilocality. To produce it you would have to confront a matrilocal society with conditions that favor keeping brothers together (like the development of internal warfare), and there would also have to be important matrilineal descent groups. This is an uncommon combination, since matrilocality is not that common. Not all such societies have matrilineal descent, and even fewer will develop internal war.

Thus far we have only discussed factors that might predispose societies to patrilocal or matrilocal residence. But what conditions might favor bilocal or neolocal residence? Comparative research indicates that bilocality results from a recent and dramatic depopulation, which brings local groups or kin groups below optimal size for organizing work. They must reconstitute to survive. So couples may move to the most viable group. Many technologically simpler peoples have found themselves in this position. All too often contact with more developed societies has brought disease and death, and in many instances the victims have found themselves displaced and forced into marginal environments. The linkage between bilocality and depopulation has evolutionary implications. If bilocality is mostly a product of contact, it could be a relatively recent phenomenon, one less familiar to our ancient hunting-gathering ancestors.

The same may be true of neolocality. This is a residential pattern particularly common in complex industrial-commercial societies like our own, where conditions encourage independence of the nuclear family, the conjugal unit consisting of husband, wife, and children. In these societies opportunity is particularistic and the nuclear family is pretty much on its own. Individuals, not families or larger kin groups, find employment. Education and ability are usually more important than kinship when it comes to finding work. When work requires movement, people take their spouses and children along but rarely their brothers and sisters. Many burdens of the extended family in simpler societies—education, defense, welfare, and care of the elderly—pass to public institutions in complex societies.

**FAMILY AND HOUSEHOLD**

The rule of post-marital residence influences the form of family as well as its composition. It says something not only about who remains, but also about the kind of families that result. Our own
nuclear families are small and simple, but in other societies families are commonly larger and more complex, in part because of the rule of post-marital residence. Neolocality produces independent nuclear families. But by bringing newlyweds to live with or near relatives, the other rules provide greater potential for family extension.

Most societies allow family enlargement through polygamous marriage, but more often extension involves some combination of married couples. In stem families, for example, there are two married couples in different generations—parents and a married child. Even more complex are joint families, which contain two or more married couples in the same generation. What might encourage such family extension and, apart from the rule of post-marital residence, what factors influence the form of extended family?

The Extended Family and Its Variants

Comparative research indicates that extended families (stem and joint) prevail in more than 50 percent of societies. According to one view, families are simpler (and kinship in general less important) in urban-industrial contexts for much the same reasons that neolocality becomes more common. Public institutions assume many functions performed by extended families and kin groups in simpler societies, while the economy encourages nuclear family independence. Hunter-gatherers may less often form extended families because their way of life encourages mobility and because food production is limited or stored less often. Families may be more complex in simple agricultural societies because cultivation encourages a sedentary way of life, while land ownership discourages family division.

But there are problems with these speculations, empirical as well as logical. For one thing, while mid-range (nonintensive) agricultural societies are more likely to have extended families (and descent groups) than simple or very complex societies, it is not
easy to predict which mid-range societies will have them. Some hunter-gatherers and some complex societies have them as well, and the curvilinear hypothesis will not anticipate those cases.

If simple societies have extended families less often it is probably not because they cannot produce sufficient food to sustain them. Hunter-gatherers have not always inhabited only the marginal areas in which we now find them, and even contemporary representatives in areas unsuited for cultivation produce enough to support multi-family groups. If they can feed collections of families, why not extended families?

In a demographic sense, cultivators certainly have a greater potential for large, complex families. Hunter-gatherers have lower fertility, perhaps because women cannot leave babies home alone. They carry their infants as they work, nursing on demand, a practice that inhibits the resumption of ovulation and hence conception. Cultivators can leave their infants home in the care of another woman, often a mother-in-law in the same extended family. Nursing is therefore less frequent, birth spacing shorter, and fertility higher. But we cannot conclude that cultivators have larger families simply because they have more children. More offspring could as well translate into more conflict, earlier family division and, therefore, more simple families.

How then can we account for the greater likelihood of extended families in mid-range cultivating societies? Is there some way we might even anticipate which societies are more likely to have them? Cross-cultural evidence suggests that extension is most likely when the various activities of women or men regularly require them to be in two places at once, which is more often the case in cultivating contexts where women tend home and children and also work in fields. Family extension resolves the problem by providing a second woman—a mother-in-law or mother, and/or a sister-in-law or sister. Indeed, task incompatibility effectively predicts which societies of any complexity are more or less likely to have many extended families.10

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**Chinese Clues**

Cross-cultural research thus explains why some societies are more likely than others to favor family extension. But we also observe considerable variation within societies. Why are joint families more
often found in certain villages than in others? Why do some families resist division longer than others, even in the same community? Why are joint families more common at one time than at another? Focusing on how labor is used may also help us anticipate particular forms of family extension within societies and communities.

Many have noted that joint families are especially common among the wealthy. For example, Nimkoff & Middleton proposed that, cross-culturally, differences in land ownership may be crucial—the more land owned the more family members needed. But why should family extension be necessary if land can be rented out or labor hired? Since many scholars have similarly observed some connection between class and family extension we need to consider, in specific contexts, why the wealthy might be more likely to have joint families than the poor. Further, we should consider cases in which even poor families have them.

Joint families have been highly valued but actually rare in China. There is abundant evidence of a class linkage there; the wealthy achieved the ideal more often than the poor. It is speculated that this is because they had more land and therefore needed more labor, or because the wealthy were better educated and more familiar with Confucian virtues. Their value system thus encouraged family extension. Sons of the wealthy were especially likely to obey their parents, and younger brothers to defer to older brothers. Filial piety delayed family division.

But not all wealthy families were joint, while even some poor ones were. More land does not necessarily demand more family labor if workers can be hired or land rented out. Nor can differences in education, ideology, or values really account for joint families, or for the linkage between wealth and their maintenance. However, studies conducted in specific Chinese communities do indicate how specific technological and economic considerations may discourage family division, especially among the wealthy.

Chinese commonly attribute family division to arguments among women, an explanation not without some merit. It is important to keep in mind that, in traditional Chinese contexts, property passes in the male line. It is divided equally among sons, so women have access to it only through husbands and sons. The situation pits mothers-in-law against daughters-in-law and sisters-in-law against each other. It poses a threat to family harmony and, thus, discourages family extension, especially to joint form.

For her well being, that of her children, and even that of her
husband, a woman must influence those who control property. When she marries she seeks to assure the loyalty of her husband. Since she will likely outlive him, security in old age will also depend on the control she can exert over her sons. But in that regard she has competition from her daughters-in-law, which is why, in traditional contexts, marriage so often unites people from different communities who have never met. A conjugal bond otherwise formed could more readily constitute a threat to the parent-child bond.

Whereas a mother-in-law has reason to keep her sons together, daughters-in-law have good reason to press for family division, to pull the men apart. Each looks to the interests of her own conjugal unit, her own children. Their interests often do not coincide with those of the parents-in-law. A few hypothetical situations make the contradiction clear.

Mr. Hwong, head of a joint family, decides to send the son of his eldest son to college. The boy is the smartest, most capable of his grandsons, the one most likely to bring rewards to the larger family by virtue of advanced education. But his younger son’s wife resents this decision. Why should the labor and resources of her conjugal unit be used to subsidize the well being of people who will eventually be independent? She therefore becomes what the Chinese sometimes call a “pillow ghost.” In bed at might she presses her husband to seek a family division.

To take another case, suppose one daughter-in-law has a child while another does not. The childless one might well agitate for family division on the grounds that her labor, and that of her husband, are subsidizing food for an unproductive family member, one who could well depart before matching their contribution. Her position will likely change when she has her own infant and when her nephew is old enough to work a plow. Her sister-in-law will become the pillow ghost then.

Given the potential for conflict that patrilocal residence and patrilineal inheritance provide, it is hardly surprising that, despite the praise lavished upon them, joint families rarely endure long, if they are formed at all. Although most people may spend some part of their lives in such families, at any given time there are likely to be few of them in any Chinese farming village—perhaps not more than five percent of all families. However, in some cases we do find more of them. Why in those villages, or in those families, are the usual centrifugal tendencies repressed? What factors suppress conflict and, thus, delay family division?
In one village, dependence on rainfall rather than canals for irrigation discouraged family division even in poor families by putting a premium on adult male labor. People could break soil and prepare their fields for rice only when it rained and the ground was wet. The work had to be done quickly and, since it rained on all fields at the same time, there was little opportunity for cooperation among families. Only men plowed, so it was important that every family try to have more than one. Under the circumstances there was good reason to resist the pillow ghost and, in that village, the frequency of joint families was unusually high. This is consistent with our cross-cultural finding that activity incompatibility is likely to encourage family extension.

Confucian virtue had little to do with it. In fact, while there were many joint families, there were also many marriages of a less than filial, virtuous sort. In response to the need for males, parents without adult sons often brought husbands in for their daughters, deviating from the customary and more valued patrilocal pattern. The situation changed later, when there was a reservoir to store water and irrigation canals to deliver it. Access to water could then be controlled and water allocated over a longer period. Families no longer had to accomplish tasks at the same time—in fact they could not do so. Cooperation then became possible and commonplace. From that time, the frequency of joint families and of matrilocal marriages dropped precipitously.

This case indicates yet another way in which the rule of residence, the way marriage is contracted and why, can influence other things we do. Before the shift to canals, matrilocality had demographic effects—compared to patrilocal marriage, and to matrilocal marriage elsewhere, it was here associated with relatively high fertility, low divorce, and relatively infrequent female adoption.

When Chinese deviate from the patrilocal ideal by bringing in a husband for a daughter, they normally do so to ensure family continuity. Matrilocality is most often a resort of poor couples who lack an heir (male) to carry on their family line. The husband, usually also poor, allows his children to take their mother’s surname in exchange for access to her family’s land. Although poverty has driven him to this concession, people pity him because he has turned his back on his ancestors and married in like a woman, leaving his family and community.

The likelihood of discord and dissatisfaction is great in such marriages. Anticipating that, parents try to find a husband far
away, someone their daughter has never seen. It is especially important in such cases to compromise the conjugal bond for the sake of the parent-child bond. That increases the likelihood that a daughter will remain behind with her children even if her husband departs. People therefore anticipate that matrilocal marriages arranged to carry on the family will be fragile, with relatively high divorce rates and perhaps lower fertility.

But in this particular community, where an unusual dependence on rainfall rather than canals put a premium on male labor, matrilocality had little to do with family continuity and much to do with an exaggerated need for labor. These marriages were, therefore, arranged quite differently. Every effort was made to attract a man within the community, possibly a long-term laborer, someone already familiar to their daughter.

Parents were prepared to compromise the parent-child bond here because their intention was to ensure an enduring union—to lock the husband in. If he lived in their village and already knew their daughter he might be less likely to leave. Their daughter would likely be content since marriage did not require that she leave family and community to join strangers elsewhere.

As we might expect, matrilocal marriage had lower divorce rates than patrilocal marriages in this village, and also lower rates than matrilocal marriages in other Chinese villages. Given the familiarity upon which matrilocal marriages were based, it is no surprise that marital fertility (and the rate of premarital conception) was higher than for patrilocally married women. It was also higher than for matrilocally married women in villages where family continuity was the motive. The fertility of these marriages declined, however, once canals reduced the need for males, and matrilocal marriages were once again arranged for more traditional purposes.

The need for male labor also discouraged early female adoption, commonplace in other Chinese villages. Given high infant mortality rates, one could never be certain that a son would survive to adulthood. Better, then, to hold daughters longer as potential lures for matrilocal husbands should the need arise.

This case shows how technology can alter marital residence and the form of family by creating an unusual need for men. Data from another Chinese village illustrates how technology can discourage family division by putting a special premium on the labor of women.¹³ When some rice-growing families began to cultivate and process tobacco as a profitable cash crop, most of the work
was given to women. The men continued to concentrate on rice. Women picked tobacco leaves as they ripened, carried them to the drying house, regulated fires there day and night, and sorted the leaves when dried. Their skills were so crucial that tobacco growers married only tobacco growers.

While rice farmers had few joint families, those that also cultivated tobacco were almost invariably joint. For them family division created special problems. Which son, for example, would inherit the very profitable drying house, and how would his brothers be compensated? More important, any family division would mean a diversion of female labor from tobacco to separate kitchens, pigs, and child care.

We have seen how technology can delay family division by encouraging men or women to remain together. These two Chinese examples actually illustrate our more general cross-cultural finding—namely, that activity or task incompatibility encourages family extension. In one case a single male could not accomplish on his own all the work that needed to be done, in the other the different tasks of women were at issue.

There are also certain economic conditions, especially characteristic of the wealthy, that may have a similar effect. In the Chinese context, the wealthy have been able to delay family division longer than the poor because they enjoy a greater potential for multienterprise family investment. To the extent that a family invests human and capital resources in different enterprises (i.e., puts its eggs in many baskets), it improves security, ability to withstand economic fluctuations, and long term wealth. Consider the following case: Mr. Lin manages a substantial family estate and heads a joint family consisting of four married sons and their respective children. He lives on the family farm with one son. Another son runs the family brothel in town, one manages the family brick factory, and yet another runs a family trucking firm. The family is invested in a number of enterprises, each of which operates on its own schedule. While the joint family is the minimal corporate kin group, the brothers live apart in different households. That short-circuits some of the conflict that might otherwise emerge were they living together. But there are also powerful economic reasons to avoid family division in this case.

By keeping the family intact, Mr. Lin can shift family labor and capital around in the most profitable way, an advantage that would be lost were his sons to divide. When the crop is brought in, he directs sons and grandsons to help. Men and women are
diverted from other family enterprises as needed. Once the crop is in, assuming a good yield, the brothel gets busy. Family members then help there. In winter, during the slack, the brick factory needs workers. Mr. Lin can meet that need as well without having to hire outsiders. He can shift capital, too, from one enterprise to the other, reducing the need to borrow at high rates of interest.

His brothel, very profitable in good years, can be a serious drain on family resources when harvests are poor and farmers less free with their money. A family that can move labor and capital between enterprises is better able to weather fluctuations of this sort. The advantage would be lost were Mr. Lin’s sons to divide. Further, it would not be easy to divide the family estate. How does one assess the value of a brothel compared to a brick factory or farm? They have different values, potentials, and risks.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Several lessons emerge from this discussion of marital residence and family. Clearly, how and why people marry the way they do and where they live after marriage are not inconsequential matters of accident. Some practices are more common than others. Cross-cultural research has suggested some conditions that usually favor one pattern over another. The task is of more than casual interest, given that these choices have ramifications elsewhere—they influence the nature of our families and kin groups, have implications for gender relations, and even for demographic performance.

One of our Chinese examples suggests that something will be lost if we think about residence patterns exclusively in terms of general social patterns. It illustrated how, in the Chinese case, matrilocal marriage can be contracted for very different purposes, in dissimilar ways, with varied consequences. Clearly we have much to learn about how technology and economy shape motivation, residence, and family form in particular contexts, and about how these in turn affect demographic behavior.

We learned from these Chinese examples, too, that predicting post-marital residence, or the likelihood and form of family extension in terms of shared values, level of development, or class is not very effective. Consistent with our cross-cultural findings we should, in specific contexts as well, look for technological and/or economic conditions likely to produce task incompatibilities, or
that might especially encourage keeping men and/or women together.

The case of Mr. Lin warns us to avoid confusing families and households, especially in complex societies. The minimal corporate kin group or family in his case consisted of several residential units, or households. If we confuse the two we run a serious risk of underestimating the incidence of extended families, especially in complex societies.

An Indian grocery store owner in Hoboken, New Jersey, living with his wife and children, might well be only one segment of a larger family corporation centered in Bombay, India. They may merely be one egg in a basket. The illegal Chinese boat person in New York, whose voyage was paid for by his relatively wealthy family in China, may similarly represent another family investment. If we fail to recognize the connections between households, we may underestimate family complexity and mystify our understanding of family dynamics.

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**Notes**


3. See Melvin Ember and Carol R. Ember, “Conditions Favoring Matrilocal versus Patrilocal Residence,” *American Anthropologist* 73 (1971): 571–594; and William T. Divale, “Migration, External Warfare, and Matrilocal Residence,” *Behavior Science Research* 9 (1974): 75–133. However, one study of only hunting-gathering societies does indicate a relationship between division of labor and marital residence. Where men contribute most to subsistence in such societies, residence is more often patrilocal; where women predominate, the rule is more likely to be matrilocal. The matter becomes far more complicated if we include other sorts of societies, however. On hunter-gatherers, see Carol R. Ember, “Residential Variations among Hunters-Gatherers,” *Behavior Science Research* 10 (1975): 199–227.

4. Ember and Ember, “Conditions Favoring Matrilocal versus Patrilocal Residence.”

6. Some suggest that bilocality reflects sexual equality. Another proposal is that scarce, fluctuating resources encourage greater residential flexibility, and thus bilocality. Although these are reasonable expectations, the ethnographic record indicates that not all bilocal peoples have these characteristics. Depopulation is a better predictor. It accounts for most bilocal cases, and perhaps for the environmental marginality of many of them as well. See Carol R. Ember and Melvin Ember, “The Conditions Favoring Multilocal Residence,” *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 28 (1972): 382–400.


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**Suggested Readings**