WOMEN IN
CHINESE SOCIETY

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allow us to see the conditions that promoted female adoption and the widespread acceptance of beliefs that had a significant impact on the lives of women. I think we will find that one of these conditions is the extent to which decisions about marriage and adoption were left in the hands of women. My guess is that many institutions that were deviant from the elite point of view were female creations.

Women and Suicide in China

MARGERY WOLF

Chinese Attitudes Toward Suicide Among Women

The dramatic public suicides of young Chinese widows in the last century became almost as well known in the West as the Hindu custom of suttee. Although the Chinese custom was apparently neither as wide- spread nor as common as readers of newspaper fillers were led to believe, like suttee it made a strong statement about the status of women. In general Chinese society a young widow, particularly a childless young widow, could expect little from the future. After marriage, a woman was no longer the responsibility of her natal family, and the only improvement she could hope for in her lowly status within her husband’s family was to become the mother of one of their descendants. With the death of her husband, that possibility ended. If she remarried, it could only be to a man of lower status (or, even worse, to one who already had a wife), and she might also have to contend with the ill will of either her natal or her marital family, depending on which had arranged the second marriage. Once she announced her intention to “follow” her late husband, she would in the short time left to her be honored by officials, admired, and pampered, and would die in the knowledge that her name would be commemorated as a chaste widow. For women raised in the tradition of the gentry, this alternative was probably more attractive than it might appear.

Suicide was also considered a proper response for gentry women whose honor had been tampered with, even accidentally. Ernest Alchkaster relates two cases in which the women were posthumously awarded “tablets of honor.” In one, an elderly unmarried woman killed herself after discovering that a drunken man, mistaking her bed for that of a friend, had fallen asleep on it. In the other case, a woman took her own
life because a thief had taken refuge under her sleeping couch. She was awarded a posthumous tablet for "the nobility of her mind."

For peasant women, these niceties of thinking and behavior were understandable, but not compelling. Suicide was for them, and still is for farm women, a socially acceptable solution to a variety of problems that offer no other solution. The knowledge that suicide was highly honored by the upper classes undoubtedly colors the attitude of modern farm women, but the frequency with which they encounter suicide in their own communities probably has more influence on their personal behavior. Suicide rates for adult women in some areas of Taiwan run as high as 25 deaths per year for every 100,000 people. Translated into rural terms this means that about every other year a community with a population of 2,500 women would expect a suicide or two. By the time a girl is old enough to marry, she probably has heard the details of a suicide in a friend's family or even been privy to the personal misery that led to a suicide. Among peasant women the act is not exotic. It is a part of their repertoire of threats, a conceivable course of action, and for some the pathetic finale of their existence.

A common outcome of "unsuccessful" suicide attempts in Western societies is a decided improvement in the life of the victim. Friends and relatives express concern, guilt, and anxious sympathy, and often with the help of a public agency attempt to help the victim reshape her life into a more tolerable pattern. But suicide has other meanings in China, meanings that may make life less rather than more tolerable for the survivor of a suicide attempt. Like so much Chinese behavior, suicide is not only an individual act, a gesture of personal despair, but also an act that implicates others. For a young person it is the ultimate rebellion in a society that requires respectful submission to the will of one's seniors, and for a woman it is the most devastating public accusation she can make of her mother-in-law, her husband, or her son. In the West we ask of a suicide, "Why?" In China the question is more commonly "Who? Who drove her to this? Who is responsible?" After the two suicides that occurred during our first trip to the northern Taiwanese site of our field research, village conversations centered on who caused the acts. One victim, a young woman who threw herself into the river, was driven to suicide by the unwanted attentions of a mainland soldier who threatened her family when she refused him. (Her young male relatives and their friends were plotting revenge even before her body was re-

* Under the Ch'ing this was a question of some legal significance: someone who caused another's suicide was subject to punishment, which varied with their relationship and the degree of culpability.

Women and Suicide in China

moved from the riverbank.) The other suicide was that of a middle-aged man who hanged himself. This man's first wife had also killed herself, thirteen years before (because, we were told, of her mother-in-law's cruelty), and the family had been in a decline ever since. Many people said it was the first wife's ghost who had caused the suicide, as well as the other misfortunes afflicting the family.

The severity of the problems a suicide can cause her family is suggested in the following quote from one of the life histories collected by Adele Fieldes in southern China.

Two months later my sister-in-law hung herself, and in the disgrace and trouble that followed, I was left at my father's for some time. There was one woman in our village whose daughter-in-law hung herself, and when the mother-in-law came in and found her thus, she, leaving the demands that could be made upon her by the girl's parents, got another rope at once, and hanged herself beside her daughter-in-law. There could be no exactions by the friends of either party, for each had harmed the other to the same degree.

To bring such disgrace to one's husband's family and so much trouble to one's natal family would not be likely to alleviate a survivor's original wretchedness. Male representatives from her natal family must, for their own face, indignantly demand explanations and guarantees of better treatment from her parents-in-law, no matter how "inconvenient" had relations with the in-laws might be. The girl must be taken home to re-

cuperate (and probably to be berated for her hasty actions) and compli-
cated negotiations must commence over her return, a journey her male relatives may be even more eager to arrange than her in-laws. By the time she returns, her husband's family has been humiliating by the negotiations, and by the gossip of curious neighbors; her mother-in-law has heard her treatment of her son and his wife openly discussed by her women friends; and, worse yet, the older woman may discover her son (who considers her responsible for managing his wife) looking at her askance.

The family, as individuals and as a group, will resent this adverse pub-
licity and the continuing attention the slightest row in the family brings. They are unlikely to feel very comforting toward the young woman who has caused them so much trouble.

Fei Hsiao-yung, writing of customs in a village in the Yangtze Valley, says of suicide: "According to popular belief [a suicide] becomes a spirit and is able to revenge herself; furthermore her own parents and brothers will seek retern, sometimes even destroying part of her husband's house." The motive of revenge often comes up in discussions of suicide, both in determining the responsibility for actual cases and in discussing
the danger inherent in family disharmony. It is also not an uncommon threat by young women at their "wifey" end, a threat that gives pause to mothers-in-law. Revenge is not, however, confined to the structurally helpless young women. The physical and mental illness of a middle-aged woman who lived in a village near ours in Taiwan was attributed to the suicide of her brother-in-law, who vowed to return and avenge the ill treatment the woman had afforded him when they lived in a joint family. Elderly parents who kill themselves are not dependent on purely mystical means of revenge, for their act itself conveys their sons and daughters-in-law of the most immoral of crimes, unchild behavior.

To the young woman who, in her misery, is brought to the contemplation of suicide as a means of escape, and who sees as the source of her misery oppression by familiar people whose authority over her is their only mark of superiority, revenge must be a strong motive for suicide. Death brings not only an end to suffering, but power, the means to punish her tormentors. M.F.C., an anonymous writer who displays in the following quote much understanding of Chinese women, enters for a moment into the mind of a young suicide.

She intends that her mother-in-law, or other offender, shall be brought to terms,—shall be made to repent keenly of her cruelty to her. She floats upon thoughts of what a disturbance her death will create, pictures to herself the consternation that will fill all hearts, when they enter her room and find her dead,—the stern anger of her own father and brothers,—the settlement that will remain,—the lawsuit her tormentors will be obliged to bear the heavy expenses of,—the grand funeral that will be exacted for the repose of her soul,—the probability that her mother-in-law or the whole family will be compelled to follow her coffin as mourners, and the opportunity her ghost will have of inflicting all imaginable evils! Yes, she who has always been despised will now be felt as a power for once,—and the deed is done,—the commits suicide.*

In this paper I do not test hypotheses or attempt to develop a theory of suicide, although I do succumb briefly to the temptation to generalize about international differences in the sex ratio of suicide and its relationship to domestic settings. I also make some fairly elementary assertions about the effect of the Chinese social system on men and women in the various roles and statuses it assigns them. Alex Inkles cites Durkheim's classic study Le Suicide an example of the difficulties sociologists can get into by ignoring (or diluting) any theory of personality functioning.* Inkles shows how a simple notion like psychic pain (a psychological parallel of physical pain) can be used to resolve

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* See the preceding paper in this volume. by Arthur F. Wolf.
into a rate, the number of suicides in an area has little meaning. I report here only the data from Sidney Gamble’s 1947 study in Peking and the 1939-40 statistics given by Lin-po for Shanghai, Hangchow, Peking, and Canton. Since the most complete records are those for Taiwan, I have taken 1907 to 1945, the period covered by the Japanese registers, as the time base for this study. F. M. Yap’s excellent study of suicide in Hong Kong falls outside this period, but since my choice of dates is fairly arbitrary anyway, I have cited it whenever it seemed particularly relevant.

To put the Chinese material in some kind of international perspective, I have selected suicide statistics from those published by the World Health Organization (WHO) for the first half of this century. I present them in the next section with some misgivings and blanket qualifications. The decision to classify a death as an accident, a suicide, a murder, or as due to “natural causes” may seem a relatively simple matter. It is not. In many cases the victim himself is unclear about what he hopes or expects will result from a potentially fatal act. In other cases the victim may have legal, economic, and emotional reasons for concealing the cause of his death. In still others the family may arrange to have the death certificate record an accidental death. Even if there has been no conscious manipulation of the facts by either the victim or the survivor, the user of the statistics still cannot be sure what he has (or has not). Very little attention, cross-culturally or even within a single country, has been given to standardizing the definition of suicide. An extreme example of the resulting confusion is mentioned by Jack Douglas in describing a major American city that had a very low yearly suicide rate: the coroner of the city classified as suicide only those cases in which a note was found with the body.15

I believe the suicide statistics for Taiwan to be unusually accurate for several reasons. In contrast to most countries, where the collection of statistics was begun at the whips of local officials, in Taiwan the Japanese Colonial Government devised and imposed a uniform system. Moreover, although all the works of man are subject to errors of carelessness, the suicide statistics for Taiwan were probably less subject to conscious manipulation by people who wished to conceal the cause of a relative’s death, the pressures that well-placed citizens can bring to bear on their countrymen probably had little influence on the Japanese colonial administrators who categorized cause of death. And finally, internal evidence indicates the data are reliable. For example, changes over time in age-specific suicide rates for certain age groups are gradual and consistent with social changes; local differences in gross rates are associated with differences in ethnic origins. The extraordinary degree of consistency in the rates over nearly forty years, years in which the population nearly doubled, attests to the quality of the data.

International Comparisons

The most striking single fact about Chinese suicide that makes it so different from Western suicide is its relationship to gender. In contrast to every other country for which we have statistical data, Chinese women are as likely as men to kill themselves and in some time periods more likely. Table 1 shows crude suicide rates for eight countries as well as the male-female ratio of those rates. Assuming whatever bias was built into a country’s collection system affected both sexes equally, a comparison of ratios probably has more validity than a comparison of rates. But, without putting undue weight on numerical differences, it is noteworthy that whereas the rates for Taiwan males in all four time periods are neither particularly high nor particularly low, the rates for Taiwan females are always the highest. Clearly it is this fact, the extrac-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date and Category</th>
<th>Taiwan</th>
<th>U.S.</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>Japan</th>
<th>Spain</th>
<th>India</th>
<th>Sweden</th>
<th>Italy</th>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M/F</td>
<td>F/M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
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<td>20.3</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1942</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: World Health Organization, Report d’operations de desagregations, 9 (4) (1985); Korea, Taiwan, China, and Japan, data based on data from 1911, 1916, 1923, 1930, 1935, 1940.

* Crude suicide rates are based on the total population which, of course, includes infants and children. I use them here because they are often all that is given for other countries. Obviously, rates based on age-specific populations are more informative, and I have used them whenever practicable.
Women and Suicide in China

dinarily high rate at which Chinese women take their own lives, that
controls the ratio. Only Japanese women (and in 1935, German women)
rival the Chinese women's rate, but in Japan the higher male rates have
more influence on the ratio.

There is another way of looking at the Chinese data in an international
context without comparing possibly incomparable rates. Figures 1 and
2 show frequency distributions of age-specific suicide rates for five
countries in the WHO sample and for Taiwan (based on the earliest
years for which complete data were available for each country). Plotting
the incidence of suicide in each age category gives us suicide profiles
for each nation's men and women. It is the patterning of suicides by
age—the profiles—rather than the rates to which I direct the reader's
attention.

In the women's profiles there seems to be very little consistency. The
three Asian countries—Japan, Ceylon, and Taiwan—show somewhat
similar patterns among young women, but in the middle years the pat-
terns diverge. The Swedish and American profiles are very different
from the others but similar to each other until the final age group. (This
apparent difference may reflect a methodological problem: the popula-
tion in older categories is much reduced, and a chance error produces
much greater discrepancies than it might in a younger, more populous
age group.) The Spanish profile is nearly flat, indicating little variation
with age.

The men's profiles show considerably less variation. Except for a
sharp drop among sixty-year-old Swedish men, the three Western coun-
tries evince a steady increase in suicide with age. This male pattern ap-
ppears in nearly all the European countries in the WHO sample, the
major variation being in the steepness of the increase. Japan and Ceylon
share the Western pattern except for a drop during the middle years.
For this particular time period, the Taiwan sample is unique, resembling
neither the other Asian nations nor the Western nations. Space limita-
tions made it impossible to include changes over time in Figure 2, but
a later table will demonstrate that by the end of the first half of this
century Taiwan's male profile followed the Western pattern.

In summary, what Figures 1 and 2 seem to be telling us is that the
patterns of suicide for women are complex and vary from one culture
to the next, but the men's have greater and apparently increasing uni-
formity. On the face of it, these patterns seem inconceivable with the
usual stereotype of a monotonous similarity of women's lives in their
domestic settings and the great opportunity for variation in the more
public setting of men's lives. If, for the moment, we accept suicide as
an index of psychic stress, it would seem that life starts out not badly
for men, wherever they live, but its negative pressures increase with age. In some cultures the distresses of men's public lives in their middle years is countered by their increasing status within their families. In others, the family is apparently no palliative for the strains of public life, and as age brings diminishing public rewards (or alternatives), the suicide rate increases. It may be that as technological changes weaken the economic and emotional power of the Asian family, this second pattern will exert a stronger influence on the suicide profiles of Asian males.

But what of the diverse and more complicated suicide profiles for women? Women have far fewer alternatives in life than men, and nearly all of them lead eventually to a domestic setting. Yet any anthropologist's library contains plentiful evidence of the variety of domestic arrangements found in the world. In some cultures the status "young married women" is the happiest; in others it is the status of highest stress. In some cultures the age of childbearing is one of loneliness; in others this affliction most commonly strikes after the children are grown; in others, loneliness is a complaint of young and old alike. The reverse side of the coin that allows men in some cultures to turn to their families when public life proves disappointing also permits their total absorption in public life if their family life proves disagreeable. Women have no alternative to an unpleasant domestic situation. They must tolerate the people responsible for their distress, and they must endure their current status until the family cycle moves them into a more comfortable one. Those who cannot endure become cases in the national suicide profile.

The notion that international variation in domestic and individual life cycles accounts for the complexity of the women's suicide profiles is a tenable hypothesis. Obviously the task is not appropriate to this paper, but the pages that follow might be viewed as a rather extravagant example of the kind of analysis necessary.

**Chinese Comparisons**

Unfortunately, Taiwan is the only province in China with reliable nonurban suicide statistics. Some attempts were made to organize statistical bureaus on the mainland in the late 1940's and 1950's, but reports were so inconsistent that the material is unusable. Available records for urban areas are only slightly better, but I include them here in order to put the Taiwan findings in the context of the rest of China. In the

* Yap's study reports on suicide in the rural New Territories, but there are special problems there, which are more appropriately discussed under the section Rural-Urban Differences below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>1957</th>
<th>1958</th>
<th>1959</th>
<th>1960</th>
<th>1961</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canton</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>141</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hongkow</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>115</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaolin</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Peking</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>69</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shanghai</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>141</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiho</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>80</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:** Numbers in parentheses are rates corrected for the unbalanced sex ratio indicated for each city.

Essay from which the ratios in Table 2 for Canton, Hangchow, Shanghai, and Peking were taken, Lin-po comments on the inadequacy of his sources—government reports, police records, and newspaper accounts. I stress this point because the ratios are quite extraordinary in a world that presumes male suicide to be at least twice as frequent as female suicide. Lin-po points out that if the unbalanced sex ratio of the urban populations is taken into consideration (there were, for example, 67 women for every 100 men in Hangchow in 1930), the ratio of female suicides would be even higher. The figures in parentheses in Table 2 are estimates (based on ratios provided by the sources cited) of the appropriate correction. The most conservative statement to be made about the data in Table 2 is that they suggest that the Taiwan pattern by no means exaggerates the Chinese sex difference in proclivity for suicide.

**Suicide and Age**

Age-specific suicide rates for Chinese women in Taiwan are presented in Table 3 and in graph form in the next section (Fig. 3). The very high rates with which young women took their own lives between 1905 and

*The rates were computed for an average of the suicides for the five years closest to each census date. Between 1905 and 1941 no census was taken so I took an average of the population in those two censuses as an estimate of the 1920 population. Unless otherwise indicated, all rates were developed in this way. In age-specific rates such as those in Table 3, the population figures to, of course, the number of people in the indicated age category. Japanese and other foreign residents are not included in any table.
Table 3. Age-Specific Suicide Rates for Women in Taiwan
(Route per 100,000 women)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>1908</th>
<th>1910</th>
<th>1912</th>
<th>1915</th>
<th>1920</th>
<th>1930</th>
<th>1935</th>
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<tr>
<td>15-19</td>
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<td>40.7</td>
<td>39.8</td>
<td>35.1</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>25.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>57.4</td>
<td>57.8</td>
<td>50.8</td>
<td>47.8</td>
<td>39.3</td>
<td>38.8</td>
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<td>25-29</td>
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<td>30-34</td>
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<td>21.5</td>
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<td>17.8</td>
<td>19.0</td>
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<td>50-54</td>
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<td>15.7</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>19.0</td>
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<td>50.8</td>
<td>51.8</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>21.4</td>
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(Source: Ministry of Interior, Taiwan Provincial Police Bureau, 1946. Note: Data for 1915 refer to 1912-15.)

Table 4. Proportions of Women Ever Married, by Age, 1905-30

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
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<th>1910</th>
<th>1915</th>
<th>1920</th>
<th>1925</th>
<th>1930</th>
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<td></td>
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<td>83.3</td>
<td>82.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
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<td>58.6</td>
<td>56.9</td>
<td>55.2</td>
<td>56.1</td>
<td>80.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>30-34</td>
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<td>60.3</td>
<td>58.5</td>
<td>60.3</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>97.7</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>35-39</td>
<td>79.7</td>
<td>88.5</td>
<td>90.4</td>
<td>89.3</td>
<td>90.3</td>
<td>99.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Census Office, Central Statistical Board, and Peking University Press, 1944, Table 59. Reprinted by permission of Peking University Press.)

ed in the next section assumes the contrary, that most of the young women who killed themselves belonged to the population of the recently married.

The Setting for Suicide

Life is often particularly pleasant for a young woman in the year or two that precedes her marriage. Although peasant families cannot afford to pamper any of their female members, the mother of an about-to-be-married daughter usually tries to spare her the more arduous tasks, loading them instead onto her son's young wife, or even taking up the slack herself. This happy time, followed by the excitement of accumulating a dowry and a trousseau of new clothes and household items, is a period of relative freedom and independence, in which suicide rates are highest. For every newly married woman, there is the familiar story of the "new girl." After a few months the poor bride cannot help being painfully
aware of the family's disappointment with her. Her mother-in-law has finally lost patience, no longer finding her desire to please sufficient compensation for culinary incompetence, her sisters-in-law resent her new clothes and mistake their mother-in-law's tolerance for favoritism, a mistake the bride may also make; and her husband, whom she sees alone only in the bedroom, where he forces unsatisfying attentions on her after a trying day, is frequently well on the path to being her arch-enemy.

Perhaps most painful of all for the young woman is her sense of isolation, of emotional loneliness. It is considered bad form for her to visit her natal family often, and even her mother discourages frequent trips home. If she is seriously maltreated by her husband or his family, her father and brothers might intervene, but occasional slaps and frequent harsh words are too unexceptional to rate more than commiseration by her mother. Her closest and most important source of protection from her husband's family and solace in her most unbearable hours of loneliness is the group of women who live nearby but are not related to her husband's family. For her first few months in the village they treat her with the suspicion that is any stranger's portion, but in time, if she does not behave foolishly, she will find a friend or two among the older women who will listen to her problems and give her advice. The advice usually amounts to "Don't pay any attention to them," and "Hurry up and have a baby—then they can't treat you that way."

The marriage ritual, her mother-in-law, her mother, her women friends, and her own knowledge of her culture tell the young woman that until she has a child, preferably a male child, her life is not going to improve and may even get worse. If she never produces a son, it will get much worse. The pressures on a young woman to conceive are so intense it is amazing that sheer anxiety doesn't produce infertility.* Once she has produced a son, a woman has undeniable status in her husband's family as the mother of one of its descendants. Her mother-in-law is relieved to have the bride she chose for her son at last live up to her expectations, and her husband is pleased to have the status of father, a status that brings him full adulthood. Both are grateful to the young woman, although neither could or would say so openly. The new mother is relieved to have finally justified her existence, is more confident about her future (all Chinese women, even young women, seem to worry about who will support them in their old age), and most important of all, sees

* With tremendously reduced infant mortality rates in Taiwan, the anxiety about producing children has lessened, but the first pregnancy is still a grave matter in the countryside.

Women and Suicide in China

her child as the beginning of a small personal circle of security in the midst of the alien world of her husband's family. I have elsewhere described in detail the ways in which a woman develops and exercises the loyalty of her own family, a task that occupies her totally for the next twenty years of her life. The birth of her son signals, for the young mother, the end of a very unhappy period in her life, a period so painful that, as we saw in Table 3, many young women do not survive it.

What comes next for a Chinese farm wife is satisfying if strenuous years. The insecure young bride gradually becomes the confident mother and competent housewife. Her mother-in-law turns over to her more
and more of the household responsibilities and, in time, authority. For many women these years are spent primarily in nuclear families, with their husbands' parents either living with other siblings or dead. The peacefulness of this phase of the life cycle is reflected in the suicide rates, which in 1955 and 1960 decline steadily until old age. The rise after sixty is probably more a function of the reduced population in that age category (see p. 122) and of the desire to escape from physical illnesses than it is of any social fact.

In 1945 and 1950, however, suicide in older women seems to increase and to include in the upsurge women in their late fifties (see Fig. 3). By 1955 a new suicide profile is obvious, and this profile holds till the end of our records. Suicide rates for young women remain high by any international standard, but are considerably lower than the first quarter of the century. Suicide rates for older women, women over forty-five, rise rather than decline as they did in the old profile. The increasing rate of suicide in older women is one of many social statistics reflecting critical changes in Taiwan in the 1920's and early 1930's. Improved transportation, new commercial enterprises, and generally expanding economic opportunities introduced by the Japanese Colonial Administration produced marked readjustments in the social system. The better education of the younger generations gave them real advantages over their illiterate seniors in finding jobs and exploiting economic opportunities. Young men were no longer dependent on land held by their fathers to feed their wives. They could rebel and some did, at least enough of them to make parents pay more attention to their sons' wishes.

Obviously, economic opportunities for women were still few, but the gust of fresh air in the family's authority structure had decided effects on the quality of young women's lives. As young men demanded and received more say in the selection of their wives, they also accepted more responsibility for their wives, to the point of defending them in conflicts with their parents. Faced with an estranged son in possession of an income over which his father had no control, many parents found themselves sidestepping issues before they came to a head. For women this was a familiar technique in dealing with their sons, and since most mothers felt more strongly allied to their sons than to their husbands, older women did not feel particularly threatened by the young men's revolt against their father's authority. However, when a son's revolt grew family of a conflict between his mother and her daughter-in-law, when a mother saw the very center of her uterine family being drawn into her daughter-in-law's sphere of influence, tragedy threatened. A Chinese woman expects her middle years to be full of rewards for the

Women and Suicide in China

long hard years that went before. She has a daughter-in-law to do the more onerous chores, and a son whose loyalty is assured by the years she spent cultivating it. If the son proves disloyal and in collusion with the daughter-in-law, the older woman finds herself not in the best years of her life but back in conflict, struggling this time not with her mother-in-law and her husband's family, but with a young woman whose potential for intimacy with her son was until now hers alone. In generations past an emotional tie between husband and wife came later in life, if at all, and was not expected in the young strangers who were married at their parents' convenience. A young wife who enters as her husband's choice has emotional and sexual advantages over her mother-in-law from the outset. When the apparently inevitable conflicts arise between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law and the son intervenes on his wife's behalf, the effect on the older woman is stunning. All the old anxieties about her physical welfare in her now new old age return. Even worse, all the years of struggle and sacrifice seem to be negated, lost to the wiles of an ignorant young woman. In despair over her powerlessness or in a fit of revengeful fury at her fickle son, the aging mother contemplates, threatens, and in some cases commits suicide.

To this point in my analysis I have ignored the alternative forms of marriage found on Taiwan, and the very different domestic climates they create. Arthur Wolf's paper in this volume shows that these "variants" accounted for more than half the marriages in northern Taiwan in the early part of this century, and at least a third as late as 1940. I will not develop here as detailed a picture of the settings these other marriage types create for women, both because I lack the space and because I think these settings contributed very little to the suicide statistics under discussion. Unfortunately, the Japanese did not categorize suicide victims by marital status, let alone form of marriage, so I cannot provide any satisfactory proof for my supposition. The most I can offer is a description of the different climates in families created by these other forms of marriage, climates which suggest that they do not create the same patterns of stress for women as the major form of marriage. If the psychic stress explanation of suicide has any validity, these alternative marriage forms are unlikely to be the source of significant numbers of suicides.

A young woman who makes a minor marriage enters her husband's family of a child, often as an infant. By the time she and her foster-brother marry, the young woman is at least as knowledgeably of the family's particular culture as her brother is. The traumatic severing of familiar, supportive relationships that marks the marriage of a woman
who weds in the major form is absent in the minor marriage. Her mother becomes also her mother-in-law. The older woman has had a good many years to decide whether or not she wished to spend the rest of her days in the younger’s company, and if there had been a major conflict of personality, the girl would have been married out. The primary adjustment for the bride lies in overcoming the incestuous feelings (or sexual revolution) her new relationship with her foster-brother arouses. Serious as this problem may be, it is focused on that one relationship, and the other areas of the girl’s life continue on much as they always have. The pervading stress of loneliness, of isolation, and of a generalized sense of threat from all sides that gives rise to suicide in the brides of major marriage is spared the girl who marries her foster-brother. Other miseries may have preceded her marriage (foster-daughters are frequently ill-treated as children), and she and her brother-husband may never achieve a sexual relationship sufficiently satisfactory to produce children, but the most dramatic result is likely to be divorce, not suicide.

What relation do minor marriages have to the second peak in the suicide profiles, that created by the suicides of mothers-in-law? My analysis of the domestic setting suggests that in minor marriages mothers-in-law are not likely candidates for suicide either. Whereas the mother-in-law in a major marriage watches with growing concern the increasing intimacy between her son and the stranger who is his wife, the mother-in-law in a minor marriage is more likely to have a closer relationship with her daughter-in-law and with her son than they have with each other. She enters her old age with her survivor family intact.

Young women who make uxorilocal marriages are also less likely to commit suicide than their sisters in major marriages. They may resent the inferior (by definition if not in fact) husbands chosen for them, but their resentment is experienced while they still enjoy the security of their own families and the familiar setting of the villages in which they were raised. For their mothers, however, this form of marriage is a cause of anxiety. Having no sons (the usual reason for imposing an uxorilocal marriage on a daughter), they are dependent on their resentful daughters for the security of their old age. Coping with a son-in-law can be tougher than controlling a daughter-in-law. If the man is dead or too badly he may simply depart, leaving the family bereft. Even worse, he may seduce his wife into leaving with him. Older female suicides probably include a proportionate share of women who arranged

*It is assumed that any man willing to “abandon his ancestors” and marry into his wife’s family is morally flawed and probably inadequate in other ways as well.

uxorilocal marriages for their daughters that were either too successful or not successful at all. Suicides can occur among women in all forms of marriage, as well as among that small group of women who never marry. An adopted daughter may prefer death to spending the rest of her life with a cruel foster-mother and a loathsome brother-husband. A young woman in an uxorilocal marriage may find suicide the only solution when her loyalties are torn between a beloved husband who wants her to desert her parents and parents who wish to replace a disruptive son-in-law. Nonetheless, the category of women whose peaks of psychoneurotic stress coincide most closely with the suicide profile for Taiwanese women are those involved in the major form of marriage.

By Way of Contrast: Male Suicide

The quality of a woman’s domestic relationships may determine whether or not she commits suicide, but though the domestic situation has some influence on a man’s disposition toward suicide, it is less likely to be the single determining factor. A young man who finds his father’s cool authority unpleasant and the emotional tug-of-war between his wife and his mother intolerable can respectably spend the majority of his time quite removed from the family, working diligently in the fields, spending his leisure hours with friends in such reputable occupations as practicing with the village band or attending agricultural association meetings. Men who work in factories or elsewhere for wages have a still wider range of activities open to them. And even the less respectable alternatives to home life—gambling and visits to teahouses and brothels—do not injure a man’s reputation if they are not excessive.

Taiwanese villagers say that a young man becomes more responsible after the birth of his first child. As a father, he is fully adult, and as his own father ages and his family grows, his economic burdens become greater. The years pass, and the more expensive gratifications of flesh and spirit he found in the world outside are harder to come by; the other non-domestic activities less satisfying. If by his middle years a man has not found some pleasure in his family, particularly in a culture that places such high value on the family, life begins to seem bleak indeed. And for old men, whose alternatives to the domestic setting are almost as few as those of the young bride, family relationships become crucial to his well-being. Unlike their wives, old men have no residual tasks from their active years of value to an extended family. Again unlike their aged wives, they are dependent on sons who formally express respect for them and are obliged to treat them well but often have no real af-
section for them. The grimness of this supposedly golden age in the Chinese life cycle is reflected in the very high suicide rates of older men.

In Table 5 the differences in the suicide rates for adult men and adult women are not large, an unusual fact in itself, and reverse themselves over time. The suicide rate for adult women rose between 1905 and 1910, but stayed at about the same level for the next fifteen years, after which it began to decline. Adult male rates started uphill in 1905 and, except for 1925 and 1930, increased steadily. Female suicide rates were either higher than men's or about the same until 1925, after which the rise of men's rates and the decline of women's reversed their relationship.

We have seen in the last section how the suicide profiles for women changed during the 35-year span of this study, and the data in Table 5 show us that the decrease in the total suicide rate of women is primarily the result of a pronounced decrease in the rate at which young women killed themselves. The age-specific suicide rates for men in Table 6 show a different pattern. Setting aside the 1905 data for a moment, the suicide rates of men under thirty-five fluctuate from year to year but remain essentially on the same level over the period of the study. For older men, however, the rates increase more or less steadily with each time period. Thus it is the increase in suicide among older men, unaccompanied by a decrease in younger men's suicide rates, that accounts for the higher total rates over the years.

### Table 5. Adult Male and Female Suicide Rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>1900</th>
<th>1905</th>
<th>1910</th>
<th>1915</th>
<th>1920</th>
<th>1925</th>
<th>1930</th>
<th>1935</th>
<th>1940</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>32.9</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>27.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>34.1</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>37.4</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>32.9</td>
<td>32.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sources:** See Table 3.

### Table 6. Age-Specific Suicide Rates for Men in Taiwan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>1905</th>
<th>1910</th>
<th>1915</th>
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<td>11.0</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
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<td>20-24</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>22.1</td>
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<td>24.6</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>23.1</td>
</tr>
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<td>25-29</td>
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<td>27.3</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>33.8</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>33.3</td>
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<td>32.2</td>
<td>31.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-39</td>
<td>43.6</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>33.5</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>36.6</td>
<td>31.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-44</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>28.7</td>
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<td>33.3</td>
<td>33.3</td>
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<td>45-49</td>
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<td>38.4</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>41.6</td>
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<td>44.8</td>
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<td>55-59</td>
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<td>33.0</td>
<td>34.6</td>
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<td>37.6</td>
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<td>60-64</td>
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<td>48.0</td>
<td>44.5</td>
<td>50.8</td>
<td>41.9</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>41.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>33.7</td>
<td>32.7</td>
<td>48.2</td>
<td>53.7</td>
<td>78.0</td>
<td>83.7</td>
<td>76.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total** (15 yr. and over) 20.5 26.8 29.9 31.0 29.6 30.5 35.6 33.5

**Sources:** See Table 3.
Since the focus of this essay is on women, I cannot examine here the non-domestic influences on men’s lives that make them more or less prone to suicidal acts. It is intriguing, however, that young men, those most directly affected by the loosening of the authority structure in the family in the 1960’s, show virtually no effect from this change in their suicide profiles. I would have expected a substantial drop, but apparently the non-domestic pressures on this age group were sufficient to maintain male suicide at a steady rate. The rates of older men both before and after this period of social change seem more sensitive to their relations within the family. The 1965 profile (see Fig. 4) shows a trough in the middle years, perhaps indicating the same satisfaction women have in their growing families and gradually increasing status at home. The profiles for later years reflect the increasing emptiness in the lives of the older men, who found their last solace, their position as master of the household, eroded by their own sons (and wives).

In interpreting men’s suicide profiles it is also fruitful to consider men’s relations not with the patrilineal family, but with the uterine families of their wives and mothers. Mothers forge uterine families for their own welfare, but their sons, the nucleus of these units, benefit greatly from their existence. When a son runs afoot of his father and the patrilineal family, he has the private family of his mother to turn to for succor and support. Even after a son marries, he can depend on his mother for encouragement, advice, and “loans” from her private savings. However, as men get older and the knots from the world sharper, more and more of them find that the uterine families on which they depended evaporated with the deaths of their mothers (sisters come home to visit less frequently and the often frayed relations with brothers may finally be severed completely). If in search of a warm nest a man then turns to the uterine family formed by his wife and their own children, he may be welcomed by the politeness reserved for high-status strangers. Finally, in old age, a man may find himself as isolated as any new bride, perhaps even more frustratingly because the isolation occurs in the midst of familiar and from the perspective of high (if token) status.

District Variation in Women’s Suicide Rates

The data in Table 7 show a good deal of variation in suicide rates for different districts in Taiwan. All the districts follow to some extent the general decrease in suicides for the 35-year time span, but most also maintain a distinctive pattern. Tainan, for example, from 1965 to 1970 is nearly always higher than other districts and—putting aside for a moment the special situations in Taitung, Hualien, and Penghu—Hsinchu is usually, but not always, the lowest. Taitung, Hualien, and Penghu are separated from the other districts because their sparse population makes a single suicide look large statistically, and because Taitung and Hualien were at least 20 percent aboriginal. The aboriginal population is categorically excluded from the suicide tables, but the likelihood of unsanitized aborigine wives of Chinese men appearing in census statistics seems high. More important, the frontier conditions in these two areas and the impossibility of accurate record-keeping under such conditions must have had considerable influence on the striking lowness of the reported suicide rates.

No single factor can account for the propensity of one district, such as Tainan, to produce high suicide rates while a neighboring district does not. I know that the rural people of the Taipei Basin consider Tainan an old, socially conservative, tradition-bound place, but how closely this picture resembles any reality, past or present, I cannot tell. If the stereotype has truth to it, conservatism might help explain Tainan’s unusually high suicide rates. Young women would probably be more strictly controlled by their mothers-in-law, have fewer tolerable alternatives to the indignities of traditional marriage, and less opportunity to lighten the isolation of their early years of marriage with friendships outside the family. Moreover, women who deviated from the traditional ways would be more sharply condemned.

But what of the districts with consistently low female suicide rates? Hsinchu is the lowest or next to lowest in all but one time period in our sample, excluding the three isolated districts. It also has the highest
concentration of Hakka-speaking residents of any district on Taiwan. To illustrate the influence of Hakka population on suicide rates, Table 8 shows the rankings of the five major districts for suicide and for the percentage of Hakka in the population. In 1909 the rankings are in near perfect accordance, in 1915 they disagree considerably, and in 1940 they are very close to perfect agreement. The higher the proportion of Hakka, the lower the suicide rate. Between 1909 and 1930, the Japanese statisticians provided an ethnic breakdown of suicides, and Table 9 shows us the reason for the influence of the Hakka population on the rates: for some time periods Hakka, men and women, commit suicide at about half the rate of their Hakken-speaking neighbors.

Unfortunately, not enough material is available on the Hakka family in Taiwan to compare the women’s life cycles with those of the Hakken-speaking women I am familiar with. Turning again to stereotypes, Hakken speakers and their ethnographers characterize Hakka women as strong, domineering, and of independent mind. Although the stereotype may derive from the particular personalities Hakken speakers have happened to encounter, any reality in the stereotype may be based on the different status Hakka women occupy in their husbands’ families from the outset. The Hakken bride comes to marriage with a dowry as large and expensive as her peasant father can provide; the Hakka bride arrives with both a dowry and a sizable amount of money that will remain under her control. Moreover, important parts of the Hakka wedding ritual include the presentation of money to the bride in exchange for tea and obesences. The amount of money a bride receives is her own secret, and it would be in bad taste for her husband to even ask about the total. Although Hakken women also have a private fund of money from similar sources, it is not likely among peasant women to survive the needs of the first year of marriage. Myron Cohen conceives of this money in Hakka society as feng money, the property of the new conjugal unit, but from his own description I think it might more accurately be described as money belonging to the woman’s uterine family. A widow who remarries takes the total amount with her, and Cohen describes the case of a young husband who is allowed to keep his deceased wife’s private money in trust for her children. I would think that the sense of isolation and helplessness that dominates the first few years of many Hakken women’s married lives would be considerably alleviated by the presence of this secret money. It could serve both as the symbol of the uterine family she hopes to create as a bulwark against future insecurity and as a source of more immediate gratifications, from bus fare home when she wants it, to the ability to lend money to a friend at a crucial moment.

Another way of looking at the low suicide rates for Hakka, one that sheds some light on the equally low male rates, focuses on the equivocal status of the Hakka in Chinese society. Many students of suicide have observed that populations who feel themselves under attack, socially or physically, have lower suicide rates than their less threatened neighbors. Most examples are of religious groups—Orthodox Jewish communities in eastern Europe, Catholic counties in Protestant countries, and the predominantly Mormon states of Utah and Idaho. The suicide rates for these groups go up as they become more integrated with their neighbors. Religious teachings barring suicide naturally must affect the rates, but there are other beleaguered groups with low suicide rates who do not share any dogma addressing itself to suicide. Nations under attack in war have lower suicide rates; suicide was surprisingly rare among concentration camp internees (although many of these in World War II...
did share a religious orientation); and the Eta, a traditional outcast group in Japan, have slightly over half the suicide rate of their urban neighbors and one-third the rate of their rural neighbors. Perhaps the Hakka, too, as a large, self-conscious minority in Taiwan, benefit from the immunity to suicide of externally threatened groups.

Rural-Urban Differences in Suicide Rates

As one might expect from the way in which Chinese suicide rates differ from Western suicide patterns, the rural-urban differences in suicide also differ. In the West, suicide is more frequent in cities and rarer in the countryside, with a good deal of diversity among medium-sized towns. In Taiwan, the opposite is true. Rates are generally higher in the countryside and lower in the cities, although smaller and newly designated cities follow the Western pattern in their inconsistency. Omitting, for clarity, these smaller cities (Keelung, Chungli, and Chiayi), we see in Table 10 that in 1950, in four out of five districts, rates for rural areas were higher than urban rates. In 1935 the balance shifts, with three out of five districts having higher urban rates, but in 1940 three out of five districts have higher rates in the rural areas.

Hsinchu is the one district in which in all three time periods the urban rates significantly exceed the rural rates. This apparent peculiarity is an intriguing example of the influence of ethnic differences on suicide. The city of Hsinchu is populated predominantly by Hokkien speakers, and it is surrounded by the largest concentration of Hakka speakers on Taiwan. The suicide rates for the three time periods suggest that the urban concentration of Hokkien speakers was not always as strong as it is now and was in 1940. Although there were marked rural-urban differences

<table>
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<th>Area</th>
<th>1950</th>
<th>1935</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Taibei rural</td>
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<td>17.0</td>
</tr>
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<td>Taibei city</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hsinchu rural</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>10.2</td>
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<td>Hsinchu city</td>
<td>10.8</td>
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<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taidong city</td>
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<td>16.4</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taichung rural</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>18.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taichung city</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaohsiung rural</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaohsiung city</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: See Table 3.

in the 1930 suicide rate in Hsinchu, the differences were less striking than they later became.

The only other area of China for which we can compare rural and urban suicide rates is Hong Kong. According to P. M. Yap, Hong Kong Island and Kowloon, both urban areas, had suicide rates of 14.8 and 18.3 per 100,000 population, respectively, and the New Territories, the rural area, had a rate of 8.7—the reverse of the Taiwan pattern. Hong Kong, of course, is very unusual among urban areas, and the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution has been felt throughout the territory. Just how similar the large rural Hakka population of the New Territories is to the Hakka in Taiwan, at least with regard to its low propensity for suicide, is impossible to determine from Yap's material.

High urban suicide rates in Western countries are attributed to the isolation and anonymity of city life, the disintegration of family life, and the laxness of social controls. We could also use these terms to describe life in a Taiwanese city, but we would be speaking from an entirely different definition of what is normal. The laxness of social control in an urban environment that causes Westerners to become "disoriented" enables a Chinese to experience a sense of liberation, to know that if he commits one or two acts of poor judgment, he will not bear them for the rest of his life as part of his social identity—as he would have to in a village. The disintegration of family life that has such negative effects on Westerners means for a Chinese woman that she begins married life in a nuclear family without a dominating mother-in-law or suspicious sisters-in-law, and in some form of partnership with her husband. The patterns of urban migration are different in China as well. Unless driven by a sudden disaster, most Chinese who migrate to cities go to neighborhoods in which they have at least one relative, and look for work in industries and businesses to which a relative or friend can recommend them. Starting then, from different places on a scale measuring society's control over a person's behavior, it seems quite reasonable that the urban setting carries quite different meanings for Western and Chinese populations, and these meanings seem to be reflected in their suicide rates.

Attempted Suicide

The Japanese Colonial Administration either decided not to record statistics on attempted suicide or decided not to publish them. Attempt-
ed suicide is even more susceptible to concealment than suicide, and
the Japanese government may reasonably have concluded that such
statistics would not be worth the trouble. Were such records available,
I would expect to find low rates of attempted suicide among the Chinese
population, at least in the early periods, as compared with Western
populations. Students of Western suicide now seem agreed that suicide
and attempted suicide are acts with different meanings and, in general,
different motivations. Some would-be suicides approach the act with
near indifference to the outcome, presuming life could not get, or death
be, any worse. Others are making a desperate appeal for help. Still others
take the risk as a way of threatening persons who are important to them.
Young women in traditional China must have been keenly aware of the
unpleasant lot awaiting a girl who survived a suicide attempt. As an
appeal for help it was useless, and few would consider it a gamble having
as one possible outcome an improved domestic situation. As retaliation
against oppressors, an unsuccessful suicide attempt had limited value
and might make the survivor regret her halfway measures. If a young
woman wished to exact revenge, she had to perform her life. There was
little to be gained from suicide attempts in China, as catharsis or as in-
strumental acts.

Another line of reasoning that makes me think rates of attempted
suicide would be lower among women in Taiwan than in the West is
fairly straightforward. All serious accidents and illnesses whether self-
duced or not were more likely to be fatal in rural areas, with their
minimal health standards. And for reasons both economic and moral,
Chinese families were loath to seek medical attention for women, the
group in Western societies most prone to attempted suicide, thus further
depressing the attempted suicide rate and increasing the completed sui-
dice rate. I was led to this grim thought while trying to reconcile the
flatness of the suicide profile P. M. Yap gives for women in Hong Kong.14
The Hong Kong women’s profile for attempted suicide reveals a gradient
as sharp as that found in the completed suicide profiles in Taiwan. Com-
pare the graph drawn from the Hong Kong data in Figure 5 with those
in Figure 3. Perhaps one factor that makes Hong Kong suicide statistics
so different from those in Taiwan is the presence of medical facilities and
the consequent greater likelihood that the young would-be suicide will
survive. The 1917 suicide statistics from Peking unfortunately do not
give age-specific rates for completed suicide, only for the combination
of completed and attempted suicide.15 However, the resulting profile
(see Fig. 5) is very similar to the 1905 and 1910 profiles for Taiwan.
Thus it may well be that if health and medical facilities were held con-
stant, the female suicide profiles for both Hong Kong in 1905 and Peking
in 1917 would resemble the Taiwan profiles.

Conclusions
This paper has not addressed itself particularly to sociologists or others
whose primary research interest is suicide. But as is so often the case
when Chinese, or for that matter Aslan, data are introduced into an established Western field of inquiry, presumptions about the range of normal behavior have to be modified. The Chinese, equally convinced of the normality of their behavior, occasionally occupy parts of the scale never used in Western cultures and hence never considered by Western social scientists. In this very general sense, the more often Chinese or other Asian data can be introduced into social science, the more valid will be our understanding of what being human means. More specifically, in regard to suicide, the Chinese data refute Western research that says men are always more likely than women to commit suicide, and old people more likely than young, and the Chinese data suggest that when life has very different meanings in different cultures. And then as further commentary on cultural variation, we find in the Chinese data two ethnic groups, Hixiden speakers and Hakka speakers, living cheek by jowl, engaged in the same occupations and with the same general range of social and economic classes, yet committing suicide at quite different rates.

The larger institutions of China, often so excitingly different from those in Western societies, have occupied an inordinate amount of research energy to the neglect of the fundamental, if homely, domestic unit that is basic to them all. The number of pages devoted to the Chinese family as a political and ritual system is enormous when compared with the number devoted to the more mundane functions of the family, those functions dependent on women. Since it is within the fundamental unit that most if not all human beings learn to interact with their fellow, and this learning begins and in many cases is completed under the direction of the female half of the population, any source of insight into the operation of the family or the motives of its women is important. In the Chinese case, and, I suspect, in other cultures as well, the correlations between women's age-specific suicide rates, their life cycle, and the family cycle can tell us a great deal about the dynamics of the family as the primary unit of society.

In this paper I have presented a rather grim and at times unsympathetic view of the Chinese family. From the perspective of many young women and to a lesser extent their elders as well, the traditional Chinese family was indeed a grim setting for life and, as we have seen, for death. In many families women lived in harmony with their mothers-in-law, and husbands and wives established relations of mutual respect and honesty. Unfortunately, these families hold down one end of a scale firmly balanced on the opposite end by the families that furnish the statistics with which we have been dealing. Arthur Smith, that astute if
31. Ho It Chang, "Cantonese Domestic Amah," p. 36.
34. Ibid., pp. 428-431; Margery Wolf, Women and the Family in Rural Taiwan (Stanford, Calif., 1972).
36. Smith, p. 469.
37. Ho It Chang, pp. 84, 135.
38. Smith, p. 467.
40. Lang, p. 42.
42. Smith, Village Life, p. 289.
43. Ho It Chang, p. 29.
44. Chung-hao, Ch'iao-ku feng-em chih, loc. cit.
45. Ho It Chang, p. 25.
46. Smith, p. 467; Dyer Ball, Things Chinese, p. 372; and Peplow and Baehr, Hong Kong Round and About, p. 117.
47. Dyer Ball, Shun-Tak District, p. 7; cf. his Things Chinese, p. 375.
50. Ho It Chang, p. 36.
52. Ho It Chang, p. 115.
54. Snowley, Chinese Dentistry, p. 177.
57. Ho It Chang, p. 120.
58. Ibid., p. 21.
59. Ibid., p. 27.
60. Topley, "Organisation and Social Function of Chinese Women's Ch'ut T'ang."
63. Topley, "Organisation and Social Function of Chinese Women's Ch'ut T'ang."
65. Ibid., pp. 93-94.
grounds, the strong international influences on the population would be more appropriate.
15. P. M. Yap, p. 12.

**Women as Writers in the 1920’s and 1930’s**

5. An excerpt from *Hsi yu chi* (Journey to the West), tr. as “The Temptation of Saint Piggy” by C. T. Hsia and Cyril Birch, contains the poetic warning against women from which these lines are taken. Cyril Birch, ed., *Anthology of Chinese Literature* (New York, 1972) 2:84. Yaksha, translated into Chinese as yeh-chiap, is an ugly demon in Buddhist mythology. It is often feminized in such “human” epithets as yeh-chiap p'ou or mu yeh-chiap.
9. Tsiao Hsiüeh-ch'iin, *Hung lou meng* (Dream of the red chamber; Peking, 1953), p. 1. This statement is actually part of the commentary that prefaces the first chapter of the novel, but has been printed as part of the main text since its first publication. The commentator is quoting the author's own words; thus he speaks in the first person. (Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.)
10. Hu Wen-k'ai, *Li-tai fu-nü chu-tso k'ao* (Writings of women through the ages; Shanghai, 1957).
22. Feng Yüan-chün, *Yüan-chün so chi'en hsüan-chü* (Selected writings of Yüan-chün before thirty; Shanghai, 1933), p. 15.
24. Shen Ts'ung-wen, *Chi Ting Ling* (About Ting Ling). He also wrote *Chi Ting Ling hsü-chü* (More about Ting Ling). The two books were reprinted together, Shanghai, 1940.
26. Shen Ts'ung-wen, *Chi Ting Ling*, p. 84.
29. Huang Ying [Lo Yün], *Hsien-tai chung-kuo nü-tso-chia*, p. 66.
30. Stories dealing with themes mentioned in this paragraph include Feng Yüan-chün, "Ke-chüeh" (Separation), "Ke-chüeh I-hou" (After separation),