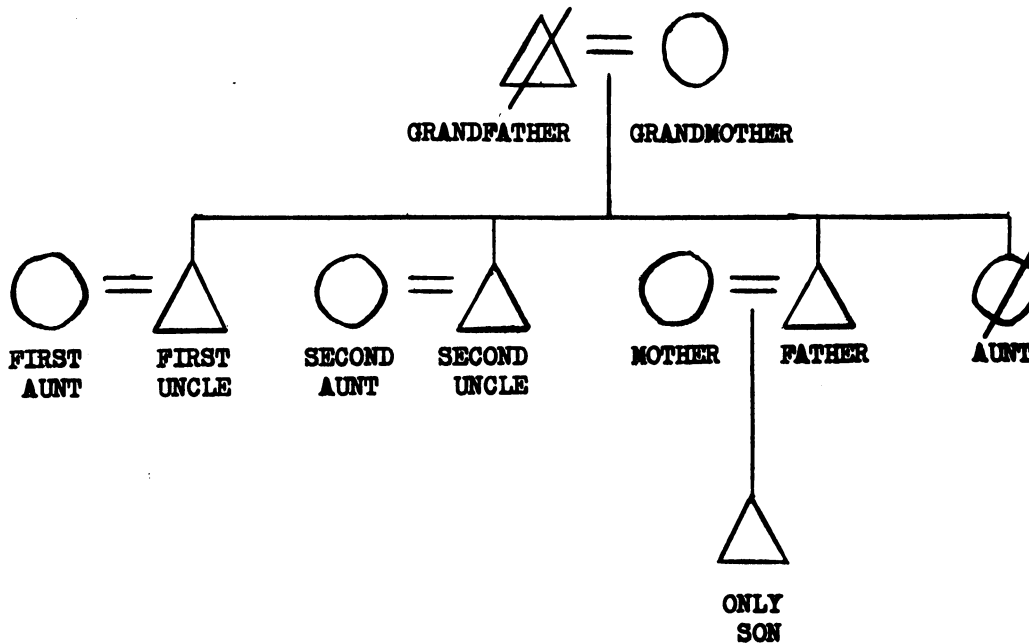


FAMILY IN TRANSTION

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At the time of his death, Grandfather, a rebel who had conspired with Sun Yat-sen to overthrow the Manchu Dynasty, had left a will. Grandmother was given his land and home while his money was equally divided among his four children, First Uncle, Second Uncle, Father, and Aunt. First Uncle, a playboy at heart and not a very resourceful person, soon parted company with his portion of the inheritance and turned to Grandmother for money. Grandmother, with no financial resources of her own, gradually depleted the portion of the inheritance which had been entrusted to her until Aunt became of age.



A short time later, First Uncle married an American-born Chinese girl, Aunt died of tuberculosis, and First Uncle left for America with his bride.

World War II began, and Second Uncle went north to help man the bastions leaving Father in charge of the household. With the approach of the Japanese, Father took Grandmother and fled to North Borneo. After the war, they returned home while Second Uncle migrated to Belgium with his Belgian wife. Father married Mother and began to raise a family. With the advent of the Communists, the family and Grandmother fled southward to Hong Kong. Though politically pro-Communist, economically the family was on the wrong side -- they belonged to the class of landowners.

Structurally, the family was caught in a transitional phase: the Chinese family structure was undergoing changes from the traditional pattern of a large patriarchal two-to-four generation unit to a simple conjugal unit which eliminated all members save the husband, wife, and non-adult children. In the traditional sense, the eldest male in the family unit was the head; after Grandfather's death, First Uncle, being the eldest son, became the head. He was in charge of all the family's activities while the supervision of the household fell to his wife. Since Grandmother was still alive, she may have chosen to hold sway or, as in this case, go into semi-retirement, retaining only a consultative position with honorific supervisory power. In the modern phase, the large household has been reduced to a single

conjugal unit. Thus, First Uncle, trapped in the transition and having a European education, could easily excuse his filial responsibilities on the ground of primary obligations to his conjugal unit. He was further excused by reason of geographical distance; and his wife, who in the traditional pattern would have ruled the household, could easily delegate the responsibility for the care of Grandmother to Mother who was the wife of a younger son and thus held an inferior position to First Aunt.

Even if Father did not want to be burdened with Grandmother and even if he resented First Uncle for his irresponsibility and Grandmother's unwise play of favoritism, he could not easily dump Grandmother. There were still the ties that bound a mother and son together, especially strengthened during the period as wartime refugees in Borneo and Hong Kong. Also, Father retained a great deal of the ethic of filial piety since he had lost Grandfather while in his late teens and lived with Grandmother the longest, First Uncle and Second Uncle having been sent away to France for much of their education. Even after First Uncle's and Second Uncle's return to China, they did not remain at home for long. Father, on the other hand, had lived most of his life at home in China; and for Father, the integration of Chinese culture was much more complete, the aged commanded respect regardless of their station in life.

For Mother, who must work to supplement Father's income, her economic position has substantially changed her position in the power

hierarchy. Her potential economic independence allows her to leave the family or, in this case, reduce the amount of subordination to which she will submit. Although Grandmother has become an "accepted" member of the family, she no longer holds sway. This is evident in the battles between Mother and Grandmother over child care, housekeeping, and personal behavior. Paradoxically, these are the same matters over which mothers and daughters disagree.

As the time approaches for their children to begin seriously contemplating marriage, there are unspoken words of desire, especially to Only Son, to begin his family within their unit. (Traditionally, when a daughter marries, she is no longer a member of her biological family but of her husband's family). But chances are slim because Only Son is not only a rebel but also part of Western culture.