

INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONS IN URBAN CHINA: PROXIMITY, CONTACT, AND HELP TO PARENTS*

FUQIN BIAN, JOHN R. LOGAN, AND YANJIE BIAN

Although most older Chinese parents live with an adult son or daughter, most adult offspring do not live with parents. We examine the relations of these noncoresident offspring with parents in terms of proximity, frequency of contact, and exchange of help. Based on a 1993 random sample survey conducted in two major Chinese cities, we find that although rates of coresidence are high, noncoresident sons and daughters live close to parents, have frequent contact with their parents, and provide regular help to parents. Relationships with noncoresident sons and daughters are unaffected by whether parents coreside with another child. There is some evidence of closer relationships with sons than with daughters, but parents without a son receive as much help from all children as do parents with sons. The effects of these and other predictors are estimated in multivariate analyses, and results are interpreted in terms of the persistence or change of traditional family norms.

Research on intergenerational relations in East Asia has focused on coresidence of parents with their adult offspring. This is natural, in light of the high levels of coresidence in the region and the evident importance of living together for mutual support, with possible implications for issues such as age at marriage, caring for small children, women's employment, and care of the elderly. Yet even in this region, most adults with living parents do not reside with them, and the study of coresidence does not inform us about the kinds of relationships they have with them. For example, in the Chinese cities that we study here, 67% of parents who have grown children live with at least one of them, but only 21% of adults (with a living parent or parent-in-law) reside with a parent (Logan, Bian, and Bian forthcoming). This apparent contradiction is possible, of course, because most older persons have more than one child, but it is rare to live with more than one of them once they are grown.

Juxtaposing coresident and noncoresident situations frames our research questions: In countries where most parents live with a child in midlife and later years, how close are parents' ties with offspring who live elsewhere? Are ties with these offspring weakened or supplanted by ties with coresiding children? Alternatively, are coresidence and sup-

port relationships with noncoresident offspring simply independent and alternative expressions of the same underlying dimension of closeness or obligation? If so, we might expect that one would have little effect on the other and that the same factors that predict coresidence would also predict relations with other offspring.

Our research deals with two topics that have been studied in other East Asian countries: (1) How often do noncoresident offspring visit with parents?, and (2) How frequently do they exchange help with parents in daily activities? We add another closely related question: How far do noncoresident offspring live from parents? Proximity is of particular interest because living nearby has been identified as a possible substitute for (and in many cases a preferred alternative to) living together in China (Unger 1993). It also has obvious relevance to the frequency of contact and help. Various studies in Japan (Bumpass 1994; Martin and Tsuya 1991; Okamura 1984) and Taiwan (Hermalin, Ofstedal, and Chi 1992; Sun and Liu 1994) suggest that there is more contact between the generations when they live closer together (for China, see also Ikels 1993).

INTERGENERATIONAL PROXIMITY, CONTACT, AND HELP: SOME HYPOTHESES

We view the urban Chinese family as a strong social unit in which even noncoresiding offspring often live nearby, visiting parents and helping them frequently. Coresidence with one child may have a small damping effect on these ties with other offspring, but we expect them to remain substantial. These expectations are consistent with the idea, implicit in most studies, that East Asian families represent a stable traditional institution with potent claims on children despite the inroads of modernization. If our research supports these expectations, however, it suggests that future research should attend more to noncoresident ties than in the past.

There are also reasons to expect different findings. Given the special characteristics of housing in socialist China, this is especially true for proximity. Though it may be true, as Unger (1993) argues, that people prefer to live close to grown offspring rather than under the same roof, this may be difficult to arrange. In China, unlike in the West, most urban residents cannot choose where they wish to live, within their budgets; they are allocated to housing units by bureaucratic institutions. One of the most important determinants of housing location is one's job assignment, which is typically made by schools or colleges for their graduates, with only a small range of individual choice.

*Fuqin Bian and John R. Logan, Department of Sociology, SUNY at Albany, Social Science 340, Albany, NY 12222; e-mail: j.logan@albany.edu. Yanjie Bian, Department of Sociology, University of Minnesota. This research was supported by the National Institutes of Health (Grant 1R01 HD3294601). Hanlong Lu from Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences and Yunkang Pan from Tianjin Academy of Social Sciences coordinated data collection in China and offered valuable advice on the interpretation of the results.

In such a system, there are only a few ways in which a noncoresiding child can live close to parents (see Logan and Bian 1993). They may be employed by the same work unit, which is more likely for blue-collar workers who are likely to inherit their position from a parent who retires (at age 50 or 55) at about the time that the son or daughter begins work (around age 20). They may be assigned housing by their local subdistrict government, a process that is widely believed to be biased in favor of married sons (leading to greater proximity for sons than for daughters). Their parents may attempt to influence the housing office to make a local placement, which might result in greater proximity for Communist Party members and persons with administrative positions. In the typical case, however, parents may not be able to live close to noncoresident children.

This feature of Chinese society also could affect levels of contact and help. We presume that proximity is a principal determinant of these relations. (In principle, proximity could be considered either a cause of contact and help by facilitating it, or a consequence of wishing to have more contact or to provide help. Due to constraints on residential mobility in China, however, proximity is more likely to be a cause.) If people are unable to live close together, distance would reduce visiting and exchange of help.

There is another line of reasoning under which noncoresident contact and help might be especially limited in this case. Intergenerational ties in China are linked to obligations that are thought to be traditionally assumed mainly by the eldest—and therefore perhaps the coresident—son. Consequently we might observe low levels of noncoresident contact and help and a strong negative effect of coresidence on ties with other offspring. Results of two studies support this alternative view. First, Sun and Liu (1994) report that as coresidence has declined in Taiwan over the last two decades, the frequency of contact with noncoresiding offspring has increased substantially. Second, Bumpass (1994; also see Martin and Tsuya 1991) reports that contact is much lower in Japan (where 25% of noncoresiding offspring see their own parents at least once a week) than in the United States (where the corresponding number is 42%). He suggests that the difference is due mainly to the higher rates of coresidence in Japan: The relatively few noncoresiding offspring in his Japanese sample may be those with the least traditional values and more difficult relationships with their parents (Bumpass 1994:88). Thus, there are ample grounds for arguing against our main hypotheses.

As we develop models predicting levels of contact and help, we are guided in part by findings from studies of coresidence in China (see especially Logan, Bian, and Bian forthcoming). Two main findings from these studies stand out. First is the great gender bias in coresidence, which overwhelmingly places married couples in the homes of the husband's parents. We ask whether the same bias exists in other relationships, or whether noncoresiding sons and daughters are able to maintain close ties with their biological parents. According to Confucianism, the patriarch's goal was to maintain an unbroken lineage for all time—past, present, and

future. Because only sons can carry the family name, the emphasis on lineal continuity intensified the importance of producing male heirs: "There are three things which are unfilial, and the greatest of them is not to have posterity" (Stacey 1983:39). On the other hand, a married daughter was considered a member of her husband's family, and was expected to establish congenial relations with his parents and siblings. The traditional saying that "a married daughter is like discarded water" reflected this view that marriage marked a passage from her own family to her husband's.

Hermalin, Ofstedal, and Lee (1992) found that Taiwanese sons provided more instrumental assistance and financial help to parents than did daughters (see Yang 1996 for similar results on financial help in a Chinese town). Another study (Hermalin, Ofstedal, and Chi 1992) suggested that Taiwanese elderly also have more frequent contact with sons than with daughters (for Japan, see Bumpass 1994 and Morioka 1968; a contradictory finding is reported by Koyama 1970). But Martin and Tsuya (1991) found that even though Japanese men lived closer to their noncoresident parents than did women, women saw their noncoresident parents almost as frequently as men saw theirs, and women phoned them more often than did men (see also Koyama 1970). Indeed, Long (1987) concludes that in Japan contact with the husband's parents and with the wife's parents does not differ. And any differences that do exist may be changing: Martin (1990) has argued that contact with the wife's biological parents is increasing in both Korea and China (see also Choe 1987; Davis-Friedmann 1991).

A second finding in urban China is that parents' needs outweigh their children's needs as predictors of coresidence. China specialists, like those who have studied the family in other developing countries (e.g., Lillard and Willis 1997), have emphasized lifelong reciprocity as a basis for intergenerational relations: "both generations believe that the creation of the children's physical existence and the care given them in childhood require children to reciprocate in their parents' old age" (Davis-Friedmann 1991:53). The popular saying "rearing a son for the sake of old age" expresses this expectation that older people, by providing economic and other support to the young, lay the foundation for their own support in later life.

The Chinese Nine-City Aging Survey (Hu and Ye 1991) also suggested an upward flow of financial support. According to elderly parents, 41% received cash from noncoresiding offspring but only 21% gave cash to them. Further, two studies of Taiwan (Lee, Parish, and Willis 1994; Sun and Liu 1994) and a study of Mainland China (Hu and Ye 1991) showed that most help is from offspring to parents (on Thailand, see Knodel, Chayovan, and Siriboon 1992). Other studies in East Asia have found that support to parents is strongly related to their needs such as being older, widowed, in bad health, or with low income (Hermalin, Ofstedal, and Lee 1992; Lee, Parish, and Willis 1994; Yang 1996). Children's needs have little effect on support to parents.

Thus, we ask not only how coresidence affects proximity, contact and help, but also how the latter are associated

with the gender of the child and the needs of the parents and children.

RESEARCH DESIGN

We analyze data from the China Housing Survey, conducted in 1993 in Tianjin and Shanghai (details of the survey and sampling frame are provided in Logan, Bian, and Bian forthcoming). Both surveys sampled housing units in selected neighborhoods, based on address lists compiled through the census (in Shanghai) and the household registration system (in Tianjin). One current resident of each housing unit was chosen randomly to be interviewed. As was typical of surveys organized with government authorization at this time, the response rate was approximately 100% in both cities. The Tianjin sample includes 1,042 persons aged 21 and above. The median age is 46, and 32% of respondents are women. The Tianjin sample is thus skewed toward male respondents. We reduce this bias in the following analyses by treating respondents as informants for themselves and for their spouses; therefore, for example, we are about equally likely to study relationships with a man's parents and with a woman's parents. Distributions on marital status, education, and income are close to those reported in the Chinese census. The Shanghai sample comprises 1,054 persons aged 21 and above. The median age is 44, and 47% are women. Distributions on major sample characteristics are close to those of the city's population. Because initial investigation revealed that patterns are similar in the two cities, the samples are pooled here to provide greater statistical power.

This survey was designed to study access to housing (including coresidence patterns) in urban China. In addition, its questionnaire provided much specific information on family composition and intergenerational relations. Although information is provided by a single respondent, the appropriate unit of analysis is typically a family or parent/child dyad. Most respondents in the median age category of 40–50 provide information about multiple parents and adult offspring; young respondents have no adult children, while old respondents may have no living parents. The core data analyses draw on respondents who have at least one noncoresiding adult child, focusing on the proximity, contact, and assistance between this parent and his/her adult offspring taken as a set. (Of 2,096 respondents in the two cities, 1,381 were over 40 and therefore liable to have adult children. Of these, 828 had adult children, and 606 had noncoresident adult children.) We supplement these analyses with a dyad file that includes the respondent with each individual noncoresident parent (or in-law, with married parents treated as one couple, $N = 1,904$). Results of multivariate analyses based on these dyads are reported selectively. These analyses include the respondent with only one randomly selected parent or in-law in order to avoid autocorrelation. Because the effects of most variables replicate results from the core sample, the full dyad models are not reported in the tables.

The three dependent variables are geographic proximity, contact between parents and noncoresiding offspring, and assistance. These were measured as follows:

Proximity

Asked how far they live from either parents or children, respondents selected among the following categories: in the same neighborhood, in the same subdistrict, in the same district, in a different district of the same city, and in a different city. For multivariate analyses predicting proximity, we recoded these categories into an interval scale reflecting our estimate of the travel time (by bicycle within the city) between parents and offspring: "in the same neighborhood" is 3 minutes; "in the same subdistrict" is 8 minutes; "in the same district" is 20 minutes; "in the same city" is 60 minutes; and "in another city" is 120 minutes. The mean recoded value is 32 minutes. We found that the model is unaffected by the particular time estimates that we allocated to each category of location. When proximity is used as a predictor, it is treated as a set of dummy variables (with "other city" as the reference category).

We prefer to treat the proximity measure as an interval scale to preserve the information that we have about relative distances. Another approach is to consider it an ordinal scale, for which ordered logistic regression is the appropriate analytic technique. The ordered logit results conform closely to those from OLS multiple regression. In one instance where results differ, we report both in the text.

Contact

Contact is measured as the frequency of contact during the past year, including letters, phone calls, and visits. (We believe that face-to-face visits are the most common type of contact because only 8% of households have a telephone.) Respondents selected among categories of never, a couple of times during the year, once or twice a month, once or twice a week, almost every day, and at least daily. We recoded these categories into specific values of "contacts per week" as *at least daily* = 7; *almost every day* = 5; *once or twice a week* = 1.5; *once or twice a month* = .3; and *never and a couple of times during the year* = 0.

To measure contact with all offspring combined, we added these scores across offspring (yielding a mean of 4.6 visits per week). We considered alternate ways of coding "total visits" for persons with several children; ours treats as equal the case of a parent who receives several visits from one child and the case of a parent who receives one visit from each of several children.

In dyad analyses, where the dependent variable is contact of a particular child with a parent, contact could be considered an ordinal variable. Again, however, results of OLS multiple regression with our interval scale conform closely to those of an ordered logit analysis, and we present only OLS results.

Help

Help with daily activities refers to the frequency (during the past year) with which noncoresiding offspring assist parents (or parents assist their noncoresiding children) with each of the following tasks: grocery shopping, cooking meals, doing

laundry, cleaning the house, repair work, taking care of parents (or children or grandchildren) when they need help, and shopping for other daily needs. Respondents selected among categories of never, only in emergencies, once a year, several times a year, once a month, once a week, a couple times a week, and every day. We considered alternative ways of constructing a single index of help. We report on analyses of help defined as the number of tasks in which children (collectively) help at least once a month (with a mean value of 1.3 tasks).

A key predictor in all of the models we report is whether the parent lives with a child. We have included minor children here (in fact, no cases involve coresident children under age 10) because coresidence with a child of any age could affect relations with other children. Indeed, the effect of coresidence defined this way tends to be slightly stronger than that of coresidence with adult offspring. We also examined whether the gender of the coresident child matters. In the one model where coresidence with any child has an effect, coresidence with a son affects contact, but coresidence with a daughter does not. Therefore, we report all equations based on "coresidence with a son of any age." Overall, 60% of parents lived with a child, and 47% lived with a son.

Several other variables are included in the multivariate models. Parental marital status is indicated by two dummy variables: widowed father (6%) and widowed mother (10%), with married couple or divorced (only 2% of cases) as the reference category. Parent's number of noncoresiding offspring (averaging 2.4) is a resource measure for parents, as parents with more offspring are likely to have more total contact and help and to have at least one child nearby. The measure of "whether there is a noncoresiding son" (true in 66% of cases) is intended to tap the possible gender bias. In models for parent/child dyads we include the child's gender, health, education, and number of own children. Parent's education is an indicator of occupational status and is relevant to the "job inheritance" hypothesis. From the perspective of modernization theory that underlies many family studies, it is also an indirect indicator of cultural preference and traditional responsibility. Parent's political status is a dichotomy indicating whether the parent is a Communist Party member or holds an administrative position in the workplace. Due to the fairly high average age of parents in this sample, a high proportion (40%) have one or the other of these positions. Parent's work status is a dichotomy indicating whether the parent is currently working, which is an indicator of the parent's economic situation. Other measures of the parent's needs are age (in years) and health, a subjective indicator in three categories ranging from "good" to "ill" health. Where parents are a married couple, these variables indicate whether either parent is working or has political position, the education of the higher-educated parent, the age of the older parent, and the health of the less healthy parent.

City is included in the multivariate analysis, coded as Shanghai = 1 with Tianjin as the reference category. Although we explored possible interaction effects, which would indicate different causal processes in one city than in the other, none proved significant.

RESULTS

Where Do Noncoresiding Offspring Live?

We begin with the issue of proximity to noncoresiding offspring, which will become a key predictor in subsequent analyses of contact and help. Table 1 (first column) reports the frequency distribution for the location of the nearest child (this is based on our sample of 605 parent respondents, for whom we have proximity data on 577 cases). About 12% of parents have a child within their neighborhood, and 62% have a child within the same urban district (which we estimate to be within 20 minutes' travel time) or closer. Given that the Chinese have little choice about where they live after leaving their parents' home and that most Chinese parents have a coresident child, we interpret our finding as evidence of a surprising degree of closeness.

Another perspective on proximity comes from our dyad sample, where respondents reported on proximity to their parents and parents-in-law. Table 1 reports results for two types of dyads, distinguishing the gender of the child. Column two provides the totals for proximity for all 1,886 child/parent dyads. Column three lists frequencies for unmarried sons with their own parents or married couples with the husbands' parents. The final column lists frequencies for unmarried daughters with their own parents or married couples with the wives' parents.

Overall, 9% of offspring live in the same neighborhood as the parent, and 48% live within at least the same district. The added surprise here is that there is only a small gender difference (though significant in a chi-square test), quite unlike the patrilocality bias that has been found for coresidence (Freedman 1958, 1966; Hu and Ye 1991; Ikels 1993; Lavelly and Ren 1992; Pan and Lin 1987; Wolf 1972). Sons are slightly more likely to be at the extremes of the distribution, either in the same neighborhood as their parents (which might indicate some gender preference) or in a different city (which might reflect greater job mobility for men than for women).

We turn now to the predictors of proximity. Our three main questions were: (1) Do parents with coresident children live farther from other children?; (2) Is there a gender bias toward living closer to sons?; and (3) Is proximity affected by the number of offspring, by indicators of the parents' needs (such as age, health, or widowhood), or by parents' education or political status? Table 2 addresses these questions via a multivariate regression for distance from a parent's nearest child, which was recoded as estimated travel time and logged. It is necessary to adopt the parent's perspective here—that is, to treat respondents as reporting on distance from their own offspring—to include the coresidence variable. Respondents were asked whether *they* live with a parent or child, but not whether *their parents* have coresident children. We have also analyzed the data using proximity of parents to a particular son or daughter as the dependent variable. Because the results are similar to those for the closest child, we do not include them in the tables.

We find that coresidence does not affect proximity to other offspring; these are independent dimensions of family

TABLE 1. PROXIMITY OF NONCORESIDING CHILDREN TO PARENTS

Location	Parent's Nearest Child ^a	Individual Children ^b	Sons/Couples & Man's Parents ^b	Daughters/Couples & Woman's Parents ^b
Same Neighborhood (%)	12	9	15	5
Same City Subdistrict (%)	10	6	6	6
Same City District (%)	40	33	30	34
Different City District (%)	33	42	37	46
Different City (%)	5	10	12	9
Totals	100	100	100	100
Number of Cases	577	1,886	812	1,074

^aBased on the sample of 577 parents reporting relationships with all of their children.

^bBased on the sample of 1,886 parent/child dyads, as reported by respondents regarding their parents or parents-in-law.

relationships. There is a significant gender effect once other variables are controlled, represented by “whether there is a noncoresiding son.” The negative coefficient of about $-.22$ means that parents with a noncoresiding son are predicted to live 22% closer to their nearest child. In an alternative model based on an ordered logistic regression, there is no overall son effect. Instead, a cumulative logit procedure reveals the more complex pattern shown in Table 1: Having a noncoresident son significantly increases the odds of being in the same subdistrict or district compared with the odds of living farther away, but also increases the odds of being in another city compared with the odds of living closer. In the dyad equation for proximity of the respondent with a selected parent, there is a significant negative coefficient of $-.24$ for the dummy variable “unmarried son or couple with husband’s parents” compared with “daughter or wife’s parents.” In this case, an ordered logit reveals the same overall gender effect.

Another significant finding is that parent’s education has a positive effect on distance ($b = .12$). (A similar effect was found in the dyad model.) Most likely this reflects the system of job assignment in China. It may also mean that better-educated people prefer to live apart—perhaps an expression of nontraditional values or a greater number of interests and friends outside the family.

Finally, parents’ number of noncoresiding offspring has a significant negative effect on distance: Parents with more children are more likely to live close to at least one of them. Other variables, such as parent’s gender and marital status, parent’s age, health and work status, and parent’s political status, do not affect proximity. There is no evidence that people with greater authority manipulate the housing allocation system to ensure living closer to children. In fact, the ordered logit procedure suggests that parents who are cadres or party members are more likely to have their nearest child living in another city compared with all other locations; hence, they live *farther* away.

Three variables appear in the dyad model that could not be included in the model for parents with all children: the education, age, and health of the child. Child’s education,

like parent’s education, is positively associated with distance. Older children live farther away, suggesting a life-cycle effect similar to that observed in studies of coresidence. And children in poorer health live closer, although this effect is significant only in the ordered logit analysis.

Contact Between Parents and Noncoresiding Offspring

Like proximity, the frequency of contact between parents and offspring can be summarized in two ways. First, we have calculated the contact of a parent with all adult offspring combined as follows: Frequency categories were recoded into frequency per week, and then summed across children. The totals were then recoded to match the original categories. For example, if parents have four children, and each child visits parents once or twice a month, we have translated this case as contact “weekly or semiweekly” with all children. Second, contact can also be measured as the amount of contact reported by individual children. Table 3 reports both measures of contact. It also distinguishes between sons and daughters, but offers more detail than was possible in Table 1’s description of proximity. This is because proximity to either set of parents is necessarily the same for husbands and wives who live together. A husband, however, may have very different levels of contact with a given parent than does his wife (e.g., he may have less contact with his wife’s parents than she does). Therefore, Table 3 summarizes the dyad results with separate distributions for the total frequencies, men with their own parents, men with their in-laws, women with their own parents, and women with their in-laws.

Table 3 reveals that contact with noncoresident offspring is frequent. Nearly one quarter of parents have at least daily contact with their children (contact with all children combined), and nearly one quarter have contact almost every day. Most parents (80%) see children at least weekly. Contact levels reported by individual sons and daughters in our sample are nearly as high: Averaging across categories of gender and own parent/in-law, 6% report daily contact, and 60% report at least weekly contact with a parent. These findings support

TABLE 2. OLS REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS PREDICTING ESTIMATED TRAVEL TIME OF PARENT TO NEAREST CHILD, WITH MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS OF VARIABLES INCLUDED IN THE ANALYSIS

Variable	Mean	B
Parent's Coresidence With a Son of Any Age	.466 (.499)	.004 (.089)
Whether There is a Noncoresiding Son	.660 (.474)	-.218* (.100)
Parent's Marital Status ^a		
Widowed father	.060 (.239)	.152 (.191)
Widowed mother	.094 (.293)	.275 (.156)
Parent's Number of Noncoresiding Children	2.365 (1.150)	-.171*** (.044)
Parent's Poor Health (Less Healthy Parent)	2.066 (.737)	.091 (.061)
Parent's Age (Older Parent)	64.128 (7.816)	.006 (.007)
Parent Working (Either Parent)	.313 (.464)	.007 (.107)
Parent's Education (Higher-Educated Parent)	3.032 (1.216)	.112*** (.042)
Parent's Political Status (Either Parent)	.402 (.491)	.001 (.099)
City (Shanghai = 1)	.393 (.489)	.427*** (.097)
Constant		2.562*** (.482)
R ²		.119

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Notes: $n = 562$. The mean (logged) travel time is 3.111, with a standard deviation of 1.077. Standard deviations (for means) and standard errors (of b) are in parentheses.

^aReference category is "both parents alive."

Unger's (1993:40) conclusion that Chinese "parents who live apart from their married children still tend to maintain very close mutual contact, more so than would be the norm in most Western societies." High levels of coresidence are not inconsistent with high levels of noncoresident contact.

There are differences between sons and daughters as well as between one's own parents and one's in-laws. The gender differences are statistically significant (based on chi-square tests of the cross-tabulation and t -tests of the differences in means between categories), but they are small and appear only in the most frequent categories: For example, 30% of sons have daily or almost daily contact with their own parents, compared with 20% of daughters. But 66% of sons and

64% of daughters have at least weekly contact. A bias toward the sons' parents also appears in contact with in-laws: 20% of daughters have daily or almost daily contact with their husband's parents, but only 14% of sons have such frequent contact with their wife's parents. Again, this gap is significant, but it disappears when we take into account weekly or semiweekly visits. Thus, the gender bias in contact is much weaker than that revealed in studies of coresidence or even of proximity. We might conclude that although there is a gender difference in the most frequent visiting categories, daughters maintain regular contact with their parents.

A stronger gap occurs between biological parents and in-laws, regardless of the child's gender. The disparity is most clear if we combine sons and daughters and combine categories of frequency to contact "at least weekly." Overall, 65% of respondents report contact at least weekly with their own parents versus 55% with in-laws.

These frequency distributions can also be summarized as the mean number of visits per week. The highest frequency is sons with their own parents (2.3), followed by daughters with their own parents (1.8), daughters with their in-laws (1.7), and sons with in-laws (1.5).

What are the predictors of frequency of contact, given that gender appears to play only a small role? Table 4 presents results of a multiple regression equation in which the dependent variable is "number of visits per week by all noncoresident offspring" reported by parents. (This is the same sample that we used in the analysis of proximity shown in Table 2. It is slightly larger here because cases with missing information on proximity are now included and coded as a separate category.)

First, we find that distance to the nearest child has a strong effect. Compared with parents whose nearest child is in another city, parents whose nearest child is in the same neighborhood report nearly seven more visits per week. If the nearest child lives in the same subdistrict, the increment is about five visits per week, approximately double the increment estimated for those whose nearest child lives only within the same district. Thus, visiting declines rapidly with distance. This point is reinforced in our analysis of the dyad file, which included information on a specific child. In that analysis, predicted increments of visiting (all statistically significant, compared with those in a different city) were 4.0 more visits per week for those in the same neighborhood, 1.9 in the same subdistrict, 1.6 in the same district, and 1.1 in a different district. Clearly living within the same neighborhood makes the largest difference. These results are consistent with other studies of Taiwan and Japan cited earlier.

Coresidence with a son has a negative and statistically significant effect, though it is small compared with the effect of proximity. The gender of noncoresiding children has no effect: Parents with a noncoresiding son receive no more visits than do parents with daughters only. This null finding is slightly different than the result from our multivariate analysis of the dyad file, where we find that sons have more contact with their own parents than daughters do with their

TABLE 3. FREQUENCY OF CONTACT BETWEEN PARENTS AND NONCORESIDING CHILDREN

Frequency of Contact	All Children Combined ^a	Individual Children ^b	Sons With Own Parents ^b	Sons With In-Laws ^b	Daughters With Own Parents ^b	Daughters With In-Laws ^b
At Least Daily (%)	23	6	10	4	5	7
Almost Everyday (%)	22	14	20	10	15	13
Once or Twice a Week (%)	36	40	36	42	44	34
Once or Twice a Month (%)	14	29	24	32	28	31
Less Often or Never (%)	6	11	10	12	8	15
Total (%)	101 ^c	100	100	100	100	100
Mean Visits per Week	4.6	1.8	2.3	1.5	1.8	1.7
SD	4.8	2.0	2.3	1.7	1.9	2.1
Number of Cases	605	1,901	514	658	417	312

^aBased on the sample of parents reporting relationships with all of their children.

^bBased on the sample of dyads, as reported by respondents regarding their parents or parents-in-law.

^cSums to more than 100% due to rounding.

own parents, or than either sons or daughters with in-laws. This effect for "son with own parents" is consistent with the frequencies and means reported in Table 3. Taking these results together, we conclude that sons visit their own parents more often than daughters do, but that in families with no son, perhaps daughters' visits increase enough to result in no net loss of filial contact for parents.

There are only two other significant predictors. Parents have more contact if they have more children. And widowed fathers report less contact with all children combined than do married couples. Because there is no similar deficit for widowed mothers, this result provides a hint that relations with parents involve a special connection to mothers.

Other factors introduced in this equation—parents' health, age, labor-force status, education, and political status—do not have significant effects. This negative result undermines hypotheses concerning parents' needs and resources.

Assistance Between Parents and Noncoresiding Offspring

Our final concern is the intergenerational exchange of help. The available measures treat parents and noncoresiding offspring as sources of help. The most distinctive aspect of the flow of help is that about 55% of the parents reported receiving regular help from offspring, whereas only about 25% of the children received any kind of regular help from parents (including help with grandchildren). The upward help flow is much stronger than the downward flow. This is in dramatic contrast to the American case, where 27% of parents report receiving help from any child, and 58% of parents give help to any child (Logan and Spitze 1996). In this respect, the Chinese family might still be considered to be parent-centered (as Levy (1949) noted), while the American family appears to be more child-centered.

We focus here on help received by parents. Again, we ask whether our indicator of relations with noncoresiding off-

spring is affected by coresidence with another child, and whether there are effects of children's gender, proximity, or other characteristics of parents reflecting their needs or resources. As in Tables 2 and 4, the sample is based on the 605 respondents who have at least one noncoresiding adult child (with 591 valid cases for this analysis). The dependent variable in Table 5 is the number of tasks on which parents received help at least monthly from any child. We have examined alternative measures, including analyses of individual tasks, but all of these measures yield similar results.

First, as expected, proximity to the nearest noncoresiding child has a significant effect on help received. However, this effect is localized: It is significant only for those with a child within the same neighborhood.

Second, whether parents coreside with a son or (tested separately) a daughter does not affect the receipt of help from noncoresident offspring. This finding seems to contradict our usual assumption about the role of coresident children in the support of parents, that is, that help with routine tasks could most easily (and most likely) be provided by a child living in the same home. Upon reflection, we note that the finding has no necessary relation to the role of coresident children, who most likely more actively help parents than do other children. Rather, we suspect that help by noncoresident offspring should be interpreted not as instrumental assistance (doing something the parent could not otherwise manage, and therefore something most likely to be done by a coresident child), but as an expression of filial respect, which every child must demonstrate. The same pattern is found in published accounts of the exchange of financial help (e.g., Hu and Ye 1991). Parents rarely provide money to children, but it is common for children to make regular small gifts of cash to parents as a sign of respect. Reinforcing this interpretation of help, Table 5 shows that help received is not associated with several standard indicators of parents' needs: their health, age, and labor-force status. But help received is significantly affected by the number of children.

TABLE 4. OLS REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS PREDICTING PARENT VISITS PER WEEK WITH ANY NON-CORESIDING CHILD

Variable	B
Proximity to Nearest Child (Reference Category = Different City)	
Same neighborhood	6.500*** (.893)
Same urban subdistrict	5.197*** (.917)
Same urban district	2.474*** (.782)
Different district of city	2.093** (.777)
Missing value	6.754*** (1.038)
Parent's Coresidence With a Son of Any Age	-.704** (.333)
Whether There is a Noncoresiding Son	.551 (.382)
Parent's Marital Status (Reference Category = Both Parents Alive)	
Widowed father	-1.609* (.718)
Widowed mother	-.485 (.583)
Parent's Number of Noncoresiding Children	1.359*** (.171)
Parent Poor health (Less Healthy Parent)	-.104 (.232)
Parent's Age (Older Parent)	.009 (.026)
Parent Working (Either Parent)	.543 (.399)
Parent's Education (Higher-Educated Parent)	.114 (.161)
Parent's Political Status (Either Parent)	.598 (.373)
City (Shanghai = 1)	-.341 (.379)
Constant	-2.582 (1.942)
R ²	.348

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Notes: $n = 589$. Standard errors are in parentheses. The mean number of visits per week is 4.609, with a standard deviation of 4.771.

Third, "whether there is a noncoresiding son" is not significant. But parent's marital status and gender do affect the help they receive from their offspring. Widowed mothers (but not widowed fathers) get more help from children than do parent couples. Because there is no effect of more direct indicators of need, we do not interpret this difference in terms of greater needs of widowed mothers. Some studies of the United States, which also find this difference, have linked it not so much to the widow's need for help as to her greater willingness to request or accept help (Spitze and Logan 1990). An alternative explanation is that children may have stronger ties to mothers than to fathers, which is consistent with our analysis of contact.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Coresidence continues to be the core of support relationships between parents and adult offspring in much of East Asia, including China, because it represents an intimate and prevalent tie. It has been widely assumed that coresidence would naturally decline in importance relative to ties to noncoresident offspring, as the levels of coresidence themselves declined over time (even though changes in the last two decades seem to have been modest). Our findings show that although most parents still live with one of their adult offspring, noncoresident children in two major Chinese cities live close to parents, maintain high levels of face-to-face contact with parents, and provide help on a regular basis to parents. Furthermore, these children's ties with parents are not greatly altered by whether parents live with another child. If these ties are altered, it is in terms of somewhat fewer visits, but not less help. Hence, the most important implication of this study is that more attention should be given to these relationships.

Our more specific results provide insight into the Chinese case. Consider first the question of proximity, which is an essential predictor of contact and help. Although it is widely believed that housing allocation is highly politicized, we found no proximity advantage for parents who are party members or administrative cadres. Proximity appears to hinge in part on children's occupational achievement, indicated by parents' or children's education: Higher-educated children are more likely to move farther away than are lower-educated children. There is also a bias toward living closer to sons—comparable to the gender bias previously found for coresidence.

With respect to both contact and assistance, we also anticipated gender differences favoring closer ties with sons than with daughters, representing the patrilocal tradition of Chinese society. There is significantly greater contact between sons and their own parents than between daughters and their own parents (or any dyad including in-laws). But, compared with parents who have sons, parents with no sons have as much contact with all of their offspring combined and receive as much regular help from offspring.

Another theoretical issue important to Chinese society is how intergenerational relationships respond to parents' or offspring's needs and expectations. Previous research had

TABLE 5. OLS REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS PREDICTING HELP RECEIVED FROM ALL NONCORESIDING CHILDREN: NUMBER OF TASKS WITH AT LEAST MONTHLY HELP

Variable	B
Proximity to Nearest Child (Reference Category = Different City)	
Same neighborhood	.971* (.409)
Same urban subdistrict	.561 (.421)
Same urban district	.757* (.359)
Different district of city	.505 (.357)
Missing value	.465 (.477)
Parent's Coresidence With a Son of Any Age	-.148 (.153)
Whether There is a Noncoresiding Son	-.163 (.175)
Parent Marital Status (Reference Category = Both Parents Alive)	
Widowed father	-.180 (.330)
Widowed mother	.636* (.268)
Parent's Number of Noncoresiding Children	.203** (.078)
Parent Poor Health (Less Healthy Parent)	.120 (.107)
Parent's Age (Older Parent)	.013 (.012)
Parent's Working (Either Parent)	.158 (.183)
Parent's Education (Higher-Educated Parent)	.005 (.073)
Parent's Political Status (Either Parent)	-.034 (.171)
City (Shanghai = 1)	-1.316*** (.173)
Constant	-.301 (.892)
R ²	.176

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Notes: The mean number of tasks with monthly help is 1.278, with a standard deviation of 1.949. Standard errors are in parentheses.

shown that coresidence was affected by indicators of parents' needs and resources but not by those of their offspring. It is somewhat surprising, then, that we find no effects of parents' age or health on proximity, contact, or help. In these respects, contact and help might be interpreted as invariant. Perhaps help to parents represents not parental needs but filial obligation. That is, every child must demonstrate respect, regardless of the parents' needs or whether other children are available to provide help to parents. We do not mean to say that more frequent contact or help cannot also serve the parents' needs, only that it does not necessarily do so. And some kinds of help, such as financial aid to parents with no pension or only a small retirement income, have a strong instrumental component. Yet, this purpose is publicly expressed within an ideology of respect and filial piety. A weekly visit, a token gift, or regular help with some aspect of shopping or household care can be more symbolic than instrumental.

Further work on these questions will yield additional insights into the character of the Chinese family. Our study has been limited to two major urban centers, and we would be especially interested in similar studies of South China, where market reforms sponsored by the state seem to have pressed social change at a more rapid pace. More important will be to develop a time dimension in which changing family relations can be directly documented. The Chinese family is enmeshed in processes whose impacts remain to be assessed. The first offspring of the one-child family era are reaching adulthood, and parents and children will begin to experience its consequences: What happens to gender preferences if parents have only a son or a daughter? Will most offspring still live apart from parents, or will most parents continue to live with their only child? What then will be the implications for relations with noncoresident offspring? This study provides a baseline for longitudinal comparisons designed to answer such questions.

REFERENCES

- Bumpass, L.L. 1994. "A Comparative Analysis of Coresidence and Contact with Parents in Japan and the United States." Pp. 221-46 in *Tradition and Change in the Asian Family*, edited by L.-J. Cho and M. Yada. Honolulu: East-West Center.
- Choe, C.-S. 1987. "Family and Kinship Organization." P. 690 in *Introduction to Korean Studies*. Seoul: National Academy of Sciences.
- Davis-Friedmann, D. 1991. *Long Lives: Chinese Elderly and the Communist Revolution*. Revised ed. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Freedman, M. 1958. *Lineage Organization in Southeastern China*. London: The Athlone Press.
- . 1966. *Chinese Lineage and Society: Fukien and Kwangtung*. New York: Humanities Press.
- Hermalin, A.I., M.B. Ofstedal, and L. Chi. 1992. "Kin Availability of the Elderly in Taiwan: Who is Available and Where are They?" Comparative Study of the Elderly in Asia No. 92-18. Population Studies Center, University of Michigan.
- Hermalin, A.I., M.B. Ofstedal, and M.-L. Lee. 1992. "Characteris-

- tics of Children and Intergenerational Transfers." Comparative Study of the Elderly in Asia No. 92-21. Population Studies Center, University of Michigan.
- Hu, R. and N. Ye. 1991. *The Elderly Survey of Nine Chinese Cities in 1988*. China: Tianjin Education Press.
- Ikels, C. 1993. "Settling Accounts: The Intergenerational Contract in an Age of Reform." Pp. 307-34 in *Chinese Families in the Post-Mao Era*, edited by D. Davis and S. Harrell. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Knodel, J., N. Chayovan, and S. Siriboon. 1992. "The Familial Support System of Thai Elderly: An Overview." Comparative Study of the Elderly in Asia No. 92-13. Population Studies Center, University of Michigan.
- Koyama, T. 1970. "Rural-Urban Comparison of Kinship Relations in Japan." Pp. 318-37 in *Families in East and West*, edited by R. Hill and R. Koning. Paris: Mouton.
- Lavelly, W. and X. Ren. 1992. "Patrilocality and Early Marital Co-residence in Rural China, 1955-85." *China Quarterly* 130:378-91.
- Lee, Y.-J., W.L. Parish, and R.J. Willis. 1994. "Sons, Daughters, and Intergenerational Support for the Elderly in Taiwan." *American Journal of Sociology* 99:1010-41.
- Levy, M. 1949. *The Family Revolution in Modern China*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Lillard, L.A. and R.J. Willis. 1997. "Motives for Intergenerational Transfers: Evidence from Malaysia." *Demography* 34:115-34.
- Logan, J.R. and Y. Bian. 1993. "Inequalities in Access to Community Resources in a Chinese City." *Social Forces* 72:555-76.
- Logan, J.R., F. Bian, and Y. Bian. Forthcoming. "Tradition and Change in the Urban Chinese Family: The Case of Living Arrangements." *Social Forces*.
- Logan, J.R. and G. Spitze. 1996. *Family Ties: Enduring Relations Between Parents and Their Adult Children*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Long, S.O. 1987. *Family Change and the Life Course in Japan*. Ithaca, NY: China-Japan Program, Cornell University.
- Martin, L.G. 1990. "Changing Intergenerational Family Relations in East Asia." *Annals of the American Association of Political and Social Science* 510:102-14.
- Martin, L.G. and N.O. Tsuya. 1991. "Interactions of Middle-Aged Japanese with Their Parents." *Population Studies* 45:299-311.
- Morioka, K. 1968. "Life History and Social Participation of the Families Living in a Public Housing Project in a Tokyo Suburb." *Journal of Social Sciences (Japan)* 7:199-275.
- Okamura, K. 1984. "Reciprocities between Elderly Mothers and Their Middle Aged Daughters in Separated Households." *Social Gerontology* 19:106-97.
- Pan, Y. and N. Lin. 1987. "Zhongguo Chengshi Xiandai Jiating Moshi" (A Model of Contemporary Chinese Urban Families). *Shehuixue Yanjiu (Sociological Research)* 3:61.
- Spitze, G. and J. Logan. 1990. "Sons, Daughters, and Intergenerational Social Support." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 52:420-30.
- Stacey, J. 1983. *Patriarchy and Socialist Revolution in China*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Sun, T.-H. and Y.-H. Liu. 1994. "Changes in Intergenerational Relations in the Chinese Family: Taiwan's Experience." Pp. 319-61 in *Tradition and Change in the Asian Family*, edited by L.-T. Cho and M. Yada. Honolulu: East-West Center.
- Unger, J. 1993. "Urban Families in the Eighties: An analysis of Chinese Surveys." Pp. 25-49 in *Chinese Families in the Post-Mao Era*, edited by D. Davis and S. Harrell Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Wolf, M. 1972. *Women and the Family in Rural Taiwan*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Yang, H. 1996. "The Distributive Norm of Monetary Support to Older Parents: A Look at a Township in China." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 58:404-15.