

## CHINESE TERMS REFERRING TO THE FAMILY AND KINSHIP

WANG YUN

SWPS UNIVERSITY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES  
WARSAW

The article is concerned with Chinese terms describing the family and kinship through different periods of Chinese history. On the basis of Chinese classical literature, works of the most famous Chinese anthropologist – Fei Xiaotong during the first half of the XX century and contemporary anthropological studies, it makes summary of most important from them and describe the family and kinship structures to which they refer.

\* \* \*

Tematem niniejszego artykułu są pojęcia używane na określenie rodziny i jej członków w różnych okresach historii chińskiej. Zostały one przeanalizowane na podstawie odwołania do chińskiej literatury klasycznej, badań wsi chińskiej wykonanych w latach trzydziestych i czterdziestych XX wieku przez jednego z najwybitniejszych chińskich uczonych – Fei Xiaotonga oraz ustaleń współczesnych antropologów kulturowych i obserwacji autorki niniejszego tekstu.

**Key words:** Chinese terms, the family, kinship, 家*jiā*, 宗族*zōngzú*, 家族*jiāzú*, 家庭*jiātíng*, 大家庭*dàjiātíng*

Chinese kinship structures were a basic of the Chinese society. Like all social institutions they were changing and evolving. Their structure was expressed through multiple terms, whose connotations were changing along with the changes of the society. In my article I made a sketch of most important of them from three perspectives. The first one is Chinese classical literature, the second is the Chinese society as it was presented by Fei Xiaotong's research published in 1930s and 1940s, and the third is their usage in contemporary China as described by contemporary anthropological researchers and my own observations.

It should be noted that the Chinese language in this paper indicates 汉语*hànyǔ* (literal meaning: 汉*Hàn* language), a common language mainly shared by the 汉*Hàn* ethnic groups (who constitute the majority of China's population), widely known as Mandarin language. The Chinese terms which I investigate are originally written in 汉字*hànzì* (literal meaning: 汉*Hàn* characters), the written form of 汉语*hànyǔ*.

Materials in oral form are adopted from 普通话 *pǔtōnghuà*, the spoken language of modern 汉语 *hànyǔ*<sup>1</sup>. The descriptions of Chinese society in the article represent the majority of 汉 *Hàn* Chinese community.

TERMS REFERRING TO THE FAMILY  
IN ANCIENT LITERATURE

A wide diversity of terms have been used in Chinese language with regard to the family throughout history, until present times. The variety of the terms should not only be taken as a result of language change, but also as a reflection of the changes in dynamics of the family structure as society has undergone change.

**家 *jiā***

The word 家 *jiā* was used to refer to a family house or residence, and also applied to name a kinship group with no regard to its scale. In some places, the term was also used as a verb which referred to setting up a home.

1. house

之子于归，宜其家室 *Zhīzǐ yú guī, yí qí jiā shì*

This young lady is going to her future home,

And will order well her chamber and house. (诗经 周南 桃夭 *Shijing Zhōunán Táoyāo*)

2. the family

四海之内若一家，通达之属莫不从服 *Sihǎi zhī nèi ruò yījiā, tōngdá zhī shǔ mòbù cóng fú*

If the world will merge into one family, there would be no one who would disobey.

(荀子 儒效 *Xúnzi Rúxiào*)

3. setting at somewhere

平原君为人辩有口，刻廉刚直，家于长安。

Pingyuanjun is skilled in mouth and upright. He lives at Chang'an.

(史记·酈生陆贾列传 *Shiji·Li shēng lù jiǎ lièzhuàn*)

**族 *zú***

The term 族 *zú* was generally applied for the lineal kinship.

宫之奇以其族行 *Gōng zhī qí yǐ qí zú xíng*

Gong Zhiqi leads his kin. (左传 僖公 *Zuǒzhuàn Xī gōng*)

<sup>1</sup> A detailed introduction of Hanyu see Künstler 1970.

九族*jiǔzú* literally means nine 族*zú*, i.e. nine generations of relatives from great-great-grand father down to great-great-grand son (Qu Tongzu 1961). There are different interpretations of 九族*jiǔzú* in Chinese history. The 古文说*Gǔwénshuō* (Older interpretation), defined the nine grades of relation in the paternal line. This is the understanding I am applying in this paper (Qian Hang 2011, 171–179). 今文说*Jīnwénshuō* (contemporary school of interpretation), defines the nine grades of relations to be four generations from the paternal line, three from the maternal line, and two from the wife's (Qian Hang 2011, 179–192). In this case a signal of bilateralization of the hitherto strict patrilineality can be found. Yet another interpretation suggests that the “nine” figuratively stands for a large number in the Chinese speech and culture. Historically it has been used to denote a collective capital extermination of living kin of a state offender. It was a brutal, but seldom exercised execution of laws (For more explanation of the custom see Qu Tongzu 1961, 16–17).

### 宗族*zōngzú*

The term 宗族*zōngzú* is composed of two terms which are 宗*zōng* and 族*zú*. According to 说文解字*Shuōwénjiězì*, 宗*zōng* refers to architecture in the use of sacrifice. The character 宗*zōng* used to write it is a pictogram. It combines two parts, with “a roof” as the upper part, symbolizing an architecture, and “a ritual of sacrifice” as the lower part. As I already mentioned, the term 族*zú* in Chinese historical context points to patrilineal groups. Together with the term 宗*zōng*, the form 宗族*zōngzú*, amplifies the meaning of a patrilineal kinship group to the position of an established social institution. Chinese historian Qian Hang claims that this institution had been gradually formed, starting from the 11<sup>th</sup> century BC, and its final shape came from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC (Qian 2009, 6). 宗族*Zōngzú* functioned as the basis of the 宗法*zōngfǎ* institution<sup>2</sup>. 宗族*Zōngzú* has been recorded in various sources since ancient times. Qian Hang has attempted to explain the topic. According to him, 尔雅*Ēryǎ*, the oldest surviving Chinese encyclopedia (from about the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC), defined the term 宗族*zōngzú* for the first time. It reads “父之党，为宗族*Fù zhī dǎng, wèi zōngzú*”, which means that the kinship based on the patrilineal lineage is 宗族*zōngzú*. Next, forty-six pairs of kinship relations within 宗族*zōngzú* were systematically listed. All the listed relations can be classed into one lineal group and five collateral groups. It is made clear in his book that 宗族*zōngzú* is formed according to the patrilineal principle but not necessarily of blood relations. What is more, it also implies the scale – the kinship order – as the limits of a 宗族*zōngzú* at the time. However, this definition was considered to be insufficient by Qian Hang in the sense that it lacked a crucial

<sup>2</sup> 宗法*Zōngfǎ* is a term describing political influence in which the degree of political power is determined by the degree of kinship relations with ruling dynasty.

portion of information about the term. First of all, it did not mention the co-residence form of 宗族 *zōngzú*, which is one of the two core features of the organization. Another deficiency was that it failed to describe the function of the group.

The deficiencies were erased by the great historian Ban Gu (32–92 AD) of the *Donghan* kingdom (25–220 AD). In *Testimonies on the White Tiger Hall* (*Báihǔ tōng* 白虎通, 79 AD), which is a book containing collected interpretation of the Confucian classics made by Confucian scholars of the time, compiled by him, several paragraphs of it were especially dedicated to 宗族 *zōngzú*.

宗者，何谓也？宗者，尊也 为先族主者，宗人之所尊也。

Zōng zhě, héwèi yě? Zōng zhě, zūn yě. Wèi xiān zú zhǔ zhě, zōng rén zhī suǒ zūn yě.

Who is [great] ancestor? [great] ancestor is someone respected. Because he is the head of kin before us. All people respect him. (白虎通疏证 宗族 *Báihǔ tōng shū zhèng Zōngzú*)

Ban Gu not only gave a more comprehensive definition of the term, but he also examined its function. The definition was made in two parts, explaining two components of the term. 宗 *zōng* was interpreted in two ways. One was as the symbol of the deceased patrilineal ancestor as I mentioned above<sup>3</sup>. To this, Ban Gu had added another interpretation, claiming that the term could also illustrate a level of respect to ancestors. In this sense, the word 宗 *zōng* meant the respect paid to one's deceased ancestors from the patrilineal side. He then continued pointing out the two functions of the term 宗 *zōng*, that is: to cultivate harmony within the 宗族 *zōngzú* and to help administer its members. Thus, the common ancestor offers a common foundation of the identity for members of 宗族 *zōngzú*, which become united as a social entity. Besides this, the 宗族 *zōngzú* contains a prescribed order to determine the lineal distance to the ancestor as well as a social distance to other members of the unit. The shorter the genealogical distance one holds to the ancestor, the higher the status and the more power one has.

While emphasizing the genealogy of the 宗族 *zōngzú*, *Testimonies on the White Tiger Hall* also contains an introduction to the term 族 *zú*. This generally pertains to a group, understood as a form of co-residence, which is customary for the 宗族 *zōngzú* members. Ban Gu did not stop here though. He made a further elaboration of an abstract meaning of 族 *zú*. He argued that the word still had a symbolic meaning as a sort of way (道 *dào*) which guides people living together and arranged around a practical business. That is the concrete life style of the members of the 族 *zú*. For example, they have the wish and obligation to care about each other, obey the hierarchy within the group, and although living separately as a rule, they are expected to assemble and function as one entity when a need arises.

After analyzing the two parts separately, Ban Gu provides us with a comprehensive definition of the term 宗族 *zōngzú*. It is presumably a group formed by people from the

<sup>3</sup> Usually in the form of the wood tablets with the name and the birth date of a deceased person.

same patrilineal kinship line, living in a neighborhood, and obliged to certain interactive responsibilities. There is a mutual dependence and help anticipation between the group members. For the 汉 *Hàn* (Chinese) people, 宗族 *zōngzú* has been not only an actual residence form, it also means a life style, an obligation to fulfill a series of social expectations, e.g. unconditional mutual interdependence among the group members subjected to an inner hierarchy<sup>4</sup>.

Summarizing, the ancient Chinese terms, 家 *jiā* is a general word for the family and kinship system. It is equal to terms family and kinship in English but in addition provides prescriptions for behavior, whereas the term 宗族 *zōngzú* refers to the Chinese patriarchal lineage which used to be the dominant form of family institution through much of the Chinese history.

#### FEI XIAOTONG'S FAMILY STUDIES

Anthropology as a research subject in China started during the 1920s, and the 1940s was the first period of its maturation. After that, because of the political situation, the subject largely remained the same from the beginning of 1950s to the late 1970s, although research was carried out, albeit with varying intensity (Xing 2003, 18). Due to this, the results achieved by researchers in the 1930s and 1940s later have become both important and unique. Learning with the renowned B. Malinowski, he developed his teacher's functional method in his works about rural life in the south of the lower reach of the Yangzi River during the 1930s and 1940s. His most important books are *The peasant life in China* (1939) and *From the soil: The foundations of Chinese society* (1948), both are milestone works in Chinese anthropological studies.

Five terms are commonly applied for the family in Fei's book. They are 家 *jiā*, 家庭 *jiātíng*, 大家庭 *dàjiātíng*, 家族 *jiāzú*, and 宗族 *zōngzú*. Three traditional terms I have introduced above and two other – 家庭 *jiātíng* and 大家庭 *dàjiātíng* are the products of the Chinese language modernization movement of the 1920s in China. 家庭 *jiātíng* has been used as the counterpart of the family and the term 大家庭 *dàjiātíng* is the combination of word “da”, literally meaning large and the word 家庭 *jiātíng*. The term 家庭 *jiātíng*, 大家庭 *dàjiātíng* has been used to point to a Chinese family, which is usually bigger in size than the western nuclear family. Thus, it (imprecisely) equals an extended family.

In his works, Fei tried to search for the real connotation of the terms referring to the family. In his first book in English in 1939, he claims that “the 家 *jiā* is a small kinship group consisting of a family as its nucleus and several dependent relatives” (Fei 1939, 29). He applied the word “expanded” to family to describe such a group. By using the expanded word, he emphasizes that the family is usually bigger than its

<sup>4</sup> To read more on Zongzu, see Qian Hang 宗族的世系学研究.

English nuclear counterpart. The reason of this enlarged form is the habit that sons usually keep living at their parents' home immediately after their marriage. In the local language, this kind of kinship is also commonly referred as 大家庭 *dà jiātíng*, literally this could be translated as "large family". In his later work, Fei made a correction on this issue; considering the structure of the 家 *jiā* in the Yangtze Valley, he argued that a better term for describing such form of kinship group should be 小家族 *xiǎojiāzú*:

"I suggest this new term because I want to clarify the difference in the structural principles of Chinese and Western "families". The difference between the so-called big and small family is not one of size, not one concerning the number of people who can be included, but one of structure. Structurally, Chinese families are lineages (家族 *jiāzú*) ... I will use the term small lineage (小家族 *xiǎojiāzú*) to indicate a single-lineage social group. Small and large lineages rest on the same structural principles, but they differ in number and in size. That is why I prefer not to use the term large family (大家庭 *dà jiātíng*) to identify a lineage. By using the term small lineage (小家族 *xiǎojiāzú*), I emphasize the structural characteristics of the Chinese family and not just the size" (Fei 1939, 81, 83).

In the time of Fei's studies the average size of the 族 *zú* contained eight families (Fei 1939, 85). However, the range of the term was far from rigorous and is a much more of a ritual group than a fixed group. Fei noticed that during the different anniversary occasions, different 族 *zú* members attended the event, all depending on the intention and the affluence of the host family. There was a social expectation to invite many 族 *zú* kins, but often only the closer kin actually appeared.

He also examined the function of 族 *zú* from the functional aspect. Besides the function of child-bearing and caring, 族 *zú* had other functions which made it a more coherent social organization. They included education, economic cooperation, and ritual obligations, etc. One 族 *zú* often used to own a common property, fields, houses for rent, a school, sacral commemorative compartment, and a cemetery whose aim was to benefit all the members as more complicated affairs needed more people to cooperate. Thus, this is why 族 *zú* connotes a bigger size than even the most extended family in the West.

Observed from the aspect of the structure, one may get an impression that 家庭 *jiātíng* (nuclear family) is either a hidden, independent, or even nonexistent unit. In fact, 家庭 *jiātíng* is included in 家族 *jiāzú*. "The smallest lineage may, in fact is, equal to a nuclear family household" (Fei 2004, 55). No matter the size of the 家族 *jiāzú*, they share the same patriarchal principle. It is worth mentioning that Szykiewicz (1992) argues that a nuclear family did not exist in early times as a separate functional unit, and that the basic family unit was 大家庭 *dàjiātíng*.

Returning to the question of the essence of the Chinese 家 *jiā*, Fei argues that 小家族 *xiǎojiāzú*, instead of 家庭 *jiātíng* 大家庭 *dàjiātíng* could reflect its real structural characteristic (Fei 2004, 53–55). In his work, 族 *zú* and 家族 *jiāzú* are used as equivalent terms and 家 *jiā* stands for the English term "family", while 族 *zú* and 家族 *jiāzú* additionally denote patrilineage.

## CONTEMPORARY TERMS REFERRING TO THE FAMILY

Different from ancient Chinese, the terms which refer to the family in contemporary Chinese language are more variable both in numbers and forms. According to my experience as a native Chinese language user, four words are frequently used: 家 *jiā*, 家庭 *jiātíng*, 大家庭 *dàjiātíng* and 家族 *jiāzú*. The connotations of these words are to some degree overlapping, but each has its specific use. In common speech, 家 *jiā* is generally applied to a normal, small family; 家庭 *jiātíng* on official occasions; 大家庭 *dàjiātíng* is used to refer to larger families, more numerous than a normal small one; and 家族 *jiāzú* is used to refer to lineage, usually seen in scholarly texts and literature. The two last terms tend to develop in a bilateral direction. Certain connections amongst them can be noticed and it is necessary to clarify these in order to identify their meaning.

家 *jiā*

Along with its most frequently used ancient connotations which were already mentioned above, the term 家 *jiā* is still widely used both in daily communications and written language. In modern Chinese, the sense of the word is much more manifold than before. So far *The Modern Chinese Dictionary* has listed more than ten of its applications, including family, home and residence, a family or a single person engaged in certain trade, specialist in a certain field, school of thought, domestic etc. (*Modern Chinese Dictionary* 现代汉语词典 2009, 653). The dictionary has listed its two senses which relate to the family, that is to say the family, and home and place of residence, which are the two most frequently used meanings out of eleven. The word 家 *jiā* in the sense of family or home is used mostly in common speech, while rather rarely used in written language or in formal occasions. This is attested by the research Center For Chinese Linguistics of the Peking University (CCL).

The CCL is a data base of samples from printed literature. The use of 家 *jiā* as a keyword suggests that the two meaning items (family and home) constitute a minor share of results when compared with other functions of the term. Thus, it is reasonable to claim that 家 *jiā*, in the sense of family, is more likely to be used in oral conversations rather than as a formal word of the same connotation.

Sample sentences used by Chinese users serve as good examples to directly demonstrate how the terms are applied.

## 1. Family

It has been mentioned above that when applied to the family, the term 家 *jiā* does not give an explicit implication of the size of the family, similarly to its ancient usage. According to *Modern Chinese Dictionary* one can simply describe one's family by saying: 他家有五口人 *Tā jiā yǒu wǔ kǒu rén* ["His family has five people"]. Here



家*jiā* is equal to the common understanding of the English word *family*, which usually refers to a small nuclear family. But it should not be any shock if anyone come across such an expression in modern Chinese literature, saying: 张家和王家是亲戚 *Zhāngjiā hé Wángjiā shì qīnqī*<sup>5</sup> [“The Zhang family and the Wang family are relatives”]. How to understand the family (家*jiā*) in the sentence depends greatly on the context. The 家*jiā* here could be a nuclear family, a stem family or the Zhang’s lineage and Wang’s lineage. All the three forms exist in social structures.

2. Home, the family place of residence

回家 *huíjiā* [“go home”];

我的家在上海 *Wǒ de jiā zài shànghǎi*. [“My home is in Shanghai” or “My family live in Shanghai”].

3. Function as a morpheme

Together with other morphemes, it can be used to construct words meaning family or domestic. In the first category, it is used as an attributive which modifies the noun morpheme after: 家人 *jiārén* [family members]; 家长 *jiāzhǎng* [family head]; 家谱 *jiāpǔ* [a genealogy book].

In the second category of words, 家*jiā* is combined with different words, which all relate to family: 家庭 *jiāting* [family] where *ting* means the yard or main hall of the family; 家户 *jiāhù* [household in a scholarly context]; 国家 *guójiā* [a country]<sup>6</sup>.

### 家庭 *jiāting*

It could be possible that it was the ambiguous meaning of the term 家*jiā* that urged the emergence of the new term. The word 家庭 *jiāting* is generally applied for the normal small family in more official occasions rather than in common speech where the term 家*jiā* dominates. The term constantly appears in the state laws on the family, and this serves as a good argument for the previous judgement.

Compared with 家*jiā*, the word 家庭 *jiāting* has a limited range of meanings. Through analyzing the searching results of the term in CCL, it was found that it is generally used in two ways, as an independent word which refers to family, e.g.

国家、社会、学校、家庭，依法保障适龄儿童，不分性别、种族，应当接受规定年限的义务教育。 *Guójiā, shèhuì, xuéxiào, jiāting, yīfǎ bǎozhàng shìlíng értóng, bù fēn xìngbié, zhǒngzú, yīngdāng jiēshòu guīdìng niánxiàn de yìwù jiàoyù.*

The state, community, school and families shall, in accordance with the law, safeguard the right to compulsory education of school-age children and adolescents. (*Compulsory Education Law of the People’s Republic of China* Article 4).

<sup>5</sup> Both *Zhang* and *Wang* are the most popular surnames in China.

<sup>6</sup> The formation of the word 国家 *guójiā* is commonly interpreted as a metaphor that a country is like a family for its people.



家庭 *jiāting* is also the term applied by Chinese scholars to define a family:

家庭是以婚姻和血缘关系为纽带的社会生活组织形式 *jiāting shì yì hūnyīn hé xiěyuán guānxì wèi niūdài de shèhuì shēnghuó zǔzhī xíngshì*. Here, the family is a social grouping based on marital union and blood ties (Pan Yunkang 1986).

The other function of the word 家庭 *jiāting* is when applied as an attributive before other nouns, meaning the “family’s...” which are widely applied in official documents e.g.

家庭关系 *jiāting guānxì* family relationship

家庭财产 *jiāting cáichǎn* family property

家庭制度 *jiāting zhìdù* family institution

### 家庭 *jiāting* 大家庭 *dàjiāting*

As stated in the review of Fei ‘s family studies, 大家庭 *dàjiāting* is used by people in daily life to refer to their kinship beyond the nuclear family. Compared with his research conducted in the 1940s, people now tend to apply the word in a more flexible way.

Generally, two interpretations could be made for this word semantically. One refers to a large sized family, which need not necessary have a complicated family structure, but which does have relatively more numerous members, e.g. families consisting of parents and three, four, or even more children, which are already relatively large in scale among contemporary Chinese families due to restrictions on procreation. The other refers to a group of close kin, which consists of at least a nuclear family and another member. There, the word “big” in the term is applied to account for the complexity of the family structure, whereas, the range of the group varies, greatly depending on individual’s personal feeling and judgement. The latter is of our interest here, in a sense of “the big family” applied for an ambiguous kinship which more or less equals to the western concept of the “extended family” when Chinese people refer to kin clusters in common speech.

My field studies have verified this finding. When asked how many family members do they have, the Chinese informants rarely responded without hesitation. Instead, they would require a clearer range of the family by asking back in return: “you mean *the big family* or *the small family*”? If they were encouraged to give the answer as they like, they would probably offer two versions, with *the small family* almost exactly referring to their nuclear family while answers for the *the big family* remained ambiguous. Generally, the answers for the latter covered grandparents, uncles, aunts, siblings, first cousins etc. from either the patrilineal or matrilineal side, but were mostly automatically categorized by the respondents in two systems. A typical pattern to answer the question would be “on my father’s side, there are ... and on my mother’s side...” The answers indicate a growing tendency to adopt the concept of bilateral kinship in contemporary China.

No matter how the term is interpreted, the application of this new word implied the changing concept of the family for Chinese people. That is to say, the small size 家庭 *jiātíng*, i.e. the nuclear family, has become the de facto reference point of understandings of the family for Chinese people. Furthermore, the widely used term 大家庭 *dàjiātíng* is used to describe the family which is over the normal small (nuclear) family size, which also points to a changing idea of the family.

It is widely accepted by scholars that the scale of the traditional Chinese family was limited by its property. This limitation made the big five-generation family only an ideal rather than a fact during most of Chinese history. For example, even though the desire for a big family was a social fact which was highly supported by the social and political institutions in imperial China, the average household was also rarely larger than five people in the 18th century (Wang 2009, 128). However, the term 家 *jiā* at the time was used, above all, in the sense of the big extended family and at the same time the small family had no a particular name. The present appearances of the words 家庭 *jiātíng* and 大家庭 *dàjiātíng* are signals of the changing of the understanding of family structure for Chinese people.

### 宗族 *zōngzú* and 家族 *jiāzú*

Anthropologists have examined the two groupings, investigating their existing forms and integration with the contemporary social life. Another task of anthropologists when studying the two terms in the Chinese society, regardless of their original intention, lies with the theoretical interests. That is, how the Chinese family system – in terms of a local knowledge – meets or challenges the existing family theories found globally. However, no matter from which aspect, the definitions of the terms are being highly essentialised. It is from here where the differences of the definition emerge and disagreements have materialised.

Generally, 宗族 *zōngzú* is the special term for a Chinese patrilineage institution. The definition of the term is rather clear and stable, and has been over the span of history. Currently, the word is a largely a scholarly term and not used in people's daily speech. The other term, 家族 *jiāzú*, without an explicit historical academic root, as is the case with the word 宗族 *zōngzú*, functions as an ambiguous word which refers to a large Chinese family in a general sense. Thus it has been understood by scholars in a very different way.

Some scholars, e.g. Zhu Fenghan (1990), Zheng Zhenman (1992), Xu Yangjie (1992; 1995) claim that there are no strict differences between 家族 *jiāzú* and 宗族 *zōngzú*, and consequently they used both terms synonymously. Feng Erkang (1994) argues that Chinese 宗族 *zōngzú* or 家族 *jiāzú* should include four elements, the patrilineal relationship among its members, based on families as its basic units, co-residence or relatively stable residence location and being registered under the state family administration.

Other researchers argue that the two terms should be distinguished from the perspective of differing aspects. Xie Jichang (1984) and Qian Hang (1990) argue the two terms represent two ways of generalization of two important types of social relationships. 宗族 *zōngzú* stresses the consanguinity – beyond a genealogical principle, while the term 家族 *jiāzú* stresses the relationship formed by marriage and birth. Translated into English, 宗族 *zōngzú* is the counter-part for “lineage” or “Chinese lineage” while 家族 *jiāzú*, is a counterpart of the family. In this case, it stresses that patrilineage is organized along the lineal principle, while the family includes a new aspect of consanguinity through the wife, that is, there is an affinity.

The second opinion held by researchers like Shi Yilong (2011) is that 家族 *jiāzú* is the branch organization of 宗族 *zōngzú*. During Shi’s anthropological field work in several villages in Fujian province, the region where 宗族 *zōngzú* used to be widely existed, found that the term is applied differently by people in daily life. In general, inside the 宗族 *zōngzú*, two levels of smaller groups could be identified: 房族 *fángzú* and 家族 *jiāzú*.

房族 *Fángzú* and 家族 *jiāzú* are sub-groups within a 宗族 *zōngzú*. If 宗族 *zōngzú* could be translated into English as Chinese patriarchal lineage, then accordingly 房族 *fángzú* and 家族 *jiāzú* could be called sub-lineages or smaller lineages within a bigger lineage, which follow the same patriarchal principle but on a somewhat reduced scale.

The formation of new 宗族 *zōngzú* is usually connected with population movements during history because of, for example, wars, disasters, state organized emigration, or individual choice etc. 宗族 *zōngzú* usually begins from the ancestor who was found, or believed to be, the first person who settled in the place which his descendants recognized as their site of origin. Everyone from the first ancestor to his latest descendants are counted as members of the same 宗族 *zōngzú*.

Generally, 家族 *jiāzú* is counted several generations up and down from the speaker. Thus, it is applied for the social organization formed by most close families or individuals in the sense of a patrilineal relationship. The common ancestor worship rituals in the villages in south China provinces, such as Hunan and Jiangxi etc. embrace five generations starting from the originating adult.

Beyond 家族 *jiāzú*, stemming from the first common ancestor of the whole 宗族 *zōngzú*, there can be several 房族 *fángzú*. Theoretically each new generation after the first ancestor could initiate a separate 房族 *fángzú*. But in practice new 房族 *fángzú* were identified mostly when a branch of the 宗族 *zōngzú* resettled in new location. Such a change in the family history was usually recorded in the genealogical book for the whole 宗族 *zōngzú*. It is worth mentioning that there are usually smaller “房 *fáng*” which are unwritten but exist in people’s minds, particularly in elders<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> It is also worth mentioning that sometimes, above the concept of “房 *fáng*” there remains “房派 *fángpài*”, graded at a higher rank. It consists of several “房 *fáng*” and is used in genealogical books. Essentially, it is a “房 *fáng*” but contains relatively more generations.

In brief summary, 宗族 *zōngzú*, 房族 *fángzú*, and 家族 *jiāzú* are three similar kinship structures based on the patriarchal principle. 家族 *jiāzú* are the most fundamental units, which consist of different scales of 房族 *fángzú* that stem from one 宗族 *zōngzú*. From the speaker's point of view the kin from the same 家族 *jiāzú* are genealogically closer than the kin from the 房族 *fángzú*, while the rest of kin from his or her 宗族 *zōngzú* are yet further removed, though still forming one larger lineage.

Accordingly, the following categorization, which demonstrates the existence of the three structures within the kin space among habitants of Fujian, was listed by Shi Yilong. To make it clear, an introduction to another set of terms is necessary.

祠 *Cí* relates to memorial buildings that commemorate ancestors; 谱 *pǔ* means genealogical books; 同.....的 *tóng.....de* applies to people from the same kin group. They are used in creating the following three groups of terms as recorded by Shi:

宗祠 *zōngcí* / 宗谱 *zōng pǔ* / 同宗的 *tóngzōng de*  
 房祠 *fáng cí* / 房谱 *fáng pǔ* / 同房的 *tóngfáng de*  
 家祠 *jiā cí* / 家谱 *jiā pǔ* / 同家的 *tóng jiā de* (Shi and Chen 2011, 35-43.)

The most common methods are to build common memorial halls, compile genealogical books. The memorial hall dedicated to an ancestor of the whole 宗族 *zōngzú*, which additionally includes several earlier generations, is called 宗祠 *zōngcí*. Similarly, structures erected for ancestors of particular 房族 *fángzú* or of a 家族 *jiāzú* are called by the group's generic term supplemented with *-cí*. The same logic of word formation is followed in the naming of different segments in genealogical books.

Other members of a 宗族 *zōngzú* can also be categorized into different subgroups and named accordingly. Kins from the same 家族 *jiāzú*, 房族 *fángzú* or 宗族 *zōngzú* are thus called 同家的 *tóng jiā de*, 同房的 *tóngfáng de*, or 同宗的 *tóngzōng de*, disregarding particular relationships between individuals and pointing instead to kin groupings within the 宗族 *zōngzú*.

However, 家族 *jiāzú* and 宗族 *zōngzú* are used by scholars in different ways. There are opinions that 家族 *jiāzú* has a wider connotation than 宗族 *zōngzú*. As mentioned above, the Chinese word 族 *zú* means a sort of community, thus here the meaning of 家 *jiā* is extended to something larger than a nuclear family. However, Sun Benwen (1947) produces a historical perspective to argue the point that 家族 *jiāzú* not only includes patrilineal 族 *zú*, but also the mother's 族 *zú* and the wife's 族 *zú*, thus mixing the laterality with affinity. In this case 宗族 *zōngzú* would be a group of the same surname, while 家族 *jiāzú* does not, as it includes spouses. A similar voice also comes from the standpoint of contemporary social reality. Yang Shanhua and Liu Xiaojing have argued that given the fact of the growing importance of kinship practices from the mother's side in rural China, 家族 *jiāzú* should be defined as a patrilineal kinship together with the spouse's (Yang and Liu 2000, 84).

In short, it can be summarised that 宗族 *zōngzú* is the more scholarly term for the Chinese lineage. 家族 *jiāzú* is a term less scholarly, more common, and is interpreted in various ways. The actual meaning of 家族 *jiāzú* is, to a great degree, determined by the perception of individual researchers on the basis of changing term usage (and perhaps of local variations).

In this paper I have mainly focused on the research done by the Chinese scholars, as our crucial goal is to examine how Chinese family terms were, and continue to be interpreted by insiders. However, it should not be ignored that numerous studies dealing with kinship-related matters in both past and present contexts have been made by scholars from outside China (cf. Freedman 1970; Ebrey and Watson 1980; Brandtstädter and Santos 2009). In their works, the Chinese terms referring to the family were also observed and investigated.

#### CONCLUSION

In this paper I have reviewed the frequently used terms in Chinese that refer to the family. I am aware that these terms do not cover all the words that Chinese people apply in describing the family but they are the most typical ones.

Practically all Chinese terms applied for the family have their specific usages. 家 *jiā* is a term which has been used both in ancient times and in contemporary China. With great flexibility, it can include the various forms of family. 家庭 *jiāting* is a relatively new term and it is the official description of the family. It is usually applied for the common small family. The term is less often used by people in daily speech.

大家庭 *dàjiāting* is applied by the Chinese for relatively close kinship around their nuclear family. More and more Chinese intend to define the word from a bilateral perspective. The most difficult term to define is 宗族 *zōngzú*, which is an ancient term referring to the Chinese lineage. The term is rarely used in people's daily communication mostly because lineages disappear. Some scholars argue that 宗族 *zōngzú* as a social institution has barely survived in contemporary China. The current iteration of 宗族 *zōngzú* is a ritual group rather than an economic-oriented cooperating unit as it was before (Yue 1994). Nonetheless, considering that rituals have been restricted to patrilineal kin, it carries a meaning of a descent group with the kind of lineage. At present, the extent of such a lineage may vary greatly, and usage of the term itself is on the wane, despite the continued importance of ritual offerings to ancestors. It appears that the 宗 *zōng* remains the last resort of patrilineal family grouping and has now become only an imagined one. One thing that is certain is that in ancient times it extended to the most removed ancestor, revered by the congregation of those performing the ritual. However, it is not clear how far removed he was. Some researchers point to nine generations, but nine could also be merely an auspicious number rather than a symptomatic one.

Lastly, the term 家族 *jiāzú*, which in recent history generally referred to the smallest patrilineage around an extended form of several closely cooperating nuclear families, each being a separate 家 *jiā*. Along with the transformation that kinship obligations continue to undergo, 家族 *jiāzú* now tends to display a more evident bilateral connotation.

The usages of the new terms e.g. 家庭 *jiātíng* and 大家庭 *dàjiātíng* and the changing connotation of the traditional Chinese terms referring to the family imply the modernization of the Chinese family. The process can be summed up as the dual tendencies of minimization and bilateralization in Chinese family development.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Baker H. D. 1979. *Chinese Family and Kinship*. London and Basingstoke.
- Ban Gu. Baihutongyi. *Testimonies on the White Tiger Hall*. Chinese Text Project. <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=en&res=705209&remap=gb>, access: 19.06.2016.
- Brandtstädter S. and Santos G. (eds.) 2009. *Chinese Kinship*. Oxon.
- Book of Poetry*. Chinese Text Project. <https://ctext.org/book-of-poetry/odes-of-zhou-and-the-south>, access: 09.03.2018.
- Ebrey P. B. and Watson J. L. 1986. *Kinship organisation in Late Imperial China 1000–1940*. Berkeley.
- Fei Xiaotong. 1939. *Peasant Life in China*. London.
- Fei Xiaotong. 1948. *From the soil: The Foundations of The Chinese Society*. Shanghai.
- Fei Xiaotong. 2002. *From the soil: The Foundations of The Chinese Society*. Beijing.
- Fei Xiaotong. 2004. *From the soil: The Foundations of The Chinese Society*. Beijing.
- Feng Erkang 冯尔康. 1994. *Zhongguo zongzu shehui 中国宗族社会 [Chinese Clan Society]*. Hangzhou.
- Ferraro G. and Andreatta S. 2012. *Cultural Anthropology: An applied Perspective*. Cengage.
- Freedman M. 1970. (eds.) *Family and kinship in Chinese society*. Stanford.
- Künstler J. M. 1970. *Pismo chińskie (Chinese characters)*. Warszawa.
- Qian Hang. 1990. On the Formation of the Patrilineal Clan System Ancient China. *Quarterly Journal of the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences* 1, 145–151.
- Qian Hang 钱杭. 2009. *Zhongguo zongzushi Yanjiu Rumu 中国宗族研究入门 [An Introduction to the Chinese Clan Studies]*. Shanghai.
- Qian Hang 钱杭. 2011. *Zongzude shixixue yanjiu 宗族的世系学研究 [Lineage Research of Chinese Clan]*. Shanghai.
- Qu Tongzu. 1961. *Law and society in traditional China*. Hamburg.
- Shen Yifei. 2013. *Ifamily: Individual, Family and the State in the modernization of urban China*. Shanghai.
- Shi Yilong. and Chen Xingui. 2011. Review and Reflection: Chinese Lineage Studies in Anthropological Perspective. *World Ethno-National Studies*. 2011(4), 35–43.
- Shi Yilong 石奕龙. 2007. *Zongzu yu jiazhu: liangge butongde gainian yu zhichengfanwei 宗族与家族：两个不同的概念与指称范围 [Zongzu and jiazhu: two different concepts and categories]*. In Li Youmei(ed.) *Jiangcun diaocha yu xinnongcun jianshe yanjiu 江村调查与新农村建设研究 [A survey in Jiangcun village and studies on Constructing New Rural Area Movement]*. Shanghai.



- Sima Qian 司马迁. *Shiji* 史记. Chinese Text Project. <https://ctext.org/shiji/ping-yuan-jun-yu-qing-lie-zhuan/ens>, access: 09.03.2018.
- Sun Benwen 孙本文. 1947. *Xiandai Zhongguo shehui wenti* 现代中国社会问题 [Social problems in contemporary China]. Shanghai.
- Szynkiewicz S. 1992. *Pokrewieństwo*. Warszawa.
- Tang Can. 2010. A Review of Modernization Theory and Its Development on Family. *Sociological Studies* 3, 199–222.
- The Dictionary Editing Office of the Institute of Linguistics CASS. 2009. *Xiandai hanyu cidian* 现代汉语词典 [Modern Chinese Dictionary]. Beijing.
- Wang Yuesheng. 2009. *The analysis of the changes of the Chinese Family Structure*. Beijing.
- Xie Jichang 谢继昌. 1984. *Yangzhicunde jiazu zuzhi* 仰之村的家族组织 [The family organization in Yangzhi Village]. Taipei.
- Xing Tie. 2003. The Review of the Domestic Researches of Family History of China in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. *Trends of Recent Researches on the History of China* 4, 16–21.
- Xu Shen 许慎. *Shuowenjiezi*. [Handian]. <http://www.zdic.net/z/18/sw/5BB6.htm>, access: 19.06.2016.
- Xu Yangjie 徐扬杰. 1992. *Zhongguo jiazu zhidushi* 中国家族制度史 [History of the Chinese family system]. Beijing.
- Xu Yangjie 徐扬杰. 1995. *Song Ming jiazu zhidushi lun* 宋明家族制度史论 [History of the Family System in Song Dynasty and Ming Dynasty]. Shanghai.
- Xunzi. Chinese Text Project. <https://ctext.org/xunzi/ru-xiao/zhs>, access: 09.03.2018.
- Yang Shanhua and Liu Xiaojing. 2000. Some Theoretical Questions in the Recent Chinese Rural Jiazu Studies. *Social Sciences in China* 5, 83–90, 205.
- Yue Qingping 岳庆平. 1994. *Jiazu wenhua yu xiandaihua* 家族文化与现代化 [Family Culture and Modernization]. *Social Science Front* 6, 107–117.
- Zheng Zhenman 郑振满. 1992. *Ming Qing Fujian jiazu zuzhi yu shehui bianqian* 明清福建家族组织与社会变迁 [Clans and social change in Fujiān during Ming Dynasty and Qing Dynasty]. Changsha.
- Zhu Fenghan 郑振满. 1990. *Shangzhou jiating xingtai yanjiu* 商周家庭形态研究 [The Family in Shang and Zhou Dynasties]. Tianjin.
- Zuo Qiuming 左丘明. *Zuo zhuan* 左传. Chinese Text Project. <https://ctext.org/chun-qiu-zuo-zhuan/xi-gong/zhs>, access: 09.03.2018.

Author's address:

Wang Yun M.A.  
 SWPS University of Social Sciences and Humanities  
 Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences  
 Department of Asian Studies  
 Chodakowska 19/31, 03-815 Warsaw, POLAND  
 e-mail: ywang@swps.edu.pl  
 ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8740-2499>.



