

Exploration of Society as Family Metaphor in the Chinese Culture¹

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Abstract

Family, as the basic unit of society, plays a unique role in the Chinese culture. In this paper, the author attempts to examine how the family is used as a conceptual framework in shaping the Chinese social pattern and way of life. By dissecting what constitutes the concept of family in terms of its structure and functions, and by elaborating on the mappings between the Chinese conceptualization of family and society as well as the Chinese social behavior within these two types of scenarios, the author wishes to identify the mechanisms through which the Chinese family model is projected onto the Chinese society at different institutional levels. The author concludes that Society as Family is a cardinal conceptual metaphor in the Chinese mind, and it contributes significantly to the Chinese perception of social life and the way they live as social beings.

We live by metaphors (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and by metaphors we access the inaccessible, perceive the invisible and experience the unexperienced. By metaphors we are able to understand the world, to relate ourselves to the environment and the people around us. To understand the Chinese people and the Chinese culture, it entails the exploration of the cardinal conceptual metaphors underlying the Chinese way of life. And for this purpose, the author of this paper attempts to examine the most fundamental concept of family in the minds of the Chinese and how the idea of family is used as a conceptual framework in shaping the social pattern and way of life in the Chinese culture.

The present exploration will begin with clarification of the conceptualization of Chinese family in terms of its structure and functions. Then the paper will examine how the family model is projected onto the Chinese society at different institutional levels. By probing

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into the mappings between the Chinese conceptualization of family and society as well as the Chinese social behavior within these two types of scenarios, the author wishes to argue that Society as Family is a cardinal conceptual metaphor in the Chinese mind, and it contributes significantly to the Chinese perception of social life and the way they live as social beings. It is hoped that the present study of the family metaphor will offer new perspectives to the understanding of Chinese culture and thus promote intercultural communication between the Chinese and people from other cultural backgrounds.

Understanding the Chinese family

Family is the basic unit of human society. However, the Chinese have credited the concept of family with special meanings and functions and have lived by that concept since ancient times both at home and in the society at large.

The Chinese concept of family

Family is an important concept in the Chinese mind and naturally an important term in the Chinese language. The Chinese life in fact is centered on the family. The abundance of linguistic forms with family is but one ready evidence for the prominence of the Chinese family. The term for family in the Chinese language is *jia* (家) or *jiating* (家庭). In the Contemporary Chinese Dictionary (Chinese-English edition, 2002), there are 71 entries of words and phrases with *jia*; and under the word *jia* as a content word there are 12 meanings.

These 12 meanings are:

- (1) family, household, as in *wojia* (我家, my family) and *Zhangjia* (张家, Zhang's family);
- (2) home, as in *huijia* (回家, go home) and *wodejia* (我的家, my home);
- (3) work place for a certain member in an army unit or a government office, as in *changzhang buzaijia* (厂长不在家, the director is not in the factory);
- (4) person or family engaged in a certain trade; as in *yujia* (渔家) for fisherman and *dongjia* (东家, family for which a servant works);
- (5) specialists, as in *zhuanjia* (专家, experts) and *huajia* (画家, painter);
- (6) school of thought, as in *rujia* (儒家, Confucianism) and *daijia* (道家, Daoism/Taoism);
- (7) one side or party in an opposition, as in *sijia* (私家, the private) and *gongjia* (公家, the public);
- (8) I, used when speaking of relatives older than oneself, as in *jiaxiong* (家兄, my elder brother);
- (9) domestic, as *jiachu* (家畜, domestic animals) and *jiatu* (家兔, domestic rabbits);

- (10) domesticated (dialectal), as in *yangjiale* (养家了, has been domesticated);
- (11) classifier for families and businesses, as in *yijiaren* (一家人, one family) and *liangjia shangdian* (两家商店, two shops);
- (12) a surname.

While in the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, which is compatible in size and authoritativeness to the Contemporary Chinese Dictionary, there are altogether no more than 9 meanings listed under the word *family* and 6 compound words with *family*.

In the Chinese language the primary meaning of *jia* is *jiating* (家庭), a compound noun combined by *jia* (家, *family*) and *ting* (庭, *house*). *Jia* is defined by the Chinese dictionary as “social unit based on marital and blood relationships, consisting of parents, the children they rear and other relatives” (the Contemporary Chinese Dictionary, 2002: 929). This seems quite similar to an English dictionary definition of a family which means a group of parents and their children (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English with Chinese Translation).

But many more meanings and values have been attributed to the concept of family by the Chinese. Traditionally, the Chinese family has three or four generations living under one roof and the family is a complex social institution rather than a mere group of parents and children. Jordan’s (2005) definition of the Chinese *jia* is more descriptive of the traditional Chinese family: “a patrilineal, patriarchal, prescriptively virilocal kinship group sharing a common household budget and normatively extended in form”.

The Chinese family is patrilineal in that descent was calculated through men or in other words, a Chinese inherits his family membership from his father. In the old times, a girl is not considered a real or permanent family member because she will take her husband’s family name and bears offspring for her husband’s family. Women today keep their own fathers’ names all their lives but are still considered by many people as belonging to their husbands’ families after marriage. Having no male descendant for a certain generation is a great shame to the ancestors in their family. A woman who bears no sons for her husband’s family (not for herself) is often blamed or mistreated. Men’s dominance can still be found in the more conservative minds and in the less developed areas. The National Population and Family Planning Commission of China released at a press conference in July, 2004 that the birth ratio between boys and girls was 116.9:100. The unusual high ratio of boys over girls is indicative of the preference for boys as influenced by traditional male-oriented family values.

That the Chinese family is patriarchal means that “the family is hierarchically organized, with the prime institutionalized authority being vested in the senior-most male” (Jordan, 2005). As a result of this, a family will be headed by a man who was older and/or of

more senior generation than anybody else. Today the supreme authority of the family head (*jiangzhang*, 家长) has been replaced by a more democratic mode of relationships in the family in many parts of China, but residue of the family hierarchy is still prevalent. Filial piety (*xiao*, 孝/孝顺), the traditional value for devotion and subordination to one's seniors has always been held highly throughout Chinese history.

Being prescriptively virilocal is another reflection of the importance placed on the male members. Traditionally, a married couple should live with the husband's family and the husband's family as a whole should be the center of their life. Many customs are related to this practice. For example, for the Spring Festival family reunion, the young couple and their children should go to the husband's parents first if they are not living together.

"Kinship Group" in Jordan's definition implies that members of the family are related genealogically. The Chinese *jia* or family is a bigger concept as it includes both one's immediate family with parents and/or grandparents and their children as well as all relatives of the family. The English concept of cousin does not have an equivalent in Chinese. For the Chinese, cousins are also members of the extended family and the Chinese words for cousins are actually sisters and brothers modified by words denoting distinction from brothers or sisters from the same parents. Therefore, cousins could be any of the following for the Chinese and they should be indicated in clear-cut terms: *biaojie* (表姐, elder sister—daughter of one's mother or father's brother or sister and who is older than oneself), *biaomei* (表妹, younger sister—daughter of one's mother or father's brother or sister and who is younger than oneself), *biaoge* (表哥, elder brother—the son of one's mother or father's brother or sister and who is older than oneself) and *biaodi* (表弟, elder brother—the son of one's mother or father's brother or sister and who is younger than oneself). So if asked how many brothers or sisters he has, a Chinese child will probably reply that he has several of them although he is the only child for his parents.

Jordan's description about sharing a common household budget in a Chinese family is not widely practiced today. Traditionally, in the extended or stem families, the possessions, income, expenses and resource distribution of all family members are managed through the patriarchal authority structure of the family. However, from the author's observation, with the shrinking of family size and the increase of double-income nuclear families, the traditional common budget scheme for all family members is no longer practiced now. In the rural areas, this tradition may still be observed by some more patriarchal families. But the common budget practice may have exerted influence on the way money is handled in the family. In many

Chinese families, the grown-up children do not have the right to control their own income before they are married or even after they are married if they live with their parents.

One last important feature of the Chinese family as described by Jordan is its extension in form. The ideal family for the Chinese is one with three or preferably four generations living under one roof (sishitongtang, 四世同堂). This type of family has been much depicted in various forms of Chinese arts. For example, in one of his semi-autobiographies *Jia* (translated into English as *Family* in 1958), the late Chinese literature master Ba Jin (巴金) chronicles the breakdown of the large and wealthy Gao family in the early years of the 20th century, when the traditional Chinese family structure and values were challenged by the more radical younger generations. And another example of more remote times is *A Dream of the Red Chamber* by Cao Xueqing in the Qing Dynasty, known as the greatest Chinese literature classic, a saga of a Chinese noble family, a tragic love story and also a great novel about Chinese family structure which, with its 120 chapters and 400 or so characters, details the life of a waning aristocratic family and the complicated relationships and conflicts between its members and all those related to them in one way or another.

Today, however, the nuclear family has become the fashion, especially in the more developed urban areas. With the development of industrialization and modernization, the traditional form of self-contained, family based agricultural economy is dying out and the need for the whole family to toil on the same piece of land is also declining. At the same time, the implementation of the one-child family planning policy since the 1970s has also expedited the reduction of family size. However, there are still strong affective as well as financial ties between married young couples (with or without children) and their parents. This can be observed from the frequent visits of married couples to their parents, many of whom continue to provide affective and financial support for their children and the caring of their children's children.

Though the family structure and life style may have changed to a certain degree with the change of times, the important values and function of the Chinese family have remained basically the same. In other words, the Chinese idea of family has lived through the times and has taken root in the Chinese mind. A look into the operating mechanisms of the Chinese family will render a better understanding of the function and role of the Chinese family as a unique social institution in the Chinese culture.

The mechanisms for the Chinese family

The Chinese people, like all people in the world, cherish the love and support of their

families. However, in many ways the Chinese family stands out as distinctive from families of other cultures. In general, the typical Chinese family is operated through, among other things, strong affiliation, heavy interdependence, distinctive power relationships and above all a hierarchical structure with each member performing his role as prescribed by traditional Chinese values.

Strong affiliation to the family

Strong affiliation to the family can be traced to the origin of social development in Chinese history. Like all human societies, the Chinese nation also evolved from the consanguineous tribal clans. The vast land and rich river resources are the life line of the Chinese people and thus set agriculture as the fundamental form of economy from the very beginning. Families, as the basic units of tribal clans, naturally live and work together for survival and common welfare. But unlike many other human societies, the Chinese tribal clans followed a different route of development from there. Instead of developing into city-states as result of revolutions from newly arising social classes as in the Hellenic civilizations, the Chinese tribal clans moved into the slavery society only as the expansion of the more powerful tribal clans, with the winning tribal clans ruling over more lands as well as the people living on the lands. The family lineage or blood ties, therefore, were not weakened but rather strengthened in the process and were to remain the core of Chinese life up to contemporary times (Zhang & Zang, 1996; Li, 1988; Zhang & Fang, 2004). The individual Chinese has his life closely attached to the family not only for emotional satisfaction but more importantly for being able to survive the harsh natural conditions and to handle the hard work in the fields. Being corporative, caring for others and collectivistic have always been the Chinese national characters.

Compared with the more individualistic cultures, the Chinese people seem to rely a lot more on their families. Family rather than the individual members themselves is the first concern and the first support for the Chinese. Traditionally the Chinese are encouraged to excel others when they grow up in order to bring honor to the family and its ancestors. For married couples, to have children means first and foremost to be able to continue the patrilineal descent line for the family. Failure to do so is humiliation and great misfortune for the family. Whatever one does is for the family. Today, the family interest is still the biggest concern in decision making for most Chinese people. Children may study hard to please their parents, to bring honor to the family and parents work hard for the wellbeing of the family, especially for making a better life of their children.

High interdependence between family members

Closely related to this strong affiliation to the family is the high interdependence between family members. Living and working together on the same land requires the Chinese people to depend on each other and collaborate with each other. The extended family structure also demands that all members of the family are related in various forms of interests, including the allocation of labor as well as that of gains from the land. Being confined to the land, one member's life cannot be really separated from life of the others in the family.

And the interdependence is most clearly manifested in the intergenerational responsibility between parents and children. Fei Xiaotong, a famous Chinese sociologist and anthropologist, described the Chinese family model as "feedback model," which can be displayed as $F1 \leftrightarrow F2 \leftrightarrow F3 \leftrightarrow \dots \leftrightarrow F_n$ (F means generation) (quoted in Gao, 2003). According to this model, generation F1 is responsible for bringing up generation F2, and generation F2 is in turn to take care of generation F1 when F1 is old; and likewise, generation F2, F3 and F_n will do the same as generation F1 and generation F2 has done to each other. Today, with the improvement of social welfare system, aged care centers and nursing homes being built up and more of such service is to be expected, the young generation are still encouraged to perform the duty of care to their parents and even grandparents. Both the Chinese constitution and the current Marriage Law explicitly stipulate that child generations have full responsibility to take care of their parents in old age.

Strong interdependence is reflected in the everyday life of many Chinese. Regular visits to one's parents and parents-in-laws as a way of showing respect and sharing housework for the elders, offering help to other members of the stem or extended family, e.g. the family of one's brother or sister whenever they are in need, are considered part of one's responsibility for the family.

Hierarchical structure and patriarchal system

It is said that no two members of the Chinese family are equal in power. Within the patriarchal system, the family is hierarchically organized with the most senior male member being entitled to unquestionable authority in decision making. Following the patriarch in the family, other members are vested with different degrees of power and duty in correspondence with their roles as prescribed by their generation, age or seniority, gender, order of birth, etc. Traditionally, senior generations have more power over junior generations, elder people have more power over younger people, and males have more power over females. It is not surprising to find an elder son in the family, while being respectful and obedient to his parents and grandparents, is obliged to protect his younger brothers and sisters as well as make decisions for them in many things. The elder children bear more responsibility and also enjoy more rights

over other children.

The role of parent, the senior male parent in particular, is to keep the family in harmony by taking over everything in the family. The parent, especially the paternal parent, is bread winner, the care taker, decision maker, while the children's role is to do as ordered or taught with no objections and questions. Filial piety best exemplifies the patriarchal system in the Chinese family. To obey one's parents is the filial piety advocated by the Chinese ancestors.

The patriarchal system extends to the kinship group or *jiazu* (家族). In each family there is a family head "jiazhang" (家长), and in the kinship group, there is also a head, called "zuzhang" (族长).

The *jiazu* is made up of many families that descend from the same ancestors and share the same family name. *Jiazu* can be considered a bigger family and the patriarch in the bigger family is in charge of important events or matters, such as weddings and funerals, conflicts within or between families in the *jiazu*. Seniors, elders and male members in the *jiazu* also enjoy more power over their inferiors, who are taught to show respect and obedience to their superiors. This is still widely practiced in rural areas today. The patriarch and seniors will be blamed for not fulfilling their duties if they fail to take up their responsibilities in the family and the juniors will be regarded as immoral or not filial if they ever show indifference to their superiors.

Family as conceptual framework for the Chinese society

It is commonly agreed that the small-scale family-based farmer economy has laid the foundation for the formation and development of the Chinese culture. The Chinese concept of family is so pervasive that it permeates every aspect of the Chinese society. The society is family amplified and the family is society in miniature. Fei Youlan (1996) claims that the patriarchal family system is the social system in the history of China and many social relations are family relations or can be taken as family relations. Many scholars hold that the Chinese society and family are of the same structure and operate in quite the same manner. Family is an invisible metaphor through which the Chinese society is built up and administered.

Liu Qingping (2000, 2003), contemporary Chinese philosopher and specialist on Confucianism, through a close and critical analysis of the texts of Confucius and Mencius, concludes that "Confucianism in essence is neither collectivism nor individualism, but 'consanguinitism'" because Confucius and Mencius always take filial piety, or consanguineous affection in general, as both the foundation and the supreme principle of human life while the individual and social dimensions are inevitably subordinated to and substantially negated by the

filial piety within the Confucian framework. Although Liu's research findings have encountered some counterviews, they point out the unquestionable emphasis of the consanguineous cliquism in the doctrine of Confucius and Mencius.

The three cardinal guides and the five constant virtues (*san gang wu chang* 三纲五常) advocated by Confucianism are considered the way of life in traditional Chinese culture. The three cardinal guides are ruler guiding subject, father guiding son and husband guiding wife (*sangang: junweichengang, fuweizigang, fuweifugang*; 三纲: 君为臣纲, 父为子纲, 夫为妇纲). The five constant virtues are benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and fidelity (*wugang: ren yi li zhi xin*; 五常: 仁义礼智信). They are used to regulate the five cardinal relationships (五伦; *wulun*) in traditional ethics between monarch and subject, father and son, husband and wife, among brothers and among friends. They were the normal and constant ethics that must remain unchanged. Of the five cardinal relationships three are family relationships, and the other two are to be handled in a family manner: monarch and subject are to be like father and son, friends are to be like brothers.

This family concept is deeply-rooted in the Chinese mind so much so that it goes beyond the family to permeate the whole society. The family is where life begins and how life is lived and experienced for the individual Chinese and for the nation as a whole. Family is the prototype upon which the Chinese society is established and operated. In other words, the society is family to the Chinese and the family model is the model by which the Chinese society functions.

In the following section, the author will illustrate how the family metaphor functions as the conceptual framework in the Chinese way of life. The parallel between the family and the society can be clearly evidenced in the institutional practice, patterns of social relations and general outlook of the Chinese. Linguistic representations the Chinese use in these given situations will be employed for such illustration.

Family as model of institutional practice

The family model is projected onto the Chinese society at different levels of institution, ranging from the government of the state to the smallest business or public organizations. At the highest level, the government runs the country as a family. The Chinese word for country or state is *guojia* (国家) meaning literally state-family. The idea that the country is family has taken root in the Chinese mind since ancient times. Ancient China entered the nation state society directly from the tribal society. The earliest nation state was built upon the clan system of the tribal society. It can be said that the "country is built within the family; the family and the country are of the same clan-based patriarchal structure" (Li, 2004: 51) .

On the one hand, family is essential for running the state. In *the Great Learning*, one of the Four Books of Confucianism, the idea of running the royal government well and bring peace to the entire country is promoted and the basis for doing this is to regulate one's family. It is said that "The government of his kingdom depends on his regulation of the family" (*jijia zhiguo pingtianxia*, 齐家治国平天下).

What is meant by "In order rightly to govern the State, it is necessary first to regulate the family," is this: It is not possible for one to teach others, while he cannot teach his own family. Therefore, the ruler, without going beyond his family, completes the lessons for the State. There is filial piety—therewith the Sovereign should be served. There is fraternal submission—therewith elders and superiors should be served. There is kindness:—therewith the multitude should be treated.

Thus we see how the government of the State depends on the regulation of the family. And the regulation of the family is most of all to keep the family function as prescribed by the Confucian idea of Li or Propriety (礼), with total devotion to the family interest and utter respect and obedience to one's elders. This will lead us to see the other aspect of the links between the family and the state: the state is run like a family.

The Chinese state and family remain unseparated until modern times. The throne is passed onto the emperor's son or whoever in the emperor's family that is entitled to be the heir. The emperor is supreme master (*huangshang*, 皇上 or *renzhu* 人主) to all and all his subjects are naturally his "children" (*zimin*, 子民). The Chinese character 君 (*jin*) is made up of two parts: 尹 and 口, meaning head of the masses or shepherd, 群 (*qun*). Sun Zhongshan (Sun Ya-sen), the forerunner of Chinese revolution that overthrew two thousand years of feudal rule, is addressed as the state-father (*guofu*, 国父) and his wife state-mother (*guomu*, 国母). Though they are in no way like the emperor and empress, the use of these terms does reflect how the Chinese respect them as their parents and how head of state is regarded as a parent like figure.

Government officials at different levels are also expected to work for those under their leadership like parents, giving them protection and care while at the same time demanding their submission. The government officials are called *fumuguan* (父母官), literally meaning parent-like officials or father-and-mother to the people. Ideally, these *fumuguan* are expected to treat and love people as their own children (*ai min ru zi* 爱民如子) and the people are to look up to them for their own well-being just like children depending on their parents. There is a popular saying in Chinese that if the governor does not take good care of his people he had

better go back home to grow sweet potatoes (当官不为民做主，不如回家卖红薯). In other words, the mission of the governor or man in power is to parent people under his rule.

The strong affiliation to the family, the heavy interdependence between family members, and the hierarchical structure of the Chinese family are all transferred to the relations between those in power at different levels of institution, from the ruler of the country to the sheriff in the local administration, and those being ruled over. The state and the family are at their best if the traditional family values are held. If the state is run in the family way, that is the ruler behaves as the ruler, the minister as the minister, father as the father and son as the son (君君，臣臣，父父，子子), each person will be performing his role in his own family and the society family, and harmony as well as prosperity will be achieved both at home and in the bigger family of the whole nation. It is assumed that the family as a whole will thrive and prosper if harmony prevails at home (家和万事兴). In other words, the basic rules of obedience, moderation and self-restraint among family members should be observed. A harmonious family is highly praised and respected by the Chinese since ancient times. Family members are encouraged to compromise and tolerate so as to avoid conflicts even at the sacrifice of their own happiness and sometimes regardless what causes the conflict. This pursuit of harmony is extended to the ideal society. Stability and unity have always been considered the most important for social prosperity. To build a harmonious society has been recently reemphasized as the national goal by the Chinese central government. What is to be practiced in the family should also apply to the country; country is a big family and is to be ministered as such.

Family as pattern of social relations

Interpersonal relationships among the Chinese are modeled after the schema for family relations. As prescribed in the Three Guides and Five Constants (三纲五常), each member has his status and role in the family and the state and he should behave himself in a way to meet the role expectations. That is the way harmony and order to be achieved. Due respect should be given to more authoritative members of the family and of the society, who in turn should also take over their responsibility for those under their charge. The ideology that the whole society is a big family is much manifested in the adoption of complicated kinship terms by the Chinese to their non-relative addressees.

Pseudo family relations

As the Chinese regard the society as a big family, the family relationship is extended to non-family members. The senior members in one's social groups are treated as senior members

of the family. So the Chinese have the tradition to use kinship terms for people outside of their family. For neighbors or elder colleagues, “aunt” is used for females and “uncle” for males. Even for strangers, kinship terms are the most common way of addressing. In asking for the way, a passer-by can be referred to as “sister,” “brother,” “aunt,” “uncle,” “grandpa” or “grandma” depending on the circumstances. Chinese children address the policeman as Uncle Police and a PLA man as Uncle PLA.² For the respected head of state, kinship term is no exception. Deng Xiaoping is Grandpa Deng. Hu Yaopang is Grandpa Hu. A nine-year old primary school student from a town in Ningpo city, wrote to Anan starting with “Dear Grandpa Anan (尊敬的安南爷爷)”. And when former KMT chairman Mr. Lianzhan visited Xian in Northwest China, the local children addressed him as Grandpa Lian.

What deserves attention is that in the application of kinship terms for non-family members, the values and norms attributed to these terms are also applied. The person addressed as Auntie should act like an aunt, caring and nurturing for the young and the one titled elder brother should also take care of the younger colleagues when called upon by the situation. In the Chinese university dorms, four to eight students share a room. Many roommates like to call each other brother or sister in order of birth dates. So there are First Elder Sister, Second Elder Sister ... for the girls and First Elder Brother, Second Elder Brother ... for the boys. Or they are simply called by the order as *laoda* (老大, Number 1), *lao'er* (老二, No. 2), etc. The youngest is usually called *laoba* (老八, No. 8) or *laogeda* (老疙瘩, pet child/the youngest child) as in a family with 8 children. The eldest student is usually consulted with problems among roommates or has the final say in making a decision.

The family-like work-unit (单位社会)

The parent-like governance is practiced at all levels of the Chinese institutions. All working Chinese are affiliated with their work-units, especially before the country shifted to the more diversified market economy. For the Chinese the work-unit means much more than a work place. Li Hanlin, a contemporary sociologist in mainland China, recently published a book entitled *Thoughts on Chinese Work-unit Society* (2004). Li, after more than 10 years of research, points out that the work-unit is a unique social institution in the Chinese society. The work-unit is what the Chinese depend on for many of their life problems and where their hope for a secure and prosperous future rests. It is a way of life for them. Lying at the core of this special institution is the family conception of the society. The work-unit is family to its staff members. All members of the work-unit are actually encouraged to take the work-unit as their

²PLA stands for People’s Liberation Army in China.

home. Therefore, a director who runs the factory as his own family (以厂为家) is regarded as a good director and a worker who devotes whole heartedly as one would to his own family is praised as a good worker.

The work-unit does function like a family in contemporary China. The management is parent to all the staff members. It is hard to believe that not long ago in China people had to get permission from their work-unit for getting married, starting a family, and for getting divorced. The management of the work-unit acts as parent in taking care of almost everything for the staff members. Even the trivial quarrels between husband and wife could be taken to the manager for arbitration. Likewise, matters of social welfare, such as life insurance, health insurance, child care are almost all done through the work-unit. Until the early 1980s, a staff could even borrow money from the work unit to meet the needs of his family.

Interestingly, one of the meanings of *jia* in Chinese is “work place for a certain member in an army or a government office.” As in *I went to the battalion headquarters, but the battalion was not in* (营长刚好不在家). It is also common to hear the Chinese say that their manager is not in (at home) as he has been away on business. Presence or absence from the work unit can be expressed exactly as presence or absence from home.

And since the work-unit is family to the Chinese, kinship terms are extensively used at work. For colleagues of the same or similar status, brothers and sisters are used, for example *Sister Wang* (王姐) is used to a woman colleague whose sir is *Wang* and elder in age. Uncle *Zhao* is used by the young staff members for a man whose family name is *Zhao* and of their parents' age.

With the deepening of economic reform, private companies, joint ventures and other new forms of enterprises and organizations have sprung up in China. In spite of all the differences in management and organizational structure, these new work-units are also expected and encouraged to provide their staff members the family-like care and protection.

Family concept as cultural outlook

Family concept is deeply rooted in the Chinese mind so much so that they relate themselves to the world and other people in the world in a family manner. The Chinese believe that the nation is a big family (祖国大家庭) and the world is also a big family (天下一家). All people under the sun are brothers (四海之内皆兄弟). Therefore, all the Chinese decedents are called sons and daughters of the Chinese nation (中华儿女), sons and grandsons of Huaxia³ (华

³ Huaxia (华夏) is an ancient name for China. It is said the ancestors of the Chinese are Huaxia people, an ethnic group living in the central plains by the Yellow River.

夏子孙) or Yan and Huang Emperors, (炎黄子孙), descendents of the dragon (龙的传人). The Chinese often describe the nation as a family of 56 ethnics (56个民族的大家庭) and many songs have been written in praise of this big family.

Chinese from Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau have always been considered members of the big national family. When Mr. Lianzhan visited the mainland before he resigned from his position of chairman of KMT, he was hailed with words like "Welcome home," "Blood is thicker than water." James Soong, Chairman of the People's First Party, was also applauded for sharing the same family view with the mainlanders. Soong remarked when addressing Tsing Hua University students that "it is most important that children would be taught that people from the mainland and Taiwan were brothers, and that they could quarrel but never change their family name". Indeed, to understand the Chinese family outlook is critical for the international world to China policies in domestic and international issues.

The family outlook determines the way the Chinese people relate themselves to others. In communication with people from other cultures, the Chinese tend to bring with them their value and norms in interpersonal relationships. A story goes about a Chinese English teacher insists on her two-year old daughter addressing a senior American teacher (in her fifties) as grandma out of respect and politeness, but only to have embarrassed her by labeling her as an old lady with an unfamiliar addressing term. When working or studying overseas, the Chinese will naturally expect to be treated in a family manner as well. They are used to taking care of others and being taken care of by others as they do in the family and once they realize they are out of the family reference in a foreign land they tend to feel disoriented and often disappointed. One of the author's friends, a young Chinese teacher was selected by the government to teach in a high school in Sydney, Australia. She was very depressed for a long time and wanted to go back to China before the contract was ended because her Australian colleagues were not "as dear as" her Chinese colleagues. She missed her family and her friends but she had to drag herself to work everyday. Her depression was lightened, however, by her visit to a village school where people chatted with her and invited her to their homes. She was all tears when she had to leave there after two weeks. Many returned Chinese have expressed the same kind of sentiment. An important factor for this culture shock is the unfamily-like working and social environment. Being taken out of the family atmosphere, they are disoriented and depression will not go away until the family feeling is found again.

There is a saying in Chinese for people of the same family name "we are of the same family five hundred years ago". (五百年前是一家). People are all related to each in a sense.

If not, pseudo relations are created because the family model is the way of life for the Chinese. The family forms the outlook of the Chinese. The country is mother (祖国母亲), the leading party is mother to all (as in the song 党啊党啊, 亲爱的妈妈—The Party, My Dear Mother) and the soldiers are families (亲人解放军). The best thing one can expect is to be treated as someone's family. To say someone is one's family is the best honor he can get. Just as the work-unit is family to all staff, the school is family to the students. The best teacher is one who treats the students like mother or father. And students like to brother and sister one another, especially in the university. The eldest in the dorm is called *laoda* (老大), meaning the eldest brother or sister and this *laoda* is supposed to take the responsibility of the eldest child in the family by showing care for the younger ones, making a decision when needed and making sure their family, i.e. the dorm is harmonious.

Conclusion

We are born into a family, mature in a family, form new families and leave them at our death. Family forms the basis for who we are, where we belong, and where we head for; family is where we are shaped into members of our culture, learn the cultural values and world views. Family life is a universal human experience that serves as a medium through which each individual sees the world and his or her place in it.

The metaphoric function of the family is particularly true with the Chinese. Family experience defines the Chinese perception of the world and people. As has been stated early in this article, the Chinese family is the prototype of Chinese society; understanding of the Chinese and the Chinese society should start with the understanding of the Chinese family because the Chinese perceive their world through their family experience. The hierarchical structure, patriarchal system, interdependent network of relations and all the values go with the family are all mapped or projected onto the society. The mechanisms underlying the Chinese family are also the dynamics for the Chinese society. It can be concluded that the metaphor society as family functions as a conceptual framework for the Chinese to understand the world and to participate in their social life.

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