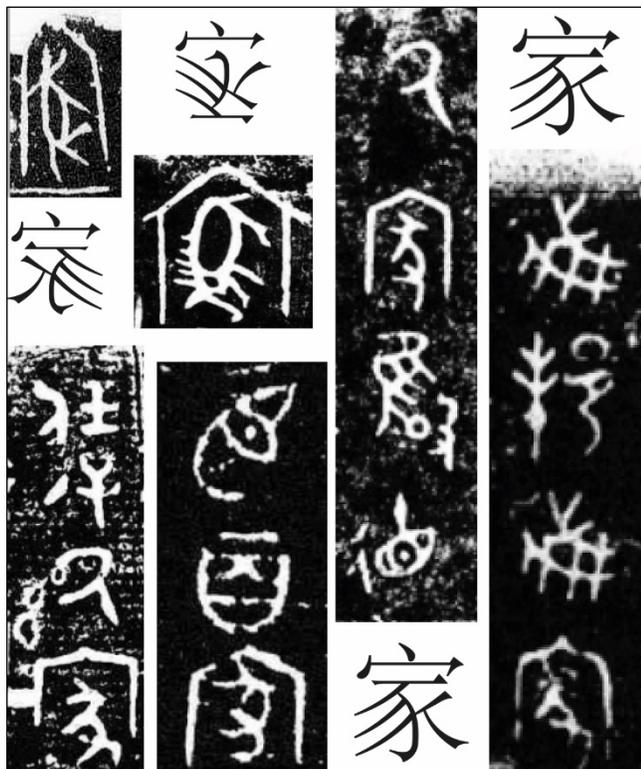




Shang and Zhou Concepts of Family and Lineage

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Anthropologists who explored and compared kinship structures around the world during the mid-twentieth century originally used “lineage” as a technical term for a unilineal descent group. Scholars of modern and premodern China adopted this term for social organizations that developed around the notion of shared ancestry, but, as a matter of fact, included only selected patrilineal relatives on one hand and incorporated married-in and adopted persons on the other hand. The current sociological definition of “lineage” as a descent-based corporate group characterized by group identity and celebrating ritual unity (Watson 1982) circumvents the question about the place of such persons in these groups, and, therefore, causes uncertainty with regard of this label’s heuristic value. In the present paper, I revise earlier attempts to coin a more inclusive definition for kin-based corporations and to apply it to the analysis of Shang and Zhou social relationships. After considering pros and cons of a label change, I suggest adjusting the definition of “lineage” by unambiguously recognizing the ability of lineages to incorporate members beyond the constraints of the unilineal descent.

In the next step, I analyze terminology used to refer to kin-based corporate groups of the Shang and Zhou periods, focusing on the term *jia* 家 (“family/house”) in contemporaneous epigraphy. Compared to the more unambiguous kinship term *zu* (“lineage”), this term received little attention so far. I argue that whereas *zu* 族 was used only in specific contexts, *jia* was a general term for kinship groups of various sizes, organizational and residential forms, ranging from small co-residential units to large, dispersed lineages. The scalability of the *jia* is, among other things, relevant for the understanding of the Zhou political concept of *bang jia* 邦家 (“polity and family/lineage”) that can be regarded as a precursor of the later concept *guo jia* 國家 (“polity and family/lineage”, “state”).

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Seminar Co-Chairs:

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