

Chinese Genealogy: An Introduction to Jiapu 家譜 (Chinese Genealogy Records)

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OVERVIEW: Because of the Chinese tradition of ancestor veneration, the earliest discovered written records in China included genealogical information. The rich, historical tradition of preserving genealogies in China gives the potential exists for someone of Chinese ancestry to be able to trace their lineage for over 100 generations, reaching back thousands of years. This presentation includes a brief history of Chinese genealogies, a look at the typical format and content of these records, search methodologies for finding Chinese genealogies (including searching for ancestral villages and exploring the Chinese genealogical collections of FamilySearch, the Shanghai Library, and other institutions), and instruction for reading the lineage and data tables portions these records.

A BRIEF HISTORY (not comprehensive, only some highlights)

| Pre-imperial China | |
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| Prior to invention of writing | Oral genealogies. Knots tied on ropes representing generations, number of family members. |
| Shang Dynasty (1600-1046 BC) | Simple pedigrees inscribed on turtle shell, cow bone and bronze for ancestral rituals. |
| Zhou Dynasty (1046-256 BC) | Imperial pedigrees and pedigrees of powerful noble lineages tracked. |
| Imperial China | |
| Han Dynasty (206 BC–220 AD) | Government compiled royal genealogy and surname registers that give origin of surnames, lineage affiliation, and historical personages. Private genealogies deal with origins, migrations, pedigrees, line segmentation, relationships, offices and careers, activities and events. |
| Sui and Tang Dynasties (589-906) | High point for surname studies. Surname registers compiled under supervision of high officials, organized by rhyme group, lineage rank, locality, and individuals. Imperial promotion of private genealogies. |
| Five Dynasties (907-960) | Government genealogy records destroyed, private genealogy compilation disrupted. |
| Song Dynasty (960-1279) | Private genealogy revival led by scholars Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007-1072) and Su Xun 蘇詢 (1009-1066). The 5-generation format created, linked to the dazong 大宗/xiaozong 小宗, the |

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| | greater and lesser descent line system for inheritance and maintenance of ancestral sacrifice rituals. Historical accuracy, pedigree, and documentation, and regular revisions within 3 generations were stressed. |
| Yuan Dynasty (1179-1368) | The 5-generation format modified to include all descendants of common ancestor. Contents include birth and death dates, burial locations for wives and in-laws, ancestral portraits. Rich and poor are included. |
| Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) | Female data decreased, female chastity promoted. Family instructions and ancestral property are prominent. Topics triple. More frequent revisions. Followed standard history format: narrative, charts, biographies, and literature. |
| Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) | Greater quantity and more extensive coverage of localities and surnames. Promoted by government ethical policies based on filial piety. Revisions more widespread and frequent. Rules for care and access are tightened. |
| New China | |
| Republic Period (1911-1949) | Sun Yat Sen promotes genealogies as a means of national unity. |
| PRC (1949 -) | Taiwan: Genealogical tradition continues without disruption. Mainland: Revision of genealogies disrupted by the Communist Revolution. Many genealogies are destroyed, particularly during the Cultural Revolution. Genealogical revival began after Deng Xiaoping's call for liberated thinking and "seeking truth from facts" at 11 th CPC National Congress (1978). |

Source: Dr. Melvin Thatcher, "Chinese Genealogy and Local Gazetteer Timeline"

SEARCHING FOR YOUR FAMILY BOOK (JIAPU – 家譜)

Besides searching for historical records, documents, and publications pertaining to Overseas Chinese, for those of Chinese descent, locating a book of the Chinese family or clan genealogy is paramount to learning of ancestral lineage and history. First, see if any family member a copy of the family genealogy. Beyond that, the most direct and effective way of obtaining the family genealogy is to go to the family ancestral home (village) to see if one still exists. Important information to the search for your family genealogy includes the name and location of the family village; the names of your ancestors starting with your parents and as many generations as possible preceding them (the names in Chinese characters, including the various names they may have been given during their lifetimes); and the names of any founding or primogenitor ancestors who may immigrated to a new location to start a branch of the family line. Armed with this sort of information, many of Chinese descent have traveled to their family villages where the books of family genealogy have been kept and have been successful in obtaining a copy.

Other resources

FamilySearch and various libraries in China have collections of genealogies to peruse. While this search method can be daunting, some very specific information such as a village name, name of a prominent ancestor, or the title of a particular genealogy will help narrow your search.

- **The China Collection of Genealogies, 1239–2014.** Since 1971, FamilySearch has been engaged in the acquisition and preservation of Chinese genealogies through its own microfilming projects and the purchase of books and microfilm copies when available. At present, almost 10,000 genealogies are included in this collection and are available online via the familysearch.org website. To access this collection, go to the Search>Records tab on the familysearch.org homepage. Click on “Browse All Published Collections” and locate the “China Collection of Genealogies, 1239-2014”, in the alphabetical list. Alternatively, using the map under the “Research by Location” heading, click on Asia, then on China. The link is at the bottom of the “China” webpage. From this point, use the waypoints (surname of interest, country, province, and county) to narrow your search. Then select from the titles of genealogies displayed and begin to browse.
- **Annotated Genealogies in familysearch.org.** FamilySearch is annotating genealogies, making them searchable using the catalog search function. Using the catalog (found under the search tab), search in the keyword field by such information as village name or other location, names of prominent ancestors, etc. Chinese characters are allowed.
- **The Shanghai Library’s General Index of Chinese Genealogies (Zhongguo Jiapu Zongmu - 中國家譜總目).** This is a world union catalog of Chinese genealogies, produced by the Shanghai Library in collaboration with FamilySearch. Published in 2010, it is an important reference work to find Chinese genealogies and identify where you can access them. The 10-volume set, currently only available in book form, can be found at the Family History Library in Salt Lake City and other libraries (use <http://www.worldcat.org> to search). This work contains the following information:
 - Bibliographic entries for 52,401 titles, 608 surnames, in 10 vols.
 - Indexes arranged by surname and stroke count, title, ancestral place, compiler, ancestral hall name, first ancestor, and famous people.
 - Annotations on ancestral place, important progenitors, migration history
 - Holding institutions in China and other countries of each genealogy
- **China Library Websites:**
 - National Library of China genealogy website: <http://ouroots.nlc.cn/>
 - Shanghai Library genealogy catalog: <http://search.library.sh.cn/jiapu/>
 - Zhejiang Library genealogy database: http://diglweb.zjlib.cn:8081/zjtsg/jiapu/zt_jp_out.jsp?channelid=91367

HELPS FOR READING JIAPU

Refer to paper, “Chinese Language Helps for Jiapu”. It is found on the familysearch.org Research Wiki (under the Search tab on the homepage.) On the Research Wiki page, search for “Chinese Research Helps”, then scroll down to “Learning to Read Chinese Genealogies 家譜”.

Useful terms:

Common Terms for Chinese Genealogies:

- 家譜 (jiāpǔ) – family genealogy record
- 族譜 (zúpǔ) – clan genealogy record
- 宗譜 (zōngpǔ) – general genealogy record

Identifying the clan surname within a title: “surname” + 氏家譜

Example: 王氏家譜 (wáng shì jiā pǔ) - The Wang Clan Genealogy

Terms for three key ancestors:

- 始祖 (shǐ zǔ) - the first or primogenitor ancestor.
- 受姓始祖 (shòu xìng shǐ zǔ) - the ancestor who received the surname.
- 始遷祖 (shǐ qiān zǔ) - the first migrant ancestor

Terminology for pedigree charts and biographical data tables:

- 一世祖 (yī shì zǔ) – the first generation ancestor, more often referred to as 始祖
- 二世祖 (èr shì zǔ) – second generation ancestors
- 公 (gōng) – following a name, a respectful term of address for an elderly man
- 翁 (wēng) - following a name, a respectful term of address for an elderly man
- 妣 (bǐ) – a formal term for one’s deceased mother, used to designate a spouse
- 配 (pèi) – joined in marriage, used to designate a spouse
- 氏 (shì) – when following a surname (spouse’s), a woman from the ___ clan
- 生 (shēng) -- birth
- 終 (zhōng) – end, the end of life
- 卒 (zú) – to die
- 歿 (mò) – to die
- 生於 (shēng yú) – born on (date)
- 終於 (zhōng yú) – died on (date)
- 墓 (mù) – a grave
- 墓於 (mù yú) – buried on (date) or buried at (place)
- 墓在 (mù zài) – buried at
- 葬 (zàng) – to bury, inter
- 生 (shēng) – begat, when followed by 子 (zǐ) – son, or multiple sons, e.g., 二子
- 長子 (zhǎng zǐ) – the eldest son
- 次子 (cì zǐ) – the second son
- 三子 (sān zǐ) – the third son
- 四子 (sì zǐ) – the fourth son