Journal of Chinese History (2022), **6**, 193–200
doi:10.1017/jch.2022.11

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STATE OF THE FIELD ESSAY

Family Relations in Chinese History

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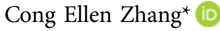

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(Received 16 February 2022; accepted 17 February 2022)

Abstract
This special issue of the *Journal of Chinese History* is dedicated to the studies of family relations. This introduction gives a brief survey of recent scholarship, puts the seven articles in this issue into conversation with each other, and identifies four main themes that emerge from this collection of essays.

This special issue of the *Journal of Chinese History* focuses on the theme of family relations. The seven essays cover a large chunk of Chinese history, stretching across the pre-imperial period, five dynasties, and the twentieth century. In recognition of the large influence of anthropological work in the study of the Chinese family, the editor invited the anthropologist Jing Xu to contribute an article.[1] Xu's essay is an especially fitting tribute: using a new theoretical and methodological framework, it reconstructs the story of a brother–sister dyad based on the field notes collected by the late anthropologists Arthur and Margery Wolf in rural Taiwan from 1958 to 1960.

The seven essays in this volume are arranged chronologically. They place four types of family relationships, parent–child, marital, sibling, and uncle–nephew, at the center of inquiry. The backgrounds and circumstances of the individuals and families under investigation vary greatly. While several articles focus on people of considerable political and cultural importance, others are concerned with less distinguished members of society, including ordinary men and women, a former slave, and young children. In terms of methodology, four of the seven articles are case studies. The remaining three each explores one type of family relationship on a more comprehensive level. Although the scope of the essays varies, all touch on a "web" of other, secondary family bonds in addition to a thorough discussion of their principal subjects. The authors draw on

[1]The anthropological literature on the various aspects of the Chinese family system and family relations is incredibly rich. For a review of early work, see Patricia Buckley Ebrey and James L. Watson, "Introduction" to *Kinship Organization in Late Imperial China, 1000–1400* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 1–15. For recent developments in the field, see the introductions and individual contributions in Susanne Brandtstädter and Gonçalos D. Santos, eds., *Chinese Kinship: Contemporary Anthropological Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2009), Gonçalos D. Santos and Stevan Harrell, eds., *Transforming Patriarchy: Chinese Families in the Twenty-First Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017), and Yunxiang Yan, ed., *Chinese Families Upside Down: Intergenerational Dynamics and Neo-Familism in the Early 21st Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2021).

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diverse source materials, ranging from the Confucian classics and legal documents to funerary biographies and field notes. It is worth special note that three articles use poetry to illustrate the way family members expressed their innermost feelings about each other. Collectively, these studies make clear that while powerful forces such as politics, the law, and religious and cultural practices molded family life and family relationships in major ways, contingent circumstances were no less significant in shaping people's lives.

Since ancient times, family and family relationships have occupied a central place in Chinese conceptions of the ethical life and ideal social and political order. Confucian discourse and government policies viewed the family as a ritual, legal, and economic entity, a set of primary and lesser relationships that were both hierarchical and reciprocal in nature. Three of the Five Key Relationships, those between father and son, husband and wife, and older and younger brothers, were family-oriented and role-based. In these relationships, the male and senior parties dominated, but everyone was expected to know his or her proper place, follow detailed guidelines regarding personal conduct, and strive to contribute to domestic harmony and prosperity. Each relationship had its specific obligations: filial devotion from sons to parents, fidelity and submission from wives to husbands, and respect and obedience from younger brothers to older brothers.[2] By mid-imperial times, a large quantity of didactic material, from filial tales and family instructions to religious teachings and tomb art, conveyed these principles. All upheld the sacredness of patrilineality and patriarchy as well as the need for submission of junior to senior family members. The same texts also promoted ideal spousal behavior, including warning men against infidelity, and against letting perhaps: letting their wives have a bad influence on them.[3] In late imperial times, the flourishing of vernacular literature and the performing arts further facilitated the transmission of these ideas, making them better known to ordinary men and women.[4]

Even though these ideas became widely disseminated, variations, adjustments, and outright violations were common. Even as they promoted orthodoxy, filial tales, biographies, and anecdotal writing hinted at tension and disharmony within the family.[5] Legal casebooks are full of evidence of domestic conflict and dysfunction in all sorts, exposing the outrageous ways of irresponsible parents, unfilial children, cheating spouses, and brothers and other relatives confronting each other at court.[6] Popular

[2]Alan K. Chan and Sor-hoon Tan, eds., *Filial Piety in Chinese Thought and History* (Oxford: RoutledgeCurson, 2004); Kang Xuewei 康學偉, *Xianqin xiaodao yanjiu* 先秦孝道研究 (Taipei: Wenjin, 1992); Thomas Radice, *The Ways of Filial Piety in Early China* (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2006); Wu Fanming 吴凡明, *Cong renlun zhixu dao falu zhixu: xiaodao yu handai fazhi yanjiu* 從人倫秩序到法律秩序：孝道與漢代法律研究 (Changchun: Jilin renmin, 2008).

[3]Keith Knapp, *Selfless Offspring*: *Filial Children and the Social Order in Medieval China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005); Yan Zhitui, *Family Instructions for the Yan Clan and Other Works by Yan Zhitui (531–590s)*, translated by Xiaofei Tian (Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2021); Zou Qingquan 鄒清泉, *Beiwei xiaozi huaxiang yanjiu* 北魏孝子画像研究 (Beijing: Wenhua yishu, 2006).

[4]Maram Epstein, *Orthodox Passions: Narrating Filial Love during the High Qing* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2019); Wilt Idema, trans., *Personal Salvation and Filial Piety: Two Precious Scroll Narratives of Guanyin and Her Acolytes* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008); and Idem a, *Filial Piety and Its Divine Rewards: The Legend of Dong Yong and Weaving Maiden, with Related Texts* (Cambridge, MA: Hackett Publishing Company, 2009).

[5]See the introduction to and multiple articles in N. Harry Rothschild and Leslie V. Wallace, eds., *Behaving Badly in Early and Medieval China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2017).

[6]Anthony J. Barbieri-Low and Robin D.S. Yates, *Law, State, and Society in Early Imperial China: A Study with Critical Edition and Translation of the Legal Texts from Zhangjiashan Tomb No. 247* (Leiden: Brill,

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literature, such as plays and novels, were equally straightforward in depicting the disasters that wrongdoing of many sorts brought to the family.[7] The prevalence of such bad behavior worried Neo-Confucian thinkers, family and lineage heads, and social observers alike. The late imperial period therefore witnessed vigorous efforts to standardize family rituals, compile and enforce lineage rules, and articulate gender norms.[8]

Scholars have devoted much effort to two aspects of the history of family and kinship: the origin and evolution of kinship organizations and elite strategies in perpetuating family status.[9] Changes in the patterns and practices of marriage, concubinage, and adoption is another set of topics that has drawn scholarly attention.[10] Specialists of women's history and gender and sexuality have been among the most productive. In the last several decades, their research has expanded from women's life course and familial roles to their active involvement in religious, literary, and local and community activities.[11] In fact, not all women married and served

2015); Robert Hegel, *True Crimes in Eighteenth Century China: Twenty Case Histories* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009); Brian McKnight and James T. C. Liu, trans., *The Enlightened Judgments: Ch'ing-ming chi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999); Matthew Sommer, *Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000) and *Polyandry and Wife-Selling in Qing Dynasty China: Survival Strategies and Judicial Interventions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015).

[7]Robert Hegel, ed., *Idle Talk under the Bean Arbor: A Seventeenth-Century Chinese Story Collection* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017); Tina Lu, *Accidental Incest, Filial Cannibalism, and Other Peculiar Encounters in Late Imperial Chinese Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2009); Yenna Wu, trans., *The Lioness Roars: Shrew Stories from Late Imperial China* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell East Asia Series, 1996).

[8]Patricia Ebrey, *Confucianism and Family Rituals in Imperial China: A Social History of Writing about Rites* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991) and Ebrey, *Chu Hsi's Family Rituals: A Twelfth Century Chinese Manual for the Performance of Cappings, Weddings, Funerals, and Ancestral Rites* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); Kai-wing Chow, *The Rise of Confucian Ritualism in Late Imperial China: Ethics, Classics and Lineage Discourse* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

[9]An important early work is Maurice Freedman, *Lineage Organization in Southeastern China* (London: Athlone, 1958). For more recent studies, see Beverly Bossler, *Powerful Relations: Kinship, Status and the State in Sung China* (Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1998); Hugh R. Clark, *Portrait of a Community: Society, Culture, and the Structures of Kinship in the Mulan River from the Late Tang through the Song* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2007); Richard L. Davis, *Court and Family in Sung China, 960–1279: Bureaucratic Success and Kinship Fortunes for the Shih of Ming-chou* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1986); Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *The Aristocratic Families of Early Imperial China: A Case Study of the Po-ling Ts'ui Family* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978); Robert Hymes, *Statesmen and Gentlemen: The Elite of Fu-Chou, Chiang-hsi in Northern and Southern Sung* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); David G. Johnson, *The Medieval Chinese Oligarchy* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1977); and Michael Szonyi, *Practicing Kinship: Lineage and Descent in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

[10]Beverly Bossler, *Courtesans, Concubines, and the Cult of Female Fidelity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2016); Ann Waltner, *Getting an Heir: Adoption and the Construction of Kinship in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1990); Rubie S. Watson and Patricia Buckley Ebrey, eds., *Marriage and Inequality in Chinese Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Arthur Wolf and Chieh-shang Huang, *Marriage and Adoption in China, 1845–1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1980).

[11]Patricia Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters, Marriage and the Lives of Chinese Women in the Sung Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Jinhua Jia, *Gender, Power, and Talent: The Journey of Daoist Priestesses in Tang China* (New York: Columbia University, 2018); Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995); Guotong Li, *Migrating Fujianese: Ethnic, Family, and Gender Identities in an Early Modern*

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predominantly family roles.[12] Relying on women's own writings, many scholars have conducted in-depth studies of the literary and social life of talented women, illustrating women as historical agents, their protest against gender restrictions, and participation in social and cultural change.[13] Taken together, these studies have helped clarify broad trends in prescribed ideals and real-life experiences, differences in class and regional practices, and historical continuities as well as major changes and transformations in the family in China's long history. At the same time, we are learning to avoid over-generalizations. To give several examples, while some fathers were strict and austere, others were doting, reflective, even vulnerable.[14] Major religions, especially Buddhism, offered different versions of the ideal family system or parent–child relationship.[15] Even though Chinese educated men often appeared reserved and hesitant in confessing feelings for family members, they did write about their emotional attachment to not only parents but also wives and other female relatives.[16] Uxorilocal, cousin, and afterlife marriages both reflected the diversities in family circumstances as well as the complexities in family dynamics and spousal relationships.[17] The strong connections among female family members not only challenged the dominance of the patrilineal and patriarchal principles, but also revealed the close relationship between women and their natal families.[18]

Of all the scholarly work on family relationships, the parent–child bond has received the most attention. Multiple monographs have examined the ideals and performances of filial piety from the perspectives of Confucian ideology, state-society relations, elite male identity, mother–son bond, and the tension between sons' domestic obligations

Maritime World (Leiden: Brill, 2016); Susan Mann, *Precious Records: Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); Man Xu, *Crossing the Gate: Everyday Lives of Women in Song Fujian (960–1279)* (Albany: State University of New York, 2016).

[12]Hsiao-wen Cheng, *Divine, Demonic, and Disordered: Women without Men in Song Dynasty China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2021); Jia, *Gender, Power, and Talent.*

[13]Grace Fong, *Herself an Author: Gender, Agency, and Writing in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008); Xiaorong Li, *Women's Poetry of Late Imperial China: Transforming the Inner Chambers* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012).

[14]Keith Knapp, "Creeping Absolutism: Parental Authority in Early Medieval Tales of Filial Offspring," in *Confucian Cultures of Authority*, edited by Roger T. Ames and Peter D. Hershock, 65–91 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006); and "Sympathy and Severity: The Father-Son Relationship in Early Medieval China," *Extrême-Orient Extrême-Occident Hors-série*, 2012, 113–36; Weijing Lu, "'A Pearl in the Palm:' A Forgotten Symbol of the Father–Daughter Bond," *Late Imperial China* 31.1 (2010), 62–97; Jonathan Spence, *Emperor of China: Self-Portrait of K'ang-Hsi* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988).

[15]Alan Cole, *Mothers and Sons in Chinese Buddhism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); Jinhua Jia, Xiaofei Kang, and Ping Yao, eds., *Gendering Chinese Religion: Subject, Identity, and Body* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014); Ping Yao, "Good Karmic Connections: Buddhist Mothers and Their Children in Tang China (618–907)," *Nan Nü* 10.1 (2008), 57–85.

[16]Katherine Carlitz, "Mourning, Personality, Display: Ming Literati Commemorate Their Mothers, Sisters, and Daughters," *Nan Nü* 15.1 (2013), 30–68; Martin W. Huang, *Intimate Memory: Gender and Mourning in Late Imperial China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2018).

[17]Patricia Ebrey, "Concubines in Sung China," *Journal of Family History* 11.1 (1986), 1–24; Weijing Lu, "Uxorilocal Marriage among Qing Literati," *Late Imperial China* 19.2 (1998), 64–110; Ping Yao, "Cousin Marriages in Tang China (618–907)," Ping Yao, *Chinese Historical Review* 18.1 (2011), 25–55; and "Until Death Do Us Unite: Afterlife Marriages in Tang China, 618–906," *Journal of Family History* 27.3 (2002), 207–26.

[18]Beverly Bossler, "A Daughter Is a Daughter All Her Life: Affinal Relations and Women's Networks in Song and Late Imperial China," *Late Imperial China* 21.1 (2000), 77–106; Patricia Ebrey, "The Women in Liu Kezhuang's Family," *Modern China* 10.4 (1984), 415–40.

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and other political and cultural engagements.[19] The politics and practice of mourning has remained an especially central concern of many studies. The first article in this issue, Thomas Radice's "A Dramaturgy of Death: Performing (and Spectating) Filial Piety in Early China," reflects these general trends. Through a close reading of discourse on filial death rituals, Radice detects a dramaturgical turn in the son's role in mourning parents from the Eastern Zhou to the early Han. In demonstrating filial piety, it is not enough for a son to act spontaneously and out of genuine grief. He also enacts "a kind of 'ritual script'" that is known and understood by all involved. From the perspective of parent–child relationship, this need to balance "personal dispositions and inherited ritual protocol" means that the most sacred domestic duty is not private in nature. A son's filial devotion is also shaped by the response from and assessment by cultivated observers. The performer–spectator relationship subsequently becomes fundamental in filial mourning.

Ping Yao's "Coping with the Loss of a Child" deals with mourning from the opposite end. Based on an analysis of 118 Tang epitaphs, Yao's study provides us with vivid detail about parental love and attachment. While the sons in Radice's study were expected to learn "what needed to be performed" and "how it should be performed" in death ritual, Tang parents deliberately ignored ritual decorum stipulated in the classics and legal codes when mourning their young children. Not only did funerary biographies allow these parents to express their grief somewhat publicly, but also let them downplay gender differences. Yao attributes this attention to children and the vivid descriptions of parent–child interaction to the strong influence of Buddhist perception of death, the afterlife, and mourning rituals.

A major contribution of recent work on women and marriage is to confirm that despite continuities in ritual prescriptions and didactic writing, actual practices underwent large changes and varied greatly across class and geographical boundaries. Women's property rights, for example, evolved over time.[20] So did notions about female fidelity and chastity.[21] Anne Kinney's "Husbands and Wives in Qin and Han-Dynasty Bamboo Legal Texts" demonstrates that women's legal status in early imperial China was far higher than previously imagined. As marriage partners, women were subject to the rule of collective responsibility, but the wife, especially widows, also shared certain privileges: she could "own land, head a household, share her husband's rank … and in most circumstances, control her dowry." "Fair" treatment of women can also be seen from official attitude toward illicit sex as well as state and lineage approval of a man promoting a female slave to the status of wife.

Kinney's findings, especially evidence of men and women deviating from ritual stipulations on marriage and marital fidelity, find an echo in Weijing Lu's "Poetry,

[19]There are too many items to list here. For a survey of Chinese and English scholarship, see "Introduction" to Cong Ellen Zhang, *Performing Filial Piety in Northern Song China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2020).

[20]Kathryn Bernhardt, *Women and Property in China, 960–1949* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); Bettine Birge, *Women, Property, and Confucian Reaction in Sung and Yüan China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Brian E. McKnight, "Who Gets It When You Go: The Legal Consequences of the Ending of Households," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 43.3 (2000), 314–63; Xing Tie 邢鐵, *Jiachan jicheng shilun* 家產繼承史論 (Kuning: Yunnan daxue chubanshe, 2001).

[21]Weijing Lu, *True to Her Word: The Faithful Maiden Cult in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008); Janet Theiss, *Disgraceful Matters: The Politics of Chastity in Eighteenth-Century China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

https://doi.org/10.1017/jch.2022.11 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Intimacy, and Male Fidelity: The Marriage of Wang Caiwei and Sun Xingyan." This is a story of conjugal love and compassionate marriage triumphing over gender norms and conventional family duties.[22] Living in the high Qing, Wang and Sun embraced and embodied the "perfect match" ideal as soulmates and intellectual and spiritual equals. The tearing down of gender barricades and conjugal hierarchy in their relationship can be seen most clearly in two important ways: first, of the couple, it was the wife who exerted the lasting impact on their relationship. Second, following Wang's death after only five years of marriage, Sun vowed not to remarry. Lu argues that the rise of the male fidelity phenomenon "represented the most radical aspect of the late imperial movement that made the husband–wife relationship a key foundation of marriage."

A distinctive feature of this special issue is its inclusion of three studies about the sibling relationship, a topic that has not been the focus of much scholarly work. My own contribution, "Brother, Uncle, and Patriarch" examines the Northern Song statesman Han Qi's (1008–1075) roles as a family man, more specifically, a brother, uncle, and patriarch. Ronald Egan's "Older and Younger Brothers" discusses the relationship of the most famous brothers in Chinese history, Su Shi (1037–1101) and Su Zhe (1039–1112). In contrast to Egan's and my focus on male–male relationship, Jing Xu's "Learning Morality with Siblings," studies a nine-year-old boy and his seven-year-old sister in a mid-twentieth-century Taiwanese family.

My study approaches Han Qi's relationship with his brothers and the younger generations from the perspective of the standing of the Han family. Han Qi's poetic and funerary biographical writing exposed his deep attachment to his brothers, nephews, and other young men in the third generation. His overarching concern, however, remained the continuation of the family through examination success and office-holding, endeavors that required the collective effort of all the Han men. For several decades, this goal not only shaped Han's interaction with his nephews and grandnephews in tangible ways, but also created noticeable undertones in his writing on family matters.

Han Qi and the Su brothers were among the most influential personalities in the Northern Song, but their family life and family relationships differed greatly. Zhang's and Egan's approaches are consequently different. In contrast to Zhang's focus on multigenerational relationships and concrete family matters, Egan's study centers exclusively on the emotional dimension of the relationship between Su Shi and Su Zhe. Drawing on their poetic exchanges over several decades, Egan argues that, despite successful careers and literary fame, their relationship with each other was in some ways the most enduring and sustaining aspect of their lives, characterized by mutual affection, disagreements, and competition. Egan's analysis yields results that may surprise us; to list just a few: Su Shi had a large following and communicated with friends and disciples frequently, but this was no comparison to his relationship with the "one and only Ziyou (Su Zhe)." Separated by only two years, the brothers were best friends for life. Yet once they were adults, they only spent a few years together and were unable to see each other for years on end. Although they were two of the most productive writers in Chinese history, they wrote to each other only a few times a year, mainly in poetry.

Jing Xu's article resonates with some of the themes in Zhang's and Egan's studies, above all in the way the older sibling dominated and the complexity of their feelings

[22]For an expanded discussion of this and other issues, see Weijing Lu, *Arranged Companions: Marriage and Intimacy in Qing China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2021).

https://doi.org/10.1017/jch.2022.11 Published online by Cambridge University Press

for each other. Xu's methodology and sources, however, are completely different. Trained in cognitive anthropology, Xu's social network analysis constructs the daily life and socio-moral world of the brother–sister dyad based on the field notes compiled in mid-twentieth-century Taiwan. Departing from the predominant focus on parent–child ties and parenting among anthropologists in Chinese studies, her work highlights the importance of peer-interaction and peer-learning. Especially interesting is Xu's analysis of the brother–sister unit maneuvering around their mother to avoid punishment. As a result, we learn a great deal about children as moral agents and the many ways that the brother and sister support each other and assert themselves in peer and family contexts.

Several themes emerge from this collection of essays. The first concerns the interconnectedness of family relationships. In addition to their principal subject of investigation, almost all of the essays touch on other, "minor" relationships, ranging from father–daughter and uncles–nephews/nieces to the bonds between grandmother–granddaughter and sisters born to different mothers. Not surprisingly, tension arose when relationships became complicated, as seen in the children dealing with their mother and Sun Xingyan feeling torn between his wife and friends. A blurring of boundaries and roles also recur. Kinney discusses a man finding his menial servant a wife and treating the servant as a son-surrogate. Han Qi treated his older brother as a father figure and his eldest nephew as a brother. Of all the personalities discussed in these essays, Wang Caiwei probably suffered the most from complicated family relations: she was born to a concubine mother, lost multiple family members at a young age, had a uxorilocal marriage, and endured pressure from her grandmother-in-law regarding producing an heir.

The second theme is the strong feelings that family relationships engender. We see men and women grieving their losses, showing love and affection, longing to spend time together, being disappointed in failures, and struggling with loneliness and resentment. More than occasionally, they ignored ritual propriety. Like the Tang parents and Wang Caiwei and Sun Xingyan, Han Qi and the Su brothers were unapologetic in displaying their affection for loved ones. The Taiwan children, Yikun and Meiyu, experienced emotional highs and lows while negotiating their relationship with each other within and outside the family.

The third theme is the presence of death. Death of people at all ages affected parents, spouses, and siblings in innumerable ways. This partly explains the prominent place of commemorative writing in Chinese literature. The articles by Yao, Zhang, Egan, and Lu feature cases of absence from a loved one's dying bed. Death was also a powerful force in shaping family relationships. Ironically, as Kinney shows, it was the passing of their husbands that thrust women into the position of household head, giving widows the autonomy and some sense of confidence in their ability to manage on their own. Losing all his older brothers made Han Qi the family patriarch, a role that he might not have anticipated for himself.

The fourth theme is young children.[23] Kinney shows a man elevating a female slave who had borne him children to the status of wife. In Yao's study, young sons and

[23]For some recent studies on children and childhood, see Ping-chen Hsiung, *A Tender Voyage: Children and Childhood in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005); Anne Behnke Kinney, *Representations of Childhood and Youth in Early China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); and the articles in Anne Behnke Kinney, ed., *Chinese Views of Childhood* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995); Wang Zijin 王子今, *Qin Han ertong de shijie* 秦漢兒童的世界 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2018);

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daughters were the nexus of family relationships that connected parents, grandparents, and other members. Han Qi wrote moving epitaphs for multiple boys and girls in the third generation. Lu's article hints at the psychological effect of children by different mothers growing up in the same household. Most importantly, Jing Xu illustrates children's critical role and unique capacity in "the acquisition, transmission and creative transformation of socio-cultural knowledge."

We hope that these essays will stimulate more work on Chinese history as seen through the prism of family relationship. Especially needed is more attention to understudied relationships such as those between in-laws, siblings, and extended family members.

Competing interests. The author declares none.

Pei-yi Wu, "Education of Children in the Sung," in *Neo-Confucian Education: the Formative Age*, edited by Wm. Theodore de Bary and John W. Chaffee, 307–24 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

Cite this article: Zhang CE (2022). Family Relations in Chinese History. *Journal of Chinese History* **6**, 193–200. https://doi.org/10.1017/jch.2022.11

https://doi.org/10.1017/jch.2022.11 Published online by Cambridge University Press