

Interaction Paper - Rynkiewich Chapter 5 “Marriage, Family, and Kinship”

People in different cultures have different views on their family history; and organize themselves in patterned ways that give social life a distinctive look.

Kinship contributes to personal identity and establishes rules for both informal and formal behavior. A nuclear family is a couple and their dependent children, regarded as a basic social unit. An extended family is a family that extends beyond the nuclear family, including grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other relatives, who all live nearby or in one household. A person's lineage is his or her line of ancestors. So matrilineal means basically "through the mother's line", just as patrilineal means "through the father's line". Bilateral descent is the tracing of kinship through both parents' ancestral lines, while unilateral descent is traced through only one gender. There are six general models for kinship terminology in the world. The predominant one called ‘Eskimo kinship’ which apply to American culture. The ‘Sudanese kinship’ terminology system has more terms, nearly a separate term for every relative. The Chinese kinship system is classified as a "Sudanese" or "descriptive" system for the definition of family.

When I arrived in America, I was confused in conversations with American people regarding how to describe our relatives. In America, both father’s and mother’s siblings are called either “uncle” or “aunt”, and the children of aunts and uncles are called “cousin” regardless of their gender. In my mind each relatives has a different title term in Chinese.

Two questions for further engaging this topic: 1. What is family dynamics? 2. How to find my family tree?