

MOSAIC

Ayi? Guma? Yifu? The 'Chinese relatives name game'

When I married into a Chinese family, nobody ever warned me about the complicated "Chinese relatives name game"



Jocelyn Eikenburg
Second Thoughts

I would need to navigate — a world of completely novel terms for family members that have no exact equivalents in my native language of English.

Consider this exchange that happened a few years ago while I spent the summer living with my in-laws in their rural village in Zhejiang province.

During dinner one evening, my

sister-in-law said our mother-in-law had spent the entire day planting the fields with a *jiujiu*, the Chinese term for uncles on the mother's side of the family. Yet as I understood, we only had two uncles we addressed with this term — Older *Jiujiu* and Younger *Jiujiu*. Neither needed help in the fields, especially the younger one, who had just begun working as the village secretary. How could our mother-in-law possibly have assisted someone called *jiujiu*?

So my sister-in-law clarified, "Oh, that's the little brother of the godfather," the very same godfather designated to watch over my husband Jun.

Suddenly, I recalled some time

ago when my mother-in-law said the godfather was actually a family relative, but I had forgotten how and asked my sister-in-law to explain. "He's the son of *gunainai*" "*Gunainai*?" In my conversational climb through this family tree, I felt increasingly tangled in its branches.

My mother-in-law, who must have already sensed my confusion while overhearing the conversation, sat down to clear things up. "*Gunainai* is the older sister of *waigong*," our maternal grandfather. "I call her *guma*, you call her *gunainai*."

"So many different names," I remarked with a sigh. Then I shared how, in the United States,

we used the same term for grandmothers, grandfathers, aunts and uncles on both sides of the family. But in my efforts to introduce this difference, I revealed how much I still had to learn by wrongly using the Chinese term *ayi* to refer to the younger aunt on the father's side.

"Don't you mean *shenshen*?" my sister-in-law asked, suppressing a grin.

My face flushed red from embarrassment, a familiar feeling for a foreigner in China, especially one trying to juggle such a complex set of family terms. "Sorry, *shenshen*. So, who do I call *ayi* then?"

"*Ayi* is my younger sister," my mother-in-law said.

"And you call *ayi's* husband, *yifu*,"

added my sister-in-law.

I slapped my forehead. "Terrible! Last time I saw *ayi* I referred to her husband as *shushu*," a word meant for younger uncles on the father's side.

My sister-in-law flashed me a sympathetic smile. "Don't worry about it. It's easy to feel as if you're lost."

Then, as if I wasn't already baffled, she gazed at her daughter, a baby at the time, and said, "She will call Jun's oldest brother *dabo*." *Dabo*? I'd never heard the term in my entire life — at least, the life that had included my Chinese family.

Years have passed since that conversation and still, whenever I appear at large family gatherings —

those that attract a more diverse mix of relatives such as the *gunainai* or *ayi* — I invariably commit at least one gaffe, if not more, while attempting to address someone.

So I have to wonder, how long will it take me before I can keep all of these names and relations together? Will mastering the "Chinese relatives name game" require a lifetime of practice?

Contact the writer at
jocelyn@chinadaily.com.cn

Online
Scan the code to hear an audio version



Candid camera: Hearty activity

A bridge in the shape of intertwined hearts, pierced by an arrow, proves a popular attraction at Chaka Salt Lake in Qinghai province, on Thursday.

ZHU HAIHUA / FOR CHINA DAILY



What's on

Cosmological Warrior

When: Aug 18, 7:15 pm
Where: Shanghai Oriental Art Center

New York City hip-hop dance company Rhythm City is coming to Shanghai bringing their award-winning choreography and explosive moves for an evening of awe-inspiring, fully interactive hip-hop drama.

Known for MTV's *Americas' Best Dance Crew Season 4*, Rhythm City has swept the east coast in the United States and has also ventured out on international tours, collaborating with celebrities such as Beyonce and Ariana Grande.

They are one of the first US dance companies to headline and perform their own tours, hitting over 100 cities in China. They also had the opportunity to share the stage with Jackie Chan and be televised by Chinese networks.

The Anatomy of the Piano

When: Sept 5-8, 7:30 pm
Where: National Center for the Performing Arts, Beijing

The Anatomy of the Piano premiered at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 2013, receiving critical acclaim.

The one-man piano performance subsequently toured the United Kingdom, Australia and Malaysia.

Billed as "part recital, part dissection", the performance features whirlwind piano playing, songs and stories as well as hand-drawn projections.

The Anatomy of the Piano begins with a false Santa Claus. A little boy who dreams of becoming an astronaut writes to Santa Claus to ask him for a spacecraft as a gift, only to see a piano under the Christmas tree next day.

Unwilling to give up, the little boy reads *The Anatomy of the Piano*, a mysterious textbook that he gets by accident. He becomes enthralled by the 300-year history of the instrument and development of piano music.

Evita

When: Sept 6-9, 10-15, 7:30 pm; Sept 7, 8, 14 and 15, 2:30 pm
Where: Shanghai Culture Square

Few leaders' spouses have sparked the imagination and adoration of the public in the same way as the rags-to-riches story of Eva Peron — Argentina's first lady in the late 1940s. The original version of the acclaimed West End and Broadway production named after her is arriving in Shanghai.

The two-and-a-half-hour show features many hit songs, including chartbusters such as *Don't Cry for Me Argentina*. Peron died aged just 33 in 1952.



LEO

When: Sept 12-22, times vary
Where: Shanghai Grand Theater

Y2D Productions' *LEO* is a mind-bending, funny, surreal, and surprisingly touching work that challenges the senses and tests perceptions of reality through the clever interplay of

This Day, That Year



Editor's note: This year marks the 70th anniversary of the founding of New China.

In 1991, the country's first tactile paving was put into use in Beijing as seen in the item from Aug 14, 1991, in China Daily.

The path stretched 1.6 kilometers in the downtown area.

Tactile paving is a system of textured surfaces which allow the visually impaired to navigate their way. There are more than 1,600 km of

such paving in the capital.

In 2001, the central government passed a law requiring tactile paving to be built along major streets in cities.

However, many "blind lanes" on sidewalks often have discarded bicycles or other obstacles.

And some of the surface indicators were clearly designed to look decorative rather than practical and user-friendly to those who need them.

Local authorities in many cities including Tianjin and Shanghai have realized the problem and taken measures to remedy the situation.

According to a 2012 survey conducted by the China Disabled Persons' Federation, only one-third of supposedly accessible facilities in

Beijing accorded with international standards, and almost 70 percent of disabled people nationwide voiced discontent with the level of access to public spaces.

In 2012, the central government implemented a regulation to guarantee construction of barrier-free public facilities.

There are nearly 85 million Chinese registered with disabilities, accounting for 6.3 percent of the population.

In Beijing, barrier-free buses and taxis are also available.

Braille signboards and route maps have also been placed to meet the needs of the visually impaired.



Wheelchair facilities have also been installed at subway stations.

The newspaper and beyond

On our Sina Weibo

Artificial meat mooncake to hit shelves

China's first-generation domestically developed artificial meat is expected to hit supermarket shelves next month. The artificial meat, made from soybean and peas, will be used inside traditional Shanghai mooncakes, according to the Changjiang Daily. Shanghai residents have already tasted the traditional snack and most could not tell the difference, the report said, noting the fake meat has zero cholesterol. The "meat" was developed by a team from Beijing Technology and Business University. The team conducted research on artificial meat for over two years to get rid of the plant flavors so the finished product would taste like meat.



Girl, 10, completes Tibet cycling challenge

A 10-year-old girl has completed the grueling adventure of cycling to the Tibet autonomous region along one of the world's most dangerous roads. Yuan Yixin cycled a total of 2,250 kilometers from Sichuan province with her father Yuan Qi over 25 days and finally arrived in Lhasa on July 30. This was the second attempt at the challenge to cycle along the Sichuan-Tibet Road for the father-daughter duo.

Passengers can book trips through new airport

Tickets for flights at Beijing Daxing International Airport are now on sale on the official website of Chinese online travel booking giant Qunar. The airport is expected to start operations on Sept 30. Located 46 kilometers south of downtown Beijing, it has been designed to relieve pressure on the overcrowded Beijing Capital International Airport. The new airport is forecast to see its passenger throughput reach 72 million in 2025.



Online
Scan to read more on our Sina Weibo page

On chinadaily.com.cn

People: Organic food idea grows naturally

Fu Yongjun started searching for organic agricultural products among remote mountains three years ago. In 2016, Fu and his colleagues set up a store to buy and sell natural food. During the past three years, Fu's footprints have spread almost all over China, and he's traveled more than 130,000 kilometers. Fu not only harvested natural products from the mountains, but also listened to touching stories from the farmers he met. Last year, Fu opened an online store on Taobao and a public account on WeChat to sell these products and tell the stories behind them to buyers.



World: Goats awarded for eating up plants

Five goats were honored for being the best of a herd of 24 that spent the summer feasting on invasive plants. The

Greatest Of All Time awards were presented to the top members of the herd in a ceremony held at Riverside Park in Manhattan, New York. The five winners were chosen on the basis of votes from thousands of locals who closely followed the animals' story from the time they were brought to the park in the spring. Massy, a 10-year-old goat, was voted the best. She tore through over 600 kilograms of vegetation. The other winning goats were Bella, Buckles, Chalupa and Skittles.

Biz: ByteDance enters search engine sector

TikTok creator ByteDance has launched an online search engine, taking its products from information flow to search field. This move may herald the beginning of a battle between it and its largest competitor, Baidu. The domain <https://m.toutiao.com/search> is now active online, proclaiming, "Search what you want," though an app has yet to manifest. ByteDance, a Beijing startup now worth \$75 billion, said in a post on WeChat this month that they are hiring new staff to build a search engine with an improved user experience. Visit our website to find out more.



Tech: AI bar knows who's next for serving

The battle to elbow rivals away and get to the front of the bar is a proud weekend tradition stretching back generations — but it causes headaches for bar staff trying to work out who has been waiting the longest. Now, British developers behind an AI bar are promising to consign shouts of "next?" to history, with the help of facial recognition. The system will use a webcam to film arrivals at the bar, feeding back the order of a virtual line to bartenders via a display screen behind the counter. The technology was tested in June at a bar in central London, and will be trialed at more establishments starting next month.

Online
Scan to read more on chinadaily.com.cn



live performance and video projection. It leaves audience members wondering which way is up.

It has been presented over 900 times in more than 35 countries, and continues to tour all around the world.

It is the unusual journey of an otherwise ordinary man whose world becomes physically unhinged.

On one side of the stage, there's a screen: vertical, rectangular. Beside it, there's a room with a ceiling, floor, two walls and a lightbulb. Inside the room, a performer sprawls on the floor, feet pressed up against a red wall. That room and everything he does in it appears on-screen, but tilted 90 degrees.

2047 Apologue

When: Sept 13 and 14, 7:30 pm
Where: National Center for the Performing Arts, Beijing

Director Zhang Yimou continues to explore the relationship between man and machine in the "third season" of his concept stage show, *2047 Apologue*.

In this new production, Zhang continued his idea from the original *2047 Apologue* by dealing with the theme of the relationship between human beings and technology. The show aims to mirror reality, commenting on how science and technology are such a huge part of life in the 21st century.

It has been more than 30 years since Zhang Yimou's directorial debut, *Red Sorghum*, won him international acclaim, including a Golden Bear for Best Picture at the 38th Berlin International Film Festival in 1988. Since then, he has enjoyed great success with global blockbusters such as *House of Flying Daggers* and *The Great Wall*.

Costantino Carrara Movie and Pop Concert

When: Sept 15, 7:30 pm
Where: Shanghai Oriental Art Center

Known for his popular piano arrangements uploaded on social media, Italian pianist and composer Costantino Carrara is coming to Shanghai to present his pop and classic crossover pieces.

Born in 1997 in Bitonto, Bari, Italy, Carrara discovered his musical ability as a child after receiving a keyboard as a gift from his grandparents. At the age of 12 he began to take piano lessons.

Currently studying jazz piano at the Niccolò Piccinni Music Academy in Bari, the talented young musician set up the WildPianos project in 2016, which aims to bring piano music to nature. Yamaha joined the project that year. The artist shot the first video in the project in Bari performing a cover of *Wherever I Go* by pop-rock band OneRepublic.

European music reviewers dubbed Carrara as "not a classical musician in the strict sense but a talent who truly bridges classical music and young audiences". With his soothing and therapeutic music, the artist will perform his arrangements of top movie tracks and songs such as *La La Land*, *The Greatest Showman*, *Bohemian Rhapsody*, *Game of Thrones* and *A Star is Born*.