



# Those close to you

A character that connects people together,  
just as kinship is seen as the foundation of society

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If 同志 (tóng zhì, comrade) was the ubiquitous form of address in the revolutionary past — and has since been appropriated by the LGBT community — then 亲 (qīn) may be the modern equivalent, at least among young urban women. Often used by Taobao merchants chatting with customers online, it is short for 亲爱的 (qīn ài de), or “dear, beloved, cherished”.

In the United Kingdom or United States, a similar term might be “love” or “hon”, respectively — a platonic term of endearment, often used by co-workers or new acquaintances, to help close distances and facilitate communication.

The character’s evolution followed a similar path as to how we form social connections in life: we are born with blood ties and, from there, make friends and build various relationships.

First and foremost, 亲 refers to one’s parents, or 双亲 (shuāng qīn): 母亲 (mǔ qīn, mother) and 父亲 (fù qīn, father). Confucianism views blood kinship as the foundation of society, and over the years, various adherents have promulgated exemplars of filial piety, but not all are exactly shining models to follow.

One tale concerns an old man in his 70s who often dressed flamboyantly and jauntily to appear young for his parents’ sake — so they could take their minds off their own age. The story coined the term 彩衣娱亲 (cǎi yī yú qīn, wear colorful clothes to please parents, or simply, “to entertain one’s parents”).

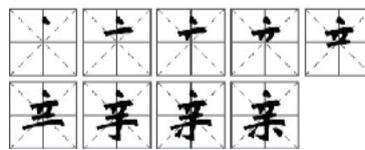
One’s biological offspring and siblings are definitely 亲, such as in 亲兄弟 (qīn xiōng dì, biological brothers). To stress the biological bond, use 亲生 (qīn shēng), such as in 亲生子女 (qīn shēng zǐ nǚ), biological children). Similarly, biological parents are 亲生父母 (qīn shēng fù mǔ), while adoptive parents are called 养父母 (yǎng fù mǔ).

Mostly referring to blood relations, 亲 sometimes can also mean relations through marriage, as in 姻亲 (yīn qīn) or “in-laws”. Though the phrase 相亲 (xiāng qīn) is roughly translated as “blind date” today, it actually started as an arranged meeting in which a man’s parents would assess and hopefully approve a prospective wife for him.

In other phrases, 亲 also refers to relatives in general, such as 亲戚 (qīn qi, relatives), 亲属 (qīn shǔ, kinsfolk), 亲友 (qīn yǒu, family and friends). The warm and loving feelings one shares with relatives are 亲情 (qīn qíng).

Sometimes, however, we also say

# 亲



qīn, dear

远亲不如近邻 (yuǎn qīn bù rú jìn lín, “a close neighbor means more than a distant relative”), since one’s neighbors may be better able to extend a helping hand in times of need, compared with distant kin.

To some, *guanxi* (关系, “connections” or “relationships”) is regarded as a “mysterious” Chinese cultural element, though, in fact, nepotism or favoritism are hardly phenomena unique to China or Asia.

Although there are elements of *guanxi* that are arguably exceptional, the term is rarely understood that way, and nor does *guanxi* always guarantee special treatment, such as in the phrase 六亲不认 (liù qīn bù rèn, “refused to acknowledge one’s closest relatives”), which means the person does not play favorites with anyone.

Another folk saying goes, 亲兄弟, 明算账 (qīn xiōng dì, míng suàn zhàng, “even between biological brothers, financial matters should be settled clearly”).

A fair and impartial attitude is always to be encouraged in matters of justice, as the phrase 大义灭亲 (dà yì miè qīn, “punish one’s own relatives in the cause of justice”) describes.

Of course, in real life, it is often the case that 任人唯亲 (rèn rén wéi qīn, “appoint people by favoritism”), but there also exists its equal and opposite, at least in ancient history. According to a legend of the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC), when the lord of the Jin state asked his official Qi Huangyang to propose a candidate for provincial chief, Qi recommended someone who was his enemy. The lord later asked him to find a general for the army, and Qi recommended his own son.

In both cases, Qi explained: “You

asked for an appropriate candidate for the position, which has nothing to do with whether they are my enemy or my son.” The tale gave rise to the phrase 举贤不避亲仇 (jǔ xián bù bì qīn chóu), which means “recommend whoever is capable, family or foe”.

Later, 亲 came to mean people who are close to you, but not necessarily related by blood, such as in 亲如手足 (qīn rú shǒu zú, “as dear as a brother”), and 亲近 (qīn jìn, “be close to”). It is also used to describe sentimental feelings, as in 亲热 (qīn rè, affectionate) and 亲切 (qīn qiè, warm and kindly).

Along the same lines, as a verb, 亲 means “kiss,” short for 亲吻 (qīn wěn). For instance, 她亲了小猫一下 (Tā qīn le xiǎo māo yī xià. “She gave the kitty a kiss.”)

Finally, 亲 can also refer to oneself, meaning “personally, in person,” as in 亲自 (qīn zì). For example, 这是他的亲身经历 (Zhè shì tā de qīn shēn jīng lì. “This event was his personal experience.”)

Whether it is family or friends, 亲 is about those who are, in some way, close to you. Hopefully, the meaning of this character will keep expanding, because, in the end, we are all in this life together.

*Courtesy of The World of Chinese; www.theworldofchinese.com*