

## FILIAL PIETY IN IMPERIAL CHINA

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*The concept of filial piety is not only a philosophical idea, but also a practical rule of ethics, which has persisted to the present time and is clearly reflected in nowadays' societies of East Asia. The aim of this article, concerning filial piety in imperial China, is to reveal the peculiarities of and the consensuses and contradictions in the conception and interpretation of filiality in Orthodox Confucianism and popular practices, as well as in Buddhism and Daoism. The study is a novelty in Lithuanian sinology as it offers a wide view on the subject, discovering its manifestations in all the three main teachings. It is an exploratory work of original sources, with some references to available studies of Western scholars. It concludes by saying that filial piety found its prominent place in most of the teachings and certainly made a great impact on nowadays' East Asian cultures.*

### **Preface**

Filial piety is an everlasting value which first emerged in Confucius' teachings, was extended to loyalty to the ruler and, in a broader sense, referred to the relationship between the inferior and the superior. Confucianism was adopted in Korea and Japan, and so did filial piety. Later the concept started to be explored by Western scholars and compared to Christian obedience, then it became the main object of academic conferences all over the world, and now this highly appreciated Confucian value is examined mostly as a cultural heritage in Far East immigrant societies and is related to the problems of aging society.

This article is concentrated on the manifestations of filial piety in imperial China, namely in Confucian, Buddhist and Daoist traditions and popular practices<sup>1</sup>. Although it is not a new subject in Western schools of Eastern studies, it is a novelty in Lithuanian sinology. As I couldn't manage to get any complete study of a subject, it is mostly an exploratory work of the original sources, namely *Lunyu* (論語, *Confucian Analects*), *Xiaojing* (孝經, *The Book of Filial Piety*), *Shujing* (書經, *The Book of History*), *Shijing* (詩經, *The Book of Songs*), *Zhongyong* (中庸, *The Doctrine of The Mean*), *Ershisi xiao* (二十四孝, *Twenty Four*

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<sup>1</sup> The article is an excerpt of a more extensive study in which the development and manifestations of Chinese filial piety are also compared to those of Korean and Japanese. The study encompasses not only the imperial epoch, but also the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

*Exemplars of Filial Piety*) and *Foshou fumu enzhong nanbaojing* (佛說父母恩重難報經, *Filial Piety Sutra*).

References are also made to a paper by Donald Holzman, who fully describes filial behavior in examples from the early texts while examining filial piety in ancient China. A study concerning funeral rites in late imperial China by Norman Kutcher was also at hand. The two studies above gave a suggestion to explore contradictions between Orthodox Confucianism and popular practices. A one-page-long article by Robert Reese gave an idea of examining Buddhist and Daoist texts and to compare the filial piety in all the three main teachings. Others are various Internet sources.

The article comes to a conclusion that filial piety was probably one of the most influential Chinese doctrines, which found its place not only in Confucian teachings where it first emerged, but also in Buddhism and Daoism all around China. Its simple basis made it easy to adopt in various teachings and various situations of social life and to preserve it to the present day.

### 1. The Fountainhead of Filial Piety

The concept of filial piety is noted in one simple character 孝 (*xiao*), which can be etymologically explained as an elder person supported by a child or, to be more exact, a son. Thus, its original meaning is a duty of a son to his old parents, a duty including total support, care and love. In fact, filial piety expands to a proper conduct with elders and superiors, including the relationships not only among the living but also with the ancestors, and prescribed not only to men but also to women.

The idea of filial obedience came from the very ancient times when communication with the ancestors was established on ritual ceremonies using special bronze vessels and oracle bones. The ancestors were regarded in the highest esteem which in some way is similar to the adoration of God in the West. The first character of filial piety was engraved in a bronze vessel at the turn of the Zhou dynasty (周; 1027–771 B.C.). The character was found on overall 64 bronze vessels dated from the Zhou dynasty to the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. and 17 from the Spring and Autumn period (春秋; 777–476 B.C.). The majority of those engravings are a simple sentence saying that in this vessel there are offerings of filial piety to the deceased father, father and uncles, or simply ancestry. Arthur Walley, citing *The Book of History* (*Shijing*, 詩經), believes that filial piety originally meant piety to spirits of ancestors and only later expanded for reverence to living parents [4, 186]. However, Donald Holzman argues for a wider meaning of *xiao* and comes to an idea that it also referred to piety to living relatives. It is evident that the majority of inscriptions in the mentioned vessels named exclusively departed ones only because they were found in ancestral temples.

Later on, filial piety entered more and more frequently the written documents of ancient China. Foremost these were the scripts of the Confucian tradition, which regarded obedience to one's parents as a natural attitude. Even Mozi (墨子; 480?–400 B.C.), who because of his idea of universal love was blamed by Mengzi (孟子; 372–289 B.C.) for “not recognizing

fathers”, while mentioning filiality in his numerous passages always raised it as a first step towards universal love [4, 186].

Filial piety as a natural and fundamental relation between people found its place in almost all schools of Chinese thought. It is only the legalist Han Feizi (韓非子; 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.) who openly despised *xiao* and stood for a total obedience to the state but not to parents. Nevertheless, he devoted the whole chapter 51, *Zhongxiao* (忠孝, *Loyalty and filial piety*), to show that only when filiality is subservient to absolute loyalty it is possible to achieve prosperity and peace in the world [4, 186].

When Qin Shihuang (秦始皇; 259–210 B.C.) unified China in 221, there came the end not only to the small states, but also to some schools of thought as philosophy also underwent the unification process. It was prohibited to speak about political issues, and the themes of ethics changed radically too. Philosophers, who had earlier talked about simple things in simple language, now were pushed to expel human experience and base their thoughts on myth and folklore; they were forced to think more or less rationally, as was expected by the throne. Everything was rearranged according to the Five Elements, numerology, cosmology and other traditional sources including the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing*, 易經).

Starting with the end of the Han dynasty (漢; 206 B.C. – 220 A.D.) filial piety occurred in different analects and other historical documents more and more frequently. Sons and daughters were ready to surpass themselves in manifesting their devotion and love towards their parents. Their extraordinary behavior, which sometimes even brought death, is possible to explain by the fact that in imperial China filial piety was regarded as an absolute virtue. All the texts depict filial piety as the foundation for all other virtues. This expansion of the concept was probably impelled by the parallel between obedience towards parents inside the family and loyalty to the ruler outside the family, drawn by imperial philosophers. The parallel is also found right here in chapter 51 of *Han Feizi*. It is also reflected in the *Book of Filial Piety* (*Xiaojing*, 孝經) and *Confucian Analects* (*Lunyu*, 論語).

Further on I will examine some Confucian classics concerning filial piety and compare philosophical attitude with popular practices.

## 2. Filial Piety in Confucian Thought

Marcel Granet, looking back to ritual classics compiled in the 2<sup>nd</sup>–1<sup>st</sup> c. B.C. when the Han dynasty was attempting to establish a Confucian rite, states that the family of these times was organized according to the imperial example – members of the family were united by relations of subordination, not feelings. Donald Holzman, reminding “Liao e” from the “Minor odes” of the *Book of Poetry* (*Shijing*, 詩經, “Xiaoya”, 小雅, “Liao e”, 蓼莪)<sup>2</sup>, on the

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<sup>2</sup> *Liao e* is a lament of the mourning one, who because of official duties cannot come to the funeral of his parents. The man is very sorry about the situation: his parents had to undergo hardships while giving birth to him and growing him, and now he isn't able to fulfil his last duty of a son.

contrary, claims that feelings played a very important role. I think that this ode reveals the necessity to obey the rite, not sincere feelings. Reading line by line I got more and more convinced that man is suffering not because of the death of his parents, but because of unfulfilled duty. This was probably determined by roughly indoctrinated ethics and strict rules of behavior, which didn't allow personal feelings between the members of a family to spring up, as Granet pointed out correctly. However, in other Confucian classics we will find the situation quite confusing, when the Teacher puts a great emphasis on the filiality as a duty, explaining the rules to fulfill it, and simultaneously demands sincerity which flows from the natural feelings towards parents.

### 2.1. Filial Piety in Classics and in Reality

One of the most eminent teachers of filial piety was Confucius (孔子; 551–478 B.C.) who was the first to mention this virtue in the main classic work of orthodox Confucianism, *The Analects* (*Lunyu*, 論語). The authorship of this classic is assigned to the disciples of Confucius, and the first variant of the script is believed to be burned by the order of the first emperor of the Qin dynasty (秦; 221–207 B.C.), however, it was restored in the Han dynasty from a manuscript found in a brick wall in the Confucius' house. This and some other existing variants were compiled into a homogeneous text and honorably named a classic<sup>3</sup>. In the Tang dynasty (唐; 618–907) the text was engraved in stone stelae and in Song (宋; 960–1279) the first commentaries on the text emerged.

In the *Analects* father is praised as an ideal, the example to follow, the highest authority. Teacher says:

“While father is living, follow his will; after his death, follow his conduct; if for three years you do not alter your father's way, you could be called filial” (1.11, also 4.20)<sup>4</sup>.

Reverence to one's father is spanless. It is expressed in obedience, decent behavior and speech, also in not speaking if speaking is not requested. According to Confucius, to honor your living father is simply natural – even animals do so. Reverence and decent conduct towards one's father grow into reverence and decent conduct towards all elders and the ruler. In other words, filial piety shifts to loyalty (*zhong*, 忠) and guarantees the stability of state:

“It is very rare that filial and fraternal people would be fond of offending their superiors, but there has never been such a man who not being fond of offending his superiors would make disorder” (1.2).

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<sup>3</sup> There were several ways to get *jing* in the title of a book. At first this was an honorable title for some very important scripts in the end of the Zhou dynasty. Later, in the Han dynasty, some books were selected by imperial officials-scholars, who gave them the title of *jing* and compiled a set of classics in this way. At first it was a set of five volumes, and in the Song dynasty their number increased to thirteen.

<sup>4</sup> This and further is my translation with reference to The Four Books [13]. The chapter and paragraph numbers of *Lunyu* are shown in brackets.

Confucius states some examples on how the son must behave towards his parents. He mentions that the son never offends his parents, never talks about them in a bad tone, does not travel to remote places unless it is necessary, always is aware of the age of his parents, defends them in need. This is probably only a few tips about filial conduct, which appeared to be crucial for Confucius' disciples.

A lot of disciples inquired Teacher directly about what filial piety was. Confucius replied: "It is when your parents are only worried when you are ill"(2.6). A child should help in overcoming the shortages, not make troubles. Sometimes it is hard, but "when troubles come, the young take the toil, when wine and food is served, it is set before the elders first". But this is not the filial piety yet. First of all, you must respect your parents. "Today filial is the one who can support one's parents. But even a dog and a horse can do that. If not the respect, what would make these things different?" (2.7). "While parents are alive, don't go far away, and if you do, know the exact destination"(4.19). And the most important is "not to be disobedient [...] Serve living parents according to the ritual, bury dead parents according to the ritual, offer sacrifices to your ancestors according to the ritual" (2.5).

Confucius told that the age of a parent must never be forgotten (4.21). We must be happy about our parents' long life, but at the same time we have to realize that the older they are the more care, love and attention they need. Furthermore, we must conceive that the day they'll be gone is approaching. Being ready for their departing, we would manage to bury them according to the ritual, and consequently the ceremony wouldn't be too pompous, the mourning would be sincere, but not exaggerative. When one asked Teacher about rites and ceremonies of the type, he said that "ceremonies would better be frugal than luxurious. The most important thing in funeral is mourning, not the temporary observance of all ceremonies" (3.4).

However, as Norman Kutcher claims, the death of parents in Confucianism is rarely understood as a natural process or is waited for easing the sufferings. This is always a great disaster, and in the first place – the sign of being unfilial. Confucian classics warn that funeral rites and mourning should not harm the living:

"After three days of mourning one starts to take casual food; in this teaching the country doesn't harm your life because of the death of the other. [...] Mourning should not last more than three years, by this showing the people that everything has an end!" (*The Book of Filial Piety*, ch. 18)<sup>5</sup>

However, after the death of parents filial piety was observed with fanaticism. In *The Book of Rites* (*Liji*, 禮記) the disease *huiji* (毀瘠) is mentioned. It is such an exhaustion that the bones are seen through the skin. In this classic, this disease is understood as overmourning,

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<sup>5</sup> This and further sections of *The Book of Filial Piety* is my translation in accordance with a literary Chinese textbook [1], translation of Fu Genqin [5], and comments of my respectable tutor D. Švambarytė, Vilnius University.

but in the Ming dynasty (明; 1368–1644) it was recognized as a sign of filiality; furthermore, the death from grief was awarded [6, 19]. Such an extremity was gained by living in a hut near the grave<sup>6</sup>, sleeping with a clod of dirt as a pillow, eating only gruel. Orthodox Confucianism claimed this practice to be degeneration of the tradition, because it was the funeral ritual itself that should help to express one's grief and to wipe out the feeling of guilt for the death of parents.

Despite the Confucian teachings, the eldest son, who was in charge for the whole thing, wanted an extravagant funeral for his filial duty to be fulfilled at best. The level of extravagancy depended on the family's financial state, but keeping it in the middle between extravagancy and modesty, as Confucius taught, was very difficult. Those who didn't have enough money would borrow in order to show all the love and care for the departed, and keeping one's face was the most important thing. This belief is common in nowadays' China too, and it arrived from the mix of Confucianism, popular traditions, geomancy, local and family customs. However, borrowing money for a vast funeral would end badly, as *Twenty Four Examples of Filial Piety* (*Ershisi xiao*, 二十四孝) declares (e. g., Dong Yong (董永) story).

The duty of filial piety does not end in the funeral ceremony. It is followed by three years<sup>7</sup> of sincere mourning and offerings in the ancestral temple till the end of days. Although, considering that filial piety is closely involved in the funeral ceremony and the cult of ancestors, some scholars blame Confucianism for focusing Chinese culture on death, I think that filial piety only puts more emphasis on hierarchy in Chinese society and fosters a higher respect for elders or superiors.

As concerns the ancestral rituals, it was in prehistoric times that the Chinese started communicating with the ancestors, for only the latter could reach the Highest Ruler (*Shangdi*, 上帝) and in the name of their successors ask Him for better crops, success in battlefield, etc.<sup>8</sup> The aim was achieved by offering food, clothes and mock money, because Chinese believe their ancestors to live casual life in the otherworld. Hungry and displeased, they become ghosts and bring distress and misfortune, while satisfied they can induce gods for the benefit of their progeny.

According to Confucianism, offering to ancestors mustn't be luxurious. Sacrificial animals mustn't be big and fat, however, to scrimp is also unacceptable. In the sacrificial ritual, as in all Confucian rituals, the most important thing is sincerity:

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<sup>6</sup> According to W. E. Soothill, this practice probably came from the times when bodies weren't buried (before 202 B.C.) and a son had to live next to the grave of his father for three years and to guard the body from wild animals [19].

<sup>7</sup> It is explained by the fact that when a child is born the parents don't let him out of their hands for three years; thus, when parents die, the child must not forget them for a second for three years (17.21).

<sup>8</sup> It is similar to the practice of praying God for gifts in Western monotheistic religions (Christianity, Judaism, Islam), only we pray God directly.

He sacrificed to the dead as if they were alive. He sacrificed to the spirits as if they were present. Teacher said: "If I don't take part in sacrifice it is equal to no sacrifice at all" (3.12).

Confucius was fond of emperor Wu and duke of Zhou, because they understood *xiao* and *li* perfectly and therefore offered to their ancestors as if they were alive (*The Doctrine of The Mean* (*Zhongyong*, 中庸), 19). Teacher believed that to honor the departed by offering them best food and utilities that made them happy while living was one of the greatest filial duties. The sacrifice to ancestors is the thank-offering for the gift of life. The thankfulness never ends, thus filial piety ends not with parents' funeral, but with the death of the child himself. But his, as a parent, good deeds are supposed to be continued by his children, so we can say that the filiality of one person lasts centuries from generation to generation. This continuum is very important and is often pointed out in writings of Confucius and Mengzi, who claimed that not having a male successor meant the end of offerings in the ancestral temple, thus this naturally was despised as an unfilial conduct. Unfilial conduct also included living separately from parents or grandparents, ending mourning before the end of a settled period, concealing the death of a parent and many others.

Filiality was awarded and unfilial conduct was punished. The "Kanggao" (康誥) chapter of *The Book of History* names various crimes, unfiliality and unfraternity among them. Sons who disobey and offend their parents and unfulfil their duties, parents who don't love their children and start to hate them, younger brothers who flout the will of Heaven and refuse to respect their elder brothers, elder brothers who don't understand the hardships that parents had to overcome while raising them and aren't fraternal to their younger brothers are suggested to be punished according to the emperor Wen (文)<sup>9</sup> penal code, otherwise the rule of Heaven would be trampled and All-Under-Heaven (*Tianxia*, 天下) would be doomed to disorder.

In many classics it is mentioned that *xiao* is the main virtue of a good ruler. Ending a thought about the proper conduct of emperor Wu and duke of Zhou in chapter 19 of *The Doctrine of the Mean*, Confucius says:

"For those who know the sacrificial rituals for Heaven and Earth and understand the meaning of sacrifice to ancestors, to rule the country is as easy as to look at their own palm!"

Confucius knew the rituals and understood the meaning of sacrifice but never struggled for an official post. When he was asked why, he answered in the following way:

"The Book of History says: 'Alas, filial piety! It is enough to love your brothers to have an authority'. This virtue gives authority. Why to struggle for official post?" (2.21)

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<sup>9</sup> Emperor Wen is the father of emperor Wu, who defeated Shang and founded the Zhou dynasty.

As *xiao* is the main virtue of a good official and an official post is gained only through the civil examination, this virtue also comes to be the foundation for learning:

Teacher said: “The Youngster must be filial within the family, fraternal outside the family, sincere and reliable, full of love for everyone and benevolent to relatives. Only after he has fulfilled these duties properly, he can apply himself on studying” (1.6).

In conclusion, there are many things about filial conduct in several biggest Confucian classics, however, the main classic we must consider in a particular case is *The Book of Filial Piety*. This classic, revealing the basis of ethics of the Han dynasty and of Orthodox Confucianism, has made a great impact on the further development of the concept of *xiao*. It was one of the fundamental writings that children were supposed to learn by heart. Thus in 229, when Sun Quan (孫權; 182–252), the founder of the kingdom Wu (吳; 229–280), asked his general to recite something of what he had learned as a child, he started with *Xiaojing* immediately [4, 191].

## 2.2. *The Book of Filial Piety*

*The Book of Filial Piety* (*Xiaojing*, 孝經) is like a compendium of Confucian thought: ethical principles and political concepts, also teachings about self-education, family order, ruling of the country and preserving peace in the world – all come in it. It is known that this classic was used as a primer in the Han dynasty. Lü Weiqi (呂維祺), a scholar of the Ming dynasty, calls the *Xiaojing* “a guide to the conduct of emperors of future generations in their government of the country and an infallible law of all ages” [5, 1].

This classical, devoted to all aspects of filial piety, expands the semantics of the concept, including in it all the best features of human character and all models of proper conduct. *Xiaojing* consists of quite a small vocabulary – only 388 different characters, however, most of them are very important and often mentioned in other philosophical opuses. It also introduces such important Confucian concepts as virtue (*de*, 德), principle (*dao*, 道), ritual (*li*, 禮), a noble man (*junzi*, 君子), sage (*shengren*, 聖人), etc.

The authorship of *The Book of Filial Piety* is ascribed to Confucius, but it is believed that his concept of *xiao* wasn't so inclusive. Since the classic is actually a dialogue between Confucius and his disciple Zengzi (曾子; 505–437 B.C.)<sup>10</sup> praised for his eminent filiality, some of the scholars claim the book to be compiled by this disciple. On the other hand, he could never name himself Zengzi (teacher Zeng), thus the authors may be disciples of Zengzi.

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<sup>10</sup> His true name was Zeng Shen (曾參) and his style name was Ziyu (子與). Zengzi learned under the sage from his sixteenth and was a voluminous writer. 668 onward his name was associated with the sacrifices to Confucius, and in 1267 Zengzi was called one of the sage's four Assessors – an Exhibitor of Fundamental Principles of Sage (*zongsheng*, 宗聖). His awe-inspiring filiality was made into a story in *Twenty Four Exemplars of Filial Piety*.



I would share this opinion, although some others believe that the authors are Mengzi and his successors, because the style of this classical reminds of his style [1, 35]. There are more versions known, because the date of compiling of the text isn't clear. It is believed that the text was created before the Han dynasty and burned by an order of the emperor Qin Shihuang. Emperor of Han appointed the restoration of the text, and this compilation was called the new text of *The Book of Filial Piety*.

Although this text was named classic before the Han rule, it gained almost no attention from imperial scholars at first. Because of the simplicity of its style and thought it was even considered to be coarse. However, historian Wang Guowei (王國維 1877–1927) claims that there was no one to examine *Lunyu* either, and the reason is simple – *The Book Of Filial Piety* and *The Analects* were studied by every Chinese on their own account, because only after this it was possible to continue further studies of larger philosophical texts more sophisticated both in style and in thought [1, 36].

In *The Book of Filial Piety* Confucius gradually represents the concept of *xiao*, starting with an introduction of the idea and ending with the last duty of filial piety, the funeral of parents. Almost every chapter ends in a few lines from *The Book of Songs*, making it more convincing.

The first chapter is very Confucian-like. First of all there are ancient sages mentioned. In their times people in All-Under-Heaven lived in harmony and prosperity, because filial piety was hold in high esteem and *xiao* was the foundation of all virtues. Being filial starts with cherishing and preserving one's body, because it is given by parents, and finishes with glorifying the parents.

The next five chapters illustrate filial piety of people of different social strata, starting with Son of Heaven (*Tianzi*, 天子), i. e. the emperor, and finishing with common people (*baixing*, 百姓). The *xiao* of a Son of Heaven is an example for all. Feudal lords (*zhuhou*, 諸侯) are moderate and modest, thus they are able to preserve the highest values and to keep their office. This gives a guarantee of harmony for common people and is a filial piety of feudal lords<sup>11</sup>. Gentry (*qing*, 卿 and *daifu*, 大夫) follow the example of ancient sages precisely, thus their clothes, speech and conduct are proper, and they preserve decent values. Therefore they are able to keep their family name and social status. That is called the filial piety of gentry. Officials (*shi*, 士) divide their love between father and mother evenly, as well as their obedience is divided between father and the superior evenly. They serve with reverence and respect and that expands to loyalty and obedience. Thus, officials are able to keep their office

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<sup>11</sup> Feudal lords *zhuhou* (諸侯) were accountable to the emperor and responsible for the altar of agricultural deities. The altar signified a territorial unit which was ruled by them. Only if they performed the rituals in a proper way, they were favored with a ward of gods in their territories and could keep their posts.

and salary and attain the right to sacrifice to their ancestors<sup>12</sup>. This is a filial piety of officials. Commoners

“save on their own needs so as to provide for the needs of their parents. This is the filial piety of common people! [...] there has never been a man who would find an excuse for not being filial” (Chapter 6).

Thus, we see that being filial means fulfilling one’s duty, which comes in accord with one’s rank.

Chapter 7 stresses that all Three Powers (Heaven, Earth and man) follow certain principles that modify their conduct. Since the ancient rulers understood and followed those principles, All-Under-Heaven lived in harmony. All duchies obeyed one emperor; all servants served their superiors; nobody neglected parents or elder brothers and sacrificed to ancestors in a proper way, thus there were no calamities or misfortune. It was the result of filial piety of ancient sages (chapter 8).

Chapter 9 is like the culmination of the text. Confucius says:

“Of all the acts of man, there is nothing greater than filial piety. In filial piety there is nothing greater than reverence for one’s father. In reverence for one’s father there is nothing greater than making him equal to *Tian* (天)”.

This shows that the greatest filiality is to deify one’s father. It is affirmed by the example of the duke of Zhou (周公; d. 1105 B.C.)<sup>13</sup>, who offered to his father as if the latter was *Shangdi* (上帝). It is an allusion to ancestral cult again. It is also stressed in this chapter that being unfilial is the worst misdeed. But chapter 15 reminds that *xiao* isn’t just a blind submission to one’s will. The Son of Heaven, only because he had discrepant officials, was able to keep his rule on All-Under-Heaven, and so did feudal lords. Officials had discrepant friends; that’s why they could keep their good name. And fathers had discrepant sons, who didn’t let them wander away to iniquity. Confucius said:

“When iniquity occurs, a son cannot obey his father’s will, a servant cannot obey his ruler’s will”.

If the inferior supports an indecent move of the superior, it would be considered as an offence of filial piety, but if he stops it he would be named filial.

The classic ends in chapter 18, called “About mourning for parents”. Confucius teaches:

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<sup>12</sup> The emperor had seven ancestral temples for different ancestors and performed rituals every month there. Feudal lords only had five temples, and other officials had three or less, depending on their rank. Common people didn’t have any temples, but they honored their ancestors at home.

<sup>13</sup> If no name is given to the duke of Zhou, in most cases it would be a reference to the younger brother Tan of the ruler Wu of Zhou. He is known as a decent Confucian and is always set as an example of a noble man and an ideal ruler.

“A good son mourns this way: he cries without voice, he performs the ritual sincerely, he speaks simple words, he is uncomfortable in good clothes, he finds no happiness in music, he finds no pleasure in delicacies – this is the revelation of his mourning!”

But the mourning shouldn't last more than three years, because everything has an end. After the funeral according to the ritual there is an ancestral temple built according to the ritual. This keeps the memoir of a deceased alive and gives pleasure to his soul. Offerings are the last filial duty.

The importance of *xiao* is exhibited in examples of ancient rulers, and its significance and magnificence are displayed in one sentence from chapter 7:

“Filial piety is the principle of Heaven, the righteousness of Earth, the code of conduct of all people”.

(夫孝，天之經也，地之義也，民之行也).

As Holzman states, such a mystical explanation isn't of the rational Confucius or Mengzi style. *The Book of History* or *The Book of Song* have some feelings in it, but the text of *Xiaojing* is arid, more concentrated on the construction of the imperial system than revealing the true feeling and decent attitude towards one's parents. Since all the text flows in a formal tone, which is even more amplified by quotes from *Shijing*, I agree with Holzman who says that *The Book of Filial Piety* was probably compiled while executing the order of emperor. There was a need for a simple but persuasive text to explain the social status and duties of every person and to strengthen the state at the same time. That's why filial piety in *Xiaojing* turns from the natural feeling for one's parents to obedience and loyalty to one's ruler.

Let's examine more texts concerning filiality, which contain family relations as the main object.

### **2.3 Twenty Four Exemplars of Filial Piety and other stories**

When filial piety gained enormous importance, the obsession for fulfilling this duty no matter what started. In 134 B.C. Han authorities invented a special award, *xiaolian* (孝廉), as the title for the most filial sons [4, 196]. In the modern Chinese it means “a graduate”, so it is natural that such a title built an open highway to the highest official posts for the hitherto unknown person. Filial sons or their parents sometimes also were awarded great personal gifts from the emperor.

Stories about pious children first emerged in the Han dynasty and reached the culmination in the 3<sup>rd</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> century. The first known story of such a type tells about a high official Shi Jian (石建). His father Shi Fen (石奮) became a servant of a founder of Han in his youth and turned from a pauper to a high official. He followed Confucian principles with all his heart

and his four sons followed him. When father reached his old age, Shi Jian visited him every day and secretly washed his bedclothes as well as his chamber pot<sup>14</sup>. Later on there were more stories like this told. They were even illustrated in carvings and relieves of the Han dynasty. Some of the stories were exposed in the *Chronicle of Eastern Han* (*Hou Hanshu*, 後漢書).

Although it is doubtful that all the facts in it are real<sup>15</sup>, the number of stories on filial piety continued to increase after the Han dynasty, and people still believe in them nowadays. Fanaticism like this is also found in the West, where the Christian saints sacrificed themselves for Christ. I absolutely agree with Holzman that among these stories it is also possible to find such amazing and shocking details as in the stories about pious Chinese children. So why shouldn't these stories be true?

One of the best known compendiums of stories about pious children is *Twenty Four Exemplars of Filial Piety* (*Ershisi xiao*, 二十四孝). This collection is not one of the Confucian classics, however, it gained the same recognition and was available at every bookshop throughout China until the communist rule. Afterwards new editions were published only after 1990 [15].

*Twenty Four Exemplars of Filial Piety* were written down in the Yuan dynasty (元 1260–1368) by Guo Jujing (郭居敬), who lived in the district of Datian (大田縣), Fujian province (福建省). The filial piety of the author is also widely known, and this compendium was published as a commemoration of the death of his father.

Stories of *Ershisi xiao* are well known not only in China, but also in Korea and Japan. The original texts have undergone many changes and some of them were even thrown into a shade by other similar stories<sup>16</sup>. The written form of the tales is short, but the spoken one is woven with longer stories, furthermore, the same plots emerge in other texts as well, e. g., *The Book of History*, *The Three Character Classic* (*Sanzijing*, 三字經), etc. The compendium includes a period of time from the legendary emperor Shun (舜; 2257–2208 B.C. (?)) to the Song dynasty and depicts mostly sons serving their mothers. Every story ends in a short verse and is illustrated with a simple picture.

It is quite surprising that women here play a very important role. It isn't of Confucian character and maybe these stories are specially selected to equipose the high esteem of men created by written Confucianism. To be hardworking, to provide parents with food and other

<sup>14</sup> This story is told in *Shiji* (詩集) 103.2765–66 and *Hanshu* (漢書) 46.2195–96 – Holzman's comment.

<sup>15</sup> Hans Bielenstein, who examined *Hou Hanshu*, regards the stories of filial piety as tales going beyond historical facts. In his opinion, even the fact that there is mentioned several times that "people ate one another" already forces to question the realism of the chronicle. However, Holzman reminds the cannibalism after the "Big Leap" (1960–1961) and during Cultural Revolution. These facts and scientific studies of Robert des Rotours in 1963 and 1968 show that cannibalism is endemic under certain conditions [4, 198].

<sup>16</sup> Thus I couldn't manage to get the source that would be evidently original. I took the material of David K. Jordan, Professor Emeritus of Anthropology, UCSD [15], as a reference, but still left the exploration of *Ershisi xiao* quite obscure.

facilities, to obey their will, not to make trouble, to know the age of the parents, to serve them according to the ritual, etc. – they were all the responsibilities of a son and of the eldest son first of all. Nevertheless, those popular stories teach women to be filial as well. A story from the Han dynasty tells about the wife of Jiang Shi (姜詩), who with her husband went long distances every day to provide her mother-in-law with some fish and pure water from a certain fountain. Ding Lan (丁蘭), another citizen of Han, divorced his wife, because she wasn't reverent to his departed parents. The unfilial conduct of a woman was the first serious reason for divorce in China.<sup>17</sup>

In fact, the role of a woman as mother, stepmother or mother-in-law was far more eminent than that of the daughter-in-law. In *Twenty Four Exemplars of Filial Piety* sons sacrificed their life or health for their mothers' or stepmothers' benefit willingly. It is told that Guo Ju (郭巨), who lived in the Han dynasty, was so poor that he even decided to bury his own son so as to provide his mother with more food. His argument was that it is possible to have more children, but mother is the only one. While digging the grave for his son he found a treasure, gods were so moved about his filiality that they saved the life of the child and gave prosperity to the family.

Gods or emperors award filial piety in numerous stories. There are also stories about emperors and high officials, who also took care of their mothers willingly. Little children understood filial piety as well: six-year-old Lu Ji (陸績) stole some oranges to bring them to his mother who liked them very much but couldn't afford them; nine-year-old Huang Xiang (黃香) heated up the bed of his father in winter and winded his pillows in summer so as to provide more comfort in his father's old age; fourteen-year-old Yang Xiang (楊香) rescued his father from the tiger. Numerous characters of these stories sacrificed their life or health for their fathers or both parents.

It is always emphasized that children never complained about the hardships they had to overcome for being filial, and they were willing to cover tremendous lengths to carry out filial duties. Many stories alongside with the *Twenty-four Exemplars* are known concerning sacrifice of a part of one's body for making medicine for critically ill parents. Kuwabara Jitsuzo says that the first such sacrifice is known from the Tang dynasty [6, 30]. Although Mongol rulers of the Yuan dynasty, as well as emperors of Ming and some of Qing (清; 1644–1911), declared that no one who sacrificed a part of his body would be allowed to take an official post, this practice was never prohibited.

There was a well known Suicide Cliff (Sheshenya, 捨身崖) on Mount Tai, where children would go to hurl themselves to death as a way of saving their ill parents or redeeming from

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<sup>17</sup> A missionary of the 19<sup>th</sup> c. Rev. Justus Doolittle named the following reasons for divorce: 1) unfilial conduct (towards parents-in-law), 2) adultery, 3) jealousy, 4) loquacity, 5) theft, 6) virulent disease (e. g., leprosy), 7) futility [2, 107].

the failure in civil examination.<sup>18</sup> In the Ming dynasty, attempts were made to decrease the number of filial suicides. The local official He Qiming (何起鳴) built a wall at the summit and renamed the spot Cliff of Loving the Life (Aishenya, 愛身崖). However, suicides continued into the 20<sup>th</sup> century [6, 30].

Thus, we have come to the paradox of filial piety: suicide is, of course, unfilial, but suicide in regard to one's parents is absolutely different. It is a consequence of the coexistence of written Confucianism and popular practices. Confucius taught to preserve every hair of one's body, because it is given by one's parents, thus a pious child would not participate in the fight or cause a war. It is not only a risk of losing a given and nurtured life, but also a risk of losing the possibility of having an offspring, what is also one of the biggest misdeeds of a person. However, filial piety is stuck in Chinese heads as a wild obsession from the early childhood and makes them ready for everything.

After this analysis of Confucian opuses it is apparent that *xiao* is closely related to many virtues of human character like an axis for the spokes that form the wheel – an ideal personality which has the characteristics of reverence, loyalty, self-sacrifice, hardworking, matching obedience with propriety, and – the most important – sincerity. Confucius believed natural love and care for family members to be the foundation of social harmony and decent attitude towards family and society to be the foundation of a personal value. Manifested in the ancestral rite, *xiao* displays the meaning of keeping the tradition and encourages the youth to continue the path of their ancestors. This may seem an argument against progress, but it guarantees the stability of the state and society, which has always been the most important thing for Chinese people.

In conclusion, filial piety emerges differently in Confucian classics and in popular practices. While Confucius taught sons to be filial, society demanded the same filiality from daughters too; while Confucius taught to preserve one's body and life, society demanded to sacrifice everything. Contradictions are also found in funeral service. The Confucian theory and practice depict filial piety in different shapes: this natural feeling in written classics is extended to loyalty for the ruler and in popular practices it is made into obsession.

### 3. Filial Piety in Daoism and Buddhism

It seems that monastic institutions of Buddhists and Daoists directly contradict the main rules of filial piety: both Buddhists and Daoists have to leave their parents to live reclusive so as to attain immortality and nirvana. Furthermore, they have to give vows of celibacy and aren't allowed to have children. However, the majority of Chinese Daoists and Buddhists spoke for

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<sup>18</sup> A failure in civil examination was considered to be a failure in fulfilling one's filial duties. Since the examination was the only way of access to higher social strata and of overcoming poverty, parents put all their hopes in their children and educated them at a great material sacrifice. Not getting a post was equal to not following a will of one's parents. And that was the worst misdeed of a devoted man.

filial piety. It was especially evident in the Song and the Yuan dynasties when new schools of Daoism emerged. They were mostly devoted to teaching popular ethics and salvation for all beings. It was stated that the one who aspires after immortality has to be loyal, filial, fraternal, obedient, and benevolent at first.

Buddhists and Daoists, Christians alike, are of two types: monks and laymen. Lay people are mostly concerned about their family, whereas monks have neither family nor job; they carry out personal practice and the promotion of teachings as their profession. Of course, some of the monks do choose a reclusive lifestyle; however, it should be stressed that Buddhism in China is mostly of Mahayana tradition, which takes the salvation of all beings as its objective. Consequently the Mahayana monks nestle beside villages and towns, where they play an active role in community life [17]. It is said that a Daoist priest has to be even more loyal, filial, fraternal, obedient, etc. for setting himself as an example for lay people.

The earliest Daoists didn't express their attitude towards filial piety very clearly, but it is evident that they didn't argue against it. Although Laozi (老子, 604–531 B.C.) seems to put some value upon this virtue, he speaks in an antithesis:

When there's no harmony in the family, the filial piety and love rises. (六親不和，有孝慈。) (Daodejing (道德經), chapter 18)

Don't be benevolent, deny justice, and people will remember filial piety and love. (絕仁棄義，民復孝慈。) (Chapter 19)<sup>19</sup>

Laozi says that filial piety and love spring up naturally from disharmony and iniquity. Good is the beginning of bad and bad is the beginning of good. Thus the spontaneity is praised.

Zhuangzi (莊子; ~ 369–286 B.C.) saw filial piety as a predestination which is unavoidable, and associated it with loyalty for a ruler which is unavoidable. He puts the following words in Confucius' mouth:

"Everyone of us has two principal rules: one of them is destiny, the other is duty. Love of a child for his parents is destiny; it cannot be excluded from one's heart. Serving the ruler is a duty; the obedient cannot go on without his master no matter what. [...] ... in serving one's parents the highest filial piety – to live with one's father and mother – is fulfilled. In serving the ruler the highest loyalty – obey every order – is fulfilled. [...] As a servant and as a son you have something you can't avoid" (Chapter 4)<sup>20</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> This is my translation according to that of J. Legge [9] and the comments of my respected teacher Chang, National Taiwan Normal University.

<sup>20</sup> This and the following quote is my translation of the Russian variant by Maliavin [10].

In chapter 14 Zhuangzi explains that it is easy to be filial and loving, but it is hard to forget this love, parents, filial piety, and subsequently make parents and the whole world forget you. This is the only way to attain inaction which is the true value for Daoists [10, 156].

In chapter 31 the Daoist-like natural float and spontaneity are emphasized:

The truth is the highest verity and sincerity. [...] It manifests in human relations in the following way: within the family the son is filial and father is loving, within the state the official is loyal and the ruler is fair. Everybody revels in parties and grieves in funerals. As well as duty is essential to loyalty and justice, happiness is essential to party, grief is essential to mourning, and provision is essential to service to parents. There are many ways to fulfil these duties. If during service to parents everything is done on time, nobody would wonder how it was done. If it is revealed with all one's heart during the party, nobody would choose which cup to drink of. If sincere grief is shown during the mourning, there would be no necessity to wonder whether the performing of the ritual is proper or not.

Zhuangzi obviously put some value upon filial piety, only he emphasized not the ritual or duty of xiao, but a sincere, spontaneous, natural, heartfelt service to parents and ruler. Only when filiality flows as if of its own accord, the principle of inaction is achieved, and this is the highest virtue.

Daoism is closely related to Buddhism, which in China was never adopted in its original Indian form. It was introduced to the Chinese as a strain of Daoism in the 1<sup>st</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> centuries, and only foreign rulers attempted to set it as an official religion. The 4<sup>th</sup>–5<sup>th</sup> century was a start for antibuddhist campaigns trying to expel Buddhism as fictitious and contradictory to Chinese traditions. As a consequence, Buddhism was modified, but it also modified Daoism alongside.<sup>21</sup> In the Tang dynasty there was a boom of the new Chinese Buddhist schools. Among them was also the nowadays well known Chan Buddhism (*Chan*, 禪), influenced by the *LaoZhuang*<sup>22</sup> Daoism school.

In the Song and the Yuan dynasties a tradition of syncretism of religion emerged. Buddha Maitreya was turned into Milefo (彌勒佛); the cult of Guanyin<sup>23</sup> (觀音), Indian Avalokitesvara, advocating love and compassion to all living creatures became very popular. As Hodous claims, the latter was the origin of the celebration of mother-goddesses, prevailing in all China [3, 32]. Some of mother-goddesses emerged when real women of great filiality, grace, dutifulness and diligence were deified after their death. What is meant by filiality here is often a sacrifice of an arm, eye or some other part of the body for the preparation of some

<sup>21</sup> Both teachings have the conception of karma and Dao as well as immortality of soul and monastic tradition.

<sup>22</sup> It's the mix of the names of Laozi and Zhuangzi.

<sup>23</sup> This is the goddess of mercy, which embodies the ideal of femininity, beauty, filial piety and compassion for the weak, and the suffering for the Chinese. At first Indian Avalokitesvara was a male god, but later, probably because of Christian influence, it became a female god both in China and India. Now it is said that this bodhisatva is neither male nor female and the sex of its visible image depends on the situation.



special medicine for critically ill parents or parents-in-law. Stories about these women are told in various Buddhist scripts.

Daoism of the Song and the Yuan dynasties, especially in Southern China, assimilated with local cults, consequently attaining some of their features; e. g., the full name of the Pure Brightness sect *Jingming zhongxiao* (靜明忠孝)<sup>24</sup> clearly manifests Confucian ethics.

The *Jingming* sect is closely related to the Numinous Treasure sect (*Lingbao*, 靈寶) and some scholars consider that Pure Brightness actually originated in the *Lingbao* sect [16]. The latter is worth notice for developing the idea of universal salvation, which said that it is possible to salvage not only all the living but also ancestors. This teaching was highly influenced by Mahayana Buddhism and was woven of elements of magic, as well as Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism.

Filial Piety was also incorporated in teachings of Complete Perfection (*Quanzhen*, 全真), which is still popular. The heart of it is the idea of syncretism of the three main teachings (*sanjiao heyi*, 三教合一), namely Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism. Although monks of *Quanzhen* also cut loose from their families, the doctrine of filial piety was very important for laymen of this sect. Furthermore, *Xiaojing* was considered as one of the main teaching scripts to Complete Perfection sect.

In fact, filial piety found its way to all Chinese religious sects of the later imperial period. Daoist temples were decorated with heroes of *Twenty Four Exemplars of Filial Piety*; stories about filial daoists, e. g., Su Xiangong (蘇仙公) [26], were also created. Filial Wu Meng (吳孟), who lived at the turn of the Jin dynasty, is mentioned in *Chronicle of the Jin dynasty* (晉書, *Jinshu*) and *Biographies of Twelve Perfect Rulers* (十二真君傳, *Shierzhenjun zhuan*) [20]. There are also more heroes known.

It is worth noting that some parts of Daoist, Buddhist and Confucian ethics are concurring: all the three of them promote mutual love, benevolence and dignity, foster not to pursue fame and wealth, but to give a helping hand and see every person as a member of one's family, and states that good deeds are awarded and bad deeds are punished. Daoism and Buddhism were also incorporated in funeral rites.

It seems that the doctrine of filial piety was one of the best ways to make Buddhism more Chinese as it was widely included in newly created sutras, e. g., *Ullambana Sūtra*<sup>25</sup>, which teaches to offer sacrifices to one's departed parents and ancestors of seven generations once a

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<sup>24</sup> Pure Brightness Loyalty and Filial Piety sect. Its origin was the cult of Xu Xun (許遜), also known as Perfect Ruler Xu (許真君), who lived in the Jin dynasty (晉; 265–420) and was educated in Confucian manner, but was very interested in Daoism and attainment of immortality. It is said that he followed the admonitions of The Brightest King of Filial Piety (孝道明王, *Xiaodaomingwang*). He was awarded the title of *xiaolian* and an official post, but resigned. Later he attained immortality and was deified and named the founder of *Jingming* in the Song and Yuan dynasties. In fact this sect was founded by He Shouchen, or He Zhengong, who promoted both *xiao* and loyalty [14].

<sup>25</sup> It was translated by the Indian monk Dharmaraksha (法護, ?-1058).

year [25]. Filial piety is also promoted in *Lotus sūtra* (*Saddharma-pundarīka-sūtra*, *Fahuajing*, 法華經)<sup>26</sup>, one of the most prominent scripts of Far East Buddhism, as well as *Avatamsaka-sūtra* (*Huayanjing*, 華嚴經)<sup>27</sup>, the main script of the *Huayan* school. It teaches to behave with all living creatures as if they were parents, teachers, elders, Arhats<sup>28</sup> or even Buddhas [21].

The same is taught in *Bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha Sūtra* (*Dicang Pusa Benyuanjing*, 地藏菩薩本願經) too. This sutra begins with introduction of “four basic kinds of filial piety: limited, extensive, contemporary, and classic”. Limited filial piety is filiality within one’s family only. Extensive filial piety means reaching out the whole world and considering all parents as one’s own. Contemporary *xiao* manifests filiality in contemporary means, and its classical kind denotes following the examples of heroes of *Twenty Four Exemplars of Filial Piety*. But the ultimate filiality is the one practiced by Sakyamuni (Śākyamuni):

If you want to practice ultimate filial piety you should investigate and practice the Buddhadharmā; learn to be a good person and a positive force in the world. The practice of acts that benefit society is genuinely filial to your parents [27].

*Itivuttaka Sūtra* (*Benshijing*, 本事經)<sup>29</sup> cites the words of Buddha about the meaning of filial reverence with the following conclusion:

Mother and father,/ compassionate to their family,/ are called/ Brahma,/ first teachers,/ those worthy of gifts/ from their children./ So the wise should pay them/ homage,/ honor/ with food and drink,/ clothing and bedding,/ anointing and bathing/ and washing their feet./ Performing these services to their parents,/ the wise/ are praised right here/ and after death/ rejoice in heaven (106 {Iti IV.7; Iti 109}) [22].

*Filial Piety Sūtra* (*Foshuo fumu enzhong nanbaojing*, 佛說父母恩重難報經)<sup>30</sup>, known in the old Pali scripts, was also introduced to China. It tells about a vast benevolence of the parents and impossibility to repay it. *Filial Piety Sūtra*, unlike *The Book of Filial Piety*, flows smoothly in one narrative about Buddha walking with his disciples. He preached filiality emphasizing the hardships a mother has to overcome while being pregnant, giving birth and

<sup>26</sup> Two versions of translation are known: *Miaofa lianhua jing* (妙法蓮華經) by Kumārajīva (鳩摩羅什) and *Zheng fahua jing* (正法華經) by Dharmarakṣa.

<sup>27</sup> The full name of the sutra is *Dafanguangfo huayanjing* (大方廣佛華嚴經). This is the longest Mahayana sutra consisting of 81 rolls and 700 000 characters in total. Three versions of Chinese translation are known, however, the Pali version is extinct. The first to translate this text was Buddhahadra (佛馱跋陀) in 420, the second was Śikṣānanda (實叉難陀) around 699, and the third was Prajñā (般若) around 798.

<sup>28</sup> It is one of ten epithets of Buddha. In Pali it is *arahant*, in Chinese *yinggong* (應供) or *alohan* (阿羅漢), and it means “worthy of sacrifice”, because he already relinquished all the desires. In early Indian teachings this epithet went to the one who already attained the highest illumination and would never be reborn again.

<sup>29</sup> “This was said [by Buddha]” is a collection of 112 short sūtras in prose and verse, included in Pali scripts. A Chinese translation was done by Xuanzang (玄奘) in 650.

<sup>30</sup> A Chinese translation by Kumārajīva.

growing up a child. Since she gives away all her heart for a child, she gradually becomes soaked, and her bones turn from white and heavy to black and light. Being asked by disciples, Buddha goes on explaining the pregnancy period, ending with the following:

“During the tenth month<sup>31</sup> of pregnancy, the body of the fetus is completed and ready to be born. If the child is extremely filial, it will emerge with palms joined together in respect and the birth will be peaceful and auspicious. The mother will remain uninjured by the birth and will not suffer pain. However, if the child is extremely rebellious in nature, to the extent that it is capable of committing the five rebellious acts<sup>32</sup>, then it will injure its mother's womb, rip apart its mother's heart and liver, or get entangled in its mother's bones. The birth will feel like the slices of a thousand knives or like ten thousand sharp swords stabbing her heart. Those are the agonies involved in the birth of a defiant and rebellious child”<sup>33</sup>.

Then Buddha set forth the ten manifestations of kindness of mother to a child, and regretted that despite this, children most often are unfilial. He fully explained all the bad deeds of the children<sup>34</sup> and stressed that nevertheless, parents still are worried day and night about their children and cannot get rid of this worry even after their own death. I should say that the mentioned misdeeds of the children are far more elaborated than those mentioned in Confucian classics. Buddha then warned that children of the unfilial will be unfilial too and after death they would go directly to the great *Avīci*<sup>35</sup> hell.

After hearing Buddha speaking all the disciples fell prone in a grief for their unfiliality and asked how they could repay the deep kindness of their parents. Then the Tathāgata<sup>36</sup> spoke to the assembly in eight kinds of profoundly deep and pure sounds:

“If there were a person who carries his father on his left shoulder and his mother on his right shoulder until his bones were ground to powder by their weight as they bore through to the marrow,

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<sup>31</sup> According to the lunar calendar.

<sup>32</sup> The five rebellious acts (五逆罪) are the following: to kill father, to kill mother, to kill a teacher, to harm the body of Buddha, to rebel in sangha.

<sup>33</sup> This and further translations are done by Upasika Terri Nicholson, and available from: <<http://www.buddhanet/e-learning/filila-sutra.htm>> and many other websites.

<sup>34</sup> They don't follow the rules, offend their parents and brothers & sisters, don't pay attention to their parents, quickly adopt bad habits such as drinking, gambling, fighting and thieving, leave their home and vagabond in other towns, marry in haste and that provides another excuse for rejecting both family and friends. Although they may languish in comfort and luxury, they are ashamed of helping their parents. They make a mock of their old withered and emaciated parents, etc.

<sup>35</sup> It is “a hell without an end” or “a hell of endless suffering”, called *wujian diyu* (無間地獄) or transcribed as 阿鼻 (*Ebi*) in Chinese. It is the last and the worst of all eight hells. It is believed that this is a place where those who commit one of the five rebellious acts or disregard the Great Vehicle are reborn.

<sup>36</sup> “The resurgent” or *Rulai* (如來) in Chinese is one of the ten epithets of Buddha, saying that he reached the highest illumination in the way every living creature can reach. It could be also translated as “this-how-coming” (*tathā + āgata*).

and if that person were to circumambulate Mount Sumem for a hundred thousand kalpas<sup>37</sup> until the blood that flowed out from his feet covered his ankles, that person would still not have repaid the deep kindness of his parents.

“If there were a person who, during the period of a kalpa fraught with famine and starvation, sliced the flesh off his own body to feed his parents and did this as many times as there are dust motes as he passed through hundreds of thousands of kalpas, that person still would not have repaid the deep kindness of his parents. [...]

“If there were a person who, for the sake of his parents, took a hundred thousand swords and stabbed his body with them all at once so that they entered one side and came out of the other, and if he continued this way for hundreds of thousands of kalpas, that person still would not have repaid the deep kindness of his parents. [...]”

However, in conclusion Buddha said that for repaying the deep kindness of the parents one needs only to copy this sutra, which he named *The Sutra about the Deep Kindness of Parents and the Difficulty of Repaying It*. It is also called the *Filial Piety Sutra*, resembling the name of *The Book of Filial Piety*. Buddhism resembles Confucianism also in emphasizing filial reverence, not submission. If parents are going bad ways, pious children have to show the path of truth to them. If one submits to the improper will of one’s parents, one would doom the parents to the suffering in hell but not show one’s filiality.

In conclusion, it is evident that both Daoism and Buddhism put some value upon the Confucian doctrine of filial piety but emphasize different aspects of it. Confucianism introduced and fixed this value into Chinese mind by showing its benefit to a person, a family, a society, a state and the whole world. Daoism emphasized that obedience to one’s parents and loyalty to one’s ruler are compulsory, and the best way to fulfil these duties is to behave in a natural, spontaneous way. Buddhism preaches to disseminate words of Buddha, to nurture one’s children properly and to love all the living creatures as one’s own parents, yet the debt for one’s parents, which is impossible to repay, hits the highlight.

## Conclusion

Filial piety is a universal virtue valued in different societies all over the world. One of the first promoters of the *xiao* in East Asia was Confucius. He noted how it benefits a person (it is the only way to self-realization), a family (it is the way to keeping harmonious relationship within the family), a state (if son is pious to his father, he will be obedient to his ruler as a grown up and that would guarantee the strength of the state), the whole world (filial people who practice piety don’t rebel, they also loath to harm their body or risk their life, that’s why they won’t start a war, and there will be peace and harmony in the world). He explained how to fulfil the

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<sup>37</sup> Sanskrit *kalpa* or pali *kappa* is *jiebo* (劫波) or simply 劫 in Chinese. This word in Indian cosmology refers to the longest period of time, i.e. the age of the whole Universe or eternity.

duty of filial piety and set ancient rulers, namely the emperors Wu and Wen and a duke of Zhou, as examples.

Confucian filial piety, manifested in various classics and dynastic chronicles, included various social duties: to be reverent to one's father, fraternal to one's brothers and loyal to the ruler, to sacrifice for ancestors, to respect elders, care for one's parents, not to move out of their house, to have a male successor who would be a link between the past and the future generations and would keep the family name and values. Thus filial piety was the crucial trait of a noble man in ancient China; however, there were also filial women, who would mostly take care of their mothers-in-law.

Confucian theory and practice differed also in the attitude towards one's body and life, as well as towards funeral rites. Although in the first chapter of *The Book of Filial Piety* Confucius warns to preserve one's body and life which are precious because are given by one's parents, children would often sacrifice a part of their body for making a medicine for critically ill parents (a practice also known in Korea and Japan) or even kill themselves trying to repay one's guilt and shame for not fulfilling their duties. Other severe measures of self-denial were accomplished in mourning.

Filial piety found its way to Daoism and Buddhism too. Both these teachings have a monastic tradition, which demands to leave one's family and give a vow of celibacy, but filial piety was highly recommended to laypeople, and even stories about filial sons likewise heroes in *Twenty Four Exemplars of Filial Piety* were created. Buddhist filial piety emerged in various Chinese sutras, and the *Filial Piety Sūtra* resembling *The Book of Filial Piety* of the Confucian classic in name is among the most eminent of them. All the three teachings promoted filial piety, but put an emphasize on different aspects of it: Confucianism on duty and its benefit, Daoism on the spontaneity of a feeling, Buddhism on the impossibility to repay a debt. Thus, it is evident that filial piety gained a high prominence in imperial China and certainly made a great impact on nowadays' Chinese culture.

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## SŪNAUS NUOLANKUMAS KINIJOS IMPERIJOJE

Ieva Simanavičiūtė

S a n t r a u k a

Sūniškasis nuolankumas Kinijos imperijoje svarbus tuo, kad buvo ne tik konfucianizmo, kuriame atsirado, bet ir budizmo bei daoizmo dalis. Konfucijus bene pirmasis ėmėsi mokyti sūnus paklusti tėvams ir juos gerbti bei visapusiškai jais rūpintis kol gyvi ir po mirties. *Sūniškojo nuolankumo kanone* ši sąvoka jau apima ir lojalumą valdovui, o bendriausia prasme nusako žemesniojo santykį su aukštesnioju ir pareigą elgtis taip, kaip pridera pagal socialinį statusą.

Kaip žinome iš įvairių metraščių ir istorijų apie nuolankius vaikus rinkinių, populiarioji praktika ne visuomet sutapo su rašytiniu konfucianizmu. Visuomenė reikalavo nuolankumo ne tik iš vyro, bet ir iš moters. Nepaisant Konfucijaus mokymų, kūnas ar gyvybė neretai buvo paaukojami dėl tėvų ar kaltei dėl neįvykdytos pareigos išpirkti, o tėvų laidotuves stengiamasi surengti kuo prabangesnes. Taigi sūniškasis nuolankumas, diegiamas nuo pat mažumės, buvo virtęs tiesiog nevaldoma manija.

Ta pati vertybė, kaip visiškai kiniškas bruožas, buvo inkorporuota ir į daoizmą bei budizmą. Taip adaptuoti šie mokymai plito Kinijoje kur kas lengviau. Vėlyvuosiu imperijos laikotarpiu gimė visiško religijų sinkretizmo tradicija ir tuo metu atsiradusiose naujose sektose puikiai derėjo ir konfucianizmas, ir budizmas, ir daoizmas, ir net liaudiški papročiai. Per visą Kinijos istoriją nuo pat Shang ir Zhou dinastijų sandūros, kai *xiao* hieroglifas pirmą kartą buvo įrėžtas bronziniame aukojimo inde, sūnaus nuolankumas išliko pamatiniu kilnaus žmogaus būdo bruožu ir visų kitų vertybių pradžia.

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