

The Positive and Negative Effects of Chinese Filial Piety

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Abstract. After thousands of years of development, filial piety has become a representative of China and has had a profound impact on the Chinese people. People find that with the development of thought, the old concept of filial piety has been unable to adapt to modern society. Therefore, this paper introduces the characteristics of filial piety and explores the influence of filial piety, which affects the self, family, and marital relationship. The focus of this paper is on the social phenomenon caused by the old filial piety and its negative impact on people's lives. It includes blind obedience to parents, the moral dilemma caused by family, and making people pay most of attention to the original family while ignoring the core family. In addition, not only the negative effect, the benefit of filial piety in the family and individual aspect also include in the paper.

Keywords: Filial piety; Moral dilemma; Family conflicts.

1. Introduction

When talking about filial piety, people's first reaction must be China. Filial piety has a history of about 3,500 years in China. It first existed in the Shang Dynasty in actual textual research. In the early days, people carved the word "xiao" on tortoises or animal bones. After thousands of years of historical and cultural development, China People have already engraved this word on their hearts. Respecting and loving parents, caring for parents, and even following their parents' instructions have become things that people must abide by, and become the standard by which a person is judged. Due to the vigorous development of filial piety culture, researches on this aspect emerge in an endless stream. In previous studies, the content of discussion mainly revolved around "Confucius", the founder of Confucianism, his profound understanding of filial piety culture and "The Classic of Filial Piety" made him have a very high status in the culture of filial piety. However, with the development of society, filial piety should be fluid, not rigid and immutable. Some smart people understand this truth, but most people still rigidly follow the old filial piety, which leads to many problems in life, including family, personal and social, causing physical, and psychological impact and harm.

In previous research, ChenQing studied the classic book 《Xiao Jing (Book of Filial Piety)》 and gave an almost comprehensive explanation of filial piety in terms of its purpose, norms, and its contributions and limitations to the development of modern Chinese history [1]. The thesis focus on ancient times. The starting point of Wang Lizhen's research is also in ancient times. He wrote his understanding of filial piety by interpreting the articles of the thinker Confucius. His research also includes various views on filial piety in ancient times [2]. HeRiqu's research focuses on the connotation of filial piety culture, and her paper also includes empirical research [3]. The difference between NiWeiwei's research and others are that the starting point of her research is the modern manifestation of filial piety, and in her research, she pointed out the specific path of conversion when faced with difficulties [4].

This article is mainly divided into three parts, in the first part, the author introduces the benefits of filial piety, which includes both personal and family aspects. The second part of the article is about the negative impact of family on the individual. In the third part of the article, the author points out the influence of filial piety on the core family and the family of origin and the common phenomenon in Chinese society.

2. The impact of filial piety

When it comes to filial piety, the core must be family, parents, and children. Chinese people often say, “When a disciple enters, he is filial, and when he leaves, he is humble”. It means that when a person is a child, he should be filial to his parents and when he enters the house and need to obey the elders when he goes out. This sentence comes from the article “Disciple Rules” that every child in China has to study at school. , filial piety is a very important part of it. Confucius also gave a detailed explanation of the requirements of filial piety in the Analects of Confucius, as “raising relatives, respecting relatives, and loving relatives”[5]. raising relatives is not only asking children to spend money for their parents, but more importantly, companionship and spiritual care, caring about their parents’ moods, always worrying about their parents’ bodies and showing their gratitude, respect and love to their parents, focus on parents and take care of everything. But such sincere and heavy filial piety often brings pressure and trouble to children in today’s society. This trouble will be reflected in different aspects especially before and after children get married.

2.1 The positive effects of filial piety

In China’s thousands of years of historical evolution, filial piety has been praised by people most of the time. There is a sentence in “The Analects of Confucius”: He is also a filial brother, and he likes to offend the superior, which is rare; he is not good at offending but likes to cause chaos, which is rare. It can be understood that when a person is filial to their parents, he will not easily contradict his superiors and cause chaos in the country. At the same time, how can a person who is unwilling to do filial piety even to his parents love his career and his motherland? Therefore, both in society and in the family, filial piety to parents has become a kind of protection for oneself. In society, people are more willing to believe in those who are filial to their parents and have a deep relationship with them. Sometimes in work, filial piety will be used as a judging standard. If employees have unfilial behavior in front of the media or the public, the company will avoid causing negative consequences and refuse to accept it. Some people who have won the “Twenty-Four Filial Piety Award” will be equivalent to a bonus item when they are employed. Therefore, filial piety is like a passport in Chinese society, which will make a person more easily accepted by people.

In the family, filial piety is the source of a family’s happiness and the way many children gain and maintain family status. In a study on the filial piety expectations of Chinese elderly parents in the context of social transformation the experimenters explored the changes in the elderly’s needs and expectations for filial piety in the new social environment [6]. The results of the study show that seniors who spend their later years at home are generally more satisfied than those who spend their later years in nursing homes, and they also tell us that when seniors pass their 70s, their needs for childcare and filial piety are higher. The performance expectations will be greatly improved, and the elderly will expect living together with their children. Most children will choose to meet their parents’ needs as much as possible to repay their parents for their upbringing. Such warm behavior will often warm the whole family and maintain a good parent-child relationship. Some unfilial children usually lead to the dissatisfaction of the parents, causing the parents to have an unbalanced mentality because the grace of parenting is not valued. Third, filial piety to parents is not only the need of the parents but also the needs of children. Filial piety toward parents and doing what they can do for them can help children not feel indebted to their parents for their long-term efforts, and thus gain a sense of belonging. Filial piety will make children gain a sense of belonging, identity, and value in the family. For example, in a family, people are more willing to honor their elders, and those who pay for their elders are often more popular, especially after the 1940s in China. After the encouragement of fertility, many Chinese families even have dozens of children. In the case of many children, they could not get enough attention from their parents when they were children. Therefore, when they grow up, they will choose to help their brothers and sisters in the family to gain the approval of their parents, to make up for the vacancies in their childhood.

2.2 The negative effects of filial piety

2.2.1 Self and family

In English, both “xiao” and “xiaoshun” are translated as filial piety. In one period in ancient China with no specific record, people added a “shun” after “xiao”, but the word “shun” makes filial piety lose its original benefits. The word “shun” means follow, which is a common problem in Chinese families -giving filial piety a potential meaning of “obedience”[7]. In most Chinese families, the boundaries between parents and children are not strong, and it can even be said that their boundaries are blurred and chaotic. Therefore, parents often intervene in their children’s growth and indoctrinate their ideas and concepts, resulting in many problems in children’s later life.

For example, some parents will teach their children at an early age that filial piety is the most important thing so that children can follow their parents’ teachings more in childhood and make it easier for parents. But at the same time, when a child is always living in the words “ Be filial to parents, obey parents is necessary” etc. he can easily lose of ability to judge. It leads to two results, one is excessive reliance on parents, asking parents for their opinions on everything, that is, the “mama’s boy” that exists in Chinese society, and its symptoms can even be manifested after marriage: hoped that parents living together with their core family. It will not only affect the efficiency of their own life and work but also affect the relationship between husband and wife.

Second: they will deny themselves, always doubt whether what they do is in line with their parents’ expectations, and thus ignore and suppress their nature and their original needs.

Such a result violates Maslow’s personality theory, the basic conditions for the realization of individual’s potential, creativity, ideals, and beliefs – “people’s needs should be met, and potential needs to be realized” An incomplete personality is the biggest obstacle to people’s real growth.

There are also some parents who, when their children become adults, find jobs and gain financial strength, to live a more comfortable life, they think that they have brought up their children, and now it is time to receive the enjoyment of success. So they take it for granted to ask for money from children who have just stepped into society and have not yet established a foothold. Although it is the duty of children to support their parents and help them improve their quality of life, the excessive demands of their parents will put children in a dilemma: on one hand, they don’t know how to say no to their parents who take care of them a lot, on the other hand, are the pressures in their own lives and the necessary need for money.

This is a questionnaire that reveals the attitudes of children toward their parents’ in Chinese families which means the upbringing. In order to avoid some of the more complex emotional entanglements between parents, the problem is presented from the perspective of an adopted child, Amy. The questionnaire was sent out twice, and the questions in the two questionnaires were slightly revised to ensure the accuracy of the answers.

In the first questionnaire, the answers to the data came from 66 ordinary people of all ages level from all over the world, of which 46 were Chinese. In the questionnaire, when people were asked "Amy is an adopted child. Her adoptive parents are very kind to her, treating her as their biological daughter, but they had no intention of telling her the truth(that she is been adopted). Amy didn’t discovers this fact until she went to college. By accident, she discovered the truth by herself. Now she is in a moral dilemma, should she be angry with her adopted parents for this? The choice is to be angry and not be angry".

At that time, 57 participants chose not to be angry (86.4% of the total), of which 43 were Chinese (93.5% of Chinese). For those who chose not to be angry, they gave the following reasons: “The adoptive parents have pulled her up, there is no reason to be angry, and they should express gratitude”, I understand that the adoptive parents do not want to make Amy sad or affect their relationship. Most of these answers were given by the Chinese, and only one person from the rest of the country gave a similar explanation. From this, it can be seen that the Chinese pay special attention to the fact that their parents are fortunate enough to raise them.

Later, the researchers changed the question in the questionnaire to “Amy is an adopted child. Her adoptive parents are not so good to her, but she still grows up healthy, the adoptive parents had no intention of telling her the truth (that she is been adopted). Amy didn’t discover this fact until she went to college. By accident, she discovered the truth by herself. Now she is in a moral dilemma, should she be angry with her adoption for this? The choice is to be angry and not be angry”.

Since want this questionnaire to focus on the Chinese situation, this time only 46 Chinese participants of all ages answered this questionnaire. The researchers hypothesized that people would be more willing to choose to be angry than to focus on upbringing. But what is shocking is that in this answer, 43 people still chose not to be angry with their adoptive parents (93.5% of the total number), and 14 out of 15 reasons they received were not angry. The people explain to them that because their parents raised them, and one of them wrote that no matter what the reason is for her adoptive parents to treat her badly, she should not be angry. After all, it was not easy for her parents to raise her, which is an evaluation of parents who are never guilty.

Therefore, it can be concluded that in the education of filial piety in China, children will have a concept that they equate the need for parenting with gratitude and not be allowed to be angry with their parents or subjectively think that their parents are right. However, Mr. ZengShiqiang from Taiwan once stated in his speech, “a person can’t completely obey their parents, or they will become filial piety. When the child grows up, the parents may still be alive ten or twenty years ago. Those things are already unrealistic.” Therefore, while being filial, as a child, they also need to have the ability to distinguish right from wrong and not blindly follow.

2.2.2 Original family and core family

It is recognized that when people get married, the core family they form will become the core of their life. Compared with their family of origin, people’s status and importance in the core family will be higher. In the family, they exist as children, but in the core family, they need to shoulder half of the responsibilities of the family, along with their wives/husbands.

But in Chinese tradition, there is such a widely circulated question that is worth thinking about. Almost all men are asked by their wives at least once before and after marriage. When your wife and mom get into the water, who will you save first? The wife usually expects the answer to saving herself first, to confirm that she is more important than the mother of the original family in the husband’s heart, but the answer given by most Chinese men is to save the mother first. This also shows a common problem in China now-couples do not realize that there needs to be a clear line between the original family and the core family. it is precise because this line is blurred that it leads to many couples fighting and even getting divorced. According to a survey and analysis, among the 100 divorced couples, 53 were influenced by their family of origin [8]. This is terrifying data, and it is also a fact faced by Chinese couples. To explain the reason for this situation, psychologist David Freeman pointed out that the influence or lack of emotions that people have in their original family will be potentially reflected after finding a spouse [9].

An example is used to show the seriousness of the problem. Just like a child who lacks parental attention in the original family, he/she hopes to gain parental approval and attention by paying his/her parents. After getting married and forming a core family, this person will have high expectations in that:the wife/husband also pays for his/her parents. But this will cause many uncertain problems. For example, the person will put the needs of the original family ahead of the needs of the core family. When the parents and relatives in the original family need money, he/she may ignore his core family’s needs such as the wife/husband’s needs for life, and the children’s needs for education, and continue lending money to members of the original family. This will inevitably lead to dissatisfaction with the wife/husband and thus spark conflict, but if the wife/husband chooses to let it go on, this problem will continue to ferment and intensify in the future.

In this kind of question about the original family and the core family, filial piety is often used as a reason, an excuse that is said by one of the parties, “when married, filial to parents is undoubtedly” this Inaccurate, extreme, and even morally kidnapping remarks often appear in Chinese people’s lives.

The problem is far more than that. As mentioned above, the boundary between the family of origin and the nuclear family is blurred in Chinese. Therefore, many mothers of the family of origin will excessively interfere in the life and decisions of the core family, and sometimes label this with filial piety. In China, there is an old saying, “ There are three kinds of unfilial piety, no descendant is the greatest [10]”. It means that when a core family chooses not to have children, it is to cut off the family’s incense and inheritance, which is the greatest unfilial piety to parents. Therefore, many wives in Chinese families have been urged by their parents-in-law to have children. What’s more, because of China’s deep-rooted concept of “ patriarchal”, after their wives gave birth to girls, they have been urging them to have two or three children, until there is a boy. According to incomplete statistics, 80% of adults in China have experienced the process of “ urging marriage first, and then urging birth”. But this is an intervention in the core family. The decision to have a child depends on the negotiation result between husband and wife, rather than the oppression of the original family and the threat from filial piety.

Therefore, setting boundaries and negotiating major issues such as children and money before marriage can help to avoid the potential impact on the original family and core family.

3. Conclusion

In today’s Chinese society, the people who are faced with the above-mentioned problems related to filial piety such as self and family, core and original family are middle-aged in the 1970s and 1980s. Because their parents were more or less influenced by the ancient feudal culture of filial piety and instilled these concepts into their children through education in the growth of their children, that is, the parents of this generation of teenagers. In the past, these old filial piety cultures should then be passed on to this generation of teenagers, but now more and more advanced ideas and concepts have been introduced and put forward, coupled with the aid of the developed Internet system and the beginning of psychology accepted and studied by the Chinese people, some people in the 1970s and 1980s began to question and improve the education they received in childhood and passed on some of the new knowledge they had learned that was more suitable for the new society to their children. This is generally referred to as personal spiritual growth and progress. Therefore, the children of this generation are more or less affected by the old filial piety, just as the filial piety of scraping bones and healing relatives in ancient China will appear a bit extreme in the eyes of modern people. However, there is another side to everything. In modern teenagers, the manifestation of filial piety seems a little too neglected, as if from one extreme to the other. Today’s children no longer attach so much importance to filial piety to their parents and regard their parents’ efforts as a matter of course, even a small number have the idea of aging the old age, with the action instead of working hard in adulthood, they ask their parents for money. This new social phenomenon will have a great impact on the good side of filial piety culture, so in the following research, the author hopes to explore and find effective educational methods based on the current social status of young people.

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