

# IMPLICATIONS OF CHINA'S FILIAL PIETY CULTURE FOR CONTEMPORARY ELDERLY CARE<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** Filial piety is a core value in ancient Chinese culture, and it still exerts significant influence on the attitudes, behavior and daily life of Chinese people today. At present, China is facing an increasingly aging population and the concern how to properly care for the elderly. Through the vertical review of filial piety in China's history, two constant elements, namely support and respect, stands out among China's traditions. There is an argument that addressing the contemporary elderly care problem requires the adequate support from two perspectives, material support from families and societies for the aged and spiritual caring for them. It is further argued that any approaches aimed at addressing contemporary elderly care issue should take into consideration the actual social and culture conditions in China, including the cultural traditions of filial piety.

**Keywords:** Filial piety. Chinese culture. Aging society.

## INTRODUCTION

Filial piety has become a core value and consensus in Chinese society and even the entire Asia. At present, the aging society in China results a predicament for the caring for elderly which is based on filial piety (FU, 2020,

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p. 176). In the face of these problems, we should not only draw on successful experiences from other countries, but also turn our attention back to the Chinese cultural traditions of filial piety, fully appreciate its value, and seek solutions to elderly caring for China's increasingly aging society.

## 1 EARLY FILIAL PIETY IN CHINA ESTABLISHED BY CONFUCIANISM

Filial piety has a long history in China. The concept of filial piety emerges as early as the Xia, Shang and Zhou dynasties and plays a significant role in society that followed. Indeed, Binglin Zhang (1868-1936) wrote *The Book of Filial Piety Ben Xia Fa Shuo*, discussing the origins of filial piety. There are also descriptions about filial piety in *The Classic of Yao of The Book of History*, the earliest extant classical literature work. In that book, Emperor Yao is praised for his efforts that unite the relatives and let them live in harmony. The successor Shun is beloved by the people as he formulates five regulations that should be practiced in families, that is, father should be fair, mother kind, brothers and sisters respectful, as well as sons and daughters filial. Regarding filial piety, Yao stresses the harmony among relatives including children's filial piety to parents, while Shun puts forward different requirements for children, sisters, brothers, and parents respectively, which both demonstrate the close connection between filial piety and patriarchal system based on blood ties. The above works claim that filial piety has a lot of significance in early Chinese traditional culture.

In the spring and autumn periods, Confucius stresses the great importance of filial piety in *The Classic of Filial Piety*, effectively promoting the spread of piety. He claims that filial piety is the moral source of all human beings, and the permanent law between heaven and earth that should be obeyed in daily lives. In his opinion, filial piety can inspire people's loyalty to the monarch and monarch's goodwill to people, thus promoting social harmony.

It is said that Confucius' greatest contribution to Chinese society is to define the concept of filial piety. As a social construct, it is associated with support and respect, emphasizing both material support and spiritual caring for parents. In *The Analects of Confucius*, Confucius talks to his student Ziyou that nowadays filial piety just means being able to feed parents. But if you do not have respect for them, what's the difference with animals? This conversation shows how Confucius is dissatisfied with the early understanding

of filial piety in ancient dynasties. Support is regarded as the most basic requirement for being filial, but it is also an instinct possessed by animals. Therefore, for Confucius, filial piety of human beings should comprise both support and respect as it is the latter that distinguishes filial piety of human from that of animals.

Support in the filial piety means providing material needs for parents, whereas respect refers to spiritual caring for parents. Zixia, another student of Confucius, asks what filial piety is, and Confucius reiterates that the major sticking point is being respectful and courteous. For example, the young tackle some troublesome affairs for their elders, and prepare wine and food before elders. Is that to be considered filial piety? The answer is no.

As the conversation shows, while acknowledging the needful element of material support, Confucius once again emphasizes that support alone is not enough and that respect is necessary. Regarding the spiritual care, Confucius constantly stresses that children should always care for parents with genuine heart and kind face, which may go beyond material support and bring true spiritual caring for parents.

For example, Confucius believes that children should be gentle when trying to dissuade their parents from doing something wrong, as well as respect and worry about them instead of resenting even if the elderly do not listen. In addition, according to *The Analects of Confucius*, children should also continuously focus on parents' age and physical condition. As Confucius said, children should not ignore the age of parents, as it may be a source of joy or anxiety sometimes. As part of fulfilling filial duties, Confucius deems it imperative for children to connect with their parents as much as possible. In Confucius's perspective, Children should not travel far from their parents who are alive and must give parents the precise destination if they do need to travel far away. A child in the distance may not able to offer parents material support, but informing parents his or her specific destination indicates true respect and relieves their parental worries.

Respect reflects spiritual caring for parents, which is closely related to morality in Confucianism. A person's life should be a process of constant pursuit of moral perfection, logically speaking, the old age is the peak of a person's morality (NIE, 2021, p. 316). In that sense, respect refers to spiritual caring for parents, also the continuing recognition of the moral standards of the elderly.

Confucius also thought that parents are responsible for building children's character and passing moral spirits to their children through family education. Therefore, a person's behavior is seen as the reflection of parents' moral standards, which is why *The Classic of Filial Piety* emphasizes that the lifelong goal of filial piety is to treat parents with filial respect by spreading good virtues. Some chapters in *The Book of Songs* emphasizes that people should inherit and spread parents' good morality, which is the embodiment of respect for parents. These works demonstrate that filial piety, respect and morality are intertwined throughout Chinese history.

With theoretical constructions by early Confucian scholars, filial piety has already become a standard for people to judge during the middle and late Warring States periods. Confucian scholars often mention King Wen of Zhou, a sagacious ruler who is known for advocating the caring for elderly. Although the Mohist school preached indiscriminate love, it does not deny love for parents. *The Book of Mencius* also records the story about Duke Wen of Teng, an aristocrat who consulted Mencius about how to exercise filial piety at his parents' funerals. The story shows that filial piety is a social consensus at that time.

Despite the intense debate between Daoist scholars including Chuang Tzu and Confucian scholars about counter-advocacy of filial piety, the debate itself reflects that filial piety has already become a broadly accepted social consensus and a judgement standard after a few hundred years. It is part of a constant effort to counter universal social values that Chuang Tzu regularly engages in arguing with Confucian scholars. Filial piety has become such a broadly accepted standard that even Mencius, a representative figure among Confucian scholars, is deemed unfilial when he chooses different funeral rites for his parents, which causes him to lose the opportunity to meet the king of the Lu State. All these suggest that the long-time theoretical construction by early Confucian scholars forms a basis for filial piety to become a social norm and a reflection of one's values.

Later, Confucianism is officially recognized as the leading ideology in the Han Dynasty, further consolidating the filial piety cultural tradition that emphasizes both support and respect. This is best illustrated by the consistency of the normativity of filial piety between Confucius and *The Book of Rites* by Dai Sheng, a scholar of the Western Han Dynasty. For example, in *The Book of Rites*, it is explicitly stated in *The Meaning of Sacrifices* that filial piety can be manifested in different degrees. At the highest level, parents and elders feel

proud of their children. At the bottom, children just provide clothing, food and other material support to meet parents' basic needs.

Dai Sheng even goes further and contrasts filial piety and support, arguing that merely providing parents and elders with abundant food is not being filial at all but only support. Contrarily, he believes that if a child follows the guidance in *The Pattern of the Family* to care parents and elders, it is important to ensure their inner pleasantness and not to disobey their intents. By doing so, the child is showing an important manifestation of being filial even in the absence of material support. As such, by the time of the Han Dynasty, considerable attention is being paid to the element of respect besides mere support in people's understanding of filial piety. Not only do Confucian scholars in the Han Dynasty confirm Confucius' proposal of both support and respect, they further develop the concept to attach more importance to respect, in contrast with Confucius' equal emphasis on both material support and spiritual respect.

## 2 GOVERNING BY FILIAL PIETY: OFFICIAL PROMOTION OF THE FILIAL PIETY CULTURAL TRADITIONS IN THE HAN DYNASTY

There are immanent causes of emphasis on filial piety in cultural traditions of the Han Dynasty. After achieving the Great Unification in the Qin and Han dynasties, the Chinese empire adopts a series of policies to consolidate social recognition and support for filial piety. Emperors of the Han Dynasty not only create the position of erudite for the Classic of Filial Piety but also build the first empire governed by filial piety. Indeed, as mentioned above, both support and respect in the concept of filial piety are stressed in policies formulated by Han Dynasty and respect is more emphasized.

As part of the emphasis on respect, the emperors of Han are significant role models for being filial. In fact, to highlight the importance of filial piety in the official ideology of Han Dynasty, record keepers begin adding a posthumous honorific to the names of emperors as another manifestation of the official effort to promote a culture of filial piety across the entire society. Specifically, in *Annals of Emperor Hui of The Book of Han*, Yan Shigu writes that those filial children are good at carrying forward the good virtues of their parents and elders. Thus, starting with Emperor Hui of Han, the posthumous titles of subsequent emperors are all preceded with a character of Xiao, namely filial. Adding Xiao to the names of deceased emperors echoes

the specific requirements of respect set in *The Analects of Confucius*, where one of the manifestations of being filial is children carrying forward their deceased parents' good virtues. Adding Xiao to posthumous titles has its theoretical origin in *The Analects of Confucius*. This is yet another piece of evidence for the significant position of filial piety in Han society, and for the great importance by Han emperors to its respective element. In fact, emperors of Han themselves are models of filial behavior for citizens to follow and emulate. *The Records of the Grand Historian Biographies of Yuan Ang and Chao Cuo* both include the story of Emperor Wen of Han in which he attends to his sick mother at her bedside, and dresses in his formal clothes even as he sleeps, for 3 years.

The Han Dynasty also enacts policies to highlight the identity and status of elders, which also constitutes part of the respective element of filial piety. For example, the laws of Han Dynasty decrees that the elderly over age 70 will receive an emperor stick, a walking stick the government conferred on the elderly as an identity symbol to demonstrate respect. Excavated bamboo slips and silk-cloth documents from the Han also include records about the emperor stick. In the bamboo slips of *The Han Statutes and Ordinance of The Second Year Statutes on Registration from Zhangjiashan*, any man, whether aristocrat or commoner, is entitled to receive an emperor stick as long as he reaches 70.

The physical configuration of an emperor stick also demonstrates respect. There is a special turtledove symbol on the stick that is distinctly visible from afar, and this distinct appearance emphasizes the respect element of filial piety at the spiritual level. In addition, elders who possess an emperor stick enjoys a number of privileges, including the same 600-dan income as government officials and the exemption from the requirement to walk quickly with small steps to show respect to officials. This policy is implemented at least through the Eastern Han Dynasty. *The Book of the Later Han* records the story that Emperor Zhang confers the emperor stick on the elders at that time.

In the Han Dynasty, respect for elders is also manifested in specific requirements for government officials. The Ceremonial of Han Offices requires that the position of erudite be assumed only by someone aged over 50: Rather than being a detriment, being old is a favourable condition for the position, reflecting that the leaders during the Han Dynasty recognizes and highly values the vast knowledge and experience that one acquires with age rather than indiscriminately viewing the old and sick as vulnerable and no longer able to contribute.

As discussed above, older citizens are valued not only considering their actual needs but also for their wisdom, which offer inner care in the form of their feeling needed. Across the society, this value and care are manifestations of officially recognize respect, and another position that has similar age restrictions is that of a Thrice Venerable in civilian society. During the early Han Dynasty, Liu Bang issues an imperial edict that commoners aged over 50 who have good virtues and are worthy exemplars could be appointed as Thrice Venerable. This edict reflects that Han society and leadership admire and value age-related experience, knowledge, morality and prestige. Notably, however, although the government rewards qualified older citizens with wine and meat every October in the early Han Dynasty, these rewards are insufficient to satisfy their material needs, making them more symbolic gestures than gestures of material support. The actual burdens of caring for the elderly still fall to their families.

Although in the early Han Dynasty, national policies fail to directly support the elderly, it is not the case that the government simply disregards the issue. For example, one policy exempts those who dutifully care for their parents from taxes and corvees. Under Emperor Xuan, the policy is extended to persons who are caring for their parents or who need to fulfil filial mourning duties. Confucianism holds that caring for parents when they are alive and holding funerals when they die are both critical to properly the fulfillment of one's filial duties. By exempting people who are caring for their parents from taxes and conscript labor, the Han empire frees them to devote necessary energy and time to their filial duties. Indirectly providing caregivers with this material support enables them to show their respect and care for their spiritual needs with their companionship.

Furthermore, the Han government supports older citizens who have lost family support. On taking the throne, Emperor Wen promulgates the Relief Edict for the poor, which mandates support for older adults who have lost spouses or children and can no longer support themselves. Han emperors give these disadvantaged older citizens actual material support to show respect.

The Han Dynasty rulers respect older citizens in a widely practiced norm. The most typical tangible evidence from Han artefacts is a large number of stone-carving portraits with the filial piety theme. For example, many portraits of well-known filial figures in Chinese history, including Zeng Can, Min Zijian and Dong Yong, are discovered in the stone chamber of the Wuliang Shrine, located in Jiexiang County, Shandong Province. These

are also preserved records of the crucial position of filial piety in Han's social norms and everyday life.

### 3 RESPECT AND SUPPORT FOR THE ELDERLY ACROSS CHINESE DYNASTIES

After the Han Dynasty, national policies based on the Confucian school of thought constantly promote respect and support for the elderly rather than fading in importance under the vicissitudes of new dynasties and changes in dominant ideologies. Indeed, whether Wei, Jin, Tang, Song or the Six dynasties, respect and support for the elderly, including through government policies, are stable components of societies.

During the Late Han Wei and Jin dynasties and the Six Dynasties, metaphysics overtakes Confucianism to become the dominant ideology. However, the ruling class not only refuses to discard the filial piety tradition but also comes to attach more importance to the respective element. First, the Han Dynasty recommendation becomes an important tool for powerful aristocratic families to use to manipulate political situations. Under this system, an important criterion for the selection of official positions is whether a person is sufficiently filial toward his parents. Then, relevant laws and decrees issued during this period further ensure material and spiritual support for the elders. For example, in *The Book of Song*, the *Biography of He Chengtian* records that if a parent accuses his or her child of being unfilial, especially being disrespectful, then the parent have the right to punish the child including his or her death.

Scholars in this period are often recognized as being completely unconventional and unrestrained in their attitudes and behavior. However, even scholars who are least accepted by the public exhibited striking consistencies in filial piety. Prominent scholars during the Late Han, Wei and Jin dynasties are often widely known for being filial, and in *The Book of Later Han*, filial piety is an important criterion for whether a person is prestigious. For example, many people at the time admire Cai Yong, who takes care of his mother day in and day out for years, and the *Biography of Kong Rong* includes ample depictions of his severe grief after his father died.

In *A New Account of the Tales of the World*, a record of the words and deeds of prominent figures during the Wei and Jin dynasties also includes lengthy accounts of filial actions of famous figures. For example, Ji Kang

suffers severe inner pain after his mother's death to the extent of spitting blood despite his pretense that everything is normal, and to follow the norms of funeral rites, He Jian strictly limits the amount of rice he can have during meals. Wang Rong also falls into excessive sorrow after his mother's death to the extent that he cannot stand upright without the support of a cane.

All of these behaviors related to parents' deaths are also manifestations of being filial to parents. The respect these venerated figures have shown to their parents have far exceeded the implications of official doctrines and substantially existed in their hearts. Their efforts reflect the success of promoting respect for the elderly since the Han Dynasty.

Policies promoting respect and support for the elderly during the Tang Dynasty generally extend those from the Han Dynasty. Filial piety also receives great attention during the Tang Dynasty, publicized in *The Classic of Filial Piety*. Filial piety is an important criterion for selecting officials. Behaviors consistent with filial piety norms are officially commended. All these measures and policies that emphasize respect have their precedents as early as the Han Dynasty.

In the early Han Dynasty, the position of erudite is established to study *The Classic of Filial Piety*, an official school textbook. Officials in the Eastern Han Dynasty are required to read it, and *The Classic of Filial Piety* is still being emphasized in the Tang Dynasty. For example, Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang writes a preface to *The Classic of Filial Piety* by himself. At the national level, the support in filial piety is also quite similar during both the Han and Tang dynasties. Material support is directly provided for the older citizens. Compared with Liu Bang's reign, *The Imperial Edict for Supporting the Elderly* issued by Emperor Wen of Han provides significantly more material support. The edict provides that special care should be given to older people. Specifically, people aged over 80 are entitled to receive 1-dan rice, 20 jin of meat and 5 dou of wine, and those aged over 90 can also additionally receive 2 rolls of silk and 3 jin of cotton wadding for clothing. *The Collection of Tang Dynasty Imperial Edicts and Orders* provided that the state provide persons aged over 100 with 5 dan of millet and 5 sections of brocade per month, those over 90 with 3 dan of millet and 3 sections of brocade per month and those over 80 with 2 dan of rice and 2 dan of brocade per month. A comparison of *The Collection of Tang Dynasty Imperial Edicts and Orders* and *The Imperial Edict for Supporting the Elderly* shows that in terms of the element of support for the elderly, the only difference lies in age division and specific amounts

of clothing and food rewards, essentially, both edicts highlight the stability and pragmatic implications of material support provided by the state. All the examples provided above demonstrate the fact that the elderly care policies of the Tang Dynasty are largely an extension of those of the Han Dynasty.

The Song Dynasty reaches a new height in terms of its emphasis on filial piety. The related cultural traditions hold significant importance for scholars of the time. For example, Su Shi, a scholar of the Northern Song Dynasty, deems filial piety as the root and foundation of all qualities of self-cultivation. Li Ding, a politically gifted official, is considered misbehaving for failing to fulfill filial piety after his mother's death, which even affects his promotion. Wen Tianxiang, a historical figure of the Southern Song Dynasty, explicitly proposes that the filial piety for parents and the loyalty to the monarch are more important than life and death. As an integrative element to scholars' emphasis on filial piety, the government efforts to construct an elderly caring and respect system during the Song Dynasty are even more sophisticated. The government guarantees and provides all-around support for the elderly.

Although filial piety has been fulfilled mainly in families and complemented since ancient times, the positions and scopes of responsibility have never been static. Consistently over time, though, the state gradually increases its focus on obeying filial piety more as laws than just as cultural norms. First, compared with the previous dynasties, *The Criminal Law* of the Song Dynasty includes many more records of punishments imposed for violations of filial piety, and relevant provisions particularly emphasized the protection of the property of the elderly. For example, *The Criminal Law* includes statutes that prevents any material damage to parents caused by property division. Emperor Taizu of the Song Dynasty explicitly stresses in an edict as follows.

Even animals take care of their parents. As human beings, how could we fail to provide our parents with material and spiritual support just because of the division of property or living separately?

The emperor highlights the prohibition on dividing property or living separately with parents with a view of protecting the living standards of elderly persons in need of care.

Second, under the leading effect of some elite officials, the main providers of filial piety expanded from the previous small families to larger clans. For example, Fan Zhongyan establishes filial houses, villages and

farmland to accommodate and provide for the elderly and poor in his clan, and these measures affect the broader elderly care and welfare institutions during the late Northern Song period. Third, state-level elderly care and social relief institutions start to emerge in the Northern Song Dynasty.

In the late Northern Song, Cai Jing draws on the clan-based elderly care system to establish charity houses, nursing homes and public cemeteries. A charity house is an official institution to provide food and shelter for widows and widowers. A nursing home is a medical facility for the poor, and the public cemetery is a place to provide humanistic burial services for poor or unidentified decedents. Furthermore, these institutions are maintained and carried forward throughout numerous dynasties.

According to the History of Song, the policy has been carried forward in the Southern Song despite the turmoil caused by the fall of the Northern Song. During the Southern Song Dynasty, people who become homeless and poor in the war could receive state and government support in terms of food, clothing and medical and burial services. Compared with the Han policy supporting widows and widowers, the elderly care policy in the Song Dynasty represents major progress, reflected by the state's establishment of sophisticated welfare institutions with a clear division of functions that help to support aged populations. Although families and clans are still the core providers of filial piety and elder support, the state starts to play a more significant role in addressing the elderly care problem.

#### **4 DUAL ATTENTION TO MATERIAL AND SPIRITUAL SUPPORT: CHARACTERISTICS OF CHINESE CULTURAL TRADITIONS OF FILIAL PIETY**

Tracking the Chinese cultural traditions of filial piety to ancient times reveals a number of long-standing characteristics. First, the high attention paid by successive dynasties to filial piety is consistent with what is emphasized in early Confucian classics, that is, both support and respect are important. Ever since the early Confucian, scholars define the specific implementation route of filial piety as material and spiritual support, namely support and respect, which are followed by subsequent cultural traditions of filial piety and relevant measures. Although different dynasties emphasize different aspects, the core value centered on respect and support as components of Chinese traditional filial piety culture has remained unchanged.

Second, in the practice of filial piety, support and respect have formed a mutually distinct yet connected relationship. On the one hand, support is often regarded as a material basis, whereas respect is considered a spiritual elevation. On the other hand, support behavior at the material level helps with the emotional cultivation of spiritual respect, conversely, the requirement for respect further generates emotional and moral restrictions on support.

Third, the elderly caring model provided primarily by families and complemented by states is also constant throughout different dynasties. Family is the basic unit for providing filial piety, which never changes even during the most chaotic times in Chinese history. Over more than a thousand years, Chinese cultural traditions of filial piety is always centered on the familial provision of elderly care, whereas the state plays an important leading and complementary role in advancing filial piety.

## **5 IMPLICATIONS OF THE CHINESE CULTURAL TRADITIONS OF FILIAL PIETY FOR CONTEMPORARY ELDERLY CARE**

Support and respect are always the core of the ancient Chinese cultural traditions of filial piety, and both elements have significant reference value to address current concerns on caring the elderly care. Although China is ushered in a new era of development, the tradition to support and to respect the elders should never be discarded as they are essential characteristics of traditional Chinese culture.

The rapid aging of Chinese population has caused an increasingly severe conundrum (SLTY, 2016, p. 1235). For example, with modern economic development and social mobility, the ancient norm of never travelling far away when your parents are alive became unsupportable. Children often live far away from their parents for study and work, which increases the number of “empty nesters”. Although children might continue their material support for their parents, they cannot guarantee this support, and they cannot fulfil the respect component of filial piety by remaining companions for their parents and caring for them. Thus, the increase in empty nesters, in fact, highlights a lack of support and respect in the traditional filial piety culture.

Moreover, rapid technological development does not necessarily bring real benefits for the elderly, who might have been left behind by the emerging technologies and new rules that benefit the younger generation. Many older

adults are never trained in how to make use of new technologies, and this failure of bringing technological convenience to the elderly represents a lack of Chinese traditional filial piety culture. Further, a focus on the ease and convenience of the young necessarily represents a depletion of respect. To conclude, the elderly is owed more support and respect according to the tenets of Chinese filial piety. Regarding these developments, it is worth returning to the traditional filial piety culture to find solutions to the dilemma of the elderly caring (BEDFORD, 2019, p. 100).

First, the basic pattern of families providing care for their elders complemented by the state is still applicable, but the state should reinforce its existing basic elderly care system. This should include enacting or improving relevant policies for allowing families to better fulfil their central role in caring for the elderly and complementing family efforts. For example, to address the issue of material shortages of the elders who lack family support, long-term care insurance can be introduced to provide social safety for their care (WANG, 2020, p. 265). With respect to the increase of the number of empty neuters, relevant policies can be issued to encourage more annual leave for families apart or for parent-care so that children can attend to their parents. Relevant institutions can also be improved to address issues of elder's medical services when their children cannot deliver daily care to them. In addition, the state can encourage older people to leverage their own experience and talents acquired over time to serve society and help others, gaining psychological care from the feeling of being needed and being respected.

Second, in terms of spiritual support, new technologies that emerge in the digital era could provide more convenience and support for the elderly, providing respect as a form of psychological care under the behavioral model of intergenerational reciprocity (OLWEN, 2021, p. 12). For example, elder citizen who wish to become literate in the new technologies should receive user-friendly training on easy-to-learn systems. New systems are designed usually for younger people without consideration of their accessibility to older people.

Another area where the state could improve its support for the elderly is the access to medical services or bedside attendance while their children are absent. The convenience of the digital era should be fully leveraged to allow the elderly to take advantage of the convenience of telemedicine examinations and other high-quality medical services. In brief, people should guide their parents and other elders in adapting to new things, and the state plays its

role to build an elderly-friendly society taking into consideration of respecting elder users and continuously increase its investment in elder care.

## CONCLUSION

This study reviews the formation process of the cultural tradition of filial piety in China and the policies on filial piety in successive dynasties. Through this study, we conclude that although the meaning of filial piety and related policies are changing all the time, the material support and the spiritual respect are always the core of the cultural tradition of filial piety in China. The problem of supporting the aged in current Chinese society is precisely the lack of support and respect. Therefore, re-examining the status of “filial piety” in Chinese history and integrating support and respect into the construction of contemporary Chinese society will promote addressing problems in supporting the aged.

Over the past two thousand years, great changes have appeared in cultural and technological arenas in China. However, the Chinese cultural traditions of filial piety are still relevant and thought-provoking, which provide many beneficial implications for addressing the dilemma of elderly caring in today’s China. The self-sacrifice of children or parents is not the best solution to the dilemma of filial piety in modern society (ZHANG, 2019, p. 227). If the filial piety culture can be re-integrated into the construction of new systems and new technologies, there will be more perfect solutions to today’s predicament. In the face of new challenges in the new era, we should draw upon advanced experience and base our considerations on Chinese cultural traditions to harmonize the roles of the state and families in providing elderly caring. The dual support at material and spiritual levels should be fully considered to efficiently advance the formation of an elderly-friendly society.

We can learn from the latest *2021 Report on the Work of the Government* that, some attempts have been made to apply the concept of filial piety into solutions of the aging population and the elderly caring. For example, basic pension is increased for retirees, subsidies and living allowances are provided for entitled groups, and basic old-age insurance funds are administered uniformly by the state (LI, 2021, p. 13). The multi-tiered social security system will be improved, with 95 percent participation rate of basic old-age insurance. Social assistance and charity systems will also be improved (LI, 2021, p. 13). We will improve traditional services, and provide the elderly and

other groups with more comprehensive and considerate services. The rollout of smart services should also cater to the aged and the disabled, so that smart devices are not barriers in their daily lives (LI, 2021, p. 31) is the reflection of respect. These measures indicate that integrating the cultural tradition of filial piety into China's system construction and science technology development will effectively promote the solution of the aging problems in China.

This study is a review of the process of gradually establishing filial piety as a cultural tradition in China, and the related policies held and evolved across successive dynasties. Analysis of ancient texts indicates that although the meaning of filial piety and related policies are always changing, material support and spiritual respect are always the core of the cultural tradition of filial piety in China. However, the problem of supporting the aged in today's Chinese society is precisely the lack of support and respect. Therefore, re-examining the status of filial piety in Chinese history and integrating support and respect into constructing a contemporary Chinese society will help solve problems of supporting the aged.

Over the past 2000 years, China has seen great changes in cultural and technological arenas. However, the Chinese cultural traditions of filial piety are still relevant and providing many beneficial implications for addressing the country's current elderly caring dilemma. Children's self-sacrifice to their parents is no longer the best solution to the dilemma of filial piety in modern society (ZHANG, 2019, p. 227), and re-integrating filial piety constructs into new systems and new technologies will bring dilemma of caring for the elderly into the 21st century. In the face of new challenges in the new era, we should draw upon advanced experience of China's cultural traditions to harmonize the roles of the state and families in providing care for the elderly. This dual support should efficiently advance the formation of an elderly-friendly society.

Toward the above goals, some advances are achieved. For instance, the *2021 Report on the Work of the Government* reports some attempts on integrating the concept of filial piety into solutions to addressing the aging problems.

We will increase basic pension for retirees, improve subsidies and living allowances for entitled groups, and advance basic old-age insurance funds administered uniformly by the state.

The multi-tiered social security system will be improved, with 95 percent participation rate of basic old-age insurance. Social assistance and charity systems will also be improved (LI, 2021, p. 13).

The above two items show support for the elderly, whereas respect may be addressed as follows.

We will improve traditional services and provide the aged and other groups with more comprehensive and considerate services. The rollout of smart services should also cater to the elderly and people with disabilities so that smart devices will not become a barrier in their daily lives (LI, 2021, p. 31).

These measures indicate that integrating the cultural tradition of filial piety into China's system construction and science technology development will effectively promote solutions to China's urgent elderly caring problem.

LI, H.; WU, G. Implicações da cultura de piedade filial da china para seu cuidado de idosos contemporâneos. *Transformação*, Marília, v. 45, p. 69-86, 2022. Edição Especial 2.

**Resumo:** A piedade filial era um valor central na cultura chinesa antiga, e ainda exerce influência significativa nas atitudes, comportamento e vida cotidiana do povo chinês. Atualmente, a China está enfrentando uma população cada vez mais envelhecida e as preocupações associadas a como cuidar adequadamente dos idosos do país. Através da revisão vertical da piedade filial, ao longo da história da China, para este trabalho, dois elementos constantes emergiram nas tradições, a saber, apoio e respeito. Argumenta-se que a abordagem do problema contemporâneo do cuidado ao idoso exigirá a incorporação adequada de ambas as dimensões, ou seja, fornecer não apenas apoio material ao idoso, na família e na sociedade, mas também prover seu cuidado espiritual. Argumenta-se ainda que quaisquer abordagens destinadas a tratar da questão devem ser baseadas nas condições sociais e culturais reais, na China, incluindo e passando além das tradições culturais de piedade filial.

**Palavras-chave:** Piedade filial. Cultura chinesa. Sociedade envelhecida.

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