

COMMENT ON “TEACHING WITH FILIAL PIETY: A STUDY OF FILIAL PIETY THOUGHT OF CONFUCIANISM”

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In this paper, the author mainly explains filial piety from Confucius and Mencius’ perspective. As the main representatives of Confucianism, Confucius and Mencius have systematically and theoretically explained filial piety, and they can be said to be the soul figures who make filial piety into the Chinese people’s blood.

In the main text, the author first discusses the origin of filial piety. In fact, there is no conclusion in academic circles about when the thought of filial piety originated. Most Chinese scholars believe that the thought of filial piety originated from the ancestors’ emotional sustenance to the ancestors and gods in the clan period in order to survive under difficult conditions, and the purpose is to continue and prosper the family. Some scholars hold the view of reproductive worship. For example, Song Jinlan and others start from the perspective of textual exegesis and believe that the word “filial piety” from “son” indicates that it is related to fertility. When Wang Changkun summed up the predecessors’ views, he also profoundly revealed the complex

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relationship between filial piety thought and ancestor worship and genital one in the clan period. He said: “The ancients combined the concept of genital worship with the superstitious concept of the soul of the ancestors... thus came the concept of worshipping and filial piety to the ancestors.” Due to the lack of exact archaeological discoveries and factual written records, all the conclusions drawn by scholars are only speculations and imaginary approaches, but no factual results (CHEN; ZHANG, 2020, p. 105, 142).

Judging from the existing archaeological data, records of “filial piety” appeared in the Yin and Zhou dynasties. But at this time, “filial piety” cannot yet reflect the meaning of human relations. Ancestor worship in the Yin and Shang Dynasties was the core of religious life. Yin people believed that ancestors could pay homage to God directly, and became the main medium between God and the human world. Since the ancestors are the intermediary between the human world and the god one, they naturally become the masters of the human world, so that they can bring disasters and blessings. This is why the Yin people pay special attention to thick burials and have religious worship of their ancestors.

The Zhou Dynasty inherited the tradition of ancestor worship in the Yin and Shang Dynasties, and especially elevated the first monarch to a god. In this way, the king, who originally belonged to only one family, became the object of common filial piety by the Zhou people through a deified transformation. It can be seen that the concept of “filial piety”, in the Western Zhou Dynasty, is not at the level of ethical life, but at the level of political one. This is because the most important work of the newly acquired Zhou people is to consolidate the regime, and religion is the most powerful force that can rule the people’s hearts. Therefore, the Zhou people tried their best to promote King Wen’s virtues, and further sanctified him and King Wu, making them the focus of the whole nation’s cohesion and the symbol of political unity. In this operation, the concept of “filial piety” becomes the connection point between each individual and the divine idol. For example, in the *Book of Songs*, there are many records of King Wen and King Wu’s “filial piety” and “pursuit of filial piety”. Its purpose is to strengthen the connection between humans and gods, so as to promote national cohesion and political unity. Therefore, “filial piety” at this time can only be said to be between religion and ethics.

Filial piety, in the sense of ethical norms, was not fully highlighted until Confucius. Confucian sages, represented by Confucius, completed the transformation of filial piety from religion to philosophy during the Spring

and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period. Rites are an important aspect of Confucian ethics. Confucius once said: “If you don’t learn rites, you can’t get on in the world.” He attached great importance to the role of rites in the cultivation of personality, and also said: “Do not see anything contrary to rites, do not hear anything contrary to rites, do not speak anything contrary to rites, and do not touch anything contrary to rites”. He regards rites as a daily life. It is worth noting that Confucius valued rites, not the form of rites, but the inner spirit of rites. Therefore, he said: “What is the use of observing rites if one has no benevolence? What is the use of rites and music if one has no benevolence?”

Confucius used rites to standardize filial piety in order to prevent and restrain foolish and hypocritical filial piety without principles and restraint. Although this restraint and prevention may not achieve the desired effect due to the lack of strong implementation, it still embodies a humanistic rationality and humanitarian spirit that balances principles and flexibility, rationality and emotion. This kind of rationality is also reflected in other aspects. For example, Confucius attaches great importance to filial piety and etiquette, but what is practical is the most important thing. Ziyou asked about the number of funeral utensils, and Confucius replied: “It must be commensurate with the family’s financial resources.” He believed that the funeral equipment should be commensurate with his own financial resources, and there was no unified standard. When Zilu lamented that he could not be filial due to poverty and died for his parents, Confucius consoled him: “Even if it is simple food, as long as you make your parents happy, you will fulfill your filial piety; Even if the coffin is thin and simple, as long as you can do it, you can be ceremonialized.” He believes that if you show love and respect to your parents and do your best, even if you are “holding your hands and feet” and “without a coffin”, you will follow the rites. In a word, filial piety and unfilial piety do not lie in form, but in inner emotion. Matching one’s appearance with one’s appearance and acting according to one’s ability are also the contingency principles of Confucius’ filial piety.

Mencius inherited the inner spirit of filial piety from Confucius, took filial piety as the highest expression of virtue, and, at the same time, had a tendency to use filial piety to permeate all virtues. Mencius said: “The way of Yao and Shun is just filial piety.” Mencius advocated the value of filial piety in social governance. He advocated that those in power should take the lead in practising filial piety in order to educate the world, and believed that Shun’s

filial piety had played a good role in enlightening the example. Shun devoted himself to serving his parents to make his father Gusou happy, to make Gusou happy and influence the whole world, and to make Gusou happy and stabilize the world. This is called great filial piety. Shun's father, Gu Sou, was very unkind to Shun and even conspired several times with Shun's younger brother to kill Shun. Shun escaped disaster wisely, but he was still filial to his father and very friendly to his younger brother and was praised by people all over the world. Mencius admired Shun's "great filial piety" very much because Shun's filial piety made his father very happy. He sets an example for the world and lets people know how father and son get along so that the whole society will be stable. In Mencius' view, filial piety comes from a person's inner virtue, and a person's moral self-sufficiency can surpass all external things, thus revealing the infinite dignity of personality. In addition, Mencius especially emphasized the unity of filial piety and benevolence, righteousness, rites and music, that is, the awareness of all moral rationality behind filial piety. And through this, it penetrates everything and completes a moral personality world. It can be seen that Mencius raised the ideological status of filial piety to a whole new level. Xu Fuguan, a New Confucian scholar, believes that Mencius's thought will also cause some problems: Mencius' expansion of the value of filial piety will actually make many people only know about family and ignore society and the country. Mencius overemphasized filial piety. On the one hand, he advocated that this virtue emerges above all things. On the other hand, he used all other things as a means of filial piety and obliterated the objective and independent value of other things.

Although the traditional filial piety ethics has been passed down for thousands of years, some of its content does not fully conform to the modern social value concept, or it is not well integrated with the new era and is not suitable for the it. It is necessary to carry out reasonable selection and modern transformation on the basis of internal criticism. For example, the hierarchical system of "father guides the son" contained in the traditional filial piety ethics, the concept of absolute patriarchy and personal attachment undoubtedly runs counter to the modern consciousness of "independence", "freedom" and "equality", so it should be resolutely abandoned. For the one-sided emphasis on one-way moral obligations and the children's responsibilities, we take the essence and discard the dross, and carry forward the two-way ethical relationship of compassion, filial piety, love and respect, and integrate it with family ethics and two-way morality in modern society that advocates equality. In addition, the over-emphasis on moral rationality contained in the ethics

of filial piety should also be consistent with the emphasis on natural human relationships in modern society. Starting from the emotional point of view, it calls for emotional communication, equality, respect and effective interaction in the parent-child relationship, so as to achieve family harmony reasonably. In short, the inheritance, transformation and innovation of traditional filial piety ethics must be based on contemporary social practice and people's needs, and consciously and actively realize its self-renewal and modern transformation.

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