

Filial Piety



Filial Piety in Buddhism

Early Buddhism did not have a strong tradition of filial piety. Buddhism in India involved many men leaving or abandoning their families, parents, wives, and children to become monks (Buddha himself was said to have done so). The true Buddhist had to reject all family ties, just as they had to reject social and class ties if they were to pursue Nirvana. Family was viewed as just another encumbrance of mortal life that had to be dealt with. Sorrow and grief were said to be "born of those who are dear." Theravada Buddhism stressed individual salvation, and had little room for the interdependent society that Confucianism had created in China, which stressed the good of the community more than the good of the individual. In India, Buddhism also advocated celibacy among its monks which was unacceptable in the Confucian world view, given that it was viewed as the child's duty to continue the parental line. Some Buddhist scholars have argued that the teaching of filial piety was a special feature of Chinese Buddhism as a response to the Chinese culture. Other Buddhist scholars have shown that filial piety was also important in Indian Buddhism. The practice of filial piety has been the chief good karma in the Buddhist moral teaching since its

inception, although it is not as foundational for Buddhist ethics as it is for Confucian ethics. The Buddha advised people to honor parents as the Brahmā, the supreme god and the creator of human beings in Hinduism, as parents have done much for their children. Hence, Buddhism teaches its followers to pay their debts to parents by supporting and respecting them, actions that are considered the first of all meritorious deeds, or good karma, in Buddhist moral teachings. Moreover, according to the Buddhist teaching of karma, matricide and patricide are considered two of the five gravest bad deeds, and the consequence is immediate rebirth in hell. Mahāyāna Buddhism developed the idea of filial piety further and formulated the four debts to four groups of people—parents, sentient beings, rulers, and Buddhism—a teaching that became very popular in Chinese Buddhism and spread to other East Asian countries.

Filial Piety in Confucianism

According to the Classic of Filial Piety, Confucius once said: "In serving his parents, a filial son reveres them in daily life; he makes them happy while he nourishes them; he takes anxious care of them in sickness; he shows great sorrow over their death that was for him; and he sacrifices to them with solemnity." For Confucius, filial piety was not merely blind loyalty to one's parents. More important than the norms of xiào were the norms of (仁; benevolence) and (義; righteousness). For Confucius and Mencius, 孝 xiào was a display of rén which was ideally applied in one's dealings with all elders, thus making it a general norm of intergenerational relations. However, in practice, 孝 xiào was usually reserved for one's own parents and grandparents, and from time to time, was elevated above the notions of 仁; benevolence and 義; righteousness. Filial piety was emphasized in Confucianism because devotion to one's parents was often associated with one's devotion to

the state.

In Confucian philosophy, filial piety (Chinese: 孝, xiào) is a virtue of respect for one's parents, elders, and ancestors. The Confucian classic Xiao Jing or Classic of Xiào, thought to be written around the Qin-Han period, has historically been the authoritative source on the Confucian tenet of xiào / "filial piety". The book, a conversation between Confucius and his student Zeng Shen (曾參, also known as Zengzi 曾子), is about how to set up a good society using the principle of xiào (filial piety). The term can also be applied to general obedience, and is used in religious titles in Christian Churches, like "filial priest" or "filial vicar" for a cleric whose church is subordinate to a larger parish. Filial piety is central to Confucian role ethics.[2]

In more general terms, filial piety means to be good to one's parents; to take care of one's parents; to engage in good conduct not just towards parents but also outside the home so as to bring a good name to one's parents and ancestors; to perform the duties of one's job well so as to obtain the material means to support parents as well as carry out sacrifices to the ancestors; not be rebellious; show love, respect and support; display courtesy; ensure male heirs, uphold fraternity among brothers; wisely advise one's parents, including dissuading them from moral unrighteousness; display sorrow for their sickness and death; and carry out sacrifices after their death. Filial piety is considered a key virtue in Chinese culture, and it is the main concern of a large number of stories.

Filial Piety in Abrahamism

Abrahamic Thought on filial piety; Honour thy father and thy mother is one of the Ten Commandments in the Hebrew Bible.

In the Gospels, Jesus affirmed the importance of honoring one's father and mother (Matthew 15:1–9, Matthew 19:17–19, Mark 10:17–19, Luke 18:18–21) Paul quotes the commandment in his letter to the church in Ephesus:

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honour your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land." (Ephesians 6:1–2, ESV. See also Colossians 3:20) — Ephesians 6:1–2 (ESV)

In his letters to the Romans and Timothy, Paul describes disobedience to parents as a serious sin (Romans 1:29–31, 2 Timothy 3:2).

The words of Jesus and the teaching of Paul indicate that adult children remain obligated to honor their parents by providing for material needs. In the gospels, Jesus is portrayed as angry with some people who avoided materially providing for their parents by claiming the money they would have used was given to God (Matthew 15:3–8, Mark 7:9–12. In these passages, Jesus quotes Isaiah 29:13) According to the Gospel of John, when Jesus was on the cross, he provided for his natural mother by giving the Apostle John the charge to care for her, which John accepted.

Nevertheless, modern Western society of today rarely practices "filial piety" as most children from a Judeo-Christian background do not honor and care for parents to the extent of those from Eastern backgrounds. This is because in the modern West, the individual is more important than the family and when an elderly parent becomes a burden to the adult child, the needs of the adult child to be burden-free supersedes any feeling of obligation to care for the elderly parent. Western children tend to abandon elderly parents to be cared for by the State or to fend for themselves in old age compared to Eastern

children who feel great sense of obligation to care and repay their debt to their parents. Western cultures tend to be youth-centric, emphasizing attributes like individualism and independence. This relates back to the Protestant work ethic, which ties an individual's value to his or her ability to work — something that diminishes in old age. Anthropologist Jared Diamond, who has studied the treatment of the elderly across cultures, has said the geriatric in countries like the U.K. and U.S. live "lonely lives separated from their children and lifelong friends." As their health deteriorates, the elderly in these cultures often move to retirement communities, assisted living facilities, and nursing homes.