

Filial Piety and Healthcare for Old People

Kam-por Yu

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

The concept of filial piety

- The Chinese concept of filial piety means much more than “serving one’s parents well”
- What is filial piety?
 - “The root of humanity”(仁之本) *The Analects*, 1.2
 - “The foundation of virtue” (德之本) *The Book of Filial Piety*
 - “The source of education”(教之所由生)
 - “The greatest of all human behaviours” (人之行莫大於孝)
 - “The best way to teach people to love one another” (教民親愛莫善於孝)

The social dimension of filial piety

- Filial piety \neq partiality in the favour of one's parents
- A filial son (孝子) = a worthy son (賢子) = a worthy person (賢人)
- “Filial piety completes in establishing one's integrity.”

The Book of Filial Piety

- “This is what a gentleman calls filial piety – The countrymen all praise: ‘Fortunate indeed, to have a son like this!’ That is filial piety.” *Dadai Liji*
- “ ‘Noble person’ (君子) is a name given by other people. The people giving him a good name, and call him the son of a noble person (君子之子). This is making one's parents noble persons.” *The Book of Rites*

Levels of filial piety

- Filial piety in the minimal sense = not to do anything that brings disgrace to one's parents (不辱父母)
- Filial piety in the maximal sense = to be a virtuous person that treats everyone properly and humanely by performing one's social roles well, thereby demonstrating the excellent moral education received from one's parents (立身行道, 以顯父母)

The three levels of filial piety

- “There are three levels of filial piety. Great filial piety consists in bringing glory to one’s parents. The next level is not bringing shame to them. The lowest one consists in supporting them.” *Dadai Liji* (大戴禮記)
- “There are three levels of filial piety. The least is seen in the employment of one’s strength in the service of one’s parents. The second is seen in the upholding benevolence and righteousness. (尊仁安義) The greatest is seen in doing charity widely. (博施備物)” *The Book of Rites*
- “Filial piety starts from serving one’s parents, advances by serving the ruler, and is completed in establishing one’s integrity.” *The Book of Filial Piety*

The Confucian conception of filial piety

- Extending from near to afar
 - Seek for other people's love and respect of what one loves and respects (敬親者不敢慢於人)
 - Care and respect other's parents as you would like your parents to be cared and respected (所求乎子者以事父)
 - Extend the love and respect to other people (老吾老以及人之老)
 - Love and respect what other people love and respect (敬其父則子悅)
- Developing from elementary to high level

The developmental nature of filial piety

- Filial piety is rooted in human nature
- Filial piety is the first emergence of the moral mind in the life of a person
- Filial piety can be understood as consisting of different levels
- Filial piety can be fostered to grow
- Fully developed filial piety is equivalent to the highest possible virtue (Yu 2015b)

Caring of old people as a social responsibility

- The good of caring all parents
- The good of caring all aged non-parents, i.e. old people who have no children to care for them
- The society and the government have a duty to care the old, especially old people who don't have family members to take care of them. (發政施仁, 必先 [鰥寡孤獨] 四者) *Mencius 1B5*
- Distributed responsibility: Individuals have primary responsibility to take care of old people who are related to them. The society has primary responsibility to take care of old people who are not taken care of by anyone.

Filial piety as a virtue

- Reality vs Name
- The reality of filial piety is based on the nature of the heart-mind
- Rejection of conventionalism

Filial Piety and End-of-life decision

- Should a filial son choose DNR for his parent?
- Interesting survey findings: In a survey done in Taiwan (Yang 2003), it was found that most people would prefer ending their life under some specific conditions (such as in vegetative state, or in a painful dying process) but they would not prefer the same for their parents.

Filial Piety and End-of-life decision

- Question: If people prefer what they regard as the best for themselves, why would they prefer something else for their parents?
- Answer: The people concerned would like to be regarded as filial, and they worry that withdrawal of treatment may be interpreted as saving resources and not caring their parent enough.

Filial Piety and End-of-life decision

- The Confucian critique: The right question to ask is not (1), but (2):
 1. What should one do to be regarded as a filial son?
 2. What should a person with the heart-mind of a truly filial son do? (What should be done to truly care about one's parent and respect his or her will?)

Dual perspective and Multiple values

- Dual perspective: forward and backward looking
 - “Humans originate from their ancestors” (人本乎祖);
“expression of gratitude to the source and going back to the beginning” (報本反始) *The Book of Rites*
 - “The dying should not harm the living” (無以死傷生);
“The sadness for the deceased should not overwhelm the wish to continue to live” (毀不滅性) *The Book of Filial Piety*
- Pluralistic values
 - The key is not to choose between opposite values, but to balance and moderate.

Multiple values in Confucian ethics

- Opposite values are regarded as complementary to each other
- Pairs of competing values
 - loyalty (*zhong* 忠) and filial piety (*xiao* 孝);
 - personal commitment (*jie* 節) and social justice (*yi* 義);
 - human feeling (*qing* 情) and principle (*li* 理)
 - refinement (*wen* 文) and substance (*zhi* 質);
 - leniency (*wen* 溫) and strictness (*meng* 猛);
 - respectful (*gong* 恭) and easy (*an* 安);
 - simple (*jian* 簡) and reverential (*jing* 敬);
 - tense (*zhang* 張) and relaxed (*chi* 弛)

Multiple values in Confucian ethics

- Three foundational values
 - *zunzun* 尊尊 (respect those who have high status – essential for maintaining stability and order);
 - *qinqin* 親親 (maintain good relationship with those who are related – essential for fostering social cohesion);
 - *xianxian* 賢賢 (appoint those who are good and capable – essential for promoting good governance).
- Nine canons of good governance
 - cultivate one's person 脩身; honour the good and capable 尊賢; be devoted to one's kin 親親; respect the senior ministers 敬大臣; understand the difficulties of the various officials 體群臣; love the common people 子庶民; attract the various artisans 來百工; give preferential treatment to people from afar 柔遠人; pacify the feudal lords 懷諸侯. *Zhongyong*
- Five core elements of the kingly way
 - Treasure the virtuous 貴有德; treasure the noble 貴貴; treasure the old 貴老; respect the elderly 敬長; love the young 慈幼 *The Book of Rites*

Multiple values and resources allocation

- To uphold the backward looking and the forward looking principles at the same time, it is necessary to make opposite and balance arrangements at the same time.
- Implication: Age is a relevant factor. Old people should sometimes have higher priority, and sometimes have lower priority.
- E.g. For regular care (such as hospitalization), old people should have priority; for life-threatening cases (such as organ-transplantation), young people should have priority.

Special features of the Confucian perspective

- Dual perspective of backward looking and forward looking
- Multiple values
- Emphasis on genuine care and respect originated from the heart-mind
- Distributed responsibility

Conclusions

- Who is responsible for caring for older members of the population when they need support?
 - Shared responsibility: Individuals should take care of the old people related to them. The government is responsible to take care of old people who are not taken care of by others.
- What priority should be given to caring for older people in comparison with obligations to care for others (such as children)?
 - Long-term interest of young people are more important for young people. Short-term gratification is more important for old people.
- To what extent should age affect the value of a person or their life, if at all?
 - Age is a relevant factor. Age has positive weight in the allocation of ordinary care, and a negative weight in the allocation of life-saving care.

Relevant writings

- (Yu 2004) Kam-por Yu, “Respecting Nature and Using Human Intelligence: Elements of a Confucian Bioethics”, in Margaret Sleeboom (ed.), *Genomics in Asia: A Clash of Bioethical Interests?*, London: Kegan Paul, 2004, pp. 159-177.
- (Yu 2010) Kam-por Yu, “The Handling of Multiple Values in Confucian Ethics”, in Kam-por Yu, Julia Tao, and Philip J. Ivanhoe (eds.), *Taking Confucian Ethics Seriously*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2010, pp. 27-51.
- (Yu 2012) Kam-por Yu, “Filial Piety as a Path to Civility: The Confucian Project”, in Deborah S. Mower and Wade L. Robison (eds.), *Civility in Politics and Education*, London: Routledge, 2012.
- (Yu 2015a) Kam-por Yu, “The Chinese Tradition of Filial Piety and the Confucian Philosophical Reconstructions”, in Wolfgang Behr, Licia Di Giacinto, Ole Döring, Christine Moll-Murata (eds.), *Auf Augenhöhe – Festschrift zum 65 Geburtstag von Heiner Roetz, (Bochumer Jahrbuch zur Ostasienforschung [BJOAF], Volume 38)*, München, Germany: IUDICIUM Verlag, 2015, pp. 145-160.
- (Yu 2015b) Kam-por Yu “The Confucian Alternative to the Individual-Oriented Model of Informed Consent: Family and Beyond”, in Ruiping Fan (ed.), *Family-Oriented Informed Consent: East Asian and American Perspectives*, Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2015, pp. 93-106.