



The Influence of Social Thought on the Connotation of Traditional Filial Piety during Guangxu Period of Qing Dynasty

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Abstract

Traditional Chinese conception of filial piety requires grown-up children to treat their parents kindly, which means satisfying their parents' material needs. As time goes by, the conception of traditional Chinese filial piety gradually evolves to the theory that requires grown-up children not only to treat their parents kindly, but also be obedient to them. In Guangxu Period of Qing Dynasty, the spread of Christianity in China, Taiping rebellion and westernization movement exert great influence on the connotation of traditional Chinese filial piety, which makes filial piety culture back to the track of its origin.

Subject Areas

Anthropology, Art, History, Philosophy, Sociology

Keywords

China, the Late of Qing Dynasty, Culture of Filial Piety, Influence

1. Introduction

The culture of filial piety is a tradition with a long history. As one of the four ancient civilizations in the world, China is a country with a history of thousands of years, covering lands in different shapes, which results from the culture of filial piety varying from region to region. On the one hand, the connotation of filial piety culture varies in different periods in ancient China; on the other hand, the vast land and integration of races make the culture of filial piety present in a different way.

2. The Connotation and Evolution of the Conception of Traditional Chinese Filial Piety

Human beings are rational, gregarious, interdependent animals, and their social attributes arouse the appearance of certain norms and order in their society, which originates the appearance of filial piety [1]. The earliest record of filial piety can be traced back to the end of primitive society, “filial piety’ appeared in the late primitive society, namely from the transition from matriarchy to patriarchy. With the establishment of blood relationship and private ownership, it was necessary to create certain rituals for grown-up children to express their gratitude, reverence to their parents’ sacrifice in the process of upbringing, that is the reason for the appearance of ‘worship of filial piety’ (performing the rituals of filial piety to his predecessors), ‘Xiao Xiang’ (sacrifice) ‘Xiao Si (sacrifice)’” [2].

The character “xiao” can be found in oracle bone inscriptions. As is known to all, most oracle bone inscriptions are hieroglyphics, and the character “xiao” is no exception. In oracle bone inscriptions, the character “xiao” is in upper and lower structure. The upper part is like a hunchbacked old man, while the lower part is like a child with outstretched hands, who seems to be holding up the old man and serving him. The interpretation of “xiao” in “Erya. Shixun” is that “be good to parents”. Filial piety originally means the relationship between the elderly and their grown-up children [2] [3]. Xu Shen in *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* explained “xiao” as: “xiao means that grown-up children should treat their elder parents kindly, because its structure is something about parents and children” [2]. Here, the ideal of “treating parents kindly” emphasizes meeting parents’ material needs, which is quite different from the connotation of “filial piety” in Confucian culture.

China is a vast country with great regional culture, religion differences which results in the phenomenon that cultural connotation of filial piety varies from region to region. Rulers in different dynasties keep thinking how to maintain peace and stability in such a vast country. In feudal society, family was the basic unit of the society, which enjoyed a high degree of autonomy. In big family, even lynching was considered legal. And “filial piety” can motivate the harmony within a big family, which was the base of the stability of the whole society. Therefore, rulers in different periods promoted the status of “filial piety”. Confucius made filial piety to be an important standard for regulating personal morality and behavior at a time when feudal ethics were being destroyed, that is, “rites and moralities collapsed”. He said, “My ambition can be illustrated by the spring and autumn annals, and my behavior is regulated by the book of filial piety” [4]. The “filial piety” advocated by Confucius is one branch of “rites”, which means treating elders kindly.

During the spring and autumn period and the warring states period, various theories flourished and developed. There were different interpretations of filial piety in different theories, which were not listed here. “Filial piety” as a tool for

the ruling class to maintain social stability dated back Han dynasty, the emperor Han Wudi established Confucianism as orthodoxy of ruling class, namely “abandoned the doctrines, only respect Confucianism”, implemented the theocracy, and integrated “loyalty” and “filial piety”, which elevated the status of “filial piety”. The popularization and promotion of filial piety in the south was realized in Tang dynasty. Due to the continuous harassment of the northern minorities, many large families migrated to the south together with the culture of filial piety. In the process of the assimilation of big families with the minorities in the south, the concept of “filial piety” was gradually accepted by those minorities. Meanwhile, with the introduction of Buddhism into China, the status of filial piety culture had not been shaken, but integrated with the thought of repayment of kindness in Buddhism, which consolidated its special position in the mainstream social thought. In Nansong Dynasty, Zhu Xi clarified the connotation of filial piety, and put forward various specific requirements on filial piety. In Yuan Dynasty, although the ruling class was Mongolian nationality, the development of filial piety culture did not stop at that time, evidenced by the appearance and popularity of Twenty-Four Filial Piety. The ruler in Ming Dynasty reigned by the concept of “filial piety”, Zhu Yuanzhang promulgated six guidelines. The first one was “filial piety”, which had been promoted throughout the history of Ming Dynasty. Anyone who performed “filial piety” would be given generous material rewards, which greatly improve social status of the person who was a “filial man”. In Qing dynasty, sovereignty was handed over to ethnic minorities. The majority of the ruling class in Qing dynasty were Manchus. The rulers in Qing Dynasty continued to use the political system of the Ming dynasty in order to maintain the stability of society. Meanwhile, they made changes when inherited filial piety culture. On the one hand, in order to consolidate its rule, Qing government did not divide its citizens into several classes as Yuan dynasty did. Instead, it copied the political system of Ming. On the other hand, the Manchu rulers were keeping on extending territory, conquering the neighboring minority community. Those minorities were less affected by the traditional Confucian culture, so with the filial piety culture. Therefore, Qing government adopted differentiation ruling strategies in this area (such as the northeast, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, Xinjiang, Tibet and other regions), which made those regions less influenced by filial piety culture.

3. The Social Trend and Its Influence in Guangxu Period of Qing Dynasty

In the late Qing Dynasty, there were several social events and social thoughts that influenced society greatly, namely, Taiping heavenly kingdom movement, The Reform movement, the Boxer Rebellion, and the New Deal in the late Qing Dynasty. This paper focuses on the social thoughts before AD 1899 during the reign of Guangxu (The reign of Guangxu period begins on August 14, 1871 and ends on November 14, 1908). Before 1899, the major social events in the late Qing Dynasty were nothing but the Taiping heavenly kingdom movement, wes-

ternization movement, reform and the Boxer Movement. These movements and reform were closely related to the spread of Christianity in China at that time. During the Opium War, western countries used gunboats to force Qing government open its door. They not only wanted to seize the wealth of China temporary, but also occupy China permanently. The spread of Christianity had become their weapon to assimilate Chinese in order to achieve the purpose of colonizing China.

The Confucian culture has been in China for thousands of years, deeply rooted in the minds of Chinese. Therefore, Christianity actively seeks for a point of convergence with the traditional Confucian culture so as to rapidly spread Christianity in China. Christianity takes “filial piety” as a stepping stone, using the similarities between them to spread Christianity in China. From December 4, 1869 to January 8, 1870, missionary Lin Lezhi published a series of articles entitled “the doctrine of the doctrine of elimination and conversion”, aiming to combine Christianity with traditional Chinese Confucianism. Later, missionary Tao Zhiqian also advocated the interpretation of Bible should be based on Confucianism. The combination of Christianity and Confucianism was further strengthened in book “From the west to the east” by the German missionary HuaZhian. This way adopted by missionaries worked, but they found it difficult to convince Chinese that man was created by God after the popularity of the idea that man had evolved from monkeys. But the influential social thoughts and social events were more or less related to Christianity in the late Qing Dynasty.

The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom movement had an unprecedented impact on the traditional concept of filial piety under the ideological theory advocated by Hong Xiuquan who expressed that “all people in the world belong to one family and all people in the world are brothers and sisters”. The traditional filial piety culture in China was born in an agricultural society, which based on big family and existed in the family system. However, Hong Xiuquan brought this system to an end, whose separated men from women and eliminated the structure of family. For instance, the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom used the method of separating men and women to govern the people in Nanjing in accordance with the “male pavilion” and “female house”, breaking the ethical relationships between husband and wife, father and son, brothers, sisters, etc. Women and Men cannot contact each other no matter what kind of relationship between them, and heterosexual contacts in any kind was fully prohibited, even couple could contact privately, otherwise they would be executed. In addition, Taiping army also banned all ancestral temple worship activities, and funeral procedures were abolished, even coffins were forbidden to use, which impacted traditional filial piety culture.

The thought of Taiping Heavenly Kingdom was disguised by Christian thought; however, its negative side could not be covered by all kinds of radical and rebellious appearances. “When the ideology was far from reaching the same level, all kinds of drastic measures carried out by the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom were

bound to go from one extreme to the other, completely deviating from people's real life. Therefore, they encountered strong resistance from the people in Jiang-nian" [5]. This extreme thought caused great damage to the traditional Chinese filial piety culture, greatly shook the concepts of the traditional filial piety culture, which cause the change of the connotation of filial piety culture in the late Qing Dynasty quietly.

From the 1960s to the 1990s, the rulers of the Qing government launched the westernization movement aimed at strengthening national strength, "westernization movement, also known as the self-help movement and self-improvement movement of the late Qing Dynasty. From the 1860s to the 1890s, ruling class introduced western military equipment, machine production and science and technology to maintain feudal rule. The slogan of the westernization movement in the early stage was 'self-strengthening', and in the late stage was 'seeking wealth'" [6]. Although they advocated learning western science and technology, they did not pay attention western culture, especially filial piety culture; on the contrary, the traditional Chinese filial piety culture was on the track of returning to its origin. "Zengguofan once said that he had read all the books in the world, all of which were about filial piety", and Zhang Zhidong's "exhorting students" was full of content of teaching people to be filial piety to their parents and love their brothers [5]. It can be said that the westernization movement played a role in maintaining the traditional filial piety culture in China, which made the filial piety culture, shaken at the late Qing Dynasty, returned to the tradition.

4. Conclusion

China is a country with a long history, vast territory and a large number of nationalities. The connotation and denotation of traditional Chinese filial piety culture have changed in different periods, regions and nationalities. This paper analyzes the social trend during the reign of Emperor Guangxu of the late Qing Dynasty in order to research the influence of social trend on traditional Chinese filial piety culture. Through this research, the author finds that the traditional filial piety culture in China was greatly influenced by the social trend in the late Qing Dynasty and the spread of Christianity in China. Overall, traditional Chinese culture of filial piety followed the pattern of being impacted, questioned and returned to its origin. Due to the rapid transformation from agricultural society to modern society, the structure of family changes greatly, which seriously impacted the traditional Chinese culture of filial piety. This paper discusses the mode how filial piety culture was impacted, questioned and returned to its original source before 1899, the end of Qing Dynasty, which works as reference to the reconstruction of filial piety culture in China today. The relevant research needs to be further deepened and improved, and author hopes that this paper can inspire further research in this field.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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