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MIN BO HUANG

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Filial Piety and Its Role in Family Support for Elderly Model of China

Submitted by: Huang Bomin (MACC/HSS)

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According to a recent report from the Chinese government, China is projected to become the world’s most aged society in 2030 and its aging population will probably account for a quarter of its total population at 330 million (Huang, 2013). Once named as the “sleeping giant” since the potential power in its economic growth, China now is gradually becoming the “aging giant” due to its aging population. With such huge aging population, the solutions of China supporting its aging population deserve special attentions.

The Chinese culture of filial piety occupies a vital place in addressing China’s aging problems. Unlike the Western countries mainly adopting social pension fund to support its aging population, China, with the inherent tradition of filial piety, chose the family support model for its elderly from history and this model still remains prevail in modern China, especially in rural areas (Li, 1997). The traditional family support for the elderly is featured by traditional filial duty: it is the moral obligation for the grown children to take care of their old parents in Confucianism. But in the context of social transformation and modernization, the significance of the family support model is challenged and undermined to some extent. Children tend to live faraway from their parents. The increasing speed of life also results in huge reduce of taking care of their parents. On the other hand, the value system of filial piety also alters and its importance may be on the decline. The phenomena of unfilial children not supporting their parents and unfilial activities like elder abuse become quite common, which arouse me more thinking about Chinese culture of filial piety.
and the family support model in the context of an aging China. So, my research topic is about the filial piety and its role in the family support for elderly model.

**Research question:**

My specific research question is to examine filial piety and its functional role in family support model of China. Through the study of filial piety and its mechanism of family support model in tradition, it could reveal some clues for today’s role of filial piety and further provide some implications for solving China’s aging problems.

The following problems will be discussed:

1) What is filial piety? What is its functional role in history?

2) What is the traditional role of filial piety played in family support model?

3) How is filial piety challenged in modern family support model?

   What is the prospect of family support model in china?

4) What is the implication for aging China?

**Rationale:**

As a developing country, China is confronted with getting old before getting rich. The rapid and massive aging population becomes a great challenge for China’s sustainable development, which arouses a hot discussion about this issue in the academic circle.

After a comprehensive searching, I find the importance of filial piety and the family support in resolving China’s aging population problems.

Filial piety has long occupied an important position in traditional Chinese culture. It is the cornerstone of the Chinese family, remaining as the fundamental value for the
relationships between parents and children (Chow, 2006). The supporting and honoring of one's parents is the basic content of traditional filial piety (Xiao, 2001).

In the family support model, it is family members, especially the grown children that take care and support the elderly. With the culture of filial piety, China’s supporting problems are largely solved in the form of family support (Wu, 2008). Yao (1998) considered, the culture was the key factor for maintaining the function of China’s family support model. He further pointed out that the unfilial behaviors are essentially not due to the economic factors, but because of the lack of moral responsibility and the ideology of filial piety. Sung (1998) considered the culture of filial piety was the theoretical pillars for the family support for the elderly model. So, there is a close relationship between filial piety and family support model.

Furthermore, filial piety also affects the family support model and its mechanism. It is the culture of filial piety that provides the basis for the family support model. As Chinese fine tradition, filial piety which includes respecting and supporting the senior largely supports the family support model (Lv, 2001). The traditional family support for the elderly is accordance with the filial piety in Confucianism. Yao (1998) concerns, the role of filial piety playing in the family support model is reflected in the way of feeling, thinking and behaving when taking care of the elderly. The family support model uncovers not merely the intergenerational relation of supporting the old on the surface. But more importantly, it is also a reflection of Chinese culture and value system, as well as a maintenance and protection for the ideology of filial piety.
Thus we could discover filial piety mainly underpins the family support model and it is also reflected and protected by this model.

However, in recent decades, owing to the rapid industrialization and urbanization, the young generation is more likely to move to and live in cities, leaving their parent behind. As a result, the family support model is challenged substantially. Meanwhile, it also shows a declining trend of influence of filial piety in modern society although people continue to feel a responsibility of supporting their old parents (Chow, 2006). The meaning of filial piety changes as well. Rather than the absolute obedience to and sacrifice for parents, it focuses more on other factors, like reciprocal exchanges between elderly parents and their children in modern China (Li & Tracy, 1999). Therefore, confronted with the current situation and challenges, the useful solutions to China’s aging problem is worthy of looking into further.

Compared with the social pension fund for support the old, the family support model has its unique advantages and suits the basic realities of China to a large extent. The social pension support would cause a huge burden for the government’s budget and economic growth. Moreover, this kind of social support, lack of respecting the old culture, does not satisfy the elderly’s spiritual need of being loved and accompanied (Shi, 2013). Hence the importance of filial piety and the family support model should be emphasized.

**Evidence:**
My paper is intended to employ a qualitative of documentary analysis based on the existing research papers, journal articles and books to probe into my research question. The origin and development of traditional filial piety as well as its function would be firstly discussed. On this basis, I am trying to discover its role and effects in the family support for the elderly model in tradition and conclude its significance. Then, in the context of aging China, the current situation of China’s support for the old and the characteristics of aging China should be take into consideration. The challenges faced by filial piety in modern China’s family support model would be analyzed. Hence I could draw some conclusion for the significance of filial piety and family support model in dealing with China’s aging problems.

**Significance:**

My paper tries to resolve China’s aging problem from the cultural and sociological perspective. It focuses on Chinese culture of filial piety and the traditional family support for the elderly model in terms of history and practical significance. Based on the culture of filial piety, it tries to explore a Chinese characteristic way of supporting the aging population. The specific importance of my research is shown as follow:

1) It is beneficial for dealing with China’s aging problem

According to the report on prediction of China’s aging population rend, an aging China is inevitable (CNCAPRC,2006). Besides the social influence, it also compromises China’s economic performance and international competitiveness.
Confronted with this situation, the efficient solutions to China’s aging problems have become one of the most important tasks for China in the 21st century. From the micro perspective, family plays a vital role in taking care of the old and its central status could not be replaced by any kind of social support. It also demonstrates the significance of filial piety in addressing China’s aging problems. Whereas from the macro perspective, the culture of filial piety also encourages people not only to respect their own parents but also to extend it to others’ parents and other old people. The promotions of filial piety and morality of respecting the elderly have its vital realistic significance.

2) It is beneficial for constructing harmonious families and harmonious society

In the context of modernization and server aging population, the problems of China’s support for the elderly become increasingly obvious. In modern Chinese society, the family support is not merely within the individual level, but more importantly it influences China’s further development in terms of continuing economic growth, political stability, harmonious intergeneration relationship.

The culture of filial piety demonstrates the responsibility of taking care of the old parents as one of the most basic value. This kind of cultural values not only does good for the code of conduct of the individuals but also is beneficial for the constructions of harmonious families and harmonious society. So the promotion of filial piety is of great importance.
Reference:


