

'Family is very important to the Chinese'. Discuss.

Family is an integral piece in Chinese culture with the average life of the average Chinese person devoted to the worshiping of ancestors and caring for the family, ranging from providing for them to being filial. The devotion to one's family was a theme common in ancient life in both the Far East and the Mediterranean world, however the importance of family in the west has changed with the culture but has persisted in China as some aspects of its ancient culture seems to persist to this day. This essay will discuss the importance of family, how this idea of filial piety has persisted and how it may have deteriorated in other aspects. To achieve this, the essay will be using modern sources in reference to the statement in question.

Tomb Sweeping day, or Qingming Festival is a celebratory day which occurs on the third day of the third month of spring. This day is usually a driery and rainy day in the lunar calendar. It is a sacred day for both the ethnic Han people and also the ethnic minority groups. On this day families would visit their ancestors tombs. To show filial piety they would clean the tombs and make symbolic offerings, this will consist of Joss paper which resembles money, cooked food such as meat and fish, the ancestors favourite foods, also fruit and wine will be prensented in front of the tomb. Then the family picnic on the foods themselves whilst sitting near the tomb/s. Insence would also be burned and is used as an instrament to communicate up to the ancestors using smoke, this is a Buddhist tradition.

Many families had used to have their own ancestral halls where wooden tablets were inscribed with the names of their male ancestors were kept, but thousands were destroyed by Mao's Red Guards during the 1960's. From these tablets, families could be traced back several hundred years or even more. In the town of Qufu, where Confucius was born, almost the whole town seemed to have the same surname which was 'Kong' and could therefore trace their families back to about 500 BCE. During the Spring and Autumn and early-mid Warring States period, a conflict existed, Confucian thinkers such as Confucius and Mencius put a piosity on filial piety whilst Shang Yang regarded it detrimental to the state. However, scholars later tended to reconcile the values, as is evident in the "Xiaojing 孝經" (The Classic of Filial Piety) and the "Zhongxiao 忠孝" (Loyalty and Filial Piety) chapter of the Hanfeizi 韓非子. The two texts reconcile filial piety with political authority, and show that the two values are based on the same made unfiliality illegal and permitted the head of a family to have very strong authority over other members of the household. Still, governments maintained control of individual households by putting the head of the family's authority under political authority.

In today's society many Chinese people accept that death is one of the most important events in a persons life cycle and therefore there's no theed to come to terms with their own mortality. People attend funerals wearing white and straw bands tied around their waists to mourn. If the deceased has made it to seventy years old (The same age that the Bible gives as man's natural life span) it's seen that there is no reason for any serious grief, though there would be a lot o fritual frieving during the funeral procession.

In an echo of the old custom of burying clothing and jewels with the body, entire shops are devoted to selling joss paper money, paper furniture, cars, houses and paper clothing that are burned and placed with the body on burial. Even the non-religious will often pay a Buddhist or Daoist priest to say prayers and perform ceremonies for the soul of the deceased. Traditionally the Chinese believed that the body had to go into the next world intact or its ghost would never be at peace, so cremation was unpopular, but China needs to find space to bury the ancestors in overcrowded cities, burial

plots are expansive therefore for some they must compromise by burying ashes. In 2013 a report in the *China Daily* described how the ever practical Chinese government is offering a new pathway to the afterlife: state subsidized burial of bodies at sea, using a fleet of special sea burial ships. The chosen day for these mass burials at sea is the Qingming holiday, the traditional day for tomb sweeping and ancestor visiting, and they are becoming quite popular. According to the report depositing one's loved one's remains at sea also means they cannot be stolen or disturbed.

The Ghost Festival is less well known but still an important part of the lunar calendar in China. It is also known as the Hungry Ghost Festival, Zhongyuan Jie (中元節), Gui Jie (鬼節) or Yulan Festival. It is a traditional Buddhist and Daoist festival which is held in certain Asian countries which include Thailand, Vietnam and Singapore. According to the lunar calendar, the Ghost Festival is held on the 15th night of the seventh month, but in certain parts of southern China it is celebrated on the 14th.

Within Chinese culture, the seventh month is referred as the ghost month (鬼月), at this time spirits, which include those of deceased ancestors come out from the lower realm. It is distinct from both the Qingming Festival and Double Ninth Festival in Autumn which living descendants pay homage to their deceased ancestors, but during Ghost Festival it is believed that the deceased come to visit the living.

On day 15 both the gates of Heaven and Hell open up, also the realm of the living open up and both Buddhists and Daoists perform rituals to forgive the sufferings of the deceased. It is said that the dead are then free to roam the earth for a month. During this month, filial piety of descendants go to their ancestors even after their deaths. This month includes many activities such as preparing ritualistic food offerings, burning incense, burning joss paper, a papier-mache form of material items like clothes, gold and other goods given to visiting spirits of the ancestors. Some people also give modern items such as faux Louis Vuitton purses and phones. Often vegetarian meals would be served with empty seats for each of the deceased in the family and treat the deceased as if they are still living. The food is an important component to the festival, apparently if the living do not want the spirits to wreak havoc on their lives, they need to be fed. The ancestor worship is what divides the Qingming Festival from the Ghost Festival because in the Qingming festival they pay their respects to both the same and younger generations, but during the Ghost Festival they will pay respects towards the older generations. Other festivities could include buying and releasing miniature paper boats and lanterns on rivers, which represents the giving of direction to the lost ghosts and spirits of their ancestors.

An important part of Confucius' filial piety is the respect that's shown towards older people/the elderly and to distant ancestors. To most Westerners "ancestor worship" can sound quite sinister, but it just means showing respect to your ancestors.

It's seen in the West that the traditional family which consists of two married parents and two children is in constant "crisis", but in China it is being regarded as the basis of Chinese society and it will guarantee the individual's security and happiness.

In the south of China, the family is most likely a part of a bigger community, which give each other a helping hand. The children should show respects towards their parents which is a fundamental concept of filial piety. Confucius defined it as a "basis of all virtue" and will serve them well in life. Some believe that the One Child policy contradicts the virtue of filial piety and this creates a generation of children who are spoiled by their parents, also because they have no parents they have not have to learn about sharing. The Chinese call these children "little emperors," but after the little emperors start their school life they are under immense pressure to fulfilling their family's hopes.

In the more rural areas, the household together is more important than the focus on one child, this is because they pull together in order to create wealth or even survive.

The Chinese language shows us kinship in its family terminology and age. A younger brother is called *didi*, the older brother would be *gege* etc. These words are also used for people outside their immediate family, which is different from what we see in the West. All these concepts ingrained in Chinese society for generations has made family important to the Chinese.

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