

Filial Piety for Modern China^{*}

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Abstract

Filial piety is a central virtue of Confucian ethics and widely viewed as an important part of what it means to be(come) Chinese. Confucian scholars emphasize the cultivation of filial piety (love and respect for parents) while assuming that parental love for children is innate. But this traditional view has led to the deformation of filial piety and twisted requests for parental love in both past and present-day China. In contrast, I will argue that long-lasting parental love also requires moral effort to become a virtue and that filial piety for the modern world cannot be morally justified without this form of parental love.

Perhaps the most common response to the question of what it means to be(come) Chinese is the following: If you are born Chinese, you will naturally be Chinese. This appears to be a tautology, yet there is a deeper meaning there. Parents are essential to one's existence. One will naturally be Chinese if both parents are. In general, the phrase "born Chinese" means that the parents were Chinese by birth. This simple and instinctive response does not account for many complex contexts, for example, if one of the parents is not Chinese, if one was not born in China, if one was born in China but immigrated to another country as a child, or if one's biological parents were Chinese but they both passed away and the

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* The author is grateful to Roger Ames, Peter Bol, and Patricia B. Ebrey for insightful comments on an earlier draft of this essay. The author also acknowledges Huang Ko-wu for sharing his comprehensive article on Yan Fu.