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## How Strong is Your Love for Your Parents? Childlike Mindset and the Confucian View of Filial Piety

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In the West, it is debatable whether children, adult or dependent, have filial obligations to their parents. By contrast, filial piety serves as one of the essential virtues in the Confucian tradition, which had not only dominated pre-modern East Asian societies but is recently promoted by 21st century Chinese government. Loving one's parents, in turn, is said to be the most fundamental and strongest human emotion praised by Confucians. This paper is not to provide justifications for treating filial piety as a virtue. But using a temporal framework, it offers a more complicated reading of the affection for parents presented in the *Analects* and the *Mencius*. While young children have strong emotional attachment to parents, adults' love to their parents is sporadic and inconsistent. To address the deficit of emotions in adults' interaction with their parents, Confucians use young children's mindset—strong affection to parents—to both justify and motivate filial actions. This paper criticizes the view that simply equalizes consanguineous affection to *xiao* (filial piety). It contends that *xiao*, as a virtue, cannot be automatically generated by original family affection. Instead, filial-oriented rituals, as Confucians advocate, is supposed to foster an affectionate relation between parent and child.

**Keywords:** Filial piety, Confucius, the *Analects*, the *Mencius*, affection for parents

The parent-child relationship is an important topic studied by various disciplines from philosophy to sociology, psychology and medical research. In the West, discussions generally focus on how parents should treat young children. Filial obligation—how children, especially adult children, should treat their parents—is a question that people often encounter but that seldom triggers heated discussion. Christian Sommers says that “[t]oday, not a few moralists dismiss it [filial obligation] as an illusion, or give it secondary derivative status.”<sup>1</sup> Indeed, it is still debatable whether children, adult or dependent, have a filial obligation to their parents.<sup>2</sup> By contrast, filial piety serves as one of the fundamental virtues in the Confucian tradition. In the early 20th century, filial piety was blamed for suffocating individual autonomy and creativity and for preventing China from modernizing.<sup>3</sup> However, with China’s rapid economic development in the past 20 years, Confucianism, especially the concept of filial piety, has returned.<sup>4</sup> Being a filial child has become a core Chinese value promoted by the government (Figure 1: poster

- 1 Christina Hoff Sommers, “Filial Morality,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 83, no. 8 (1986): 439. See also Philip J. Ivanhoe, “Filial Piety as a Virtue,” in *Working Virtue: Virtue Ethics and Contemporary Moral Problems*, ed. Rebecca L. Walker and Philip J. Ivanhoe (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 297–312.
- 2 Amy Mullin surveys this debate in her article “Filial Responsibilities of Dependent Children,” *Hypatia* 25, no. 1 (2010): 157–73. See also Nancy S. Jecker, “Are Filial Duties Unfounded?,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (1989): 73–80. For a survey of ideals of filial piety in the Western tradition, see Jeffrey Blustein, *Parents and Children: The Ethics of the Family* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).
- 3 May Fourth intellectuals have written various articles to criticize filial piety; see Wu Yu 吳虞, “Jiazhu zhidu wei zhuanzhi zhuyi zhi genju lun” 家族制度為專制主義之根據論, in *Wu Yu ji* 吳虞集, ed. Zhao Qing 趙清 and Zheng Cheng 鄭城 (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1985), 61–66; idem, “Shuo xiao” 說孝, *ibid.*, 172–77; Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀, “Dongxi minzu genben sixiang zhi chayi” 東西民族根本思想之差異, in idem, *Duxiu wencun* 獨秀文存, vol. 1, *Lunwen* 論文 (Hong Kong: Yuandong tushu gongsi, 1965), 35–40; Lu Xun 魯迅, “Ershisi xiao tu” 二十四孝圖, in idem, *Zhao hua xi shi (zhushi ben)* 朝花夕拾 (注釋本) (Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian, 1958), 18–24.
- 4 For 20th century intellectuals’ criticism of filial piety, see Lu Miaw-fen 呂妙芬, *Xiao zhi Tianxia: Xiao jing yu jinshi Zhongguo de zhengzhi yu wenhua* 孝治天下：《孝經》與近世中國的政治與文化 (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan; Lianjing chuban, 2011).



Figure 1: “Filial piety should have the priority” propaganda material (PRC, 2017).

This is a poster produced by the Education Division of the Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China 中國共產黨中央委員會宣傳部宣傳教育局 (中宣部宣教局 in short) in 2017. On the right, it says “Filial piety should have the priority. Chinese Dream” 孝當先 中國夢; at the bottom, it labels itself as a “Public Service Announcement of the Core Value of Socialism” 社會主義核心價值觀公益廣告. In the picture, a man in his prime age is taking care of his aged father by helping him wash his feet, while his little son, probably four to five years old, tries to dry off his father’s back with a towel. The traditional wisdom says that how you treat your father shapes the way your own children treat you. By contrast, the Confucian canons, the *Analects* and the *Mencius*, hold that adults should preserve the heart-mind of young children, being as affectionately attached to our parents as we were when we were little.

on filial piety and the “Chinese Dream”).<sup>5</sup> Long before its political revival, scholars of Asian studies have examined filial piety in lengthy articles, asking whether filial piety (*xiao*) is the root of Confucian morality or whether it leads to moral corruption.<sup>6</sup> Despite different answers to these questions, filial piety is generally believed to prescribe the proper way children in treating their

5 For the revival of Confucianism in the past ten years in China, see Sébastien Billioud and Joël Thoraval, *The Sage and the People: The Confucian Revival in China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). Jeremy Page, “Why China is Turning Back to Confucius,” *The Wall Street Journal*, September 20, 2015, Eastern edition, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/why-china-is-turning-back-to-confucius-1442754000>; Yu Hua, “When Filial Piety is the Law,” *New York Times*, July 7, 2013, A21, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/08/opinion/when-filial-piety-is-the-law.html>; “Ideology in China: Confucius Makes a Comeback,” *The Economist*, May 19, 2007, 64, <https://www.economist.com/asia/2007/05/17/confucius-makes-a-comeback>.

6 The two special issues of *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy*, vol. 7, nos. 1–2 (March–June 2008), are devoted to the debate over whether filial piety will lead to moral corruption.

parents, and loving one's parents, in turn, is said to be the most fundamental and strongest human emotion praised by Confucians.

This paper does not intend to discuss whether we have filial obligations to our parents or to provide justification for treating filial piety as a virtue.<sup>7</sup> Rather, using a temporal framework, it offers a more complicated reading of the affection for parents presented in the *Analects* 論語 and the *Mencius* 孟子. Early Confucians held that while young children have a strong emotional attachment to their parents, adults' love for their parents, though still spontaneous and natural, is sporadic and inconsistent. Their observation echoes modern psychological research. The temporal and changing love for parents itself is not sufficient to lead to filial actions. Confucius and Mencius consistently address the deficit of emotions in men's interaction with their parents. They use young children's mindset—the strong affection for parents—to both justify and motivate filial actions. To return to the heart-mind of the young child (*chizi zhi xin* 赤子之心), adults' love for their parents needs to be recalled by specific circumstances and cultivated by filial-oriented rituals. Re-examining children's emotional connections to parents in a temporal framework helps to understand the famous filial stories that highlight the childlike love for one's parents.

This re-examination also serves as a critique of the view that simply equates consanguineous affection with *xiao* (filial piety). I contend that although Confucians emphasize that we should serve our parents with affection—just as Confucians insist that we should perform rituals with genuine feeling—*xiao*, as a virtue, cannot be directly generated by original consanguineous affection but needs to be continuously cultivated.<sup>8</sup>

7 In responding to Western theories on filial obligations, Philip J. Ivanhoe, writing from the perspective of the Eastern tradition, elaborates well why filial piety is a virtue. See Ivanhoe, "Filial Piety as a Virtue." See also Chenyang Li, "Shifting Perspectives: Filial Morality Revisited," *Philosophy East and West* 47, no. 2 (1997): 211–32; Zhang Xianglong, "A Temporal Analysis of the Consciousness of Filial Piety," trans. Huang Deyuan, *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* 2, no. 3 (2007): 309–35.

8 For virtue ethics and how virtue can be shaped by rituals or prescribed actions, see Edward Slingerland, "Virtue Ethics, the *Analects*, and the Problem of Commensurability," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 29, no. 1 (2001): 97–125; Michael Puett, "Ritualization as Domestication: Ritual Theory from Classical China," in *Ritual Dynamics and the Science of Ritual*, vol. 1, *Grammars and Morphologies of Ritual Practices in Asia*, ed. Axel Michaels et al. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2010), 365–76. See also Rosalind Hursthouse and Glen Pettigrove, "Virtue Ethics," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Winter 2016 Archive edition (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2016), article published Jul 18, 2003, revised Dec 8, 2016, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/ethics-virtue>.

This new reading of *xiao* also offers a solution to the debate on whether *xiao* (filial piety) or *siduan* 四端 (the “four beginnings” or moral sprouts) should serve as the root of the morality in the *Mencius*. I argue that love for one’s parents and the unbearable feeling of watching others suffer (*bu renren zhi xin* 不忍人之心) are of the same nature: both are moral sprouts that can only develop into virtue—filial piety or benevolence—after they are properly stimulated and consistently cultivated.

## I. Literature review

Approximately twenty years ago, Wu Hung 巫鴻 identified the image of ageless children in Wu Liang pictorial presentations, describing Lao Laizi 老萊子 as behaving like a small child into his seventies to entertain his ninety-year-old parents.<sup>9</sup> Wu Hong explains that if parents are not supposed to become “old,” then the son must always be “young.” Keith Knapp revisits this motif in medieval-era filial stories, pointing out that it reflects Mencius’ claim that the filial son should have a childlike love for his parents.<sup>10</sup> Knapp’s view echoes that of Shimomi Takao, who argues that it is a central message of this genre that the filial son or daughter should forever remain a child at heart when facing his or her parents.<sup>11</sup>

Modern spectators would feel puzzled, if not awkward, when encountering these stone carvings or stories portraying a man in his seventies behaving like a child in front of his parents: Lao Laizi wears multicolored clothes to serve his parents food in the main hall; he plays with toy birds, crawls and rides a bamboo horse; when he slips and falls, he cries like a baby. Bo Yu 伯瑜, who was also seventy years old, asked his mother to still beat him whenever he made a mistake.<sup>12</sup>

9 Wu Hung, “Private Love and Public Duty: Images of Children in Early Chinese Art,” in *Chinese Views of Childhood*, ed. Anne Behnke Kinney (Honolulu, Hawai‘i: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1995), 79–110.

10 Keith Nathaniel Knapp, *Selfless Offspring: Filial Children and Social Order in Medieval China* (Honolulu, Hawai‘i: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2005), 147–51.

11 Shimomi Takao 下見隆雄, *Kō to bōsei no mekanizumu: Chūgoku joseishi no shiza 孝と母性のメカニズム——中国女性史の視座* (Tokyo: Kenbun shuppan, 1997), 38–39.

12 See “Piwu ge. Ling zhi pian” 顰舞歌・靈芝篇 by Cao Zhi 曹植, quoted in *Song shu* 宋書, comp. Shen Yue 沈約 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 22.627. For a detailed discussion of the story of Bo Yu, see Wu Hong, *The Wu Liang Shrine: The Ideology of Early Chinese Pictorial Art* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1989), 286–87.

Philosophers have long taken filial piety as a core doctrine of Confucianism, with some claiming that filial piety is the basis of Confucian morality. In the *Analects*, Confucius' disciple Youzi 有子 said, "As for filial piety (*xiao*) and fraternity—they serve as the roots of benevolence" 孝弟也者，其為仁之本 (*Analects* 1.2).<sup>13</sup> Mencius said, "The real fact of benevolence is to serve one's parents" 仁之實，事親是也 (*Mencius* 4A27).<sup>14</sup> Among the numerous studies on the virtue of filial piety, sophisticated and interesting as they are,<sup>15</sup> few of them address the childlike mentality requested by Confucian

13 *Lunyu* 論語, CHANT (CHinese ANcient Texts) Database, The Institute of Chinese Studies (ICS) of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, accessed March 8, 2020, <http://www.chant.org>. Translation of the *Analects* follows James Legge, trans, *Confucian Analects*, vol. 1 of *The Chinese Classics*, rev. ed. (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1960) and consults with D.C. Lau, trans., *The Analects* (New York: Dorset Press, 1979).

14 *Mengzi* 孟子, CHANT (CHinese ANcient Texts) Database, The Institute of Chinese Studies (ICS) of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, accessed March 8, 2020, <http://www.chant.org>. Translation of the *Mencius* follows James Legge, trans., *The Works of Mencius*, vol. 2 of *The Chinese Classics*, rev. ed. (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1960) and consults with D.C. Lau, trans., *Mencius*, rev. ed. (London: Penguin, 2004).

15 Scholars generally do not strictly differentiate filial piety from one's love for one's parents, nor do they differentiate young children's love for parents from adult's love for parents. Ge Zhaoguang 葛兆光 said that, "...from the perspective of Confucius, among all the feelings, the consanguineous affection is of absolute certainty. Like the son loves his father, the younger brother loves his elder brother, these are real human nature derived from consanguineous kinship. This true nature of humans elicits real affections, which are called 'filial piety' and 'fraternity'" 在孔子看來，所有的情感中，血緣之愛是無可置疑的，兒子愛他的父親，弟弟愛他的哥哥，這都是從血緣中自然生出來的真性情，這種真性情引出真感情，這種真感情就是「孝」、「悌」；see Ge Zhaoguang, *Gudai Zhongguo wenhua jiangyi* 古代中國文化講義 (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2006), 52. Qingping Liu says, "...Confucius and Mencius always take filial piety, or, more generally speaking, consanguineous affection, as not only the foundation but also the supreme principle of human life"; see Qingping Liu, "Filiality versus Sociality and Individuality: On Confucianism as 'Consanguinitism,'" *Philosophy East and West* 53, no. 2 (2003): 234. See also Philip J. Ivanhoe, *Ethics in the Confucian Tradition: The Thought of Mengzi and Wang Yangming*. 2nd ed. (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett Publishing Company, 2002), 3.



teachings.<sup>16</sup>

This paper scrutinizes how the *Analects* and the *Mencius* talk about consanguineous love and its dynamics with filial piety. I will show that in Confucian teachings, there is a clear distinction between adult children's and young children's love for their parents. While young children's affection for their parents is praised as the most natural and fundamental feeling, adult children's love for their parents, though still spontaneous, is situational and has inconsistent manifestations. I argue that equating consanguineous love with filial piety oversimplifies Confucians' sophisticated elaboration of the parent-child relationship. Instead, realizing adults' love for parents is insufficient for performing filial actions, Confucius and Mencius emphasize the return to the mindset of a small child. In light of modern psychological studies of young children's attachment to their parents, we now can more easily explain some arduous filial actions described or prescribed by Confucian teachings. Genuine unconditional love for one's parents diminishes with age and changing interests. However, the Confucian project is to recreate that affectionate and unconditional love for parents, and filial-oriented rituals are designed to fulfill this role.<sup>17</sup>

16 The view that one's affection for one's parents can automatically lead to filial actions echoes one group of Western contemporary moral philosophers who argue that the "moral ideal of the parent-child relationship" should be characterized by love and mutual respect. Christina Sommers criticizes their view, arguing that their "moral perspective on family relationships as spontaneous, voluntary, and duty-free is simply unrealistic"; see Sommers, "Filial Morality," 448–51. However, in her discussion on various theories of filial obligations, Sommers does not consider Confucian doctrine on this topic. Neither Simon Keller nor Anders Schinkel consider Confucian filial piety in their recent articles on theories of filial duty: Keller, "Four Theories of Filial Duty," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 56, no. 223 (2006): 254–74; Schinkel, "Filial Obligations: A Contextual, Pluralist Model," *The Journal of Ethics* 16, no. 4 (2012): 395–420. For a critique of western theories on filial obligation, see Chenyang Li, "Shifting Perspectives: Filial Morality Revisited."

17 Lisa Raphals approaches filial piety from the gender perspective. Although, she argues, the traditional view regards male filial emotion as natural, female filiality is culturally constructed, as women are supposed to fulfil their filial actions toward their parents-in-law, for whom they do not have natural affection. See Raphals, "Reflections on Filiality Nature and Nurture," in *Filial Piety in Chinese Thought and History*, ed. Alan K.L. Chan and Sor-hoon Tan (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 215–25. See also Hsiung Ping-chen, "Constructed Emotions: The Bond between Mothers and Sons in Late Imperial China," *Late Imperial China* 15, no. 1 (1994): 87–117; idem, "Sons and Mothers: Demographic Realities and the Chinese Culture of *Hsiao*," in *Women in the New Taiwan: Gender Roles and Gender Consciousness in a Changing Society*, ed. Catherine Farris, Anru Lee, and Murray Rubinstein (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2004), 14–40.

## II. Changing love for parents

In the *Mencius*, young children's love for their parents, which is natural and spontaneous, is characterized as an example of innate ability (*liangneng* 良能) and innate consciousness (*liangzhi* 良知):

Men possess an ability that is not acquired by learning, and this is innate ability. Men possess knowledge that is not acquired by deliberating, and this is innate consciousness. There is not a child carried in the arms who does not know how to love their parents, and when they are grown a little, there are none of them who do not know how to love their elder brothers. Affectionately caring for parents is benevolence. Respecting elders is righteousness. There is nothing else—expanding this kind of feeling and action to all under heaven. (*Mencius* 7A15)

人之所不學而能者，其良能也；所不慮而知者，其良知也。孩提之童，無不知愛其親者；及其長也，無不知敬其兄也。親親，仁也；敬長，義也。無他，達之天下也。

This is a famous passage elaborating on Mencius' view on humans' capacity to be good. Notably, what Mencius describes as an innate ability is not men's love for their parents in general but young children's love. Because young children's mental and physical well-being depends on their caregivers, whom in most cases are their parents, children are emotionally attached to the caregivers. Mencius' claim corresponds to modern psychological research as well as to the experience of parenthood. John Bowlby, in his famous attachment theory, notes that young children have innate mechanisms to bring themselves together with their mother. When they are babies, they are passive—smiling, fretting, crying. As they grow bigger, they become more active—following, touching, and clinging.<sup>18</sup> A normally developing child develops an affectionate regard for any caregiver who provides regular physical and/or emotional care. Even for the most negligent and abusive caregiver, children's attachment is

18 John Bowlby, "Beginnings of Attachment Behaviour," in idem, *Attachment and Loss*, vol. 1, *Attachment* (London: Hogarth Press, 1969), 265–98.



still relatively strong.<sup>19</sup> Young children's attachment to parents—both physical reliance and affectionate regard—leads them to yield to their parents' will, listen to their commands and voluntarily imitate their behaviors and values. Deprivation of parental love fundamentally inflicts trauma on them. Even temporary separations between parents and young children cause considerable emotional anxiety.<sup>20</sup>

However, this strong emotional connection to parents will fade as children grow up and become independent and occupied with other pursuits. In terms of children's emotional needs, parents' love gradually becomes less important. Instead, adults spend time pursuing friendships, romantic love, and recognition in society. Furthermore, adult children pursue autonomy. Acting as self-reliant human beings, they are responsible for their own behavior and must navigate the world according to their own judgment. Yielding to parents' orders, even if it is a cultural code, becomes difficult.

Mencius clearly realizes the changing emotional needs and changing concerns a person experiences at different ages and notes that the relationship with one's parents will change accordingly. The thinker says,

When young, one yearns for one's parents. When taking an interest in women, one yearns for the young and beautiful. When having a wife and children, one yearns for one's wife and children. When serving, one yearns for one's lord. If one cannot obtain the approval of one's lord, one feels burnt within. (*Mencius* 5A1)

人少，則慕父母；知好色，則慕少艾；有妻子，則慕妻子；仕則慕君，不得於君則熱中。

19 Diane Benoit, "Infant-Parent Attachment: Definition, Types, Antecedents, Measurement and Outcome," *Paediatrics and Child Health* 9, no. 8 (2004): 541–45; Corinne Rees, "Childhood Attachment," *British Journal of General Practice* 57, no. 544 (2007): 920–22; Grazyna Kochanska, "Emotional Development in Children with Different Attachment Histories: The First Three Years," *Child Development* 72, no. 2 (2001): 474–90. Modern studies focus on how healthy emotional attachment helps the mental and physical development of children, but Confucians' discussions focus on the opposite dynamics, elaborating how children's love for their parents shapes their attitude and behavior toward their parents.

20 See also Jerrold R. Brandell and Shoshana Ringel, "Bowlby's Theory of Attachment," in *Attachment and Dynamic Practice: An Integrative Guide for Social Workers and Other Clinicians* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 29–52; Harry T. Reis, "Caregiving, Attachment, and Relationships," *Psychological Inquiry* 11, no. 2 (2000): 120–23; Phillip R. Shaver and R. Chris Fraley, "Attachment Theory and Caregiving," *Psychological Inquiry* 11, no. 2 (2000): 109–14.

Parents are the pivot of one's life only at a young age. As a person grows into an adult, he/she pursues a spouse, desires to establish a family, and aspires to achieve accomplishment in this world. These actions distract his/her attention and love from his/her parents. Mencius' observation corresponds with sociologists' and psychologists' research on the parent-child relationship, which shows that when adult children marry, it means that their parents are no longer their main emotional support or top priority; in this stage, they become more self-reliant and require more physical boundaries between their lives and the ones of their parents.<sup>21</sup> While these changes are thought to be natural and healthy in the modern era, they were taken as a moral deficit among Chinese thinkers in pre-imperial and imperial China. For example, the *Xunzi* 荀子 quotes Shun 舜, the exemplary filial son, who says that "when a man has a wife and children, his filial actions toward his parents dissipate" 妻子具而孝衰於親.<sup>22</sup> The saying "filial action declines at the time when a man has a wife and son(s)" 孝衰於妻子 prevails in different text collections in the classical age of China, such as the *Guanzi* 管子, *Wenzi* 文子 *Deng Xizi* 鄧析子, and *Shuoyuan* 說苑.<sup>23</sup> A Chinese folksong still says, "A magpie's is long; he married a wife and gave up his mother" 喜雀尾巴長, 娶了媳婦不要娘.<sup>24</sup> The *Book of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記) quotes Confucius, saying that even if rulers emphasize filial duty to parents, not the kindness to children, "people attenuate their filial duty [to their parents], and augment gentle kindness [to children]"

21 Deborah M. Merrill, *When Your Children Marry: How Marriage Changes Relationships with Sons and Daughters* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011).

22 *A Concordance to the Xunzi* 荀子逐字索引, ed. D.C. Lau et al. (Hong Kong: The Commercial Press [H.K.] Ltd., 1996), 23.116.

23 *A Concordance to the Guanzi* 管子逐字索引, ed. D.C. Lau et al. (Hong Kong: The Commercial Press [H.K.] Ltd., 2001), 12.36, which reads slightly differently: "妻子具則孝衰矣"; *A Concordance to the Wenzi* 文子逐字索引, ed. D.C. Lau et al. (Hong Kong: The Commercial Press [H.K.] Ltd., 1992), 4.23; *A Concordance to the Deng Xizi* 鄧析子逐字索引, in *Concordances to the Kong Congzi, Deng Xizi, Yin Wenzi, Gongsun Longzi* 孔叢子逐字索引·鄧析子逐字索引·尹文子逐字索引·公孫龍子逐字索引, ed. D.C. Lau et al. (Hong Kong: The Commercial Press [H.K.] Ltd., 1998), 2.6; *A Concordance to the Shuoyuan* 說苑逐字索引, ed. D.C. Lau et al. (Hong Kong: The Commercial Press [H.K.] Ltd., 1992), 10.79.

24 "The Ungrateful Son," in *Chinese Mother Goose Rhymes*, trans. Isaac Taylor Headland (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1900), 60–61, with translation modified. See also the online primary source "Children and Youth in History," The Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media (CHNM) at George Mason University, accessed March 8, 2020, <http://chnm.gmu.edu/cyh/primary-sources/browse/?tags=East+Asia>.

民猶薄於孝而厚於慈。<sup>25</sup>

Adults' love for their parents is transient and lacks the necessary stability to automatically make one a filial child. Only those who fully embody the virtue of filial piety are able to preserve their deep affection for their parents throughout their lives. Shun, the sage, is such an exceptional figure. Mencius comments on Shun's filial piety, saying "The great filial man for his whole life yearns for his parents. Still yearning for his parents at the age of fifty — I see this in Shun" 大孝終身慕父母。五十而慕者，予於大舜見之矣 (*Mencius* 5A1).

The Han-era text *Xinxu* 新序 reiterates Shun's filial story and highlights that Shun fulfills the virtue of filial piety to its extreme, precisely because at the age of fifty, his love for his parents is still as strong as that of a young child. The whole anecdote is as follows:

In the past, Shun's [...] father was blind and stubborn, his stepmother was fraudulent, and his stepbrother Xiang was overbearing, all of whom were lowly, stupid and unchangeable. Shun fulfilled the way of filial piety, caring for and nurturing his blind father. His blind father and his brother conspired against him. They asked Shun to repair the granary and dig the well and attempted to seize those opportunities to kill him. But Shun filially served his parents even in a more genuine way. When he had gone to the farmland, he wept and cried. At the age of fifty, Shun behaved like a young child who affectionately yearned for his [parents]. This can be called the supreme filial piety.

昔者舜……父瞽瞍頑，母嚚及弟象傲，皆下愚不移。舜盡孝道，以供養瞽瞍。瞽瞍與象為浚井塗廩之謀，欲以殺舜，舜孝益篤，出田則號泣，年五十，猶嬰兒慕，可謂至孝矣。<sup>26</sup>

How should a man respond if his corrupted parents and his half-brother try to kill him more than once? The *Mencius* explains that these murders were attempted because Shun's parents wanted his property, and his half-brother coveted his wives (*Mencius* 5A2). If we situate these stories within Western discussions of filial obligations, the murderous actions would destroy whatever

25 "Fangji di sanshi" 坊記第三十, *Liji jijie* 禮記集解, ed. and comm. Sun Xidan 孫希旦, coll. and punc. Shen Xiaohuan 沈嘯寰 and Wang Xingxian 王星賢 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1989), 30.1288.

26 *A Concordance to the Xinxu* 新序逐字索引, ed. D.C. Lau et al. (Hong Kong: The Commercial Press [H.K.] Ltd., 1992), 1.1.

relationship Shun has with his parents. Therefore, he would not assume any responsibilities or duty to take care of his parents.<sup>27</sup> Additionally, any independent human being would intuitively try to protect him-/herself and would naturally keep a distance from or even develop hatred toward those who threaten his/her life. However, Shun acts against humans' natural instincts. The sage, knowing that his parents tried to kill him, not only still sincerely served and looked after them but also wanted to obtain their love and was emotionally afflicted by their alienation from him. Mencius comments on Shun's affection toward his parents, saying that "if he could not obtain the hearts of his parents, he could not be considered a man; and that if he could not get into an entire accord with his parents, he could not be considered a son" 不得乎親，不可以為人；不順乎親，不可以為子 (*Mencius* 4A28).

Both the motivations and the emotions behind Shun's actions are puzzling and difficult to understand until we read the explanation provided in the anecdote: the adult Shun loves his parents as strongly as young children do. Indeed, modern psychological research shows that young children will yield to abusive caregivers and try to please them even when the latter act violently toward them.<sup>28</sup> Only when we understand the adult Shun's love for his parents in light of a young child's attachment to a caregiver, we can comprehend the Confucian narrative regarding Shun's filial love:

[Mencius] said, "[... Shun would have said,] 'I exert my strength to cultivate the fields, like others I honorably fulfill my duty as a son. As for my parents not loving me, is there something wrong with me?'" The sage

27 Shun is an exemplary filial son praised by early Confucian thinkers. Modern studies on stories of Shun's filial action focus on a moral dilemma posed by Mencius in an imagined situation: how would Shun, a sage-ruler, respond if his father had murdered a person? Would Shun's response, considering his filial piety, lead to corruption of the justice system? See Lauren F. Pfister, "Sublating Reverence to Parents: A Kierkegaardian Interpretation of the Sage-King Shun's Piety," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 40, no. 1 (2013): 50–66; Liu Qingping, "Confucianism and Corruption: An Analysis of Shun's Two Actions Described by *Mencius*," *Dao* 6, no. 1 (2007): 1–19; Yang Zebo, "Corruption or Hypercriticism? Rethinking Shun's Two Cases in *Mencius*," trans. Niu Xiaomei and Richard Stichler, *Contemporary Chinese Thought* 39, no. 1 (2007): 25–34.

28 Karen Schneider-Rosen et al., "Current Perspectives in Attachment Theory: Illustration from the Study of Maltreated Infants," *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development* 50, nos. 1–2 (1985): 194–210; Douglas Barnett and Joan I. Vondra, "Atypical Patterns of Early Attachment: Theory, Research, and Current Directions," *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development* 64, no. 3 (1999): 1–24.

emperor [Yao] had his own children, nine sons and two daughters, various officials, oxen and sheep, storehouses and granaries, all prepared, to serve Shun amid the farming fields. Of the scholars under Heaven, there were multitudes who had flocked to him. The sage emperor [Yao] led all under Heaven and transferred them to him. But because he was not in accord with his parents, he felt like a poor man who has no one to turn to. To be delighted by all scholars under Heaven is what men desire, but it was not sufficient to remove the sorrow from Shun. Possession of beautiful women is what men desire, and Shun had the two daughters of the Emperor [Yao] as his wives, but this was not sufficient to remove his sorrow. Being rich is what men desire, and Shun was rich enough to possess all under Heaven, but this was not sufficient to remove his sorrow. Honors are what men desire, and Shun had the dignity of being the son of Heaven, but this was not sufficient to remove his sorrow. Being the one whom men like to please, possession of beautiful women, possession of riches and honors were not sufficient to remove his sorrow. Only when he was in accord with his parents could his sorrow be removed. (*Mencius* 5A1)

(孟子)曰：「……『我竭力耕田，共為子職而已矣，父母之不我愛，於我何哉？』帝使其子九男二女，百官牛羊倉廩備，以事舜於畎畝之中。天下之士多就之者，帝將胥天下而遷之焉。為不順於父母，如窮人無所歸。天下之士悅之，人之所欲也，而不足以解憂；好色，人之所欲，妻帝之二女，而不足以解憂；富，人之所欲，富有天下，而不足以解憂；貴，人之所欲，貴為天子，而不足以解憂。人悅之、好色、富貴，無足以解憂者，惟順於父母，可以解憂。」

Shun has obtained the highest worldly success—political power, wealth, and fame—that a man could aspire to. However, Shun is not happy, because what he cares most about is obtaining the love of his parents. Shun's attitude toward his parents reflects exactly the mentality of young children. Adults try to pursue political power, social prestige, and wealth, but those things are of no significance to young children. What a young child cares about most is the love of his caregiver, who provides him with a sense of security and the emotional foundation from which to explore the world.

Other statements on filial piety in the Confucian classics are illuminated when we understand the filial feelings prescribed by Confucians in light of a young child's mentality. The following famous saying is attributed to Confucius: "While a man's father is alive, observe his aspiration; when his father is dead, observe his conduct. If for three years he does not alter from the way of his father, he can be called filial" 父在，觀其志；父沒，觀其

行；三年無改於父之道，可謂孝矣 (*Analects* 1.11). The statement “If for three years he does not alter from the way of his father, he can be called filial” appears twice in the *Analects* and once in the *Book of Rites*.<sup>29</sup> Famous as it is, imposing this doctrine on an adult is a challenge, as an independent person must take action according to his/her own discretion. However, when this didactic teaching is targeted towards young children, it becomes relatively reasonable. Even in contemporary society, parents do serve as role models for young children who are forming their own value system. The filial action prescribed by Confucius requires one to adopt the mentality of a young child who possesses a strong affection for and identifies with one’s parents.

In fact, it is standard practice for Confucians to use young children’s affection to rationalize filial actions, especially in the mourning service. When commenting on a passage in the *Book of Rites* about a son with a deep affection for his parents, Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200 CE), a famous Eastern Han Confucian scholar, says, “The filial son has not lost the heart-mind of young children” 孝子不失其孺子之心.<sup>30</sup> Another anecdote in the *Book of Rites* reads,

Zeng Shen asked Zengzi, saying, “In wailing for a parent, is there any standard voice?” [Zengzi] replied, “When a young child has lost his mother on the road, is it possible for him to think about the standard voice?”

曾申問於曾子曰：「哭父母有常聲乎？」曰：「中路嬰兒失其母焉，何常聲之有？」<sup>31</sup>

Zengzi’s description of a young baby losing his/her mother corresponds with psychologists’ observations: “... when a healthy child of over six months is removed from his mother figure to whom he is attached and placed with strangers, his initial response is to cry and seek to regain her: ‘He will often cry loudly, shake his cot, throw himself about, and look eagerly toward any sight or sound which might prove to be his missing mother.’”<sup>32</sup> Confucians prescribe that an adult should weep for deceased parents just like a young baby weeps when trying to regain his/her mother.

<sup>29</sup> See *Analects* 4.20; *Liji jijie*, 30.1287.

<sup>30</sup> *Liji jijie*, 24.1214n.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 21(1).1103.

<sup>32</sup> John Bowlby, “Grief and Mourning in Infancy and Early Childhood,” *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child* 15 (1960): 15.



Mozi 墨子 laughs at Confucians for establishing a rationale for their teachings on young children's affection for their parents. The following debate well demonstrates this point:

Gong Mengzi said, "The three-year mourning service is an imitation of the affection that I have toward my parents." Mozi said, "As for the intelligence of young children, they only know to love their parents. When parents are no longer there, they are still crying without a stop. What is this for? It is the extreme degree of foolishness. Thus, is the intelligence of the Confucians any higher than that of young children?"

公孟子曰：「三年之喪，學吾之慕父母。」子墨子曰：「夫嬰兒子之知，獨慕父母而已。父母不可得也，然號而不止，此亦故何也？即愚之至也。然則儒者之知，豈有以賢於嬰兒子哉。」<sup>33</sup>

The Confucian rites prescribe that a man should cry five times within first three days when his/her parent dies. During the three-year morning service for parents, the mourner is supposed to occupy the unplastered slanting shed. The mourner is to wear sackcloth with jagged edges, sleep on straw with a clod of earth as pillow, and eat thin porridge without meat. These actions are intended to show that the mourner's deep grief has led him/her to lose interest in the basic desires of comfortable living. It even prescribes that the mourner is supposed to walk with a staff because it is supposed to indicate that the sadness he/she is experiencing has weakened his/her physical body.<sup>34</sup> It is said that even after twenty-five months, "the sorrow and pain [of the mourner] have not yet ended, and the loving thoughts [for the deceased parents] are not yet forgotten" 哀痛未盡，思慕未忘。<sup>35</sup> Loss of a parent is devastating for everyone at any age. However, for young children who do not yet possess the emotional and physical maturity to bear the psychological trauma associated with parental loss, the death of one or both parents means damage to their physical and mental health in the long term.<sup>36</sup> The duration and intensity of grieving and mourning that Confucians require for those who are bereaved of parents might sound extreme for mature men/women whose attention and attachment are no

33 *A Concordance to the Mozi* 墨子逐字索引, ed. D.C. Lau et al. (Hong Kong: The Commercial Press [H.K.] Ltd., 2001), 12.108.

34 *Liji jijie*, 15(2).900, 38.1373.

35 *Ibid.*, 38.1373.

36 James Sengendo and Janet Nambi, "The Psychological Effect of Orphanhood: A Study of Orphans in Rakai District," *Health Transition Review* 7, no. S1 (1997): 105–24.



longer focused on their parents.<sup>37</sup> However, this kind of grief can be naturally experienced by young children.<sup>38</sup>

### III. Mismatch between emotional connections and filial actions

For Confucians, there is a mismatch between one's affection for one's parents and one's capacity to perform filial actions, between children's changing priorities and parents' changing needs. Whereas young children exhibit strong attachment to their parents and are willing to yield to their authority and will, they do not possess the ability to serve their parents well. Whereas young children will voluntarily do things to please their parents, parents at their prime age do not have an urgent need for their children's help. When parents have advanced to old age and emotionally and physically seek their children's care, adult children's affection for them has already become attenuated and does not automatically lead to the caring actions prescribed by Confucians. Mencius mentioned twice that only Shun, who embodies the highest filial piety, yearns for his parents even at the age of fifty.

For ordinary adults, love for their parents, natural as it is, is not constantly present in their daily lives. Confucius tries to activate filial action via consanguineous affection, but he needs to awaken this feeling among his disciples by reminding them how their parents have tenderly cared for them when they were young.

When Meng Wubo asked what filial piety is, the Master said, "Your father and mother have no other cause for anxiety other than your illness."  
(*Analects* 2.6)

孟武伯問孝。子曰：「父母唯其疾之憂。」<sup>39</sup>

37 Some adults did experience intensive pain caused by loss of parents for years.

38 Modern psychoanalytic studies show that the loss of one or both parents can directly lead to childhood trauma. See J. William Worden, *Children and Grief: When a Parent Dies* (New York: Guilford Press, 1996); Mevludin Hasanović et al., "Psychological Disturbances of War-Traumatized Children from Different Foster and Family Settings in Bosnia and Herzegovina," *Croatian Medical Journal* 47, no. 1 (2006): 85–94; Jane D. McLeod, "Childhood Parental Loss and Adult Depression," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 32, no. 3 (1991): 205–20; "Psychological Problems and Parental Loss," *Science News* 113, no. 2 (1978): 21.

39 This passage can also be interpreted from another perspective. As Confucius said to his disciples, in order to free parents from worries about their children's health, they should take care of their own health first.

Zaiwo 宰我, one of Confucius' famous disciples, challenges the three-year mourning service, arguing that three years' self-denial in mourning one's parents is too long. For three years, Zaiwo says, if no rituals (except for those related to mourning) are performed, the rituals get lost; if no music is performed, men forget music.

Confucius does not directly respond to the challenge. Instead, he attempts to rekindle his listeners' love for their parents by reminding them of the three years of care they received from their parents after they were born. The master says,

It is three years after a child is born that he spares his parents from carrying him with arms. The three years' mourning is universally observed under Heaven. Did Yu [Zaiwo's personal name] enjoy the three years' love of his parents? (*Analects* 17.21)

子生三年，然後免於父母之懷，夫三年之喪，天下之通喪也。予也，有三年之愛於其父母乎？<sup>40</sup>

While Confucius holds that the three-year mourning service is the common practice, he does not use the external social codes to prescribe Zaiwo's action. Instead, the master appeals to Zaiwo's affection for his parents, which, he hopes, will motivate his disciple to voluntarily accept the austere practices required by the three-year mourning service.

Strong emotional attachment to parents would automatically lead to sincere filial actions prescribed by rituals, but the situation Confucius faces is the deficit of emotion. This is why he refers to young children's relationship with their parents, hoping that by evoking his disciple's memory of his love for his parents when he was little, he would be able to fulfill his filial duties with genuine feeling. However, the sage cannot expect filial actions from his disciples if their affection for their parents is not strong enough to motivate them to serve their parents altruistically.<sup>41</sup>

The Master said, "If you were [after a year of mourning] to eat good rice, and wear embroidered clothes, would you feel at ease?" "I should,"

40 *The Book of Rites* also includes Confucius' comment on the three years' care provided by parents to justify the three-year mourning service. See *Liji jijie*, 38.1377.

41 See also David S. Nivison, "Weakness of Will in Ancient Chinese Philosophy," in idem, *The Ways of Confucianism: Investigations in Chinese Philosophy*, ed. Bryan W. Van Norden (Chicago, Ill.: Open Court, 1996), 79–81.

replied Zaiwo. The Master said, “If you feel at ease, do it then! However, when a gentleman is in the mourning period, if he eats nice food, he could not enjoy it; if he listens to music, he could not feel joyful; if he is comfortably lodged, he could not feel at ease. Therefore, he would not do any of those things. However, now that you feel at ease, do it by all means!” (*Analects* 17.21)

子曰：「食夫稻，衣夫錦，於女安乎？」曰：「安。」「女安則為之！夫君子之居喪，食旨不甘，聞樂不樂，居處不安，故不為也。今女安，則為之！」<sup>42</sup>

The deficit of emotions is one of the major concerns of Confucius when addressing filial piety.

Ziyou asked about filial piety. The Master said, “Currently men who are called filial children are those who are able to support their parents. But even for dogs and horses, men can feed and house them. Without respect, what is the difference?” (*Analects* 2.7)

子游問孝。子曰：「今之孝者，是謂能養。至於犬馬，皆能有養；不敬，何以別乎？」

Zixia asked about filial piety. The Master said, “It is the emotional expression on the face that is difficult. If there is any troublesome affair, the young ones can take care of them, and if there is wine and food, their elders are served. Is this to be considered filial piety?” (*Analects* 2.8)

子夏問孝。子曰：「色難。有事弟子服其勞，有酒食先生饌，曾是以為孝乎？」

Providing food, lodging, and service to one’s parents is likely a practice people perform to meet the requirements of established rituals. However, without emotional engagement, Confucius cannot call such actions filial piety. Only men who love their parents can perform these actions with a proper attitude and facial expression.

A filial son, with a deep love [for his parents], is sure to have a gentle and kind attitude; having a gentle and kind attitude, he will have a pleasant

42 Thomas Radice argues that filial piety in Confucian tradition can first be understood as filial-oriented rituals. See Radice, “Confucius and Filial Piety,” in *A Concise Companion to Confucius*, ed. Paul R. Goldin (Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), 189.

facial expression; having a pleasant facial expression, he will have a gentle countenance.

孝子之有深愛者，必有和氣；有和氣者，必有愉色；有愉色者，必有婉容。<sup>43</sup>

However, pre-imperial thinkers commonly hold that for adults, loving one's parents is more difficult than performing filial actions. They observe that those who have performed the duty of filial piety do not necessarily love their parents. The *Zhuangzi* says,

To fulfill filial actions with respect is easy, but to fulfill filial actions with love is difficult.

以敬孝易，以愛孝難。<sup>44</sup>

The *Han Feizi* expresses a similar view:

Among filial sons who love their parents, there is only one among one hundred.

孝子愛親，百數之一也。<sup>45</sup>

Xunzi asserts that some filial actions are against human nature and people's natural disposition: "As for sons yielding to fathers, [...] it is against human nature and contradicts human dispositions" 夫子之讓乎父……皆反於性而悖於情也。<sup>46</sup>

Although Xunzi and Mencius have different understandings regarding how to achieve morality, their observations about adults' love for their

43 *Liji jijie*, 24.1214.

44 *A Concordance to the Zhuangzi* 莊子逐字索引, ed. D.C. Lau et al. (Hong Kong: The Commercial Press [H.K.] Ltd., 2000), 14.38. The *Zhuangzi* also says that "The son's love for his parents is the fate, and it cannot be relieved from one's heart;" 子之愛親，命也，不可解於心, see *ibid.*, 4.10. Unlike other early Chinese sources that empathize young children's inevitable love for their parents, here children's love is discussed in a general sense. See also Ikeda Tomohisa, "The Evolution of the Concept of Filial Piety (*xiao*) in the *Laozi*, the *Zhuangzi*, and the Guodian Bamboo Text *Yucong*," in *Filial Piety in Chinese Thought and History*, 12–28.

45 *A Concordance to the Han Feizi* 韓非子逐字索引, ed. D.C. Lau et al. (Hong Kong: The Commercial Press [H.K.] Ltd., 2000), 37.121.

46 *Concordance to the Xunzi*, 23.114. Of course, in this passage, Xunzi talks about adult children. Young children, especially those under five, naturally yield to their father.

parents are similar.<sup>47</sup> Neither thinker holds that adults' love for their parents is consistently manifested in daily life, nor do they believe that this natural love is sufficient to lead to filial actions. What differentiates them from one another is their different solutions to teaching filial actions. Xunzi holds that rituals should be used to shape people's actions, leading them to fulfill their responsibilities for filial piety.<sup>48</sup> By contrast, Mencius contends that adults' affection for their parents can be awakened by proper external stimuli, a claim that is well illustrated in his story about the origin of funerals:

There once were people who did not bury their parents. When one's parent died, one simply carried the body and threw it into a gully. One day, when passing by, the individual saw foxes and wildcats devouring the body, and flies and gnats biting at it. Perspiration ran down his forehead, and he looked away, unable to gaze at it directly. It was not on account of other people that this perspiration flowed. His innermost feelings in the heart revealed through his facial expression and eye movement. He went home and came back with baskets and spades and covered the body. Covering the body, thus, is the decent thing to do. Filial sons and benevolent men inter their parents, and there must be a proper way [to do so]. (*Mencius* 3A5)

蓋上世嘗有不葬其親者。其親死，則舉而委之於壑。他日過之，狐狸食之，蠅蚋姑嘬之。其類有泚，睨而不視。夫泚也，非為人泚，中心達於面目。蓋歸反藁裡而掩之。掩之誠是也，則孝子仁人之掩其親，亦必有道矣。

As children's emotional attachment to their parents fades, adults may become indifferent to or ignore their aged parents. The *Book of Rites* says that even

47 Bryan W. Van Norden holds that "Xunzi acknowledges that humans innately care for their own kin"; see Van Norden, "Virtue Ethics and Confucianism," in *Comparative Approaches to Chinese Philosophy*, ed. Bo Mou (Hants, England: Ashgate, 2003), 112. As evidence, he refers to pp. 270–71 of *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy* (ibid., 121n54), by which I think he means the passage that says, "Among all the living things between Heaven and earth, those that have blood and *qi* are sure to have awareness, and of those that have awareness, none does not love its own kind.... Thus, among the creatures that have blood and *qi*, none has greater awareness than man, and so man's feeling for his parents knows no limit until the day they die." See Philip J. Ivanhoe and Bryan W. Van Norden, eds., *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy* (New York: Seven Bridges Press, 2001), 270–71.

48 See *Concordance to the Xunzi*, 23.116 (from "天非私曾、騫、孝己而外眾人也" to "豈其性異矣哉").

if people are taught to be filial, they “still forget about their parents” 民猶忘其親.<sup>49</sup> Fading affection for parents can explain why some people even do not bury their deceased parents. However, adults’ affection for their parents will manifest itself in response to proper external stimuli and thereby has the potential to develop into morality—filial piety per se. When adults see the decaying corpses of their parents, Mencius said, their innate emotions will emerge, motivating them to take care of the bodies. These stimulated emotions toward parents are of the same nature as the compassion King Xuan of Qi felt for the sacrificial ox that is going to be slaughtered (*Mencius* 1A7) or the unbearable feelings a person would experience when seeing a child about to fall into a well (*Mencius* 2A6):

- 1) The emotions are innate, genuine and not acquired via education.
- 2) These feelings, as Bryan W. Van Norden contends, have both cognitive and behavioral dimensions.<sup>50</sup> And such feelings can lead to actions: those who cannot bear to see the decaying corpses of their parents bury them properly; the king spares the sacrificial ox when seeing it trembling with fear; those who worry about the safety of a falling child rush to his/her rescue.
- 3) Because they are based on genuine feelings, these actions are sincere and are performed for their own sake. Mencius emphasizes that King Xuan of Qi saved the sacrificial ox not because he was stingy; the witness saved the child not because he/she worried about his/her reputation or wanted rewards from the child’s parents; and those who perspired when seeing the rotting corpses of their parents chose to bury them not because they were afraid of other people’s criticism, but rather they were ashamed—they were sweating with guilt.<sup>51</sup>

Although these genuine feelings can lead to moral actions, they are

49 *Liji jijie*, 30.1289.

50 Bryan W. Van Norden, “Mengzi and Xunzi: Two Views of Human Agency,” in *Virtue, Nature, and Moral Agency in the Xunzi*, ed. T.C. Kline III and Philip J. Ivanhoe (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000), 103–34; Craig K. Ihara, “David Wong on Emotions in Mencius,” *Philosophy East and West* 41, no. 1 (1991): 45–53.

51 Sin Yee Chan 陳倩儀 contends that universal sympathy and filial affection are altruistic concerns. Kim Myeong-seok holds that universal sympathy and filial affection are all “concern-based construals.” See Sin Yee Chan, “Filial Piety, Commiseration and the Virtue of *Ren*,” in *Filial Piety in Chinese Thought and History*, 180–81; Kim Myeong-seok, “What *Cèyīn zhī xīn* (Compassion/Familial Affection) Really is,” *Dao* 9, no. 4 (2010): 419–20.

only the starting point of morality.<sup>52</sup> Being sporadic and inconsistent in their manifestations and responding to specific situations, these spontaneous sympathetic feelings toward others' sufferings are not sufficient to drive a person to perform moral actions.<sup>53</sup> More specifically, love for one's parents is only a sprout of filial piety that needs to be developed into full-fledged morality. If not developed, Mencius explicitly says, one cannot even serve one's parents (*Mencius* 2A6).<sup>54</sup>

In conclusion, to reduce filial piety to family affection and to claim consanguineous affection as the foundation for morality cannot do justice to the more sophisticated understanding of the parent-child relationship presented in the *Analects* and the *Mencius*. Early Confucians realized that people's affection for their parents changed over time. In addressing the deficit of the emotions necessary to both the motivation for and the performance of filial actions, they turn to young children's unconditional love for their caregivers, hoping that the recalling of those memories will sustain genuine filial actions. Filial actions cannot be directly and automatically generated by adults' love for their parents. Instead, both the teaching of filial piety and the filial action prescribed by rituals are believed to shape and reinforce the affection between children and parents, helping adult children regain the heart-mind of a young child. In this line of thinking, Mencius claims that just like the principles of conduct that mediate and shape the relationship between the lord and his

52 Ivanhoe calls these "giveaway actions" because their spontaneity and directness are seen as proof of their authenticity; see *Ethics in the Confucian Tradition*, 39–40. See also Mark Csikszentmihalyi, *Material Virtue: Ethics and the Body in Early China* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 139.

53 Xiusheng Liu compares the principle of sympathy in David Hume's theory with Mencius' sympathy theory, and Marion Hourdequin uses Mencius' sympathy stories to shed light on her critiques of Michael Slote's ethics of care and empathy. Both note that because it lacks consistency, sympathy by itself cannot serve as the basis of morality but needs direction. See Liu, *Mencius, Hume, and the Foundations of Ethics* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2003), esp. 30–37; Hourdequin, "The Limits of Empathy," in *Virtue Ethics and Confucianism*, ed. Stephen C. Angle and Michael Slote (New York: Routledge, 2013), 209–18.

54 The whole passage reads, "In general, for the four sprouts within oneself, knowing them, one will then enlarge and develop them, a phenomenon that is like that of fire which has begun to burn, or that of a spring which has begun to find vent. If one is able to develop them, they will suffice to enable him to protect all within the four seas. If one fails to develop them, they will not suffice to enable him to serve his parents" 凡有四端於我者，知皆擴而充之矣，若火之始然，泉之始達。苟能充之，足以保四海；苟不充之，不足以事父母， see *Mencius* 2A6.



ministers, between the husband and wife, between the elderly and the youth, and between friends, the ethics between father and son—defined as *qin* 親 or “affectionate relationship”—should be properly taught (*Mencius* 3A4).<sup>55</sup>

Consanguineous love will not naturally become filial piety. Instead, teaching filial actions is an efficient way to stimulate an affectionate connection with parents, a teaching that is commonly advocated by pre-Han and Han scholars. According to the *Xiao jing* 孝經, the Master said, “For teaching the people to be affectionate and loving, there is nothing better than filial piety” 教民親愛，莫善於孝。<sup>56</sup> “The first [of the Three Exemplary Behaviours] is to behave filially in order to develop an affectionate attachment to one’s parents” (三行，) 一曰孝行，以親父母。<sup>57</sup>

55 The original passage reads, “He appointed Xie to be the Minister of Instruction, to teach the relations of humanity. Between father and son, there should be affection; between sovereign and minister, righteousness; between husband and wife, attention to their separate functions; between old and young, a proper order; and between friends, fidelity” 使契為司徒，教以人倫：父子有親，君臣有義，夫婦有別，長幼有敘，朋友有信，see *Mencius* 3A4.

56 *A Concordance to the Xiao jing* 孝經逐字索引, in *Concordances to the Erya, Xiao jing* 爾雅逐字索引·孝經逐字索引, ed. D.C. Lau et al. (Hong Kong: The Commercial Press [H.K.] Ltd., 1995), 12.3.

57 *A Concordance to the Zhouli* 周禮逐字索引, ed. D.C. Lau et al. (Hong Kong: The Commercial Press [H.K.] Ltd., 1993), 2.25. If love for one’s parents, by nature, resembles sympathetic compassion for the suffering of others, then, one might argue, how can we understand the “graded love” in Confucianism? On what grounds does Mencius attack Mozi’s indiscriminate love and despise those who hold that one can love one’s neighbor’s son like one loves one’s brother’s son? First, as Kwong-loi Shun 信廣來 notes, we cannot find sufficient textual evidence in the *Mencius* to defend the doctrine of “graded love.” Second, David B. Wong 黃百銳 argues that Mencius attacks Mozi’s universal love and emphasizes love for family members, but this is not due to the biological bond having priority in Mencius’ teachings. Instead, Wong believes, because we live most of our lives with our family members, family is the institution where we first and foremost have our moral affection developed and the place where we first and foremost practice our morality. This view is echoed by the archeological text *Human Nature Comes via Mandate* (“Xing zi ming chu” 性自命出), which elaborates dynamics between various emotions and external circumstances. See Shun, *Mencius and Early Chinese Thought* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997), 146–49; Wong, “Universalism versus Love with Distinctions: An Ancient Debate Revived,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 16, nos. 3–4 (1989): 251–72; for a discussion of the *Human Nature Comes via Mandate* with a partial English translation, see Michael Puett, “The Ethics of Responding Properly: The Notion of *Qing* 情 in Early Chinese Thought,” in *Love and Emotions in Traditional Chinese Literature*, ed. Halvor Eifring (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 43–51.

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# 由愛至孝 —— 孩提之童的愛與儒家孝道的再 思考

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在西方哲學研究中，子女是否對父母有盡孝道的責任一直是一個有爭議的問題。與此形成對比的是，在儒家傳統中，孝被認為是最基本的倫理道德，而孝道一直作為最重要的社會價值主導著二十世紀以前的傳統東亞社會。

很多學者由此認為對父母的愛是儒家所推崇的人類最基本、最強烈的感情。本文的宗旨不在於討論孝道是否應該成為一種合法化的倫理道德。本文採用一個時間的框架，旨在對《論語》、《孟子》中對父母之愛的討論作複雜的細讀。雖然孩提之童對父母有著強烈的情感依附，成年人對父母愛卻有著間斷性和不持續性的特點。成年人對父母的感情不足以成為孝道的行動的自然動機。針對這個觀察，孔子和孟子強調孩提之童對父母的愛，用孩童對父母強烈的情感依附來合法化孝道，並希望以此為孝行提供足夠的行為動機。本文提出，對父母之愛並不能自然而然的生成作為倫理道德的孝道。至於儒家提倡以孝行為中心的各種禮儀，則旨在於行為中培養和加強對父母的愛。

**關鍵詞：**孝 孔子 《論語》 《孟子》 血緣之愛