

## Early Buddhist and Confucian Concepts of Filial Piety: A Comparative Study<sup>\*</sup>

*Guang Xing*

[guangxin@hku.hk](mailto:guangxin@hku.hk)

There are only a few modern scholars who have made comparative studies on Buddhist and Confucian concepts of filial piety. Michihata Ryoshu and Zhong Yulian have done so, but they both discuss the filial concepts of the two schools separately, one after the other. Therefore, in a real sense, theirs are not comparative studies, because they neither discuss the similarities and differences nor analyze the causes behind them. In this paper, I mainly confine myself to the early texts of both schools of thought, in which we can only find the basic definition of the concept of filial piety and how the concept has been developed and changed in later writings. After summarizing and analyzing the concepts of filial piety in both Buddhism and Confucianism, I have found that there are five similarities and three differences between the two schools; furthermore, Confucianism has two aspects which are not shared by Buddhism. The reasons behind these are that filial piety is the foundation as well as the highest norm in Confucian ethics and all morality and civilization come from it. By contrast, filial piety in Buddhism is not the foundation of its ethics, although it is an important ethical teaching of the Buddha. Instead, the concepts of karma and *samsāra* are the bases of Buddhist ethics.

---

<sup>\*</sup>The Chinese version has been published in the *Universal Gate Buddhist Journal*, No.45 (2008), 169-210. This English translation is a revised and expanded version with additions and corrections. Thanks to the two anonymous reviewers for their comments and valuable suggestions.

## 1. Introduction

There are only a few modern scholars who have made comparative studies on Buddhist and Confucian concepts of filial piety, such as Michihata Ryoshu and Zhong Yulian. Both Michihata's *Fojiao Yu Rujia Lunli (Buddhist and Confucian Ethics)* and Zhong's *Rufu de Xiaodao Shixiang (Filial Thought in Confucianism and Buddhism)* discuss the filial concepts of the two schools separately, one after the other. Therefore, in a real sense, theirs are not comparative studies, because they neither discuss the similarities and differences nor analyze the causes behind them. Sun Xiusheng has also written a paper on the issue, entitled "Rushi xiaodaoshuo de bijiao yanjiu" (A comparative study of Confucian and Buddhist concepts of filial piety). But Sun's study is just a simple description of some stories found in the Buddhist literature, and he too has neither summarized the concept of filial piety in Confucianism nor analyzed it in Buddhism. Wang Kaifu has touched upon filial piety in his paper "The Ethical thought in the *Sigalovāda Sūtra* — the similarities and differences of Confucian and Buddhist ethics are also discussed concurrently".

However, Zongmi (780 - 841), an ancient Buddhist scholar in China, made a brief comparative study of filial piety in Buddhism and Confucianism in his commentary to the *Ullambana Sūtra*. But in his discussion Zongmi used mostly Mahāyāna literature as well as the ideas and practices prevalent in his time; as a result, the early Buddhist scriptures such as the *Āgamas* were not utilized, let alone the Pāli *Nikāyas*, though they are basic for the study of both the concept and the practice of filial piety in Buddhism. Thus Zongmi's comparative study is limited in scope. We understand that Zongmi had a strong wish to reconcile the conflict between Confucianism and Buddhism. Therefore in his study he asserted that filial piety is the foundation of both Confucianism and Buddhism. However, karma is the foundation of ethical teaching in Buddhism, although filial piety is also considered important. It is Confucianism that considers filial piety as the foundation of ethics.

In this paper, I mainly confine myself to the early texts of both Buddhism and Confucianism. I use texts such as the *Lunyu* (Analects), the *Shijing* (Book of Poetry), the *Mengzi* (Mencius), the *Liji* (Book of Rites) and the *Xiaojing* (Classic of Filial Piety) etc. for Confucianism and the *Nikāyas*, the *Āgamas*, the *Vinayas* of different schools in Pāli and in Chinese translation for Buddhism. This choice of texts is due to the following two reasons. First, we can only find the basic definition and description of the concept of filial piety in both schools of thought in

their early texts; the concept has been developed and changed in later writings of various masters. The understanding of this basic definition of filial piety in both schools will also help us in the study of the issue in later writings. Second, there are many texts written by later masters of both schools related to the issue which we cannot deal with in this paper and have to leave for another paper.

Some scholars may think that the composition of the *Classic of Filial Piety* is late and the concept of filial piety in it had already developed, so it should be left out if I intend to use only early sources. I take the *Classic* into consideration as one of the early sources of Confucianism because it is the representative work of Confucianism on filial piety and it summarizes the concept as it had developed until then. As a result, this work is included in the thirteen classics of Confucianism. Therefore, not to include the *Classic of Filial Piety* in my study would leave a gap.

## 2. Similarities between Confucianism and Buddhism

Morality is the foundation of both Buddhism and Confucianism and filial piety is an important ethical teaching in morality. There are five similarities between the schools of thought concerning filial piety.

### 1) Emphasis on repaying the debts to one's parents

The idea of repaying the debts to one's parents is found in both Buddhism and Confucianism, but the ways of repaying them are different. The ancient text of *Shijing*, which is considered as authoritative by Confucians, teaches the idea of filial piety and repaying debts to parents. Confucian classics often quote from this text as supporting evidence for their ideas. The *Shijing* says,

It is my father that begot me!  
 It is my mother that fed me!  
 They kept me, they loved me,  
 They fed me, they reared me,  
  
 They tended me, they shielded me,  
 Out and in, they cared for me.

It is time that I requited their love,  
But it is like great heaven unlimited. (*Shijing*, *Xiaoya*, 2.3)<sup>1</sup>

The *Shijing* here describes the toil and difficulties of parents in bringing up their children, so it is said, “It is time that I requited their love, but it is like great Heaven, unlimited.”

In both the Northern and Southern traditions of Buddhism, we find the thought expressed in the *Shijing* about the compassion of parents towards their children. The *Kataññu Sutta* of the *Anguttaranikāya* says,

Monks, one can never repay two persons, I declare. What two? Mother and father. Even if one should carry about his mother on one shoulder and his father on the other, and so doing should live a hundred years, attain a hundred years; and if he should support them, anointing them with unguents, kneading, bathing and rubbing their limbs, and they meanwhile should even void their excrements upon him, – even so could he not repay his parents.

Moreover, monks, if he should establish his parents in supreme authority, in the absolute rule over this mighty earth abounding in the seven treasures, – not even thus could he repay his parents. What is the cause for that? Monks, parents do much for their children: they bring them up, they nourish them, they introduce them to this world.<sup>2</sup>

From the above quotations it is clear that both Buddhism and Confucianism have the same idea of filial piety with an emphasis on parents’ difficulties.

<sup>1</sup> English translation quoted from *Shijing: The Book of Poetry*, 419-421. Regarding the last sentence in the verse, the original is “But heaven has grabbed them from above” which means that they have died. The translator of *Shijing* adopts Cheng Junying’s interpretation. See Cheng’s *Shijing Xing Zhu* 《詩經新注》 (Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 1985) 406. But Zhou Zhenfu interprets it as “It is like the heaven unlimited so it could not be repaid”. See Zhou’s *Shijing Yizhu* 《詩經譯注》 (Beijing Zhonghua Shuju 2002) 327-328. Here I follow Zhou’s interpretation, which is the normal understanding, so I have changed it into “It is like great heaven unlimited”. The *Shijing* (Book of Poetry) is one of the five classics of Confucian tradition. The others are the *Shujing* (Book of Documents), the *Liji* (Book of Rites), the *Yijing* (Book of Changes), and the *Chunqiu* (Spring and Autumn Annals).

<sup>2</sup> A i 61. The English translation is adopted from *The Book of the Gradual Sayings*, i, 56-57. All the English translations are quoted from PTS translations, otherwise translators will be mentioned. The counterpart of this sutta is also found in the Chinese translation of the *Ekottarāgama*, T2, No. 125 (20.11) 600c-601a.

## 2) Respect and reverence to parents

Both Buddhism and Confucianism speak of respect and reverence for parents, but the latter emphasizes it. The *Lunyu* says, “Nowadays ‘filial’ means simply being able to provide one’s parents with nourishment. But even dogs and horses are provided with nourishment. If you are not respectful, wherein lies the difference?” (*Lunyu* 2.7) So in the Confucian concept of filial piety respect is the root and propriety is the model. The *Liji* also says, “There are three degrees of filial piety. The highest is the honouring of our parents; the second is not disgracing them; and the lowest is being able to support them.” (*Liji* 24.) The *Mengzi* basically continued Confucian thought concerning respect to parents, as it says, “The greatest thing a dutiful son can do is to honour his parents.” (*Mengzi* 9.4)<sup>3</sup> “A son of supreme dutifulness (*Daxiao* 大孝) yearns for his parents all his life.” (*Mengzi* 9.1) According to Confucianism, in the practice of filial piety supporting one’s parents is the basic requirement and respect for parents is the highest form. Therefore, “In serving your parents you may gently remonstrate with them. However, once it becomes apparent that they have not taken your criticism to heart you should be respectful and not oppose them, and follow their lead diligently without resentment.” (*Lunyu* 4.18) The importance of respect and reverence in the Confucian practice of filial piety is well demonstrated in these quotations.

Although respect is the core of the Confucian concept of filial piety, in practice one should perform it in accordance with propriety (*Li* 禮) So according to the *Lunyu*, when Meng Yizi asked Confucius about filial piety, the Master said, “It is not being disobedient.” Then Fan Chi further asked the master to clarify it and the Master told him: “When your parents are alive, serve them in accordance with the rites; when they pass away, bury them in accordance with the rites and sacrifice to them in accordance with the rites.” (*Lunyu* 2.5) In other words, in the practice of filial piety one should always follow propriety. But what is propriety in Confucianism? According to the *Xiaojing*, Confucius says,

Ritual propriety is simply a matter of respect (*jing* 敬). Thus, the son finds pleasure in respecting his father; the younger brother finds pleasure in respecting his elder brother; the minister finds pleasure in respecting his lord; and all of the people find pleasure in respecting the Emperor. Those who are respected are few, but those who find

---

<sup>3</sup>The translation is adapted from Lau: 193. The Chinese characters and Pinyin are added by the writer.

pleasure in showing this respect are legion. This is what is called the vital way (*dao* 道). (*Xiaojing* 12)<sup>4</sup>

Again, the *Liji* also describes it:

They are the rules of propriety, that furnish the means of determining (the observances towards) relatives, as near and remote; of settling points which may cause suspicion or doubt; of distinguishing where there should be agreement, and where difference; and of making clear what is right and what is wrong. (*Liji* 1.6)

According to those rules, one should not (seek to) please others in an improper way, nor be lavish of his words. According to them, one does not go beyond the definite measure, nor encroach on or despise others, nor is fond of (presuming) familiarities. To cultivate one's person and fulfill one's words is called good conduct. When the conduct is (thus) ordered, and the words are accordant with the (right) course, we have the substance of the rules of propriety. (*Liji* 1.7)

From the above discussion, it is clear that both filial piety and propriety have respect as their core. Filial piety is the natural feeling of a man, while propriety is the rule and model for practice of it. In the Confucian text *Lunyu*, it is said that Zai Wo asked Confucius about the three years' mourning for parents, saying that one year was long enough:

If the gentleman refrains from practising ritual for three years, the rites will surely fall into ruin; if he refrains from music for three years, this will surely be disastrous for music. After the lapse of a year the old grain has been used up, while the new grain has ripened, and the four different types of tinder have all been drilled in order to rekindle the fire. One year is surely long enough.

To this Confucius said,

This shows how lacking in Goodness this Zai Wo is! A child is completely dependent upon the care of his parents for the first three years

---

<sup>4</sup>All the English translations of the *Xiaojing* quoted in this paper have been adapted from Henry Rosemount, Jr and Roger T. Ames, 2009. See Bibliography.

of his life—this is why the three year mourning period is common practice throughout the world. Did Zai Wo not receive three years of care from his parents? (*Lunyu* 17.21)<sup>5</sup>

From this dialogue it is clear that according to early Confucian thought, filial piety is a natural feeling of a man towards his parents. The *Xiaojing* clearly defines the practice of filial piety in five ways.

The Master said, “Filial children in serving parents in their daily lives show them real respect (*jing* 敬), in tending to their needs and wants strive to bring them enjoyment (*le* 樂), in caring for them in sickness reveal their apprehension, in mourning for them express their grief, and in sacrificing to them show true veneration. With these five dispositions firmly in place, they are truly able to serve their parents.” (*Xiaojing* 10)

Buddhism also teaches respect and reverence for parents. The *Sabrahma-sutta* (Equal with Brahmā) of the *Āṅguttarānikāya* says,

Monks, those families where mother and father are worshipped in the home are reckoned like unto Brahmā. Those families where mother and father are worshipped in the home are ranked with the teachers of old. Worthy of offerings, monks, are those families where mother and father are worshipped in the home. ‘Brahmā,’ monks, is a term for mother and father. ‘Teachers of old,’ monks, is a term for mother and father. ‘Worthy of offerings,’ monks, is a term for mother and father. Why so? Because mother and father do much to children, they bring them up, nourish and introduce them to the world.<sup>6</sup>

First, parents are respected as Brahmā, the king of all gods. According to Brahmanism, humans are created by Brahmā. Here the Buddha ironically said that

<sup>5</sup>All the English translations of the *Lunyu* quoted in this paper have been adapted from Edward Slingerland 2003. Please see Bibliography.

<sup>6</sup>This *sutta* appears twice in the *Āṅguttarānikāya*: A i 132; ii 70. *The Book of Gradual Sayings*, i 114-115; ii 79. *Itivuttaka*, verses 109-111. It is also found in the short version of the Chinese translation of the *Samyuktāgama* (T2, No.100 (88) 404a), although two items are added: (1) parents are also worshipped as Mahādeva and (2) the family is also respected by others if parents are supported with all kinds of material things.

if one respects Brahmā as the creator of humankind, it is better to respect one's parents because the latter is the real creators of you. Second, parents are respected as the early teachers as they educate their children from the time they are born. Third, parents are respected as worthy of offerings and support to provide their basic requirements.

Respect and reverence for parents is also discussed in the *Mahāyañña* (Great Sacrifice) of the *Aṅguttaranikāya*, in which we find a dialogue between the Buddha and a fire worshipping Brahmin about how to perform a sacrifice that involves a lot of killing of cows and other animals. The Buddha advised the fire worshipping Brahmin, in sacrificial terminology, that there are three kinds of fires that should be revered, respected and venerated: parents are the first kind of fire; one's wife and children, employees and dependents are the second; the third fire represents religious persons who have either attained the goal of arahantship or have embarked on a course of training for the elimination of negative mental traits. The Buddha said to the Brahman: "these three fires, when esteemed, revered, venerated, respected, must bring best happiness."<sup>7</sup> Here parents come first.

These two *suttas* demonstrate the Buddhist teaching of respect and reverence for parents.

### 3) Unfiliality as one of the five grave crimes

Both Buddhism and Confucianism consider unfiliality as one of the five grave crimes.

Confucianism considers unfiliality as the first of five grave crimes. As the *Xiaojing* says,

The Master said, "The crimes that are addressed by the Five Punishments number some three thousand, and none of them is graver than to be wanting in family reverence." (*Xiaojing* 11)<sup>8</sup>

In the Han dynasty, the idea of "ruling the state by using filial piety" was conceived of and implemented; unfiliality was considered as one of the grave crimes.

---

<sup>7</sup>A iv 44. This is also found in the Chinese translation of the *Samyuktāgama*, T2, No. 99 (93) 24c; also in the shorter version of the Chinese translation of the *Samyuktāgama*, T2, No.100 (259) 464c.

<sup>8</sup>Here Henry Rosemount and Roger Ames translate "Xiao 孝" as "family reverence" instead of the normal translation "filial piety". It is also reflected in the title of the book they have translated *The Chinese Classics of Family Reverence* for the *Xiaojing* 《孝經》, instead of the normal translation *The Classic of Filial Piety*.



According to the *Chongqiu Jueyu*, “one who beats his father will be beheaded.” This is the law concerning filial practice in the Han dynasty (206BCE - 220 CE). So from the Three Kingdoms dynasty to the Northern and Southern dynasties the contents of filial piety became more systematic and concrete. It was during Northern Qi (550-577) that the “ten grave crimes” were first established and written in law; unfiliality was number eight. According to the law of the Liu Song dynasty (420-479), “One who is unfilial to his parents will be persecuted and hanged in the market.” (The Biography of Gu Kaizi in the *Song Shu*, the History of the Liu Song Dynasty.) In the Tang dynasty, the “ten evils” appeared in the law books and unfiliality is the seventh of the ten. The *Sui Shu* (History of the Sui Dynasty) says, “Again the ‘ten evils’ were established..... the seventh is unfiliality.” The item of the “ten evils” was in the law books from the Tang until the late Qing dynasty and unfiliality was one of the ten evils. The Tang law system was the most complete one. The punishment for unfiliality is: “One who scolds his parents or grandparents will be hanged, one who beats them will be beheaded.” “Those who report their grandparents and parents (for any wrong deeds) will be hanged.”<sup>9</sup>

According to the Buddhist teaching, killing one’s mother and father are the first two of the five gravest kinds of evil karma. The *Parikuppasutta* of the *Āṅguttaranikāya* says,

Monks, five are the lost in hell who lie festering, incurable. What five? (By him) has his mother been deprived of life; his father; an arahant; (by him), with evil thought, has the Tathāgata’s blood been drawn; (by him) has the Order been embroiled. Verily monks, these are the five lost in hell who lie festering, incurable.<sup>10</sup>

According to this *sutta*, one who has killed his mother or father has committed the gravest evil karma so he will be born in hell with immediate effect. This shows the importance of filial piety in Buddhist ethical teaching.

The Chinese translation of the *Ekottarāgama* also tells us that there are eleven kinds of people who cannot attain the path; one of them is one who kills his par-

<sup>9</sup>All the quotations concerning judiciary are cited from Ma Shaoqing (2006), 122-4.

<sup>10</sup>A iii 146. *The Book of Gradual Sayings*, iii 112. These five gravest kinds of bad karma are mentioned in many places in the Chinese *Āgamas*: the *Samyuktāgama*, T2, No.99 (792), 205a; the *Madhyamāgama*, T1, No.26 (200), 769a, 724a.

ents.<sup>11</sup> According to the *Vinaya* of various schools, one who kills his parents will not be admitted into the order of the Saṅgha and if he has entered, he should be expelled<sup>12</sup>

From the above discussion, it is understood that both Buddhism and Confucianism consider unfiliality as a grave crime, but the latter's punishments for it are much heavier than the former's. According to Confucianism, even if one scolds one's parents one will be hanged, but according to Buddhism one will be born in hell only when one kills a parent.

#### 4) Generalization of filial piety

Both Buddhism and Confucianism generalize the practice of filial piety as the social order and the universal law respectively. According to the *Lunyu*, filial piety is a natural feeling towards one's parents, but this idea has been developed in the *Liji* and it generalizes this morality as the universal law, the eternal and the constant (method) of Heaven and the righteousness of Earth. All human behaviour is connected with filial piety, from war to daily life: in service to the ruler, in dealings with friends. It includes all aspects of human life.

Zengzi said, "The body is that which has been transmitted to us by our parents; dare any one allow himself to be irreverent in the employment of their legacy? If a man in his own house and privacy be not grave, he is not filial; if in serving his ruler, he be not loyal, he is not filial; if in discharging the duties of office, he be not reverent, he is not filial; if with friends he be not sincere, he is not filial; if on the field of battle he be not brave, he is not filial. If he fails in these five things, the evil (of the disgrace) will reach his parents; dare he but reverently attend to them?" (*Liji* 24.26)

---

<sup>11</sup>T2, no.125, 800a12. "The Buddha said, there are these eleven kinds of people who will not attain the path. What are the eleven? They are one who commits adultery, one who is of harsh speech, one who is difficult to advise, one who is shameless, one who is hateful, one who kills his parents, one who kills an arahant, one who cuts off the root of good, one who performs bad deeds, one who has the wrong idea of "I", one who has bad thoughts towards the Tathāgata."

<sup>12</sup>Pāli Vinaya, i, 297; the *Sarvāstivādinaya*, T23, no.1435, 397b; the *Dharmaguptakavinaya*, T22, no.1428, 813a; the *Mahāsaṅghikavinaya*, T22, no.1425, 417b; the *Mūlasarvāstivādinaya*, T23, no.1442, 566c; the *Vinaya*, T24, no.1464, 871b.

The *Liji* further generalizes this morality: “To fell a single tree, or kill a single animal, not at the proper season, is contrary to filial piety.” (*Liji* 24.28) Thus filial piety is considered as the universal truth.

Zengzi said, “Set up filial piety, and it will fill the space from earth to heaven; spread it out, and it will extend over all the ground to the four seas; hand it down to future ages, and from morning to evening it will be observed; push it on to the eastern sea, the western sea, the southern sea, and the northern sea, and it will be (everywhere) the law for men, and their obedience to it will be uniform. There will be a fulfilment of the words of the ode (III, i, ode 10, 6), ”From west to east, from south to north, There was no unsubmitive thought.” (*Liji* 24.27)

The Buddhist generalization of filial piety is different from Confucianism. Buddhism considers all kinds of service and help to sentient beings as filial piety. This is because Buddhism does not think of death as the end of life but as a change of form. A human being may be born in heaven to enjoy life or be born in hell to experience suffering. Sentient beings wonder in the realm of *saṃsāra* from the beginningless time till now, so that all other sentient beings may have been one’s parents in past lives. Therefore one should practise filial piety towards all sentient beings. The Buddha says to his disciples in the *Mātu Sutta* of the *Samyuttanikāya*:

Bhikkhus, this *saṃsāra* is without a discoverable beginning... It is not easy, bhikkhus, to find a being who in this long course has not previously been your mother... your father... your sister... your son... your daughter. For what reason? Because bhikkhus, this *saṃsāra* is without discoverable beginning... it is enough to be liberated from them.<sup>13</sup>

Therefore, Mahāyāna followers vow to save all sentient beings because they are possibly their past parents. So the Buddhist practice of filial piety is still within the idea of repaying debts to one’s parents, but Confucianism makes filial piety the universal law.

<sup>13</sup>S ii 189-90. *The Book of Kindred Sayings*, iii 128. This is also found in the Chinese translation of *Samyuktāgama*, T2, No. 99 (942) and the shorter Chinese translation of *Samyuktāgama*, T2, No. 100 (345).

### 5) The responses to filial piety

Both Buddhism and Confucianism have taught the gods' or heaven's responses to filial piety. Confucianism taught that heaven would respond to a human act of filiality, while Buddhism thought that gods would respond to human filial actions.

The *Xiaojing* says, "Indeed, family reverence (*xiao*) is the constancy of the heavenly cycles, the appropriate responsiveness (*yi*) of the earth, and the proper conduct of the people." (*Xiaojing* 7) So it is natural that heaven will respond to human filial actions. According to the *Xiaojing*:

In such a world, the parents while living enjoyed the comforts that parents deserve, and as spirits after death took pleasure in the sacrificial offerings made to them. Hence, the empire was peaceful (*he*) and free of strife, natural disasters did not occur, and man-made calamities were averted. In this way the enlightened kings used family reverence to bring proper order to the empire. The Book of Songs says, 'So admirable is the excellence (*de*) of his conduct that all of the states in the four quarters repair (*shun*) to him.' (*Xiaojing* 8)

What Confucianism emphasizes here is that peace will prevail when people practise morality. But the *Xiaojing* further interprets this as the response of spirits.

Of old the enlightened kings (*mingwang*) served their fathers with family reverence, and in so doing, served the heavens (*tian*) with acuity (*ming*); they served their mothers with family reverence, and in so doing, served the earth judiciously. With the young in compliance (*shun*) with their elders in this manner, proper order prevailed among those above and those below. With the enlightened kings being acute and judicious in their service to the heavens and to the earth, the gods and spirits sent down their blessings upon them.

Thus, even the Emperor must show reverence—referring here to his father's generation. And must place others before him—referring here to his elder brothers' generation. At the ancestral temple his offering of respect (*jing*) was in remembrance of his parents. He would cultivate his person and be circumspect in his conduct for fear of disgracing those who have come before.

When at the ancestral temple the Emperor offers his respects, the ghosts and spirits acknowledge him with appreciation. When familial and fraternal deference reaches this level, the feeling resonates with the gods and spirits, shines throughout the four corners of the world, and affects everything everywhere. (*Xiaojing* 16)

Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang dynasty explained the sentence in the above quotation “the spiritual intelligences displayed [their retributive power]” (神明彰矣) in *Xiaojing* as “When Heaven and Earth were served with intelligence and discrimination, the spiritual intelligences will know the earnestness [of humans] and bestow good fortune and protection on them. Thus it is said: ‘displayed [their retributive power].’” Xing Bing (932-1010) explained this in his commentary to the *Xiaojing* as “this chapter explains the influence of filial piety and the response to it.” So from the *Xiaojing* to emperor Tang Xuanzhong to the Confucian scholar Xing Bing, all interpreted that the practice of filial piety will influence spirits, who will respond to it. Therefore in the official Chinese history books there are special chapters such as the “Biographies of Confucian Scholars” and “Biographies of Filial Sons” dedicated to recording the stories of response to those who have practised filial piety. The well known stories are like that of the filial son Guo Ju, who because of poverty buried his own son in order to support his mother; he was rewarded with gold by heaven. Wang Xiang to get some fish for his mother, wanted to use his own body to melt ice; because of his filial piety the ice melted itself and two fishes came out as the reward of heaven.<sup>14</sup>

Buddhism has a similar thought. Respecting parents is seen as the first principle of ethical conduct, as Dharma, the way things should be, the social order. If parents are not respected, worse things will happen, such as war. This idea is found in many places in the Pali *Aṅguttaranikāya* as well as in the Chinese translations of the *Samyuktāgama*, the *Dirghāgama* and the *Ekottarāgama*.

These texts say that on the eighth day, the fourteenth day and the fifteenth day of each month, the ministers who are councilors of the Four Great Kings, the sons of the Four Great Kings and the Four Great Kings themselves perambulate this world to see whether many folk among men pay reverence to mother and father, to recluses and Brahmins, and show deference to the elders of the clan,

---

<sup>14</sup>These two stories of filial sons are selected in the *Twenty Four Filial Stories*, which was collected and published in the Song Dynasty.

and do good deeds.<sup>15</sup> Then the Four Great Kings report to the ruler of the gods of the Thirty-Three as they sit in the hall of righteousness. If the report is negative, the gods of the Thirty-Three are displeased, saying, “Surely, sirs, the god-hosts will diminish and the *asura*-hosts will increase.” But if the Four Great Kings report in positive terms then the gods of the Thirty-Three are pleased, saying, “Surely, sirs, the god-hosts will increase and the *asura*-hosts will decrease.”

In the Buddhist scriptures, *Asuras* are known for fighting with gods. According to the PTS *Pali-English Dictionary*, “The fight between Gods Asuras is also reflected in the oldest books of the Pāli Canon and occurs in identical description under the title of *devāsura-saṅgāma*” in many places.”<sup>16</sup> By contrast, gods represent righteousness, as the Pāli passage informs us that even the assembly hall of the gods is named Sudhammā, the Hall of Righteousness: “The Four Great Kings report the matter to the Devas of the Thirty-Three, as they sit in conclave in the *Hall of Righteousness (Sudhammā)*, saying ...”<sup>17</sup> This is supported by the Chinese translations of the *Samyuktāgama*, the *Dirghāgama* and the *Ekottarāgama*, according to which the gods assemble in the Hall of Righteousness to discuss matters after they have inspected the world.<sup>18</sup> So the above passage implies that if many folk do not pay reverence to mother and father, to recluses and Brahmins, there will be more fighting, since *asuras* love fighting, whereas gods maintain peace. So according to this passage, whether human folk respect their parents or not is the source of the ethical practices that directly affect the peace of the world.

The *Cakkavatti Sihanāda Sutta*, which is found in the Pāli *Dīghanikāya* and in both Chinese *Dirghāgama* and *Madhyamāgamas*, mentions that whether parents are respected and honoured or not, is one of the factors leading to either increase or decrease of the human lifespan. The text says that when the lifespan of people decreases to two hundred and fifty years, the following things will increase: lack of filial piety to mother and father, lack of religious piety to holy men, lack of regard

<sup>15</sup>The *Catumahārāja Sutta* of the *Aṅguttaranikāya* i 142; the *Samyuktāgama*, T2, no.99, 295c-296a; the shorter version of the *Samyuktāgama*, T2, no.100, 389a; the *Dirghāgama*, T1, no.1, 134b-135a and the *Ekottarāgama*, T2, no.125, 624b-625a.

<sup>16</sup>PTS *Pali-English Dictionary* (p.89), the fighting of gods with *asuras* is mentioned in the following passages: D ii 285; S i 222 (cp. 216 sq.), iv 201 sq., v 447; M i 253; A iv 432.

<sup>17</sup>A i 143. *The Book of Gradual Sayings*, i 126. The italics are mine.

<sup>18</sup>The Chinese term found in the *Ekottarāgama* is *Shanfajiang tang*, which means “Good Dharma Teaching Hall” (T2, 624b). The Chinese *Samyuktāgama* mentions only *fatang*, which means “Dharma Hall” (T2, no.125, 295c).

for the head of the clan. So the lifespan decreases to a hundred years.<sup>19</sup>

When the lifespan of people is only ten years, “among the humans keen mutual enmity will become the rule, keen ill-will, keen animosity, passionate thoughts even of killing, in a mother towards her child, in a child towards its mother, in a father towards his child, and a child towards its father” etc. What people do is only the ten bad deeds; the ten good deeds are not heard of.<sup>20</sup>

On the other hand, the lifespan of people increases when they respect their parents, religious men and heads of clans. The Pāli version says that this happens when the lifespan of people is twenty years, and because of the good they do they will increase the length of life; as a result, their sons will live forty years.<sup>21</sup> So filial piety is even affects the order of nature.

These few examples show that Buddhism too teaches the response of gods to the practice of filial piety, but it is closer to the ideas found in the Confucian text of *Lunyu* and differs much from *Liji*'s account.

### 3. Differences in Buddhism and Confucianism

As Buddhism and Confucianism are different in their philosophy of life, there are four differences in their concept and practice of filial piety. The Confucian philosophy of life emphasizes the family and social responsibilities of the individual so that one must both be a filial member of the family and actively participate in social service, and aim to cultivate one's person, regulate one's family, order well the state, and make peace in the world. This is clearly described in the *Daxue*:

The ancients who wished to illustrate illustrious virtue throughout the kingdom first ordered well their own states. Wishing to order well their states, they first regulated their families. Wishing to regulate their families, they first cultivated their persons. Wishing to

---

<sup>19</sup>D iii 70-71. In the Chinese translation of the *Madhyamāgama* (T1, no.26, 523a), it is said when people's lifespan is five hundred years, these things grow: not respecting parents, *śramaṇas* and Brahmins and not performing meritorious deeds. Thus, the lifespan of their sons decreases to either two hundred and fifty years or two hundred years.

<sup>20</sup>D iii 71-73. The English translation is adapted from the Rhys Davids' translation in *Dialogues of the Buddha*, 70. The same description is also found in the Chinese translation of the *Dīrghāgama* (T1, no.1, 41a).

<sup>21</sup>D iii 74-5. But the Chinese translation of the *Madhyamāgama* (T1, no.26, 524b) says when the lifespan of people is forty thousand years, people respect their parents, religious men and heads of clans. As a result of the good they do, the lifespan of people increases to eighty thousand years.

cultivate their persons, they first rectified their hearts. Wishing to rectify their hearts, they first sought to be sincere in their thoughts. Wishing to be sincere in their thoughts, they first extended to the utmost their knowledge. Such extension of knowledge lay in the investigation of things. Things being investigated, knowledge became complete. Their knowledge being complete, their thoughts were sincere. Their thoughts being sincere, their hearts were then rectified. Their hearts being rectified, their persons were cultivated. Their persons being cultivated, their families were regulated. Their families being regulated, their states were rightly governed. Their states being rightly governed, the whole kingdom was made tranquil and happy. (*Daxue* 3)<sup>22</sup>

As discussed above, filial piety is the root and foundation of Confucian ethics and it is the basis for self-cultivation. But the aim of the Buddhist philosophy of life is to end suffering by getting liberated from the world of desire and attachment, but this does not mean leaving the physical world. Therefore according to the Buddhist teaching, one needs to cultivate morality first and finally achieve moral perfection.

### 1) The ways of repaying debts to parents

The ways of repaying debts to parents differ in Confucianism and Buddhism, as the philosophy of life is different in the two systems of thought. The Confucian classics – the *Lunyu*, the *Liji*, the *Dadai Liji*, the *Mengzi* and the *Xiaojing* etc. – describe in detail the concept and practice of filial piety. The *Lunyu* says, “When your parents are alive, serve them in accordance with the rites; when they pass away, bury them in accordance with the rites and sacrifice to them in accordance with the rites.” (*Lunyu* 2.5) The *Dadai Liji* says, “There are three kinds of filial piety. The greatest is respecting parents, the second is not to disgrace them, the third is supporting them.” (*Dadai Liji* 11.1)<sup>23</sup> The *Xiaojing* summarizes:

Filial children in serving parents in their daily lives show them real respect (*jing*), in tending to their needs and wants strive to bring

---

<sup>22</sup>James Legge’s translation.

<sup>23</sup>All the translations from the *Dadai Liji* are mine.



them enjoyment (*le*), in caring for them in sickness reveal their apprehension, in mourning for them express their grief, and in sacrificing to them show true veneration. With these five dispositions firmly in place, they are truly able to serve their parents. (*Xiaojing* 10.1)

Here it is clear that filial piety is divided into two, three and five sections. But this still does not include all aspects of filial piety in Confucianism. Therefore modern scholars have various classifications.<sup>24</sup> For convenience of discussion I will classify filial piety in Confucianism into these seven aspects under three headings. First, when parents are alive, they should be (1) respected and revered, (2) made happy with all kinds of support, without worries when ill, (3) advised without being tiresome. Second, when parents are dead, (4) the funeral ceremony should be performed according to propriety, (5) their profession should be carried on so as to make their names known to future generations. Third, (6) keeping one's body intact, and (7) having posterity.

---

<sup>24</sup>Yang Guoshu classifies filial piety under fifteen heads: (1) respecting parents, (2) obeying parents, (3) remonstrating with parents (not to let them fall into injustice), (4) serving parents with propriety, (5) inheriting father's profession, (6) making parents' names known in the future, (7) reflecting on the parents' love, (8) making parents happy by skilful means, (9) making parents not to worry, (10) always being prepared to serve parents, (11) supporting parents for their wellbeing both physically and mentally, (12) protection of oneself, (13) having posterity, (14) funeral with propriety, and (15) sacrifice with propriety. But Ge Rongjin classifies filial piety into negative and positive aspects. There are seven items from the negative aspect: (1) "not to disobey" is filial piety, (2) father and son cover up for each other, (3) "one does not travel far away when parents are alive", (4) "There are three things which are unfilial, and to have no posterity is the greatest of them", (5) "Our bodies – down to every hair and bit of skin - are received by us from our parents, and we must not presume to injure or wound them. This is the beginning of filial piety." (6) generous burial and long mourning, (7) the superstition of "[gods']response to filial piety" and the sense of "fool's filial piety". Five from the positive aspect: (1) look after parents, (2) respect and honour parents, (3) remonstrate with parents, (4) honour elders, (5) combine filial piety with aid to the nation and saving people. Luo Chenglie 駱承烈 classifies filial piety under five heads: (1) supporting parents, (2) honouring parents, (3) respecting parents, (4) having propriety towards parents, (5) making parents well known (through establishing the family character by filial practice, so as to make its name famous in future ages). Cited from Xiao Qunzhong (2002): 271-2. Xiao Qunzhong classifies filial piety in two aspects under six heads: that when parents are alive one should (1) support and respect them, (2) treat them with propriety daily, and look after them with anxiety when they are ill, (3) treat them with obedience and remonstrate with good reasons; and when they are dead one should (4) bury them and offer sacrifice for them with propriety, (5) inherit their aspirations and remember their good works, (6) admire parents for one's whole life. Cited from the same book, 274-286.

Of these, numbers 1 to 5 are found in Buddhism, but numbers 6 and 7 are not.

The Buddhist text named *Sigālovāda Sutta* teaches people to perform five things as the practice of filial piety. A child should minister to his parents by (1) supporting them, (2) performing their duties, (3) keeping the family tradition, (4) making oneself worthy of the inheritance, and (5) offering alms in honor of one's departed relatives.<sup>25</sup> These five items are found in the first five aspects of Confucianism, except that the third, to advise them, is discussed in another *sūtra*. Of course, we have to admit that the Confucian description of filial piety has more detail than the Buddhist, because filial piety is the foundation of the entire Confucian teaching.

Both Buddhism and Confucianism advocate the practice of advising parents as a way of repaying one's debts to them, but how to advise them is different in these two schools of thought. According to Confucianism, when advising parents, a son should do it gently with utmost respect. However if the parents do not listen, the son should not be resentful. Thus the *Lunyu* says,

The Master said, "In serving your parents you may gently remonstrate with them. However, once it becomes apparent that they have not taken your criticism to heart you should be respectful and not oppose them, and follow their lead diligently without resentment."  
(*Lunyu* 4.18)

It is however the positive duty of a son to advise his parents. The *Xiaojing* clearly states this point when it says that Zengzi asked Confucius, "I would presume to ask whether children can be deemed filial simply by obeying every command of their father." Confucius angrily said,

What on earth are you saying? What on earth are you saying? Of old, an Emperor had seven ministers who would remonstrate with him, so even if he had no vision of the proper way (*dao*), he still did not

---

<sup>25</sup>D iii 189. There are five Chinese translations of the *Sigālovāda Sūtra* but only four are extant : (1) An Shigao's independent translation in 148-170 found in T1, no.16, (2) Zhi Fadu's independent translation in 301 found in T1, no.17, (3) Gautama Saṅghadeva's translation found in the *Madhyamāgama* [T2, no.26(135)] in 397-8, and (4) Buddhayaśas's and Zhu Fonian's translation found in the *Dirghāgama* [T1, no.1 (16)] in 413. The five ways a son should minister to his parents are found in all the four extant versions of the *sutta*, although there are some differences in wording as they were translated by different people at different times.

lose the empire. The high nobles had five ministers who would remonstrate with them, so even if they had no vision of the proper way (*dao*), they still did not lose their states. The high officials had three ministers who would remonstrate with them, so even if they had no vision of the proper way (*dao*), they still did not lose their clans. If the lower officials had just one friend who would remonstrate with them, they were still able to preserve their good names (*ming*); if a father has a son who will remonstrate with him, he will not behave reprehensively (*buyi*). Thus, if confronted by reprehensible behavior on his father's part, a son has no choice but to remonstrate with his father, and if confronted by reprehensible behavior on his ruler's part, a minister has no choice but to remonstrate with his ruler. Hence, remonstrance is the only response to immorality. How could simply obeying the commands of one's father be deemed filial? (*Xiaojing* 15)

Here it is quite clear that if one does not advise one's parents if they are liable to do some wrong, it is like making them unrighteous and is considered unfilial. So according to the *Liji*, Confucius said, "To obey (his parents') commands without angry (complaint); to remonstrate with them gently without being weary; and not to murmur against them, though they punish him, may be pronounced filial piety. It is said in the *Book of Poetry* (III, ii, ode 3, 5), 'Your filial son was unceasing in his service.'" (*Liji* 30.18)

The method and attitude to parents in advising them is discussed in the *Dadai Liji* in detail.

Dan Juli asks Zengzi, "Is there a method in service to parents?" Zengzi said, "Yes, love and respect. If the conduct of parents follows the course of moderation, then one should follow them; if not, then one advises them; if the advice is not taken, one should act on their behalf. If one [blindly] follows one's parents without advice or remonstrance, that is not filial piety, but if one only remonstrates but does not follow their orders, that too is not filial piety. The remonstrance of a filial son should aim for good without disputes and quarrels; if a dispute takes place, it will cause chaos. [If a son thinks that] due to his advice his parents become faultless, there is peace, but [if a son thinks that] due to his advice his parents become sages there will be

chaos. A filial son does not have private happiness, he worries about his parents' concerns and enjoys his parents' happiness. If a filial son skillfully changes [his ways of offering advice], his parents become peaceful. If one sits solemnly as if in a sacrificing ceremony, stands straight as if sacrificing grain, does not speak without enquiry, and only speaks according to one's parents' wishes, this makes one a man of good behavior, but it is not the way a man's son should be. (*Dadai Liji* 12.1)

If a parent has a fault, (the son) should with bated breath, and bland aspect, and gentle voice, admonish him. If the admonition does not take effect, he will be the more reverential and the more filial; and when the father seems pleased, he will repeat the admonition. If he should be displeased with this, rather than allow him to commit an offence against anyone in the neighborhood or countryside, (the son) should strongly remonstrate. If the parent be angry and (more) displeased, and beat him till the blood flows, he should not presume to be angry and resentful, but be (still) more reverential and more filial. (*Liji* 12.18)

In the service of his parents a son, if he has thrice remonstrated and is still not listened to, should follow (his remonstrances) with loud crying and tears. (*Liji* 2.113)

The remonstration or advice of a son to his father is described in the *Liji* in detail with more regulations. For instance, a son should advise his parents humbly with a soft voice and pleasant appearance. If his parents are not happy and beat him till he bleeds, a son should not be resentful, but increase his respect and reverence. In advising, one should not dispute with parents, otherwise it is the start of chaos. If parents do not take the advice, one should reflect on how one is offering it to see if there is any shortcoming. This kind of advice should be offered only three times; if the parents still do not listen, then one should listen to one's parents.

What the *Mengzi* says on remonstration is a continuation of what is said in the *Lunyu*:

Not to complain about a major wrong committed by one's parent is to feel insufficient concern; on the other hand, to complain about a

minor wrong is to react too violently. Insufficient concern and too violent a reaction are both actions of a bad son. (*Mengzi* 12.23)<sup>26</sup>

Buddhism has a similar teaching on advising parents to do good deeds. It says in the *Kataññu Sutta* of the *Aṅguttaranikāya*, mentioned above:

Moreover, monks, whoso incite his unbelieving parents, settles and establishes them in the faith; whoso incite his immoral parents, settles and establishes them in morality; whoso incite his stingy parents, settles and establishes them in liberality; whoso incite his foolish parents, settles and establishes them in wisdom, – such an one, just by so doing, does repay, does more than repay what is due to his parents.<sup>27</sup>

These four ways of advising parents are discussed in detail in the *Vyagghapajja Sutta*:

Four conditions, Vyagghapajja, conduce to a householder's weal and happiness in his future life. Which four?

The accomplishment of faith, the accomplishment of virtue, the accomplishment of charity and the accomplishment of wisdom.

What is the accomplishment of faith?

Herein a householder is possessed of faith, he believes in the Enlightenment of the Perfect One (Tathāgata): Thus, indeed, is that Blessed One: he is the pure one, fully enlightened, endowed with knowledge and conduct, well-gone, the knower of worlds, the incomparable leader of men to be tamed, the teacher of gods and men, all-knowing and blessed. This is called the accomplishment of faith.

What is the accomplishment of virtue?

Herein a householder abstains from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and from intoxicants that cause infatuation and heedlessness. This is called the accomplishment of virtue.

<sup>26</sup>Translation adapted from Lau: 267.

<sup>27</sup>A i 61. *The Book of Gradual Sayings*, i 115. We find the four ways of repaying parents' debts in the *Ashuda Jing* (To2, 863b), Xuanzang's translation of the *Benshi Jing* (T17, 682c), Yijing's translation of the *Mūlasarvāstivādinaya* (T23, no.1442, 642b) and the *Mūlasarvāstivādinaya Baisaja* (T24, no.1448, 16a).

What is the accomplishment of charity?

Herein a householder dwells at home with heart free from the stain of avarice, devoted to charity, open-handed, delighting in generosity, attending to the needy, delighting in the distribution of alms. This is called the accomplishment of charity.

What is the accomplishment of wisdom?

Herein a householder is wise: he is endowed with wisdom that understands the arising and cessation (of the five aggregates of existence); he is possessed of the noble penetrating insight that leads to the destruction of suffering. This is called the accomplishment of wisdom.<sup>28</sup>

According to this *sutta*, if one can advise one's parents in these four ways in a skillful manner, parents will obtain a good life in this world as well as in the world beyond. This is what Buddhists consider the best way of repaying one's debt to one's parents. The *Benshi Jing* translated by Xuanzang also contains a version of this short *sūtra* in which the manner of advising parents is described as skillfully advising and comforting them by way of example and praising good deeds.<sup>29</sup>

The difference between Buddhism and Confucianism in advising parents is that Buddhism emphasizes advising parents to do more good deeds, for instance to observe the five precepts and to make offerings, while Confucianism emphasizes the ways in which to offer the advice. This is due to deeper differences. According to the Buddhist teaching of karma, it is only when parents perform good deeds that they can enjoy the fruits in this world and the next. But according to Confucian tradition respect is the priority, so the manner of advising becomes of paramount importance: respectful ways make them happy, while bad ways make them unhappy.

Besides, the Buddhist way of advising is more active and positive while the Confucian way is more passive. According to the Buddhist teaching, one should advise one's parents to do good deeds in their daily life while they are healthy and active so that they can enjoy the fruits of their actions both in this life and the

---

<sup>28</sup>A iv. 279. *The Book of Gradual Sayings*, iv 187-188. The counterpart of this *sutta* is found in the Chinese *Samyuktāgama*, T2, No.99 (91) 23b-c and also the shorter version of the Chinese *Samyuktāgama*, T2, no.100 (91).

<sup>29</sup>T17, no.765, 682c.

world beyond. But according to Confucian teaching, it is only when parents are liable to make mistakes that one should advise them.

Confucianism has two more items in the practice of filial piety: keeping one's body intact and having posterity. These two items are not discussed in the Buddhist scriptures because its ideology is different. If we understand "keeping one's body intact" as not harming one's physical body, Buddhism advocates the same thing, but for reasons which have nothing to do with filial piety. Buddhists hold that the physical body should always be maintained in good health as it is an important instrument for a Buddhist to practise the Dharma and to fulfill life's goal. However, Buddhism does not consider the physical body as something sacred, in as much as it is the gift of one's parents, as do Confucians. The *Sīhanādasutta* of the *Aṅguttaranikāya* even states, "Even so, lord, I carry around this body of mine, full of holes and slits, oozing, dripping."<sup>30</sup> Hence a Buddhist is allowed to sacrifice his own body to perform a bodhisattva act of saving other sentient beings. In the Buddhist birth stories, we read that in past lives Śākyamuni as a bodhisattva offered his limbs to others and even sacrificed his life for others.

According to the Buddhist teaching of karma, the moral thought is a wholly individual responsibility, so it always speaks of actions and their consequences for an individual. But Confucian moral thought is a family responsibility, so it always talks about the relationship of father and son. Therefore, according to the Buddhist teaching of karma, one can only reap the fruits of one's own deeds, whether good or bad. Children can never do so on behalf of parents. As a result, having posterity has no direct effect on one's parents, but advising them to do good is more beneficial. The idea of having posterity is no part of Buddhist moral thought because it does not concern one's parents and their welfare does not depend on their grandchildren.

## 2) Filial piety as the highest norm versus karma

Confucianism considers filial piety as the highest norm to be followed by all members of society, while Buddhism considers karma as the basis of ethics, although it also teaches filial piety as the most important ethical conduct. This is because the core teaching of Confucianism is morality which is centred on the family, and filial piety is the foundation of family morality. Otherwise the family will have

---

<sup>30</sup>A iv 375. The translation is adapted from E.M. Hare, PTS iv, 251. This is also referred to in the *Milindapañha*, 74. It is also found in the Chinese translation of the *Madhyamāgama*, T1, no.26, 453c5; the *Ekottarāgama*, T2, no.125, 713a27-28; the *Nāgasena Bhikṣu Sūtra*, T32, no.167ob, 70ob.

no foundation. Therefore in Confucianism it is from filial piety that all moral teaching grows. So filial piety became “the constant (method) of Heaven, the righteousness of Earth.” The *Xiaojing* says,

It is family reverence (*xiao*),” said the Master, “that is the root of excellence, and whence education (*jiao*) itself is born. (*Xiaojing* 1)

Zengzi said, “May I presume to ask if there is anything in the excellence (*de*) of the sages that surpasses family reverence?” The Master replied, “Of all the creatures in the world, the human being is the most noble. In human conduct there is nothing more important than family reverence.” (*Xiaojing* 9)

Indeed, family reverence is the constancy of the heavenly cycles, the appropriate responsiveness (*yi*) of the earth, and the proper conduct of the people. (*Xiaojing* 7)

Some modern scholars consider that Ren 仁 (benevolent action or virtue) is the highest form of Confucian morality. But when we examine the concept of Ren in early Confucian texts, we find that the concept of Ren is wider than filial piety but it includes filial piety. The highest form as well as the root of Ren is filial piety. In the *Lunyu*, it is said that You Ruo, the disciple of Confucius said, “Filial piety and fraternal submission, are they not the root of all benevolent actions [Ren]?” (*Lunyu* 1.2) Confucius also said, “When those who are in high stations perform well all their duties to their relations, the people are aroused to virtue [Ren].” (*Lunyu* 8.2) “A youth, when at home, should be filial, and, abroad, respectful to his elders. He should be earnest and truthful. He should overflow in love to all, and cultivate the friendship of the good [Ren].” (*Lunyu* 1.6) “Benevolence [Ren] is the characteristic element of humanity, and the great exercise of it is in loving parents.” (*Liji* 31.19) The *Mengzi* had a similar thought and repeatedly emphasizes that “Loving one’s parents is benevolence [Ren]; respecting one’s elders is rightness.” (*Mengzi* 13.15)<sup>31</sup> “The content of benevolence [Ren] is the serving of one’s parents; the content of dutifulness is obedience to one’s elder brothers.” (*Mengzi* 7.27)<sup>32</sup> From the above quotations, it is clear that filial piety is the root of Ren and Ren has filial piety as the highest form. It is only when a person loves his parents that he can extend this love to other people.

<sup>31</sup>Translation adapted from Lau 291-293. Pinyin added by the writer.

<sup>32</sup>Translation adapted from Lau 169. Pinyin added by the writer.



Because filial piety is the highest form of Ren in Confucian ethics, Confucianism had the thought of mutual covering up by father and son. This idea further developed to the extent that revenge out of filial piety was allowed by law but revenge for other reasons was prohibited by law. In ordinary society the former is not condemned but highly praised.<sup>33</sup> In Chinese history, there were people who killed other people to avenge their fathers but were pardoned by the emperors. We shall return to this issue later.

In the Tang dynasty Zongmi (780-841) thought that “filial piety is the foundation of both Buddhism and Confucianism”.<sup>34</sup> Zongmi found support for his assertion in the saying that “Filial piety is called precepts and also called restraint” in the *Fanwang Jing* (Sūtra of Brahma Net), which is considered as a text for Bodhisattva precepts.<sup>35</sup> However, the *Fanwang Jing* itself is a controversial text, as some scholars think that it is apocryphal.<sup>36</sup> Even if the text is a translation from a scripture transmitted from India, the above saying must be an interpolation, as it is out of place. I have discussed this issue in another paper already so I will not discuss it here.<sup>37</sup> Looking at it from a historical perspective, Zongmi’s interpretation shows his way of reconciling Buddhism and Confucianism, as he advocated a comprehensive understanding of the two religions.

Although morality is the foundation of Buddhism, its practice and cultivation consist of three steps: morality, concentration and wisdom. It is quite clear that morality comes first. Morality includes all kinds of codes of practice such as the five precepts, ten virtues, and filial piety, but karma is the foundation of Buddhist

---

<sup>33</sup>Please see Wang Rupeng and Jian Wumin, “Filial Piety and Revenge — the Relations between Morals and Legal System in the Han Dynasty.”

<sup>34</sup>Zongmi’s commentary on the *Ullambana Sūtra*, T39, no.1792, 505b.

<sup>35</sup>T24, no.1484, 1004a25. See “‘Filial Piety is called Precepts’: Chinese Development on the Buddhist Concept of Filial Piety”, Zong Xing and Dao Jian edd. *Fojiao yu Zhongguo Chuantongwenhua: Yang Zangwen xiansheng qishi zhi shoujing jinian lunwenji* (Buddhism and Chinese Traditional Culture: Celebration of Professor Yang Zengwen’s Seventy Years Birthday). Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2009, 807-825.

<sup>36</sup>The authenticity of the text has been questioned since ancient times. But in the last century many Japanese and Chinese scholars such as Mochizuki Shinkō 望月信亨, Hodo Ono 大野法道, Tang Yongtong 湯用彤 etc. Modern scholars such Wang Jianguang all consider that the text is apocryphal. See WUT Tai Shing, “An Examination on the Factuality of Fang-wang Jing: From the Study of Ancient Classic and Archive”, *Universal Gate Buddhist Journal*, Vol.38 (2007), 177-198.

<sup>37</sup>See “Filial Piety in Early Buddhism”, *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, (edd. Damien Keown and Charles S. Prebish), Volume 12, 2005, pp.82-106. Journal URL: <http://blogs.dickinson.edu/budhistethics/files/2010/04/xing1228.pdf>.

ethics. The *Dhanañjanisutta* of the *Majjhimanikāya* tells us that one experiences the result of doing evil karma even if he has done it for the sake of his parents.

What do you think, Dhanañjani? Suppose someone here were to behave contrary to the Dhamma, to behave unrighteously for the sake of his parents, and then because of such behavior the wardens of hell were to drag him off to hell. Would he be able [to free himself by pleading thus]: “It was for the sake of my parents that I behaved contrary to the Dhamma, that I behaved unrighteously, so let not the wardens of hell [drag me off] to hell”? Or would his parents be able [to free him by pleading thus]: “It was for our sake that he behaved contrary to the Dhamma, that he behaved unrighteously, so let not the wardens of hell [drag him off] to hell”?

No, Master Sāriputta. Even while he was crying out, the wardens of hell would fling him into hell.<sup>38</sup>

So karma is the foundation of Buddhist morality, although filial piety is an important ethical teaching.

### 3) Filial piety as a one way duty versus a reciprocal way

Confucianism only emphasizes the duty of children towards parents, while Buddhism teaches reciprocity.

In Confucianism there is little or no discussion of the responsibility and service of parents to their children. In other words, the rights of children have not been recognized, so filial piety is one way. Of course, one can argue that the natural feeling and love of parents towards their children are always there, so there is no need to say more.

The teaching of filial piety and the exercise of parental authority to filial piety have been shown to be correlated with children’s rigidity and a lack of cognitive complexity, which is not healthy. A lifetime of accepting the authority of one’s parents leads to both children and adults who are inhibited when it comes to expressing their own opinions, let alone dissent, and this leads to resentment towards parents and bottling up of frustrations. Authoritarianism, as a result, creates rigidity, because people cannot express themselves. Its final result is to stifle

---

<sup>38</sup>M ii 186-7. English translation from Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi (1995) 792. This is also found in the Chinese translation of the *Madhyamāgama*, T1, no.26, 456c-457a.

creativity; it leads to conservatism in a society, and conformism on the individual level.

Unlike Confucianism, Buddhism emphasizes reciprocity in relations between parents and children. Children have the responsibility to support and respect their parents, and at the same time they are entitled to good education, inheritance of the family wealth, etc. So both parents and children have to respect each other and benefit from one another. The *Sigālovāda Sutta* teaches that children serve parents in five ways and parents should also care for children in five ways.

And there are five ways in which the parents, so ministered to by their son as the eastern direction, will reciprocate: they will restrain him from evil, support him in doing good, teach him some skill, find him a suitable wife and, in due time, hand over his inheritance to him. In this way the eastern direction is covered, making it at peace and free from fear.<sup>39</sup>

This scripture is found in both the Southern tradition of Pali literature and the Northern tradition of the Chinese translation of the *Śṛgālavāda Sūtra*. The emphasis on reciprocity is found in all the versions.

#### 4) The power of the father and the virtue of the mother

Confucianism emphasises the power of the father, while Buddhism talks more of the mother's virtues.

The father's power is emphasized in Confucianism and children have to respect and obey their father's orders. But there is little said about respect for the mother. The *Xiaojing* has Confucius say:

In human conduct there is nothing more important than family reverence; in family reverence there is nothing more important than venerating one's father; in venerating one's father there is nothing more important than placing him on a par with heaven (tian). And the Duke of Zhou was able to do this." (*Xiaojing* 9)

The lower officials drawing upon their devotion to their fathers to serve their mothers, the love (*ai*) they feel toward them is the same;

---

<sup>39</sup>D iii 190. English translation adapted from Maurice Walshe (1995) 467. The same is also found in the four extant versions of this *sūtra* in Chinese translation. See footnote 19 above.

drawing upon their devotion to their fathers to serve their lord, the respect (*jing*) they feel for them is the same. While to their mothers love is rendered and to their lord respect is shown, it is only in service to their fathers that both love and respect combine.

Hence, service to the lord with family reverence is loyalty (*zhong*); service to elders with family reverence is compliance (*shun*). With loyalty and compliance being firmly in place in service to those above, they are able to maintain their tenure in office and to continue their ancestral sacrifices. Such, then, is the family reverence of the lower officials. (*Xiaojing* 5)

So the father is to have both “love” and “reverence”, but the mother more love than reverence. The *Liji* for instance tells us That Confucius said, “Therefore a son of all-comprehensive virtue serves his parents as he serves Heaven, and serves Heaven as he serves his parents.’ Hence a filial son does all that can be done for his person.” (*Liji* 27.13) Here service to heaven is reverence. So Confucianism emphasizes the father’s power.

Confucian filial piety has been developed with emphasis on the father’s power. First, in the Han dynasty, Dong Zhongshu advanced the “three bonds and five virtues”; the relationship between father and son became a bond (*gang*). Dong described “the bond between father and son” as “the Father is the heaven of his son”. Here the father is considered superior and the son should obey his father’s orders. This idea has been developed and explained in the *Baihutong* (Comprehensive Discussions of the White Tiger Hall): “What is the relation between father and son? The father is the model with which he teaches his son, and the son is thus free from the consequence of sin.”<sup>40</sup> Thus, the relationship between father and son changed from a natural love to a power relationship. Confucian filial piety came to mean irrational and total obedience of a son to his father, culminating in such dicta as “If the emperor wishes his ministers to die, they must die, and if the father wishes his son to die, he must die too.”

By contrast, Buddhism emphasizes the great compassion and virtue of parents, especially the mother’s virtue. This is clear from the early Buddhist scriptures.

---

<sup>40</sup> Cited from *Baihutong Shuzheng*, 376.

The *Samyuttanikāya* says, “A mother is the friend of one’s own home.”<sup>41</sup> The shorter version of the Chinese translation of the *Samyuktāgama* says, “In one’s home, the mother is the dearest parent.”<sup>42</sup> In the Pāli language, mother is always placed before father (*mātā-pitaro*) whenever parents are mentioned. People are also named after their mother, such as Sāriputta, which means the son of Sāri. According to the *Dictionary of Pali Proper Names*, Sāriputta’s father was a Brahmin named Vanganta and his mother Rūpasāri. It was because of his mother’s name that he came to be called Sāriputta.<sup>43</sup>

The Mahāyāna version of the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* translated into Chinese by Dharmakṣema in 421 also speaks of the mother’s virtue.

It is like the child who gradually grows up and thinks: “This is the doctor, who knows best about prescriptions and medicines. When I was still in the womb, he gave my mother medicine. As a consequence of this, she was in peace, and by reason of these circumstantial factors, I was out of danger. Oh, how dreadful that my mother had to undergo great pain. For ten months she guarded and carried me. After my birth, she took care that I should not be too dry or too damp, and saw to my excretions; she gave me milk and fed me. For all of this, I must pay her back what I owe her, see to her feelings, be obedient to her and serve her.”<sup>44</sup>

Here a mother’s pain and difficulty in giving birth to and bringing up her child are specially mentioned. The *Dacheng bensheng xindi guan jing*, translated by Prajñā in 790, has a chapter on filial piety and at the end it summarizes a mother’s virtues as ten.

Because of this, a mother has ten virtues: first, the virtue of the great earth, as the mother carries her child in her womb; second, giving birth, as the mother undergoes great pain in giving birth; third, the virtue of care, as the mother takes great care of the child with her own hands; fourth, the virtue of bringing up, as the mother provides for

---

<sup>41</sup>S i 37.

<sup>42</sup>T2, no.100, 427b.

<sup>43</sup>See the entry “Sāriputta” in the *Dictionary of Pali Proper Names*. The *Ratnaketudhāraṇīsūtra* translated into Chinese by Prabhāmitra in 629-630 says, “Upātissa says, ‘Tissa is my father’s name and Sāri is my mother’s name, I am named after my mother, so called Sāriputta.’” T13, no.402, 538c.

<sup>44</sup>T12, no.374, 419c21-24.

her child the things according to the seasons; fifth, the virtue of wisdom, as the mother skillfully cares for her child with wisdom; sixth, the virtue of ornaments, as the mother decorates her child with beautiful ornaments; seventh, the virtue of refuge, as the mother protects her child with her arms; eighth, the virtue of teaching, as the mother guides her child skillfully; ninth, the virtue of advice, as the mother with skillful words advises her child against bad deeds, and tenth, the virtue of inheritance, as the mother entrusts her child with the family profession.<sup>45</sup>

The Chinese Buddhists composed the well known *Fumu Enzhong Jing* (Sutra on the Great Kindness of Parents) by absorbing the ideas and thoughts discussed in the above texts, and recast An Shigao's translation of *Fumuen nanbao jing* (Sutra on the Difficulties of Repaying the Kindness of Parents). This apocryphal text is found in the eighty-fifth volume of the Taisho edition of the Buddhist Tripitaka. It focuses on the description of the ten virtues of a mother. Later there were many revisions and additions and it became one of the most popular Buddhist texts in Chinese society.<sup>46</sup>

#### 4. Three Special Aspects in Confucian Filial Piety

There are three special features of the Confucian concept of filial piety which are not found in Buddhism. The first is the strong political implication, the second is concealment and the third is avenging one's parents.

##### 1) Strong political implication

Confucian filial piety has a strong political implication. When filial piety is applied to rulers it is called loyalty. The *Xiaojing* has a special chapter on "Filial Piety in Government" which discusses the connection between filial piety and politics and emphasizes its political function and operation.

---

<sup>45</sup>T3, no.158, 297b23-c2. The Tang dynasty Pure Land master Fazhao composed an essay entitled *Fumu enzhong zhanwen* (Essay on parents' great kindness) to praise a mother's virtue. T47, no.1983, 490a.

<sup>46</sup>Please see Cheng Acai (2003). According to this scholar, sixty hand copies of the *Fumu Enzhong Jing* have been found in Dunhuang.

The Master said, “Of old when the enlightened (*ming*) kings used family reverence to bring proper order to the empire, they would not presume to neglect the ministers of the smallest state, how much less so the dukes, earls, and other members of the high nobility. Thus all of the different vassal states participated wholeheartedly in their service to these former kings. Those who would bring proper order to the vassal states would not presume to ignore the most dispossessed, how much less so the lower officials and common people. Thus the various families all participated wholeheartedly in their service to these former lords. Those who would bring proper order to the various families would not presume to overlook their servants and concubines, how much less so their wives and children. Thus all of the people participated wholeheartedly in their service to their parents. In such a world, the parents while living enjoyed the comforts that parents deserve, and as spirits after death took pleasure in the sacrificial offerings made to them. Hence, the empire was peaceful (*he*) and free of strife, natural disasters did not occur, and man-made calamities were averted. In this way the enlightened kings used family reverence to bring proper order to the empire.” The Book of Songs says, “So admirable is the excellence (*de*) of his conduct that all of the states in the four quarters repair (*shun*) to him.” (*Xiaojing* 8)

According to this, “all under heaven peace and harmony may prevail, disasters and calamities will not occur, misfortunes and rebellions may not arise” if the state has been ruled by kings with filial piety. This is because filial piety is the root of *ren* 仁 (benevolence), and if *ren* is established the great Way may prevail. According to the *Lunyu*,

Master You said, “A young person who is filial and respectful of his elders rarely becomes the kind of person who is inclined to defy his superiors, and there has never been a case of one who is disinclined to defy his superiors stirring up rebellion. The gentleman applies himself to the roots. ‘Once the roots are firmly established, the Way will grow.’ Might we not say that filial piety and respect for elders constitute the root of Goodness?” (*Lunyu* 1.2)

So filial piety is the root of benevolence (*ren*) and filial piety should start with the rulers, and it is only if the rulers respect their parents that other people will follow and no one will disrespect his/her parents. So the *Xiaojing* says, “With love and respect being fully expressed in this service to parents, such conduct will educate and transform (*dejiao*) the common people, serving as exemplary in all corners of the world. Such, then, is the family reverence of the Emperor.” (*Xiaojing* 2) It is in such a way that the entire world becomes peaceful. As for the ministers,

Hence, service to the lord with family reverence is loyalty (*zhong*); service to elders with family reverence is compliance (*shun*). With loyalty and compliance being firmly in place in service to those above, they are able to maintain their tenure in office and to continue their ancestral sacrifices. Such, then, is the family reverence of the lower officials. (*Xiaojing* 5)

Therefore, according to Confucianism, “There is a fundamental agreement between a loyal subject in his service to his ruler and a filial son in his service to his parents.” (*Liji* 25.2) According to the *Xiaojing*, Confucius said,

It is only because exemplary persons (*junzi*) serve their parents with family reverence that this same feeling can be extended to their lord as loyalty (*zhong*). It is only because they serve their elder brothers with deference (*ti*) that this same feeling can be extended to all elders as compliance (*shun*). And it is only because they maintain a proper home life that this same sense of organization can be extended as proper order to the offices of government. Thus, when one is successful in what one does at home, a name (*ming*) is established that will be passed on to posterity. (*Xiaojing* 14)

This is why from the Han dynasty onwards, many emperors themselves either explained or wrote commentaries on the *Xiaojing*, because filial piety is closely linked with loyalty. In fact, Confucian scholars argued that filial piety and loyalty are interrelated. Emperor Xiao Wudi of Liu Song (420-479) and Emperor Wudi of Liang explained the *Xiaojing* and Emperor Xuanzhong of Tang wrote a commentary to the *Xiaojing*. As Lo Yuet Keung points out in his paper “On the Dearth of Filial Daughters in Pre-Tang China”, the *Xiaojing* is basically for politic purposes because it divides filial piety into five categories according to social status: the son



of the heaven, the princes of states, high ministers and great officials, inferior officials, and common people. The practice of filial piety in each of these categories is different.<sup>47</sup> So we may say that filial piety has already been developed from the natural feeling of a person and the relationship between parents and children as discussed in the *Lunyu* to a political tool for the service of rulers in the *Xiaoqing*. Therefore, there appeared the theory of “ruling the state with filial piety” in the Han dynasty and it continued into the Northern and Southern dynasties.

The Buddhist concept of filial piety is simply the relationship between parents and children and there is no political involvement at all.

## 2) Mutual covering up by father and son

Confucius spoke of father and son covering up for each other. This is because Confucian ethics centres upon family morality and in family morality filial piety is the core. If parents and children report each other’s misconduct to government officials then filial piety will collapse, and family morality will lose its foundation. When a family is not at peace the entire society is not at peace, because families are the building blocks of a society. Therefore, according to the *Lunyu*, Confucius said, “Among my people, those whom we consider ‘upright’ are different from this: fathers cover up for their sons, and sons cover up for their fathers. ‘Uprightness’ is to be found in this.” (*Lunyu* 13.18) The *Mengzi* also says,

The way lies at hand yet it is sought afar; the thing lies in the easy yet it is sought in the difficult. If only everyone loved his parents and treated his elders with deference, the Empire would be at peace. (*Mengzi* 7.11)<sup>48</sup>

The *Mengzi* states quite clearly that it is only when filial piety exists in a family that peace may prevail in the world.

Some modern scholars criticize Confucius for urging that father and son cover up for each other, calling it corruption and putting blood relations above the law.<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup>Lo (2004), 298-299.

<sup>48</sup>Translation is adapted from Lau: 161.

<sup>49</sup>See Liu Qingping’s four papers in Chinese: (1) “Confucian Ethics: Rational Morality or Blood Relation Morality?” *History of Chinese Philosophy*, 1999, No.3; (2) “On the Blood Relation Features of the Philosophy of Confucius and Mengzi” *Philosophy Gate*, edited by Department of Philosophy Peking University, Vol.1, No.1; “Virtue or Corruption? – An Analysis of two cases about Song in the *Mencius*” *Philosophical Studies*, Vol. 2, 2002; and “Unlimited Benevolence – On the Absurdity in the Philosophy of Confucius and Mencius” *Critics in Philosophy*, Vol.1, 2002.

But we cannot isolate the above saying when we discuss its implications, because the *Lunyu* and other Confucian classics such as *Xiaojing*, the books that contain the master's sayings, do not provide us with the context in which the master spoke. So we are liable to make mistakes. We have to examine Confucius' sayings in their context to gain a better understanding.

Concerning the relationship between father and son, there is another important factor. As we have shown above, Confucius spoke of a son's duty to advise and even remonstrate with his parents, not merely always to obey without question. From this it is clear that Confucius emphasized that a son should remonstrate with his parents before saying anything false. But our quotation from *Xiaojing* 15 showed that when parents persist in what is wrong, Confucius emphasized harmony and unity within a family, which means that father and son should conceal each other's wrongdoings, for this will preserve family harmony, which is good for society as a whole.

In Buddhist ethics, covering up by father and son is meaningless, because even if they can escape the punishment of civil law, they cannot escape the law of karma.

### 3) Avenging Parents

Confucianism considers filial piety as the root of virtue and basis of education, so filial piety becomes the constancy of the heavenly cycles, the appropriate responsiveness of the earth, and the proper conduct of the people. In the practice of filial piety the father is the centre, as the *Xiaojing* says that in human conduct there is nothing more important than filial piety, and in filial piety there is nothing more important than venerating one's father. Thus Confucianism strengthened the idea of avenging father and mother with its emphasis on filial piety. The *Lunyu* says, "Someone asked, 'What do you think of the saying, 'Requite injury with kindness (*de* 德)''? The Master replied, 'With what, then, would one requite kindness? Requite injury with uprightness, and kindness with kindness.'" (*Lunyu*: 14.34) The *Liji* also says, "With the enemy who has slain his father, one should not live under the same heaven." (*Liji*: 1:70) Zheng Xuan of the Han dynasty explained the above sentence as "His father is the heaven for the son. The son would not be a filial son if he lives under the same heaven with the person who kills his father. So the son should kill that person, and then it stops." Kong Yingda of the Tang dynasty further explained: "Father is the heaven of the son, and if one's father is killed, it is

the killing of the heaven, so one must take revenge to kill that person, as the son cannot live under the same heaven with the killer.”<sup>50</sup> The *Liji* again says,

Zixia asked Confucius, saying, ‘How should (a son) conduct himself with reference to the man who has killed his father or mother?’ The Master said, ‘He should sleep on straw, with his shield for a pillow; he should not take office; he must be determined not to live with the slayer under the same heaven. If he meets with him in the market-place or the court, he should not have to go back for his weapon, but (instantly) fight with him. (*Liji*: 3.53)

Kong Yingda of the Tang dynasty further explained: “ ‘He should not have to go back for his weapon’ means that he should always bring his weapon with him, so even if he meets the killer in a market place he need not go back and find his weapon, but fights on the spot.”<sup>51</sup> It is quite clear that one should avenge one’s parents and be prepared to fight at any time. The *Dadai Liji* also says, “One should not live in (the same world) together with the killer of one’s parents.” (13.6) All this evidence shows that Confucianism supports the idea of avenging one’s parents, as it is part of filial practice. Although the *Mengzi* says,

Only now do I realize how serious it is to kill a member of the family of another man. If you killed his father, he would kill your father; if you kill his elder brother, he would kill your elder brother. This being the case, though you may not have killed your father and brother with your own hands, it is but one step removed. (14.7)<sup>52</sup>

But, it was very common to avenge parents and blood relatives in the Han dynasty, as Confucian thought occupied the central place and the Confucian idea of “ruling the state by using filial piety” was implemented.

There is no such idea of revenge in Buddhism, as it contradicts the basic Buddhist principle. The Buddhist idea is to overcome hatred by compassion and loving kindness, as the verse in *Dhammapada* goes: “Hatred never ceases through hatred in this world. Through non-hatred alone does hatred cease. This is an eternal law.” (No.5)

<sup>50</sup> *Liji Zhengyi*: 84. The translation of both comments of Zheng Xuan and Kong Yingda is mine.

<sup>51</sup> *Liji Zhengyi*: 213. This translation is also mine.

<sup>52</sup> The translation adapted from Lau: 313.

## 5. Conclusion

We may come to a tentative conclusion that Confucianism considers filial piety as the highest norm and standard of ethics and as the constant (method) of Heaven, the righteousness of Earth. But karma is the foundation of Buddhist ethics, although filial piety is considered an important moral principle. Therefore, the Confucian analysis of filial piety is far more detailed than that of Buddhism. Just as Confucian scholars point out that the purpose of Confucian ethics is to build family and nation together, so the purpose of Confucian filial piety is to extend the family ethic to the society and state. Therefore the *Lunyu* says,

The *Book of Documents* says, ‘Filial, oh so filial; friendly to one’s elders and juniors; [in this way] exerting an influence upon those who govern.’ Thus, in being a filial son and good brother one is already taking part in government. What need is there, then, to speak of ‘participating in government’? (*Lunyu* 2.21)

But the aim of Buddhist morality is individual personal cultivation so that one becomes a perfect person and finally attains *nirvāṇa*.

## References and Abbreviations

The primary sources are listed by title and the secondary sources are listed by author.

### Primary Sources

*Āṅguttaranikāya*, (abbr. A) vol. I & II (1995) ed. R. Morris, vol. III-V (1976, 1979) ed. E. Hardy. Oxford: Pali Text Society. Reprinted. English translation: *The Book of Gradual Sayings*, vol. I, II and V, translated by F. L. Woodward, vol. III & IV, translated by E. M. Hare. Oxford: PTS, reprinted 1995. *The Numerical Discourse of the Buddha, A Translation of the Āṅguttara Nikāya*, translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi. Boston: Wisdom Publication, 2012.

*Baihutong Shuzheng*, Commentary by Chen Li and edited by Wu Zheyu. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1994.

*Benshi jing* (T17, no. 765) translated by Xuanzang in 650.

CBETA DVD - Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association, 2011.

- Confucian Analects with Selections from Traditional Commentaries*. Translated by Edward Slingerland. Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2003.
- Dacheng bendi xindi guan jing* (T03, no. 159) translated by Prajñā in 790.
- Dharmaguptaka Vinaya* (T22, no. 1428) translated by Buddhayaśas and Zhu Fonian in 408.
- Dīghanikāya*, (abbr. D) Vol. I, II and III, edited by T.W. Rhys Davids and J.E. Carpenter. Oxford: the Pali Text Society, 1995. Reprint. English translation: *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīghanikāya* translated by Maurice Walshe, Boston: Wisdom Publication, 1995.
- Ekottarāgama* (T02, no. 125) translated by Gautama Saṅghadeva in 397.
- Fumuen nanbao jing* (T16, no. 684) (Sutra on the Difficulties of Repaying the Kindness of Parents) translated by An Shigao in second century.
- Liji*. Translated by James Legge. 1885. Sacred Books of the East, Vol. 28, part 4.
- Liji Zhengyi*. Annotated by Zheng Xuan of Han dynasty and further commented on by Kong Yingda of the Tang dynasty. Beijing: Beijing University Press, 1999.
- Madhyamāgama* (T01, no. 26) translated by Gautama Saṅghadeva in 398.
- Mahāsaṃghikavinaya* (T22, no. 1425) translated by Buddhahadra and Faxian in 416.
- Majjhimanikāya* (abbr. M) Vol. I (1993) edited by V. Trenckner, Vol. II and III (1994) edited by R. Chalmers. Oxford: the Pali Text Society. Reprint. English Translation: *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, translated by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi. Boston: Wisdom Publication 1995.
- Mencius*. Revised edition translated by D. C. Lau. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2003.
- Samyuktāgama* (T02, no. 99) translated by Guṇabhadra in 435-443.
- Samyuktāgama* (T02, no. 100) shorter version and the translator's name lost, registered under Qin dynasties (352-431).
- Samyuttanikāya*, (abbr. S) Vol. I (1999), II (1994), III (1975), IV (1990), V (1976), edited by L. Feer. Oxford: the Pali Text Society. Reprint. English translation: *The Connected Discourse of the Buddha: A Translation of the Samyuttanikāya*, translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi. Boston: Wisdom Publication, 2000.
- Sarvāstivādivinaya* (T23, no. 1435) translated by Vimalākṣa and Kumārajīva 413.
- Sarvāstivāda vinaya Mātrka* (T23, no. 1441) translated by Saṅghavarman in 435.
- Shijing: The Book of Poetry*, translated by Rongpei Wang. Hunan People's Publication House, 2008.
- Sigālovāda Sūtra* (T01, no. 16) first Chinese translation by An Shigao in second century, second translation *Sanshengzi Jing* (T01, no. 17) by Zhi Fadu in 301.

*Taisho Shinshu Daizokyo* (abbr. T) eds. Takakusu Junjiro and Watanabe Kaigyoku (Tokyo: Taisho Issaikyo Kanko kai, 1924-1932). (References to the Taisho Tripiṭaka are in the standard abbreviated form of T. [vol. no.] such as Vol. 52, no. 2102, 17a-c).

*The Chinese Classics of Family Reverence: A Philosophical Translation of the Xiaojing*. Translated by Henry Rosemount, Jr and Roger T. Ames. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009.

*Vinaya* (T24, no. 1464) translated by Zhu Fonian in 378.

*Vinayapitaka*, Vol.I-V, edited by H. Oldenberg. Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1995. Reprint. English translation: *The Book of the Discipline*, Vol.1-6, translated by I. B Horner, Oxford: Pali Text Society 1997. reprinted

*Xuzangjing*: The Shinsan Dainihon Zokuzokyo (abbr. X), Tokyo: Kokusho Kankokai, 1975-1989.

*Zhongyin jing* (T12, no. 385) translated by Zhu Fonian in 365-384.

## Secondary Sources

Bi, Lijun and Fred D'Agostino, (2004) “The doctrine of filial piety: a philosophical analysis of the concealment case” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, Volume 31, Number 4, 451-467(17).

Chen, Yifeng (2003), “Weijin nanbeichao shiqi rufo de xiaodao zhizheng” (The Argument on Filial Piety between Confucianist and Buddhist during Wei-Jin and Southern & Northern Dynasty”, *Nandu Xuetan* (Academic Forum of Dan Du), Vol.2, 23-27.

Cheng, Acai (2003), “*Fumu Enzhongjing* chuanbu de lishi kaocha” (A Study of the Historical Transmission of the Discourse on the *Fumu Enzhong Jing*) in Xiang Chu and Cheng Acai edited *Xinshiji Dunhuangxue Lunji* (A Collection of Papers on Dunhuang in the New Millennium), Chengdu: Bashu Shushe, 27-48.

Fazhao (Eighth Century) *Fumu enzhong zanwen* (Eulogy of the Great Debts to Parents) CBETA, T47, no. 1983, p. 490, a5-29.

Gu Qiyong (ed.) (2004) *Rujia Lunli Zhengmingji: yi Qinqinhuyin Weizhongxin* (Contention on Confucian Ethics: with a Focus on the Concealment of Parents and Sons), Wuhan: Hubei Education Publication.

Lin, An-hung (1992) *Rujia Xiaodao Sixiang Yanjiu* (A Study of Confucian Filial Piety Thought), Taipei: Wenjing.

Lo Yuet Keung (2004) “*Xiaojing* zhong siyouhuanwu de nuxing – jianlun tangyiqian de xiaonu hanjie de xianxiang” (On the Dearth of Filial Daughters in Pre-Tang

- China), *Zhongguo Wenzhe Yanjiu Jikan* (Journal of Chinese Culture and Philosophy), No.24, 293-330.
- Luo Chenglie (2003) *Zhongguo Gudai Xiaodao Zhiliao Xuanbian* (A Selection of Material on Filial Piety in Ancient Times), Jinan: Shandong University Publication.
- Michihata Ryoshu (1986) *Fojiao Yu Rujia Lunli* (Buddhism and Confucian Ethics), Chinese translation by Shi Huiyue. Taiwan: Huayu Publication.
- Ma Shaoqing (2006) “Gudao xiao dui sifa de yingxiang” (The Influence on the Judiciary of Xiao in Ancient China), *Journal of Liuzhou Teachers College*, V.21, No. 2, 122-124.
- Ma Yaping (1996) “Xiao de erchongxing jiqi shehui jiazhi” (The Dual Nature of Filial Piety and its Social Value), *Journal of the Southwest Nationalities College* (Philosophy and Social Science Edition), Vol. S6.
- Sun Xiusheng (1998) “Rushi xiaodaoshuo de bijiao yanjiu” (A comparative study of Confucian and Buddhist concepts of filial piety), *Dunhuang Research*, volume 4, 1-11.
- Wang Kaifu (2000) “Shanshengjing de lunli sixiang – jianlun rufo lunli sixiang de yitong” (Ethical Thought in the *Sigalovāda Sutta*: A Discussion on the Differences and Similarities of Confucian and Buddhist Ethical Thought), *Collected Papers of the Fourth Conference on Confucianism and Buddhism*. Taipei: Huafan University Department of Philosophy.
- Wang Rupeng and Jian Wumin (2004) “Xiao yu Fuchou: Handai daode yu fazhi de guanxi biaoqian” (Filial Piety and Revenge — the Relations between Morals and Legal System in the Han Dynasty), *Journal of Tonghua Teachers’ College*, Vol.25, No.1, 12-15.
- Xiao Qunzhong (2002) *Zhongguo Xaio Wenhua Yanjiu* (A Study of Chinese Filial Piety), Taiwan: Wunan Book Publication.
- Yuanzhao (Eleventh Century) *Yulanpen jing su xingji* (A New Sub Commentary on Zongmi’s Commentary on the *Ullambana Sūtra*), X21, No.372.
- Zhang Rupin (2001) “Lun rufo xiaodaoguan jiqi xianghu ronghe” (On the Confucian and Buddhist Concepts of Filial Piety and their Mutual Assimilation), *Tongji University Journal* (Social Science Edition), Vol. 6, 9-14, 37.
- Zhong Youlian (1977) *Rufo de Xiaodao Sixiang* (Filial Thought in Confucianism and Buddhism). Taipei: Fojiao Chubanshe.
- Zhu Lan (2003) *Zhongguo Chuantong Xiaodao de Lishi Kaocha* (A Historical Study of Chinese Traditional Filial Piety). Taiwan: Lantai Chubanshe.
- Zongmi (Ninth Century) *Yulanpen Jing Su* (A Commentary on the *Ullambana Sūtra*), T39, No.1792.