
Traditional Chinese Family: Meaning And Changes

The vast changes economically and politically, it has led to a range of adaptations in the Chinese family unit. The changes within families has been in an attempt to upkeep with societal changes and ensure the best outcome for all family members involved. The laws and regulations have shifted greatly especially in the wake of the one-child policy and the gendered preference of male children. Additionally, there has been more emphasis put on sacrifices made for children's future, replacing the previous emphasis on making sacrifices for one's ancestors. By examining the experience of families via ethnographic readings, it can be noted how these changes have been in response to temporospatial occurrences. The readings highlight the development of intergenerational intimacy, the redefinition of filial piety, and the rise of descending familism within Chinese families. The changing patterns in household composition play a key part in the structure and function of intergenerational relationships. This is furthered by the redefining of the norms of filial piety which has paved the way for intergenerational intimacy rather than feeling the generation gap. All of these factors combined with macro-level social factors contribute to intergenerational intimacy which is a key aspect in family life and results in the rise of descending familism.

The different kinds of household arrangements that are produced by the pattern of relationships feed into how the generations interact with each other. The family unit is flexible, complex and everchanging. A shift in terminology and ways of speaking about each other is noted in the Yan reading as there was an improvement in intergenerational relationships. With a focus on rural North China, he notes how fewer aged villagers complained to him about their difficulties in old age and instead there was an increasing number of the elderly who praised their married children (sons and daughters alike) for their wide-ranging support and care. They made use of the local expression qinjin which translates to "dear and close" to describe this new progress. Thus, it can be noted that Generational gaps and the difference in societal expectations strongly plays into the shifts in the family unit.

Generational gaps have played a substantial role in how relationship patterns are developed and how households arrange themselves. This can be noted with the strong contrast between the parents' generation and their children's generation. The people within the parents' generation which would've been born between the 1960s and 1970s. The telling features of this generation include several siblings, an agricultural lifestyle with a focus on land cultivation and the tradition of sons live near parents after marriage (patrilocal), leaving daughters to marry out. Opportunities for social mobility were incredibly limited due to little access to secondary and tertiary education combined with no access to white collar jobs. The children's generation (born in the 1990's) is starkly different. Children would often be singletons or have one sibling, there was a movement away from agricultural jobs towards white-collar jobs (due to increased job opportunities as a result of economic and educational changes), and more pressure to achieve better than their parents. Due to the steady rise in industrialisation, a family's income was no longer limited to just agriculture as more jobs were created that branched out to a variety of areas. This combined with access to secondary education which was extended to universities, meant that the children had more tools for success in society, aiding them in a movement to a better life. This was furthered by the prestige that came with a university degree, as it was considered both an honour and a great opportunity to attend university. Due to increased

opportunities, children were expected to leave the countryside after marriage. This contributed greatly to the culture of self-sacrifice by parents for their children, which has included a lot of disregard for their own wellbeing for the sake of their children's success. However, it has allowed for the family unit to achieve better as a result of the self-sacrifice of parents.

A plethora of symbols and metaphors are applied throughout the readings in order to create emphasis on societal values that have arisen out of economic and political changes. The key symbols and metaphors of love and care are discussed across the Yan, Fong and Kipnis readings and how it varies and shifts. It is observed that there is less submission from the younger generation. They still adopt caring and supportive roles, however, there is less strict obedience. Education recurrently is used as a symbol for a better life and more opportunity. There is an incredibly strong emphasis placed on achieving well in school, as it leads to university entrance and the aforementioned prestige that comes with university. Educational success is regarded as an ultimate family project, and a channel for expressing filial piety. Due to increased opportunities, parental investment in the child is seen as the only channel for social mobility. As a result, parental self-sacrifice for children's well-being and education has become more apparent. The self-sacrifice that parents go through for the benefit of their children's future goes to extremes, including denying their own wellbeing for the sake of the furtherment of their children. The Chinese state actively reinforces parent-child commitments and support through societal expectations that have been furthered by economic and political changes.

Education plays an incredibly important role within society. It is a collaborative effort which includes various people and factors working together. Parents work hard labour jobs to provide the necessary material funding for their children's education, while hoping that in return, they will have filial and successful children. Students are expected to study hard to enact a filial gratitude that fulfils their parents' wishes, while teachers' efforts are both a call for further efforts by the children, and public recognition from peers, educational administrators and society at large. Schools act as a core location for the teaching of societal standards and the socialisation of children. Often teachers are regarded as role models for their students and are highly respected as they act as a tool for success for studying students. Thus, teachers are regarded with the highest respect and are often treated like authority figures. Teachers take over much of the responsibility for raising and disciplining children as children spend many hours at school which means they are away from their families for extended periods of time. Education focuses on academics that expand students' knowledge and skills which in turn, aids them in their ability to seek a better life both financially and educationally. However, it is also a key place for teaching and enforcing widely held social values such as familial ethics of filial piety and sacrifice, what constitutes a normal family and household. Children are constantly reminded of the sacrifice that their parents make for them and how all their hard work in school will both get them a better future and allow them to give their parents a better life. There is a shift in the empowerment of daughters, due to their ability to fulfil the duties associated with filial piety. Via redefining of the norms of filial piety by relinquishing unconditional obedience and submission from the junior to the senior generations, it paves the way to intergenerational intimacy. School serves as a responsibility under filial piety and due to it being readily available to the current generation to both sexes, it expands the potential for both females and males to achieve. This is contrasted against the previous emphasis placed on having male children, as previously they were the only ones who could fulfil the duties associated with filial piety. Therefore, education is regarded as a strong symbol in Chinese society for social mobility and the sacrifices needed to achieve a better quality of life. The schools in turn, adjust to political and economic changes as schools are constantly adapting to local population structures.

Filial piety maintains its traditional aspects that date back to Confucianism times and creates a strong pattern of ethics among families and Chinese society. This includes unconditional respect and obedience of the junior generation to the senior generation, financial support and care by adult children for their elderly parents and continuation of the descent line via human reproduction and the practising of rituals to ancestors. Self-sacrifice is necessary in all three aspects, and the ultimate goal is the security and prosperity of the family. Personal happiness is understood as being ancestral and parental happiness resulting from the filial actions and self-sacrifice of both decedents and children. However, there was a strong change in this ideology that prompted the focus of filial piety to be the younger generation rather than the older generation. This led to the lessening of obedience expected from the younger generation, and the aims of filial piety to be in the interests of the children's happiness and comfort, rather than just their parent's wellbeing.

Previously, filial piety had a very strong focus on parents. This was due to a combination of factors such as forced early retirement, parents residing in the countryside, few opportunities for post-retirement income and the increased opportunities for the preceding generation. Due to the large increase in opportunities for the younger generation, it allowed for more social mobility. This meant that they could achieve better lifestyles that would in turn, enhance their parents' lives. But, due to various changes, filial piety is being fulfilled via descendant's happiness rather than descendants purely living for their parent's happiness and comfort. Self-sacrifice still remains as a commonly held value. However, there has been a shift from sacrificing to the ancestors, to making sacrifices for children. By changing the focus to the children, it has allowed for stronger emotional bonds between parents and their child as there is less tension between parents and child.

Due to China's history of population planning, the families have responded according. These changes were a result of the political and economic conditions at the time. Some examples of these population planning efforts included; the Chinese communist party encouraging births for strengthening the communist revolution in the 1950's, family planning agencies urging families to reduce reproduction in the 1950's-1960's in response to the significant increase in life expectancy and population growth as the population was thriving, the new agenda of market reforms which focused on small households and was associated with economic development gave rise to the one-child policy which was enforced within the 1980's. However, more recently, the one child policy was abolished and, in its place, the two-child policy was implemented due to the ageing population in 2015. This can be attributed to the increased standards of living, and improvements in medicine. Thus, it can be noted that Chinese families have historically acted accordingly to state standards of child rearing and may continue to do so in the future.

Therefore, these changes in the structure of intergenerational relationships are both adaptations to changing political and economic circumstances and evidence of cultural continuity. While the vessel of the past remains, and some traditions are still enforced, families within contemporary Chinese society have adapted to the various political and economic changes that have guided both the formation of the family unit and the bonds within it. By examining the work of Yunxiang Yan and following his argument that "the centripetal power of the third generation of children, who attract attention, love, and care from both their grandparents and their parents" represents a 'breakthrough' in 'traditional Chinese family culture' it is evident that these changes have occurred in response to macro-level economic and political changes.