

# The Influence of Confucianism on Chinese Parenting

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## Introduction

Confucianism and its practices have left their mark on the history of many Eastern countries, especially China, and can be seen in the attitude toward academic success that is commonly inculcated in children from a very early age. Moreover, just as important is the imprint of the dogma of family hierarchy and respect for elders in the mentality of the Chinese. Often, however, incorrect interpretations of teaching and an aggressive authoritarian parenting approach can have a negative impact on the mental state of children. Confucius created his school to generalize ancient Chinese traditions and man's spiritual and moral improvement (Chang, 2018).

The philosophical system of Confucius laid the foundations not only for the subsequent ideology of the Chinese state but directly influenced the approach to parenting even until nowadays (Yang, 2019). Therefore, the influence of Confucianism led to the establishment of distinct approaches to parenting styles, notably high parental expectations in the academic field, respect for familial ties and the elderly, and prioritizing of reputation rather than a child's mental health.

## Boosting Student Performance

Several tenets of Confucianism is related to education and its importance in the life of any person, and it is is firmly embedded in the very understanding of the upbringing process in China. Confucius believed that education was the path to character creation and should be perceived as a transformation process into a noble person. The most vital component of Confucianism is based on the "vision of human excellence" (Charlene, 2017, p.2).

As a result, every individual is expected to create and improve their character, striving for perfection in life and work environment (Su, 2019). In this situation, *junzi* is used to

characterize the path toward moral improvement and enlightenment from the point of view of Confucianism, and it is defined as a prerequisite (Huang & Gove, 2018). Confucius believed that a person becomes better and more moral by striving to correct shortcomings and wrong actions (Lieber et al., 2018). Therefore, education and the development of ethical norms have occupied a priority position in the Chinese education system, including parenting (Lin, 2019). For centuries, people who followed the tenets of Confucianism have used learning as a form of self-improvement through the assimilation of moral and ethical norms and submission to traditions, aiming to teach that to their offspring.

Such notions transformed the traditional Asian upbringing styles, emphasizing the importance of academia. Nowadays, the parenting style in China is based on the idea of educating offspring and pushing them toward excellence in many fields. Chinese families prioritize education and honor the family name so that they raise their children to become dignified members of society (Peters, 2020). As a form of showing gratitude to their parents, children try to become successful and work hard to meet the family's expectations (Cai et al., 2020). Regardless of their financial situation, parents strive to give their children a decent education (Zhu & Chang, 2019).

During childhood, in addition to school classes, clubs and sports sections are mandatory and are encouraged by parents (Deng & Smith, 2018). Later in life, in educational institutions, strict discipline is maintained starting from kindergarten, and the child is busy from morning to evening.

The pressure is put on children by their parents from a young age. Learning begins from infancy, and at the age of one and a half, children are taught counting, singing, and physical education (Ding & Goh, 2020). By the age of three, the child already knows several hundred hieroglyphs. The upbringing and education of children are engaged in the family (Hu et al., 2019). It takes many years of hard work, and yet, it is considered a matter of honor for the whole family to benefit and teach a poor but capable relative and promise her many benefits in case of success, which usually stimulates charity (Vermander, 2019). As a result, Asian families, including Chinese families, practice strict parenting styles, requiring high academic performance and encouraging children to hone their skills in different fields. Thus, the level of competence of children in the family not only serves as an indicator of

so-called human excellence but puts a higher value on the family name.

## Determining Family Structure

The second tenet of Confucianism is related to family structure. Confucius placed a strong emphasis on filial piety, the link between caregivers and children, as well as other ties within families. He also stressed societal structure, accentuating several types of human connections according to Confucianism: ruler-minister, father-son, husband-and-wife, elder-younger, and friend-friend (Shek & Chan, 2018). This draws a distinctive line and implies specific rules that pertain to the behavior expected from the individuals, stating that a friend-friend relationship will differ from a father-son relationship (Shek & Chan, 2018).

In this sense, Confucianism's philosophy revolves around the notion of loyalty to one's family and respecting the people in authority. This dedication may manifest as ancestor worshiping, deference to authoritative parenting, or the use of familial metaphors to characterize the ruler and his regime, such as the son of heaven (Van, 2019). For Confucian principles, the family is the most significant social unit, and loyalty to the family could only benefit the wider community (Zhou, 2022). Therefore, according to Confucianism, one should always love their family before turning their affections outward, and such love benefits every person in the community, setting the foundation for societal norms and standards.

Indeed, such Confucianism's approaches to social ties manifested in the modern Chinese parenting style, which accentuates a specific familial structure within the household. In China, providing for elderly relatives is viewed as the family's most important duty (Pezzutto, 2019). For senior Chinese people, close relatives are their primary source of material, mental, social, and moral support. Children frequently assist in providing their elderly parents with support and care, and such parenting results in compliance with the Chinese (Wang and Lu, 2021). In China, it has long been customary for children to be legally obligated to assist their elderly parents (Xu & Campbell, 2018).

It is the child's duty to demonstrate their values of respect when their parents grow older since parents nurture the offspring. As a result, one can see how deeply Confucianism

beliefs are ingrained in Chinese families and how many duties are seen as rather obligations of children, and there are no discussions regarding them, but expectations of respect and support of the elderly and immediate family. Parental style is, therefore, based on teaching children to respect those in control and expect obedience and support from their offspring once they grow older.

## **Deteriorating Mental Health**

Finally, Confucianism claims that people need to maintain their inner strength and not let external factors disrupt it, which implies that Confucianism promotes the reinforcement of stamina. Some Confucian ideals and rules are regarded as safeguards for psychological well-being (Thu et al., 2021). For example, it is advised to preserve mental peace and lessen depressive feelings by reading the *Zhongyong*, meaning Doctrine of the Mean (Badanta et al., 2022). It is believed that people with greater degrees of Confucian attitudes are better able to handle stressful circumstances.

The given concept of building character strength is implemented in the Chinese parenting style, when parents put greater emphasis on other factors, such as academic excellence or respect for the family. It is commonly believed that Chinese parents are one of the world's strictest, even authoritarian, parents (Sun, 2020). It is a frequent situation for them to pay little attention to children's personalities and mental vulnerability. To teach the younger generation discipline, modern Chinese rarely praise, and even for the slightest offenses, they can punish their children (Zhu, 2020). Despite such restrictions, the Chinese, when they grow up, do not hate, but on the contrary, love and infinitely respect their parents and feel a sense of great gratitude (Arthur, 2019). Growing up, they take care of their parents, convincing them they have raised decent people (Vuong et al., 2018).

The overall parenting styles are, therefore, not devoid of love completely, but rather love is manifested in different aspects, such as teaching excellence, perseverance, character strength, and order. However, it is still important to note that Confucianism's ideals put pressure on children, which might lead to the deterioration of their mental health.

## **Conclusion**

Undoubtedly, Confucianism led to the establishment of approaches to parenting styles, expectations in the academic field, and respect for familial ties and the elderly. Confucianism's philosophical and ethical teaching, carried out within the framework of classical Confucian education, contributed to the formation of the cult of literacy and education in Chinese society. Children are expected to perfect in different fields and strive for perfection in the academic realm, which illustrates the remnants of Confucianism's tenet about human excellence. In this sense, Chinese families place a high value on education and upholding the honor of their family name in order to create honorable citizens. Another influence of Confucianism on Chinese parents is through respect for family and the elderly since the rule of Confucius is to revere those in control, and through family, the community becomes better.

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