



Fatherhood and family from an Asian Perspective

Taiwan, Korea, Thailand, Laos, Hong Kong, Japan, and the people's republic of China (PRC) constitutes what we know today as Asian and Chinese cultures. The Asian-styles of fathering is different from American, English, and African styles of parenting.

The difference with American parenting lies in the fact that Asian and Chinese fathers give hope to their children and raises them in two-parent homes. Chinese fathers like Africans show great love to their children. At early stage in the life the Asian and Chinese fathers introduce children to Confucius religion and meditation as a way of infusing morality in them. Part of Confucius civilizing mission was to define what it meant to be a father or a husband, and to teach people to respect the proper relationship between family members and regulate sexual behavior (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia). Asian and Chinese fathers also express love and teach children to respect family values and keep to the law. Thus Chinese and Asian parenting repertoire along with the values and methods of childrearing is rigorous resulting in raising happy and productive children. Despite the fact that it is rigorous, fathers help nurture their children productively in their journey towards adulthood.

In Chinese culture along with Confucian thoughts, marriage is of grave significance both to families and society. Marriage is important for the cultivation of virtues. In marriage, the power and authority of a father is limited in maternal relationship. Here, the male becomes son-in-law who lives in the wife's home. This practice was common during transformation of antithetic marriage into monogamy, which signifies the decline of matriarchy and the growing dominance of patriarchy in ancient china. Despite the dangers of patriarchy fathers from Confucius perspective bring family under supervision and control. The much we know about patriarchy and Confucius is that fatherhood roles and expectations in Chinese society differ substantially from those found in Africa, the West and the Caribbean. In traditional Chinese thinking, fathers are seen as custodian of the family, the clan, and society. They are enforcer of morals and values in the community. The moral dimension of fathering in Asian culture is unquestionable. In this regard, Asian men have the belief that a good man or person is a good father. This belief is founded on the moral dimension of fathering defined by scholars in the BYU School of family life that states that good fathering is essential to being a good man (Hawkins, et al, 1997). This same belief is anchored on the fact that fathers make sacrifices and give up something for the sake of children. Besides, most of the social, moral and financial values they enforce in the family and society are derived from Taoism with a combination of conservatism. Other strong values different from Confucianism and Taoism fathers enforce in the family are the principle of



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honesty and integrity which children learn as part of Chinese tradition regardless of religion. Married family men enforce these teachings and other tenets of Confucius regardless of religion and socio-economic status. The reason is because Chinese geographical area is influenced by low fertility rates and cultural histories that are shaped by principles and ideology.

Studies show that half of Chinese men choose fatherhood at the age of 30 to 35 (Beijing News, 2005). In comparison to African and American counterparts, fathers in the Asian tradition spends less time with children, a custom that reflects and shapes images of fathers as hardworking and distant figures and when compared to African cultural history, Africans have a slight edge over an Asian father. In both cultures fathers are both hardworking and close to children in their families. Also, Chinese and African men extend their parental obligations to their children beyond childhood and adolescence. They provide for children's education and welfare, even as children grow into adulthood. They make sacrifices to finance children's education and transition to adult life. These parental sacrifices and provisions have caused Asian children to stay in the family longer than compared to American children. Demographic studies show that American children leave home at 18 to live independent from parent and family.

The relationship between fathers and their wives in Asian society is unilateral. Although relationship is authoritarian, wives are expected to do as husbands say. In Asian families, men have the final say. Their words are final. Family meta rules comes from them and obedience to their rules are better than sacrifice. Obedience in Chinese culture reinforces dependency (husband pleasing) in the family while authoritarianism and control externalizes locus of dominance and reduce personal responsibilities. Obedient to men as the head of the family are typically central in the lives of Asian Americans with members expected to behave with loyalty and devotion to its values (Del Carmen, 1990). Chinese men at all circumstances expect wives to be faithful. Infidelity in marriage is abhorred and is treated with ignominy. Wives must be chaste at all times without compromise. However, the demands of wifely expectations often times have caused Chinese women to suffer and sacrifice silently. Wong (2001) writes that marriage expectations from Chinese women cause them to become a martyr, a sacrificial lamb when it comes to family responsibility. The author argued that such practice inflicts the same pain upon their daughters and in-laws. Strict obedience that is demanded from Chinese women causes them to cope in denial and resignation. It causes them to stumble and rise in submission for family welfare. Chinese culture believes that women's obedience reflects how humble and faithful they are to their husbands. Obedience determines how well they will respect others and



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the law. It determines how they will treat other men besides their own husbands. Asian society believes that disobedient and unfaithfulness leads to extra-marital affairs, informal mistresses, concubines and polygamy.

The relationship between Asian fathers and children are filial and warm. Men consider children as emperor of the homes. In Asian culture, the dream of every men is to have a male heir whose duty it would be to care for them at their old age. The birth of a daughter, by contrast generates little happiness and despondency. Men feel a little uncomfortable because daughters marry into the husband's family. This results in fathers paying less attention in nurturing their daughters "because they will live." On one hand, children express what Shwalb et al (2004) calls reciprocal sense of moral duty to their fathers to study hard and succeed on behalf of the family. This reciprocal duty according to Shwalb continues into later adulthood where children felt obligated to work hard at their own jobs and to take care of their aging parents, out of respect and "moral debt."

Filial piety in Asian culture is the most favored virtue of manhood. It is also the most favored virtue of childhood and adulthood. Filial piety-loyalty, respect and devotion of children to their parents-is of prime importance in traditional Asian families. In return, filial piety makes Chinese fathers favor their sons over their daughters and expect them to conform in self denial. First-born son is most valued in the family as Africans do. Investment in the first sons are based upon the cultural believe that he would carry on the family lineage after the extinction of men. This is one area where Chinese and African culture strike some similarities and balances. When Chinese men invest on their sons, it causes mothers to develop harmonious relationship with their daughters. However, fathers have unquestionable authority over sons and daughters. They also have right to the lives of children.

Wong outlined seven facets towards a responsible fatherhood, namely: family and psycho-social relationship with the other in Chinese society.

Level	Description	Manifestation	Chinese
1	Enhancing your own face	Etiquette Consciousness	<i>Pinyin yao mianzi</i>
2	Enhancing others face	Reciprocity	Gei mianzi
3	Losing your own face	Shame, humiliation	Diu mianzi
4.	Hurting other's face	Retaliation for shame felt	Shang mianzi



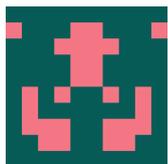
5	Saving your own faces	Avoid shame, be proper	Baocum mianzi
6	Saving other's face	No criticism, give apology	Mian mian ju
7	Tearing your own face	Relationship destroyed	Yuan mou mian

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