Yom Chi Taekwon-Do Association
Presents

Filial Piety
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Filial Piety

Roots in Eastern Philosophy and the Martial Arts

V Dan Thesis

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The Eastern culture has for many years been the basis for many a history and philosophy lesson. With a deep understanding of the universe and all the complexities that make up it's philosophy, the Eastern culture's religious beliefs, medicine, martial arts, and practices have affected the world and people in many ways. This culture's influence has in many ways shaped the perspective of today's society about "The Way". This belief in "The Way, or Do" brings enlightenment and peace into our world, and in itself has changed the way we live our lives for many people. These principles are rooted in every day life and affect many practices in today's society involving our business, education, industry, and family life. These beliefs make up the foundation for many of today's cultures, and have molded the eastern culture with influence from many people over the last several hundreds of years.

There are many people who helped shaped the foundation of this culture. Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism are just but a few of the religious followings that are the backbone of the eastern culture religious beliefs. The different countries that make up the Eastern world have rooted their countries in philosophy, religious beliefs, and the martial arts of some sort. The belief in Confucianism bases its philosophy on writings by Kong-Fu Zi, otherwise known as Confucius. The compilation of works called "The Analects" has become the official philosophy of the country. The Eastern culture way of life is based on many different beliefs and philosophies that are a very important part of life in everyday activities. In religion, the martial arts, and many other areas, there are codes or guidelines of conduct that have been clearly defined from writings of these people in history. These writings are
reflected in the way that this culture has grown with reverence for many of its philosophy dictated practices. The oriental culture has always held in high accord the way its code of conduct is dictated by its philosophy. Looking back in literary history, classic examples of that code of conduct are the “Hwarang Warrior Code”, and “The Bushido”, also known as the Code of the Samuri. References to these writings throughout history in many literary senses reflect the strict adherence of individuals to a higher standard of living in many facets of life. These writings speak of the strict hierarchy which ruled this culture for many years and has impacted it even in today’s society. The analects refer to several key concepts that are practiced with this philosophy and are roots for its people.

The code of the Hwarang is similar to the more commonly known code of the Japanese Samuri, Bushido. The Bushido code was established in feudal Japan during the 12th to 17th centuries to serve as a social guide rule of life and as a set of ideals for the samuri or military class. The code of the Hwarang-do played a similar role in the Korean kingdom of Silla approximately 1000 years earlier. Being established in the 6th to 10th century it was considered more ancient and refined than Bushido. This code played a very important part in the history of the unification of the three kingdoms of korea. Stories of the soldiers and their individual feats illustrate the code of the Hwarang, the type of ethics and morality essential to the evolution of the martial arts and the success of a nation. This code has profoundly affected the Korean people and their culture throughout history. The lives and deeds of the Hwarang illustrate a level of courage, honor, wisdom, culture, compassion, and impeccable conduct that few men
in history have demonstrated. The dedication and self sacrifice of the Hwarang was clearly based on principles much stronger than ego and self interest. This basis was the Sesok-Ogye, the code of the Hwarang as set forth by the great Buddhist monk and scholar, Won Kang:

Be loyal to your king
Be obedient to your parents
Be honorable to your friends
Never retreat in battle
Make a just kill

Like Confucianism, Bushido required filial piety, but originating in the feudal system, it also held that supreme honor was to serve one's lord unto death. If these obligations conflicted, the samuri was bound to his lord despite the suffering he might cause his parents. In Bushido however loyal and filial a man may be in his heart, if he lacks the proper etiquette and manners, which displays respect to lord or parent, he cannot be regarded as living in conformity with it. Even in private or public, one is not to disregard respect to lord or parent. These beliefs and ideas have shaped the way throughout history.

The Confucian idea brings together several related notions. Two of them are: First, the duty of children to their parents: filial piety. Second, family is important in the Five Constant Relationships since three of them involve family relationships: parent and child, husband and wife, elder sibling and junior sibling. Filial piety is the Confucian emphasis on respect and love for one's parents and elder relatives. This is an important part of the Five Constant Relationships. The Five Constant Relationship's are: parent and child, husband and wife, elder friend and junior friend,
ruler and subject. These are the central relationships, according to Confucianism, of which one must always be aware. One’s place in each provides a specific role for a person to fulfill with respect to the other person. This is one of the notions in which Confucianism makes it clear that although one is an individual, one is always acting in relation to other people.

Already centered, Korean society became highly patriarchal when the Confucian system was imported from China and made the official state belief system in about 1390 AD. Order and authority are the hallmarks of Confucian thought. Fathers are responsible for their families and must be both obeyed and revered by everyone. Even ancestral fathers are honored. The custom called filial piety is evident even in many of today’s societies and many other cultures as well. Traditionally older people are accorded honor. For instance, at dinner the eldest person sits first, eats and drinks before anyone else can begin. Anyone older must always be addressed with honor, even among acquaintances. No one would think of calling an older person by their first name, much less a grandfather or grandmother. Bowing to them is really the traditional way of greeting. Hard work, obedience to family, protection of the family, and proper decorum among family members are very much Korean values, even in the modern world today.

The Analects of Confucius bring many an interpretation to the description of what is considered “Filial Piety”. Confucius said: “A young man should serve his parents at home and be respectful to elders outside his home. He should be earnest and truthful, loving all, but become intimate with jen. After doing this, if he has
energy to spare, he can study literature and the arts." In the above mentioned quote, the development of one’s proper relationship with one’s parents and others around him or her is fundamental in life. Confucius again said: “When your father is alive, observe his will. When your father is dead observe his former actions. If, for three years you do not change from the ways of your father, you can be called a real son”.

In terms of the development of the character of the human being, the most fundamental practice is that of filial piety, the English translation of the Chinese hsiao which means love, respect and take care of one’s parents. Confucius believed that if people cultivated this innate tendency well, all other natural forms of human goodness would be positively affected by it. Filial piety has been a stronghold in the Eastern culture, and from history books and literature, it has played an important part in many aspects of society from armed forces relationships with officers to the father/son relationship. The Bushido and the Code of the Hwarang dictate that filial piety was an important part of the structure and beliefs of soldiers and protectors of people with various benefactors. These roots are directly related to the study of martial arts, since both of these groups trained extensively in all the aspects both physically and mentally.

The structure of rank and position in the military setting are closely related to the structure of martial arts. The expectation of courtesy, integrity, perserverence, self control and indomitable spirit, as well as being filial to senior belts and persons that are in positions of respect are of utmost importance in the teaching of the martial arts. In the martial arts, the instructor becomes the teacher at many times when the parent can’t be the teacher. This relationship is fostered and developed over many years and
is often stronger than the one between parent and child. As the Samuri would be loyal to his king, a student shall be loyal to his instructor. The elements of the relationships between the Student/Instructor and Instructor/Student are outlined to develop a relationship based on trust and honor between two people. These relationships are a fundamental part of the development of “The Way”.
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