

The goals, means and influencing factors of ancient family moral education for Chinese children*

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ABSTRACT: In ancient China, the goal of moral education in the family was to cultivate a man of virtue. The content of moral education mainly included ambition, serving the country and helping the people, filial piety, respect for elders, love for the clan, uniting brothers and fostering neighborliness, being indifferent to fame and wealth, industriousness and thrift, fostering virtues, telling right from wrong and elevating moral character. The implementation means of moral education in ancient families can be studied according to family precepts, poems, songs, pithy formulas (often in rhyme) handed down, and the records of various ceremonies and educational activities. The main factors that affect the implementation of family moral education are parents' concepts of the moral education, the moral character and cultural quality of parents, the specific living conditions and ways of families, the interpersonal relationship and culture of families, as well as the humanistic and natural environment around families.

EET/TEE KEYWORDS: Family education; Ancient family precepts; Traditional culture; implementation of moral education; China; XX-XXI Centuries.

Traditional Chinese culture pays attention to the construction of a value system based on morality. Its core value is to develop individuals, build families and govern the country with morality. It is the common task of society, schools and families to foster virtue through education. In ancient China, people advocated self-cultivation, family regulation, state governance and bringing peace to all under heaven. «The development of education is not only the

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responsibility of the government and schools, but also the one of families»¹. China has attached great importance to family education since ancient times. The primary task of ancient families was to cultivate the virtues of their descendants from childhood. In all dynasties, all people including emperors, nobles, officials and ordinary people hoped that their future generations could make their families prosperous and bring honor to their family names. It is valuable for today's family to eliminate its feudal dross, tap its essence for reference, and draw historical wisdom from the excellent traditional Chinese culture so that they can «do better in moral education for the next generation and help their children learn morals»².

«History is not only a mirror for reference, but also a mirror for real society»³. China has a long tradition of moral education. «Since the concept of moral education was introduced in China, it has also received great attention»⁴. The current research on family moral education in ancient China mostly focuses on family precepts based on those of a certain dynasty or the whole history, or focuses on precepts of a single family, such as *Admonitions for the Yan Clan* 颜氏家训, to explore the moral education through in ancient Chinese family education. If we only look at the family moral education from the literal perspective of family precepts, we can only tap its static content of moral education, but cannot understand the whole process of ancient family moral education. Nor can we achieve a comprehensive understanding of the current reality of family moral education. Apart from family precepts, there were many ceremonies and educational activities, songs and rhymes often passed down by word of mouth in ancient families. The factors affecting family moral education also need to be explored.

1. *The goal and content of family moral education in ancient China*

In ancient China, great importance was attached to ethics, and the goal of family moral education was to cultivate men of virtue who could achieve benevolence, righteousness, manners, wisdom and credit. As for the content of family moral education, for example, the opening chapter of *Admonitions for*

¹ Y. Zhaoshan, S. Yizhi, *Policy Evolution and Theoretical Exploration of All-round Education*, «Education Research», n. 12, 2018, pp. 18-29.

² Y. Xiaohui, *70 Years of Scientific Development of Ideological and Political Education in China*, «Social Science Front», n. 10, 2019, pp. 1-8.

³ H. Guopan, *History is the Mirror of the Real Society*, «Southeast Academics», n. 1, 1999, pp. 3-5.

⁴ L. Haifeng, J. Yuan, *Reform of College Examination and Admissions and Comprehensive Development of Students' Morality, Intelligence, Physique, Aesthetics, and Labor*, «Higher Education Research», n. 2, 2022, pp. 1-12.

the Yan Clan indicates its moral education content – the basic content of our family moral education is nothing more than to make our family members act in a clean manner, self-reliance, self-respect, loyalty to the monarch, patriotism, leniency and kindness. Although the content of moral education in each family is different and has different emphasis, it can be summarized in the following five aspects.

1.1. *Being ambitious and serving the country and its people*

Since the Spring and Autumn Period, under the influence of the idea that «he who excels in study can follow an official career» and the system to select officials through imperial civil examinations 科举 after the Sui and Tang Dynasties, even children from agricultural, «industrial and commercial families have been urged by their parents to learn as soon as possible to become officials as early as possible»⁵. Among them, «some may be materialistic but others hope to serve the country and its people to realize their lofty aspirations»⁶. The important content of family moral education in ancient China is political education, and the ultimate direction of family moral education is state governance and bringing peace to all under heaven. Mencius put forward his idea about lofty ambition – living a moral life, being courteous and righteous. During the Three Kingdoms Period, Zhuge Liang 诸葛亮 pointed out in *Admonitions to My Nephew* 诫外甥书 that the ambition of a man should be great. «In the Song Dynasty, educational and cultural undertakings developed greatly, and the Imperial Examination in the Song Dynasty became more and more prosperous»⁷. Xie Liangzuo 谢良佐 of the Song Dynasty thought that a man shouldn't just seek benefits for himself, but set up an ambition to seek benefits for the world. These are examples of the ancient family moral education that warned the later generations to make great ambitions and take the betterment of their country as their responsibility at all times. Zhu Xi 朱熹 of the Song Dynasty further explained “ambition” as that «the so-called ambition is not to overpower others, but to directly learn from Yao and Shun»⁸. In *Admonitions for the Yao*

⁵ L. Haifeng, *The 110th Anniversary of Abolishment of the Imperial Examination*, «Journal of Xiamen University», n. 5, 2015, pp. 83-91.

⁶ J. Yuan, *Commemoration of the 70th Anniversary of Zhang Zhongli's 'Chinese Gentleman': A Rare Masterpiece of Doctoral Dissertation*, «Shanghai Economic Research», n. 6, 2022, p. 2.

⁷ J. Yuan, C. Lin, *The ways, characteristics and contemporary response of prodigy education in the Song Dynasty*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», n. 2, 2023, pp. 103-124.

⁸ L. Jingde, W. Xingxian, *Classified Conversations of Master Zhu Xi*, Zhonghua Book Company, 1986.

Clan 药言, Yao Shunmu 姚舜牧 of the Ming Dynasty believed that «all people must first set ambitious goals, otherwise their life is meaningless. How can they achieve anything?»⁹. Yuan Huang 袁黄 believed that «if one aspires to do good deeds with the aim of benefiting the people of the country, his merits are great even if the number of good deeds are small; if he does deeds only for the benefit of himself, his merits are very small even if the number of deeds are big».

1.2. *Filial piety, respect for elders and love for the clan*

Traditional Confucianism believes that emotion among family members is the most reliable basis for the implementation of moral education. «Con-sanguinity is a stable force, and filial piety is a subjective reflection of human kinship»⁹. When the family implements moral education to regulate the human relations, the first thing mentioned is filial piety and respect for elders. *Er Ya* 尔雅 holds that filial piety means being kind to parents. As for the specific behavior of filial piety, it is summarized in *Classic of Filial Piety* 孝经 as follows. Dutiful sons should strive to show respect to their parents in their daily lives, and help them maintain a happy mood when serving them in their diet and lifestyle. When parents are sick, they should take care of them. When parents pass away, they should do their best to mourn and make arrangements for a funeral. They should take ancestor worship seriously. Ancient scholars put forward different levels of filial piety when they carried out moral education for future generations. Zeng Zi, a student of Confucius, believed that there were three levels of filial piety – the greatest filial piety is to fully respect one’s elders, followed by preventing one’s parents from being humiliated, and supporting them materially. Empress Ren Xiaowen 仁孝文皇后 of the Ming Dynasty also believed that respecting and honoring elders is filial piety at a high level, while supporting elders is filial piety at a low level. We should support our parents not only physically, but also mentally. Furthermore, Peng Duanwu 彭端吾, an official of the Ming Dynasty, told his descendants in *Admonitions for the Peng Clan* 彭氏家训 that «filial piety is to be a healthy and nice man». Shi Chengjin 石成金 of the Qing Dynasty in his *Family Heirloom* 传家宝 believed that filial piety was the ability of descendants to meet elders’ expectations and make their clan prosperous. «Filial piety is kindness, diligence, thrift, and not bringing shame on the clan». Wang Xiang 王祥 of the Western Jin Dynasty pointed out in *Admonitions for the Descendants* 训子孙 that «the highest level of filial piety is to make his parents proud of his virtue and repu-

⁹ Z. Xiaohong, *The Tradition of Filial Piety and Fraternal Duty and Seniority Rules: The Intergenerational Relationship in Traditional Chinese Society*, «Zhejiang Social Sciences», n. 5, 2008, pp. 77-82.

tation». Thus, filial piety is shown at four levels. After supporting their elders physically and mentally, the descendants also need to live up to their elders' expectations. When the descendants become adults, they need unite the clan and make their family name known to please their elders.

1.3. *Uniting brothers and fostering neighborliness*

The third content of ancient family moral education is to educate descendants on how to treat their brothers and neighbors. *Admonitions for the Yan Clan* points out that brothers were raised together. They shared a table for dinner, and a younger brother wore his brother's clothes. They studied and played together. *Family Norms* further explain their relationship as follows. Brothers are like the branches and leaves attached to the roots, as well as the hands and feet attached to the body, which cannot be separated. Brothers are prone to disputes over property and power. It is very important to regulate the relationship between brothers. Otherwise, brothers will split their household, and the brotherhood will also come to an end. According to the Fang Xiaoru 方孝孺, an elder brother must love his brother, and a younger brother must respect his brother. Never should they hurt each other over insignificant matters.

In addition, «our friends also have a certain impact on our moral values and ethical conduct»¹⁰. The most important way to maintain a good family atmosphere is to choose friends. Ancient families often warned their descendants to be cautious about making friends. *Admonitions for the Bai Clan* 白公家训 warn the descendants that friends are one of the five human relationships. Be cautious in making friends because bad friends may harm you. He who can tell your faults is your teacher. He who always praises you is your enemy. If you lie down with dogs, you will get up with fleas. Since you are prone to be influenced by your surroundings, you have to be careful when making friends. Zhang Lüxiang 张履祥 in the Qing Dynasty pointed out the relationship between making friends and morality in his *Admonitions for My Son* 训子语 – similar aspiration, benevolence and righteousness are the basis of establishing a friendship, so we should make friends with those of virtue. In addition, fostering neighborliness is also indispensable. As an important part of our contact, our neighbors carry out social functions. *Codes of Conduct for the Yuan Clan* 袁氏世范 point out that families with children must often warn and restrain their children from damaging fruits, trees and other plants at their neighbors' homes. The elders of the family will ask their children to be kind and helpful to their neighbors in their daily lives.

¹⁰ Z. Ying, H. Huashe, *Cong Xun Zhai Yu*, Gu Wuxuan Publishing House, 2016.

1.4. *Being indifferent to fame and wealth, industrious, and thrifty*

Indifference to fame and wealth is a noble virtue pursued by the ancients. Diligence and thrift are traditional virtues formed under the condition of limited material wealth in ancient China. They are important moral content for ancient Chinese families to warn their children how to deal with people and things around them. Being indifferent to fame and wealth can make people go further and pursue the happiness and significance of life. Zhuge Liang of the Three Kingdoms pointed out in *Warning to My sons* that without being pure, a bright ambition is out of reach and without being indifferent, a far-off goal cannot be reached. Sima Guang 司马光 of the Northern Song Dynasty further explained in his book, «noble people can act according to the right path without being manipulated by others when they reduce their selfish desires; people with low self-cultivation can restrain themselves by reducing their selfish desires, save money, avoid crimes and make their families prosperous». If we pay too much attention to fame and wealth, the ancients also have admonished us. For example, Lu You 陆游 of the Southern Song Dynasty in *Family Precepts of Fangweng 放翁家训* warned that everything in the world succeeds because of striving hard in the face of difficulties, and also failed because of extravagance and laziness to strive for progress after success. Diligence and thrift are closely related to the sustainable development of the family. For example, Yao Shunmu of the Ming Dynasty pointed out in *Admonitions for the Yao Clan* that the most important aspect of managing a family lies in diligence and thrift. Wu Linzheng 吴麟征 of the Ming Dynasty also pointed out in his *Concise Expressions of Family Precepts 家诫要言* that «we can't run a family without thrift». The *Exhortation* by Zhu Bailu 朱栢庐 in the Qing Dynasty believed that diligence and thrift were the ways to make a living. If you are not diligent, you will earn less; if you are not thrifty, you will waste more. As for the relationship between wealth and frugality, the discussion in *Essays Written in Jing Chu Ancestral Temple 经锄堂杂志* by Ni Si 倪思 of the Southern Song Dynasty was more specific – the rich and the poor have their means to make a living respectively and they will have money to spend. if they live within their means. Yan Zhitui 颜之推 in the Northern Qi Dynasty also particularly warned that «to be thrifty isn't to be mean and we should embrace doctrine of the mean». According to *Admonitions for the Yan Clan*, you should be thrifty rather than mean. The thrift refers to frugality for the sake of etiquette and righteousness; the meanness means not helping the poor and needy. It is too extravagant for someone to give, and too stingy for frugality. It is desirable that you can give without extravagance and be frugal without meanness.

1.5. *Fostering virtues, telling right from wrong and elevating moral character*

«Confucianism and Chinese philosophy explore the ideal personality and the method of self-cultivation»¹¹. In ancient China, family moral education was derived from them. The basic point of personal requirements was the word «self-cultivation». Only after self-cultivation can a man manage successfully family affairs, followed by governing the state. Sima Guang of the Northern Song Dynasty pointed out in *Family Norms* 家范 that «from the Son of Heaven to the common people, they all attach great importance to cultivate themselves». Tang Zhen 唐甄 in the Qing Dynasty also pointed out in *Latent Book for Use* 潜书 that «for a man of virtue, self-cultivation is the most important, literary talent comes second, and wealth is the last». Emperor Kangxi 康熙 believed that «all people should cultivate and restrain themselves anytime and anywhere». As for the specific practice of self-cultivation, ancient parents also had relevant instructions. Sun Qifeng in the Qing Dynasty thought in *Family Precepts for the Sun Clan* that «don't say all the words, expose all the cleverness, and take all the good things». Zheng Banqiao 郑板桥 in the Qing Dynasty believed that «to be a nice man telling right from wrong is the most important». Kangxi has a lot of specific discussions on the respect of upholding morality and self-cultivation, such as the hope that future generations will have goodwill, be cautious when they are at leisure and alone, don't underestimate others, and be responsible for their own mistakes.

2. *The Main Means of Family Moral Education in Ancient China*

As for the research on the means of implementing moral education in ancient Chinese families, most of them focused on the family precepts. In fact, in addition to the family precepts, there were many ceremonies, educational activities, poems, songs, and pithy formulas (often in rhyme) passed down by word of mouth in ancient families. In the long-term exploration and practice of ancient Chinese family moral education, combined with the traditional Chinese culture and the reality of ancient society, three types of moral education methods, namely, family precepts and rules, poems, songs, pithy formulas (often in rhyme), and ceremonies, were mainly formed to pass on the ethics and mainstream values of ancient society to the descendants. From the perspective of the historical process, the moral education effect of using these methods is

¹¹ C. Lai, *On the Basic Concept of Confucian Educational Thought*, «Journal of Peking University», n. 5, 2005, pp. 198-205.

remarkable, which not only cultivates many upright men and people with lofty ideals, but also is widely adopted by later generations.

2.1. *Family precepts and rules aimed at self-cultivation, family regulation, state governance, and bringing peace to all under heaven*

Family precepts are an important means of implementing family moral education in ancient China. It includes family rules and letters. As far as its content is concerned, «family precepts are admonitions to guide people to deal with family relations and educate their children to grow up by using the etiquette system, ethics and codes of conduct of the autocratic society»¹². The traditional Chinese legal culture has deeply affected people's concept of institution. The generation of family precepts is inseparable from the ancient social culture. Both the aristocratic families and ordinary people live together in the unit of the clan, and it is very common for four or five generations to live together. This makes it necessary for family precepts to take on the task of governing a large group of families, so that family members can cultivate themselves according to the ethics and codes of conduct of traditional culture, achieve harmony and stability and promote family development.

The category of family precepts can be divided according to the class of people in ancient political society. When people from different social classes formulate family precepts, they want to achieve different moral purposes. First, the royal family's family precepts, such as Li Shimin's 李世民 *Norms for the Emperor* 帝范 in the Tang Dynasty, and Zhu Yuanzhang's 朱元璋 *Ancestors' Admonitions* 祖训录 in the Ming Dynasty. The educational object of this kind of family precepts is the royal descendants, whose main purpose is to cultivate the morality that they should have when they become monarchs in the future. Its ultimate goal is to maintain its rule and achieve the long-term stability of the country. The second is the family precepts of official families and aristocratic families, such as Zhuge Liang's *Letter of Warning to My Son* in the Three Kingdoms, Yan Zitui's *Admonitions for the Yan Clan* in the Northern Qi Dynasty, Bao Zheng's *Family Precepts* 包拯家训 in the Song Dynasty, Sima Guang's *Family Norms* and Zhu Xi's *Admonitions for the Zhu Clan*. This kind of family precepts pays attention to maintaining the status of noble and scholarly clan. Since the ancient political situation was changeable, their future generations would be killed if they were careless. Therefore, they hope that while preserving the family, their future generations will have a bright future. The third is the family precepts of the common people, such

¹² H. Jia, *The Value, Logic and Practice of Chinese Traditional Legal Culture Education*, «Social Science Front», n. 4, 2021, pp. 276-280.

as those starting with surnames, which are common in local chronicles. In the long history, the common people's families used family precepts to admonish their descendants on their moral character, such as filial piety, loyalty, faithfulness, propriety, justice and integrity. which has played a certain role in moral education. In a word, as a means of family moral education, family precepts contain the genes of Chinese culture and are important contents of traditional culture. They exert a subtle influence on Chinese people's thinking and behavior. They have a strong attraction, appeal and affinity in the hearts of Chinese people who have a tradition of loving their families and attaching importance to family building.

2.2. *Easy-to-remember and catchy poems, songs, and pithy formulas (often in rhyme) with virtue cultivation as the goal*

In ancient China, poems, songs, and pithy formulas (often in rhyme) were used for family moral education. Because of their rhythmic beauty, they are widely spread, and descendants will consciously recite them before and after meals or when learning and working. In ancient times, many ethics and morals were contained in poems, songs, and pithy formulas, (often in rhyme) which were more vital and easy to remember than the family rules written on paper and pasted on the wall, and were often passed down orally. According to the *Book of Changes* 易经, «it is a holy feat to cultivate integrity». Ancient China attached great importance to early childhood education, believing that education in this period could lay a foundation for individuals to «learn to be sages»¹³. From the perspective of modern educational psychology, little rhymes, songs, and pithy formulas are suitable for children's learning and development. In this sense, poems, songs, and pithy formulas are the first choice for families to carry out moral education for their children, and they play a vital role in the stage of moral cultivation of children. These poems, songs, and pithy formulas include *the Song of Warning to My Son* 诫子吟 by Shao Yong 邵雍 of the Northern Song Dynasty, *the Poem to My Sons* 示儿诗 by Lu You of the Southern Song Dynasty, *Admonitions for My Son* 训儿篇 by Wang Shouren 王守仁 of the Ming Dynasty, and *the Song of Admonishing Preschool Children* 训蒙歌 by Pang Shangpeng 庞尚鹏. For example, in Shao Yong's poem, men of virtue are good while petty men are evil. Another example is Wang Shouren's *Admonitions for My Son*, «which contains moral education for children, such as filial piety, loyalty and trust, in addition to the

¹³ T. Mao, W. Linghao, *Research on the Cultivation of Children's Communication Ability by Chinese Traditional Enlightened Reading Materials*, «Guangxi Social Sciences», n. 6, 2018, pp. 205-211.

strict role of parents and teachers»¹⁴. It is catchy as follows. «Respect parents and brothers. Teachers and parents must be strict. Listen to good advice and learn manners. Do not indulge yourself and play idly. Check your merits and demerits. Make helpful friends and learn beneficial skills». Some families directly use the compiled poems, songs, and pithy formulas to provide moral education for their descendants, such as famous *Three-Character Classic* 三字经 and *Thousand-Character Classic* 千字文.

2.3. Various ceremonies and educational activities held to internalize morality

From its origin, the ceremony itself is a basic activity to promote people's moral growth. Most of the original moral education was carried out in the ceremony, and morality was also embodied and observed in the ceremony. Rituals shape children's lives and enable them to adapt to a certain social order. «Rituals form a bridge between the field of socialization and the system»¹⁵. Various ritual activities in ancient Chinese family moral education have strongly cultivated the excellent moral character of descendants.

On the one hand, these ritual activities come from daily life. For example, Sima Guang of the Northern Song Dynasty stipulated in his *Family Code of Conduct* 谏水家仪 that the son and the daughter-in-law are expected to make every effort to pay attention to their parents' daily necessities. Before dawn, they should go to their parents' residence to offer them food. Another example is Lu Jiuyuan 陆九渊 of the Southern Song Dynasty, who lived in Jinxi, Fuzhou for generations and established a set of daily life etiquette. There were two times of ancestor worship in the morning and evening. «Every morning, the parents and their children bowed to the ancestral hall and gathered in the hall. In the evening, they repeated this». There were also ceremonies such as the declaration of daily life. «Bow in the morning, play three drums, and one of children recite poems or admonitions aloud. Have tea after eating, hit the chime three times, and one of children recite poems or admonitions aloud»¹⁶. These ceremonies were put into daily life, which greatly promoted the moral cultivation of future generations in filial piety and self-reflection. Morality is generated in daily life. Moral education is provided in daily life, and guides the construction of a new life.

¹⁴ J. Yuan, *Contemporary Reflection on the Tradition of Respecting Teachers in China*, «Jiangsu Education», n. 55, 2020, pp. 58-60.

¹⁵ C. Wolfe, Z. Yaliang, *Rituals in Education: Demonstration, Imitation, Cross Culture*, «Peking University Education Review», n. 2, 2009, pp. 130-142.

¹⁶ L. Dajing, annotated by Liu Zhiyou, *Notes of He Lin*, Qilu Publishing House, 2017.

On the other hand, these ritual activities are also reflected on important occasions. Xu Rulin's 许汝霖 *Dexingtang Family Stipulation* 德星堂家订 in the Qing Dynasty, specifies the ritual norms in terms of banquets, funeral arrangements, burial, and sacrifices. For example, banquet dishes can be used when needed, and spared if unnecessary. «Banquets for important people and wedding banquets are occasionally held and only twelve dishes are served. There are only eight dishes for other banquets». Another example is the funeral ceremony, which advocates strict frugality. «When days of mourning are set, don't invite more guests as it brings additional expenses». Yao Shunmu of the Ming Dynasty, in his *Admonitions for the Yao Clan*, mentioned the ritual of ancestor worship. «In a clan, if someone has filial piety, friendliness, righteousness and virtuous deeds, his good deeds should be presented to their ancestors to inspire their descendants on the day of ancestor worship. If there are people who have been evil, they will be admonished day by day, so that they can know how to introspect and mend their ways». The ritual of ancestor worship is intended to cultivate the good moral character of later generations, such as remembering their ancestors, expressing gratitude for the source of benefit, and repaying kindness.

3. *Factors in the Implementation of Ancient Family Moral Education*

The implementation of family moral education is restricted by many factors, and the differences between family and parents are objective. When parents carried out moral education in ancient Chinese families, parents' concepts of family moral education, parents' moral character and cultural quality, living conditions and ways of families, interpersonal relationships and culture of families, and the humanistic and natural environment around families will have a certain impact on the effect of moral education, which should be explored one by one.

3.1. *Parents' concepts of family moral education*

«Parents' concepts of family education refer to the basic and overall view of children's development in the process of education»¹⁷. From the perspective of moral education, they are parents' educational concepts of how to provide

¹⁷ L. Xiuli, L. Hang, *Parental Concepts of Family Education for Preschool Children: Current Situation and Problems*, «Journal of Northeast Normal University», n. 5, 2009, pp. 192-195.

their children family moral education. Educational concepts will shape the operation ideas of family moral education. It is the basis of parents' moral behavior, which is of great significance to the moral cultivation of children. Scientific family education concepts can reduce the occurrence of children's problematic behaviors. Influenced by traditional culture, the concept of family education in ancient China is slightly different from that of today, which is manifested in three aspects. First, ancient families attached great importance to living together as a clan, and parents paid special attention to the morality of their descendants to foster stronger family ties, values, and traditions. Second, the Chinese ancients put forward the idea of early teaching, focusing on children's learning from one rule and one norm. Third, it comes down in one continuous line with the concept of morality given priority over penalty, and families will strictly discipline children in the process of implementing moral education.

Focus on fostering stronger family ties, values, and traditions. It is a fine tradition of the Chinese nation to attach importance to family ties, values, and traditions. In ancient times, as literati and officialdom, they especially advocated fostering stronger family ties, values, and traditions. Their basic purpose was to make their descendants promising, and bring honor to their family names, and then ensure that these values and traditions can be passed down from generation to generation to maintain their family reputation forever. For example, Yan Zhitui of the Northern Qi Dynasty thought that «if you associate with good people, you will acquire their virtue; if you associate with bad people, you will acquire their faults»¹⁸. Sima Guang of the Northern Song Dynasty also believed that

If one always gets along with upright people, his thoughts and actions cannot be without integrity, just like a person who grew up in the state of Qi cannot help speaking Qi dialect; If one often gets along with dishonest people, he will become dishonest, just like those who grew up in the state of Chu cannot help speaking Chu dialect¹⁹.

Only when every descendant has a good moral character can good family ties, values, and traditions be formed. As required in the *Admonitions for the Yao Clan*, «when the whole family, old and young, gather together, they can admonish and teach each other, and everyone wants to be worthy of the reputation of the descendants of the sages. This is the real innocent family».

Pay attention to the early implementation of moral education. As early as the Western Han Dynasty, Jia Yi put forward the idea of «early education», emphasizing that before children come under external influences, parents should have the idea of early moral education for children. *Admonitions for the Yan Clan* has a relatively complete discussion. «When infants know peo-

¹⁸ Y. Zhitui, annotated by Guan Shuguang, *Admonitions for the Yan Clan*, Zhongzhou, Ancient Books Publishing House, 2008.

¹⁹ S. Guang, *Family Norms*, Shanghai, China Bookstore, 2018.

ple's happiness and anger, parents should educate them to do what they are told to do, and not do it when they are not allowed». It also emphasizes that this period is the key to accepting moral education, and if missed, it will be difficult to correct. For example, «when people are young, it's easy for them to concentrate. However, when they grow up, they may be distracted and find it difficult to concentrate. Therefore, it is necessary to educate them in their early years and never miss this great opportunity». As summarized in *Family Precepts for the Xiaoyou Clan* 孝友堂家训, «it is too late to learn how to remedy when children don't accept proper early education and are used to bad habits».

Pay attention to strict teaching and family governance. The family education concept of ancient parents also paid attention to «morality given priority over penalty» and the punishment was much stricter than that of today if there was any immorality and disrespect. According to *Admonitions for the Pang Clan*, «if a descendant violates family precepts, he will be brought to the ancestral hall and his bad deeds will be told to his ancestors. He will be punished and ordered to introspect and mend his ways». *Norms For the Zheng Clan* 郑氏规范 stipulates that «the young cannot defy the elders. Those who speak rudely and act contrary to the law should be instructed, and those who do not correct their mistakes should be severely punished». Lu Jiuyuan also stipulated that «when a child makes mistakes, parents will tell him off in the face of other children. If he does not correct his mistakes, he will be beaten with a stick. If he never mends his ways until becoming intolerable, he will be punished by the official». In particular, immorality is intolerable to parents, and punishment is more severe.

If there is evidence that he is not dutiful to his parents and brothers, he will be beaten with a rod 40 times for being unfilial, and 20 times for being not dutiful to his brothers. If he repeats the mistakes, he will be punished again. If he makes these mistakes three times, he should be expelled from the ancestral hall²⁰.

3.2. *Excellent moral character and cultural quality of parents*

The heads of families, especially parents, have a great influence on their children, often affecting their whole life. The comprehensive quality of the head of a family, such as moral character and cultural quality, affects the effect of moral education. Teaching by personal example is better than verbal instruction. The moral quality of the head of a family has influenced the descendants and they imperceptibly formed a specific moral character. Mencius

²⁰ F. Chengkang, *Family Law and Clan Rules in China*, Shanghai, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences Press, 2016.

elaborated on the view that the head of a family should set an example. Gong-sun Chou 公孙丑 asked, «why doesn't a man of virtue educate his son in person?» Mencius answered, it is not feasible. A teacher must use correct norms. If using the correct norms is ineffective, the teacher will become angry. As soon as anger arises, it actually hurts the child. Father uses strict standards to demand his son, but he doesn't act according to the correct standards himself. «This harms the relationship between father and son and then their relationship deteriorates»²¹. Sima Guang of the Northern Song Dynasty emphasized in the *Family Code of Conduct* 谏水家仪 that «as the head of a family, he must abide by rites and law to lead their children and families». Xu Sanzhong 徐三重 of the Ming Dynasty also emphasized in his *Family Rules* 家则 that «the head of a family should abide by rites and laws and should not act recklessly. They should be selfless and should not be biased».

On the one hand, the advantage of teaching by personal example is that descendants are influenced by the head of a family and consciously form some moral character. As mentioned in *Yuan Ti Ji* 原体集, «the head of a family is a role model for the whole family. If he can be diligent, how dare others be lazy; if he can be frugal, how dare others be extravagant». On the other hand, it can help the head of a family establish prestige. When his children and grandchildren have behaviors that do not conform to the moral norms, they can be convinced by his discipline. As pointed out in *Admonitions for the Yan Clan*, for the same words, people always believe in the close person; for the same command, people always obey the person they believe in. The cultural quality of the head of a family refers to his scientific and cultural level, which has a certain impact on what kind of family moral education goals and content he determines. The higher his cultural quality is, the more accurately he can grasp the social requirements for personal moral development, and the more they can choose the appropriate moral content.

3.3. *Specific living conditions and ways of families*

In ancient China, there was a clear division of social strata. There was a clear difference between «scholars» and «farmers, artisans and merchants». The former integrated economic, political and cultural capital, while the latter lived hard and had poor family living conditions. Therefore, on the one hand, subject to family living conditions, different families will have different patterns when implementing moral education. To prevent the decline of the family and pursue the prosperity of the family, the scholar family will implement

²¹ M. Ke, annotated by Wan Lihua *et alii*, *Mencius*, CITIC Press, 2013.

the family moral education in a complete way. The family can have enough strength to hold a grand moral education activity, or the courtyard can be set up in an orderly manner. The plaques for moral education can be hung everywhere, so that children and grandchildren can cultivate themselves, be loyal, filial, benevolent and just to consolidate their social status. However, in the families of the vast majority of ordinary people in China, the implementation of moral education is relatively limited. For example, in terms of family precepts as one of the means of implementing moral education, since most people in ancient China were illiterate and there were few written family precepts for civilians, word of mouth was the main form of admonition. If literate civilians have no social status, most of the written family precepts they wrote are only circulated within their families. Therefore, most of written family precepts that can be tested in history are formulated by influential powerful families or successors, who have no worries about food and clothing.

One exception is that the bureaucrats or literati and officialdom who were born in poverty, after having a certain social status and economic foundation, recorded the precepts of their predecessors in the form of reminiscence, and then passed them on to their descendants and published them. On the other hand, due to the different lifestyles of each family, their basic attitudes and habits in terms of food, clothing, housing and transportation are different. Since descendants live in different families, there will be differences due to the influence of attitudes and habits of heads of families. Scholars often live collectively in the form of a large group of families. Descendants follow their elders to read and learn and master the four arts of study. Their habits formed by early upbringing are helpful for them to develop personal qualities as they grow older. However, ordinary families are common in small households, where several family members «work at sunrise and rest at sunset». The heads of ordinary families carry out simple moral education about production and life for their children and grandchildren. In a word, investigating the implementation of family moral education cannot be separated from the specific living conditions and ways of families. «Different life horizons provide different perspectives and methods for descendants to investigate life, delimit different perspectives for understanding life»²², and have a significant impact on the implementation of family moral education.

²² L. Jie, *The Basic Function of Moral Education: Guiding the Construction of Life*, «Education Research», n. 6, 2010, pp. 3-8.

3.4. *Interpersonal relationship and culture of families*

The interpersonal relationship of families refers to the relationship between family members. It affects the effect of receiving moral education from the elders, as well as the moral judgment and moral choice of the descendants. Its significance can be seen from the statement that «social norms are the basis of education» in *Admonitions for the Yan Clan*. Sima Guang of the Song Dynasty further explained social norms in *Family Norms* as «righteousness of the ruler, the obedience of ministers, love of fathers, filial piety of sons, kindness of elder brother, respect of younger brothers». Social norms are the norms of these six kinds of human relations. There is no better way to govern a family than social norms. With the social norms, «the father is loving and able to teach his son, the son is filial and able to advise his father, the elder brother is kind and friendly, and the younger brother is respectful and obedient». Therefore, «social norms are beneficial». A good interpersonal relationship between family members is conducive to children learning filial piety and other ethics, and learning how to love. Not only can they love themselves and others, but also can they form a universal love for their family and country. From the perspective of traditional culture, the ancients did not stop at the emotional level to define the connotation of family interpersonal relationships such as filial piety and fraternity but tried to guide this emotion into the track of the family system, and transform the filial piety to parents into obedience to the patriarchal hierarchy.

The development path of Chinese civilization is the same structure of the clan and the country. Family-oriented and ethics-centered are the basic values of this civilization. It is fundamentally different from the development path of European and American civilization whose «basic values are individual-oriented and related to religion»²³. In ancient China, social norms required fathers to do their duties as fathers and sons to do their duties as sons in families. Social norms required the monarch to do his duty as the monarch and ministers to do their duties as ministers in the country. In the final analysis, there were two aspects of the problem. «Serving parents» was consistent with «serving the monarch», and «to be filial» was consistent with «to be loyal». In the traditional cultural society, which pays attention to the principle of internal saintliness and external kingliness, the interpersonal relationship in the family and the ethical culture it embodies are the epitomes of the national political relationship and ancient Chinese culture. If the interpersonal relationship between family members is not harmonious, and the father is not kind, then the son is not dutiful, and the family has lost the basic norms of etiquette. As a result, the moral education of the family to its descendants will be im-

²³ W. Zeying, *The Core of Chinese Family Values and Traditions is to Shape, Cultivate and Establish Correct Values*, «Journal of Shanghai Normal University», n. 4, 2015, pp. 5-11.

possible, and future generations will eventually be wiped out because of their incompatibility with the feudal etiquette and law of the country and society.

3.5. *Humanistic and natural environment around families*

As early as the Spring and Autumn Period in China, there was a detailed discussion about the impact of the characteristics of social strata and the surrounding environment on the cultivation of a person's filial piety, righteousness and other moral characters. There is a paragraph in *Duke Huan of Qi Seeking Hegemony with the Help of Guan Zhong* 管仲对桓公以霸术 as follows. «If scholars can live in a secluded place, from morning till night, from childhood to adulthood, to learn the principles of righteousness, filial piety, respect, love and kindness, they will settle down without being disturbed by other things and changing their will. Therefore, children can learn from their fathers and brothers without supervision, and have mastery of knowledge without effort. In this way, the descendants of scholars will always be scholars». The environment has a certain impact on family moral education, which can be divided into the following two categories.

First, the environment is created by couplets, inscriptions and artifacts. In ancient China, couplets, plaques, calligraphy, paintings and decorative items, reflect not only the family's pursuit of a peaceful and happy life, but also the family's high recognition of some moral standards. They are an important part of the family moral education environment. These artifacts condense the ardent expectation of the elders for the noble moral behavior of their future generations and exert a subtle influence on the moral cultivation of descendants. Through the couplets, heads of families can express their expectations for their descendants. For example, Zeng Linshu 曾麟书 in the Qing Dynasty wrote a couplet to educate his sons in self-cultivation, family regulation, state governance, and bringing peace to all under heaven. On the plaque of the residence, it is generally three or four characters to give prominence to the key points.

For example, the words «to be inclusive and virtuous» show the pursuit of inclusiveness and virtue of such families. In terms of decorative items, ancient families would place the calligraphy and paintings of mythical figures or ancient sages as ornaments in their houses, calling on the whole family to learn from them. They would also use the three durable plants of winter (pines, bamboos and plum blossoms), and four symbols of men of virtue (plum blossoms, orchids, bamboos and chrysanthemums) as ornamental plants to express their yearning for the noble character. These couplets, inscriptions and decorative items together constitute the physical environment in the implementation of family moral education, which is characterized by its intuitive image and long-term existence, playing an important role in moral education.

Second, the environment is created by rural regulations and customs. Since the Shang Yang 商鞅 Reform of the Qin Dynasty, more than a dozen households or dozens of households who lived together formed a basic social unit in ancient China, which was called «township» or «village». With the development of the economy and the increase in population, more than 100 households in the Ming and Qing Dynasties constituted a village. The ancient families who lived together in a «township» or «village» had close ties, complied with the village rules and customs, and often carried out certain social activities with similar lifestyles and behavior habits. The interaction between the descendants and others in a «township» or «village» will have an impact on the implementation of family moral education. Liu Zhou 刘昼 in the Northern Qi Dynasty explained that «customs refer to activities or ways of behavior people living in a particular circumstance are used to»²⁴. The local custom environment is formed by contacts among people in a «township» or «village», which is characterized by group and authority. On the one hand, a good custom environment can transmit public moral norms, further promote the implementation of family moral education, and help to cultivate the good moral character of future generations in a «township» or «village». On the other hand, a bad custom environment will reduce the effectiveness of the implementation of family moral education, and descendants will have bad behavior under its influence. *Huai Nan Zi* 淮南子 discusses the influence of the custom environment on the implementation of moral education as follows. «If a baby who was born in his own country grows up in another country, he can't know the customs in his own country. It can be concluded that etiquette and customs are not innate to humans, but formed under external influences». As a result, human nature is originally pure and innocent, but they will be influenced and changed if they are in bad customs for a long time. Once changed, they will forget their original nature, and be in tune with the people around them.

²⁴ F. Yashu, *Collation and Annotation of Liu Zi's Thought*, Zhonghua Book Company, 1998.