

Review of Family Relations in China: From the Perspective of Economic History

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Abstract: Based on the historical materialism that the economic base determines the superstructure, this paper discusses the causes of family relations in modern and contemporary Chinese society from the perspectives of feudal politics, feudal economy and modern economy, and puts forward future prospects and suggestions. Furthermore, most importantly, dividing the family relations into bloodline and utilitarian, a special exploitation relationship between parents and their children in feudal society has been disclosed by this research, and is proved by using the classical indifference curve and budget line analysis method of microeconomics, the law of its change with the development of economic history is found, the future development trend is predicted. Trying to answer the question of where Chinese family relations come from and where they go may have constructive enlightenment for the further modernization of the economy and society in China.

1. Family Relations under the Ideology of Small Peasant Economy

Since the reform and opening up, China's social urbanization has developed rapidly, and a large number of people have flooded into the city. Accepting the influence of the city's ideological trend, they seem to have broken the shackles of traditional feudal culture and become a new generation. However, we cannot deny that at most 50 years ago, Chinese society was still the world of small peasant economy; at most, before two generations, the vast majority of people's thoughts were still thorough small peasant ideas. The idea of small peasant originated from the production relations of small peasants, which in then affected the family relations of Chinese society and formed a Chinese "filial piety culture" that has lasted for more than 5,000 years.

Of course the "filial piety culture" has its positive effect, we do not deny it.[1] But now when we want to analyze the impact of "filial piety culture" on family relations in Chinese society, we must inevitably talk about its drawbacks: "filial piety culture" actually breaks the natural feelings between parents and children in some aspects, alienates the relationship between parents and children into interest, and uses "filial piety" to cover this interest connection.

1.1 Pose: The Natural Connection between Parents and Children

Parents and children have a natural emotional connection, which is biologically determined by everyone's genes and can hardly be destroyed. This connection is not only reflected in parents' love for their children, but also in human's pursuit of having children: and it is this pursuit of having children that has contributed to the emergence of China's filial piety culture.

The children, all know to love their loved ones, and elders, all know to respect their brothers.(Mencius)

It is difficult to find parents in the world who are born not to love their children, and there are very few children who are born to hate their own family. Using this innate connection, the ancient Chinese invented the culture of filial piety.

Filial piety originated from the traditional reproductive worship in China. The original glyph of filial piety refers to the birth of children, and the meaning of the word refers to the object is similar to home, because the basic element of the family is the parents and their children. Until the formation of primitive Confucianism, filial piety still remained in the instinctive yearning for reproduction. However, after the Western Zhou Dynasty, all this changed in essence: filial piety no longer refers to simple reproduction, but has become a collective cultural behavior of the Chinese people with the later Confucian filial piety culture.

Among the bronze script and literary works of the Western Zhou Dynasty, most of the filial piety is a kind of ancestor sacrifice for the purpose of seeking children, that is, to pray for the spirit of the ancestors in heaven to bless many children and grandchildren. Therefore, on the basis of retaining the concept of giving birth to children, the filial piety after the Western Zhou Dynasty added new content - respect for ancestors and respect for heaven. This leads to two questions: why do we have more children and grandchildren, and why do we respect ancestors and heaven? They expound the family relationship under the ideology of small peasants from both economic and cultural aspects.

1.2 The Obsession of “more children, more blessings”

The concept of having more children, more blessings is not unique to the Chinese people. To study whether the whole society is affected by the consciousness of “more children, more blessings”, we might as well start from the perspective of fertility. Fertility is an important indicator to measure the intensity of women's fertility. It not only reflects the development level of the productive forces of the whole society, the demand for labor force, but also reflects the concept of fertility of women of childbearing age.

Table 1: Historical changes in fertility rates in various regions of the world

	China	UK	Nigeria
1960	4.45	2.69	6.36
1980	2.74	1.90	6.85
2000	1.63	1.64	6.12
2020	1.28	1.56	5.31

In Table 1, it can be seen from the above table that it indeed not the unique concept of the Chinese people, but a cultural phenomenon that exists widely in various countries around the world, and there are significant differences in intensity in different regions, showing the overall characteristics of more in areas with rich resources and fewer in areas with poor environment; more in backward areas and fewer in developed countries. From this, it can be obtained that the formation of the concept of fertility is closely related to the level of economic development.

We know that the industrial structure of a region represents the level of local economic

development and the local labor demand. The primary industry needs the largest number of labor, and the areas with backward economic development are dominated by the primary industry. If more labor is needed, people will naturally have more fertility needs. Back to the title, it was the absolute advantage of the small peasant economy in ancient China. In the small peasant economy, if you want to increase family income, you can either get more land or get more labor. For a peasant family, it is obviously unrealistic to hire labor: so having children has become the fastest way to obtain cheap labor. The ancients did not need to sign up for piano classes for their children, let alone pay them to buy a car and a house. The whole cost of raising was just adding an extra bowl of water to the porridge and two more chopsticks on the table, while the benefits brought by the children were very considerable.

Therefore, the ideal way for the development of a Chinese family is: you inherit five acres of land from your father. You and your wife have given birth to five sons and five daughters. When your son grows up, he has become a strong laborer and has surplus value. You exchange the surplus value for more land. After a few years, you will have 30 acres of land, and there are five strong labors for you to do live. The son will have a son again. The longer you live, the more wealth you have, and the better your life will be. This is why Chinese people believe that the longevity of children and grandchildren is the greatest happiness in life. When you hang up, your sons will be separated, each person will be divided into six acres of land, and the overall social wealth will be increased, and there will be another reincarnation. In the small peasant economy, most of the rich rural households you can see come from this proceed.

Under this social reality, it is natural for China to develop the idea of “more children, more blessings”. But there is an inevitable loophole in this model: parents can certainly treat their children as cheap labor through this kind of parent-child economic relationship, but children are also human beings. Human beings need to have their own ideas. How can parents ensure that their children will always listen to their own words? They chose to use their social voice to build a cultural system of respecting ancestors and sky.

1.3 The belief of respecting the ancestors and respecting the sky

We Chinese have lived in such a place since childhood. It emphasizes gentleness, respect and thrift, and filial piety first. The whole society works together to hold filial piety to the supreme moral high ground. It seems that no one has ever thought about why there is such a system? Is this system natural and reasonable?

The so-called respect for ancestors is to respect parents and elders. Why is there such a culture? From the perspective of game theory, respecting parents is the best choice (Table 2 is a possible simple diagram, the above field area as an example). The ancient Chinese obviously did not understand game theory, but they must understand that they wanted to live as long as possible.

Table 2: A possible game situation between the elder and young

	Filial piety	Unfilial piety
Filial piety	6,6	8,2
Unfilial piety	2,8	5,5

People will grow old. If someone advocates reducing the burden of old-age care and abandoning the culture of respecting the elderly, what should he do when he is old? Without the upbringing of young people, he can only live on his own. This is a cause of the respect for ancestors culture; from another perspective, in the traditional farming society, the elderly undoubtedly have the richest production experience. Although they cannot directly participate in social production, they can play an indispensable guiding role in social production. This is one of the root causes of filial piety in

ancient China, and it can also explain the gradual disappearance of traditional filial piety in recent years. With the continuous development of science and technology, the elderly no longer master the most advanced production technology, but the new generation of young people from universities have the most abundant knowledge. In this way, he lost the advantages of experience and technology, and emphasized that respect for ancestors has become a helpless move of this generation of elderly people. Only through cultural constraints can they change the disadvantages of their economic status, so that they can spend their old age in peace.

Of course, respect for ancestors has a positive impact. The ancestral culture provides a stage for future generations to remember their ancestors. Respecting ancestors not only respects the ancestors themselves, but also respects the various rules and regulations left by the ancestors, which is conducive to the stability of the whole society to a certain extent and plays an auxiliary role in morality and law. However, these rules and regulations are not all reasonable. Compared with their role in maintaining social stability, they are more of a constraint on the next generation of young people, which limits the development of the whole society. At the same time, the tradition of respecting the elders also hinders the promotion path of young people. The elders have occupied an important position for a long time, ensuring social stability, but also greatly inhibiting the vitality of society, making the whole society always heavy. It moved forward ignores the need to create innovation, but just stick to the rules and maintain as always, which is more harmful and less beneficial to social development.

The so-called worship of heaven is to believe in the ghosts and gods of heaven and earth. Mao Zedong mentioned that “men in China are generally governed by three systematic powers, namely, regime, ethnic power and theocracy. In addition to these three powers, women are also dominated by husband’s power. These four types of power - regime, ethnic power, theocracy and husband’s power: represent all the ideas and systems of feudal patriarchal law, and are the four great ropes that bind the Chinese people, especially the peasants. The ruling class in feudal society has the final right to interpret ghosts and gods (Just like the church of a certain era in the West). As an important supplement to the regime and ethnic power, theocracy participated in the idea of controlling the ruled class, which also affected the construction of family relations between the Chinese people.

“More children, more blessings”, respect ancestors and heaven, together form a traditional Chinese family centered on patriarchy, ethnic power and theocracy, and build a family relationship under the economic ideology of small peasants from the perspective of economy and culture.

1.4 Rule the world with filial piety

To sum up, the small peasant economy and family culture represented by the filial piety culture has run through China’s feudal society for more than 2,000 years, and has maintained the stability of the entire feudal society by maintaining the basic component of the society.

After the birth of Confucianism, the ruling class took advantage of the Confucian exposition on filial piety to promote feudal filial piety, and exchanged the country’s “long-term governance and security” at the expense of part of social vitality, that is, “ruling the world with filial piety”. This can indeed be exchanged for temporary stability, but the long-term confinement of society will inevitably have many negative effects - the feudal patriarchal system is the result of the development of feudal filial piety to the peak. We will explain in detail the formation, connotation and impact of the feudal patriarchal system in the next section.

2. A Special Exploitation Relationship between Parents and Their Children in Feudal Society

At the earliest time: in the animal world where productivity is close to zero, the family system began to exist. Typically, such as red hemp ducks, penguins and swans, animals like them strictly

abide by monogamy. The purpose of this family system is very simple: to raise children by both husband and wife, reduce the pressure of survival, and let children's survival rate is higher, and it is also likely to have feelings between husband and wife for each other. This family system has always been praised by human beings, but human beings have never had such a pure and flawless family system.

In the earliest days of human society, although the productivity was a little higher than that of animals, it was still very low. At this time, private ownership has not been established. The basic unit of human production is a public clan commune[4]. The family system is mainly a blood family and a Punalua family (AKA Sub-blood group marriage system). Although the two family systems are a little different, they both have 2 common features: husband and wife, in Master Lü's Spring and Autumn Annals, Such a society is recorded:

In the past, there was no monarch, and its people lived in groups. The people know their mother but did not know the father, and there was no difference between the husband and wife, boys and girls.

It is a very typical feature of an early human family. Because it is not monogamy, women don't know who they are pregnant with children. When the child is born, they only know who the mother is, and they can't determine the father. This is also the reason for the formation of the female clan: even the father can't be sure, and the patrilineal clan can't be formed at all.

There is no hierarchical relationship in the first two family systems, but in the same way, at this time, the family does not have love between men and women, but only forms a family to reproduce. Therefore, there is no oppression in this kind of family, but it is by no means the ideal family system we have been pursuing.

Later, human productivity further developed. After a complex process, the primitive public clan commune was dissolved, private ownership was established, and the basic production unit began to transform into a patriarchal family[5]. However, the members of the patriarchal family were all slave-owners class. They did not work and relied on slaves to support them. The slaves had a lot of complaints about this:

Why do three hundred bales of grass move home without sowing? Do not hunt in winter night, why do you see the courtyard badger hanging ah? Those old gentlemen, ah, never eat their own labor!

(Book of Poetry - Shijing)

Thousands of years after the establishment of the slave society, iron and cattle farming began to be popularized, which greatly improved the productivity. Under the influence of the development of the productive forces, the production relations of slavery began to be gradually eliminated. The patriarchal family began to disintegrate, and the basic units of production began to transform into small families. During this period, there were a number of large and small changes in China that accelerated the establishment of the family economy, such as the Shang Yang's Reform.

Family has more than two men but do not divide, times its tax. (Shiji)

It forced to break up the big family into a small family. Although Shang Yang was finally dead, like his other reforms, the formation of the family economy is the inevitable result of historical development, and once it is on the top, it can't be stopped. Since the establishment of the Chin Dynasty, the family has become the most basic production unit in China, and the establishment of feudal society has also cleared the last obstacle to the establishment of feudal patriarchy.[2]

The family in the feudal society was an exclusive family, which is commonly known as the "monogamous family", but at this time, the autocratic family was not very stable. Maybe one of the couple's adultery with someone else would destroy an autocratic family. However, at that time, it was not a big deal for the husband to commit adultery with others. Otherwise, concubines will not have been allowed in ancient China, so the dictatorship at this time was exclusive for women.

Why can men get the privilege of not being bound by dictatorship? This is related to the production of feudal society. Most men are strong, so they are the main labor force in the family and the main economic source. They have money, so they also have power. The husband has absolute leadership in the family. Moreover, the more women do not participate in production, the lower their status. A daughter of a rich family's status in the family is often not as high as that of a rural woman in the family. She only needs to sit and wait for food all day, while the peasant woman "Wake up early every day and return late to make textiles". Farmers' women also participate in production, and their status is naturally higher.

In the feudal patriarchal system, the status of children is even lower. In China's feudal patriarchal families, the most basic principle of the relationship between parents and children is "filial piety"[3], and what is this "filial piety"? It is "no violation", all the parents' requirements must be met by the children, and all the parents' orders must be obeyed by the children. The autocracy in the feudal family was even higher than the autocracy of the emperor. At least the emperor would set up some officials to find mistakes for himself, but what about in the feudal family? Suppose you and your father are walking on the road, and there is a pit in front of the road. You told your father to let him take a detour, but he insisted on moving forward and did not allow you to take a detour. At this time, if you dare to refute or take a detour, you will be unfilial. All right and wrongs are judged by the parents. The will of the parents is the will of the children.

Do not dare to forget parents anytime. (Liji)

It is even said that children can be counted as part of the family property, parents can dispose of their children at will, and the state protects this right. The Qing Law rules that:

When parents accuse their children, just directly according to their parents' wishes without interrogation. (The Qing Law)

Parents have the right to punish their children. There is no doubt that the love praised and pursued by the ancients can only be born in free love, while the feudal patriarchy is exactly the opposite. As I said earlier, children are basically equivalent to family property in a feudal patriarchal family, so the freedom of marriage cannot exist under this family system, and marriage is completely arranged by the parents of both sides.

From the above analysis, it is not difficult to see that the feudal patriarchal system is characterized by no freedom of marriage, clear hierarchy, absolute authority of parents and absolute obedience of children.

If you want to continue to explore the reasons for the existence of the feudal patriarchal system, it must be analyzed in combination with the situation of feudal society. The feudal patriarchal system is a product of feudal society, and the feudal patriarchal system has also maintained social stability.

The worry is that the damage to the father's power will damage the emperor's power; the fear is that after destroying the hierarchy, it will destroy national security.

In order to maintain the hierarchy of superiority and inferiority in society, so as to consolidate the dominant position of feudal rulers, the feudal patriarchy is the basis of its foundation. It must exist. It can be said that China can maintain a situation of great reunification without being fragmented like Europe. To a certain extent, it has benefited from the feudal patriarchal system. Similarly, China's ideological autocratic system for thousands of years and slow social development are also thanks to the feudal patriarchy to a certain extent.

With the help of the above-mentioned social mechanisms such as monarchy and patriarchy, the father of the feudal society grasped the control of his wife and children, and then occupied their labor results. The realization of this exploitative relationship relies on the cultural atmosphere and legal system, which is an inevitable product of feudal society. For example, the 'Draft Civil Law of the Qing Dynasty' stipulates that parental authority is exercised by the father or mother, and

stipulates the rights of the father or mother to the children in terms of both personal and property. Parents' rights to their children are not limited to minor children, and adult children should also be bound by parents' rights.

Parents have the right to specify their children's residence and occupation.

(Draft Civil Law of Qing Dynasty)

It can be seen that based on the control of law and culture, parents have formed an economic exploitation relationship with their children.

3. Conclusion: braids on the head and braids in the heart

To sum up, the development of family relations in the entire Chinese economic history is based on kinship emotions. Economic factors play a very important role in family relations, and culture influence this process. According to Mises of Austria, economics is a kind of behavior science. In essence, the cornerstone of human action science is the person who is acting: he is an individual person, not a stone or atom that can be accurately expressed in quantity and 'moves' according to the laws of physics. On the contrary, people have their own internal intentions, goals or purposes to achieve, and people will also form ideas on how to achieve these goals. Our research should be based on people's ideas and serve people's behavior, rather than functions and historical games on paper.

In China, Children always feel that their parents don't understand us just because they are subtly influenced by traditional feudal ideas and although children are also unconsciously influenced by feudal ideas, they are not as strong and profound as the previous generation: the 1911 Revolution cut the braids on people's heads. The braids in our hearts still exist, despite we were born in the new era. Our society has experienced the baptism of a hundred-year-old revolution, gradually removing the remnants of feudal society and rejuvenating under the light of modern ideas. In this environment, our family relationship will move forward in the ideal direction from generation to generation, and the family culture accepted by our children and parents. The gap will become smaller and smaller, and the family conflicts caused by the cultural generation gap will naturally gradually disappear in the long river of history.

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