

## Family in Ancient China

**DIRECTIONS:** You have information from three different sources describing family life in Ancient China. Use this information to add notes about these topics.

### Family Life

The Chinese family was ruled by the father of the house. His wife and children were required to obey him in all things. Women generally took care of the home and raised the children. Marriage partners were decided by the parents and the preferences of the children getting married often had little impact on the parent's choice.

A big part of Chinese family life was the respect of their elders. Children of all ages, even grown ups, were required to respect their parents. This respect continued even after people were dead. The Chinese would often would pray to their ancestors and offer sacrifices to them. Respect of the elders was also part of the religion Confucianism.

### School

Only wealthy boys attended school in Ancient China. They learned how to write using calligraphy. They also learned about the teachings of Confucius and studied poetry. These were important skills for government officials and the nobles.

### Life of Women

The life of women in Ancient China was especially difficult. They were considered much less valuable than men. Sometimes when a baby girl was born she was put outside to die if the family didn't want it. This was considered okay in their society. Women had no say in who they would marry.

(from [https://www.ducksters.com/history/china/daily\\_life.php](https://www.ducksters.com/history/china/daily_life.php))

**Family Relationships** The ancient Chinese put a high value on family. Society demanded that individuals show loyalty to their family. Within the family, older family members had more power and privileges than younger ones. As in most ancient societies, men had higher status than women.

**Family Life** Confucian teachings about family loyalty and respect for elders were key values. During the Han, ancestor worship continued. People made offerings to show respect and gain support from their ancestors.

Also, the Han legal code enforced Confucian values. Parents could report children who did not behave with filial piety. Adult children would be punished harshly. Younger children, though, were usually exempt from punishment.

(from our textbook)

	Views on women	Philosophies
Confucianism in Han China	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>FILIAL PIETY REQUIRED THAT PEOPLE RESPECT THEIR ELDERLY AND ANCESTORS, ESPECIALLY MALE ONES.</b></li> <li>● <b>THE IDEAL ROLE FOR A WOMAN WAS TO TAKE CARE OF A LARGE HOUSEHOLD.</b></li> <li>● <b>WOMEN TYPICALLY DIDN'T HAVE FORMAL ROLES IN CONFUCIAN LIFE OUTSIDE THE HOME.</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>BOTH CONFUCIANISM AND DAOISM HAVE THE CONCEPT OF YIN AND YANG, OR DUALITY.</b></li> <li>● <b>WOMEN ARE SEEN AS PART OF THE YIN: YIELDING, SUBMISSIVE, SOFT, ETC.</b></li> <li>● <b>MEN ARE SEEN AS PART OF THE YANG: AGGRESSIVE, POWERFUL, ETC.</b></li> </ul>
Daoism in Han China	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>WOMEN WERE ALLOWED TO BE PRIESTS AND TEACHERS IN THE DAOIST TRADITION.</b></li> <li>● <b>IN THE CLASSICAL DAOIST TEXT, THE DAODEJING, FEMININE CHARACTERISTICS SUCH AS FERTILITY, SOFTNESS, AND SUBMISSION ARE SEEN AS POSITIVE AND RESPECTED FEATURES.</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>IN DAOISM, THE FEMALE CONTRIBUTION AS THE YIN IS MORE RESPECTED THAN IT IS IN CONFUCIANISM; IT IS SEEN AS A PART OF NATURE.</b></li> <li>● <b>DAOISM SUGGESTS THAT A SOFTER, MORE YIELDING ATTITUDE MAY EVENTUALLY LEAD TO MORE FAVORABLE RESULTS.</b></li> </ul>

<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/world-history/ancient-medieval/women-and-families/a/women-and-families-article>

**Honoring Ancestors** The most important spirits to many ancient Chinese were those of their ancestors. They believed that family members lived on after death in the spirit world. The spirits of those ancestors remained part of the family.

Like any family member, the ancestors had to be supported and cared for. If the living took care of their ancestors, then the ancestors would protect and guide them. But the spirits of ancestors could also cause people trouble. The key to a good relationship was for the living to honor the dead.

Over the centuries, the Chinese developed many rituals to honor their ancestors. Families had shrines with tablets inscribed with ancestors' names. They set out food for their ancestors on special occasions to welcome them home. After paper money came into use, they burned fake "spirit" money to give the ancestors income in the afterlife. Practices of honoring the spirits of the dead are known as **ancestor worship**. Many of these rituals related to ancestor worship are performed at holidays and funerals in China today.

**Reading Check** Why was it important to the Chinese to honor their ancestors?