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The History of Family in China

Source 1: <https://quatr.us/china/ancestors-parents-chinese-family.htm>

May 2016 - "Most people in ancient and medieval China thought families were very important. Kids often lived not just with their parents, but also with their grandparents, their aunts and uncles, and their cousins. Richer people also lived with slaves or servants.

People took good care of their children. They carried babies and toddlers all the time, and gave them good pieces of food. But if your family wasn't rich, all the strong adults and teenagers in the family had to go out to work in the fields during the day, and then the children had to stay with their grandparents or an old aunt, or with their older sisters or brothers.

Boys in China often kept on living with their families even after they grew up, spending their whole lives living in the same house. But girls, when they grew up, got married and went to live in their husband's house. The girls had to do whatever their mothers-in-law told them to do.

Most people thought that it was very important to respect old people. The oldest people in the house continued to be in charge until they died. Even after the old people died, people believed that their grandparents and their parents continued to exist as invisible spirits or ghosts watching over the family, and they made altars so they could sacrifice to the spirits of their ancestors. Everyone's house had these altars, and everyone sacrificed to their ancestors. Otherwise the whole family would have bad luck."

Main Ideas from Source 1	
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Source 2: <https://chinaculturecorner.com/2013/06/21/the-chinese-family/>

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"Family has long been a key component within Chinese society, and many aspects of Chinese life can be tied to honoring one's parents or ancestors. In fact, the majority of the "five relationships" espoused by Confucius were directly centered on the family. Due to this focus on the family, it was common for the Chinese, even when fully grown with children of their own, to not only remain in or close to their hometown, but also have many, if not all, living generations of a family living under the same roof (四世同堂). Chinese who may have done business far from home, or may have been appointed to government posts far away, would normally have found time to return home on a regular basis, giving rise to the popular Chinese saying: *"falling leaves returning to the root of the tree that sired them."*

"The concept of family in China was so important that it was one of the few moral and ideological concepts to survive the decade-long turmoil and chaos of the Cultural Revolution relatively unscathed. While many Chinese elders lament the fact that young adults born in the 1980's or later possess no clear moral compass or strong standards of behavior, no one in China has forgotten the importance of family.

The Chinese Family Structure

"The Chinese family structure has traditionally been rigid and hierarchical, with elders still receiving the largest degree of reverence, respect and obedience, a practice that has continued into the modern age. And while Confucius may have preached that showing respect and filial piety to one's elders did in no way require blind obedience, in actual practice throughout Chinese history and today, many parents and grandparents expect their children/grandchildren to do as they are told. Within the traditional Chinese family structure, each family member has a specific form of address in Chinese, with different forms of address for older and younger

brother, sisters, aunts, uncles, grandfathers and grandmothers, on both the maternal and paternal sides of a family.

“And while this naturally can appear complicated to the uninitiated Westerner, in fact, it was and is incredibly important to the Chinese family structure. A significant aspect of life in the Chinese family is showing the proper amount of respect to the appropriate members of the family. For example, a father’s elder brother will accordingly rank higher than his younger brother, and there exist separate terms to differentiate the two, to both members of the family as well as to outsiders. And these terms also offer insight into the position of a girl within the traditional Chinese family unit. Many of the terms for family members on the maternal side of the family begin with the character “Wài (外),” literally meaning “outside,” indicative of the fact that Chinese women, even after marrying into a new home were still considered to be outsiders.”

Main Ideas from Source 2	
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Source 3: <https://culturalatlas.sbs.com.au/chinese-culture/chinese-culture-family#chinese-culture-family>

Family

“The family unit is considered to be one of the most central institutions. For many, their family provides them with a sense of identity and a strong network of support. In China, the family is largely understood through Confucian thought. In Confucian thinking, the family contains the most important relationships for individuals and forms the foundations of all social organisation. For instance, the roles of husband and wife, parent and child, elder brother and younger brother are clearly defined. A husband/father is expected to exhibit dominance and kindness to his wife in return for obedience and love, and offer guidance and protection to his children in return for respect and obedience.

“Confucian roles are not strictly adhered to anymore. Nevertheless, children are still expected to obey their parents and honour their elders. This is in accordance with *filial piety*, the Confucian tenet that stresses the importance of age. For example, in most regions of China, the entire family is expected to consult family elders on big decisions. Moreover, children are expected to care for their parents as they age. Sending elderly parents to an aged care facility is considered shameful.

“Families are also perceived to have a collective identity and reputation in China. This is often referred to as *face*, whereby the act of a single individual will impact the perception of all its members by others. The interest of the family is expected to supersede the interests of the individual. Family members are also expected to receive preferential treatment in return for their loyalty to the family.”

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Text-Rendering Protocol Activity

What is one SENTENCE from the reading above that you feel is particularly significant?	
What is one PHRASE from the reading above that you feel is particularly significant?	
What is one WORD from the reading above that you feel is particularly significant?	
Describe one PERSONAL connection that you discovered in the reading.	

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