**上海外国语大学 2020 –2021学年第一学期**

**期末考试试卷**

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**Please write an essay about 500-800 words in English, explaining a cultural phenomenon in China. A comparative perspective is encouraged.**

Although respecting the elders is a common value across different cultures, the concept of filial piety, or孝(*xiao)*, is undoubtedly reminiscent of Chinese culture. As the famous Chinese saying goes, “百善孝为先” (“*xiao* is the utmost virtue”), filial piety is a value ingrained in the Chinese society. Of the ten legendary kings of ancient China, Shun is epitomic of this virtue. He is heralded as the embodiment of filial piety for seeking peace with his parents who made an attempt on his life. In *The Twenty-four Filial Exemplars*, filial piety is portrayed as a core value not to be compromised regardless of whether parents fulfil their duties. This is made plain in the story of *Danyi Shunmu,* where a child repaid evil with kindness despite being mistreated by his stepmother. Besides, the *Classic of Filial Piety* introduces filiality as fundamental to all other moral values and it has both a personal and communal implication. The line “身体发肤，受之父母，不敢毁伤，孝之始也。立身行道，扬名于后世，以显父母，孝之终也。夫孝，始于事亲，中于事君，终于立身。” in the *Classic of Filial Piety* could be loosely translated as “taking proper care of your body is the beginning of *xiao* since you owe your bodies to your parents. Cultivate a commendable character, do good, leave a legacy in order to bring your parents honour; this is the purpose of *xiao.* It begins with serving your parents, extends to your service to the emperor and ends in the cultivation of a noble character”. The manifestation of filiality encompasses diverse aspects including one’s body, morality, conduct, social responsibility and legacy. Filial piety is even depicted as servitude towards one’s parents, which then leads to one’s loyalty towards the emperor. The all-inclusive approach of *xiao* in Chinese culture is perhaps the biggest diverging point from that of Western culture’s, although the Biblical tradition explicitly instructs children to give due respect to their parents, as written in Ephesians 6:1-3, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour your father and mother, which is the first commandment with a promise: that it may be well with you and you may live a long life on the earth”­. The Western idea of filial piety differs from Chinese *xiao* in respects of its pervasiveness and motivation. *Xiao* in Chinese culture permeates almost every aspect of quotidian life. 不孝 (*buxiao),* which is the opposite of *xiao*, is considered a serious breach of social values in a Chinese context. Besides, after becoming legal adults, children are still expected to gain their parents’ approval or blessings in decisions like marriage. Although the social expectation of the modern Chinese community with regards to absolute obedience towards parents is less intense nowadays, the need of giving back and expressing gratitude shown through good academic performance, a decent life and a good character is still evident. For example, it is not surprising for a PhD student seeking employment at McDonald’s to receive comments like “你对得起你父母吗?” (“don’t you think you have failed your parents?”). Also, it is fairly common for parents to expect tokens of appreciation from their children, be it in the form of regular allowance or children asking their parents to live with them. In more conservative families, sending one’s old folks to nursing homes is also considered *buxiao*. To some extent, *xiao* is a way of life for the Chinese. This differs from the Western idea of filial piety, which is independent of an individual’s character and major decisions in life. Although children have an obligation to support their old folks, other aspects of their lives, including their jobs, marital choices and conduct are unrelated to the gratitude they feel towards their parents. In other words, filial piety remains an idea within the family unit itself, having limited to no influence over other aspects of the children’s lives. On top of that, the motivation behind this sense of responsibility towards one’s parents is also different. Chinese *xiao* comes from a time-honoured tradition whereby individuals accept, without question, the innate superiority and authority of parents over their children; while Western filiality stems from a mutual respect for individuals in a family with little to no power dynamic inequality. In this case, each independent individual carries a responsibility towards the society, including towards one’s aging parents.