THE IDEA OF FILIAL PIETY IN ANCIENT CHINA

How did filial piety effect family patterns in Ancient China?
How did filial piety effect Chinese government?
What was China like during the Middle Ages?

- China was also a feudal society during the Middle Ages
  - Considered one of the world’s major powers at the time

- **In Europe** = emphasis on land

- **In China** = emphasis on loyalty
  - Filial piety
What is filial piety?

- Filial piety is the idea of putting the family’s needs / interests above one’s own wishes
  - Unconditionally love and support for parents / other relatives
  - Show complete obedience towards elders
  - Deep respect towards family’s past (ancestors)
Who came up with the idea of Filial Piety?

- Filial piety was the idea of a Chinese philosopher named Confucius (551-479 BC)
  - Believed that respect for elders was key to running a good society / government

How might this ideal make sense?
CONFUCIUS THE TEACHER
“The Golden Rule”
CONFUCIUS TEMPLES
CONFUCIUS’ BIRTHDAY (TEACHER DAY) - 9/29
When did Filial Piety originate?

- Originated between 200 and 500 AD in ancient China
  - Chinese emperor actually turned the practice into law
  - Became the basis for Chinese political science & social code
HOW DID FILIAL PIETY IMPACT THE CHINESE GOVERNMENT?

- Ancient China was ruled by an emperor
  - Periods of rule were known as “dynasties”

- To justify their rule, emperors used the idea of filial piety to create a new philosophy
  - “The Mandate of Heaven”
NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH THIS DYNASTY...
What is the “Mandate of Heaven”?  
- The “mandate of heaven” is the Chinese version of “divine right”  
  - What is “divine right”?  
- Under this rule, the emperor displays himself as a “father figure”  
  - Played on the Chinese people’s sense of respect for their elders
Mencius (385-303 BC)

I believe in good people.
The Chinese “Father” - A Benevolent Ruler -
**Dynastic Cycle**

1. **Mandate of Heaven**: The people believe the new dynasty has the gods’ approval.

2. The dynasty’s power grows weaker.

3. Disasters such as floods, famines, and invasions occur.

4. The people believe the dynasty has lost the gods’ approval.

5. The dynasty is overthrown.

6. The new dynasty restores peace and order.
Not to Be confused with this Mandate...
THE FORBIDDEN PALACE
THE HALL OF SUPREME HARMONY
Dragons...dragons...everywhere!!!
The Throne of the Chinese Emperor
How did the Chinese people show their belief in filial piety?

- One way was through ancestor worship
  - Families would build shrines or small memorials to dead family members
  - Believed that through offerings, insured a good afterlife for their family
  - The spirits of their ancestors protected them from evil
Ancestor alter inside a Chinese families home
Ancestor shrine near Beijing, China cir. 2007
Other examples of ancestor shrines in Chinese society
WHERE IS FILIAL PIETY PRACTICED TODAY?

- Filial piety is practiced all over Asia today
  - Extremely important to Chinese culture
  - Thought it is not punishable by death in modern Asia, breaking such piety is looked down upon.
    - China / Japan

Filial Piety statue in Tokyo, Japan cir. 1998