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The Role of Filial Piety in Shaping Society: A Comparative Study of Confucian and Islamic Thought

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Abstract :

Filial piety is a deeply rooted ethical and spiritual value in both Confucian and Islamic traditions, shaping how individuals relate to their parents and, more broadly, to society. This paper offers a comparative exploration of filial piety as presented in two foundational texts: The Analects of Confucius (论语Lunyu) and the Qur'an. Focusing on themes such as respect and obedience, compassion for aging parents, the role of filial duty in moral development, emotional sincerity, ethical boundaries of obedience, and ritual expressions of reverence, the study examines how each tradition defines and practices filial responsibility.

While Islam and Confucianism share a profound respect for parents and view filial piety as essential to family and social harmony, they differ in significant ways. In Islam, filial piety is a religious obligation, firmly grounded in divine revelation and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. Confucianism, on the other hand, frames filial piety as a philosophical and social principle tied to the maintenance of order and hierarchy. The practice of ancestor veneration, which is central to Confucian tradition, contrasts sharply with Islamic teachings, which emphasize monotheism and discourage such rituals. By examining both the similarities and the differences in these two traditions, this study aims to foster deeper cross-cultural understanding and appreciation for the diverse ways in which families and moral values are shaped across civilizations.

Key Words:

Filial Piety, Confucianism, Islam, family ethics, religious values, moral duty, ancestor veneration.

1. Introduction

Filial piety—the moral responsibility to respect, obey, and care for one's parents—occupies a central place in both Confucian and Islamic traditions. While these two systems differ in their historical roots and theological frameworks, they share the



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belief that honoring one's parents is fundamental to both personal virtue and social stability. In Confucianism, filial piety (xiao, 孝) goes far beyond a private moral obligation; it serves as the very foundation of a harmonious society.

Confucius famously states in the *Analects* (1:2), “Master You [You Ruo] said, “Among those who are filial toward their parents and fraternal toward their brothers, those who are inclined to offend against their superiors are few indeed. Among those who are disinclined to offend against their superiors, there have never been any who are yet inclined to create disorder. The noble person concerns himself with the root; when the root is established, the Way is born. Being filial and fraternal — is this not the root of humaneness?” suggesting that ethical conduct within the family forms the basis for all human relationships. The Confucian vision of a well-ordered society begins at home—with a family grounded in respect and duty—then expands outward, as expressed in the ¹(*Analects* 2:7) The Master said, “The filial piety nowadays means the support of one's parents. But dogs and horses likewise are able to do something in the way of support; - without reverence, what is there to distinguish the one support given from the other?” In this view, filial piety is not just about family bonds; it is a crucial step toward achieving broader moral and political order ²(Chan, 1963) ³ (Chan 2004). In Islamic tradition, filial piety isn't just a cultural norm—it's a deeply rooted moral and spiritual obligation. The Qur'an repeatedly emphasizes kindness and respect toward one's parents, placing this duty right next to the worship of God. The Prophet Muhammad consistently highlighted the importance of honoring one's parents.

What makes a comparative study of filial piety in Confucianism and Islam so compelling is how each tradition weaves this virtue into its larger moral and spiritual worldview. In Confucian thought, which centers on human relationships and ethical self-cultivation, filial piety (xiao) is expressed through social hierarchy, ritual propriety (li), and a deep respect for one's ancestors. These duties don't end with a parent's passing—instead, they extend into practices like ancestor worship and elaborate funeral rites. Such customs are not merely symbolic; they reflect a broader cosmology in which the family is seen as a living thread that binds past, present, and future generations (⁴Ebrey, 1991). In contrast to Confucianism, Islam strongly discourages ancestor worship, but it places profound importance on maintaining family bonds—known as *silat al-rahm*. Honoring parents in Islam goes beyond their lifetime; it includes praying for them, giving charity on their behalf, and keeping in touch with their relatives and friends, even after they've passed away (*Sahih Muslim*, Hadith). While the two traditions are rooted in very different worldviews—Confucianism emphasizing a moral order embedded in human relationships, and Islam centering on a divine, theocentric framework—both place the parent-child relationship at the heart of a virtuous life. In both cases, filial piety is not just a personal obligation but a cornerstone of moral and social harmony.

In today's rapidly changing world, where urbanization, individualism, and evolving cultural values are reshaping the fabric of family life, traditional concepts like

filial piety face new challenges—and perhaps even greater relevance. As families become more fragmented and generational ties shift, understanding how different traditions view the duty of children toward their parents can help us make sense of broader moral and social patterns. This paper takes a closer look at how Confucianism and Islam define and express filial piety, drawing on foundational texts and contemporary scholarship to explore how this age-old virtue continues to shape ethical thinking and social relationships in both cultures.

2. Conceptual Foundations of Filial Piety in Confucianism and Islam

Filial piety—the deep respect, care, and devotion shown to one’s parents and elders—has been a central moral value in many cultures throughout history. Across the world’s major religions and philosophies, including Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, honoring one’s parents is seen as a vital part of ethical living. Yet, among these traditions, filial piety holds a particularly significant place in both Confucianism and Islam. In both systems, it goes beyond being a simple family duty; it is seen as essential to maintaining harmony within the family, fostering a stable society, and nurturing one’s own moral and spiritual growth ⁵(Tanggok, 2017). Filial piety has long been regarded as one of the most cherished virtues in Chinese culture. Rooted deeply in the fabric of family life, it is seen not only as a fundamental moral principle but also as a symbol of respect, responsibility, and gratitude toward one’s parents and ancestors.

Among the many values passed down through generations, filial piety stands out as a cornerstone of traditional Chinese ethics—reflecting the profound importance placed on family bonds and the social harmony they help maintain (⁶杨志刚 2014). Filial piety (xiao) is the core pillar of Confucian ethics (⁷Ho, 1986). The term filial comes from the Latin *filius* or *filia*, meaning “son” or “daughter,” and it refers to the natural duties and bonds that exist within families. When combined with the word piety, which conveys a sense of devotion, respect, or moral reverence, the phrase filial piety takes on a deeper meaning—highlighting a child’s heartfelt responsibility, gratitude, and loyalty toward their parents. In many cultures, this concept is seen as a moral cornerstone, shaping not only family life but also broader social behavior. In Chinese, filial piety is expressed through the character 孝 (xiào), which is made up of two parts: 老 (lǎo), meaning “elder,” placed above 子 (zǐ), meaning “child.” Visually, this symbolizes the idea of the younger generation supporting and honoring the older—a powerful reflection of inter-generational care. In both Confucian and Islamic traditions, filial piety is far more than a private virtue; it serves as a guiding ethical principle with profound spiritual, social, and moral dimensions.

Filial piety holds a deeply significant place in both Confucian and Islamic moral traditions, though it is expressed in different ways. In Confucianism, the idea of filial piety is captured by the concept of xiào (孝), which emphasizes honoring, obeying, and

caring for one's parents and ancestors. It's more than just a personal virtue — it's seen as the root of moral character and the foundation of a well-ordered society. In 4:19 Confucius says: "While one's parents are alive, one should not travel far away. If one must travel, one must have a set destination." ⁸(*Analects* 4:19). The *Classic of Filial Piety* (*Xiaojing*), a text traditionally attributed to Confucius and his disciple Zengzi, reinforces this idea by stating that "filial piety is the root of virtue, and all teaching grows out of it." Throughout Chinese history, especially during the Han dynasty, filial conduct wasn't just a private matter — it became a public standard. For example, officials were often selected based on their reputation for filial devotion through the *xiaolian* system, which valued both family loyalty and moral integrity. In this way, filial piety in Confucianism served as both a personal ethic and a guiding principle for social and political life (⁹Chai, 1957; ¹⁰Nylan, 2008).

In Islam, filial piety is most often expressed through the Qur'anic concept of *birr al-wālidayn*, which emphasizes kindness, gratitude, respect, and obedience to one's parents. The Qur'an repeatedly commands believers to honor their parents, placing this duty immediately after the worship of Allah. In *Surah Al-Isra* (17:23), it is stated: "Your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him, and that you be kind to parents. Whether one or both of them attain old age in your life, do not say to them a word of disrespect (uff), nor shout at them but address them in terms of honor." Another powerful reference appears in *Surah Luqman* (31:14): "We have enjoined upon man [care] for his parents. His mother carried him, [increasing her] in weakness upon weakness, and his weaning is in two years. Be grateful to Me and to your parents; to Me is the [final] destination." These verses clearly emphasize the emotional, physical, and spiritual burden borne by parents—especially mothers—and link gratitude toward them with gratitude toward God.

Prophetic traditions (Hadith) also reinforce the centrality of filial piety in Islamic ethics. Abdullah bin Amr narrated that: The Prophet (pbuh) said: "The Lord's pleasure is in the parent's pleasure, and the Lord's anger is in the parent's anger." (Hasan) ¹¹(Jami' at-Tirmidhi 1899, Book 27, Hadith 3, Vol. 4, Book 1, Hadith 1899)

While Confucian filial piety emphasizes ritual, societal hierarchy, and ancestral continuity, Islamic filial piety is grounded in divine command, moral gratitude, and spiritual reward. Despite these differences, both traditions enshrine the parent-child bond as sacred and foundational to ethical living. Scholars such as Afsaruddin and Tu Weiming have noted that both systems treat the family as the basic unit of moral education and societal cohesion, though Confucianism draws more from a ritual-ethical tradition and Islam from a theistic-moral framework ¹²(Radice, T. 2017); ¹³(Afsaruddin, 2002).

3. Filial Piety in Confucianism

In Confucianism, filial piety (*xiào*, 孝) is regarded as the most fundamental virtue, forming the foundation for moral cultivation and societal harmony. Drawing from

ancient Chinese traditions and later refined by Confucius (551–479 BCE), filial piety goes beyond simple obedience—it reflects a deep sense of respect, gratitude, and responsibility toward one's parents. This respect naturally extends to ancestors, elders, and even rulers, forming the basis for a well-ordered society. As Confucius famously remarked in the *Analects*, The Master said, "While a man's father is alive, look at the bent of his will; when his father is dead, look at his conduct. If for three years he does not alter from the way of his father, he may be called filial." ¹⁴(*Analects* 1:11), suggesting that how we treat our family members mirrors our capacity for compassion and virtue in the wider world ¹⁵ (Ni, P. 2017).

The *Classic of Filial Piety* (Xiaojing, 孝经), traditionally attributed to Confucius and his disciple Zengzi, explores the idea of filial piety through a thoughtful dialogue. In this text, filial piety is not just about respecting one's parents—it's seen as the foundation for moral behavior and social harmony. The idea is that if a person can practice respect and care within their own family, they're more likely to show loyalty and responsibility in society as a whole. This connection between private virtue and public duty is central to Confucian thought. One well-known line from the text puts it simply: "The root of the moral way lies in the relationship between father and son." The text even goes so far as to suggest that leaders should be chosen based on their filial conduct, since it reflects their character and their potential to govern wisely and justly (¹⁶Legge. 2022).

In Confucianism, filial piety goes far beyond simple obedience to parents during their lifetime. It represents a lifelong commitment to honoring one's family, deeply rooted in emotional, physical, and even spiritual responsibilities. This commitment includes caring for aging parents, observing proper mourning after their passing, and maintaining ancestral traditions through rituals and ceremonies. One key aspect is ensuring the continuation of the family line—especially through marriage and having male heirs, which was traditionally seen as a way to preserve the family's name and legacy. Rituals (li, 礼) play a central role in expressing this devotion. As Confucius taught in the *Analects*, "When parents are alive, serve them according to the rites; when they die, bury them according to the rites and sacrifice to them according to the rites" ¹⁷(*Analects* 2:5). These practices reflect not just duty, but a deep reverence that binds the living and the dead through generations.

Moreover, xiào is not just about feelings of love or respect—it's something that must be shown through concrete actions and moral responsibility. In fact, true filial piety sometimes means having the courage to correct one's parents when they make a mistake. Confucius emphasized this point when he said "The Master said, 'In serving your father and mother you ought to dissuade them from doing wrong in the gentlest way. If you see your advice being ignored, you should not become disobedient but should remain reverent. You should not complain even if in so doing you wear yourself out'". This idea reflects a deeper understanding of filial piety—not blind obedience, but a relationship built on mutual care, where moral guidance can flow both ways. ¹⁸(*Analects* 4:18).

The influence of xiào (filial piety) in ancient China went far beyond the household—it played a central role in shaping the political and administrative structures of the time. During the Han dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE), filial piety wasn't just a personal moral value; it became an institutional criterion for public service. Through the xiaolian (孝廉) system, individuals who demonstrated exceptional filial devotion and moral integrity were recommended for government positions. This approach reflected the deeply rooted belief that those who were loyal and respectful to their parents would also be honest and dutiful in serving the state. In this way, the private virtue of filial piety was transformed into a public standard for governance, reinforcing Confucian ideals at every level of society ¹⁹(Ch'ü, T'ung-tsu. *Law and Society in Traditional China*, 1961). The emphasis on hierarchical harmony and the role of the family as a microcosm of the state meant that loyalty to the emperor was seen as an extension of filial loyalty.

Modern scholarship continues to affirm the centrality of filial piety in Confucian ethics. According to ²⁰Yao Xinzong (2000), in *An Introduction to Confucianism*, filial piety remains “the foundation of all social virtues” in Confucian cultures, deeply influencing interpersonal relationships in East Asian societies. Some scholars have also noted that xiào is a dynamic value, capable of adaptation in modern times to emphasize empathy, responsibility, and care.

Thus, filial piety in Confucianism is more than a personal virtue—it is a cultural ideal that shaped familial, political, and spiritual life in China and continues to influence East Asian societies today. Its philosophical depth, ritualistic expressions, and moral scope demonstrate why Confucius viewed it as essential to the cultivation of humaneness and social harmony.

4. Filial Piety in Islam

In Islam, filial piety is deeply embedded in the core ethical and spiritual teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith. The Qur'an repeatedly emphasizes the importance of showing kindness, gratitude, and humility toward one's parents. One of the most striking examples comes from ²¹Surah Al-Isra (17:23–24), where Allah commands: “*Your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him, and that you be kind to parents...*” The verse goes on to instruct believers not even to utter a word of frustration—like “uff”—toward their aging parents, and instead to speak to them with dignity and compassion. What's especially powerful here is that filial piety is mentioned immediately after the core Islamic belief in monotheism (tawhid), showing just how seriously this obligation is taken.

Another powerful verse like ²²Surah Luqman (31:14) urges believers to be grateful to their parents, especially the mother: “*And We have enjoined upon man [care] for his parents. His mother carried him, [increasing her] in weakness upon weakness, and his weaning is in two years. Be grateful to Me and to your parents; to Me is the [final] destination.*” ²³Surah Al-Ankabut (29:8), also echo this sentiment, in this ayah “*And We*

have enjoined upon man goodness to parents. But if they endeavor to make you associate with Me that of which you have no knowledge, do not obey them. To Me is your return, and I will inform you about what you used to do.” urging believers to honor their parents but to remain firm in their faith if those parents urge them to go against God’s command. These verses not only establish kindness to parents as a moral responsibility but also as a divine injunction.

The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) reinforced these teachings through his sayings and actions. He ranked *birr al-wālidayn*—goodness toward one’s parents—as one of the most beloved deeds to Allah after prayer. In numerous hadith, it is described as one of the most beloved deeds in the sight of Allah—right after offering prayers at their appointed times. As narrated by Al-Walid bin ‘Aizar:

I heard Abi ‘Amr ‘Ash-Shaibani saying, “The owner of this house.” he pointed to ‘Abdullah’s house, “said, ‘I asked the Prophet (sallallahu ‘alaihi wa sallam) ‘Which deed is loved most by Allah?’” He replied, ‘To offer prayers at their early (very first) stated times.’ ” ‘Abdullah asked, “What is the next (in goodness)?” The Prophet (sallallahu ‘alaihi wa sallam) said, “To be good and dutiful to one’s parents,” ‘Abdullah asked, “What is the next (in goodness)?” The Prophet said, To participate in Jihad for Allah’s Cause.” ‘Abdullah added, “The Prophet (sallallahu ‘alaihi wa sallam) narrated to me these three things, and if I had asked more, he would have told me more.”²⁴

Another Hadith narrated by Abu Huraira says:

A man came to Allah’s Messenger (sallallahu ‘alaihi wa sallam) and said, “O Allah’s Messenger (sallallahu ‘alaihi wa sallam)! Who is more entitled to be treated with the best companionship by me?” The Prophet (sallallahu ‘alaihi wa sallam) said, “Your mother.” The man said. “Who is next?” The Prophet said, “Your mother.” The man further said, “Who is next?” The Prophet (sallallahu ‘alaihi wa sallam) said, “Your mother.” The man asked for the fourth time, “Who is next?” The Prophet (sallallahu ‘alaihi wa sallam) said, “Your father”.²⁵(Sahih al-Bukhari 5971- Book 78, Hadith 2-Vol. 8, Book 73, Hadith 2).

Similarly Narrated ‘Abdullah bin ‘Amr:

A man said to the Prophet, “Shall I participate in Jihad?” The Prophet (sallallahu ‘alaihi wa sallam) said, “Are your parents living?” The man said, “Yes.” the Prophet (sallallahu ‘alaihi wa sallam) said, “Do Jihad for their benefit.”²⁶(Sahih al-Bukhari 5972- Book 78, Hadith 3, Vol. 8, Book 73, Hadith 3). All these teachings make it clear that in Islam, caring for one’s parents is not just good manners—it’s a sacred duty.

A Hadith found in Abu Dawud “While we were with the Messenger of Allah! (ﷺ) a man of Banu Salmah came to Him and said: Messenger of Allah is there any kindness left that I can do to my parents after their death? He replied: Yes, you can invoke blessings on them, forgiveness for them, carry out their final instructions after their death, join ties of relationship which are dependent on them, and honour their friends.” explains that a child can continue to show righteousness (*birr*) even after a parent's death—by making supplications for them, honoring their promises, maintaining ties with their loved

ones, and giving charity on their behalf. These teachings reflect how Islam views filial piety as a lifelong—and even afterlife—commitment rooted in love, respect, and spiritual duty ²⁷(Sunan Abi Dawud 5142, Book 43, Hadith 370, Book 42, Hadith 5123)

Furthermore, Islamic teachings expand filial ethics to include compassion for the elderly and vulnerable beyond one's own parents. Anas bin Malik (R.A) narrated that an older man came to talk to the Prophet (SAW), and the people were hesitant to make room for him. The Prophet said, 'he is not one of us who does not have mercy on our young and does not respect our elders.' Imam Tirmidhi said, this Hadith is Gharib. Zarbi (one of the narrators) reported Munkar narrations from Anas bin Malik (R.A) and others. This reflects a broader ethic of reverence for elders that is deeply tied to the spirit of filial piety ²⁸(Jami' at-Tirmidhi 1919, Book 27, Hadith 25)

In addition to the moral and spiritual dimensions, Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) also institutionalizes filial piety through financial and legal obligations. Children are religiously obligated to support their aging parents if they are unable to support themselves. According to Islamic law, neglecting the maintenance (nafaqa) of one's parents when they are in need and the child has the means is considered sinful. Moreover, inheritance laws grant parents a fixed share of the deceased's estate, reinforcing their dignity and security even after death (International Islamic Fiqh Academy).

In Islam, filial piety goes far beyond being just a cultural or social expectation. It is woven into the very fabric of the faith through clear guidance in the Qur'an, the sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and Islamic legal principles. These sources together emphasize that honoring and caring for one's parents is not simply an act of kindness—it's a profound moral, spiritual, and religious duty. It stands as one of the essential values that uphold the Islamic understanding of ethical behavior and family life.

5. Similarities between Filial Piety in Confucianism and Islam

Both Confucianism and Islam place profound importance on honoring and caring for one's parents, viewing it as a fundamental moral responsibility. In Confucian teachings, filial piety (xiao, 孝) is seen as the root of all virtues and a key element in cultivating personal character and social harmony. Classical texts like the Analects and The Classic of Filial Piety frequently emphasize that a respectful, obedient, and dutiful attitude toward one's parents is essential for ethical living. In a similar vein, Islam upholds the value of parental respect as a sacred duty, ranked just below devotion to God. The Qur'an repeatedly urges believers to treat their parents with compassion and dignity, especially as they age.

As already mentioned Surah Al-Isra (17:23–24): *“For your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him. And honour your parents. If one or both of them reach old age in your care, never say to them ‘even’ ‘ugh,’ nor yell at them. Rather, address them respectfully. And be humble with them out of mercy, and pray, “My Lord! Be*

merciful to them as they raised me when I was young.” This verse captures the deep reverence and gentle conduct expected of children in Islam, reflecting a shared moral emphasis between both traditions.”²⁹(Setyawati 2024). This common emphasis reveals how both traditions deeply value honoring parents, viewing it as a fundamental part of leading a morally upright life.

Another notable similarity between Confucianism and Islam is the strong emphasis both traditions place on a child's lifelong duty toward their parents. In Confucian thought, this duty is not limited to obedience alone—it encompasses tangible acts of care, especially as parents grow older. Children are expected to provide emotional support, ensure their parents' well-being, and express gratitude through daily respect and kindness. Similarly, Islamic teachings uphold caring for one's parents as a sacred moral responsibility. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) repeatedly highlighted this in his teachings—for example It was narrated from Mu'awiyah bin Jahimah As-Sulami, that Jahimah came to the Prophet (ﷺ) and said:

"O Messenger of Allah! I want to go out and fight (in Jihad) and I have come to ask your advice." He said: "Do you have a mother?" He said: "Yes." He said: "Then stay with her, for Paradise is beneath her feet.”³⁰(Sunan an-Nasa'i 3104, Book 25, Hadith 20, Vol. 1, Book 25, Hadith 3106). In both traditions, filial piety goes beyond following orders; it involves deep emotional connection and practical care, forming a lasting bond of love and responsibility throughout life³¹(Sayilgan, S. 2023).

Both Confucianism and Islam place great emphasis on the role of the family in shaping a morally upright and stable society, with filial piety at the heart of this vision. In Confucian thought, the family is not just a private institution but the foundation of social life. When relationships within the family—especially between children and parents—are marked by respect and care, this harmony extends outward to create a well-ordered society. Similarly, in Islam, strong family bonds are seen as essential for fostering a healthy moral environment. Honoring and caring for parents is more than just a personal virtue—it helps nurture compassionate, responsible individuals who contribute positively to their communities. In both traditions, then, filial piety is not only a private duty but a powerful force for building social harmony and collective well-being³²(Farwa 2021).

Ultimately, both Confucianism and Islam go beyond viewing filial piety as a private family matter—they see it as a value with far-reaching impact on society as a whole. In Confucian thought, the journey toward becoming a virtuous person starts at home: by honoring one's parents, a person learns the habits of respect and responsibility, which then extend outward to the community and the state. Islam similarly links kindness to parents with one's spiritual integrity, framing it as both a religious duty and a reflection of genuine faith. Values like gratitude, humility, patience, and accountability—nurtured through filial behavior—are seen in both traditions as essential ingredients for a moral and harmonious society. In this way, filial piety is not just about family ties; it's a moral

principle that shapes the character of individuals and, through them, the world around them.

6. Differences between Filial Piety in Confucianism and Islam

Although there are many shared values between Confucianism and Islam when it comes to filial piety, the two traditions differ quite noticeably in how they understand and practice it—especially when we consider their religious contexts, systems of authority, rituals, and philosophical underpinnings. In Islam, honoring one’s parents is not just a moral recommendation; it is a religious obligation clearly outlined in the Qur’an and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. Failing to fulfill this duty is seen as a serious wrongdoing—unless a parent’s request conflicts with core Islamic principles. On the other hand, Confucianism treats filial piety as an ethical principle rooted in human reasoning and tradition, rather than in divine revelation. Confucius and his disciples taught that respecting and caring for one’s parents is essential for personal virtue and social harmony, but it isn’t tied to a concept of God or spiritual command. So, while both traditions deeply value filial conduct, the basis of their authority is quite distinct—divine command in Islam versus moral philosophy in Confucianism.

Another key difference between Islamic and Confucian views on filial piety lies in how they approach obedience and authority. In Islam, respecting and obeying one’s parents is a serious moral duty—but it has its limits. If parents ask their children to do something that goes against Islamic teachings, the child is not required to obey. This principle is clearly stated in the Qur’an (31:15), which reminds believers that while kindness to parents is important, ultimate loyalty belongs to God. In contrast, Confucianism tends to stress a more absolute form of obedience. Children are generally expected to follow their parents’ wishes, even at the expense of their own comfort or opinion. This reflects the Confucian ideal of a well-ordered family where the parent’s authority is central. That said, later Confucian thinkers—especially in the neo-Confucian tradition—introduced more room for moral reflection, suggesting that blind obedience isn’t always the highest virtue if it conflicts with deeper ethical principles.

Another important distinction between Confucian and Islamic understandings of filial piety lies in their approach to rituals and ancestor-related practices. In Confucian traditions, honoring one’s parents continues even after their passing through formal ceremonies, such as maintaining ancestral tablets, offering food or incense, and holding commemorative gatherings. These acts are deeply rooted in the cultural belief that maintaining a spiritual connection with one’s ancestors fosters familial harmony and expresses lasting respect. Such rituals are not merely symbolic; they are integral to how Confucian societies preserve family continuity across generations. In contrast, Islamic teachings strongly oppose any practices that resemble ancestor worship. Central to Islamic belief is tawhid—the absolute oneness of God—which means that no prayers or rituals should be directed toward the dead. Instead, Islam encourages children to honor

deceased parents by praying to Allah on their behalf, seeking His forgiveness and mercy. There are no physical offerings or ancestor-related rites, as Islamic devotion remains solely God-centered. This fundamental theological difference significantly shapes how filial piety is expressed within each tradition..

Religion plays a distinct role in how filial piety is understood and practiced in Islam and Confucianism. In Islam, being good to one's parents is not just a moral obligation—it is considered an act of worship that directly affects a person's spiritual standing. It's placed alongside core religious practices like prayer, fasting, and giving to charity, showing how deeply it's woven into a believer's relationship with God and the afterlife. In contrast, Confucianism approaches filial piety from a more ethical and philosophical angle. It emphasizes respect and care for parents as part of cultivating personal virtue and maintaining harmony in society, rather than as a means of earning supernatural reward. These key differences highlight how each tradition is shaped by its broader worldview—one rooted in divine accountability, the other in human-centered moral development and social order.

7. Conclusion

This article explored how the concept of filial piety is understood and practiced in both Islam and Confucianism—two influential religious and philosophical traditions. The goal was to highlight not only the common ground but also the distinctive features that shape how each tradition views the responsibilities of children toward their parents. The findings reveal that both systems place strong emphasis on honoring parents, fulfilling one's duties toward them, and maintaining family harmony as a key to a well-ordered society. Despite their different theological and cultural backgrounds, both Islam and Confucianism affirm the deep moral value of filial piety, showing that respect for parents is a virtue recognized across civilizations.

While there are meaningful similarities between the two traditions, significant differences in the concept and practice of filial piety are also evident. In Islam, filial duties are firmly anchored in religious teachings, with clear directives found in the Qur'an and the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). In contrast, Confucianism relies on the moral and philosophical teachings of Confucius and other classical thinkers, emphasizing social harmony and ethical conduct. One of the most striking distinctions lies in the role of religion: Islam considers filial piety a form of worship linked to spiritual accountability, whereas Confucianism approaches it as a social virtue rooted in familial and societal roles. Moreover, Confucianism includes rituals such as ancestor worship, which are absent in Islamic practice, where worship is directed exclusively to God. By exploring sacred texts, scholarly interpretations, and the cultural contexts in which these traditions developed, this comparative study sheds light on how filial piety informs family structures, social norms, and moral values in both Islam and Confucianism. This research encourages meaningful cross-cultural dialogue by helping us better understand the values behind both Confucian and Islamic traditions.

Exploring how filial piety is viewed in these two belief systems shows just how deeply rooted the idea of honoring and respecting one's parents is, regardless of culture or religion. Both traditions recognize that filial piety plays a powerful role in building strong families, maintaining social harmony, and encouraging moral behavior. By looking at the shared values and unique approaches within each tradition, we not only deepen our appreciation for other cultures but also gain insight into our own. This kind of understanding can help us create more respectful, compassionate communities and strengthen the relationships that matter most in our daily lives.

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