

Twenty-Four Ways to Carry Out *Xiao* (Be Good to Parents)

By Feng Xin-ming

November 16, 2006; revised February 3, 2008

Precepts Mainly From *Di Zi Gui* and *Xiao Jing*

二十四行孝法

馮欣明著

2006年11月26日；2008年2月3日修改

主要取材自「弟子規」及「孝經」

Return to Home: <http://www.tsoidug.org/>

Return to *Di Zi Gui*: <http://www.tsoidug.org/dizigui.php>

Return to “Papers”: <http://www.tsoidug.org/papers.php>

Author's Note:

Xiao (孝) or being good to parents is a fundamental tenet of traditional Chinese society and therefore fundamental to the Chinese heritage. Being good to parents, *xiao*, has been designated by the original Confucian classics the foundation of civil society and the guarantee of moral conduct. It is not possible to understand traditional Chinese society, Chinese history, and the Chinese heritage in general without some understanding of *xiao*.

Over the past century, however, *xiao* has been denigrated by various intellectual forces, such that it is now identified in many Chinese people's minds with *yu xiao* (愚孝) i.e. foolish or blind *xiao*. It is laughed at and considered, along with *yu zhong* (愚忠) i.e. foolish or blind loyalty, to be the reason for China being backward and poor despite all the thousands of years of civilization.

To make matters worse, there is some truth in the charge of foolish blind *xiao*: since the the 1000's during the *Song* Dynasty, there has been an intellectual movement lasting several centuries to convert *xiao* and Confucian teaching in general from a set of practical and reasonable tenets into a metaphysical cult of absolutes and excesses. For example, the version of the book The Twenty-Four *Xiao* (二十四孝) published in 1604 during the *Ming* Dynasty under the emperor's patronage, has a story supposedly about exemplary *xiao* where the protagonist, in order to spare food for his parents, goes to kill his own son. That kind of "exemplary *xiao*" is completely foreign to Confucius' original teachings, which teach valuing the next generation and one's own life and health as being first commandments of *xiao*, and which teaches that the flip side of *xiao* by the offspring is kindness by the parents: *qin ci zi xiao* (親慈子孝), i.e. "parents be kind; sons be *xiao*." While during the early and mid-*Qing* dynasty reasonableness is somewhat restored by the popularization of such tracts as *Di Zi Gui* (弟子規) and a general intellectual trend away from the cultish excesses of the previous five centuries or so, some cult-like thinking has still revolved around *xiao*, and is partly responsible for the vulnerability of the entire concept to wholesale attack and denigration during the twentieth century.

To revive *xiao*, which I think is indeed a most important foundation of civil society and a strong guarantee of moral behavior, and to remove *xiao* from the cultish deviations of the 1000's to the 1600's, I have written this "Twenty-Four Ways to Carry out *Xiao*," to update the 1604 "Twenty-four

Xiao.”

Of course, there are more ways to carry out *xiao* than only twenty-four; I use the number only because of the 1604 work.

Here I translate *xiao* plainly into English as “being good to parents” rather than the standard translation of “filial piety,” a term which dates from the Jesuits working at the *Ming* Dynasty court during the early 1600’s and is open to cultish interpretation. *Xiao*, I feel, should mostly be a normal day-to-day activity of being good to parents, and unlike what the cultists advocate, no god-like worship of one’s living parents is needed, no self-deprecating overriding guilt feeling is called for, and no extraordinarily painful, self-punishing, excruciating exertion or sacrifice need be involved, except under certain special circumstances. Also, I am not enamored with the term “filial piety” because it denotes a subjective state, i.e. a state of mind, a state of piety. I think *xiao* is more of an objective state, i.e. a way of conduct, indeed a whole way of living one’s life. Thus I use the term “being good to parents.”

My paper is based mainly on the precepts in the above-mentioned *Di Zi Gui* and in the early Confucian classic *Xiao Jing* (孝經), plus study and discussion, including discussion with my students.

Hopefully this work will contribute somewhat to the revival and renewal of what is good in the Chinese heritage. No doubt this piece can stand improvement; any suggestions or comments from the reader will be much appreciated.

Feng Xin-ming, November 2006

Twenty-Four Ways to Carry out *Xiao* **(to Be Good to Parents)**

By Feng Xin-ming, November 2006

Precepts Mainly from *Di Zi Gui* 弟子規 and *Xiao Jing* 孝經
Also in Chinese in both Simplified and Complicated Script

There are many ways to carry out *xiao*, that is, to be good to parents, and here are twenty-four of the ways:

1. Respect parents and treat parents with courtesy;
2. Obey parents' orders, unless they are against moral righteousness;
3. Reverently and thoroughly receive and understand parents' teachings;
4. Accept parents' reprimands;
5. Look after our bodies and our health;
6. Look after our daily affairs well;
7. Frequently update parents on our situation, so that they wouldn't worry;
8. Practice and cultivate good conduct and character, so that we will reflect well on our parents;
9. We must not hoard the family's material possessions for our own use but must share them with the family;
10. Come into possession of what parents like, and avoid or get rid of what parents don't like;
11. Even if parents hated us, we would still need to be Xiao (be good) to them;
12. If parents should engage in wrong conduct that is against moral righteousness we must remonstrate and dissuade, and persist until we succeed;
13. Among siblings there must be harmony;
14. The older siblings should help look after and teach the younger so that the burden on the parents will be lessened;
15. We should have a stable career;
16. In study and career we should do our best and achieve the best that we are capable of;
17. If possible, we should attain outstanding achievements so that our names will be remembered by posterity and thus bring glory to our parents;
18. When we are young and our parents are working we must help our parents with their work and with the household chores;
19. When parents are old and unable to work we must support them materially;
20. If parents are ill or infirm we must care for them;

21. When parents die we must hold dignified funerals;
22. When parents die we must mourn for an appropriate period;
23. After parents die we must periodically hold sincere memorials for them;
24. We must have offspring in order to carry on the previous generations' name.

二十四行孝法 (简体字)

冯欣明著，主要取材自「弟子规」及「孝经」

行孝有很多方法，以下是其中的二十四種：

1. 尊敬父母，对父母有礼貌；
2. 服从父母的命令，除非不义；
3. 恭敬仔细地领受和理解父母的教导；
4. 接受父母的责罚；
5. 照顾好自己身体和健康；
6. 照顾好自己日常事情；
7. 经常对父母报告自己的情况，不要让父母担忧；
8. 修养良好的品德、行为，以显父母；
9. 家庭的物资要与家庭分享共用，不要占为己有；
10. 父母所喜爱的事物要尽力争取；父母所厌恶的事物要尽力清除；
11. 尽管父母憎恨我们，也须要对父母行孝；

12. 如果父母有不义的、错误的行为就要劝谏，还要坚持，到成功为止；
13. 兄弟之间须要和睦；
14. 做兄姐的应该帮助照顾教导弟妹，为父母减轻负担；
15. 事业要稳定；
16. 在事业、学业上争取能力所能达到的最佳成就；
17. 能力做到的话，达到事业或功绩辉煌，扬名于后世，以显父母；
18. 年少时要帮助父母的家务和事业，替他们减轻负担；
19. 父母年老不能工作赚钱，就要供养父母；
20. 父母有病或衰老时就要服侍父母；
21. 父母死亡就要举办庄严的丧礼；
22. 父母死亡就要守适当的孝期；
23. 父母死亡后就要定期虔诚地拜祭；
24. 要生育儿女，继承上代的姓名。

二十四行孝法（繁體字）

馮欣明著，主要取材自「弟子規」及「孝經」

行孝有很多方法，以下是其中的二十四種：

1. 尊敬父母，對父母有禮貌；
2. 服從父母的命令，除非不義；
3. 恭敬仔細地領受和理解父母的教導；
4. 接受父母的責罰；
5. 照顧好自己身體和健康；
6. 照顧好自己日常事情；
7. 經常對父母報告自己的情況，不要讓父母擔掛；
8. 修養良好的品德、行為，以顯父母；
9. 家庭的物資要與家庭分享共用，不要佔為自有；
10. 父母所喜愛的事物要盡力爭取；父母所厭惡的事物要盡力清除；
11. 盡管父母憎恨我們，也須要對父母行孝；
12. 如果父母有不義的、錯誤的行為就要勸諫，還要堅持，到成功為止；
13. 兄弟之間須要和睦；
14. 做兄姐的應該幫助照顧教導弟妹，為父母減輕負擔；
15. 事業要穩定；
16. 在事業、學業上爭取能力所能達到的最佳成就；
17. 能力做到的話，達到事業或功績輝煌，揚名於後世，以顯父母；

18. 年少時要幫助父母的家務和事業，替他們減輕負擔；
19. 父母年老不能工作賺錢，就要供養父母；
20. 父母有病或衰老時就要服侍父母；
21. 父母死亡就要舉辦莊嚴的喪禮；
22. 父母死亡就要守適當的孝期；
23. 父母死亡後就要定期虔誠地拜祭；
24. 要生育兒女，繼承上代的姓名。