

A Reassessment of Life

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Life is a strenuous journey. It has its demands and stresses which take up much of our time and efforts. Every day, more and more is expected out of each and every person. When you are young, you are expected to succeed at school. As you get older, you are expected to raise and support a family. You are encouraged to work hard at your job, get promotions, and provide the best possible life for your loved ones. With these extra burdens and anxieties, it is very easy to lose focus of what the real priorities of life are. While reading *Chung Hyo Ye, Tales of filial devotion, loyalty, respect and benevolence from the history and folklore of Korea*, people are reminded of the important things in life and what you really should be striving for.

In several cultures, especially the American culture, precedence is placed on wealth and material objects. The family is seen as a commodity; as something nice to have on the side. The love and stability that a family provides is taken for granted. It is not uncommon to hear about the emphasis placed on individuality and independence. A child challenging the advice of a parent is not unheard of; in fact, it is somewhat even encouraged. The basis of our culture has been rooted in doing whatever it takes to succeed, without minding who has to be harmed or deceived in the process. It is often wondered why America and other cultures are seemingly faltering in terms of moral growth. Maybe it is not necessary to look any further than to view the way family values are treated to figure out the answer.

It is obvious that the Korean culture holds their families to the highest esteem. This is what strikes me the most about these essays and this book as a whole. The respect that children hold for their parents is remarkable and awe inspiring. The fact

that it is common practice to put others ahead of your own personal convictions is beyond amazing, and the emphasis placed on the value of community and family is astounding. In several of the chapters, the ultimate self-sacrifice was given in order so another could live a better life. What an example to show to your children, and ultimately, to the rest of the world.

I think that the world, especially the United States, could learn a lot from the Korean culture. I believe that the relationships between parents and children here are strained. Children spend too much time fending for themselves instead of seeking the counsel of their parents. Parents are seen as monetary support for their offspring and that is all. The children do as they please afterwards. It is mind-boggling to look at the amount of mothers and fathers staying in nursing homes as they grow older. The love and support they provided to their children as they grew is not reciprocated as it should be.

The loyalty, respect, and overall benevolence are also undetectable. As mentioned earlier, children are more likely to strive for self preservation rather than familial support. To disown a parent is not unheard of, nor is using a parent just for the sake of obtaining money or other material goods. As long as they are happy, it doesn't matter how much the other person has to sacrifice. To be successful is the number one priority for a majority of Americans, with all other aspects being viewed as a bonus.

If families were to take the morals presented in *Chung Hyo Ye, Tales of filial devotion, loyalty, respect and benevolence from the history and folklore of Korea*, and

truly try to live them, I believe that the United States and many other countries around the world would grow in insurmountable ways. What people don't realize is that even though having material goods is a great accomplishment, nothing, absolutely *nothing*, can overcome the love and support that a family can provide. Fancy clothes cannot replace the warmth of a mother, and a solid house cannot replace the strength of a father. This realization alone, the fact that the family should be your greatest source of pride, is the greatest revelation that a person could recognize.

This essay is not meant to condemn the families around the world. It is merely a wake up call. I know personally that I do not live out these morals presented in the book. I know I should work harder at showing my parents my utmost appreciation for what they have done for me in my life. I know I should also work harder at diverting my focus from the "American Dream" of wealth to more of a humanistic view of respect, loyalty, and benevolence. This book was really a chance for me and others to reassess our lives and change our priorities. This new outlook is the overall affect that this book had on me, and I hope that with this new awareness, I will be able to live a more complete and fulfilling life.