

# The Dilemma of Pang

Scholarly sources:

Knapp, K.N. (2005) *Selfless offspring: Filial children and social order in Medieval China*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press.

Wolf, M. (1972) *Women and the family in rural Taiwan*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

## Meet Pang

Pang was a fifteen-year-old girl living with an extended family of 36 people in China in the early Middle Ages. Because girls weren't considered as important as boys in China during these times, she was often called "The Daughter of Ding Lang."

Ding Lang was her father.



## Pang's world

Pang's family was a member of the Han ethnic group, the largest ethnic group in China.

Pang and her large family lived in the charming old city of Jiankang. Even back in 400 AD, this city had over one million people. Because Pang's father had a good position in one of the municipal offices of the City of Jiankang, the family lived comfortably in a beautiful compound .

They were considered middle class by Han standards.



Pang's early childhood had been a very happy one. She played every day with her siblings, cousins, and pets.



Later on, Pang played soccer, as the game had been invented in China hundreds of years earlier .



Pang loved the family feasts with all of her relatives. They ate a lot of rice and fowl, such as duck and chicken. They also ate a variety of vegetables with their rice.

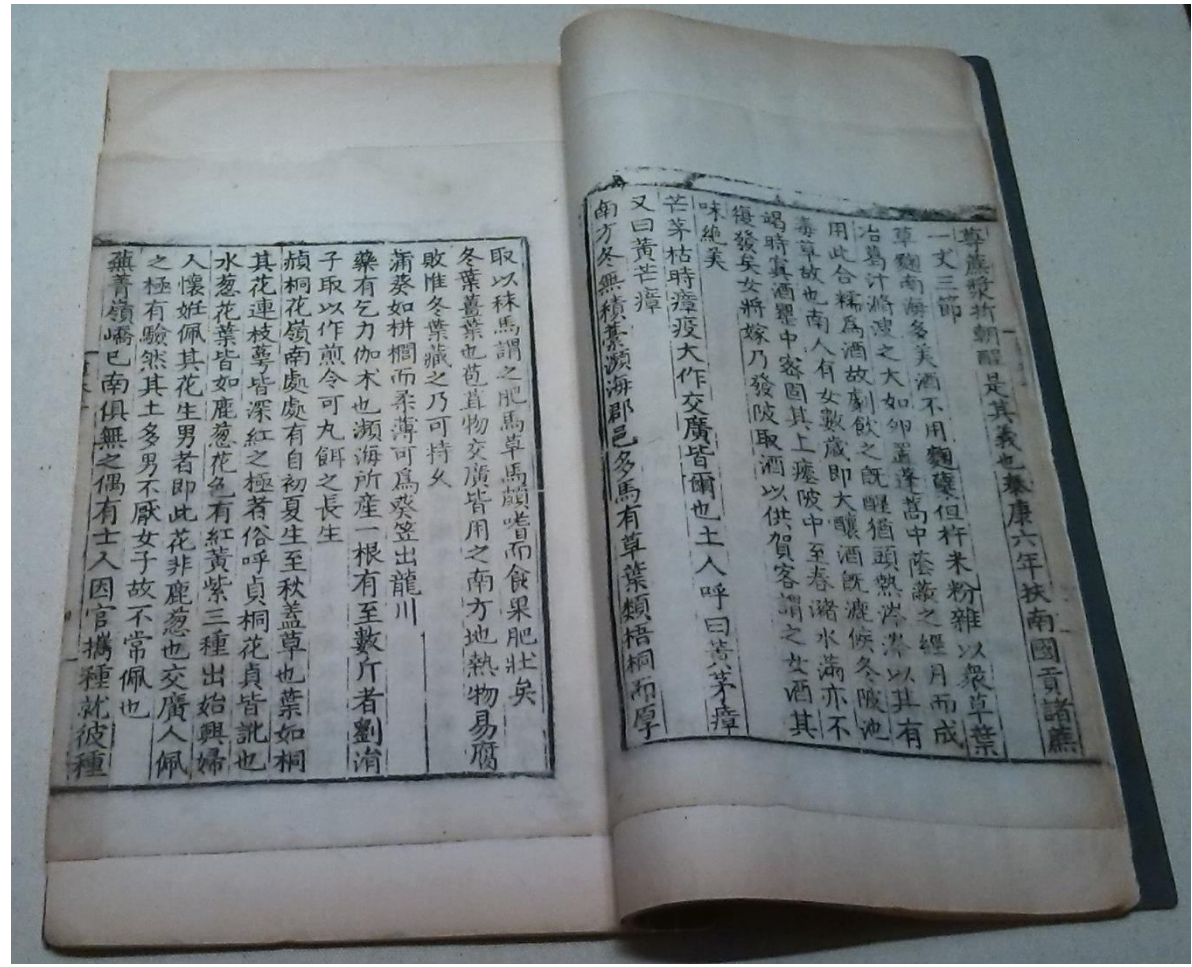


Pang loved making silk with the women of the household.

Silk was only worn by the highest dignitaries in China, but because Pang's father worked in a highly ranked government office, he was allowed to wear it.



Pang also read stories. Everyone in her family knew how to read and write.



尊庶幾折朝醴是其義也  
 奉康六年扶南國貢諸蔗  
 一丈三節

草麴南海多美酒不用麴  
 但杵米粉雜以麴草葉  
 治葛汁滲漉之大如卵  
 置葦蒿中陰蔽之經月而成  
 用此合糯為酒故刻飲之既醒  
 猶頭熱滂漉以其有毒草故也  
 南人有女數歲即大釀酒既漉  
 候冬陂池竭時真酒罌中密固  
 其上瘞陂中至春潄水滿亦不  
 復發矣女將嫁乃發陂取酒以供  
 賀客謂之女酒其味絕美

芒茅枯時瘴疫大作交廣皆爾也  
 土人呼曰黃茅瘴  
 又曰黃芒瘴  
 南方冬無積葉瀕海郡已多馬  
 有草葉類梧桐而厚

取以秣馬謂之肥馬草馬頗嗜而食果肥壯矣  
 冬葉蔓葉也苞莖物交廣皆用之南方地熱物易腐  
 敗惟冬葉藏之乃可持久

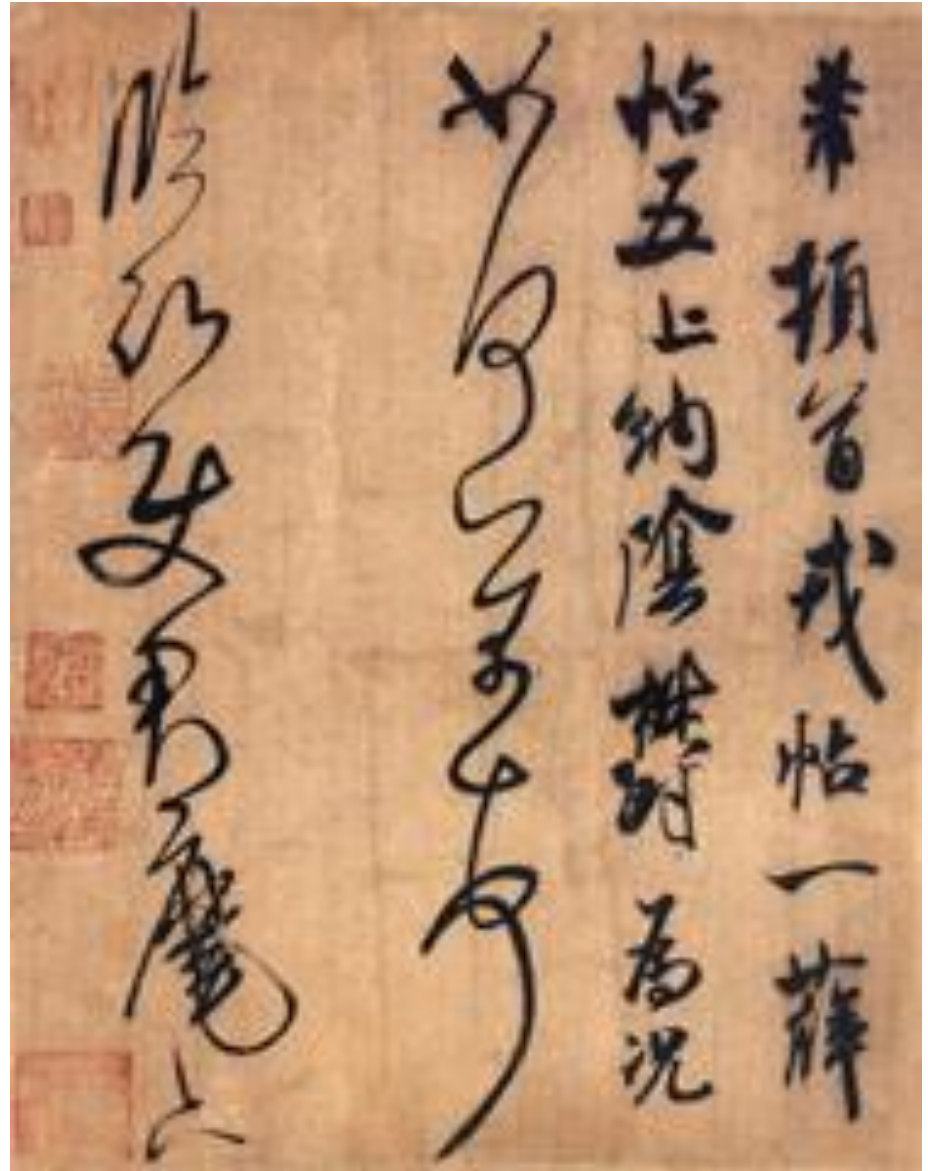
蒲葵如耕欄而柔薄可為葵笠出龍川  
 藥有乞力伽木也瀕海所產一根有至數斤者劉涓  
 子取以作煎令可丸餌之長生

楨桐花嶺南處處有自初夏生至秋蓋草也葉如桐  
 其花連枝萼皆深紅之極者俗呼貞桐花貞皆訛也  
 水葱花葉皆如鹿葱花色有紅黃紫三種出始興婦  
 人懷妊佩其花生男者即此花非鹿葱也交廣人佩  
 之極有驗然其土多男不感女子故不常佩也

燕菁嶺嶠巴南俱無之偶有士入因官攜種就彼種



Chinese writing was done on scrolls like the one shown here. The words were made up of small characters, and writing went top to bottom.



Pang's brothers went to school. Only boys were allowed to receive a formal education in early Medieval China.

But Pang's brothers taught their sisters to read.

Her oldest brother, Xian (right), was one year away from attending a college, called The School for the Sons of State.



As important as literacy was to the Han of China, goodness was more valued. The Han followed the teachings of the ancient wise man, Confucius. Confucius lived about 500 years before Jesus and he passed on an early version of the Golden Rule, which read, "Do not do to others what you do not want done to yourself."



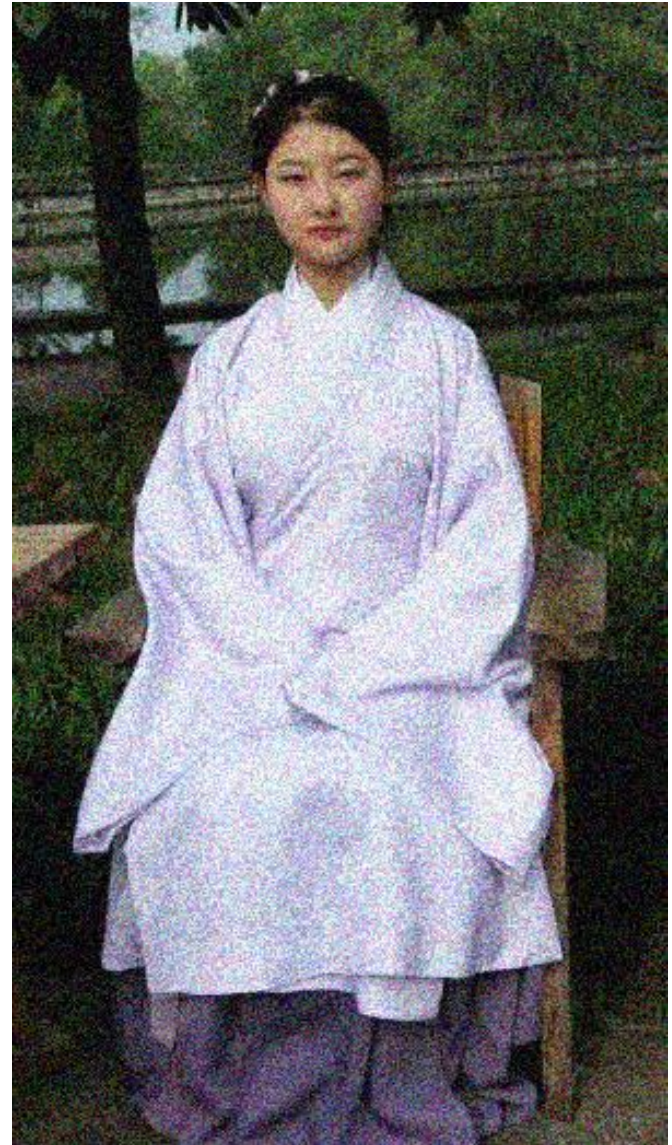
Confucius taught people to avoid selfishness, worship their ancestors, and show very strong respect for parents. This respect for parents was the most cherished tradition of the Chinese, and was known as filial piety.

Pang, like other children, was deeply devoted to her parents—especially her mother. But that's where she faced her dilemma.



## Pang's dilemma

Pang's mother, Ci, was a beautiful woman with a reputation for filial piety. As a young girl she saved the life of her father by jumping in front of a runaway horse carrying her father. People in Jiankan were so amazed that they brought gold coins to Ci's father. The family was very poor, but they let Ci take some of the coins with her when she married Ding Lang and moved into his household.



Over the years Ding Lang's family came to believe that Pang's mother Ci had special healing powers with Chinese medicines that had been given to her by her ancestors because of her remarkable filial piety.

Because of this, Ci was allowed more privileges in the house than most other women had.



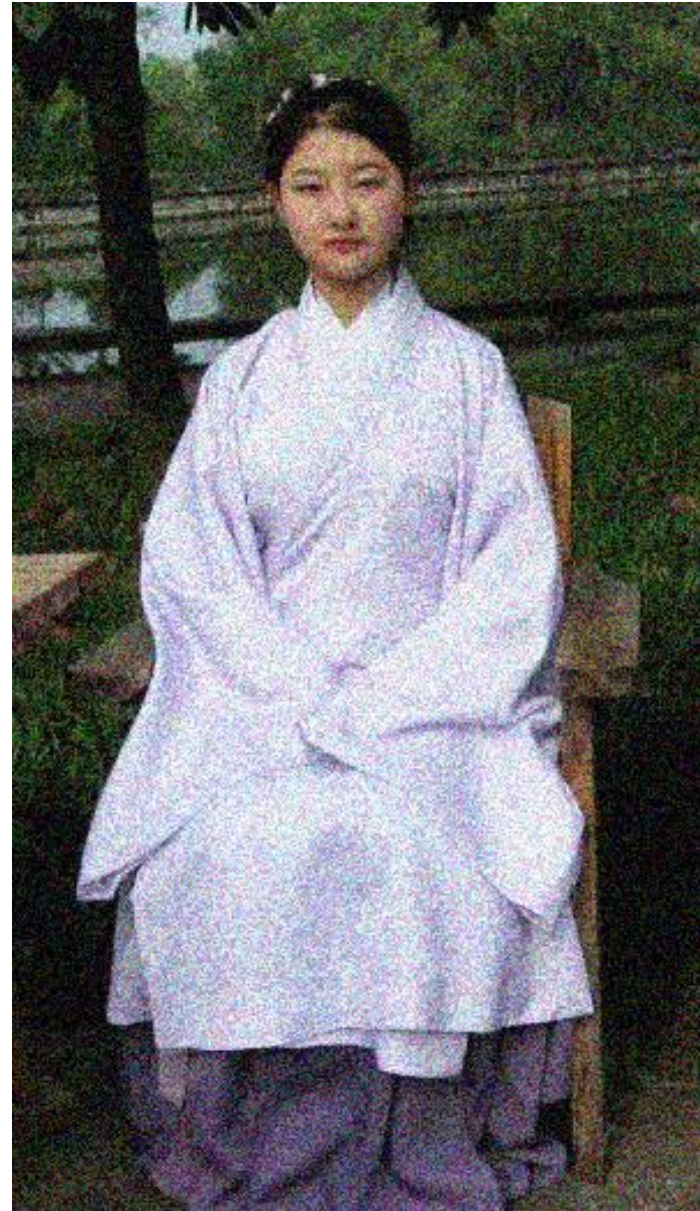
Pang spent much time following her mother around as a young girl. She hoped that one day she might also gain healing powers that would help others.

Pang's mother, Ci, taught Pang to follow the ways of women in the household—how to prepare food, keep an orderly house, make silk, and obey the men and elders (even though she knew that her mother had more authority in her house than most women). Pang was told that one day she would marry and would have to go to the household of her husband's family. She needed to understand how to fit in.



Pang worshipped her mother—sometimes even more than she worshipped her father and her ancestors.

But suddenly something changed.





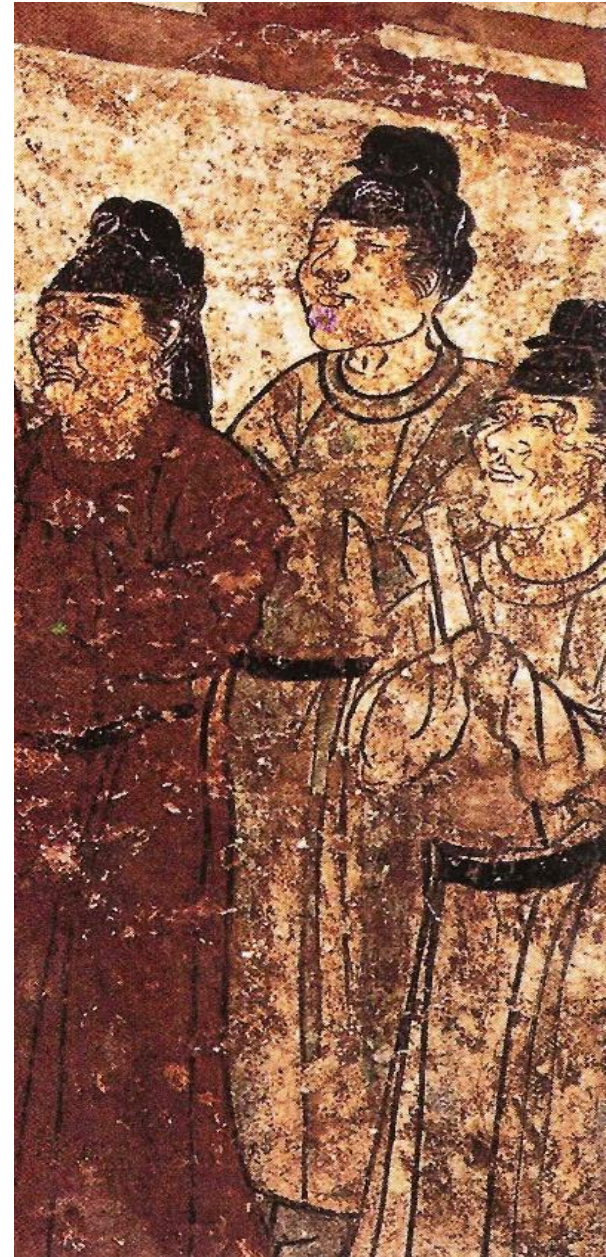
One day Ci's brother came to visit the family of Ding Lang with his sons. He had a huge request to make of Pang's mother. Pang overheard the conversation.

"Little sister," he said. "Many years ago our beloved parents had a pot of gold coins given to us by our friends because of your act of filial piety. Our beloved parents gave you some of those coins."

Ci nodded. "Yes, they will go to my eldest son Xian for his college education."



"But your poor family back home no longer has any wealth and I now have these sons that must go to college if they are ever to help me and my wife in our older years. I beseech you to surrender the coins to us so at least one son can go."



When sweet young Pang heard her uncle's request, she could not believe her ears.

"Mother will never give him her gold," she thought. "My brother Xian must go to college."



But Ci told her brother that she would carefully consider his request and give him her answer tomorrow.

That night Ci went to her parents' home and followed her elders into the chamber where they honored their ancestors. She wished to seek wisdom from them.



On the altar were carved tablets honoring Ci's family's beloved ancestors. She burned incense to them and asked for guidance.

By late that night she knew her decision. She would inform her husband, but she knew he would not disagree with what she must do. There was only one truly right way.



In the morning, Ci summoned her brother. She told him that she and Ding Lang had come to a decision. Much to Pang's horror, Ci handed him all the gold coins she had and said it would be enough to send one of his sons to college. This way her brother and his wife would be supported in their later years.



Pang was so shocked! How could her parents do this to their own son?

And if none of their sons went to college, how would they be able to support their parents later in life? How had Pang's mother and father made a decision that would harm them?



Because of Pang's filial piety—her utmost respect for her parents—she would not question their decision.

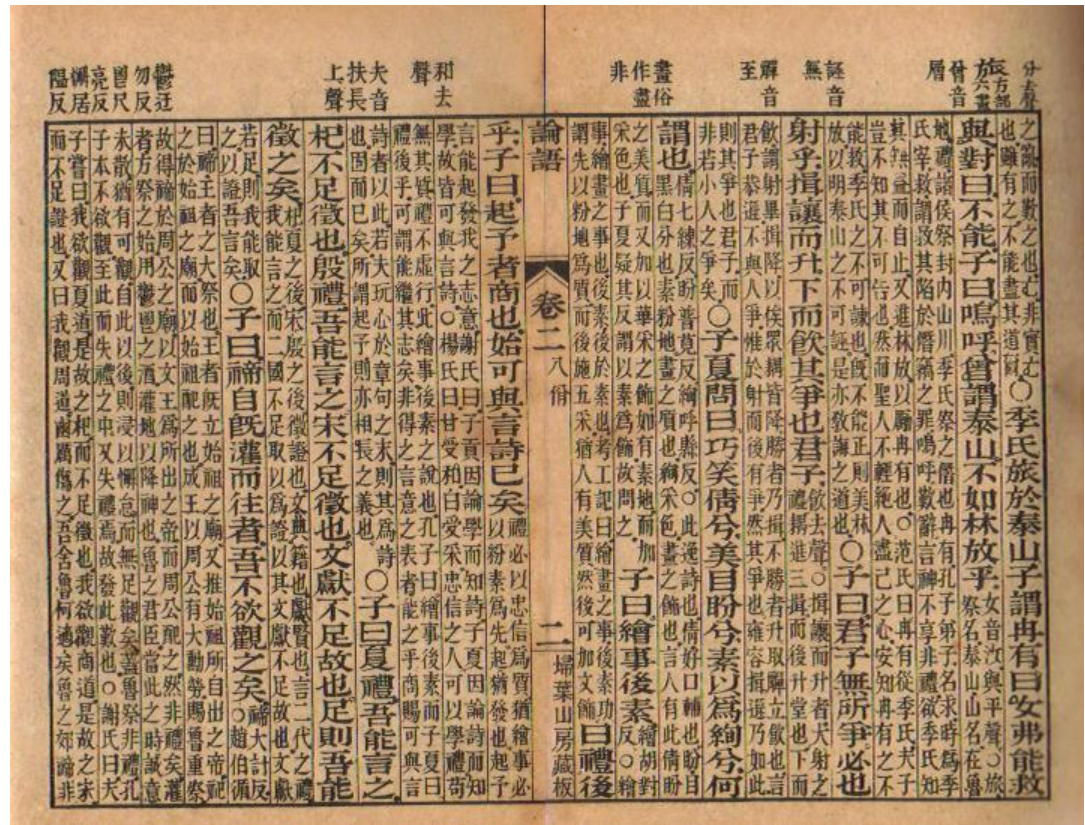
Instead she went to her brother Xian and told him how shocked she was.

But Xian did not share her surprise.





"Little sister," Xian began. "Do you not remember all the writings of Confucius and the other texts I gave you to read?"



"I do," Pang replied. "I read all the stories of filial piety and I understand it so well. And you, my righteous brother, have been the best example of this. Do you not bring food to the ancestors? Do you not serve our parents day and night, bringing them little delicacies from your earnings? Do you not work for them tirelessly?"



"But, my little sister," Xian responded, "filial piety is not practiced in order to get a reward. I do not do this so my parents will send me to college and I will have high earnings.

"In your readings you must have learned about the meaning of si and gong. Didn't you?"



"Of course," said Pang. "Si is selfishness, or caring about yourself before all others. Gong is the opposite."



"That's correct," said Xian. "Gong is everything that is goodness in our Han world. It is thinking about others first.

"You see now what our parents have done? They thought first of the wellbeing of our uncle and his wife before their own wellbeing, Our family has more wealth than our uncle's family. We will find a way to stretch that to care for our parents. But what our mother did with her gold was truly righteous."

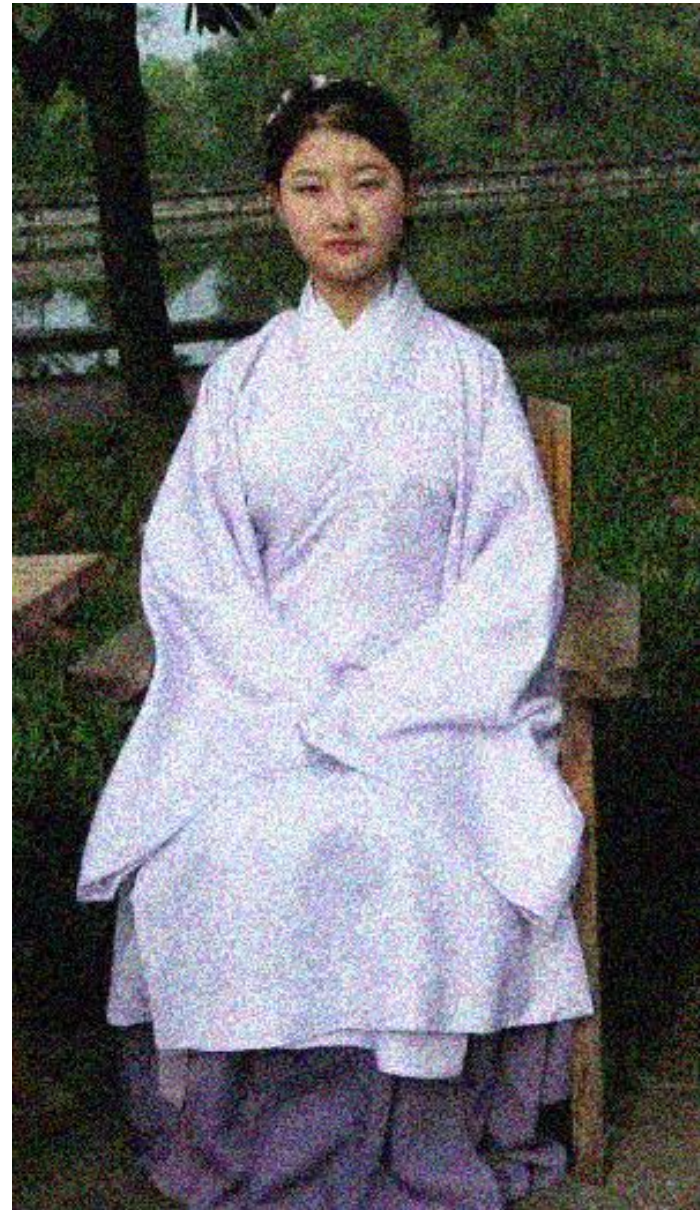


And so it was that Pang came to understand her Han ways better.

Her dilemma was resolved and she went on to take her place among the women of her household.



And throughout the city of Jiankang, the reputation of Ci, Pang's mother, grew. The story of what she did for her brother's family was passed on for countless generations.



And what about today in China?  
Yes, the ideas of si and gong  
continue to be relevant. And most  
Chinese still worship their  
ancestors.

And what about filial piety? It  
has even survived the long rule of  
communism in China. In fact, in  
2013, the Chinese government  
formally passed a law of filial  
piety to guarantee that the  
Chinese would always provide for  
their parents.





The end

Let's talk!!!