

# The Concept of Health Preservation in Traditional Family Precepts and Its Practical Significance

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## ABSTRACT

The concept of health preservation in traditional family precepts mainly includes the concept of valuing one's life through assuring the safe of life, the concept of working hard of not giving up worldly affairs, the moral cultivation concept of cultivating one's physical and mental health, the nature-cultivation concept of restraining anger and being frugal, and the concept of happy health preservation of abandoning oneself to nature, systematically answering questions such as the premise, purpose, and methods of health preservation. Learning from the traditional family precepts on health preservation is of practical significance for promoting the construction of a healthy China and realizing the people's aspirations for a better life.

**Keywords:** Family precepts, Concept of health preservation, Health preservation through virtue.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

At present, the socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era, the people's need for a better life is growing and health is the prerequisite for a better life. General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out that "Health is an inevitable requirement for promoting comprehensive human development, a fundamental condition for economic and social development, an important symbol of national prosperity, and a common pursuit of the people." [1]<sup>370</sup> Therefore, it is necessary to prioritize the development of ensuring people's health to accelerate the construction of a healthy China. Health preservation is undoubtedly an important measure to improve health and is increasingly being valued by people. It is crucial to clarify what constitutes health preservation, as well as why to and how to maintain it. The concept of health preservation in traditional family precepts is an important component of excellent traditional Chinese culture, the content of which mainly includes the concept of valuing one's life through assuring the safe of life, the concept of working hard of not giving up worldly affairs, the moral cultivation concept of cultivating one's physical and mental health, the nature-cultivation concept of restraining anger and being frugal, and the concept of happy health preservation of abandoning oneself

to nature, which systematically answers questions such as the premise, purpose, and methods of health preservation. Learning from the concept of health preservation in traditional family precepts and realizing the creative transformation and innovative development of traditional health preservation culture are of practical significance for promoting the implementation of the healthy China action, improving the health literacy of the whole people, and thus realizing the people's yearning for a better life.

## 2. THE CONCEPT OF VALUING ONE'S LIFE THROUGH ASSURING THE SAFE OF LIFE

Health preservation first requires that there is "life" to be preserved, so valuing life is a prerequisite for health preservation. Confucianism puts people first and values life. *The Analects of Confucius* · *Xiangdang* records: "The stable of the Confucius was on fire. Confucius returned from the court and said, 'Is anyone hurt?'. He didn't ask how the horses were doing". [2]<sup>150</sup> In the case of a fire in the stable, Confucius didn't care about property damage, but instead, prioritized people. He first asked 'Is anyone hurt?', reflecting his emphasis on human life. The Taoist school "emphasizes life over objects" and believes that the value of any external

object can't exceed the meaning of life. Zhuangzi once used the metaphor of a supernatural turtle to express his pursuit of "wagging my tail in the mud" and refused the invitation of two senior officials from the Chu State. Yan Zhitui put forward in *Yan's Family Precepts on Health Preservation* that "People who want to keep health should first consider avoiding disasters and assuring the safe of life", expressing the importance of the premise of health preservation, i.e., "life". Yan Zhitui cited the examples of Shan Bao, Zhang Yi, Ji Kang and Shi Chong to illustrate the importance of avoiding disasters and assuring the safe of life. He said, "Shan Bao valued health preservation very much, but he didn't take precautions against the hungry tigers from the outside, resulting in being eaten by the hungry tigers. Zhang Yi took precautions against external invasion very seriously, but died from internal fever. These are all lessons left by our predecessors. Ji Kang wrote *Health Preservation*, but was beheaded due to arrogance and rudeness. Shi Chong hoped to take medicine to prolong his life, but was killed due to his insatiable greed for accumulating wealth. This is all the muddles of the previous generations". [3]<sup>156-157</sup> Yan Zhitui believed that one can maintain his life only if he is alive. The first thing to do in health preservation is to value and preserve life. This is a lesson left by the predecessors, and future generations can learn from it.

Traditional family precepts believe that one should avoid disasters and prioritize life. But it is not always necessary to prioritize the preservation of life. In *Yan's Family Precepts on Health Preservation*, it is proposed that "One cannot live without cherishing life, but also cannot live on in degradation for the sake of survival". It is believed that valuing life and health preservation are not meant to live on in degradation. "If a man suffers harm due to integrity and filial piety, is punished for fulfilling benevolence and righteousness, dies in order to protect the family, or dies for the country"[3]<sup>157</sup>, it should be the responsibility of a man of noble character. It emphasizes that health preservation is not for the sake of living on in degradation, responsibility and integrity are more important than life. Lin Zexu expressed his thoughts in the poem *Fu Shu Deng Cheng Kou Zhan Shi Jia Ren*, "I will do whatever it takes to preserve my country even at the cost of my own life, regardless of fortune or misfortune to myself", expressing his patriotic sentiments of dedicating himself to the country and disregarding his reputation. Life is indeed precious, but personal

integrity and national responsibility are even more precious. This dialectical and comprehensive understanding of preserving life is of great significance.

The traditional family precepts of "avoiding disasters" and "assuring the safe of life" still have practical significance for strengthening the life safety and health education of people in contemporary society, especially primary and secondary school students. In October 2021, the Ministry of Education issued the "Guidelines for Introducing Life Safety and Health Education into Primary and Secondary School Curriculum Textbooks", which proposes to select content related to life safety and health education based on the characteristics of primary and secondary school disciplines, guided by core competencies, as part of the subject teaching materials, and integrate it into primary and secondary school curriculum textbooks to promote life safety and health education in primary and secondary schools. Through education, students' awareness of life safety protection of "life first, health first" can be effectively enhanced, which can lay a solid foundation for students' healthy growth, lifelong development and the improvement of the whole people's health literacy.

### **3. THE CONCEPT OF WORKING HARD OF NOT GIVING UP WORLDLY AFFAIRS**

The direct purpose of health preservation is to cultivate vitality, prevent diseases, and achieve health and longevity. The fundamental purpose of health preservation should be to strive for academic pursuits and not give up worldly affairs. Yan Zhitui pointed out in the *Yan's Family Precepts on Health Preservation* that it is impractical to cultivate immortality through health preservation. Health preservation and life preservation should "not give up worldly affairs", that is, health preservation should not delay or abandon the matter of seeking personal development. In *Zeng Guofan's Family Letters*, it is also proposed that health preservation is not for seeking immortals, but for managing families and businesses. Zeng Guofan said in his letter *To Younger Brothers Cheng and Yuan* in the tenth year of Tongzhi reign (1871) that "Health preservation should go hand in hand with hard working. Only a person with strong will and healthy body can revitalize his family and achieve his career". [4]<sup>344</sup> Therefore, health preservation is not about seeking immortality, but simply seeking

physical health and happiness, which is to actively engage in learning, work, and life in a better state.

The traditional family precepts put forward the idea of active treatment of diseases, and don't advocate sticking to study and work with diseases, because work and learning tasks cannot be completed well without a healthy physical and mental state. Yao Shunmu proposed active treatment after illness, "waiting to be cured with ease". Wang Huizu put forward that "The most important thing for diseases is to cure them as soon as possible" in his *Shuang Jie Tang Yong Xun*. In the *Letter to Sishun on November 16, 1912 in Liang Qichao's Family Letters*, Liang Qichao said: "I used to get sick from my homework in school in Datong, and I still feel afraid today. You mustn't repeat the same mistakes"[5]<sup>22</sup>, warning her daughter Liang Sishun not to fall ill due to her eagerness to complete her studies. After learning that his daughter suffered from insomnia, Liang Qichao was very worried. He said in a letter home: If you are in a hurry, you can reduce your homework, but don't use your brain too much from getting sick.

The traditional family precepts of "striving to study" and "not giving up worldly affairs" as the purpose of health preservation have certain practical significance in inspiring people to strive for the realization of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and the Chinese dream. General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out that we should "accelerate the construction of a healthy China, strive to ensure people's health in an all-round and full-period way, and lay a solid healthy foundation for the realization of the Two Centenary Goals and the Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation". [1]<sup>370</sup> Therefore, based on the basic guarantee of the health of the whole people, it is important to encourage all the people to work tirelessly to win the great victory of socialism with Chinese characteristics and realize the Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

#### **4. THE MORAL CULTIVATION CONCEPT OF CULTIVATING ONE'S PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH**

The traditional concept of health preservation not only values self-cultivation, but also values nourishing one's physical and mental health, believing that moral cultivation is the main method of health preservation.

The Confucian philosophy of "benevolent people live a long life", the Taoist philosophy of "complete and unbiased health cultivation methods", and the Buddhist philosophy of "liking to do good deeds for cultivation" all aim to maintain health through moral cultivation. There is not much direct discussion of health preservation in traditional family precepts, which is a reflection of their emphasis on "health preservation through virtue". Almost all family precepts regard teaching children to cultivate their body and mind, and cultivate their morality as an important content. They believe that cultivation of morality is the foundation of life and career. In *Cong Xun Zhai Yu*, Zhang Ying proposed that "Those who accumulate virtue and do good deeds will not be defeated". The virtue advocated by Zhang Ying is mainly the virtue of humility. He said: The great sages of Yao and Shun, known in history as "honest, dutiful, and humble"; Confucius was highly virtuous, and his disciples praised him for being "dutiful, frugal, and humble". There is an ancient saying that "Those who are willing to suffer losses naturally do things smoothly". The elderly value humility. Zuo Shi said, "Humility is the foundation of virtue". [6]<sup>66</sup> These explanations all express Zhang Ying's emphasis on the virtue of humility. There is a chapter *The Effect of Virtue of Humility in Liaofan's Four Lessons*, which advocates the character of humility. Wang Huizu also emphasized the importance of morality in *Shuang Jie Tang Yong Xun*, and he proposed viewpoints of "difficulties and achievements all being based on acting with integrity", "being an upright person", "considering cultivating virtue after achieving one's goals", "one cannot lose his credit", and "paying attention to what is beneficial". In *Expostulating with the Offspring*, Zhuge Liang put forward the idea of how to cultivate one's morality, such as "cultivating one's moral character by calmness, and cultivating one's morality by thrift". In *Cong Xun Zhai Yu*, Zhang Ying proposed methods to cultivate morality such as "reading to nourish the mind". Zhang Ying believed that "Reading can increase one's growth of Tao's heart and be the first thing to do for personal well-being", believing that the first thing to do for maintaining one's body is reading. For those people who don't read all day long, when they are idle and have nothing to do, "They have no place to rest in their body and mind and no place to rest in their ears and eyes". Therefore, their minds are turned upside down and delusions lead to anger. When encountering unpleasant things, one feels extremely sad because he feels like "This only happens to me". Therefore, "When being in adversity, he is not

happy, and when being in prosperity, he is not happy". Therefore, by cultivating one's mind and morality, one can broaden one's mind and achieve psychological balance, which is of positive significance for health preservation and wellness.

Traditional family precepts emphasize moral cultivation and advocate the view of maintaining health through moral cultivation, which has certain practical significance for promoting people to strengthen moral cultivation and build a harmonious society. In 2019, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council issued the "Guidelines for Citizen Morality Construction in the New Era", which pointed out: "Socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era. Strengthening the moral construction of citizens and improving the moral level of the whole society are the strategic tasks of building a moderately prosperous society in an all-round way and building a modern and powerful socialist country in an all-round way, which are also the inevitable requirements of adapting to the changes in major social contradictions, meeting the people's urgent needs for a better life, and promoting all-round social progress and all-round human development". Therefore, advocating for "health preservation through virtue" in a certain sense helps to strengthen social moral construction and thus meet the people's aspirations for a better life.

## 5. THE NATURE-CULTIVATION CONCEPT OF RESTRAINING ANGER AND BEING FRUGAL

The traditional concept of health preservation emphasizes the impact of emotions on health, believing that nourishing one's nature is an important method of health preservation. Sun Simiao, a famous medical scientist in the Tang Dynasty, put forward in the *Qian Jin Yao Fang · Preface to Nurturing Nature* that those who are good at nurturing nature can cure the disease they have not suffered, and he believed that "As long as the nature is good itself, all internal and external diseases will be known about". Sun Simiao put forward the "way of cultivating nature" in *Qian Jin Yao Fang · Taoism's Cultivating Nature*, including not to walk and stand for a long time, not to sit and lie for a long time, not to look and listen for a long time, not to worry, not to anger, not to grieve, not to fear, and so on. From this, it can be seen that health preservation requires a combination of nourishing the body and stabilizing emotions.

The traditional family precepts advocate the nature-cultivation concept of restraining anger and being frugal, that is, the way to keep healthy by avoiding anger and being frugal, which is the same as Sun Simiao's ideas. In *Zeng Guofan's Family Letters*, Zeng Guofan put forward that "Restraining anger and being frugal are the key to health preservation". In *Cong Xun Zhai Yu*, Zhang Ying proposed that anger harms the body, so he asked his descendants to calm down and not be burdened by external things. Zhang Ying also summarized the four-word "way to longevity", namely, kindness, thrift, calmness and quietness, where "thrift" includes the ideological connotation of Zeng Guofan's idea of "being frugal". Zhang Ying believed that not only should one be frugal with money, but one should always consider frugality in everything. Zheng Guanying put forward the health preservation principle of "moderation without injury", which is actually an explanation of the thought of being frugal. Zuo Zongtang proposed the health preservation concept of "sitting still and concentrating". Yao Shunmu proposed in his *Medicinal Words* that "Forcibly doing things that cannot be done will make one's own energy exhausted", which is not conducive to health preservation. The above explanations all contain the path of "being frugal" to maintain one's health.

The nature-cultivation concept of restraining anger and being frugal advocates suppressing the desire and advocating the idea of frugality, which is conducive to promoting the construction of ecological civilization. General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out that "The construction of ecological civilization is closely related to everyone and everyone should be a practitioner and promoter. We need to strengthen the promotion and education of ecological civilization, strengthen citizens' environmental awareness, promote the formation of a moderate, green, low-carbon, civilized and healthy lifestyle and consumption mode, and form a good trend of common participation of the whole society". [1]<sup>396</sup> The traditional family precepts advocate the idea of suppressing desires, frugality, and cherishing, which has certain practical significance in opposing extravagance, waste, and unreasonable consumption, and promoting the formation of a simple, moderate, green, and low-carbon lifestyle.

## 6. THE CONCEPT OF HAPPY HEALTH PRESERVATION OF ABANDONING ONESELF TO NATURE

The concept of happy health preservation is a prerequisite for longevity and an important method of health preservation. In *Zhuangzi · Zhibei Tour*, Zhuangzi proposed the joy of mountains and forests, "Seeing mountains, rivers, trees, and hilly land makes me feel very happy". In *The Analects of Confucius · Yongye*, it is recorded that Confucius said, "Wise people love water, while benevolent and righteous people love mountains. Wise people understand flexibility, while benevolent and righteous people have a peaceful state of mind. Wise people are happy, and benevolent and righteous people live a long life"[2]<sup>89</sup>, believing that the joy of mountains and forests is complementary to longevity. Tao Yuanming expressed his love for the natural scenery in his book *Letters to Yan and Others*, saying, "When I see the interweaving of trees and leaves, even if the birds change their voices, I still feel very happy." In the minds of Chinese people, mountains and rivers are not only the sources of material means of human life, but also embody human thoughts and emotions. "While picking asters near the eastern fence, I see the southern mountain leisurely. In the twilight, wisps of colorful mist linger and rise, and flocks of birds fly back to the embrace of the distant mountains", expressing a free and carefree state of mind. "Raising my cup, I beckon the bright moon. For her, I, together with my shadow, will make three people", expressing the comfort provided by nature in a lonely state of mind. Appreciation of mountains and rivers provides comfort and pleasure to the soul, which is beneficial for physical and mental health. And in order to appreciate the natural scenery, one first needs to go out of their home and towards nature, so that they have a certain amount of exercise, and exercise has an important impact on health preservation. Sun Simiao, a medical scientist, proposed that "The way to keep healthy is to work moderately", "People who want to work physically won't get any diseases", and "One cannot go beyond the amount of exercise of the body", believing that exercise is more important than rest and nutrition. [7]<sup>1510</sup> The joy of mountains and forests helps people persist in exercising and form exercise habits. Moderate exercise can improve the body's metabolic capacity, promote blood and lymphatic circulation, strengthen organ function,

and delay aging, which is of great significance for health and wellness.

In *Cong Xun Zhai Yu*, Zhang Ying also proposed that the joy of life lies in the joy of the mountains and forests. He believed that anyone who loves singing and dancing, woman's charms, money, and personal gain must experience hardship if they have joy. Only by reading and facing beautiful landscapes can there only be joy but no hardship. However, Zhang Ying also proposed that in order to enjoy the joy of mountains and forests for a long time, four conditions need to be met: "Namely, morality, article, economy, and fortune." The first is morality, which refers to noble sentiments and personal cultivation. The second is article. As for the beauty of mountains and rivers, lush forests and slender bamboo, the appreciation of natural landscapes requires a certain level of cultural cultivation in order to better appreciate them. The third is the economy. The joy of moral writing also requires a material foundation. The fourth is fortune, which means that a person can "stay out of poverty and richness, defamation and praise", not be burdened by fame and fortune, and not be bound by the worldly affairs. Only by possessing these four conditions can one better enjoy the joy of mountains and forests, as well as the clear blessings of mountains and forests.

The concept of happy health preservation of abandoning oneself to nature in the concept of health preservation helps to enhance people's awareness of protecting nature and the environment, and helps to establish a new concept of ecological civilization that respects, conforms to, and protects nature, thereby promoting the construction of ecological civilization. General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out: "The mountains and forests are dyed, the plains are blue and green, and the urban and rural areas are full of birds' twitter and fragrance of flowers. This kind of natural beauty not only brings people the enjoyment of beauty, but also serves as a foundation for humanity to move towards the future". [8]<sup>374</sup> A good ecological environment is the foundation of human survival and health, and the people's need for a beautiful ecological environment is an important component of the pursuit of a better life. The concept of happy health preservation of abandoning oneself to nature is of practical significance for improving people's health and pursuing a better life.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The concept of health preservation in traditional family teachings combines health preservation with moral and sexual cultivation, reflecting the correct understanding that consciousness and psychological factors have a significant impact on a person's health status. The traditional family motto of health preservation holds that health preservation should have a healthy lifestyle, an optimistic attitude towards life, and that health preservation should go hand in hand with active work and learning. These are undoubtedly scientific understandings. In short, the concept of health preservation in traditional family teachings has practical significance for people to improve their health preservation concepts, guide their health preservation behaviors, and create a better life based on physical and mental health.

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