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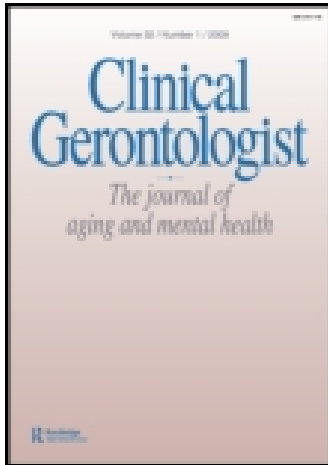
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Older People's Belief of Filial Piety in China: Expectation and Non-expectation

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This paper discusses the concept of filial piety and whether older generations of Chinese people have reduced their expectations of these behaviors from younger generations. The paper describes two studies (conducted in mainland China) that examine expectations for filial piety. The first study looks at the demographic variance on older adults' expectation of filial piety and finds no differences in the effects of age, gender, living area, educational level, etc., on levels of expectation. Close correlation exists, however, between well-being and levels of filial piety expectation. The second study introduces a modified version of filial piety expectation scale (FPE) and describes a dual model of filial piety that characterizes this concept in terms of two separate factors. The FPE is compared with attitudes to aging using a new standardized measure (the Attitudes toward Aging Questionnaire [AAQ]), and a strong positive relationship is evident. Data are discussed regarding the traditional value of filial piety, and its modifications, in current Mainland China.

KEYWORDS *Chinese elderly, expectation scale, filial piety*

INTRODUCTION

“Among hundreds of virtues, filial piety is the most important one” (*bai shan xiao wei xian*, a traditional Chinese proverb). This widespread traditional

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saying indicates that filial piety (*xiao*) is the prime guiding principle of socialization (Ho, 1981) and is strongly emphasized in Chinese culture (Yang, 1981). In China, it is a culturally embedded persuasive force used by parents to shape the values, attitudes, and behaviors of their children (Liu, 2008). As a central concept in Confucianism, which is essentially consanguinitism rather than individualism or collectivism (Liu, 2003), filial piety addresses the ideas of how children should treat their parents (Yeh, & Bedford, 2003). In general, this construct includes a large range of demands from material to emotional requirements, including support, memorializing, deference, compliance, respect, and love. The structures of filial piety are often generalized within cultures and within families to apply to elder respect (Sung, 2001) and authority relationships beyond the family (Yeh & Bedford, 2003).

Traditionally, filial piety has been described conceptually but has not been defined operationally. More recently, researchers have begun to explore its definition in an empirical manner. Sung (1995) has defined filial piety as a two-dimensional concept. The first dimension, behaviorally oriented filial piety, was measured by sacrifice, responsibility, and repayment; the second dimension, emotionally oriented filial piety, was measured by harmony, love and affection, and respect. A more developmentally sequenced model of filial piety has been advanced by Yeh and Bedford (2003), who have validated another dual model of filial piety made up of two factors: reciprocity and authoritarianism. Reciprocal filial piety is beneficial to individual's development, as it enhances interpersonal relationships. It encompasses emotionally and spiritually attending to one's parents out of gratitude for their child-rearing efforts, and advocates providing physical and financial care for one's parents as they age and when they die. Authoritarian filial piety is less benign toward an individual's development, as it accentuates hierarchy and submission. It entails suppressing one's own wishes and complying with one's parents' wishes because of their seniority in physical, financial, or social terms, as well as continuing the family lineage and maintaining one's parents' reputation. While new models of filial piety may have contemporary themes, they nonetheless retain a connection with earlier more traditional concepts as outlined in Ancient Chinese texts.

There are other considerations as well. Given the thousands of years of historical cultural influences, it is still widely expected that filial piety retains a "currency" for Chinese people today. There is obviously still some pressure to conform to the expectations of filial piety as a cultural norm (Chan, 1997). However, it is also acceptable to assume that filial piety is swayed by the trends of modernization, urbanization, and globalization rapidly occurring in China. Based on an in-depth interview with 50 elderly Chinese people living in Hong Kong, Ng and colleagues (2002) observed that while it seemed that some adult children might still listen to and respect their parents, they might not show sympathy for their parents' situation and might not put them as their first priority. While remaining obedient to their parents, they may not do so unquestioningly and submissively. Liber, Nihira, and Mink (2004) note that the

conceptualization of filial piety has been modified among Chinese immigrants to the United States, with parents confronting challenges to maintain this value when raising children. The provision of informal support by adult children and their filial behavior may appear in selective form, which differs from the traditional Confucian concepts. The amount of informal support that can be provided by adult children is based on geographical distance (Joseph, 1998), living arrangements (Lam, 2006), closeness of relationships, and economic status of adult children (Ng et al., 2002). Furthermore, it would appear that filial piety has not been totally eroded but seems more akin to cultural norms that affect, and are affected by, intergenerational relationships (Ng et al., 2002).

According to Confucian teaching, it is a matter of course for parents to enjoy their children's filial piety; thus it would seem reasonable to assume that elders expect their children to differentially comply with filial piety behavior. However, studies from Taiwan (Hsu et al., 2001), Mainland China (Yue & Ng, 1999; Zhan, 2004), and Hong Kong (Cheng & Chan, 2006) have consistently found that although the older generations retain the value of filial piety, they have lower expectations for their children than would be traditionally the case. It appears that the older generations are adjusting their belief of filial piety and are satisfied with their children's filial behavior (Cheng & Chan, 2006). Although this may be the case, its consequences for the emotional well-being of older Chinese people are not yet fully understood.

The current study addresses two important questions regarding expectations for filial piety. First, how are expectations for filial piety related to older people's psychological well-being in current China? Do those older people with a higher expectation of filial piety have better or worse psychological status? Secondly, are there qualitative changes with respect to filial piety expectations? Are there new components being added into filial piety expectations? A two-dimensional model is tentatively proposed in this study that includes both expectations and non-expectations. The concept of *non-expectation* of filial piety suggests a profound modification of the construct by current older Chinese. Consequently, a very critical issue arises with this conceptual change. What is the role of non-expectation in the elder individual's psychological life?

STUDY 1

This study examines the relationships between filial piety expectations and older Chinese people's psychological states, such as parent-child support and feelings of self-esteem. Based on previous findings (Hsu et al., 2001; Yue & Ng, 1999; Zhan, 2004; Cheng & Chan, 2006; Pang et al., 2003) that older people adjust to low expectations of filial piety, we are hypothesizing that higher expectation for filial piety will be inversely related to psychological well-being.

METHODS

Participants and Procedure

Using convenience sampling, 288 older adults from four regions of Mainland China were recruited in this study. This group included 159 male and 129 female participants, with a mean age of 65 years and an age range of 53 to 87 years. The mean age for males is 65.81 ± 6.13 years and for females is 64.17 ± 6.21 years. Among them, 124 participants lived in cities, 74 in towns, 89 in counties, and 1 person did not report his residence. Mean education was 6.8 years ($SD = 5.39$), and 82% were married. Participants were asked to fill out all questionnaires individually. It took 20 to 30 minutes to complete the questionnaires and each participant was paid 20Yuan RMB for their time contribution. Health status was reported to be “good or very good” by 50% of the sample, “so-so” by 34.4%, and “bad and very bad” by 15.6%.

Measurements

FILIAL PIETY EXPECTATION

A 10-item questionnaire was designed to measure older people’s expectations for filial piety. It provides information about the extent to which older adults believe that their adult children should take care of them. Response to each question was on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Nine items were stated in a positive direction, for instance, “Children should hold the belief that it’s their duty to take care of their parents.” And one item was in negative, i.e., Item 2 “Parents do not expect care from their children, they are only happy if their children live a good life.” It’s originally assumed that “do not expect” and “expect” were on the two ends of the continuum of filial piety expectation, hereby the raw score of Item 2 was supposed to be simply reversed when computing total score of filial piety expectation. In order to examine the validity of this self-developed questionnaire, a confirmatory factor analysis (by Amos 4.0) was conducted. The results shown in Table 1 and Figure 1 indicate that there are two one-factor models that are statistically accepted. In the 10-item model, Item 2 had a low but positive loading on the latent factor of filial piety expectation. Comparatively, the 9-item model had better content validity as Item 2 presented more distinctive meaning in relation to other items.

TABLE 1 Confirmatory Factor Analysis of the Questionnaire of Filial Piety Expectation

| | χ^2 | df | p | χ^2/df | NFI | RFI | CFI | IFI | TLI | RMSEA |
|---------|----------|----|------|-------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 10-item | 114.655 | 35 | .000 | 3.276 | 0.990 | 0.984 | 0.993 | 0.993 | 0.989 | 0.089 |
| 9-item | 98.882 | 27 | .000 | 3.662 | 0.991 | 0.985 | 0.993 | 0.993 | 0.989 | 0.096 |

NFI = normed fit index; RFI = relative fit index; CFI = comparative fit index; IFI = incremental fit index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis index; RMSEA = root mean square of approximation.

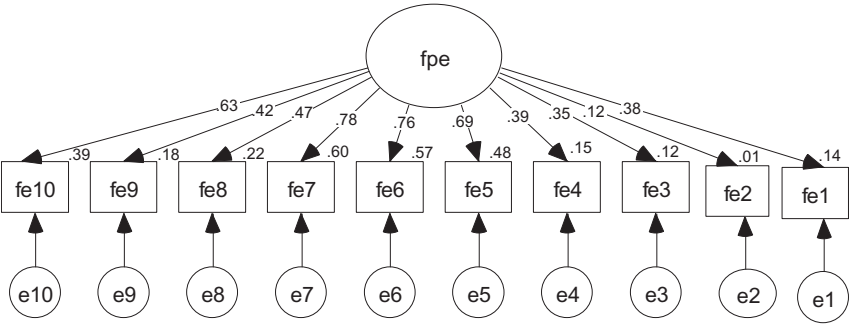


FIGURE 1 Factor loadings of 10 items on the latent factor of filial piety expectation.

Therefore, in this study the average score of 9 items was used as the index of expectation for filial piety reported by participants. The higher the score of the scale, the stronger the filial piety expectation one reported. The Cronbach α value of this 9-item scale was .74.

PARENT-CHILD SUPPORT

To measure the parent-child support perceived by the older parents, the parent-child social support questionnaire (Wang et al, 2005) was used. This questionnaire comprised two subscales. One scale (28 items) measured the social supports the elders provided to their adult children, and the other (26 items) measured the social supports the elders received from their adult children. There were three types of supports in each subscale: financial support, service support and emotional support. The participants responded to each item on a 4-point Likert scale from 1 (never) to 4 (often). A higher score indicates higher level of supports one provided to or received from the adult children. The Cronbach α value of the provided support scale was .91, while it was .94 for the received support scale.

FEELINGS OF SELF-ESTEEM

Rosenberg's 10-item Self-Esteem Scale (SES) was used to measure the participants' self-esteem. Participants responded on a 4-point Likert scale from 1 (completely untrue) to 4 (completely true). The Cronbach α of SES in this study was .76.

SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Age, gender, living area (categorized into city, town, and county), educational length, spouse status (yes/no), perceived health status (5 points ranging from 1 [very good] to 3 [so-so] to 5 [very bad]), annual family income,

and number of children were reported before the participants started to complete the focal questionnaires.

RESULTS

Predicting Filial Piety Expectation by Sociodemographic Variables

Ho's (1996) review suggested that more traditional filial attitudes were held by those who were older, male, and less educated. Cheng and Chan (2006) also found that men could have slightly higher expectations of filial piety from their children than could women. To identify what sociodemographic variables might be important for understanding older people's filial piety expectation, we conducted a regression analysis. The variables of age, gender, living area, number of children, educational level, and health condition were entered as predictors. The results are presented in Table 2.

Results showed that none of the sociodemographic variables predicted filial piety expectation ($F_{(8,250)} = .699, p = .692$). This suggests that participants report similar level of filial piety expectation regardless of their social and demographic background. These findings are apparently inconsistent with those of previous studies (Chang & Chan, 2006).

Psychological Function of Filial Piety Expectation

Pearson correlation analyses (see Table 3) revealed that older participants' filial piety expectation were significantly and positively correlated with self-esteem ($r = .16, p < .01$) and several sources of parent-child supports, including provided emotional supports ($r = .17, p < .01$), received service supports ($r = .29, p < .01$), received emotional supports ($r = .17, p < .01$), and the total received supports ($r = .21, p < .01$).

Given that significant correlations were also found between the two types of total supports ($r = .275, p < .01$) as well as between self-esteem and the total supports ($r_{provided} = .368, p < .01$; $r_{received} = .190, p < .01$), a partial correlation analysis was conducted among the variables. By controlling for

TABLE 2 Regression Analyses of Filial Piety Expectation on Sociodemographic Variables

| Variables | <i>b</i> | β | <i>t</i> | <i>p</i> | <i>R</i> ² | <i>Adj. R</i> ² |
|--------------------|----------|---------|----------|----------|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| Age | .003 | .043 | .623 | .534 | .022 | .009 |
| Sex | -.048 | -.056 | -.788 | .431 | | |
| Marital status | .014 | .013 | .184 | .854 | | |
| Resident area | -.058 | -.118 | -1.289 | .199 | | |
| Educational level | -.007 | -.083 | -.932 | .352 | | |
| Household income | .011 | .046 | .536 | .592 | | |
| Health status | -.015 | -.034 | -.523 | .601 | | |
| Number of children | .004 | .017 | .242 | .809 | | |

TABLE 3 Correlations among Filial Piety Expectation, Parent-Child Support, and Self-Esteem (*r*)

| | Provided supports | | | Received supports | | | Self-esteem |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------|------------|------------|-------------------|------------|------------|-------------|
| | Financial | Service | Emotional | Financial | Service | Emotional | |
| | (3.18±.51) | (3.11±.72) | (2.45±.67) | (2.77±.66) | (3.25±.62) | (2.64±.79) | (3.32±.52) |
| Filial piety expectation (4.63±.42) | .064 | .040 | .172** | .105 | .288** | .174** | .161** |
| Total | | .105 | | | .211** | | |

**p* < .5;

***p* < .01.

self-esteem, the correlation between filial piety expectation and total received support decreased to .17 but was still significant at $p < .01$ level, while the correlation between filial piety expectation and total provided support changed to .08, $p > .05$. By controlling for parent-child supports, the correlation between the filial piety expectation and self-esteem became .09, $p > .05$. These findings suggested that total received support mediated the relationship between filial piety expectation and self-esteem.

SUMMARY

This study did not replicate previous findings reported by Ho (1996) and Cheng & Chan (2006) in terms of demographic variance on expectation of filial piety. Age, gender, living area, educational level, health condition, and number of children were not found to be significant predictors of expectation of filial piety for older Chinese people. Two considerations could serve as the potential explanation for results reported. On one hand, there may be regional differences regarding the concept and practice of filial piety among different Chinese societies and cultures, such as Chinese immigrants, Hong Kong Chinese, Taiwan Chinese, and Mainland Chinese. The present study is one of very few to report data from Mainland China alone. On the other hand, it is quite possible that a unitary belief in filial piety is commonly shared among Mainland Chinese people due to cultural influences. Moreover, the mean expectation of filial piety from the elders was quite high ($4.63 \pm .42$, see table 3) in Study 1, which suggested that older people from Mainland China retain a strong and optimistic belief in this construct.

This study does not support the hypothesis that a higher filial piety expectation is inversely related to psychological well-being. On the contrary, those with a higher expectation of filial piety reported more support from their adult children and in turn felt higher self-esteem. Although the causal links between filial piety expectation and received support and self-esteem, are unclear, the significant correlations among them suggest that higher expectation of filial piety functions well for older people.

STUDY 2

In Study 1, Item 2 was excluded from the original 10-item scale of filial piety expectation because of its low factor loading and low content validity. However it is interesting to examine carefully the syntax meaning of this item. While this item is negatively toned, contrary to the remaining 9 items of the expectation of filial piety scale, nonetheless it is paradoxical that this statement loads positively on the domain of filial piety expectation (see

Figure 1) just as the other 9 items do. Thus although only one item in negatively voiced, the exploratory results presented in Study 1 might suggest an independent dimension. Hence, we hypothesized a dual model of filial piety expectation, namely “expect” (FPE) and “do not expect” (NFPE) that are different rather than contained on the same continuum of filial piety belief. The main goal of Study 2 is to examine the hypothesis that non-expectation of filial piety emerges as a separate, distinct component of the belief of filial piety expectation among older Chinese people living in Mainland China.

METHODS

Participants

Participants were community-dwellers from three cities of Mainland China. In total, 495 older adults, of which 246 were male (49.7%), took part into this study. The age of participants ranged from 53 to 88 years, with a mean age of 68.5 ± 5.88 years. The mean age was 69.9 ± 5.78 years for males and 67.1 ± 5.66 years for females. Among the participants, 6.7% were illiterate, 21.3% finished primary school, 28.4% completed high school, 18.4% had gained a technical certificate, 24.3% had a college or university degree, and 0.8% specified “others” education. Each participants received 30 Yuan RMB for their involvement in this study. About 73% participants reported they were healthy, with only about 27% reporting themselves as unhealthy.

Measurements

FILIAL PIETY EXPECTATION

Based on the 10-item questionnaire of filial piety expectation used in Study 1, three reversed items were added into the scale. (A copy of the final scale may be obtained from the first author upon request.) Participants responded on a 5-point Likert scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). As hypothesized, item 1 and item 3 to 10 consecutively comprised the subscale of expectation of filial piety (FPE), and items 2, 11, 12, and 13 comprised the subscale of non-expectation of filial piety (NFPE).

ATTITUDES TOWARD AGING

The Attitudes towards Aging Questionnaire (AAQ, Laidlaw et al., 2007) was used to measure the older adults' attitudes toward their own aging. This questionnaire had been validated in multiple cultures including Japan as a representative of Asian culture (Laidlaw, et al, 2007). The development of the 24 item self-report AAQ followed a coherent, logical, and empirical

process taking full account of relevant gerontological knowledge and modern and classical psychometric analytical methods. Pilot testing on 1,356 participants from 15 centres worldwide refined the scale and further testing with a field trial of 5,566 participants from 20 centres worldwide contributed to the further development of this new measure. The AAQ's three-factor structure encompasses broad domains including psychological growth, psychosocial loss, and physical change. Profile scores afford a more sophisticated appraisal of an individual's self perception of the experience of aging. The Cronbach's α values for these three subscale were .76, .83, and .74, respectively.

RESULTS

Theoretical Validity and Reliability of the Scale

A confirmatory factor analysis (Amos 4.0) was conducted to examine the theoretical validity of the 13-item scale of filial piety expectation. Two alternative models were developed and compared. Model 1 was a two-factor oblique model with expectation of filial piety and non-expectation of filial piety as the latent factors. In Model 2, a second order factor was added. The results are presented in Table 4 and Figure 2.

As can be seen, Model 1 reports better indices of goodness of model fit, especially on χ^2/df and RMESA. As shown in Figure 2, there are significant positive correlations between the two latent factors, namely the expectation of filial piety and the non-expectation of filial piety. At this point, the theoretical hypothesis that older people's expectation for filial piety comprised both expectation and non-expectation was supported. Meanwhile the reliability of the scales was examined with internal consistency. The Cronbach's α values were .84 for the subscale of expectation of filial piety and .65 for the subscale of non-expectation of filial piety.

Variations of Expectation and Non-expectation of Filial Piety by Sociodemographic Variables

In Study 1, no significant differences were found with filial piety expectation on number of sociodemographic variables. To re-examine this

TABLE 4 Confirmatory Factor Analysis of the 13-item Questionnaire of Filial Piety Expectation

| | χ^2 | df | p | χ^2/df | NFI | RFI | CFI | IFI | TLI | RMESA |
|---------|----------|----|------|-------------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| Model 1 | 267.857 | 64 | .000 | 4.185 | .983 | .976 | .987 | .987 | .982 | .080 |
| Model 2 | 364.353 | 65 | .000 | 5.605 | .977 | .968 | .981 | .981 | .974 | .096 |

NFI = normed fit index; RFI = relative fit index; CFI = comparative fit index; IFI = incremental fit index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis index; RMESA = root mean square of approximation.

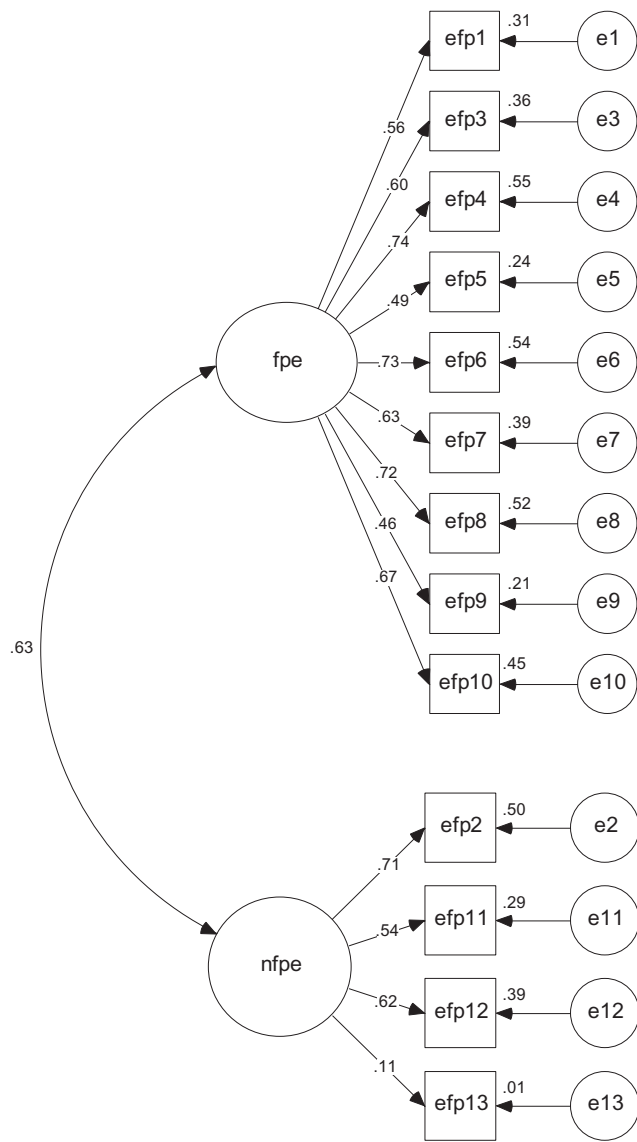


FIGURE 2 Confirmatory factor analysis of filial piety expectation scale (Model 1).

phenomenon, we conducted a regression analysis using the same method as reported in Study 1 again on both expectation and non-expectation of filial piety (Table 5). In this dataset, the variable of age, sex, marital status, subjective health status, and educational level of the participants were entered as predictors. The analysis revealed exactly the same results as in Study 1: none of the sociodemographic variables significantly predicted the filial piety expectation ($F_{(5,447)} = 1.015, p = .408$). When considering non-expectation of filial piety, however, sex was a significant predictor

TABLE 5 Regression Analyses of Sociodemographic Variables on Expectation and Non-expectation of Filial Piety

| Variables | <i>b</i> | β | <i>t</i> | <i>p</i> | <i>R</i> ² | <i>Adj. R</i> ² |
|-------------------|----------|---------|----------|----------|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| Expectation | | | | | .011 | .000 |
| Age | −.006 | −.045 | −.914 | .361 | | |
| Sex | −.050 | −.031 | −.634 | .526 | | |
| Marital status | −.182 | −.048 | −.998 | .319 | | |
| Educational level | −.048 | −.083 | −1.728 | .085 | | |
| Health status | −.087 | −.049 | −1.04 | .299 | | |
| Non-expectation | | | | | .017 | .006 |
| Age | .012 | .083 | 1.708 | .088 | | |
| Sex | .207 | .118 | 2.398 | .017* | | |
| Marital status | .203 | .048 | 1.008 | .314 | | |
| Educational level | .022 | .034 | .717 | .474 | | |
| Health status | −.055 | −.028 | −.597 | .551 | | |

($F_{(5,447)} = 1.548$, $p = .017$,) with women ($3.49 \pm .87$) reporting higher scores of non-expectation of filial piety than men ($3.29 \pm .88$).

Psychological Function of Expectation and Non-expectation of Filial Piety

The three subscales' mean scores of AAQ were used as the indicators of psychological attitudes toward aging in Study 2. Bivariate correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between FPE/NFPE and these attitudes. As shown in Table 6, both FPE and NFPE significantly and positively correlated with all three dimensions of attitudes toward aging.

When controlling for NFPE, the correlations between FPE and the attitudes decreased but were still significant at $p < .001$. When controlling for FPE, the correlations between NFPE and the attitudes also decreased but were still significant at $p < .001$ except for psychological loss. The findings

TABLE 6 Bivariate and Partial Correlations between Filial Piety Expectation and Aging Attitudes (*r*)

| | Psychological loss ($2.02 \pm .73$) ^a | Physical change ($3.21 \pm .91$) ^b | Psychosocial gain ($2.96 \pm .81$) ^b |
|----------------------------|---|--|--|
| FPE ($3.86 \pm .79$) | .203*** (.163***) | .396*** (.368***) | .447*** (.310***) |
| NFPE ($3.39 \pm .88$) | .134*** (.048) | .331*** (.189***) | .345*** (.231***) |

^aHigher score means more negative attitude;
^bhigher score means more positive attitude;
*** $p < .001$; the *r* values in parenthesis mean partial correlations by controlling NFPE when analyzed FPE, and vice versa.

strongly suggested that both FPE and NFPE are strongly, and independently, related to attitudes toward aging.

SUMMARY

As the confirmatory factor analysis revealed, 13 items of the filial piety expectation scale could ideally be reduced into two separate dimensions: expectation and non-expectation for filial piety. Moreover, these two factors positively correlated with each other (see Figure 2). The results clearly supported the hypothesis that non-expectation of filial piety is a component of an older people's beliefs about filial piety expectation. It's very interesting to further consider the relationship between these two factors. Contrary to common thinking, the expectation and the non-expectation of filial piety are not ends of a same continuum, but rather are separate constructs. Thus, a higher expectation of filial piety relates to a higher non-expectation of filial piety instead of a lower non-expectation as one might expect if these were opposite ends of the same pole. The emergence of the concept of filial piety non-expectation is potentially important as it may be regarded as a contemporary re-conceptualization of the traditional value of the filial piety.

The findings that both FPE and NFPE have positive and significant correlations with specific attitudes towards aging indicate that FPE and NFPE both have certain constructive meaningfulness to an elder's well-being. Moreover, it is possible that participants reporting higher levels of NFPE could be better off than participants reporting higher levels of NPE as the NFPE did not correlate with negative aging attitude towards psychological loss. The results may suggest somewhat paradoxically that the emergence of belief of NFPE is a successful adaptation for older people.

DISCUSSION

Consistently the results examining filial piety expectation of older people in this study show two ways to characterize filial piety belief in current Mainland China. We discuss this complex issue in two sections.

The Traditional Value of Filial Piety

In Study 1, the mean score of filial piety expectation (see Table 1) suggested that Chinese elders generally held a very high expectation of filial piety from their adult children. But in Study 2 conducted 5 years after the first study, the mean score for filial piety expectation was reduced significantly (Table 6). Perhaps this reduction is a reflection of the incredible pace of change in Chinese societies over the last 5 years. However, these results

suggest that in current societies in Mainland China, the belief of filial piety is maintained by the elders as an important tradition. As a cornerstone of traditional ethical value in China, filial piety still plays its traditional role in current social life.

Meanwhile, both Study 1 and Study 2 together inform the expectation that filial piety has a close relationship with older people's psychological status. In traditional China, to receive good care from one's adult children is a direct benefit from the children's belief in, and practice of, filial piety. It is evident in Study 1 that older people with higher expectation of filial piety reported receiving more supports from their adult children. Furthermore, the expectation of filial piety appeared to indirectly help these older people to maintain their self-esteem through receiving more supports. In Study 2, positive connections were found between the expectation of filial piety and two aspects of aging attitudes, namely physical change, and psychosocial gain. All of these results suggested that higher expectation of filial piety is beneficial to older people's well-being today, just as it was in the past.

Modifications to the Traditional Value of Filial Piety

There are three dimensions to the discussion reported here. First, the extent to which the belief of filial piety is currently endorsed in Chinese society can never be exactly the same as it was in ancient times. With industrialization and urbanization, the practicality of the traditional Chinese concept of filial piety has, for some time, been thought to become weakened in the face of economic and political transformation (Yu, 1983). Given the huge social, economic, and technical development of globalization in China, traditional values, such as filial piety, are arguable on the decline or under transformation (Yeh, 2003). The findings from Study 2 emphasize this. Over a 5 year interval between the completions of studies one and two, the average score of expectation of filial piety declined significantly. In light of this trend, an even lower expectation of filial piety might be predicable for future generations, which has been demonstrated elsewhere (Hsu et al., 2001; Yue & Ng, 1999; Zhan, 2004; Cheng & Chan, 2006; Pang et al., 2003).

Secondly, respecting the care given by adult children, Study 1 found that not only filial piety expectation, but also the elder's supports provided to the adult children, were significantly correlated with supports received from adult children. This result suggests that, similar to western culture (Lee et al., 1994), the reciprocity of intergenerational social exchange acts as an important source of care to older parents in contemporary Mainland China. While the traditional value of filial piety may not be solid enough to force young generations to take care of their older parents, the closeness of the intergenerational relationship may be more influential on children's care giving behavior (see also Ng et al., 2002).

Finally, a more profound modification regarding the conceptualization of filial piety was revealed by this study. Sung (1995) and Yeh (2003) have suggested important contributions when understanding the belief of filial piety in modern China by considering multiple levels to the concept of filial piety. Consistent with their work, this study found that FPE and NFPE were two relatively independent components of elder people's belief of filial piety expectation.

These findings on modification of the belief in filial piety have some useful implications for policy-makers and researchers. Older people's receiving care from their adult children is an important convention in Confucian cultures. However, modern care systems may need to take account of modifications of this traditional value. Choi (2000) states that the development of public services might be reduced and underdeveloped if an unrealistic and idealized form of filial piety is assumed, where young generations are anticipated as primary providers of caregiving for their old parents. In current and future Chinese society, although children and family are still thought to be the most reliable sources of caregiving for the elderly, more and more public resources will need to be provided as the traditional belief of filial piety is likely to be increasingly eroded.

Clinical Applications

We conclude that Chinese older people maintain the traditional value of filial piety, whilst simultaneously adjusting the conceptualization of filial piety dynamically. Indeed one could conclude that the concept of filial piety survives in contemporary Chinese society because it has evolved across generations, and the data presented here support this. While the findings of this study are most applicable to Mainland Chinese people, nonetheless, the data may speak to the experiences of Chinese immigrants, such as Chinese people living in the United States, and in Europe. In a study of Chinese immigrants to the United States, Liber, Nihira, and Mink (2004) have found that Chinese participants tried to maintain the value of filial piety while modifying their conceptualization of it. A recent cross-culture study of filial piety by Laidlaw and colleagues (in press) indicated that older adult Chinese immigrants to the U.K. and older adult Mainland Chinese people reported similar levels of expectation of filial piety as well as non-expectation of filial piety compared with U.K.-born older adults whose levels of filial piety expectation differed significantly from either cultural group.

The data presented here may be of use to clinicians as it suggests that the concept of filial piety retains a strong 'currency' among Asian minorities (Park & Chesla, 2007). Thus therapists working with older people from different cultural groups need to educate themselves about this concept, and then enquire about how filial piety may be a factor in the relationships within generations in the household (Chen & Davenport, 2005). A simple

clinical example of filial piety in action may be seen in dementia caregiving. Traditionally in Chinese society, filial care is provided by the daughter-in-law; thus, one may wish to enquire about the reasons and motivations for providing care just as one would with any other caregiver. Problems may emerge if both members of the caregiving dyad hold differing levels of belief and/or investment in the concept of filial piety. Thus one might suppose that if a caregiver has become more acculturated within society then there may be a lessened sense of obligation (Ng et al, 2002) that may be at odds with an elder's expectation for filial piety.

Thus it is recommended that clinicians working with older people and their caregivers from Asian communities enquire about their expectations for filial piety. One might administer the subscale of expectation for filial piety (9 items) to the client and evaluate their expectation level. It is suggested here that a client could be regarded as holding a high expectation of filial piety if the average score is above 3.5. In this case, the clinicians could treat filial piety as a specific theme for individual psychotherapeutic intervention. This may yield interesting discussions and a problem-solving orientation could be adopted to help an individual examine appropriate roles and goals that may be consistent with cultural beliefs. Cognitive behavioral therapy with its emphasis upon problem-solving, its logical, here and now orientation, and the respectful collaboration that occurs between client and therapist may be culturally appropriate as a psychological treatment orientation with Chinese-Americans (Chen & Davenport, 2005; Hwang, Wood, Lin & Cheung, 2006).

Limitations

One should be very cautious when generalizing the findings from this study. There are some evident limitations in this study. First, convenience sampling could bias the results. The participants, especially the participants from more rural areas, may not be very representative. In addition, the older people involved in the study seem to have better health and social status than do many of their peers, and this again may limit their representativeness of the population as a whole. Lastly and the most importantly, the concept of filial piety here mainly focuses on taking care of one's older parents. It remains to be seen what data will emerge when wider examples of filial piety are explored.

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