

DIFFERENTIATION BETWEEN THE ATTEMPTS AND THE CONSEQUENCES OF CONFLICT RESOLUTIONS FOR FILIAL DILEMMAS: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF TELEVISION PRIME-TIME DRAMAS

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Yeh (1995) was the first to propose the concept of "filial dilemma" to categorize parent-child conflicts in Chinese families. Six distinct types of filial dilemmas and five types of offspring dilemma-resolving strategies have since been identified. The six filial dilemmas are as follows: (1) unethical or immoral demands by the parent (s), (2) conflicts between parental demands and the child's expectations, (3) parental demands exceeding the child's abilities, (4) the inability to meet filial responsibilities because s/he is overloaded with other obligations, (5) the child caught in the middle of a spousal disagreement, and (6) the parent(s) behaving in an unreasonable manner. The five dilemma-resolving strategies are conceptualized in a two-dimensional model: "the emphasis on parental wishes and welfare" and "the emphasis on the offspring's own wishes and welfare". The 5 dilemma-resolving strategies are (1) the self-sacrifice type, (2) the utilitarian type, (3) the compatibility type, (4) the escape type, and (5) the compromising type. This paper maintains that Yeh's model is unclear on whether each dilemma-resolving strategy is defined by the "attempts" or the "consequences" of the strategy. For example, although the self-sacrifice strategy implies that the offspring intends to devalue his/her own welfare to promote parental satisfaction, the child's good intentions may not necessarily produce the intended results. Self-sacrifice may lead to parental concern and regret that was not anticipated before or during the implementation of the strategy.

This paper examines the feasibility of

utilizing both the "resolving attempts" and "resolving consequences" concepts to analyze parent-child filial conflicts and patterns of conflict resolution. It also endeavors to realize how parent-child relationships are constructed and revealed in Taiwanese prime-time dramas. The data drawn from Lay (1996) included six dramas that debuted on the three major TV networks in Taiwan during 1995. Two thousand four hundred and thirty-one parent-child interactions from fifty-nine parent-child dyads (including in-laws and grandparent-grandchild dyads) in 267 one-hour episodes were coded. The data analyses examined (1) the association between the types of filial dilemmas and the patterns of dilemma-resolving strategies, (2) the compatibility between attempts and consequences of each resolving strategy, (3) the extent of each type of filial dilemmas as a function of the compatibility between the attempts and the consequences of the applied dilemma-resolving strategy, (4) gender differences in the filial dilemmas faced, the resolving strategies applied, and the consequences received by the offspring and the parent after implementing various dilemma-resolving strategies, and (5) the consequences of applying "deceiving actions" to resolve filial conflicts. Six types of filial dilemmas were collapsed into two categories to reduce the number of variables and simplify the data analysis. The "bi-directional dilemmas" category consisted of dilemmas that originated from conflicts between parental demands and the child's expectations and from the child's inability to meet the filial responsibilities because of other

obligations. The “authoritarian dilemmas” category consisted of dilemmas that originated from unethical or immoral demands by the parent (s), from parental demands exceeding the child’s abilities, and from unreasonable behaviors exercised by the parent(s).

Results revealed that the “utilitarian strategy” was most frequently utilized to resolve “bi-directional dilemmas” while the “self-sacrifice strategy” was most frequently employed to resolve “authoritarian dilemmas”. The “compatibility strategy”, the most adaptable of Yeh’s (1995) strategies, only appeared eleven times in the 209 dilemma-resolving strategies recognized in the sample. Moreover, the attempts and the consequences of three of the five dilemma-resolving strategies were incompatible. Anticipated consequences emerged only when the protagonists applied “self-sacrifice” or “escape” conflict resolutions that were considered the least adaptable of the five resolving strategies. The incompatibility between dilemma-resolving attempts and consequences was especially profound in strategies that were preceded by “authoritarian dilemmas”.

In conclusion, the dramas sampled herein

described the resolution patterns of parent-child conflicts in a very traditional manner. Children were likely to sacrifice their own welfare even if their parents’ requirements were immoral, unreasonable, or transcended their children’s abilities. In terms of gender differences, the dramas depicted conflicts between mother and son more often than other parent-child dyads. Sons were more likely to face “bi-directional conflict” than “authoritarian conflict” especially with their mothers. Sons were also more likely to adopt “utilitarian” or “compromising” dilemma-resolving strategies while daughters were prone to use “self-sacrifice” strategies. This finding suggests that TV dramas still impose female stereotypes on their audience. Future research endeavors should investigate whether and how audiences utilize the messages implied in dramas and integrate the parent-child interaction scripts into their knowledge or schema of parent-child relationships.

Keywords: Parent-child interaction, Conflict resolution, Filial dilemma, Gender differences, Television, Prime-time drama