

Are Parents Never Wrong ? The Influence of Chinese Parents Role Obligation on Parent-Child Conflict and Relationship

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Previous studies in cultural Chinese context on the conflict between children and their parents mostly adopted a western “right-based” perspective to identify conflict without considering whether the perspective is fitted to view cultural Chinese parent-child conflict. This study used an “obligation-based” perspective taken by children to explore parent-child conflict events and their relation. Three empirical studies were employed.

In study 1, a questionnaire was used to survey 236 university students. The results showed that university students could classify their parents’ behaviors into different kinds of obligations. While obligations could be fulfilled or violated, these conditions were then added into the classifications and used for study 2. In study 2, open-ended questions were given to 65 university students, and written description of 308 parent-child conflict experiences, including conflict events and the relation after the conflict, were collected. The results of content analysis showed clear indication of an obligation-based conflict event framework, as our research constructed. Furthermore, three kinds of conflict events, “fulfill positive obligation”, “violate uncompulsory obligation” and “violate compulsory obligation” were best predictors of parent-child relation after conflict. In study 3, scenario questions were given to university students to examine the effects of parent-child conflict in genuine or superficial relationships. 295 valid questionnaires were collected. Parent-child relationship prior to the conflict, described as a genuine harmony or a superficial harmony, was found to moderate the relationship after conflict. When parents fulfilled positive obligation, the parent-child relation after conflict was better for those in a genuine harmony than the ones in a superficial harmony. Those in a genuine harmony would even remain a positive parent-child relation after conflict. When parents violated compulsory obligation, the parent-child relation after conflict became negative regardless of whether the prior relationship was genuine or superficial, and the two showed no significant difference. Finally, the implications and future research directions were discussed.

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