

The Relationship between Views on the Chinese Parent-Child Relation and Modern Filial Behavior: The Mediating Effect of Dual Filial Piety Belief

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The parent-child relationship is the first and most important interpersonal relationship that one develops, and filial piety is an important cultural value in Chinese society. The Dual Filial Piety Model (DFPM) is a proposed indigenous psychological model of Chinese filial piety, wherein the characteristics of Chinese filial piety consist of two aspects, reciprocity and authoritarianism. The DFPM has been examined in a series of empirical studies to test its arguments. However, related research on beliefs about the Chinese parent-child relation and their connection to filial piety beliefs and behaviors is still in its early stages. Chinese society is deeply influenced by Confucianism, and this has shaped beliefs about the parent-child relation. There are two types of Confucian beliefs regarding the parent-child relation, the life origin belief (LOB) and the parent-child as a united entity belief (PUB). The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between Confucian beliefs regarding the parent-child relation and filial behaviors, and the potential mediating role of dual filial piety beliefs among them. A questionnaire survey was conducted with 220 participants, 94 male and 126 female college students. The mean age of the participants was 21.01 ($SD = 1.09$). Confirmatory factor analysis was used to validate the measures, and hypotheses were tested with structural equation modeling analyses. The mediating effect of dual filial piety beliefs was also tested with the bootstrap method. The results showed that: 1. LOB is positively related to caring filial behaviors, while PUB is positively related to caring filial behaviors and compliance filial behaviors simultaneously. 2. Reciprocal filial piety belief could be a mediator of the relationships between LOB and caring filial behaviors, and between PUB and caring filial behaviors. 3. Authoritarian filial piety belief could be a mediator of the relationship between BPU and compliance filial behaviors. In accordance with the results of the research, the discussion makes some suggestions for the future for constructing a parent-child theory with Chinese cultural characteristics.

Keywords: *life origin belief, parent-child as a united entity belief, dual filial belief, modern filial behaviors*

Extended Abstract

The parent-child relationship is the first and most important interpersonal relationship that one develops, and filial piety is an important cultural value in Chinese society. The dual filial piety model (DFPM) is a psychological model that characterizes Chinese filial piety in terms of reciprocity and authoritarianism. The DFPM has been tested in a series of empirical studies.

However, research on beliefs about Chinese parent-child relationships and their connection to filial piety beliefs is still in its early stages. Chinese society is deeply influenced by Confucianism, and this has shaped beliefs about the parent-child relationship. There are two Confucian beliefs regarding parent-child relationships: the life origin belief (LOB) and the parent-child as a

united entity belief (PUB). The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between Confucian beliefs regarding the parent-child relationship and filial behaviors, and the potential mediating role of dual filial piety beliefs. A questionnaire survey was conducted with 220 participants in Taiwan (94 male and 126 female college students). The mean age of the participants was 21.01 ($SD = 1.09$). Confirmatory factor analysis was used to validate the measures, and hypotheses were tested using structural equation modeling. The mediating effect of dual filial piety beliefs was tested using the bootstrap method. The results showed that 1) LOB was positively related to caring-type filial behaviors, while PUB was positively related to both caring-type and compliant-type filial behaviors; 2) reciprocal filial piety belief mediated the relationships between LOB and caring-type filial behaviors, and between PUB and caring-type filial behaviors; and 3) authoritarian filial piety belief mediated the relationship between PUB and compliant-type filial behaviors. Based on these results, suggestions are made for the construction of a theory of parent-child relationships with Chinese cultural characteristics.

Introduction

Under the trend of global population aging, filial piety is not only an important research topic in Chinese societies but also an important cross-cultural and interdisciplinary research issue globally (see de Vries, 2020; Dykstra & Fokkema, 2012; Harkness, 2013; Jones et al., 2011; Li et al., 2021; Lowenstein & Daatland, 2006; Macon, 2016; O'Mahonys, 2015; Pearson, 2013; Scott & Sharp, 2014; Sin, 2016; Tsao & Yeh, 2019).

The dual filial piety model (DFPM) is an established psychological model that has accumulated abundant empirical support (Bedford & Yeh, 2021; Chen et al., 2018; Jin et al., 2011; Leung et al., 2010; Sun et al., 2019; Yeh, 2003; Yeh, 2009a; Yeh & Bedford, 2003). The DFPM suggests that the concept of Chinese filial piety contains two important aspects: reciprocity and authoritarianism. Reciprocal filial piety (RFP) corresponds to the Confucian ethical principle of "favoring the intimate," emphasizing the close bond and spontaneous emotional expression

between parents and children. Authoritarian filial piety (AFP) echoes the principle of "respecting the superior" in Confucian ethics, emphasizing that given the unequal status of parents and children, children should obey parents' demands and fulfill their filial duties (Yeh, 2017).

Studies on Chinese parent-child relationships have mostly explored the connotations and the influence of filial piety. Few empirical studies have deeply explored why Chinese people value filial piety. There are two Confucian beliefs on parent-child relationships: the life origin belief (LOB) and the parent-child as a united entity belief (PUB) (Chen, 2018). According to the LOB, children's lives originate from their parents, which cannot be repaid fully and is an important reason why children should respect their parents and care for them when they are old (Hwang, 2009; Yeh, 2003). The PUB is related to the Chinese people's self-concept, which often includes important others such as families (Hsu & Yeh, 2019; Hwang, 2005; Markus & Kitayama, 1991, 2010), and emphasizes the mutual responsibilities and obligations of the self and important others, such as parents.

Most studies have focused on the effect of filial piety beliefs on the formation of individual personality and behaviors, but lacked discussion about the relationships among beliefs about parent-child relationships, filial piety beliefs, and filial deeds (especially caring-type filial behavior, abbreviated here as CRFB, and compliant-type filial behavior, abbreviated as CPFEB). The purpose of this study was to examine the mediating effect of dual filial piety beliefs in the relationship between the beliefs about parent-child relationships and modern filial behaviors of Taiwanese college students. Treating modern filial behavior as the dependent variable, the study was designed to explore whether individuals' dual filial piety beliefs (RFP and AFP) mediate the effects of their beliefs about parent-child relationships (LOB and PUB) on their filial behaviors (CRFB and CPFEB).

Hypotheses

This study tested the following five hypotheses.

H1: A belief in parent-child objective blood relations (LOB) is positively associated with CRFB.

- H2: PUB is positively associated with CRFB and CPFBS.
- H3: Individuals with a strong LOB are more likely to hold a higher RFP and to demonstrate a higher level of CRFB toward their parents. That is, RFP plays a mediating role in the relationship between LOB and CRFB.
- H4: Individuals with a strong PUB are more likely to hold a higher RFP and demonstrate a higher level of CRFB toward their parents. That is, RFP plays a mediating role in the relationship between PUB and CRFB.
- H5: Individuals with a strong PUB are more likely to hold a higher AFP and demonstrate a higher level of CPFBS toward their parents. That is, AFP plays a mediating role in the relationship between PUB and CPFBS.

Methods

A questionnaire survey was conducted to collect data from college students in Taiwan. Valid responses were provided by 220 participants (94 men and 126 women) with an average age of 21.01 years ($SD = 1.09$). Three scales were used to measure beliefs about parent-child relationships, dual filial piety, and modern filial behavior. Responses were all based on a 6-point Likert type scale. On the beliefs about parent-child relationships scale (BPCR), 1 represented “strongly disagree” and 6 represented “strongly agree”; on the dual filial piety beliefs scale (DFPS), 1 represented “very unimportant” and 6 represented “very important”; on the modern filial behavior scale (MFBS), “1” represented “never done” and “6” represented “completely done.”

The BPCR (Chen, 2018) is an 11-item self-report measure of LOB (five items; e.g., “children are born in this world because of their parents”) and PUB (six items; e.g., “weal and woe are shared between children and parents”). This scale had good internal consistency in the present study (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .92$ for both the LOB and PUB subscales).

The DFPS (Yeh & Bedford, 2003) is a 16-item self-report measure of RFP (eight items; e.g., “be grateful to

parents for raising you”) and AFP (eight items; e.g., “live with parents even after marriage”). The DFPS had good internal consistency in the present study (Cronbach’s α values of .91 and .87 for the RFP and AFP subscales, respectively).

The MFBS is a self-compiling scale with seven items to measure CRFB (three items; e.g., “calling frequently to care for parents,” “celebrating important holidays with parents”) and CPFBS (four items; e.g., “meet parents’ expectations,” “don’t talk back to parents”). This scale had good internal consistency in the present study (Cronbach’s α values of .83 and .81 for the CRFB and CPFBS subscales, respectively).

Results

Confirmatory factor analysis

The skewness coefficients of all variables were between -1.47 and .13, and the absolute values of the kurtosis coefficient were between -.72 and 3.38, all within the normal range suggested by Kline (1998), so confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to test the fit of the model for the three scales.

The goodness of fit indexes of the models of the three scales used in the study were all within the acceptable range (Hair et al., 1998). The results for the two-factor models were as follows. BPCR: $\chi^2(43, N = 220) = 95.65$, $p = .00$, $\chi^2/df = 2.22$, standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = .04, Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) = .95, incremental fit index (IFI) = .96, comparative fit index (CFI) = .96, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .08; DFPS: $\chi^2(103, N = 220) = 189.68$, $p = .00$, $\chi^2/df = 1.84$, SRMR = .07, TLI = .94, IFI = .95, CFI = .95, RMSEA = .06; and MFBS: $\chi^2(13, N = 220) = 34.76$, $p = .001$, $\chi^2/df = 2.67$, SRMR = .05, (TLI) = .94, IFI = .97, CFI = .97, RMSEA = .087.

Structural equation modeling

Overall correlation model

To understand the relationships among the latent variables and all variables in this study, an overall correlation model was constructed and tested. The results

for all relevant model indicators were as follows: $\chi^2(512, N = 220) = 867.65, p = .00, \chi^2/df = 1.70, SRMR = .06, TLI = .91, IFI = .92, CFI = .92, RMSEA = .06$, indicating that the model fit the data well. The results for the latent variables are shown in Table 1.

Bootstrap test of the mediating effect

To test the direct effect of belief about parent-child relationships on modern filial behavior (Hypotheses 1 and 2), the paths from LOB and PUB to CRFB were added

to the model. Without considering the mediating effect (see the standard regression coefficients in parentheses in Figure 1), the results showed that LOB had a positive and significant influence on CRFB ($\beta = 0.24, p < .01$). Hypothesis 1 was thus supported. PUB also had a positive and significant effect on CRFB and CPFB ($\beta = 0.30, 0.63, ps < .01$). Thus, Hypothesis 2 was also supported.

Next, using gender as a control variable (male =

Table 1

Mean, Standard Deviation of Main Variables and Correlation Matrix of Their Latent Variables for the Overall Study

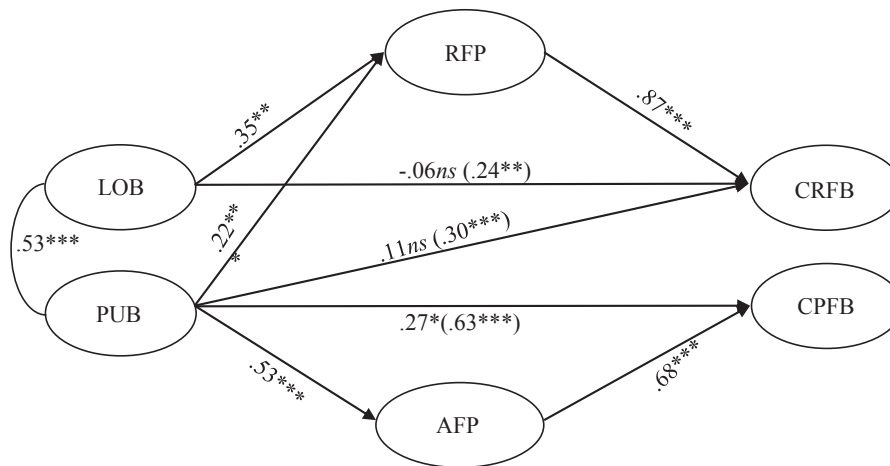
	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. LOB	5.27	0.90	-				
2. PUB	3.73	0.93	.53**	-			
3. CRFB	5.04	0.69	.42**	.40**	-		
4. CPFB	4.37	0.95	.36**	.61**	.56**	-	
5. RFP	5.22	0.54	.49**	.37**	.88**	.53**	-
6. AFP	3.63	1.03	.24**	.53**	.40**	.83**	.34**

Note 1: LOB: the belief on life origin; PUB: belief on parent-child as a united entity; CRFB: caring type of filial behaviors; CPFB: compliant type of filial behaviors; RFP: reciprocal filial piety; AFP: authoritarian filial piety.

** $p < .01$.

Figure 1

The mediating path of the dual filial piety beliefs on the relationship between beliefs of parent-child relation and modern filial behaviors



Note 1: This model uses gender as a control variable; the coefficients in parentheses are the direct effects of the independent variable on the dependent variable without considering the effect of mediator variable; all regression coefficients in the figure (including those in parentheses) are standardized coefficients.

Note 2: LOB: belief on life origin; PUB: belief on parent-child as a united entity; CRFB: caring type of filial behaviors; CPFB: compliant type of filial behaviors; RFP: reciprocal filial piety; AFP: authoritarian filial piety.

ns: $p > .05$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

1, female = 0) to test the mediating effect of RFP, the mediating path of LOB on CRFB through RFP and the mediating path of PUB on CRFB through RFP were added to the model. To test the mediating effect of AFP on the relationship between PUB on CPF, a mediating path between PUB and CPF through AFP was added to the model. Figure 1 shows the complete model. The structural equation model fit indexes of the overall mediation model were good: $\chi^2(546, N = 220) = 935.92, p = .00, \chi^2/df = 1.71, SRMR = .08, (TLI) = .90, IFI = .91, CFI = .91, RMSEA = .06$.

The results indicated that LOB increased CRFB through RFP, supporting Hypothesis 3, and that RFP was an intermediary factor between PUB and CRFB, supporting Hypothesis 4. As shown in Figure 1, the direct effects of both LOB and PUB on CRFB changed from very significant to completely nonsignificant, indicating a full mediating effect of RFP. In addition, AFP played a mediating role between PUB and CPF, supporting Hypothesis 5, but the mediating effect was only partial.

Discussion

The results of this study suggest that the more strongly Taiwanese college students held an LOB, the more willingly they practiced CRFB such as caring for and spending time with their parents. This result echoes the findings of Yeh (2009b) and Chen (2018), showing that blood closeness is positively correlated with emotional support for parents, and revealing that an objective blood relationship is still an important criterion for college students to differentiate closeness with others (Zhuang & Yang, 1997). In addition, the results of the mediation model showed that PUB enhanced the level of CRFB through RFP and the level of CPF through AFP. These results echo Yu's (1991) view of Chinese parent-child relationships: in Chinese families, it is easy for parents and children to form interdependent relationships because children regard their parents as part of themselves, so they usually internalize the values of their parents, which makes them willing to listen to parental demands and fulfill their filial duties.

From the perspective of Bowen's self-differentiation

theory, the concept of PUB in Chinese culture may be regarded as a negative function because PUB is closely related to being undifferentiated from others. However, the results of this study show that PUB can have a positive impact on RFP and CRFB, which emphasize emotional support and caring for parents. If cultural differences between East and West are not carefully considered and Western parent-child relationship theory is directly applied to the results, it is easy to ignore the positive effect of PUB on RFP and CRFB. Therefore, this research constructs an indigenous concept of parent-child relationships from the perspective of Chinese culture, and establishes the relationships between and among beliefs about parent-child relationships, filial piety beliefs, and modern filial behaviors, expanding theories of filial piety and echoing previous researchers' assertions that it is necessary to actively construct an indigenous theory of parent-child relationships, rather than directly adopting Western theory (Lee, 2018; Wang & Jia, 2013).

The results of this study suggest that beliefs about parent-child relationships influence beliefs about filial piety and modern filial behaviors. Moreover, most people in Chinese society are interdependent with their parents throughout their lives, and children in a Chinese family are expected to support their aging parents. According to a survey on the status of the elderly by the Taiwan Ministry of Health and Welfare (2013), 70% of the respondents reported that the ideal way of living for the elderly (over 65 years old) was to live with their children, suggesting that mutual support between parents and children is a deep-rooted ideology in Chinese society. This study focuses on the construction of an indigenous Chinese conceptualization of parent-child relationships. Future research could shift the focus to its practical application, such as by exploring the relationship between beliefs about parent-child relationships and parent-child residence preferences, or the influence on individual physical and mental health, thereby strengthening the ecological validity of its application (Hsu & Yeh, 2019).

However, this study still has some limitations. First, the study was based on a correlational research design, and it was therefore not possible to determine specific causal relationships between the variables. In the future,

an experimental method or a longitudinal study design could be used to confirm causal relationships. Second, the MFBS used in the study was compiled with college students as its target, and the participants were all college students, so the results may not be applicable to groups other than college students. However, even with the above shortcomings, the results expand theoretical perspectives

on Chinese parent-child relationships and filial piety, and provide a reference for subsequent related research.

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