CONFUCIAN VALUE OF FILIAL PIETY – THE PERCEPTIONS AND RECEPTION OF FILIAL PIETY DUTIES OF URBAN ELDERLY AND PERCEPTION AND PERFORMATIVITY OF DUTIES OF URBAN ADULT CHILDREN

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HS4008 LITERATURE REVIEW

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Introduction

Filial piety is a central philosophical understanding of Chinese culture. The role it plays as homogenizing agent is paramount in the maintenance of family patterns in China. However, the consequence of one-child policy implemented in 1980 to control population for the main aim of economic progress resulted in a demographics change, i.e. aging population for which its consequences has been experienced in China. Moreover, various social changes have been made to meet the changing society’s demands in aiding China’s national development aim towards Harmonious Society, which was first proposed by the Chinese government in 2005, to promote overall societal balance and harmony by narrowing inequality among urban and rural areas (Du, 2013). Changes in market in recent decades have transformed the family structures in China as well, both in urban and rural areas, even though research have shown greater impact on the lives of people being left behind in rural areas. In lieu of these changes, many studies have been done, focusing on the impact of these changes on the family, in particular, the act of filial piety preformed by children to their parents and is usually looked from the aspect of familial support for the elderly parents in areas of financial, social and emotional spheres, forming the informal sphere of filial piety which is practiced by the adult children. In addition, the problem of aging population has also resulted in research on the relationship between state’s role and the children’s role in taking care of their elderly parents in a society where filial piety is still widely practiced and believed in. This form focus around formal support systems - welfare provisions by state, which contributed to the rethinking of performativity of filial acts to parents, is the sole responsibility of children. Expectations of filial piety duties by elderly parents is also studied to understand if understanding of filial piety from parents’ point of view has deviate from the traditional understanding of filial piety (Fan, 2007; Mao & Chi, 2011; Du, 2013; Liu, Guo & Klug, 2013).
Demographics Changes in China

Aging population is one problem of many nations worldwide today. However, for China, the proportion of elderly, which is defined as persons who are aged 65 years and above, in the country is a cause of concern due to significant complications. In 2012, there were 185 million people in China elderly people, comprising 13% of the total population. In 2015, the figure is expected to increase to 221 million, which will include 51 million elderly people whose children no longer live with them. By 2053, the proportion of elderly will double, exceeding 487 million and constituting 35% of the population (Xinhua, 2012).

Furthermore, aging population increases as life expectancy among people in China increase, pushing China into age of longevity. As studied, in 2010, the overall life expectancy is estimated at 74 years, and 80 years for some cities at higher developmental level. The national survey in 2006 also indicated the overall good health of elderly people in China (Guo & Chen, 2009).

Social Changes and its Relationship with Aging Population

Bedsides changing demographics of population, various social changes have taken place in China for the past three decades but not limited to – economic reform from planned economy to market economy and restructuring of social security system, medical insurance system, the employment system, housing system and the education system. Firstly, the change of market in China from planned to market economy has intensified competition among businesses and thus competition among the young people in country for jobs as well as financial security. This leads to large-scale migration, where many young people are migrating from the rural to urban cities in search for job opportunities.
State welfare provision implementation and regulations, also resulted unequal access to these provisions by elderly from rural areas. Combined with large-scale migration of young from rural to urban areas, the ability of children to perform traditional notion of filial piety duties in providing informal support to parents reduced (Du, 2013).

Confucian Virtue of Filial Piety
In Confucian Cardinal, the children have fundamental responsibility for taking care for their aged and the failure to do so meant hat the child could not cultivate virtue for human lives and express virtue in their lives as it is part of the process to become fully human (Fan, 2007). To achieve filial piety, five acts have to be performed – one, the support of parents; two, the honor, revere and obedience to one’s parents; three, produce heirs; four; bring honor and glory to one’s ancestors and five, mourn and offer memorial service and sacrifice to parents after their deaths (Li, 1997). Being able to achieve three-generation family is the key to ensure those acts can be fulfilled. Within these stipulated behaviors under the traditional understanding of filial piety, there is inherent emphasis on children responsibilities with regards to their parents and parents are naturally entitled to enjoy these from their children because of inherent moral sentiment of gratitude that children have to repay the self-sacrifice and contribution given to the children while parents were raising them up (Wan, Laidlaw, Power, & Shen, 2009, Fan, 2007). Moving beyond the acts stipulated in the cardinal, they can also be defined empirically as behavioral oriented, emotional oriented which is based on reciprocity and authoritarianism (Sung, 1995).

Main Arguments in Previous Research
As stipulated above, China has undergone demographic, social and economic changes within 3 decades. The change in family structure brought about by large-scale migration has resulted
in ways children’s perform their filial piety to their parents. As observed in many research, geographical distance, living arrangements as well as economic status of adult children are determinants of informal support towards parents (Wan, Laidlaw, Power, & Shen, 2009; Mao & Chi, 2011; Du, 2013; Liu, Guo & Klug, 2013). If traditional pattern of care is not feasible to show filial piety to their parents, i.e. married children staying with their parents or living nearby parents’ home to continue taking care of their parents everyday, other arrangements are made, which includes the use of institutionalized care arrangements (Fan, 2007). This showed that children are willing to conform to the Confucian cardinal to fulfill the moral sentiment even if social arrangements have made it difficult for them to perform filial piety acts in the traditional ways. Despite availability of alternative care arrangements, it is noted that familial care is still preferred. While Fan (2007) found out that even with alternative arrangements available for children to fulfill their filial piety duties, Wang, Laidlaw, Power & Shen (2009), found out that the conformation to filial piety value may also be due to societal or state pressure to ensure filial piety is practiced, which might be suggested from the introduction of laws and regulations such as Law of Protection of Rights and Interests of the Ages (Meng & Hunt, 2013), as well as introduction of care institutions to cater to changing needs, children do not have a choice but to comply with the value.

From the perspective of elderly parents, on the other hand, recognized the issue of filial piety differently. With generations of elderly people getting old, the elderly population itself is not homogenous. Social background such as martial status, education level, economic independence and health differs among the elderly population; pose distinctive ideas about traditional norms of family and filial piety within the elderly population (Du, 2013). In Mao & Chi (2011) research, three major factors identified above with respect to filial piety – financial, social and emotional have positive relationship in relation to elderly parents.
perception of their children’s performance of filial piety. Family harmony is another expectation of filial piety perceived by elderly parents in addition to the various determinants stated above. Parents perceived the fulfillment of filial piety when the children put in high level of effort to maintain family harmony. Furthermore, in 2006 National Sampling Survey on Older Persons, there is an increasing proportion of elderly people who do not wish to conform to traditional family structure – three generation family, with only 36.2 percent of elderly in urban areas and 53.0 percent of elderly in rural areas prefer to stay with their children (Guo & Chen, 2009).

Institutional changes affects parents’ expectations of filial piety towards their parents as well. With increase accessibility to state welfare provisions such as pensions and insurance programs, the extent of financial support that parents expected to get from children is not higher than those without such insurance, although this does not mean the total elimination of financial support from children (Liu, Guo, & King, 2013). Therefore, behaviors stated in Confucian Cardinal on filial piety might not be entirely applicable to parents’ expectations from their children in the current time period. Hence, the issue of reciprocity and authoritarianism, which is inherent in the traditional filial piety virtue, be consistent with the changing social environment currently.

**Methods Employed for Current Research**

Based on past research, the methods employed, in particular by Wang, Laidlaw, Power, & Shen (2009), Mao and Chi (2011) and Liu, Guo and Klug (2013) are based upon quantitative methods. The sample used in these research were based on previous surveys such as Chinese Longitudinal Healthy Longevity Survey (CLHLS), the Family Dynamic Survey (FDS) and nationally representative study Sample Survey on Aged Population in Urban/Rural China and
includes large sample size. Therefore, due to the nature of research sample origin, data collected can be generalized for the country; however, it cannot be used to represent data for a specific sample group.

For Fan’s (2007) research on the other hand, method employed is qualitative method, which includes interviewing of sample group. The sample group however, focuses on elderly care administrators, elderly caregivers, family and physicians rather than the elderly persons themselves. Therefore, acts that are deemed to be filial, in particular the use of familial care for elderly care are based on opinions of other actors involved in the process besides the recipient themselves.

**Conclusion**

Aging population is an ongoing problem faced by China and social and institutional changes have changed the traditional family structure, which is essential for children to fulfill their filial piety. Despite extensive research on the issue of aging population and support, both informal and formal systems as forms of acts of filial piety, area focusing on expectations of parents towards their children filial piety acts as well as the type of actual acts performed to their parents for the fulfillment of filial piety is not as extensively studied. Furthermore, there is also lack of research on changing perception of traditional Confucian cardinal of filial piety with respect to the changing family and social structures in place. In particular, the change in perception of filial piety of urban elderly persons and urban elderly adult children is not extensively research as most studies done are based on representation of the Chinese society as a whole rather than a specific target group. Target samples of the elderly should also be segregated into a range of age groups in addition to urban/rural divide to reflect the contrast
of perceptions towards filial piety based not only by urban or rural area but also
differentiation according different age groups of the elderly population. Perceptions then can
be compared with actual acts performed to them by their children based on age group and
area segregation to get in depth idea to allow insight on whether it has deviate from
traditional acts of filial piety. Following that, the relationship between the acts and inherent
reciprocity and authoritarianism in traditional Confucian virtue of filial piety can also be
understood.

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