A test of the Dual Filial Piety model

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Filial piety is a central concept in Confucianism, containing important ideas about how children should treat their parents. Research over the past two decades has resulted in conflicting findings over whether filial piety is beneficial or harmful to individual development. The Dual Filial Piety model integrates these conflicting findings and suggests neither assessment of filial piety is appropriate. The present study offers empirical evidence in support of the dual model and offers commentary on the role of filial piety in modern Chinese society and directions for future research.

Key words: culture, Dual Filial Piety model, filial piety, individual development, parent–child relations.

Introduction

Filial piety (xiao) is a central concept in Confucianism containing important ideas about how children should treat their parents. Its demands range from material to emotional requirements, such as support, memorializing, attendance, deference, compliance, respect and love, and its structures are often generalized to apply to authority relationships beyond the family. Teaching young people about filial concepts in daily life has traditionally been seen as a basic duty of teachers and parents.

Research on the role of filial piety in the context of modern Confucian societies has led to conflicting findings and generated debate as to whether filial piety has an overall helpful or harmful impact on individual psychological development. For example, filial piety has been correlated with better intergenerational relationships (Lawrence et al., 1992), lower levels of parent–child conflict (Yeh & Bedford, in press) and greater financial, physical and emotional support for parents (Ishii-Kuntz, 1997), especially during illness (Lee, 1998). In contrast, filial attitudes have also been found to positively correlate with parental emphasis on obedience, indebtedness to parents, impulse control, proper conduct, overprotection, harshness and inhibition of children’s self-expression, self-mastery and all-round personal development (Ho, 1994), as well as children’s cognitive conservatism and rigidity (Boey KW, unpubl. data, 1976).

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Yeh (1997, 2003) addressed the debate by developing a model to integrate the conflicting findings based on historical analysis of the filial concept and factor analysis of the study by Yang et al. (1989) identifying four distinct filial piety factors. Yeh (1997) used confirmatory factor analysis to identify two higher order factors, which correspond to the two focal filial piety attributes in the two stages of historical development of the concept: reciprocity and authoritarianism. Reciprocal filial piety encompasses emotionally and spiritually attending to one’s parents out of gratitude for their efforts in having raising one, and physical and financial care for one’s parents as they age and when they die for the same reason. The beneficial aspects of filial piety identified in previous research, such as enhanced interpersonal relationships, reflect reciprocal filial piety. Authoritarian filial piety 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 because of the force of role requirements. Authoritarian filial piety accentuates hierarchy and submission. It reflects the generally negative findings on filial piety.

Yeh (2003) concluded that ‘Any attempt to restrict this [filial piety] concept to the choice of giving it up or keeping it would not be an appropriate and responsible way of dealing with such a complex concept’ (p. 79) and proposed the Dual Filial Piety model based on reciprocal and authoritarian filial piety as a prototype for future research on filial piety. However, he provided no empirical support for the model. The central goal of the present study is to validate the Dual Filial Piety model by demonstrating that two distinct dimensions reflect the opposing facets of filial piety identified in previous research.

Hypotheses

From the perspective of the Dual Filial Piety model, the impact of filial piety on individual development can neither be labeled wholly beneficial nor harmful. Instead, reciprocity and authoritarianism form two intertwined aspects of filial piety grounded in historical development of the concept. To test the validity of this model, the relation between each of the two aspects of filial piety and several specific personality traits, attitudes and behaviors are explored in this study.

Personality

The Five Factor model of personality structure is proposed to have universal applicability (McCrae & Costa, 1997), even with Chinese samples (Leung et al., 1997), although it may not provide a complete picture of personality for people of all cultures (Zhang & Bond, 1998). The five personality domains contained in the model are Neuroticism (stress, worry, fear, anger, guilt, sadness), Extroversion (sociability, assertiveness, activity and talkativeness), Openness to experience (curiosity and receptivity to new ideas and values), Agreeableness (cooperation and trust) and Conscientiousness (self-control of impulses and strong-willed behavior).

Reciprocal filial piety is expected to positively relate to Agreeableness and Extraversion based on Wiggins’s (1982) assertion that these two personality factors are closely related to interpersonal relationships, which are also the central concern of reciprocal filial piety. A positive relation is expected between reciprocal filial piety and the Openness factor because one cannot exchange affection with another person without some degree of openness to that
person. Reciprocal filial piety is associated with satisfaction with interpersonal concerns, so a negative relationship is expected with Neuroticism. Both reciprocal and authoritarian filial piety may positively relate to Conscientiousness as it contains the concept of dutifulness, which has implications both for interpersonal relationships and for hierarchical beliefs.

The rigidity and conservatism associated with authoritarian filial piety suggests a negative relation with Agreeableness. No particular relation is expected between authoritarian filial piety and Extroversion. Authoritarian filial piety is expected to relate to Openness negatively based on Zhang and Bond’s (1998) suggestion that ‘the [Openness] disposition is just the opposite of cognitive conservatism’ (p. 413), which correlates strongly with filial piety (Ho, 1994, 1996). A positive correlation between Neuroticism and authoritarian filial piety is expected based on Zhang and Bond’s (1998) suggestion that there is great potential for inner conflict in individuals who subscribe to traditional filial beliefs and are exposed to Western ideologies of freedom and independence.

In addition to the five personality traits of the Five Factor model, Cheung et al. (2001) identified a sixth personality factor for Chinese populations. This factor is represented by the indigenous constructs of renqing and harmony, both of which focus on interpersonal relationships. Renqing entails paying more attention to the feelings involved in an interaction than to computation of gain or loss. Harmony reflects contentment with interpersonal relations. Both are expected to be positively related to reciprocal filial piety, but not authoritarian filial piety.

Initial examination of the results of the pilot data for the harmony and renqing scales led to the surprising finding that both are positively related to both types of filial piety, instead of just reciprocal filial piety as expected. Exploratory factor analysis of the pilot data identified two subfactors in each scale. On the harmony scale, these two subfactors were labeled Discreetness with Others (e.g. I always talk carefully to avoid harming others) and Valuing Harmony (e.g. I always maintain a peaceful inner state). Both subfactors represent general values in Confucian cultures and are expected to relate positively with both types of filial piety. The two subfactors identified on the renqing scale were Common Human Decency (e.g. We should pay back those to whom we are grateful) and Particularism (e.g. Although I know my friend is incapable, I would still recommend him for a good job). The first subfactor is expected to be related positively with reciprocal filial piety and have no relation with authoritarian filial piety, with the converse true for the second subfactor. These relationships are expected because reciprocal filial piety emphasizes equal treatment of all people, while authoritarian filial piety emphasizes treatment of people according to their ranking in the hierarchy, or in accordance with their status or role.

**Attitudes**

Ho’s (1994) research showed a strong relation between filial piety beliefs and traditional attitudes. Yang et al. (1991) identified five psychological components of Chinese traditionality, two of which appear conceptually related to authoritarian filial piety and its emphasis on hierarchy: Submission to Authority and Male Dominance. They also identified five psychological components of Chinese modernity. Three of these components appear conceptually related to reciprocal filial piety: Egalitarianism and Open-mindedness, Affection-centrism (allowing affect primary dominance in decisions and reactions) and Gender Equality. We expect to find a moderate positive relationship between authoritarian filial piety and traditionalism, and a negative relationship between authoritarian filial piety and belief in modernism. Reciprocal filial piety with its emphasis on equality and reciprocity
is expected to relate to Egalitarianism and Gender Equality. Because the duties of reciprocal filial piety rely on great affection as a motivation instead of hierarchy as with authoritarian filial piety, Affection-centrism is also expected to relate to reciprocal filial piety.

Authoritarianism is a cluster of attitudes that entail belief in and acceptance of hierarchical order and established rules, a high degree of submission to authority, neglect of peers’ opinions and rejection of dissent (Chang, 2000). Chang found that traditional filial piety strongly influences the nature of Asian Chinese authoritarianism. Authoritarian filial piety is expected to influence these authoritarian attitudes positively, whereas reciprocal filial piety is expected to relate negatively with them.

**Behavior**

Empathy refers to the reactions of one individual to the observed experiences of another. It is conceptualized as multidimensional, rather than as a single unipolar, construct (Davis, 1983) with both cognitive and affective components (Deutsch & Madle, 1975). Perspective-taking, a core cognitive component, refers to the tendency to spontaneously adopt the psychological point of view of others. Empathic concern is a core-affective component referring to other-oriented feelings of sympathy and concerns for unfortunate others. Cognitions and affects relating to these two components of empathy were examined with the expectation that those with strong reciprocal filial piety beliefs more easily take the perspective of others and feel disturbed at another’s misfortune. These types of cognitions and affects were expected to be related positively with reciprocal filial piety and to have no relation with authoritarian filial piety.

Self-disclosure refers to verbal communication of personally relevant information, thoughts and feelings to another person, and is a primary process required for interpersonal intimacy (Ries & Shaver, 1988; Lawrenceau et al., 1998). Two kinds of self-disclosure can be distinguished: factual and emotional (Morton, 1978; Ries & Shaver, 1988). Factual self-disclosure reveals personal information. Emotional disclosure reveals private feelings, opinions and judgments. We expect that those with strong reciprocal filial piety beliefs more easily disclose personal information. Behavior related to self-disclosure was expected to be influenced positively by reciprocal filial piety and have no relation with authoritarian filial piety.

**Methods**

**Participants and procedure**

A total of 900 college students (410 male and 490 female) and 1155 senior high school students (578 male and 577 female) were recruited for the study. Most were from schools in Northern and Eastern Taiwan (74% of college students and 93% of high school students). The remainder were from Central or Southern Taiwan. Participants were recruited by classes as a unit and filled out the questionnaires in groups. They were told that the study was a survey of their opinions and feelings about their family and interpersonal relationships. On average, it took 25–30 minutes to complete the questionnaires.

**Questionnaires**

Participants completed six psychological questionnaires: the Filial Piety Scale (FPS), the Five Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI), two subscales from the Chinese Personality Assessment...
Inventory (CPAI), the Authoritarian scale, the Chinese Psychological Traditionality and Modernity Scale, and the Empathy and Self-disclosure scale. Participants responded to all scales except one according to a five-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The Empathy and Self-disclosure scale used a five-point scale from ‘completely doesn’t match’ to ‘completely matches’ for participants to indicate how closely their behavior matched the description.

A pilot study was conducted with 369 college students (143 male and 226 female) and 545 high school students (252 male and 293 female). Item analysis of the pilot study data led to removal or rewording of some items in the scales. The revised subscales were used in the formal study.

Filial Piety Scale. The short-form FPS (nine items) (see Appendix in Yeh 2003), developed from the original 52-item FPS (Yang et al. 1989), was used to measure reciprocal and authoritarian filial piety. Seven additional items relating to reciprocal or authoritarian filial piety were also included from the original scale in a slightly modified form. Respondents indicated how important each statement was to them. Examples of items measuring reciprocal filial piety include, ‘Hurry home upon the death of a parent, regardless of how far away you live’ and ‘Be grateful to parents for raising you’. Authoritarian items include, ‘Live with parents even after marriage’ and ‘Compliment your parents when needed to save their face’. Analysis of internal consistency resulted in a Cronbach $\alpha$ of 0.90 for the reciprocal and 0.79 for the authoritarian filial piety scale.

Five Factor Inventory. The NEO-FFI is a short form of the NEO PI-R. It consists of 60 items and assesses an individual’s personality with respect to the Big Five personality factors. Internal consistency analysis of the five subscales resulted in Cronbach $\alpha$’s from 0.62 to 0.84, with a total average of 0.75.

Harmony and renqing scales. Two subscales of the Chinese Personality Assessment Inventory (CPAI), the Harmony and renqing scales were used to assess individual patterns on indigenous Chinese personality traits. The Harmony scale consists of 15 items measuring a person’s contentment with interpersonal concerns. Discreetness with Others and Valuing Harmony, the two subfactors of the Harmony scale, had Cronbach $\alpha$’s of 0.71 and 0.67 respectively. The 15-item renqing scale measures interpersonal sensitivity to social favors. The Cronbach $\alpha$ of the Common Human Decency subfactor was 0.68 and it was 0.63 for the Particularism subfactor.

Authoritarianism scale. Chang’s (2000) 25-item Authoritarianism scale was the source of items for the Authoritarian scale used in the present study. Chang’s scale was developed for use with Chinese subjects from the Dogmatism scale (Fruchter et al., 1958), the California Fascism scale (Adorno et al., 1950) and the Right-wing Authoritarianism scale (Altemeyer, 1981). The components of Chang’s scale are the strong need for power, neglect of peer groups, emphasis on age and work experience, intolerance of dissent, and acceptance of hierarchy. Wording was adjusted and three items were eliminated from Chang’s scale due to lack of conceptual fit, resulting in the 22-item measure used in the present study. Two subfactors of the Authoritarianism scale were revealed in a factor analysis. The first is labeled Authoritarian Aggression. It is defined as general aggressiveness directed at various persons, which is perceived to be sanctioned by the established authorities. The second is labeled Conventionalism. It is defined as a high degree of adherence to the social conventions.
perceived to be endorsed by society and the established authorities. The internal consistency analysis of Authoritarian Aggression revealed a Cronbach $\alpha$ of 0.76, and a Cronbach $\alpha$ of 0.67 for Conventionalism.

**Chinese Psychological Traditionality and Modernity scale.** The Chinese Psychological Traditionality scale and the Chinese Psychological Modernity scale each consist of five subscales of 12 items each (Yang *et al.*, 1991; Yang, 1999). We selected a total of five subscales conceptually related to reciprocal and authoritarian filial piety: two subscales from the Chinese Psychological Traditionality scale (submission to authority and male dominance), and three from the Modernity scale (egalitarianism and openmindedness, affection-centrism, and gender equality). According to the pilot study, the five scales were modified as follows: the submission to authority subscale (SA) was reduced to seven items, the male dominance subscale (MD) to eight items, the egalitarianism and openmindedness subscale to eight items, the affection-centrism (A) subscale to seven items, and the gender equality subscale was reduced to eight items. Items from the egalitarianism and openmindedness subscale and the gender equality subscale merged into a single factor we labeled EOG in the final study. The internal consistency as measured by the Cronbach $\alpha$ for SA, MD, A, and EOG was 0.68, 0.88, 0.64, 0.81 for these subscales, respectively.

**Empathy and Self-disclosure scale.** The Empathy scale is composed of two subscales. These subscales are the perspective-taking scale (PT), and the empathic concern scale (EC). The seven-item PT scale measures an individual’s behavioral tendency to spontaneously adopt the psychological point of view of others in everyday life. The seven-item EC scale measures the individual’s tendency to experience feelings of sympathy and compassion for unfortunate others. The Self-disclosure scale (SD) consists of 13 items and measures the individual’s behavioral tendency to trust in or be intimate with family and close friends.

The PT and EC scales are primarily revised items from Davis’s (1996) Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI). An additional three items were chosen from among the cognitive items of the Plank *et al.* (1996) Empathy scale. The SD scale is a translated version of Schlein *et al.*’s (1977) Interpersonal Relationship scale (IRS). Analysis of the internal consistency of the PT, EC and SD scales resulted in Cronbach $\alpha$'s of 0.77, 0.76 and 0.79, respectively.

**Results**

According to the hypotheses, both measurement and causal models were tested simultaneously with the LISREL 8.3 package (Scientific Software International (SSI), Chicago, IL, USA). To reduce the complexity of the model and improve the stability of the measures, the Stepwise Variable Selection method (Kano & Harada, 2000) was used to control the indicator number of each measure to between three and five (based on the goodness-of-fit statistics). Models for the high school and college samples were first processed separately. As significant differences between them were found on two subtests only (discussed below) and these were differences of degree only and not direction, the results presented are for the pooled data.

**Personality**

Results confirmed our hypotheses with respect to the Big Five personality factors. The weighted least squares chi-squared of the model (d.f. = 219, $N = 2055$) was 1290.30, $p < 0.001$. 

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Kelloway (1998) cautioned that chi-squared values are vulnerable to sample size, and suggested that it is highly unlikely to obtain a non-significant chi-squared value with a large sample. Other indices, such as the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), the goodness of fit index (GFI) and the adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI) are more suitable as indicators of a model’s acceptability. According to these indices (RMSEA = 0.051, GFI = 0.94, AGFI = 0.93 and critical N (CN) = 416.37), our model is acceptable. Gamma values (all path coefficients are based on the Completely Standardized Solution) for the relation of reciprocal and authoritarian filial piety to the Big Five personality factors are presented in Figure 1. Reciprocal filial piety had a positive relation with Openness, Agreeableness, and Extroversion, and authoritarian filial piety had a negative relation with Openness and Extroversion. The relation between authoritarian filial piety and Agreeableness did not reach significance. Authoritarian filial piety had a positive relationship with Neuroticism, while reciprocal filial piety had a negative relation with it. Both types of filial piety had a positive relationship with Conscientiousness as expected.

Results on the components of the renqing subscale were as expected, with reciprocal filial piety positively relating to the Common Human Decency factor and having no relation with Particularism, and the opposite was true for authoritarian filial piety (Figure 2) (weighted least squares chi-squared (87, N = 2055) = 483.16, p < 0.001, RMSEA = 0.048, GFI = 0.97, AGFI = 0.96, CN = 495.86). It is worth noting that both these effects are stronger than those with the Big Five personality factors.

Results on the harmony subfactors were more surprising (Figure 3). Initial data showed a positive relation with both harmony factors by both types of filial piety, albeit a weaker relation with authoritarian filial piety (weighted least squares chi-squared (72, N = 2055) = 486.17, p < 0.001, RMSEA = 0.054, GFI = 0.97, AGFI = 0.95, CN = 415.56).

However, once Valuing Harmony was used as a mediator between both types of filial piety and Discreetness with Others, the fit of the model improved (the chi-squared of the

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**Figure 1**  Gamma values for the relation between reciprocal and authoritarian filial piety and the Big Five personality factors. *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001. Solid lines indicate significant relationships. Dotted lines indicate the relationship is not significant.
model dropped significantly), the direct relation between both types of filial piety on Discreetness with Others disappeared (Figure 4) and, in fact, the positive relation of authoritarian filial piety with Discreetness with Others became negative, although not significant. The relation between each type of filial piety and Valuing Harmony remained nearly the same even after accounting for the relation between the two harmony subfactors (weighted least squares chi-squared (73, $N=2055$) = 322.17, $p<0.001$, RMSEA = 0.042, GFI = 0.98, AGFI = 0.97, CN = 649.77).

**Attitudes**

Results on the attitudes measures were very clear (Figure 5). As expected, reciprocal filial piety influenced modernity positively and traditionalism negatively, with the converse true
for authoritarian filial piety (weighted least squares chi-squared (161, \(N=2055\)) = 755.77, \(p<0.001\), RMSEA = 0.044, GFI = 0.96, AGFI = 0.95, CN = 563.34).

Two subfactors of the Authoritarianism scale were revealed in a factor analysis. The first we labeled Authoritarian Aggression. It is defined as a general aggressiveness directed at various persons, which is perceived to be sanctioned by the established authorities. The second we labeled Conventionalism and defined it as a high degree of adherence to the social conventions that are perceived to be endorsed by society and the established authorities. Reciprocal filial piety had a negative influence on measures of authoritarianism, while authoritarian filial piety had a positive one (weighted least squares chi-square (60, \(N=2055\)) = 321.14, \(p<0.001\), RMSEA = 0.047, GFI = 0.98, AGFI = 0.96, and CN = 541.76) (Figure 6).

**Behavior**

Hypotheses with respect to empathy-related behaviors were generally supported. Reciprocal filial piety beliefs related positively to scores on the two empathy scales and the Self-
disclosure scale. Authoritarian filial piety related negatively to the Perspective Taking scale, had no relation with the Empathy scale, and had a positive relation with the Self-disclosure scale (weighted least squares chi-squared (98, \(N=2055\)) = 413.51, \(p<0.001\), RMSEA = 0.041, GFI = 0.97, AGFI = 0.96, CN = 638.18) (Figure 7).

\[ \text{Figure 7} \quad \text{Gamma values for the relations between reciprocal and authoritarian filial piety and the Empathy scales.} \quad **p<0.01; ***p<0.001 \]

Discussion

Overall results were as expected. With respect to personality, only the hypotheses concerning authoritarian filial piety differed slightly from the results. Authoritarian filial piety had a negative influence on Agreeableness, but it did not reach a significant level as expected. It also had a slight negative relation with Extroversion when no relation was expected. The strength of the relationship in each case was minor, and results may be unstable; further research is needed to confirm them.

One of the two incidences of significant difference between the high school and college samples occurred in the strength of influence authoritarian filial piety has on the Conscientiousness factor, which was stronger for high school students (\(\gamma=0.18\)) than for college students (\(\gamma=0.03\)). Most high school students in Taiwan take the extremely competitive College Joint Entrance Examination to qualify for higher education. It is generally recognized that while getting admitted to a good university, and especially a popular department such as premed, in Taiwan is very difficult, once accepted, academic requirements are not heavy. The greater constraints and pressures on high school students could play a role in the relation of authoritarian filial piety and Conscientiousness because of authoritarian filial piety’s strict concern with fulfilling obligation according to role norms.

The Chinese personality factor of Harmony was demonstrated to have two subfactors, one of which (Valuing Harmony) was an important mediator for the relation of both types of filial piety to the other subfactor (Discreetness with Others). With this mediation taken into consideration, both types of filial piety, in fact, had an indirect relation with Discreetness with Others instead of a direct one as expected. This finding implies that although Discreetness with Others and Valuing Harmony are both core components of Chinese personality, Valuing Harmony is more basic than Discreetness with Others. The strength of influence of the two types of filial piety was also stronger for both Chinese personality factors, than for the Big Five factors. This result is likely to be due to the common cultural origins of the filial piety types and the Chinese personality factors.

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The second incidence of significantly different results between college and high school samples occurred in the degree of influence reciprocal filial piety has on self-disclosure. College students (\( \gamma = 0.29 \)) were more influenced than high school students (\( \gamma = 0.17 \)). Again, it is possible that the lesser social constraints and pressure on college than high school students play a role in the differential impact, allowing college students to have a fuller range of tendencies on both reciprocal filial piety \( (M = 27.63, 26.98 \text{ for college and high school students, respectively, } t\text{-test} = 4.32, \text{ d.f.} = 2011, p < 0.001) \) and self-disclosure \( (M = 28.01, 26.85 \text{ for college and high school students, respectively, } t\text{-test} = 3.85, \text{ d.f.} = 2007, p < 0.001) \), so the influence of reciprocal filial piety on self-disclosure may appear greater with college students than with high school students.

Results differed from our hypotheses with respect to authoritarian filial piety and empathy and self-disclosure measures. We expected no relation between authoritarian filial piety and perspective taking, empathic concern, and self-disclosure. Indeed, there was no relation with empathic concern. However, a negative relationship with the first measure, and a positive relation with the last were found. Perspective taking is a cognitive component of empathy. Higher authoritarian filial piety manifests in greater cognitive conservatism that decreases the individual’s ability with other kinds of thinking and reduces the individual’s opportunities for perspective taking, which may explain the negative relation with this factor. Self-disclosure generally refers to trust and intimacy with other people. As the self-disclosure measure in our study was revised from the original to use family instead of partners as the target persons in the questions, a stronger relation between authoritarian filial piety scores and self-disclosure may have resulted from the increased emphasis on family because of authoritarian filial piety’s stress on greater trust in and self-disclosure with family members.

An interesting pattern emerged in the relative strength of influence of reciprocal versus authoritarian filial piety on the various personality, attitude and behavioral measures. Overall, reciprocal filial piety had a more powerful influence on the personality measures, while authoritarian filial piety had greater influence on attitudinal measures, and influence was about equal on behavioral measures. It is plausible that because some of the values contained in reciprocal filial piety also appear in many other cultures, including Western ones (Bond, 1988; Schwartz, 1994), it is more deeply related to the universal personality factors than authoritarian filial piety, which is acquired through socialization in Confucian cultures. The attitudes measured in the present study relate to Confucian cultural values, as does authoritarian filial piety, which could explain its greater influence on this domain. The relative equality of impact on behavioral measures reflects the mix of personality and attitudes that shape a person’s behavior.

The role of filial piety as well as its significance and content is changing. Numerous researchers have noted that filial piety is on the decline and no longer commands the same degree of absolute observance it once did (Ho & Kang, 1984; Ho et al., 1989; Ho, 1994). Others have discerned that although some filial obligations, such as ancestor worship and affective consideration and care of parents are still affirmed, others such as absolute obedience and subjugation of individual needs, are now neglected (Ho & Kang, 1984; Chuang & Yang, 1991; Yeh, 1997).

The present study provides support for the Dual Filial Piety model. In light of these results, a revised interpretation of some previous studies is possible. For example, it seems plausible that Ho and Lee’s (1974) Filial Piety Scale, which in fact was developed to examine the relation between authoritarianism and attitudes towards filial piety and ‘traditional filial attitudes’ (Ho, 1996; p. 159) is a measure mostly of authoritarian filial piety, and does not encompass many reciprocal aspects of filial piety. Studies using this scale as a measure of
filial piety (Ho & Kang, 1984; Ho et al., 1989; Ho, 1994; Ho, 1996) have all found filial piety to be associated with generally negative development aspects.

Results of the present study not only provide support for the findings of previous studies, they also suggest that while there may be continuing support for reciprocal filial piety, authoritarian filial piety may be decreasing in relevance in modern Chinese societies. Reciprocal filial piety has a self-reinforcing element in that it promotes good family relations (Yeh, unpubl. data, 1999), and will, therefore, likely retain its relevance. In addition, as mentioned, the values contained in reciprocal filial piety overlap with values found in many other cultures. As Confucian cultures come into contact with other cultures these values will reinforce one another (Liu et al., 2000). Authoritarian filial piety, however, may not have a self-reinforcing element. In fact, it conflicts with prominent values of other cultures such as egalitarianism and democracy. ‘It seems plausible that the prevalence of filial piety and its accompanying authoritarian moralism in Chinese societies has diminished as a consequence of modernization and exposure to Western influence’ (Hwang, 1999; p. 145). It should be noted, however, that the implications of authoritarian filial piety are not all negative. Authoritarian filial piety has a positive role in reducing parent–child conflict, independent of the effects of reciprocal filial piety (Yeh & Bedford, in press). Other studies have also suggested that in the Chinese cultural context, authoritarianism has both functional and dysfunctional elements (Leung et al., 1998). Sometimes, it may convey coordination and order and have a positive effect on interpersonal relationships; sometimes it may be perceived as unwanted domination and restriction and have a negative effect on individual autonomy (cf. Lau & Cheung, 1987). These issues require further exploration in future research.

A possible weakness of the present study was its reliance on survey data and the possibility that the questionnaires correlated with each other due to conceptual similarity, limiting the predictive power of the results. Future research might include non-questionnaire data or behavioral measures to test survey results and provide further insight into the topic. Directions for future research might also include development of a model relating the four types of filial belief combinations (high reciprocal-high authoritarian, high reciprocal-low authoritarian, low reciprocal-high authoritarian, low reciprocal-low authoritarian) to various personality and attitudinal or behavioral measures. Especially with respect to individual adaptation in modern Chinese society, it seems likely that low reciprocal polar combinations (low reciprocal-high authoritarian type and low reciprocal-low authoritarian type) would be associated with more problem behaviors (internalizing and externalizing) than high reciprocal polar combinations (high reciprocal-high authoritarian type and high reciprocal-low authoritarian type). If this situation is the case, it is clear that affection, intimacy and trust are more important than norms, power and role constraints as fundamental essentials for a modern harmonious Chinese society.

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