



A Comparative Study of Filial Piety Education in Chinese and Malaysian Chinese

Wang Yanfang¹, Muhammad Daoh¹, Nur Muneerah Kasim¹

¹Universiti Selangor, Malaysia

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Abstract

Filial piety, a fundamental Confucian value, is traditionally emphasized in Chinese education. However, globalization and modernization have influenced how filial piety is taught and perceived. This study explores the similarities and differences in filial piety attitudes among Chinese and Malaysian Chinese university students. The sample consists of 598 students, including 325 from China and 273 from Malaysia, selected through stratified random sampling from major universities. Independent sample t-tests were conducted using SPSS to analyze the responses. The statistical analysis indicates that while there are shared perspectives, differences also exist in filial piety attitudes between the two groups. Both Chinese and Malaysian Chinese college students highly value the culture of filial piety. In the dimension of authority, the mean scores of both groups are relatively low and similar, suggesting that under the influence of modern society, traditional notions of authority have weakened among university students in both countries. Chinese university students demonstrate more proactive emotional respect, whereas Malaysian Chinese students place greater emphasis on traditional commemorative rituals. Additionally, interviews with 11 education experts (six from China and five from Malaysia) yielded recommendations and strategies to strengthen filial piety education.

Keywords: *Filial piety, textbook analysis, comparative study*

INTRODUCTION

Filial piety (FP), a central tenet of Confucianism, has been deeply embedded in Chinese cultural traditions for thousands of years, shaping ethical norms, family relationships, and social structures (Bedford & Yeh, 2019). The concept, originating from the teachings of Confucius (551 – 479 BCE), emphasizes obedience, respect, and care for one's parents and elders, serving as the moral foundation of personal conduct and social harmony (Siow, 2024; Nainee et al., 2021). In both China and the Malaysian Chinese community, filial piety remains a fundamental virtue, influencing not only interpersonal relationships but also educational philosophies and moral teachings (Nainee et al., 2021). However, as societies undergo rapid modernization and globalization, structural functionalist theory predicts that filial piety will be eroded. In contrast, other perspectives argue that modernization may only slightly or conditionally weaken filial piety. Education is considered a potential factor in mitigating the effects of modernization (Cheung & Kwan, 2009). This has led scholars to emphasize the importance of educational interventions in preserving and adapting filial values in contemporary society. To guide this study, the following research objectives and questions are proposed:

R01: To explore the changes in the attitude of filial piety among Chinese students in China and Malaysia.

R02: To obtain guidance from educational experts in Confucian ethics on filial piety, considering various opinions.

RQ1: What is the current status of filial piety in Confucian ethics among Chinese and Malaysian students?

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Corresponding author's email: muhammad66@unisel.edu.my

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RQ2: In the context of modern society, how can traditional filial piety be maintained among Chinese students in China and Malaysia?

In response to growing concerns about the erosion of traditional filial values due to modernization and globalization (Cheung & Kwan, 2009), this study aims to conduct a comparative analysis of filial piety attitudes among Chinese and Malaysian Chinese university students. By integrating quantitative survey data and qualitative expert interviews, the research seeks to identify cultural similarities and differences, understand the evolving perception of filial duties, and propose educational strategies to strengthen filial piety in both contexts. The purpose of this study is to explore how filial piety is understood and practiced across two culturally linked yet socially distinct communities, and to offer practical insights for enhancing filial piety education in contemporary society.

The research survey was conducted using Google Forms to investigate the perspectives and attitudes of university students regarding filial piety in China and Malaysia. The survey was administered to university students in Malaysia at Tuanku Abdul Rahman University and in the Chinese mainland at Hunan Normal University. Students in these two schools are from different regions of Malaysia and provinces in China, making them representative. Therefore, the study's contributions include improving cross-cultural educational strategies and preserving moral education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Filial piety, a foundational virtue in Confucian philosophy, has historically shaped interpersonal relationships, ethical expectations, and social hierarchies across East Asian societies (Mai & Le, 2024). Traditional conceptions of filial piety emphasized obedience, providing material support, and upholding family honor. However, as societies undergo modernization and globalization, these values are being reinterpreted by younger generations (Cheung & Kwan, 2009). Understanding how filial piety evolves under these sociocultural pressures requires an examination not only of historical texts but also of current empirical research grounded in educational and psychological contexts.

Conceptual Evolution and Multidisciplinary Perspectives

The study of filial piety has evolved from a traditional Confucian ethical norm to a multidimensional construct with cross-disciplinary relevance. The Dual Filial Piety Model (DFPM) distinguishes between reciprocal filial piety (RFP) and authoritarian filial piety (AFP), providing a refined framework for examining its cultural and psychological foundations (Bedford & Yeh, 2021). Scholars have expanded their scope to include sociological, educational, and mental health dimensions (Li et al., 2021; Lim et al., 2022). For instance, RFP has been linked to more positive educational and emotional outcomes, while AFP may reinforce hierarchical compliance with potential psychological costs (Han & Cheung, 2024). These developments underscore the transformation of filial piety into a construct adaptable to global contexts, with research extending beyond East Asian societies to investigate its universality and contextual variations (Lin, 2023; Rozycka-Tran et al., 2021).

Cross-Cultural Gaps and Methodological Fragmentation

Despite growing interest, research on filial piety faces significant cross-cultural and methodological limitations. Studies often rely on self-reported surveys and cross-sectional designs, limiting causal inference and generalizability (Pan & Tang, 2021; Li et al., 2021). While there is emerging evidence from diasporic communities, such as Vietnamese or Chinese Americans, the

Malaysian Chinese context remains understudied (Kim & Silverstein, 2021). Furthermore, cultural hybridity and generational differences are rarely explored systematically, leading to fragmented understanding across contexts (Che et al., 2022). The field lacks longitudinal and mixed-method approaches that could capture the evolving nature of filial norms across life stages and cultures. Without these, the interaction between cultural adaptation, psychological well-being, and intergenerational expectations remains insufficiently addressed (Chadwin, 2023). Researchers are calling for comparative frameworks that integrate qualitative and quantitative data across diverse sociocultural environments (Ma et al., 2022; Zhang & Chen, 2022).

Educational Transmission and Theoretical Framing

Filial piety's role in education highlights both its developmental value and its potential to shape adolescent behavior. RFP fosters academic motivation, well-being, and autonomy, whereas AFP may undermine psychological health and increase academic pressure (Guo et al., 2022; Guo et al., 2021). These findings suggest that filial values can be strategically integrated into curricula through family-school-community collaboration. However, educational systems often lack a theoretical foundation for integrating moral education, particularly in multicultural societies like Malaysia (Li & Wu, 2022). Furthermore, while some studies validate filial piety's role as a mediator between parenting and academic outcomes, the theoretical framing remains narrow and context-specific (Rozycka-Tran et al., 2021). Future research must develop culturally responsive pedagogies that reflect both RFP's benefits and AFP's potential drawbacks (Che et al., 2022). Broadening the theoretical and methodological scope will enhance the relevance of filial piety education in modern educational and cross-cultural discourse.

To complement the DFPM and better align with the Confucian cultural context, this study also draws on the Three-Dimensional Model of Filial Piety (Shi & Wang, 2019), which conceptualizes filial piety as a culturally embedded construct encompassing emotional closeness, behavioral obligations, and moral values rooted in family continuity and respect.

Research Gap and Hypotheses

Despite progress in expanding filial piety research beyond traditional boundaries, comparative studies between Chinese mainland and Malaysian Chinese youth remain scarce. This study responds to that gap by comparing university students' attitudes across these two culturally connected but socially distinct contexts. Based on prior studies and theoretical framing (Bedford & Yeh, 2021; Pan & Tang, 2021), this study tentatively explores whether differences exist in the dimensions of filial piety between Chinese and Malaysian Chinese university students. While no fixed assumptions are imposed, the analysis is guided by the expectation that cultural and social environments may shape these perceptions differently.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a mixed-methods design, combining descriptive and exploratory approaches. The quantitative component is descriptive in nature, aiming to compare filial piety attitudes among student groups across cultural contexts. The qualitative interviews are exploratory, intended to uncover educational experts' insights into how filial piety values are transmitted and sustained in modern society.

Sampling

This study adopts a method that combines purposive sampling and convenience sampling to examine the attitudes and differences held by Chinese university students in mainland China and Malaysia regarding their understanding of filial piety. The survey's preliminary inclusion criteria

specified that participants must originate from Chinese families residing in Malaysia for a minimum of two generations, whereas Chinese university students in Malaysia are predominantly concentrated at Tunku Abdul Rahman University. Therefore, for the convenience and specific purpose of the demand analysis survey, the researchers decided to select students from Tunku Abdul Rahman University. This method combines purposive sampling and convenience sampling, which is a non-probability sampling that selects participants based on their availability and relevance to the research objectives.

The survey was conducted using Google Forms to investigate the perspectives and attitudes of university students regarding filial piety in China and Malaysia. The survey was administered to university students in Malaysia at Tuanku Abdul Rahman University, and the university students in Chinese Mainland at Hunan Normal University. Students in these two schools are from diverse regions of Malaysia and provinces in China, making them a representative group. Sample size depends heavily on the specifics of the research design and the particular aspects of the research outcomes being investigated. Similarly, Omair (2014) points out that several critical factors must be considered when determining sample size, including the size of the target population, the desired confidence level (typically set at 95%), the acceptable margin of error, and the estimated variability or prevalence of the outcome variable. As the sample size increases, the precision of the results improves. Careful consideration of these factors is essential to ensure an appropriate and effective sample size is chosen.

This study employs William G. Cochran's formula for calculating the sample size, as shown in the equation below, which is derived from the fundamentals of statistics, in particular, confidence intervals used to estimate the scale. It is a standard approximation based on the binomial distribution, from which the relationship between the accuracy of the sample size rain estimate is derived.

$$n = \frac{Z^2 \cdot p \cdot (1 - p)}{E^2}$$

Where,

- n = sample size
- Z = estimated population proportion
- p = estimated population proportion
- E = allowable margin of error (precision)

In this study, the SPSS application is used to extract the sample size from the target population. SPSS is a technique that can calculate the sample size rather than relying on published tables or empirical rules. This power analysis program can automatically calculate the required minimum sample size after inputting parameters such as the effect size, power, and confidence level of the study. In this study, E is typically set at 0.05 (i.e., 5%), indicating that the difference between the sample proportion and the population proportion is considered acceptable if it does not exceed 5%. For a 95% confidence level, $Z = 1.96$. To obtain the maximum sample size, p is taken as 0.2. Therefore, the sample size for this study was determined to be 246 respondents, calculated using SPSS.

The total sample size of 598 university students exceeds the minimum requirement for independent sample t-tests, ensuring sufficient statistical power for comparative analysis. For the qualitative component, interviews were conducted with 11 educational experts, a number that aligns with established saturation principles in qualitative research, where rich, repetitive themes typically emerge within 10–12 interviews.

The design and execution of this mixed-methods study are guided by a methodological framework that emphasizes the integration of quantitative and qualitative findings to strengthen validity, particularly in research conducted within culturally diverse educational contexts.

Instrumentation

Firstly, the present study used the 5-point Likert scale to assess individuals' attitudes and opinions towards filial piety. The scale consisted of 30 statements rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Respondents were required to circle the number that best represented their attitude about filial piety in their daily lives. This part plays a crucial role in presenting numerical data regarding the beliefs and opinions of university students.

This questionnaire is a revision based on FC questionnaire. The original FC scale employed a 4-point scoring system, with rating of 0 (Not at all appropriate), 1 (Somewhat appropriate), 2 (Quite appropriate), and 3 (Very appropriate). Later researchers, considering the scientific nature of psychometrics, the accuracy of data analysis, and participant experience, adopted a 5-point scale. The 5-point scale includes a neutral option (often "Neutral" or "No opinion"), allowing respondents to choose a middle ground when they do not have a strong opinion on a particular statement. This is necessary in many cases, as respondents might not have a strong stance on certain items, and providing a neutral option avoids forcing them to make a choice that does not reflect their true feelings.

This structured instrument aims to collect extensive data regarding university students' perspectives and attitudes. The survey is meticulously designed to investigate several crucial viewpoints relevant to the filial piety cognition of university students. The survey is segmented into various sections, each focusing on distinct facets of international cognition of filial piety by university students. The survey's initial section is dedicated to collecting demographic data from the participants. This section is crucial, as it provides context for the responses, enabling a more profound understanding of how demographic factors may influence perceptions. It includes questions on participants' age, gender, religion, and other specific family situations.

The following section of the survey centers on filial piety cognition. This section examines the attitudes of university students toward their parents in daily life. This part mainly includes six dimensions of the CFP regarding the views of university students on filial piety, namely substance, body, emotion, authority, glory, and commemoration. These four themes are composed of 32 statements about the behavior of children towards their parents. The purpose of this method is to provide a comprehensive understanding of university students' cognition of filial piety towards their parents in daily life.

Participants were 325 university students (50.68% females; Mage=20.36years) attending from China and 273 university students (55.04% females; Mage = 21.29 years) from Malaysia. In terms of religion, 156 respondents were Buddhist, 49 were Taoist, 45 were Christian, 18 were Muslim, and 7 were from other religions. The questionnaire was mainly administered in classrooms, where the authors explained the voluntary nature of the participation and assured them of the confidentiality of the information provided. The reliability of the instrument was also checked before it was used for the final data collection. Reliability is a central concept in measurement, and it basically refers to consistency; both internal consistency and consistency over time. The reliability of the instrument was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha via SPSS, given that this coefficient as one of the most extensively employed and methodologically appropriate indices of reliability within descriptive research. The α -coefficient for the pilot test was 0.765, but it improved to 0.775 for the final data collection. The α -coefficient (the maximum value for $\alpha = 1$) indicated that the reliability of the instrument was acceptable.

The CSFP consists of 32 items assessing FP behaviors (Chen et al., 2007; e.g., "1. You should

accompany your parents in leisure activities. The items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with higher scores indicating higher levels of filial behaviors. The reliability analysis yielded Cronbach's alpha values of $\alpha = 0.964$ for the China sample and $\alpha = 0.951$ for the Malaysian sample. The China sample completed the questionnaires in Mandarin, while the Malaysian sample used both Mandarin and English versions that had been translated and back-translated to ensure semantic equivalence, with discrepancies resolved through translator consensus, and the study protocol approved by the Institutional Review Board.

After multiple attempts, we ultimately decided to extract six factors from the 32 statements. This approach not only facilitates comparison with the subjective classification but also provides insights for its refinement. Principal component analysis was used for factor extraction, and the six factors collectively explain 61.768% of the total variance. Following orthogonal rotation, the factor loadings of the six factors on each statement. For clarity, only the higher absolute values of the loadings for each factor component are retained in the table. This indicates that our interpretation of filial piety, based on the literature, corresponds well with contemporary Chinese understanding. The Cronbach's α values for the six dimensions — Substance, Body, Emotion, Authority, Glory, and Ritual Needs are 0.762, 0.845, 0.834, 0.915, 0.841, and 0.869, respectively. Since all Cronbach's α values exceed 0.7, the questionnaire demonstrates good internal consistency and reliability.

Table 1. Results of The Scale Reliability Test

Subactive Variables	Cronbach's α	Total Cronbach's α
Substance	0.762	0.915
Body	0.845	
Emotion	0.740	
Authority	0.834	
Glory	0.841	
Ceremony	0.869	
Total		

Secondly, the study carried out a series of semi-structured interviews with a total of 11 educational experts. The six educational experts, comprising three from China and five from Malaysia, participated in the qualitative data collection. The interviews will be conducted via online platforms such as Google Meet, written responses, or face-to-face interviews, as participants were geographically dispersed.

Table 2. Demographic Data of Interview Participants

Code	Participant Gender	Race	Education
P1	F	Chinese	Bachelor
P2	M	Chinese	Doctor
P3	M	Chinese	Doctor
P4	F	Chinese	Doctor
P5	M	Chinese	Doctor
P6	M	Chinese	Doctor
P7	F	Malaysian Chinese	Doctor
P8	M	Malaysian Chinese	Doctor
P9	M	Malaysian Chinese	Doctor
P10	M	Malaysian Chinese	Bachelor
P11	F	Malaysian Chinese	Doctor
P12	M	Malaysian Chinese	Doctor

To explore the qualitative dimension of the study, in-depth interviews were conducted with educational experts to gain a deeper understanding of their guidance on whether to maintain or enhance CFP within the Chinese community. The selection of interview participants was based on their willingness to provide comprehensive and descriptive explanations of their experiences and perceptions. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner, which allowed for adaptability in the conversation while ensuring that important subjects were covered. This methodology yielded abundant qualitative data that supplemented the quantitative results obtained from the surveys, providing a comprehensive educational perspective on CFP.

Table 3. Methods Used to Achieve Each Research Objective

Research objectives	Research questions	Methods
RO1: To explore the changes in the attitude of filial piety among Chinese students in China and Malaysia.	RQ1: What is the current status of filial piety in Confucian ethics between Chinese and Malaysian student?	Quantitative (questionnaire)
RO2: To obtain guidance from educational experts in Confucian ethics about filial piety through the various opinions.	RQ2: Under the background of modern society, how we maintain the traditional filial piety among Chinese students in China and Malaysia?	Qualitative (interview)

The overall mixed-methods design and sequential implementation were guided by principles that ensure methodological rigor and enable the triangulation of quantitative and qualitative components. This approach strengthens both the validity and the interpretability of findings across culturally distinct populations.

To further strengthen the internal validity of the study, data triangulation was employed by integrating results from quantitative surveys and qualitative expert interviews. The quantitative data provided statistically generalizable insights into filial piety attitudes among university students in China and Malaysia, while the qualitative data offered in-depth interpretations and contextual understanding from educational experts. This dual-layered approach enabled cross-verification of key themes—for example, experts emphasized the emotional and commemorative aspects of filial piety, which corresponded with student responses indicating a shift toward these dimensions. By comparing and converging results from two distinct data sources, the study enhances the credibility of its conclusions and reduces potential biases inherent in single-method research.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

To contextualize the findings, Table 4 and 5 presents the age-based and family structure distribution of participants from China and Malaysia.

Table 4. Demographic Information from China

Categories	Type	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	160	49.23
	Female	165	50.77
Year	16 - 19	163	54.42

Categories	Type	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
	20 - 23	108	38.10
	24 - 27	37	5.10
	28 and above	17	2.38
Family Structure	Both parents	219	74.49
	Both parents and Grandparents	33	11.22
	Father or Mother only	26	8.84
	Grandparents only	10	3.40
	Father and stepmother or Mother and stepfather	6	2.04

Table 5. Demographic Information from Chinese Malaysian

Categories	Type	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	123	45.05
	Female	150	54.95
Year	16~19	128	46.89
	20~23	83	30.40
	24~27	39	14.29
	28 and above	23	8.42
Generation of Chinese	Second	40	14.65
	Third	73	26.74
	Above	160	58.61
Family Structure	Both parents	197	72.16
	Both parents and Grandparents	25	9.16
	Father or Mother only	24	8.79
	Grandparents only	6	2.20

Through SPSS, this study compares the concepts of filial piety of Chinese students in China and Malaysia. Based on the T-test analysis results, this section discusses the differences in filial piety attitudes. There are similarities in the attitudes towards filial piety between Chinese college students in China and ethnic Chinese college students in Malaysia. Both Chinese college students and Malaysian Chinese college students highly value the concept of filial piety. However, in the authority dimension, the mean values of the two groups are both low and relatively close to each other. This indicates that under the influence of modern society, college students in both countries have experienced a weakening of certain traditional authority concepts.

To enhance clarity and facilitate cross-group comparison, this section is divided into subsections based on participant age groups (16–19, 20–23, 24–27, and 28+). Each subsection discusses the results across six filial piety dimensions: Substance, Body, Emotion, Authority, Glory, and Commemorate. This structure enables more focused interpretation and facilitates accessible navigation of key findings.

Table 6. T-test Analysis of The Means and Differences Between Attitudes Towards Filial Piety Between Chinese Students in China and Malaysian Chinese Students (Age Group 16–19)

Dimension	Zone	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	p
Substance	China	163	3.677	0.888	4.094	0.000
	Malaysia	128	3.177	1.136		
Body	China	163	3.652	0.838	4.520	0.000
	Malaysia	128	3.129	1.079		
Emotion	China	163	3.796	0.801	5.892	0.000
	Malaysia	128	3.129	1.065		
Authority	China	163	2.603	1.053	0.786	0.433
	Malaysia	128	2.509	0.961		
Glory	China	163	3.744	0.791	6.788	0.000
	Malaysia	128	2.973	1.079		
Commemorate	China	163	3.170	1.145	-0.520	0.603
	Malaysia	128	3.236	1.018		

Table 7. T-test Analysis of Mean Differences in Attitudes Toward Filial Piety Between Chinese Students in China and Malaysian Chinese Students (Age Group 20–23)

Dimension	Zone	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	p
Substance	China	108	3.741	0.863	4.563	0.000
	Malaysia	83	3.108	1.052		
Body	China	108	3.640	0.840	2.428	0.016
	Malaysia	83	3.285	1.111		
Emotion	China	108	3.698	0.799	2.647	0.009
	Malaysia	83	3.327	1.064		
Authority	China	108	2.683	1.034	1.560	0.120
	Malaysia	83	2.454	0.959		
Glory	China	108	3.617	0.861	3.353	0.001
	Malaysia	83	3.102	1.178		
Commemorate	China	108	3.220	1.075	-1.121	0.264
	Malaysia	83	3.389	0.968		

Table 8. T-test Analysis of Mean Differences in Attitudes Toward Filial Piety Between Chinese Students in China and Malaysian Chinese Students (Age Group 24–27)

Dimension	Zone	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	p
Substance	China	37	3.712	0.868	3.352	0.001
	Malaysia	39	2.846	1.344		
Body	China	37	3.775	0.707	2.685	0.009
	Malaysia	39	3.235	1.024		
Emotion	China	37	3.559	0.751	-0.051	0.960
	Malaysia	39	3.568	0.909		
Authority	China	37	2.718	1.040	1.236	0.220
	Malaysia	39	2.410	1.126		
Glory	China	37	3.779	0.819	3.289	0.002
	Malaysia	39	3.064	1.055		
Commemorate	China	37	3.027	1.239	-1.336	0.186
	Malaysia	39	3.397	1.178		

Table 9. T-test Analysis of Mean Differences in Attitudes Toward Filial Piety Between Chinese Students in China and Malaysian Chinese Students (Age Group 28 and above)

Dimension	Zone	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	p
Substance	China	17	3.863	0.882	1.741	0.090

Dimension	Zone	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	p
Body	Malaysia	23	3.232	1.285	2.140	0.039
	China	17	3.784	0.818		
	Malaysia	23	3.123	1.060		
Emotion	China	17	4.206	0.509	3.757	0.001
	Malaysia	23	3.290	1.009		
	China	17	2.546	0.872		
Authority	Malaysia	23	2.404	1.070		
	China	17	3.470	0.744	1.164	0.252
	Glory	Malaysia	23	3.130		
China		17	3.015	0.994		
Commemorate		Malaysia	23	3.174	1.137	

Age Group 16–19

Substance and Body Dimensions

Chinese students scored higher than Malaysian students on Substance and Body dimensions with medium effect sizes (Cohen's $d = 0.47$ and 0.54 , respectively). These results suggest a stronger orientation toward material and physical filial obligations among younger Chinese participants.

Emotion and Glory Dimensions

Significant differences were observed in Emotion ($d = 0.70$) and Glory ($d = 0.79$) dimensions, indicating a deeper internalization of emotional and reputation-based filial values by Chinese students.

Authority and Commemorative Dimensions

No significant differences were found in Authority ($d = 0.09$) or Commemorate ($d = -0.06$), reflecting a shared generational shift away from hierarchical and ritualistic traditions.

Theme 1: Achievement-Oriented Filiality

"Young people in China are still under pressure to 'achieve for the family,' whereas in Malaysia, students are encouraged to talk back, ask why, and share ideas." - Expert Interviewee P5

This supports the higher Glory and Substance scores among Chinese students and reflects the influence of egalitarian educational values in Malaysian contexts.

Age Group 20–23

Substance and Body Dimensions

Chinese students maintained higher scores on Substance ($d = 0.65$) and Body ($d = 0.35$), showing the sustained importance of tangible filial support.

Emotion and Glory Dimensions

Differences in Emotion ($d = 0.39$) and Glory ($d = 0.50$) remained but were smaller, indicating a gradual cultural shift among both groups.

Authority and Commemorative Dimensions

No statistical significance in Authority ($d = 0.23$) or Commemorate ($d = -0.17$) persisted.

Theme 2: Relational and Emotional Filiality

“University students here express filial piety more through presence and support than through control or obedience.” - Expert Interviewee P2

This perspective aligns with the lower Authority scores and relational emphasis among Malaysian Chinese students. Meanwhile, Chinese students maintain a results-oriented outlook shaped by social achievement norms.

Age Group 24–27

Substance and Body Dimensions

Effect sizes for Substance and Body were large ($d = 0.75$) and medium to large ($d = 0.61$), reflecting a continued material emphasis among Chinese students.

Emotion and Glory Dimensions

Emotion scores were nearly identical ($d = -0.01$), showing convergence. Differences in glory remained notable ($d = 0.74$), reflecting persistent cultural expectations.

Authority and Commemorative Dimensions

Authority ($d = 0.28$) and Commemorate ($d = -0.31$) remained nonsignificant but suggest subtle divergences in filial ritual practices.

Theme 3: Maturation and Emotional Awareness

“By their mid-20s, many young people begin to shift their thinking—from just giving money to thinking about what their parents actually need emotionally.” - Expert Interviewee P6

This marks a developmental transition, explaining why emotional filiality converges in this age group, while material support remains high among Chinese students.

Age Group 28 and Above

Substance and Body Dimensions

Although Substance was not statistically significant ($p = 0.090$), the effect size was medium-to large ($d = 0.57$). The body showed significance ($d = 0.67$), indicating persistent caregiving values.

Emotion and Glory Dimensions

A vast difference in Emotion was found ($d = 1.22$), indicating that emotional filial piety dominates at this life stage. Glory differences were more minor ($d = 0.38$).

Authority and Commemorative Dimensions

Both Authority ($d = 0.14$) and Commemorate ($d = -0.15$) remained negligible, affirming reduced reliance on tradition.

Maturation and Emotional Awareness

“At this stage, it is no longer about how much you give your parents—but how present you are when they need you emotionally.” - Expert Interviewee P9

These insights support the strong emphasis on emotional filial piety in the older age group and explain the sustained low scores in Authority and Commemorate dimensions across all cohorts.

Across all age groups, the comparison shows:

- Material filial piety (Substance, Body) is consistently more emphasized by Chinese students, especially in early adulthood.
- Emotional filial piety shifts from parity to dominance in older students, particularly in the 28+ age group (a significant effect).
- Authority and commemorative dimensions show negligible cultural differences, reflecting generational decline in traditional obedience and ritual forms.
- Glory remains more important for younger Chinese students, reflecting sociocultural expectations tied to academic success and familial pride.
- The qualitative data align with these patterns, contextualizing statistical results within broader cultural and educational systems. This comprehensive integration of quantitative and qualitative evidence offers a robust, multidimensional view of filial piety development across contexts and life stages.

To strengthen the statistical interpretation, effect sizes (Cohen's *d*) are reported alongside all significant t-test results reflecting the magnitude of the differences. Prior to conducting independent sample t-tests, assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variances were examined. Shapiro-Wilk tests indicated approximate normality for each group, and Levene's tests confirmed that the homogeneity of variance assumption was not violated ($p > 0.05$) for the majority of comparisons.

Table 10. Summary of Cohen's *d* Effect Sizes by Age Group and Filial Piety Dimension

Dimension	16–19 (<i>d</i>)	20–23 (<i>d</i>)	24–27 (<i>d</i>)	28+ (<i>d</i>)	Interpretation Notes
Substance	0.47	0.65	0.75	0.67	Medium to large across all groups
Body	0.54	0.35	0.61	0.67	Rising with age, medium
Emotion	0.79	0.39	1.22	–	Strong shift from parity to dominance
Authority	0.09	0.23	0.28	0.14	Negligible across all groups
Glory	0.79	0.59	0.74	0.38	High in youth, decreases with age
Commemorate	-0.06	-0.17	-0.11	-0.15	Small to negligible, favors Malaysia

Contemporary filial piety education diverges from traditional forms by emphasizing emotional engagement and voluntary practice, achieved through multi-channel implementation. Contemporary filial piety education diverges from traditional forms by emphasizing emotional engagement and voluntary practice, achieved through multi-channel implementation.

Family as the Foundation: Strengthening Emotional Roots

The family remains the primary site where filial values take root. Across both China and Malaysia, educators emphasize the importance of emotional connection over mere behavioral compliance.

"We must reframe filial piety as a mutual relationship. Children today are more emotionally aware. They need to feel loved and respected to reciprocate care naturally." - Expert Interviewee P1

"We encourage families to set a 'family tradition day' where elders share life experiences, and children express appreciation through letters or performances. These moments create lasting emotional memories." - Expert Interviewee P10

As the cornerstone of filial piety education, the family nurtures filial emotions and behaviors. Parents, as the first educators, should strengthen emotional bonds with children through interaction, respect, and support. Guiding children to participate in family affairs and setting a good example are key. A positive family atmosphere significantly influences children's acceptance and practice of filial piety.

School as the Conduit: From Knowledge to Practice

Schools are crucial for transforming abstract values into structured learning and guided practice. In societies, schools play a vital role in systematizing filial piety education. By integrating it into various curricula, such as language, mathematics, and history, students gain a multidisciplinary understanding. For example, language classes use classic texts, and math problems incorporate filial-related scenarios. Schools also organize themed activities and strengthen home-school collaboration. This approach transforms theoretical knowledge into practical actions.

"We integrate filial piety into project-based learning. Students do not just write essays—they create video interviews, organize appreciation events, and document family rituals." — Expert Interviewee P3

"Besides academic grades, we include a 'filial behavior portfolio'—students log acts of care, such as helping elders, learning family history, or resolving intergenerational conflict." - Expert Interviewee P8

"We hold 'home-school filial talks' where parents and students attend workshops together, reflecting on what respect means in daily life. This bridges the gap between theory and action." – Expert Interviewee P1

"Teachers must model filial behavior. We provide professional development on Confucian ethics and modern family dynamics, so they teach not only with knowledge but also with character." - Expert Interviewee P7

Society as the Support System: Creating a Cultural Ecosystem

Outside the home and school, societal influences shape how filial piety is perceived and practiced.

"We run youth digital storytelling projects. When a teen documents their caregiving role and shares it on social media, it inspires peers more than a textbook ever could." - Expert Interviewee P11

"Filial education should be embedded in lifelong learning systems, from early childhood to elderly care training. Government support can come through funding intergenerational programs or tax benefits for caregiving families." - Expert Interviewee P12

"We must define filial piety in contemporary terms— not as rigid hierarchy, but as mutual well-being. This opens the concept to diverse family structures and modern realities, including digital relationships with elderly relatives." - Expert Interviewee P4

The social environment supports the spread and practice of filial piety culture. Media and online platforms disseminate filial piety through various content forms. Community activities, such as nursing home visits and volunteer projects, offer practical opportunities for people to engage in filial piety. In comparison to previous research, this study highlights the transition from traditional obedience-based filial piety education to a more emotion-centered and practice-oriented approach. It details how different channels (family, school, society) contribute to this new model. While previous studies may have focused on the concept or impact of filial piety in isolation, this research highlights the collaborative efforts across multiple sectors. Additionally, it explores how modern technologies and social structures can be leveraged to promote filial piety, offering a new perspective in the field of filial piety education research. Overall, contemporary filial piety education aims to balance personal, familial, and social aspects in the context of modern society.

These findings align with a broader East Asian shift from hierarchical, obedience-based filial piety toward relational and emotional expressions of care. This trend has been documented among Chinese American, Korean, and Singaporean youth (Lum et al., 2015; Sung, 1995), and is supported by qualitative findings in this study, which emphasize "relational and emotional filiality" and "maturation and emotional awareness." The observed results can be analytically framed using [Bedford and Yeh's \(2019\)](#) Dual Filial Piety Model (DFPM), which delineates two distinct dimensions of filial piety: Authoritarian Filial Piety (AFP), characterized by obligation, submission, and hierarchical compliance, and Reciprocal Filial Piety (RFP), grounded in affection, gratitude, and voluntary care.

Participants' decreasing scores on the "Authority" dimension across age groups, and the increasing emphasis on the "Emotion" dimension, suggest a transition from AFP to RFP — particularly among older and Malaysian Chinese students. These findings show that filial piety is not vanishing but transforming into a more emotionally driven and internally motivated practice. In addition, stages of moral development provide a lens for understanding age-based variations in filial reasoning. Adolescents may reason at the "conventional" level (Stage 3: seeking approval). At the same time, young adults shift toward "post-conventional" reasoning (Stage 5: mutual respect and care), corresponding with emotional maturation observed in the 24+ and 28+ age groups.

Finally, Hofstede's cultural dimensions provide a macro-sociocultural explanation. Malaysia's relatively lower power distance and more dialogic family norms may facilitate egalitarian and expressive filial behaviors, explaining the stronger emotional over authoritative expressions of filiality observed among Malaysian students compared to Chinese students from a higher power distance culture. These theoretical and international references not only validate the current findings but also elevate their relevance for comparative family studies, moral education, and cross-cultural psychology.

CONCLUSIONS

This study set out to address two core research questions:

RQ1: What is the current status of filial piety in Confucian ethics among Chinese and Malaysian students?

RQ2: Under the background of modern society, how can traditional filial piety be maintained among Chinese students in China and Malaysia?

Regarding RQ1, the quantitative findings reveal that while both Chinese and Malaysian Chinese students still uphold filial values, the expression of these values differ across cultural and generational lines. Independent sample t-tests were conducted using SPSS to analyze the responses. The statistical analysis indicates that while there are shared perspectives, differences also exist in filial piety attitudes between the two groups. Both Chinese and Malaysian Chinese college students highly value the culture of filial piety. In the dimension of authority, the mean scores of both groups are relatively low and similar, indicating that the influence of modern society has weakened traditional notions of authority among university students in both countries. Chinese university students demonstrate more proactive emotional respect, whereas Malaysian Chinese students place greater emphasis on traditional commemorative rituals.

In relation to RQ2, the qualitative findings underscore the modernization and emotional transformation of filial behavior, as participants highlighted affective reciprocity, emotional presence, and communicative respect rather than hierarchical obligation, thereby suggesting a reformulated model of filial piety that is more attuned to the values of contemporary pluralistic and individualistic societies. This study also presents a nuanced, field-based exploration of contemporary filial piety education, marking a shift from prescriptive obedience to relational engagement. The inclusion of voices from Chinese and Malaysian professors, principals, and cultural educators reveals a shared understanding: filial piety must be relevant, emotionally rooted, and socially integrated.

To translate these insights into practice, 11 education experts derived educational recommendations based on a tripartite approach that involves the family, school, and society. These strategies aim to enhance university students' comprehensive understanding of filial piety education in both countries and to strengthen the implementation and effectiveness of filial piety education. For educators: Integrate filial piety into project-based learning, student storytelling, and reflective journals. Emphasize emotional intelligence, conflict negotiation, and intergenerational dialogue over didactic moral instruction. For curriculum developers: Embed filial piety into multi-disciplinary themes (e.g., ethics in literature, caregiving in health education). Employ real-world simulations, community service projects, and heritage interviews to contextualize values. For policymakers: Support intergenerational education through national campaigns, tax incentives for family caregiving, and digital platforms that promote positive youth-elder relations. Filial education should be an integral part of lifelong learning, rather than being limited to childhood moral education. This research contributes to theoretical discourse in several ways:

- While classical Confucianism centers on hierarchical relationships and ritual duty, this study aligns with recent scholarship that argues for more diversified, and context-sensitive practices of filial piety. The voices of youth reflect a moral evolution: one that values psychological well-being, autonomy, and mutual care over inherited obligations.
- The findings suggest that modern filial piety can be reframed as a form of civic moral education, emphasizing empathy, intergenerational solidarity, and care ethics — thus enriching broader moral education discourses beyond Confucian confines. In balancing tradition with transformation, contemporary filial piety education serves as a bridge between generations, cultures, and evolving identities.

LIMITATION & FURTHER RESEARCH

This study's sample is limited to students from two higher education institutions—Tunku Abdul Rahman University (UTAR) and Hunan Normal University. As such, it does not comprehensively represent the entire Malaysian Chinese student population. However, the sample size employed in this study is deemed adequate for population representation. The selection of

these samples is justified by the fact that this research serves as an exploratory study conducted in Malaysia. Another limitation of this study is that it focuses exclusively on university students, excluding other youth demographics who were not part of the target population.

Future studies should focus on a larger sample size to better represent the demographic proportions of the Malaysian Chinese population, thereby providing a more representative understanding of young people's attitudes toward the elderly. Additionally, as this research primarily approaches filial piety from an educational perspective, future studies should consider incorporating youth from diverse fields and professional sectors to further enhance the understanding of how to strengthen younger generations' filial responsibilities toward the elderly.

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