

# Filial Piety, Modernization, and the Challenges of Raising Children for Chinese Immigrants: Quantitative and Qualitative Evidence

ELI LIEBER  
KAZUO NIHIRA  
IRIS TAN MINK

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**ABSTRACT** *This study examines Chinese immigrant parents' perceptions of filial piety. The concept of filial piety is introduced and we discuss the impacts of modernization and immigration experience on the challenges faced by contemporary Chinese immigrants as they reconcile traditional values with the demands of sociohistorical change and child rearing in the United States. Factor analysis of a commonly applied scale demonstrates multiple aspects of filial piety and reflects modifications from traditional views. Interview results point to aspects of filial piety not fully represented in the quantitative scale and expose specific challenges in child rearing related to filial values. These findings suggest the evolution of expectations and strategies related to a cultural adaptation of filial piety. One key demand is for strategies consistent with parental values while maintaining respect for children's unique point of view. The conclusions focus on the development of approaches to understanding the evolving conceptualization and meaning of filial piety for contemporary immigrant Chinese. [Chinese, immigrants, parents, filial piety, cultural values, cultural models]*

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People of my generation believe that taking care of our parents in the future is a universal truth, but I don't know if our children will have this sense of responsibility. I believe they won't have this sense of responsibility, but maybe if they really love us, they will want to take care of us . . . if they feel close to their parents. When the time comes, then

I will know. When we were younger, our views were different from theirs. For example, we would take care of our younger siblings. But now, I feel [he] doesn't think that he will have to take care of his younger sister. He doesn't have this sense of responsibility. (mother, 517)

**T**he meaningfulness of filial piety to those of Confucian ancestry is pervasive, encompassing aspects of the self and well-being as well as the more familiar associations to family and societal behavior (Chao and Tseng 2002; Hwang 1999; Lu and Lin 1998). Although frequently oversimplified in terms of obedience, respect, and care for one's parents, the concept of filial piety is a central Confucian principle and a dominant feature of Chinese culture and family life. Filial piety speaks to issues of humanity and social and familial harmony, and is considered "the foundation of virtue and the root of civilization" (Makra 1961:3). It has been argued that social change, as evinced in modernization and immigration, erodes the dominance of such concepts and modifies their manifestation in contemporary life (Dion and Dion 1996; Hwang 1999; Marsella and Choi 1993; Yang 1996, 1998). As indicated by the Chinese immigrant mother quoted above, parents are uncertain about their hopes and expectations regarding filial behavior by contemporary youth being raised in the United States. Hopes certainly remain, but it is not clear to these parents how best to encourage these values in their developing children. Strategies from past generations are available and efforts are made to apply them. However, when these strategies are deemed inappropriate or ineffective, parents try to revise traditional approaches or develop new ones that better respond to contemporary circumstances (LeVine 1977; Super and Harkness 1986). In an exploration of the concept of filial piety as it pertains to Chinese immigrant parents in the United States, this study incorporated both quantitative and qualitative methods to consider the centrality and meaning of filial values within an immigrant population. Filial piety is examined from its Confucian foundation and with respect to modern pressures and the challenges Chinese immigrant parents face as they adjust to life in the United States.

## **FILIAL PIETY**

As a core Confucian value, the concept of filial piety sets a foundation for sociocultural beliefs and behaviors in many Asian societies. The concept is not simply a set of guidelines for hierarchical displays of respectful behavior. Filial piety is intertwined with Asian conceptions of "face," "harmony," "personal relationship," and "relational determinism,"

which address the social and moral implications of behavior (Choi and Lee 2002; Gabrenya and Hwang 1996; Ho 1976; Hu 1944; Hwang 1987; King 1991; Yang 1995, 1996; Zhang and Bond 1998). Moreover, filiality has a strong association in Confucian culture with the concept of “ren.” *Ren* has been translated as benevolence, compassion, magnanimity, goodness, love, human heartedness, charity, perfect virtue, and man-to-manness. As a concept, or human virtue, *ren* is strongly linked to human responsibility, loyalty, uprightness, and righteousness (Dy Jr 1997). “Confucius placed the practice of ‘ren’ heavily on the shoulders of those in positions of leadership . . . ‘The common people may be made to follow it (the Way), but cannot be made to understand it’ ” (Dy Jr 1997:177). Chai and Chai (1965) further explain the importance of the concepts *yi*, or righteousness, and *li*, or a code of ritual or norm of social conduct, to the foundation of filial piety. These concepts define the range of what is normative filial behavior. Together with *ti* (fraternal love), *hsiao* (filial piety) serves as the expression of *ren* in people’s day-to-day lives. From the perspective of life within families, parents represent “those in positions of leadership” and, thus, are responsible for fostering the development of *ren* in their children. From a functionalist perspective, the development and maintenance of *ren* serves to establish and maintain a Confucian sense of social harmony within the family and, thereby, in society at large. The notion that “common people” cannot be expected to understand the virtue of *ren* demands that the requisite behaviors can and must be developed through the teachings, modeling, and expectations of filial piety. The centrality of the family context in this societal obligation cannot be overstated.

Beyond other considerations of filial piety, Sung (1995) provides a more comprehensive conceptualization that includes five key aspects: love and affection, repayment, harmony, responsibility, and sacrifice. In Sung’s study, these aspects emerged as most relevant to contemporary views of filial piety based on ratings of importance across a number of ideals identified in Chinese and Korean stories of exceptional filial piety. Sung carried out factor analysis of these aspects and identified two key factors: behaviorally oriented filial piety and emotionally oriented filial piety. Sung draws attention to two aspects of filial piety related to the present study: (1) the broader nature of filial piety as understood by Asian people; and (2) the presence of multiple meaningful dimensions, behavioral and emotional, within the concept. In terms of assessment, Sung’s five aspects of filial piety, listed above, represent a core to be included in any thorough evaluation.

Whereas Sung’s analytic approach served to identify key aspects, the holistic manner by which filial piety penetrates life and reflects a constellation of values may be less tangible and require more thoughtful consideration (Sung 1995). The present study builds on Sung’s findings

in attempting to explicate further our understanding of filial piety as currently assessed, and seeks a deeper appreciation of the concept among Chinese immigrants living in the modern Western context of the United States. As described further in the method section, this study focused on six aspects of filial beliefs (caring, achievement and excellence, obedience, respect, work ethic, and responsibility) believed to capture those elucidated by Sung (1995) and Ho (1994). At the same time, the present study also reflects the language through which participants described these beliefs.

## **MODERNIZATION, IMMIGRATION, AND CHANGE**

Rapid culture change is taking place in many Confucian societies around the world. Particularly in those experiencing expanding capitalistic economies, populations are exposed to and are adopting more modern ways of life (Hwang 1999; Marsella and Choi 1993; Wu 1996; Yang 1996, 1998). Given this exposure and the development and evolution of new concepts of personhood within these societies, Hwang (1999:178) asks, "How will the significant features of social relationships among East Asian people [be] influenced?" Along with changes in traditional Asian societies, immigrants also face the challenges of adjustment to living in a Western culture. As Western values, beliefs, institutions, and cultural practices differ from those of traditional Asian cultures, immigrants to the United States face unique child-rearing challenges. Parenting with intent to foster the development of traditional Asian values can be complex within a broader society whose features are unsupportive of and perhaps inconsistent with these values. Particularly with respect to the influence of the U.S. education system on developing children, and the importance of education to Asian people, immigrant parents must strive to understand the relevant cultural practices and apply strategies that support the development of the traditional values they wish their children to possess (Bronfenbrenner 1977, 1979; Miller and Goodnow 1995).

Trends toward smaller families, increased mobility, greater numbers of females in the job market, and other social and economic changes have had a major impact on the logistics, practicality, and meaning of filial behavior for contemporary Chinese (Ho 1996; Hwang 1999; Yeh 2003; Zhan and Montgomery 2003). Ho's review of the filial piety research literature leads him to conclude that, "traditional filial piety is on the decline" (Ho 1996:165). Although research findings indicate that filial beliefs and practices remain salient and important to today's Chinese, it is recognized that these values are changing as a function of modernization in Chinese societies across the globe (Hwang 1999; Lan 2002; Liu et al.

2000; Ng et al. 2002; Wong and Ujimoto 1998; Yeh and Bedford 2003). Yang (1998) describes a variety of psychological adjustments Chinese may make in response to the sociocultural change of modernizing societies. These approaches reflect ideological perspectives and values with an emphasis on issues of cultural identity and change. Yang (1998:90) states, "Ordinary Chinese people have been under constant pressure for change in their ideas, behaviors. . . . As a result, specific psychological and behavioral changes have occurred in various areas of daily life and accumulated to form larger changes in life styles and institutional systems." It is reasonable to expect that the conceptualization and expectations related to traditional concepts such as filial piety will evolve in the lives of these individuals and communities. Key goals of the present research, thus, are to explore this evolution and seek insights into the nature of change.

Building on earlier work exploring quality of life as a function of acculturation and Asian identity (Lieber et al. 2001), this study considers how the traditional values of filial piety may continue to play an important role in the lives of Chinese immigrants to the United States. Theoretically, we argue that in the course of adjustment to life in modernizing and Western contexts, Chinese immigrants would be challenged in an effort to maintain a traditional perspective on the core Confucian value of filial piety. Accordingly, it is likely that a variety of strategies, explicit and implicit, would be employed by Chinese parents to maintain this value in their lives. Thus, this study looks to identify and understand the frustrations parents experience and the expectations and hopes they have for themselves as parents and for their children's socialization with regard to filial values.

Specifically, we hypothesized that: (1) Chinese immigrant parents' conceptualization of filial piety is being modified from traditional Confucian teachings to concepts and behavior that reflect the influence of modernization and adaptation to American culture, (2) the contemporary concept of filial piety will be revealed in factor analysis results as a multiple factor structure, and (3) insights into the nature of this evolving conceptualization of filial piety will be available through qualitative reports of immigrant parents' views regarding the challenges of child rearing in the U.S. context.

## **METHOD**

### **Participants**

Chinese first-generation immigrant parents ( $N = 128$ ; 69 women and 59 men) living in the Los Angeles metropolitan area served as participants

for this study. The participants' average age was 44.02 years ( $SD = 5.08$  years) and they had lived in the United States for an average of 16.25 years ( $SD = 7.37$  years). They were generally of middle-class socioeconomic status (SES), with a Hollingshead (1975) rating of 3.93 ( $SD = 1.44$ ). They were well educated, with 86.25 percent having at least a high school education and 57.25 percent with a college or university degree. Participants had immigrated from China (50 percent), Taiwan (37.5 percent), and Hong Kong (12.5 percent). Reported employment status for women was 39.1 percent unemployed/homemaker; 7.3 percent part time; and 53.6 percent full time. For men, 3.4 percent were unemployed/homemaker; 8.5 percent part time; and 88.1 percent full time. Participant households include an average of 2.51 children ( $SD = 0.82$ ), with children being 32 percent girls, 68 percent boys and having an average age of 12.07 years ( $SD = 2.61$  years).

## Instruments

***Filial Piety Scale.*** Ho's (1994) adaptation of Ho and Lee's (1974) filial piety scale was applied to assess filial beliefs. This instrument was initially developed to represent "all of the essential components of filial piety" (Ho and Lee 1974:305) in a study of the relations between filial piety and authoritarianism. The scale was later adapted for broader applications in research examining the relations between filial piety and personality characteristics, parental attitudes, and child-rearing practices (Ho 1994; Ho and Kang 1984; Ho and Lee 1974). Although several versions, many with reduced item sets, have been developed for various applications, the full 22-item version presented in Ho (1994) was applied here as a benchmark for indexing reported levels of filial piety. The original English translation of the filial piety scale, provided by Ho, was edited for colloquial U.S. English expressions. Using a 6-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree*), respondents indicate their level of agreement with each statement describing a principle or behavior related to filial values. The scale includes statements such as, "The ultimate crime is being disrespectful to one's parents and failing to care for them," "Children should not travel to faraway places when their parents are still living," and "To continue the family line is not the primary purpose of marriage." This version of the scale has demonstrated satisfactory reliability in samples of Chinese mothers, fathers, grandparents, and college students, with coefficient alphas ranging from .77 to .83 (Ho 1994).

***Immigration Experiences.*** Open-ended interviews were conducted to explore parents' descriptions of challenges to raising children in the United States and their views of any "generation gap" between themselves and

their children. Interview questions were very broad; for example, "Let's talk about whether it is easier or harder to raise a child in [country of origin] than in the U.S." and, "How do you feel about the educational system in [country of origin] and the U.S." Furthermore, there were no specific questions or interview probes targeting filial piety or the specific aspects of filial beliefs that subsequently emerged from the data. The interview introduction and questions were written initially in English and then translated into Chinese. These research materials were then back-translated and pretested with a small preliminary sample to confirm the proper functioning of the materials (Brislin 1980). In each case, two bilingual individuals, who spoke English and either Mandarin or Cantonese, conducted the initial translation and back-translation. The research team, including the translators, then met to reconcile any discrepancies in the functional meanings of the two versions. Application of the two versions, English and Chinese, was monitored to ensure that there were no apparent differences between the two in terms of participants' reactions and responses.

A subsample of 74 parents (40 women and 34 men) participated in these interviews. In analyses comparing this subsample with participants not providing interview data, no significant differences were found for any key variables (i.e., filial piety scores, gender or age of children, parent country of origin, parent age or time in the United States, and household SES). Interview responses provided deeper insight into the psychosocial perspectives of the participants and their thinking about filial values, beliefs, and practices. The University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) EthnoNotes system (Lieber et al. 2003), a tool for the management, integration, and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data, was applied in organizing, interpreting, and analyzing the interview transcripts. All excerpts were coded on the basis of a coding scheme developed to provide a framework for understanding the parents' perspectives on their children's development and their approaches to child rearing. The excerpts analyzed in this study were those coded with at least one of the six codes related to filial beliefs: caring, achievement and excellence, obedience, respect, work ethic, and responsibility. Coding of data from approximately 20% of the cases was subjected to interrater reliability analyses. For these cases, coding from two independent coders was compared to validate the reliability of coding decisions among team members. Levels of interrater agreement were found to be acceptable, with an average Cohen's Kappa statistic for interrater reliability of .73, and ranging from .61 to .82. The remaining cases were subsequently coded by at least one of the trained coders with occasional checks to ensure that acceptable levels of coding reliability were maintained.

## Procedures

Data for this study were collected as part of a larger investigation that focused on the adaptation of Asian immigrant families with young children to the United States. Participants were recruited through Chinese area schools and other social service organizations serving the Chinese community. Eligible families were contacted by phone and, upon acceptance to participate, home interviews were scheduled. Interviews were conducted in the participants' homes in the language in which they reported feeling most comfortable (English, Mandarin, or Cantonese). Scale data were collected by traditional mail. Participants received nominal financial compensation (\$30) for their participation.

## RESULTS

### Quantitative Results

An exploratory factor analysis was carried out using data from the 22-item version of Ho and Lee's (1974) filial piety scale. The goal of this analysis was to identify those items and dimensions that emerge as empirically meaningful to this population. Interpretation of the obtained factors was guided by the empirical relationship between the filial piety scale and the constructs examined in past work (Ho 1994; Ho and Kang 1984; Ho and Lee 1974). Our optimal result, using principal-factors analysis with Oblimax rotation, included three factors comprising 16 items from Ho's (1994) original 22 items (see Table 1). Factors were determined through examination of the scree plot, eigenvalues, and degree of interpretability (Fabrigar et al. 1999). These factors represent eigenvalues 4.106, 2.51, and 1.37, respectively, and account for 49.94 percent of total variance. Although the Oblimax rotation allowed for factors to correlate, no significant relations between factors were found.

The psychometric properties of this reduced-item set and identified factors were further examined. As a whole, this subset of items shows a strong representation of the original filial piety scale, as the total score with the retained 16 items correlated to .97 with the total score represented by Ho and Lee's original 22 items. Internal consistency for a reduced-item scale (i.e., using the 16 items identified in the factor analysis) is satisfactory (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .74$ ). For the three individual factors extracted (scree plot, eigenvalues, and degree of interpretability), Cronbach's alphas are .86, .74, and .59, respectively.

The goal of the factor analysis was to identify and explore any meaningful factors on which the Chinese immigrants may show varying levels of

**Table 1. Filial Piety Item Factor Matrix**

| Item   | Factor |     |     |
|--|--------|-----|-----|
|  | 1      | 2   | 3   |
| Rearing sons to provide for oneself in old age should no longer be the main reason for having children.            | .91    |     |     |
| Becoming famous to bring honor to your parents should not be the most important reason to strive for success.      | .84    |     |     |
| To continue the family line is not the primary purpose of marriage.  | .81    |     |     |
| It is all right for children to protest when parents scold them without reason.                                    | .66    |     |     |
| Parents should not interfere with their children's freedom to choose a career.                                     | .64    |     |     |
| No matter what, children should always obey their parents  |        | .63 |     |
| The ultimate crime is being disrespectful to one's parents and failing to care for them.                           |        | .60 |     |
| If a man's wife and mother argue, the man should tell his wife to listen to his mother.                            |        | .54 |     |
| Children should respect their parents, no matter how their parents conduct themselves.                             |        | .49 |     |
| Any sacrifice is worthwhile for the sake of filial piety.  |        | .46 |     |
| The main reason not to do dangerous things is to avoid causing one's parents to worry.                             |        | .46 |     |
| Children should not travel to faraway places while their parents are still living.                                 |        | .46 |     |
| Children should live according to the beliefs and attitudes of their father even after he has passed away.         |        | .45 |     |
| Children should be eternally grateful and reciprocate the love and kindness they have received from their parents. |        | .43 |     |
| Children do not have to respect the people respected by their parents  |        |     | .94 |
| Children do not have to seek parental advice when there is a problem. They can make their own decisions.           |        |     | .45 |

Note.  $N = 128$ . Loadings less than .27 are omitted from table.

filial belief. Interpretation of the obtained factors distinguishes between Factor 1 as representing modified views on traditional aspects of filial piety, Factor 2 as representing classic views and principles of filial piety, and Factor 3 as representing children's dependence on parents. The subset of 16 items were selected from Ho and Lee's full 22-item scale on the basis of the strength of their loadings on a primary factor within the model relative to any loadings on other factors. It should be noted that, because

**Table 2. Filial Piety Scale and Factor Descriptive Statistics by Gender**

| Scale                            | Subsample             |           |                         |           | <i>p</i>  |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------|-------------------------|-----------|-----------|
|                                  | Male ( <i>n</i> = 59) |           | Female ( <i>n</i> = 69) |           |           |
|                                  | <i>M</i>              | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i>                | <i>SD</i> |           |
| Filial Piety total               | 3.83                  | 0.45      | 3.18                    | 0.54      | <.001     |
| Factor 1—Modified Filial Beliefs | 4.44                  | 0.67      | 2.39                    | 0.63      | <.001     |
| Factor 2—Classic Filial Beliefs  | 3.69                  | 0.66      | 3.45                    | 0.71      | <i>ns</i> |
| Factor 3—Filial Dependence       | 2.97                  | 0.87      | 3.89                    | 1.14      | <.001     |

*Note.* All scores are scaled in the direction of stronger filial beliefs—higher scores indicate greater agreement with filial value.

Factor 1 includes predominantly negatively worded statements, distinctions between Factors 1 and 2 require further investigation using different instruments.

Table 2 shows significant mean differences between male and female participants for total filial piety, Factor 1 (modified filial beliefs), and Factor 3 (filial dependence), but not Factor 2 (classic filial beliefs). No significant results were found in analyses examining the influence of child gender, child age, or parent country of origin on any filial piety scale score.

### Qualitative Data Results

The open-ended semistructured interviews focused on parents' perceptions of whether a "generation gap" exists between themselves and their children, and how they frame and express the nature of this gap. Using the UCLA EthnoNotes system, transcripts were analyzed for content across a variety of themes, and relevant excerpts were coded on the basis of the coding system described in the Method section. For the present study, excerpts coded as being related to issues of caring, excellence and achievement striving, responsibility, work ethic, obedience, and respect were analyzed for their contribution to an understanding of filial piety. Following a description of general findings, more specific results are presented along with a brief discussion of their relevance to parents' hopes and expectations surrounding filial values.

Two broad findings emerged from the qualitative data that consistently cut across the more specific parental concerns presented below. Both relate to filial issues of cultural pride and family lineage—that is, maintaining and promoting cultural heritage and the family across generations. The first of these involves levels of aspiration they hold for their children across many domains. Parents reported clear concerns that their

children's levels of aspiration were far lower than they recalled having during their own childhoods, and that they held for their children. In their words, "I think kids of this generation tend to expect so much from their parents and then they don't feel like they need to really work to gain what they need" (mother, 207); "I have greater expectations than he does. . . . I feel [he] should have more 'A's,' but he says, 'It's not easy to get so many A's, a lot of people get a 'C.' So to me he's saying, 'That's good enough' " (father, 801). These parents were not satisfied with their children's willingness to settle for the ordinary. This concern was particularly clear when parents drew reference to their own efforts, past and present, to provide opportunities for their children's futures, and their expectations that their children capitalize on these opportunities.

The second broad finding involves parents' concerns about their children's adoption of the "American style." They expressed ambivalence about the influence of the U.S. education system and culture, and frustrations about the many occasions in which they struggled with conflict between this influence and Chinese ways of thinking. Such concerns are clear in parents' reports: "[School] is too different from her family education and Chinese traditions. They don't teach her how to respect parents and the elderly. They only teach her American styles, which often contradict our Chinese ways of thinking" (mother, 515); "My wife has a good influence on my child, but doesn't understand much of America. She tells her from the Chinese viewpoint. Since Americans' viewpoints are different, whether she can accept it or not depends on herself" (father, 106); "He is more Americanized, like the native born. . . . Yet, they are still deeply influenced by us. So they are stuck in the middle: between education from the West and from the East. They are probably neither Chinese nor Americans" (father, 508). Here we see indications of parents' understanding that their children are in unique educational and social environments and acknowledgment of uncertainty about how to respond as parents.

In describing these overriding concerns and interpretations, parents also talked about teaching and monitoring strategies for coping with their situation. For example, one mother commented, "I always teach them that they have to work hard, and then they will gain something. . . . I'm trying to encourage them" (mother, 850). Another said, "You always need an adult to watch over them from behind. . . . you begin watching when they are small so they can develop a sense of responsibility" (mother, 522). As illustrated further below, these parents generally recognized the need to find some compromise in their expectations. Consequently, they tried to understand the challenges faced by their children. They attempted to implement sometimes new and unfamiliar parenting practices to find a balance that would maximize aspects of their children's development

and, at the same time, enhance their parental efficacy. Solutions were sought through efforts to understand the characteristics and influence of the U.S. culture, maintain respect for their children, and explore the meaning of the traditional beliefs and values they held. They sought to discover effective and feasible parenting approaches that would best serve the unique needs of their developing children.

Analysis of the specific issues coded as related to caring, excellence and achievement striving, responsibility, work ethic, obedience, or respect offers insights into the challenges related to filial piety that were salient to these immigrant parents. Filial piety permeates many aspects of life, with observable and reportable features working together in dynamic and complex ways. Although parents did not generally comment on this, Asian sociocultural history provides a unique framework that serves to organize thinking about these issues as a coherent whole. The complex content of the excerpts reveals that these key issues are best appreciated in the context of parents' holistic interpretations of their lives.

### **Caring For Others**

Caring for others . . . it seems like the kids that grow up here are not very good at caring for others, unlike our . . . [wife interrupts and offers "self-centered"]. Yeah, self-centered, like my daughter. In everything she thinks about herself. It's a different story with others, of course, she helps her good friends, but she still thinks about herself first. Unlike us, the way we treat others; to us family value is very important. You have to take care of your family, take care of others; if you lose out a bit, and others benefit from it, it doesn't matter. (father, 106)

Of the parents, 72 percent provided comments coded as relevant to issues about caring for others. Parents' concerns in this area focus on impressions of children as self-centered, individualistic, and self-promoting. Children were viewed as having a lower standard of responsibility for and capability of caring as compared to parents' hopes and expectations. "They feel I'm a busybody for being caring. I tell them that I am caring for others, not cutting into other people's business. They have more of the Western way of thinking, like don't bother with other people's business" (mother, 135); "That's how American education is in many things. If it is your own problem, you have to deal with it yourself. But, but if it is not your problem . . . don't easily get involved" (mother, 518). Parents attributed many of these problems to the influence of U.S. education and culture. This is a conflict between the more Western individualist perspectives of thinking of oneself before others and the more Asian collectivist perspective of thinking of others—with an emphasis on family responsibility and obligation—before oneself (Markus and Kitayama 1991). Overall, caring for others was seen as an area of behavior and attitudes that needed to be taught by parents to raise children's standards of caring. These

concerns address traditional filial-piety issues of comfort and security for parents and the family. That is, will children be willing and able to meet the parents' needs as they age? Will caring concerns emerge as strong and effective motivators for the children and encourage behaviors that are expected of them as they grow into adulthood? Or, given the changes related to modernization, are these expectations less realistic than they may have been for past generations?

### **Excellence and Achievement Striving, Responsibility, and Work Ethic**

It's different. My son is in tenth grade, going to high school. After he graduates, he will look for a job and go to college. He wants to find an easy job, study computer in college. I said, "You can't just learn one thing, you have to learn everything. If you cannot do one thing, then you still have something else. Right? If you cannot do one job, you can still find another." I teach him that. If the children don't understand, I will teach them. (mother, 852)

The content coded as relevant to excellence and achievement striving, responsibility, or work ethics is intertwined and will be presented as a whole. The percentages of parents who provided comments coded as excellence and achievement striving, responsibility, and work ethic were 57 percent, 73 percent, and 65 percent, respectively. Parents reported that their children's levels of striving, ambition, or determination were often inadequate. They were disappointed and frustrated by their children's apparent willingness to settle for the mediocre, average, or ordinary. Despite parents' expectations and hopes, they saw their children as seeking to do the minimum necessary or avoiding a task altogether unless they saw it as "fun" or offering some tangible return. Parents expressed a need to monitor, remind, and communicate about the tasks to which they feel their children must attend. Children were seen to look for the easy way out of challenges, offering less than their "best" efforts. They showed lower standards and expectations for themselves than their parents had for them, and many seemed to believe that they could simply attain their goals without any exceptional or systematic effort.

I think they still need to improve their sense of responsibility. I hope that one day soon they will get married and become fathers. Then they will understand why their mother was trying to promote a sense of responsibility. . . . Now, they fight against you in many things, attack, criticize. When you try to teach, they think you dislike them, so they attack, like acting in self-defense. (mother, 144)

"Working hard, I feel this is a must, a basic thing to do. If you want to be able to gain a footing in this society, working hard is a must. There should be no question about it. If they feel they can [get away with] not doing it, then they won't. So we need to continue communicating with them and discuss with them" (father, 117); "[He] is supposed to understand that he needs to work hard. He claims that he understands it,

but he's not showing it. Kids these days haven't necessarily had to work hard. They feel they can get whatever they want" (father, 207). In these more modern times, children's schooling continues to be emphasized as a child's primary "work" and responsibility, and parents expressed relative satisfaction to the extent that this education was taken seriously. Although ideally children would offer more help at home, household chores and other responsibilities were secondary and of lesser concern to parents: "They are pretty responsible because when we ask them to do something, they will do it and they recognize that being a good student and learning are their responsibilities, that's why they work hard to do it" (father, 803); "Sense of responsibility, yes, in certain areas. For example, I want the children to do their homework and I watch their schoolwork closely. But when it comes to things like doing dishes, their sense of responsibilities isn't there" (mother, 702).

Parents did, however, express concern that their children expected to be provided for by their parents without apparent intentions to meet and take over this responsibility as they grew up. Parents did not offer any explicit attributions for this problem but expressed attempts to teach the work ethic and values of ambition through their modeling and verbal encouragement. Furthermore, they sought to stimulate this development by making comparisons to behavior exhibited by others or from their own past. These issues have implications for parents' hopes and expectations that their children would maintain, contribute to, and raise family reputation and standards as they grew into adulthood. That is, would the children bring honor to the family through their achievements in the broader society? Parents worried that their apparently lazy and less ambitious children might not be able to maintain these standards as family roles shifted over time.

## Obedience

When we were young, whatever our parents said, unconditionally, under any conditions we would listen. But now you have to give them a reason, some explanations why they have to do it. Often there needs to be some discussion and sometimes they still choose to not listen to us. (mother, 517)

Eighty percent of parents commented on obedience issues. Key concerns in this area appear to be focused on parents' views that children demand explanations and compelling reasons for parents' obedience demands. Children were reported to resist, ignore, or make excuses in response to such demands and insist on equilateral discussion prior to their decision for compliance. Parents were frustrated and disappointed with children's unwillingness simply to comply, as had been the case in earlier generations in Asia where they had grown up listening to parents and

elders: “He’s less obedient; very rigid, stubborn, and self-centered. The children here are too self-centered and it’s hard for them to tolerate others” (mother, 514); “In terms of obedience, I think my values and my child’s values are not alike. Of course, I keep an open mind. That is, if I compare my relationship with my parents to their relationship with me, they are very disobedient. But in terms of important principles, they still have to follow” (father, 117).

For these families, compliance was sought through discussion and negotiation to acceptable terms as determined, at least in part, by the child—certainly an adjustment from the absolute unquestionable obedience expected of children during previous generations. Parents attributed the pressure to make this compromise to the influence of U.S. culture. They felt that U.S. children were more independent, individualistic, and self-centered and, thus, more resistant to parental guidance. This is clearly an area where parents were forced to accept discrepancies in the pace and manner by which they and their children adapted to U.S. culture (Markus and Kitayama 1991; Sue et al. 1998). Parents reported efforts to participate in discussion and to provide compelling explanations for requests while trying not to pressure for “absolute obedience”: “Generally they listen, but as they grow older they will express their opinions. As long as they can explain their attitudes and I don’t think it’s a big deal, we can make a compromise. It’s negotiable, as long as it’s not a big problem” (mother, 702); “From the viewpoint of Chinese, this is something everyone knows: parents can never be equal to a child. From his view, he thinks they are equal. This is one point where we are entirely different. He feels he is obedient, in terms of U.S. obedience, but in terms of being filial, he doesn’t have this kind of concept” (father, 715); “Children here are very independent. It has to do with society and education. So I do not force my children. I’ll scold them if they do something extreme. But we can’t change them because the system in this society is like that” (father, 514); “They listen to what I say. But this kind of listening, they listen but still have a rebellious mentality inside, don’t like it, right? Being obedient in front of you and disobedient behind you [a Chinese proverb], it’s still there” (father, 522).

It is noteworthy that parents appeared to acknowledge their own doubts about absolute obedience, and it is likely that such doubts were in some way communicated to their children. Thus, attempts were made to find compromise positions wherever possible, yet parents did report insisting on obedience when it came to certain important circumstances and principles of life. With respect to filial piety hopes and expectations, these concerns speak to issues of family and social harmony, parental control and authority, and parents’ ability to effectively guide children through their lives.

## Respect for Elders and Authority

Here, everyone is referred to by their first name. That's why, naturally, there doesn't seem to be a hierarchy among people. I am the same as you. Because we live close, we have regular contact with my parents and I have to constantly remind my children. For example, when we are getting into the car, they fight to sit in the front seat. I tell them that there's an elderly person in the car. They have to sit in the back. Things like that. I think this is something you need to teach, not because there's a difference between living in the US or in Taiwan. If you don't teach it, the kids still won't know it. (mother, 612)

Seventy-three percent of parents provided responses coded as relevant to respect. These responses indicate concerns both about their children's current behavior and expectations for future behavior. Many parents reported that their children seemed to understand the concept of respect and associated behaviors, but were not always acting as the parents wished. There were frustrations with the lack of any apparent social hierarchy that would dictate appropriate and respectful behavior as determined by relationships in the United States (Yang 1995). Similar to issues of obedience, there were attributions to "American style" and the influence of U.S. culture and education in parents' explanations of children's questioning of whether to show respect to anyone without convincing reasons: "She still respects the elderly; she knows she should. However, she believes that while she should respect, if the elders are not nice to her, she won't respect them. Yet in Chinese tradition, no matter what, you still respect [the elderly]" (father, 106); "Their concept is there still, because they have studied in Taiwan and they know how to respect elders. But, it's whether they are willing to or what they are thinking in their hearts. They have learned some of this American style. In America, you see the old and the young are treated as equals. There is an advantage to this, to not let them suppress themselves; there is a disadvantage as well" (father, 612).

Parents further referred to their own past and previous generations regarding how respect was offered to the elderly. According to these parents, in the United States, there is no apparent age or status-based hierarchy among people. Thus, children must be taught, monitored, and frequently reminded why, when, where, and how to show respect. Similarly, some parents reported that the distance between young and old was smaller so the children were not "afraid" as they had been in past generations: "I try to teach them the old way because I feel that respect for elderly is most important. I always tell them that if you respect people, then people will respect you—no matter who it is. And I don't like that some people call their mom, not 'mom,' but their name or whatever. I don't allow them to do that" (mother, 850); "There is a difference between now and before. Before, we were more respectful of the elderly, we were more fearful of them, there was more distance between us and the elderly. . . . Now, they

still respect the elderly, but not like us before, we were afraid of the elderly. They can get along with them pretty well” (father, 145).

Another parent commented:

Maybe I'm a little bit better, definitely, especially on respecting teachers, the authority, the elderly, and the pastors. I think my sons are not as good, but they're not really out of line. It is probably due to the way I teach them. Sometimes there are teachers, especially in America, who set bad examples for the students. So I told them even though they're the teachers, they're not always right, which is true. Also, there are teachers who mislead children. That is why they are somewhat influenced by what I think. (mother, 803)

These notions suggest that both within the family and the broader society, children are not facing traditional social sanctions for their display of untraditional behavior. In parents' perceptions of their children's disrespectful behavior, there were concerns about losing face and bringing dishonor to the family (Hwang 1987, 1999; Yang 1995). Yet, for example, parents faced the dilemma of teaching children to respect elders and authorities (e.g., teachers) even though these elders and authorities did not work to guide the children in ways consistent with parents' expectations and goals. Particularly when it came to schooling as a primary childhood activity and of such importance to Chinese families, it was distressing to these parents to feel that the traditional behaviors they encouraged might not be supported or respected within the educational environment. These concerns challenged parents in their desire to guide their children and negotiate a fit between their experiences and understanding of the U.S. cultural context and traditional expectations and parenting practices.

In summary, this study explored contemporary Chinese immigrant parents' perspectives on filial piety. Assuming that filial values, beliefs, and practices continue to be meaningful and desirable in this population, we investigated how they conceptualized filial piety and how this conceptualization maps onto parenting goals and practices. Our findings offer insights into those aspects of filial piety that the parents considered most important and relevant to their lives, their understanding of the challenges they encountered in working toward these standards, and the strategies they learned to adopt in socializing their children to maximize their own life opportunities and, at the same time, ensure the maintenance of core Chinese cultural values.

### **Quantitative Findings**

Quantitative results demonstrate that three interpretable factors can be identified within this sample based on the items in Ho and Lee's (1974) filial piety scale. These factors are distinguished both in terms of level of

abstraction and focus on different aspects of filial values. In contrast to Factor 2 (classic filial beliefs), the items loading on Factors 1 (modified filial beliefs), and 3 (filial dependence) are notably more domain-specific and represent less-traditional views of filial piety (see Table 1). The absence of significant correlations among the factors suggests that the manner in which individuals think about caring for parents and making major life decisions may be less-directly linked to the traditional core of filial beliefs than they were in the past. These results demonstrate distinctions between the endorsement of items reflecting a traditional set of filial beliefs (Factor 2) and modified filial views (Factors 1 and 3) that may have consistently mapped onto these beliefs in past generations. More generally, the factor analysis results suggest that for this contemporary immigrant population, the concept of filial piety may include multiple aspects—only three of which are represented by items on the scale.

Considering mean scores, it is important to note that the scale score for negatively worded items is reversed. Thus, the scores are scaled toward agreement with filial beliefs—higher scores indicate greater agreement. Fathers' mean scores fall above the response scale midpoint (i.e., 3.5) for total filial piety, Factor 1, and Factor 2, indicating their general agreement with statements of filial value. Mothers' mean scores show an opposite pattern, with these same scores falling largely below the scale midpoint, indicating a general disagreement with filial piety statements. Only for Factor 3 (filial dependence) does this pattern reverse, with mothers reporting significantly greater agreement with filial dependence than fathers. Immigrant fathers' total filial piety and Factor 1 (modified filial beliefs) scores are also significantly higher than those of immigrant mothers. Immigrant mothers may find themselves in a context that offers greater freedom and opportunity than that of more traditional male-oriented Chinese societies (Dion and Dion 1996; Root 1998). It is noteworthy that males and females in our sample showed significant differences in Factor 1, but not in Factor 2 (classic filial beliefs). The classic virtue of filial piety is equally embraced by both men and women in our sample, although the men uphold and support the practice of modified filial beliefs at significantly higher levels than women. This result is consistent with Suzuki's (2000) findings that, although no differences were observed in areas of core conceptual filial values, Asian Americans scored significantly higher than Euro-Americans in behaviorally oriented areas of filial piety. Finally, all filial piety scale results are consistent with the hypothesized effects of exposure to the sociocultural forces of modernization taking place in Chinese communities throughout the world and the additional challenges for immigrants (Glenn 1983; Hwang 1999; Marsella and Choi 1993; Sung 1985; Wu 1996; Yang 1996, 1998).

## DISCUSSION

Originally [my daughter] grew up in China, so her values basically are still pretty similar to those of Chinese children. She would still assume the responsibility to look after her parents as we get old. But after coming to America, she feels that Americans are not quite the same. When they are grown, and if the parents are not nice to them, they don't have to look after their parents. As for her, she still says to us, "I still have responsibility toward you." (father, 106)

This quote captures both the hopes that are likely shared by many immigrant Chinese parents and the salience of distinctions between Chinese and U.S. culture that may influence their children and render certain expectations unrealistic. These and other issues identified in the qualitative data analysis offered rich insights into whether: (1) filial piety continues to play an important and meaningful role in Chinese immigrant families, and (2) how the conceptualization of this concept may be changing for these families.

The qualitative data provide consistent and clear indications of Chinese immigrant parents' perspectives on challenges to traditional conceptions of filial piety and strategies they develop for socializing children toward these values. Motivation to meet these challenges suggests the persistence of filial piety as a meaningful and important cultural value. Parents expressed a need to modify their expectations in response to both their understanding of their children's behavior and experiences and an awareness and acknowledgment of their own adjustment to life in the United States. Parents' reports allowed for a framing and discussion of those areas most salient to key issues of filial values (i.e., caring, work ethic, excellence and achievement striving, responsibility, obedience, and respect) and the challenges they saw in socializing their children to appreciate and respect these values and maintain their Chinese cultural heritage. Their comments reveal a clear anticipation that the establishment of a foundation for these beliefs and values is necessary for the core cultural values associated with filial piety to exist in their children as they grow into adulthood and raise future generations. Thus, parents' motivations for meeting the responsibility of socializing these values in their children are apparent, as are their efforts to develop strategies for negotiating the inconsistencies, and associated obstacles, between Chinese and U.S. values and contexts (Dy Jr 1997; Hwang 1999; Yang 1998).

The interview responses provided a holistic perspective on filial piety, offering a more comprehensive view of how the concept is thought about in the daily lives of immigrant Chinese parents than could be gained from a questionnaire alone. The qualitative findings map directly onto Sung's 1995 description of filial piety factors and, as compared to the quantitative results, provide more detailed information about those aspects of

the model. Examination of parents' reports related to caring, excellence and achievement striving, responsibility, work, obedience, and respect illuminates the nature by which the issues cut across the more specific aspects of Sung's model representing love and affection, responsibility, repayment, sacrifice, and harmony. This finding indicates the complexity of thought and action required for parents to balance their own beliefs and feelings about filial piety, their beliefs, values, and understanding of the U.S. cultural context, and their expectations, strategies, and hopes as parents.

## CONCLUSION

Revisiting this study's primary hypothesis in light of the findings, filial piety appears to remain a meaningful and socially relevant concept for this population of Chinese immigrant parents. Yet both the quantitative and qualitative results show strong indications that experiences with modernization and immigration to the relatively more egalitarian U.S. culture have had a discernable impact on parents' conceptualization of filial piety. Our data do not allow us to disentangle themes attributable to either modernization or immigration experience, thus interpretation of how these forces of change may impact the modification of filial views is taken as a whole. These parents articulated the challenge of translating traditional beliefs and values into practical applications within the particular sociocultural context in which they live. As times change and new contexts are encountered, this process will continue to demand flexibility and innovative responsiveness—a modernized response (Marsella and Choi 1993).

Finally, as Chinese immigrants work to understand the challenges they face as parents and make efforts to develop effective and satisfying parenting strategies, expectations and strategies related to socializing filial piety appear to be evolving. The parents studied here provide evidence of their efforts to develop and apply strategies that are consistent with their own values yet maximize an understanding and respect for their children's needs and unique challenges. The quantitative results show that Chinese immigrant parents' conceptualization of filial piety may consist of multiple aspects. However, the limitations of this commonly applied measure in assessing the evolution of filial piety are apparent in light of this study's qualitative findings. Further development of quantitative assessment for filial piety must look to the possible variety of aspects related to the concept and strive to represent the various components in reliable and valid ways for the populations in which they will be applied. The qualitative findings offer insights into how traditional conceptualizations of filial values

have been challenged, the processes parents engage in as they seek to reconcile their traditions and the pressures of modern U.S. society, and those aspects of filial piety that demand attention for full representation of the concept. Further focus on this evolution and assessment of filial piety will allow us to understand better the importance, meaning, and function of this core Confucian concept to modernizing societies.

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ELI LIEBER is Research Psychologist and codirector of the Department of Psychiatry and Biobehavioral Sciences/Neuropsychiatric Institute, Center for Culture and Health, Fieldwork and Qualitative Data Research Laboratory, at the University of California, Los Angeles. KAZUO NIHIRA is Professor Emeritus, Department of Psychiatry and Biobehavioral Sciences, UCLA. IRIS TAN MINK is Associate Research Psychologist, Department of Psychiatry and Biobehavioral Sciences, UCLA.

## NOTE

*Acknowledgments.* We wish to express our appreciation for research support to the Fieldwork and Qualitative Data Laboratory, Center for Culture and Health, UCLA (NICHD Grant 5P30 HD004612, Jean de Vellis, Principal Investigator; Thomas Weisner, co-Principal Investigator); the Department of Psychiatry and Biobehavioral Sciences and NICHD Grant P01-HD11944 awarded to Kazuo Nihira and Iris Tan Mink; and NICHD grant R01-HD31856, awarded to Iris Tan Mink. We also wish to thank the families for their dedicated participation and willingness to provide the rich data that makes such work possible, Lai Ling Chau for the many hours she spent preparing the interview data for analysis and assisting in their interpretation, and Bob Edgerton and Andrew Fuligni for their insightful feedback on earlier drafts of the manuscript.

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