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# A Comparison of Contemporary Filial Piety in Rural and Non-Rural China and Taiwan

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A Comparison of Contemporary Filial Piety in Rural and Non-Rural China and Taiwan

Li Ping Su

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Science

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## ABSTRACT

### A Comparison of Contemporary Filial Piety in Rural and Non-Rural China and Taiwan

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There is evidence that industrialization and urbanization has led to an increase of immigration to urban areas for employment and has led to a change of family structure and connection between parents and adult children in Chinese societies. However, little research has compared different Chinese societies, as well as rural and non-rural regions. This study compared the adult children's current level of filial piety, between non-rural and rural regions, and between males and females using data from an international study of countries in East Asia. Overall, China reported higher level of filial piety as compared to Taiwan. Moreover, for the regional differences, the China rural group also showed higher levels of filial piety than the China non-rural group. The gender differences between these two regions further explain this phenomenon. Both male and female non-rural groups and the female rural group reported similar amount of caregiving. However, the male rural China group reported significantly lower levels of caregiving than the female rural China group as well as both male and female non-rural groups. These results help fill the literature gap in contemporary filial piety between societies in East Asia.

Keywords: filial piety, filial attitude, attitude of financial support, caregiving, cross-culture, China, Taiwan, non-rural, rural, gender

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title Page .....	i
ABSTRACT.....	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iii
LIST OF TABLES .....	vi
FIGURE.....	vi
Introduction.....	1
Literature Review.....	3
The System of Family in Confucianism .....	3
Historical Gender Differences .....	3
Historical Filial Piety within Families .....	4
Current Movement in Industrialization and Urbanization .....	5
Differences between China and Taiwan .....	5
Research on Filial Piety in Contemporary China and Taiwan.....	6
Filial attitude .....	6
Financial support.....	7
Caregiving.....	8
Filial piety in families with only one child .....	8
Rural and Non-Rural Comparisons.....	9
Gender Differences in Filial Piety .....	11
Purpose of Study.....	12
Methods.....	13

Procedure .....	13
Sample Characteristics.....	14
Measures .....	15
Filial attitude .....	15
Attitude of financial support .....	15
Caregiving.....	16
Rural vs. non-rural region.....	16
Control variables.....	17
Analysis.....	17
Results.....	17
Preliminary Analysis.....	17
Descriptive Statistics.....	18
Differences between China and Taiwan .....	19
Differences between Rural and Non-rural China and Taiwan.....	20
Gender Differences within Rural and Non-rural China and Taiwan .....	21
Discussion.....	22
Clinical Implications .....	26
Limitations and Future Directions .....	27
References.....	29
Table 1 .....	39
Table 2 .....	40
Table 3 .....	41

Table 4 .....	44
Figure 1 .....	45

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 .....	39
Table 2 .....	40
Table 3 .....	41
Table 4 .....	44

## FIGURE

Figure 1 .....	45
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## Introduction

Filial piety *Xiao* is considered to be the central concept in Confucianism, which guides proper manners in the parent-child relationship and moral responsibility in China and Taiwan. The ancient Confucian ethic writing, “The Book of Filial Piety,” stated that adult children’s four basic filial responsibilities to elderly parents were first, taking care of elderly parents’ basic financial, material and emotional needs; second, absolutely obeying parents’ teachings and desires even if the child has to sacrifice his/her own will; third, co-residing with elderly parents in order to provide their basic needs; and fourth, repaying parents’ kindness after death with proper ceremony and remembrance (Lu & Li, 2008). In traditional filial piety, parents and children had reciprocal obligations in that parents provided the basic needs and shelter to children when they were young, and children would repay their parents’ kindness by taking care of them in their elderly years. After the Han Dynasty (206 BC - 220 AD), though, filial piety became a more one-sided obligation so that parental authority and control overpowered children’s autonomy and independence (Hwang, 1999). As the Chinese proverb stated, if the emperor wanted the servants to die, the servants had to die; if the father wanted the son to die, the son had no rights to disobey (Ruan, 1644-1911).

However, due to industrialization and urbanization, an increase of immigration to the urban areas for employment led to a change of family structure from the three-generation living arrangement to the nuclear family, which led to adult children’s economic independence, as well as a looser connection between parents and adult children (Thornton & Lin, 1994). As a result, the traditional norms regarding filial piety have changed in modern China and Taiwan. For many adult children, the obligated duty or obedience to parents have become unreasonable, unpractical, and problematic. The hierarchical parent-child relationships seemed to create



barriers for children's free choice and independence, and some children perceived pressure in a hierarchical relationship to sacrifice their own needs and goals for the good of parents under the obligation of filial piety. Consequently, this has caused resentment among some adult children toward their parents, with their behavior towards their parents coming from obligated duty, rather than genuine love and respect (Hwang, 1999; Zhan, 2004a).

Despite these cultural changes, a number of studies have shown that filial piety still holds societal significance in China and Taiwan. For example, a recent study in China showed that most college students believed that the traditional norms of filial piety were still important today (Chen & Yi, 2011). In addition, several studies mentioned that geographical distance, resource availability, economic status, and lifestyle differences between rural and urban areas might also influence elderly parents' needs for their adult children's support and adult children's filial piety (Fuligni & Zhang, 2004; Rosenberg & Jing, 1996; Tang & Parish, 2000). These factors could also change the traditional gender filial responsibility primary from sons and daughters-in-law to daughters for the purpose of filling the shortage of potential caregivers because of small family sizes in contemporary China and Taiwan (Fuligni & Zhang, 2004; Montgomery, 2003). However, most recent research on filial piety has been conducted in only one specific area in either China or Taiwan, with no studies comparing the level of filial piety across regions. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to use data from the East Asia Social Survey (EASS) that was conducted in China and Taiwan to examine the differences and similarities in adult children's levels of current filial piety toward parents across regions, specifically Taiwan and China, urban and rural regions, as well as between males and females.

## Literature Review

### The System of Family in Confucianism

Among diverse schools of Chinese thought, Confucianism is the most influential, which forms the foundation of the Chinese cultural traditions and the norms for interpersonal behaviors (Pye, 1972). Confucianism clearly states the doctrines and rules for individual's behavioral and moral standards, governing the entire range of human interaction in society (Ch'en, 1986). Starting from family to society and country, there are five basic human relationships, called *Wu Lun*: master/follower, father/son, husband/wife, elder/younger brothers, and friend/friend. These five relationships define each person's social position and status in each hierarchical relationship and prescribe personal privileges and responsibilities to others in order to ensure a harmonious society (Chen & Li, 2007; Hsiao, Jen, & Lee, 1988; Jian, 2001; Li & Chen, 2002).

Confucius emphasized that family is considered the basic unit of society and country, where the development of proper manners is cultivated (Hui & Triandis, 1986; Lee & Mock, 2005). Due to the emphasis on a sense of harmony, interdependence and concerns for others (Hui & Triandis, 1986), the interests of the individual were generally placed as secondary to those of the larger family (Thornton & Lin, 1994). Moreover, family interactions were governed by family hierarchy, obligation, and duties (Lee & Mock, 2005).

### Historical Gender Differences

Historically, family structure in Chinese society was characterized by patriarchy and hierarchy according to age (Fang & Wark, 1998; Ho, 1981; Hsu, 1985; Pfeifer, Miller, Li, & Hsiao, 2013; Zang, 1993). In the traditional beliefs, more emphasis was placed on the father and son relationship than the husband and wife relationship. (Huang, 2005; Wang & Crane, 1994).

Traditionally, with the custom of “trice obeying,” women were expected to comply with their fathers or elder brothers in youth, their husband in marriage, and their sons after their husbands’ death. The value of a wife was determined by her ability to produce male heirs and serve her parents-in-law. In a traditional family, the roles of each member were prescribed before they were born, such as a disciplinal role for father, a caring and affectionate role for mother, a caretaker role for the elderly parents for the eldest son, and a household helper for the eldest daughter (Lee & Mock, 2005). Males, particularly father and the eldest son, had dominant roles in families.

### **Historical Filial Piety within Families**

Filial piety emphasizes the importance of a child’s relationship with his/her parents, including a duty to obey and take care of his/her elderly parents (Baker, 1979). Filial piety, a reciprocal respect and set of behaviors between parents and children, was considered the fundamental principle in teaching children proper manners in order to maintain family and societal stability (Lee, 1953). It also promoted the importance of parent-child interdependence and child’s moral obligation to repay parental care and affection (Yang, 1959). Filial piety demanded that children be absolutely obedient and completely devoted to their parents. At the same time, parents depended on their children for their old-age security, which enhanced their deep devotion to the care and upbringing of their children (Yang, 1959). In the historical perspective, sacrifice for family was considered the most cherished virtue and important part of life. As for adult children, they held respect and obligation to aging parents, honored the family name, and emphasized group harmony instead of individual desires (Fan, 2000; Wong, 1998). In the traditional household structure, a multigenerational-family living structure was the typical

family structure in the Chinese society. This living arrangement also formed a basis for support system between parents, children, and grandchildren for each family (Yuan, 1987).

### **Current Movement in Industrialization and Urbanization**

Because of dramatic social and economic changes during the past century, there has been a significant transformation regarding traditional Confucian beliefs, including parent-adult child interaction and responsibilities regarding filial piety. Family and household structure have changed due to economic development in both contemporary China and Taiwan, which has altered the living arrangement for elderly members. With increased education and urban living, a shift to non-family employment, and the opportunity to live away from the family before marriage, young people have moved away from their family and elderly parents in order to pursue their individual desires, which has resulted in non-traditional living arrangements, such as empty-nest households, skip-generation households (grandparents living with grandchildren), network households (children and parents living separately but within few blocks), and by-turns households (parents taking turns living in the son's house) (Goldstein, Ku, & Ikels, 1990; Gui, 1988; Hareven, 1987). These new family structures and living arrangements have transformed adult children's roles in family and their filial piety responsibility, as well as the growth of independence from their parents (Thornton & Lin, 1994; Thornton & Fricke, 1987).

### **Differences between China and Taiwan**

Although China and Taiwan share a common cultural heritage, these two Chinese societies have followed dramatically different paths over the past 60 years. In 1949, China essentially split into two governmental structures, one in Mainland China and the other in Taiwan, and since their division, they have experienced different political and social changes

(Thornton, Chang, & Sun, 1984). After separating, Taiwan was influenced by extensive interaction with Western societies that moved it toward rapid modernization and democratization. On the other hand, after the establishment of the Communist government, the People's Republic of China became isolated from western influence for many years. During that time, traditional Confucian family norms and structures fell under attack due to social and economic reforms (Chia, Allred, & Jerzak, 1997; Xia & Zhou, 2003). In addition, the Marriage Law in China in 1950, along with subsequent legislation, shifted the process of the mate selection decision-making from parents to individuals, which has influenced changes in family hierarchy and filial piety obligation (Xia & Zhou, 2003). Taiwan's democratic structure has influenced family dynamics and personal ideology, which can be seen in the example of women in Taiwan demonstrating more liberal views than those in China (Chia et al., 1997).

### **Research on Filial Piety in Contemporary China and Taiwan**

**Filial attitude.** Current research has shown that filial piety still holds a significant value in Chinese societies (Huang, 1977; Huang, 1982; Chen & Yi, 2011; Whyte, 1997; Liu, 2013); however, the current differences in overall level of filial piety in rural and non-rural China and Taiwan is relatively unknown. In the only study that examined regional differences, Fuligni and Zhang (2004) found that China urban male adolescents reported a weaker sense of family obligation than did rural male adolescents and both urban and rural female adolescents. Some studies indicate that age, co-residence, and geographical areas influence the level of filial piety. Comparing different populations, younger urban residents appear to have a weaker sense of filial piety than older urban residents (Lu, 2009; Yang, 1981). Moreover, adult children who lived with their parents also report more commitment to their filial responsibility than those who do not (Chuo & Li, 2008). In response to the notion that there might be a decline of filial piety,

Zhang (2004) argued that filial piety is not declining in Chinese societies; rather, structural changes, increasing educational opportunity, and greater geographic mobility are going to have a greater impact on their behaviors in elderly care.

Furthermore, current attitudes about filial piety have become less authoritarian (Ho & Kang, 1984; Ho, Hong, & Chiu, 1989; Ho, 1994) and integrated with both collectivist and individualistic perspectives (Lu, 2009). Some studies have recognized that some filial responsibilities, such as ancestor worship and looking after the physical and emotional caregiving of the elderly parents, are still affirmed, but others, such as absolute obedience and self-sacrifice are now disregarded (Chuang & Yang, 1991; Ho & Kang, 1984; Whyte, 1997; Yeh, 1997). Considerable research has indicated that adult children might encounter struggles with fulfilling their traditional filial obligations (Chen & Silverstein, 2000; Zhu & Yang, 1988). Therefore, neo-filial piety has been suggested by several scholars as reflecting an emphasis of a balance of both elderly parents' and adult children's needs and characteristics in terms of filial responsibility (Lu, 2006; Yeh, 1996).

**Financial support.** Although financial support is still one of the ways that adult children fulfill their filial piety (Lee, Parish & Willis, 1994), it is no longer the most common way. Studies have shown that helping parents with their personal matters and giving emotional support are more common than financial assistance (Chen & Yi, 2011; Lin, 2000; Wang & Liu, 2004). However, financial support may compensate for absence of other filial responsibilities, such as emotional support, co-residence, and caregiving, due to physical distance that has accompanied urbanization (He & Ye, 2009). Research shows that the frequency and amount of financial assistance were generally determined based on the needs of elderly parents (Lee & Xiao, 1998; Lee et al., 1994). Adult children give more financial support to their elderly parents

if the parents have lower incomes, lower occupational positions, or poor health (Lee & Xiao, 1998). Additionally, adult children who migrated to urban areas for employment provided more financial support to the elderly parents in the rural area than those children who stayed in the rural area (Du, Ding, & Feng, 2004).

**Caregiving.** Adult children still show a strong sense of filial responsibility in taking care of elderly parents; however, their caregiving behaviors often do not match up to their sense of filial piety due to geographic mobility and migration for employment and education (Chen & Yi, 2011; Yue & Ng, 1999). Also, Zhan, Ni, and Bin (2006) found that young adults expressed less commitment to elderly care if there was a conflict between employment and caregiving. Co-residence is an important factor in fulfilling filial responsibility, with adult children who are living with their parents performing more caregiving functions (Lin, Wong, Tang, & Chen, 2003; Weinstein, Sun, Chang, & Freedman, 1990). However, the proportion of the elderly who live only with their spouse or alone has increased significantly, leading to a decrease in the proportion of the elderly living with married children (Chang, 1999; Yi & Chen, 1998). Yeh (2009) has suggested a mutual aid model to explain the connection between living together and providing more support. He argued that that amount of emotional support adult children provided to their aged parents was at least partially a function of the assistance in household labor and child rearing that parents provided to their children. However, when adult children did not reside with parents, both parents' support to children and children's support to parents decreased. This phenomenon was explained due to the lack of contact and communication between both parties.

**Filial piety in families with only one child.** The One-Child policy in China has significantly changed family structures from having multiple siblings to being an only child. Research findings are mixed concerning the effect of being an only child on one's level of filial

piety (Fuligni & Zhang, 2004; Falbo & Poston, 1993; Rosenberg & Jing, 1996). Some children have referred to an excessive sense of filial obligation due to the burden of family support falling solely on that child (Fuligni & Zhang, 2004; Rosenberg & Jing, 1996; Zhan, Feng, & Luo, 2008). Zhan (2004b) and Zhan et al. (2008) found that “only children” experienced higher levels of filial piety than children from multiple-child families, although they expressed a lower level of willingness to co-reside with parents than did children from multiple-child households. The reasons for adult only children’s high filial obligation and low willingness were the lack of siblings to divide the filial duty, as well as increases of educational opportunity and geographic mobility. However, the issue of how the One-Child policy affects the filial obligation is a fairly new topic.

### **Rural and Non-Rural Comparisons**

The levels of filial attitude, attitude of financial support, and caregiving between rural and non-rural areas can be influenced by a number of factors, including different resource access (Tang & Parish, 2000), lifestyles (Fuligni & Zhang, 2004), socioeconomic background (Fuligni & Zhang, 2004), and government-sponsored social welfare availability (Rosenberg & Jing, 1996). Economic and social changes are occurring rapidly in China, but not all segments of the Chinese population are experiencing the recent shifts to a market economy (Tang & Parish, 2000). Adult children’s filial attitude level generally depends on the needs in families. For example, families in rural areas generally live largely agricultural lifestyles and expect higher filial piety from their children in assisting in farming and household duties (Fuligni & Zhang, 2004; Lin, 2000). In contrast, families in urban areas work outside of home, and children are exposed to an urban, industrial lifestyle; therefore, parents expect lower filial piety from their children in helping out with the household duties and parental needs (Fuligni & Zhang, 2004).



Little research has compared levels of filial piety in rural and urban regions in China and Taiwan. While no studies could be found that compared rural and non-rural regions in Taiwan, two studies were found that studied populations in China. A study examined rural and urban differences in financial support by adult children towards their parents in China. The national study (Lee & Xiao, 1998) used 1992 data from the China Research Center on Aging with a sample of 20,093 participants aged 60 or older participants from 13 of China's provinces. They found that elderly parents' needs and unequal support from the government between rural and urban areas strongly influenced adult children's financial support to them. Elderly parents living in the rural areas more frequently received support than those living in urban areas; however, those in the rural areas received a smaller amount of financial support than those in the urban areas, probably because adult children in rural areas had lower incomes. Additional research has found that adult children who migrated to urban areas for employment provided more financial support to the elderly parents in the rural area than those children who stayed in the rural area (Du et al., 2004). Both studies were conducted from elderly parents' perspectives, instead of adult children's.

Another study examined attitudes of approximately 700 10th and 12th grade students living in rural and urban China in the areas of family obligation, current assistance, respect for family, and future financial support (Fuligni & Zhang, 2004). They found that urban male adolescents reported a weaker sense of family obligation than did rural male adolescents and the females of both locations, and rural adolescents held a higher value on supporting the family in the future than urban youths.

The shortage in adult children's caregiving to their elderly parents is considered a national problem, especially in the rural areas in China and Taiwan (Duan, 2012; Lu & Li, 2008;

Xu, Li, Chuang, & Hui, 2006). Several studies have mentioned the current problems of elderly care and the need for solutions in rural China because of urbanization, absence of adult children co-residing with them, scarce government financial support for rural residents, and non-subsidized elderly medical care (Chia, 2006; He & Ye, 2009; Jin & Liu, 2012; Yang et al., 2005). Due to the physical distance, adult children often find alternative ways to fulfill their responsibility. Li and Kou (2011) found that adult children who resided with elderly parents in rural China emphasized material support, whereas adult children who did not reside with their parents in the rural area emphasized emotional support. Whereas, in order to solve the elderly care problem, the Taiwanese government launched a national plan to care for the elderly from 2008 to compensate the caregiving shortage (Chuang, 2009).

### **Gender Differences in Filial Piety**

Historically in China and Taiwan, sons and daughters-in-law have generally carried the major responsibility for taking care of their older parents; daughters fulfilled the son's roles when sons were not available (Hermalin, Ofstedal, & Chi, 1992; Lin et al., 2003; Lee et al., 1994). Based on the gender ideology in family responsibility, sons were generally expected to provide financial supports to their parents, whereas daughters were expected to provide household support and daily care to their parents (Ross, 1987). However, in past studies with Taiwanese samples (Hermalin et al., 1992; Lin, 1992; Lin et al., 2003), the results have indicated that sons were almost twice as likely as daughters to provide support in both household labor and finance to their older parents. Additional research (Lin, 2000; Yi & Chen, 1998) found this to be true in rural Taiwan. These studies found that elderly parents expected their adult sons to take care of them more than their daughters. This phenomenon could be explained by the Taiwanese parents' expectation of their sons and daughters-in-law to carry the filial responsibilities instead

of their daughters (Yeh, 2009).

On the other hand, the responsibility of providing caregiving to elderly parents seems to be expected as daughters' filial responsibility more than sons' in China. In Fuligni and Zhang's 2004 study of 700 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students in China, they found that male adolescents reported a weaker sense of family obligation in terms of assisting, supporting and respecting the family than did female adolescents. Similarly, Zhan and Montgomery (2003) reported a decline in the patrilocal tradition of caregiving in urban China, finding that the responsibility of taking care of the elderly parents had shifted from sons to daughters.

### **Purpose of Study**

Due to rapid social and economic changes, traditional attitudes and behaviors regarding filial piety have changed in Chinese cultures. However, the rate of social and economic changes in rural and non-rural areas in China and Taiwan have been different (Lee et al., 1994). The differences in the social structure in China and Taiwan over the past 60 years have created possible regional differences in current filial attitudes and behaviors. The purpose of study was to address this important gap in the research literature by comparing current levels of filial piety between rural and non-rural China and Taiwan. In addition to examining differences between China and Taiwan, rural and non-rural differences will be examined. Using data from the 2006 East Asian Social Survey, this study focused on four questions:

1. What is the pattern of filial attitude, attitude of financial support, and caregiving in China and Taiwan?
2. Are there differences among adults in filial attitude, financial support, and caregiving between China and Taiwan?

3. Are there differences among adults in filial attitude, financial support, and caregiving between rural and non-rural areas in China and Taiwan?
4. Are there gender differences among adults in rural and non-rural areas in China and Taiwan in filial attitude, financial support, and caregiving?

## **Methods**

### **Procedure**

The data used for this study came from the East Asian Social Survey (EASS) 2006. The EASS 2006 was conducted from June to December 2006 in China, Japan, Korea and Taiwan. It included questions about families, including marriage, gender roles, family solidarity, intergenerational support exchanges, filial duty, division of labor, and marital relationships. This cross-national survey was composed of the four general social surveys—CGSS (Chinese General Social Survey), JGSS (Japanese General Social Survey), KGSS (Korean General Social Survey), and TSCS (Taiwan Social Change Survey) that included identical questions so that cross-national comparisons could be made. For the purpose of this study, only the Chinese and Taiwanese data were used in this study.

The Chinese General Social Survey (CGSS) followed a four-stage Probability Proportional to Size (PPS) sampling to gather data from September to December 2006. All questions were given by structured face-to-face interviews and answers were filled in by the interviewers. The initial sample size was 7,572 participants. After excluding those who could not be contacted, refused to participate, and were ineligible, the final sample size for CGSS was 3,208 participants, for a 38.5% of response rate. The relatively low response rate can be explained by the way that it was calculated, which included both eligible and ineligible (bad addresses, deceased, etc.) sample members in the calculation. Due to the nature of this study, the

sample for this study was limited to those who were between aged 20-69 years old and had at least one child and one parent alive. The entire sample was married at the time of study. The final sample size for this study was 1,542.

The Taiwan Social Change Survey (TSCS) followed three-stage stratified sampling to gather data from July to August 2006. All questions were given by structured face-to-face interviews and answers were filled in by the interviewers. The initial sample size was 5,032 participants. After excluding those who could not be contacted, refused to participate, or were ineligible, the final sample size for TSCS was 2,102 participants, for a 42% of response rate. Again, the response rate calculated with the inclusion of those who were ineligible for the study. Due to the nature of this study, the sample for this study was limited to those who were between aged 21-72 years old and had at least one child and one parent alive. The entire sample was married at the time of study. The final sample size for this study was 751.

### **Sample Characteristics**

The sample from China was 43.3% male and 56.7% female. The mean age was 39.93 years old ( $SD = 9.11$ ), with a range of 20 to 69 years old. In terms of education, 6.2% reported no formal education, 17.4% reported had 1-6 years of schooling, 39.1% had 7-9 years of formal schooling, 25.3% received 10-12 years of schooling, 11.4% received more than 12 years of schooling, and 0.6% reported still attending school at that time. In addition, 32% reported there were no sons in the family at the time of interviews, and 41.4% reported no daughters in the family at the time of interviews. In terms of their parents' status, 70.2% reported their father was still alive, 89.8% reported their mother was alive at that time, and 58.1% reported both parents were alive.

The sample from Taiwan was 47.0% male and 53.0% female. The mean age was 43.41

years old ( $SD = 9.33$ ), with a range of 21 to 72 years old. In terms of education, 1.3% reported no schooling, 9.4% reported 1-6 years of schooling, 15.9% had 7-9 years of formal schooling, 38.7% received 10-12 years of schooling, 34.2% received more than 12 years of schooling, and 0.5% reported still attending school at that time. In addition, 19.2% reported there was no son in the family at the time of interviews, and 28.6% reported there was no daughter in the family at the time of interviews. In terms of their parents' status, 63.5% reported their father was still alive, and 90.7% reported their mother was alive at that time.

## Measures

**Filial attitude.** Filial attitude was measured using a six-item scale. Participants responded to the following statements, "Children must make efforts to do something that would bring honor to their parents," "Be grateful to parents for raising me," "No matter how bad parents treat me, one should still treat them well," "One should give up his/her interest or choice of career to fulfill parents' expectation," "Support my parents' livelihood to make their life more comfortable," and "Authority of father should be respected." They responded on a seven-point likert scale ranging from "*strongly agree*" to "*strongly disagree*". This scale showed adequate reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of .74 for the China sample and .62 for the Taiwan sample.

**Attitude of financial support.** Attitude of financial support was measured by using a total of four-item scale. The first two items were used to measure attitude of financial support toward men and the last two items were used to measured attitude of financial support toward women. Participants responded the following questions: "To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about financial support for parents? Here, adult man and woman are those who are aged 18 or above. Attitude to financial support: a. unmarried

adult man to parents b. unmarried adult woman to parents c. married adult man to parents d. married adult woman to parents.” They responded on a seven-point likert scale ranging from “*strongly agree*” to “*strongly disagree*.” The scale showed good reliability, with a Cronback’s alpha of .81 for the China sample and .82 for the Taiwan sample.

**Caregiving.** Caregiving was measured using a two-item scale. Participants responded to the following question, “How frequently did you do each of the following things to your own parent(s) for the last 12 months? a. Taking care of household chores (e.g., cleaning, meal preparation, shopping, running errands, etc.) b. Listening to personal problem or concerns.” Participants responded to a five-point likert scale ranging from “*very frequently*” to “*not at all*.”

**Rural vs. non-rural region.** In China, the researchers divided the size of communities into seven different categories based on population and region: above 4,000,000; 2,000,000-4,000,000; 1,000,000-2,000,000; 500,000-1,000,000; 200,000-500,000; under 200,000; and rural area as being clearly designed into its own category. In this study, we categorized the first six categories as a non-rural region and the rural area in the sample as a rural region. Approximate two-thirds (66.3%) of the final sample size for China fit in the non-rural region and about one-third (33.7%) fit into the rural region. As for Taiwan, researchers divided the size of community into four categories: large cities, medium cities, small cities/towns, and rural areas as being clearly designed into its own category. Similar to the China sample, we categorized the first three categories as non-rural regions and the rural area in the sample as the rural region for this study. Approximate 94.9% of the final sample size for Taiwan fit in the non-rural region, whereas about 5.1% fit into the rural region.

**Control variables.** Age and education were included as control variables. Age was measured by the age of the participants at the times of interviews. Education was measured by the number of years each participant attended school.

## **Analysis**

A series of MANCOVAs were used to compare the level of filial piety between China and Taiwan, rural and non-rural areas, and males and females, with age and education included as covariates. First, we compared adult children's filial attitude, attitude of financial support, and caregiving toward their elderly parents between the China and Taiwan samples to examine differences between two societies. Next, we compared adult children's filial attitude, attitude of financial support, and caregiving between rural and non-rural areas within China and Taiwan. Finally, the levels of filial attitude, attitude of financial support, and caregiving were compared between male and female respondents within non-rural and rural China and Taiwan.

## **Results**

### **Preliminary Analysis**

A factor analysis on the twelve items of the level of filial piety within each country was examined (See Table 1). As expected, three factors were found for both countries. The first factor, filial attitude, contained six items representing adult children's attitude toward the norms of filial piety. The second factor, attitude toward financial support, contained four items representing adult children's attitude toward providing financial support to their elderly parents. The third factor, caregiving, contained two items representing adult children's frequency of providing caregiving to their elderly parents.



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Table 1 about here

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The correlations between covariates (age and education) and independent variables (filial attitude, attitude of financial support, and caregiving) were examined (see Table 2). The correlations between age, filial attitude ( $r = -.05, p < .05$ ), and attitude of financial support ( $r = .04, p < .05$ ) were significant. The correlations between education, attitude of financial support ( $r = -.09, p < .01$ ), and caregiving ( $r = -.15, p < .01$ ) were also statistically significant.

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Table 2 about here

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### **Descriptive Statistics**

The means and standard deviations for filial attitude, attitude of financial support, and caregiving in China and Taiwan are reported in Table 3. The mean scores of filial attitude, attitude of financial support, and caregiving for China were 2.45 ( $SD = .69$ ), 2.76 ( $SD = .94$ ), and 3.28 ( $SD = .96$ ), respectively; the respective mean scores for Taiwan were 2.30 ( $SD = .68$ ), 2.57 ( $SD = 1.07$ ), and 2.99 ( $SD = .93$ ).

The results of the descriptive statistics indicated that most adults in China and Taiwan reported being in agreement with traditional attitudes and norms of filial piety (See Table 3). When collapsing the categories of *strongly agree*, *fairly agree*, and *somewhat agree*, 88.5% of

participants in China and 84.9 % in Taiwan agreed that “Children must make efforts to do something that would bring honor to their parents.”

Likewise, 56% of participants in China and 97.1% in Taiwan agreed that children should “Support my parents’ livelihood to make their life more comfortable.” Although participants showed agreement in most of the filial items, there was a large difference between China and Taiwan participants with the statement, “One should give up his/her interest or choice of career to fulfill parents’ expectation,” with 92.6% and 36.5%, respectively, agreeing with the statement. In addition, most participants agreed that they should provide financial support to their parents, and the majority of respondents reported that they provide care to their parents. Results indicated that 56.8% of participants in China and 57.4% of participants in Taiwan reported *very frequently*, *often*, and *sometimes* “Taking care of household chores (e.g., cleaning, meal preparation, shopping, running errands, etc.),” and 64.6% in China and 81% in Taiwan reported for “Listening to personal problems or concerns.”

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Table 3 about here

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### **Differences between China and Taiwan**

The results of a one-way MANCOVA indicated a significant difference between China and Taiwan in the level of filial attitude, attitude of financial support, and caregiving (Pillai’s Trace = .02,  $F(3, 2266) = 18.49, p = .000$ ). Univariate independent one-way ANCOVAs

demonstrated a significant effect for filial attitude,  $F(1, 2268) = 41.42, p = .000$ , attitude of financial support,  $F(1, 2268) = 17.17, p = .000$ , and caregiving,  $F(1, 2268) = 11.90, p = .001$ .

Post hoc Tukey analyses for country differences in the levels of filial attitude ( $p = .00$ ), attitude of financial support ( $p = .00$ ), and caregiving ( $p = .00$ ) yielded significant results in pairwise comparisons of the three dependent means (see Table 4). In all three cases, respondents in China had reported higher levels of filial attitude, attitude of financial support, and caregiving than Taiwan (See Figure 1). The results indicated the societal differences and answered our second research question, “Are there differences among adults in filial attitude, financial support, and caregiving between China and Taiwan?”

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Table 4 about here

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Figure 1 about here

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### **Differences between Rural and Non-rural China and Taiwan**

The results of a one-way MANCOVA indicated a significant multivariate effect for the groups of rural and non-rural China on the level of filial attitude, attitude of financial support, and caregiving (Pillai’s Trace = .01,  $F(3, 1519) = 3.85, p = .01$ ). Univariate independent one-way ANCOVAs also demonstrated a significant effect for caregiving,  $F(1, 1521) = 11.32, p = .00$

and non-significant effects for filial attitude,  $F(1, 1521) = .00, p = 1$ , and attitude of financial support,  $F(1, 1521) = .66, p = .42$ .

Post hoc Tukey analyses for regional differences in China in the levels of caregiving ( $p = .00$ ) yielded significant results. Respondents in non-rural China ( $M = 3.30, SD = .88$ ) reported significantly higher levels of caregiving than those in rural China ( $M = 3.12, SD = .89$ ). The results indicated regional differences in China and answered our third research question, “Are there differences among adults in filial attitude, financial support, and caregiving between rural and non-rural areas in China and Taiwan?”

In terms of Taiwan, the results of a one-way MANCOVA indicated a non-significant multivariate effect for the relationship of rural and non-rural Taiwan on the level of filial attitude, attitude of financial support, and caregiving (Pillai’s Trace = .00,  $F(3, 741) = .67, p = .57$ ). Univariate independent one-way ANCOVAs also demonstrated non-significant effects for filial attitude,  $F(1, 743) = 1.67, p = .20$ , attitude of financial support,  $F(1, 743) = .27, p = .61$ , and caregiving,  $F(1, 743) = .63, p = .43$ .

### **Gender Differences within Rural and Non-rural China and Taiwan**

Gender differences were tested respectively within each region (see Table 4). A one-way MANCOVA results indicated a significant multivariate effect between males and females in rural and non-rural China (Wilks’ Lambda = .98,  $F(9, 3692) = 3.98, p = .00$ ). Univariate independent one-way ANCOVAs demonstrated a significant effect for caregiving [ $F(3, 1519) = 10.67, p = .00$ ] and non-significant effects for both filial attitude [ $F(3, 1519) = .01, p = 1$ ] and attitude of financial support [ $F(3, 1519) = .80, p = .50$ ]. Post hoc Tukey analysis of gender differences in levels of caregiving in rural China indicated that males were less actively involved in caregiving than females ( $p = .00$ ), with means of 2.95 ( $SD = .83$ ) and 3.29 ( $SD = .90$ ),

respectively. In addition, male rural China group also showed significant lower level of caregiving than both male ( $M = 3.33$ ,  $SD = .90$ ) and female ( $M = 3.26$ ,  $SD = .87$ ) non-rural groups.

A non-significant multivariate effect between males and females in rural and non-rural Taiwan was also found in analysis (Wilks' Lambda = .98,  $F(9, 1799) = .98$ ,  $p = .09$ ). Univariate independent one-way ANCOVAs demonstrated a significant effect for filial attitude [ $F(3, 741) = 2.68$ ,  $p = .05$ ] and non-significant effects for both attitude of financial support [ $F(3, 741) = 1.17$ ,  $p = .32$ ] and caregiving [ $F(3, 741) = .81$ ,  $p = .49$ ]. Likewise, post hoc Tukey analysis also indicated there were no significant differences for filial attitude, attitude of financial support, and caregiving (see Table 4). These results also answered our fourth research question, "Are there gender differences among adults in rural and non-rural areas in China and Taiwan in filial attitude, financial support, and caregiving?"

## Discussion

Although some scholars have hypothesized reduced filial piety in contemporary China and Taiwan due to dramatic social and economic changes from modernization and urbanization (Chen & Silverstein, 2000; Yang, 1988), adult children in China and Taiwan continued to report a strong sense of filial piety. The majority of the participants in this study showed strong agreement toward traditional norms of filial piety and actively provided caregiving to their elderly parents. The findings supported the previous research (Huang, 1977; Huang, 1982; Chen & Yi, 2011; Whyte, 1997; Liu, 2013) that filial piety is still significantly valued in these two current Chinese societies.

In the cross-cultural aspect of the study, both China and Taiwan reported strong support for filial piety; however, the findings indicated that adult children residing in China showed

higher levels of filial attitude, attitude of financial support, and caregiving than those residing in Taiwan. For example, 92.6% of the respondents, compared to 36.2% of those in Taiwan agreed that children should “give up their interest or choice of career to fulfill parents’ expectations. They also scored higher than participants in Taiwan on the questions that asked, “children must make efforts to do something that would bring honor to their parents” and “authority of father should be respected”. Although some fundamental elements and values of filial piety are shared among Chinese societies, the interpretation of filial piety is more indigenous to individual societies than universal across all Chinese societies (Ho, 1996; Yeh & Yang, 1989).

The lower level of filial piety in Taiwan can probably be explained by its modernization and democratization through extensive interaction with Western societies that influenced family dynamics and personal ideology (Chia et al., 1997). After the division between China and Taiwan in 1949, different political and social changes have taken places in these two societies, leading to some significant cultural differences (Thornton, Chang & Sun, 1984). Taiwan has moved rapidly toward modernization and democratization and has changed from an agricultural society to a substantive industrial society through extensive interaction with Western societies. This intensive interaction with Western societies over the past 60 years has substantially increased. On the other hand, the Communist government in China isolated itself from the outside societies both physically and psychologically for many years (Chia et al., 1997; Xia & Zhou, 2003). Although the situation in China has changed dramatically in recent years, with substantial interaction with Western businesses and universities, Taiwan has been strongly influenced by Western views in various ways for over 60 years. The socioeconomic culture in the West has historically encouraged individualistic characteristics, such as assertiveness, independence, privacy, self-reliance, and persistent pursuit of activities that optimize personal

pleasure (Ali, Lee, Hsieh, & Krishnan, 2005; Ji, Nisbett, & Peng, 2000). With frequent business trading and modernization, individual values in Taiwan are probably more in tune with these individualistic characteristics than those in China. However, the results of our study still indicate a strong sense of filial piety in Taiwan, although they are lower than those in China.

The findings in our study of filial attitude differences between rural and non-rural areas in China were dissimilar with previous studies. One reason for the different results is that different age groups were studied. Although the study by Fuligni and Zhang (2004) found that different levels of filial piety among male and female adolescents in urban and rural China, it was a study of high school students. Therefore, it is possible that attitudes of high school students may not reflect levels of filial piety among adults.

Moreover, the use of older datasets by previous research may also account for the different results. The past two decades have seen dramatic social and economic changes in rural China that have created more individual economic opportunities, educational opportunities, and more government services to rural regions of China. Consequently, the findings by Lee and Xiao (1998) that rural parents were more likely to receive financial assistance from their children than parents living in urban China, although the amount is less, can be explained by the fact that the data are nearly two decades old. The authors suggested that adult children's financial support was strongly influenced by elderly parents' needs and unequal support from the government between rural and urban areas. It is possible that government elderly care in the rural region has improved, reducing elderly parents' needs from adult children's support.

In terms of caregiving behaviors, adult children who resided in non-rural China showed more involvement than those who resided in rural China. The gender differences between these two regions further explain this phenomenon. Compared with the amount of care work each

child provided to the elderly parents based on gender and regional differences, no significant differences were found among adult children, except males in rural China. Both male and female non-rural groups and the female rural group reported similar amount of caregiving. However, the male rural China group reported significantly lower levels of caregiving than the female rural China group as well as both male and female non-rural groups. The discrepancy between the filial attitude and actual behaviors for males in rural China indicated that, although they felt strong sense of filial piety, their circumstances impeded them from fulfilling their responsibilities.

The finding of gender differences in actual caregiving in rural China is consistent with other studies about China (Yang, 1996; Zhan & Montgomery, 2003). Similar to previous studies, adults in the labor force were moving from rural to urban areas to pursue jobs that were far away from their villages and towns. The demands of migration and a long commute for career opportunities have resulted in an increased geographic separation between adult children and their older parents (Xia, 1997). Perhaps, these circumstances explain the difficulty for males to provide caregiving in rural China. Based on the traditional filial responsibilities primarily provided by sons and daughters-in-law, it is possible that daughters-in-law replaced sons' responsibilities in order to fill the shortage in the rural areas. Another interpretation is that male adult children in rural China might provide more financial support or other less traditional ways to compensate for the lack of ability in providing elderly care, which was not examined in this study. These findings also suggest that the traditional gender ideology in carrying out filial responsibility is seen in rural China. Males are expected to assist elderly parents financially, whereas, females are expected to provide emotional and physical care (Yue & Ng, 1999; Yang, 1996).



The findings that there were few gender differences in filial piety within the two Chinese societies were also different than findings from past studies. Again, the age of the datasets and methodological issues may account for the different findings. Two of the studies used data from the 1989 wave of the Survey of Health and Living Status of the Elderly in Taiwan (Lin et al, 2003; Hermalin et al, 1992) and probably don't reflect current attitudes of filial piety. In addition, another two studies (Lin, 2000; Yi & Chen, 1998) assessed the attitudes of parents regarding filial piety, rather than adult children's attitudes which were assessed in the current study. It is probable that parents' and adult children's perceptions of filial piety differ, which could account from the different findings.

### **Clinical Implications**

It is important to know that filial piety is still an important value and tradition for Chinese individuals and families residing in China and Taiwan. This study has found substantial evidence that intergenerational support and respect still hold significant values in parent-child relationships and various degrees of filial piety were found between China and Taiwan. While the husband-wife dyad is dominant in Western society, the parent-child relationship is still very strong in Chinese cultures. Therefore, there is a need for MFTs to respect this intergenerational relationship and understand the different family dynamics between Western and Eastern societies. Consequently, MFTs need to be sensitive to these issues while working with this population. Knowing the origin where the client is from or grew up provides a conceptual framework in understanding or hypothesizing their commitments toward elder care, typical hierarchical relationship, and gender role ideology.

These findings also have important implications for MFTs living in the US who are working with Chinese immigrants or Chinese American families. Sue and Sue's (1971) heuristic

model provides three stages for measuring Asian American identity based on the clinical differences among Chinese Americans: *traditionalist*, who internalizes traditional Chinese customs and values, resists acculturation forces, and believes in the old way; *marginal person*, who attempts to assimilate into White society and rejects traditional Chinese ways with a possibility of having racial self-hatred; and *Asian American*, who is in the process of forming a positive identity between two cultures. Therefore, clinicians can measure their clients' acculturation to the Western culture based on the society and region to develop matched treatment plans and interventions to tailor their uniqueness. It is important for clinicians to have a basic understanding about Chinese families and differences in each society, but yet not to over-generalize each individual's commitment and views toward filial piety.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

One limitation of this study is that the rural Taiwanese sample was fairly small (N = 38). A larger sample of adult children in rural Taiwan would have improved the robustness of the findings and accuracy in the regional differences across countries.

Moreover, it is possible that adult children's caregiving behaviors are performed primarily in response to external social pressure. The reduction of social pressure could significantly modify established patterns of caregiving. In other words, the greater influence of social pressure on direct caregiving behaviors, as opposed to financial assistance, may indicate changes in future patterns of elderly care. Therefore, the increase of social services may reduce social expectations for a child to provide parent care when adult children become less available due to family size or mobility. Another factor toward gender differences is the possibility that daughters-in-law provide sufficient elderly care to fulfill needs when sons were unavailable. Our measurements primary focus on adult children's filial attitude and caregiving behaviors rather

than the relationship between social services and intergenerational support and dyadic filial responsibility. Future research is suggested to test how these factors influence adult children's financial support and caregiving behaviors and to conduct a dyadic analysis to test filial responsibilities among adult children and their spouses in order to portray a more comprehensive picture of contemporary intergenerational support in Chinese societies.

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Table 1. *Factor analysis of China and Taiwan*

<i>Items</i>	<i>China</i>			<i>Taiwan</i>		
	<i>F1</i>	<i>F2</i>	<i>F3</i>	<i>F1</i>	<i>F2</i>	<i>F3</i>
<b><i>Filial Attitude</i></b>						
Children must make efforts to do something that would bring honor to their parents	.73			.61		
Be grateful to parents for raising me	.79			.62		
No matter how bad parents treat me, one should still treat them well	.78			.68		
One should give up his/her interest or choice of career to fulfill parents' expectation	.79			.48		
Support my parents' livelihood to make their life more comfortable	.39			.74		
Authority of father should be respected	.53			.50		
<b><i>Attitude of Financial Support (agreement)</i></b>						
Unmarried adult man to parents		.84			.87	
Married adult man to parents		.83			.88	
Unmarried adult woman to parents		.77			.80	
Married adult woman to parents		.76			.69	
<b><i>Caregiving</i></b>						
Taking care of household chores (e.g., cleaning, meal preparation, shopping, running errands, etc.)			.90			.82
Listening to personal problem or concerns			.90			.82
Cumulative contribution ratio (%)	47.02	64.17	80.52	37.46	52.86	67.00

Table 2. *Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations*

	1	2	3	4	5	Means	<i>SD</i>
1. Age	1					41.07	9.33
2. Education	-.13**	1				9.71	3.97
3. Filial Piety	-.05*	-.01	1			2.37	.67
4. Attitude of Financial Support	.04*	-.09**	.21**	1		2.66	.92
5. Caregiving	-.02	-.15**	.11**	.18**	1	3.16	.91

*Note:* \* denotes significance at  $p < .05$

\*\* denotes significance at  $p < .01$

Table 3. Means, standard deviations, and percentages of filial attitude, attitude of financial support, and caregiving in agreement in China and Taiwan

Factors/Items	China (N = 1542)		Taiwan (N = 751)	
	Percentages (%)		Percentages (%)	
	M (SD)	Agreement	M (SD)	Agreement
<i>Filial Attitude</i>				
Children must make efforts to do something that would bring honor to their parents	2.41 (1.01)	88.5	2.23 (1.29)	84.9
Be grateful to parents for raising me	1.99 (.94)	95.7	1.28 (.53)	99.8
No matter how bad parents treat me, one should still treat them well	2.16 (.95)	93.9	1.81 (1.04)	95.2
One should give up his/her interest or choice of career to fulfill parents' expectation	2.22 (.97)	92.6	4.17 (1.59)	36.5
Support my parents' livelihood to make their life more comfortable	3.39 (1.41)	56	1.74 (.88)	97.1
Authority of father should	2.55 (1.11)	84.6	2.6 (1.41)	79.6



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be respected

***Attitude of Financial Support***

To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about financial support for parents?

a. unmarried adult man to parents	3.07 (1.34)	68	2.25 (1.26)	85.7
b. unmarried adult woman to parents	3.1 (1.35)	65.9	2.49 (1.34)	80.2
c. married adult man to parents	2.38 (.99)	87.8	2.29 (1.22)	85.7
d. married adult woman to parents	2.47 (1.01)	85.9	3.22 (1.45)	63.2

***Caregiving***

	<b>M (SD)</b>	<b>Provided Support</b>	<b>M (SD)</b>	<b>Provided Support</b>
<hr/>				
How frequently did you do each of the following things to your own parent(s) for the last 12 months?				
a. Taking care of household chores (e.g., cleaning, meal	3.35 (1.14)	56.8	3.31 (1.25)	57.4

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preparation, shopping,  
running errands, etc.)

b. Listening to personal problem or concerns	3.2 (1.00)	64.6	2.67 (1.02)	81
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*Note:* Agreement indicated the combined percentages of *strongly agree*, *fairly agree*, and *somewhat agree*  
Provided support indicated the combined percentages of *very frequently*, *often*, and *sometimes*  
Filial attitude and attitude of financial support were scored with a seven-point likert scale: 1 = “*strongly agree*,” 2 = “*fairly agree*,” 3 =  
“*somewhat agree*,” 4 = “*Neither agree nor disagree*,” 5 = “*somewhat disagree*,” 6 = “*fairly disagree*,” 7 = “*strongly disagree*”  
Caregiving was scored with a five-point likert scale: 1 = “*very frequently*,” 2 = “*often*,” 3 = “*sometimes*,” 4 = “*seldom*,” 5 = “*not at all*.”

Table 4. MANCOVA results of filial piety, attitude of financial support, and caregiving for countries, regions, and genders

				China						Taiwan					
		China	Taiwan	Non-rural			Rural			Non-rural			Rural		
				All	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All	Male	Female
<b>Filial Attitude</b>	Mean	2.44 <sup>a</sup>	2.23	2.44	2.44	2.44	2.44	2.44	2.44	2.24	2.19	2.30	2.07	2.00	2.24
	(SD)	(.68)	(.63)	(.68)	(.67)	(.69)	(.67)	(.62)	(.71)	(.63)	(.61)	(.64)	(.62)	(.58)	(.66)
<b>Attitude of Financial Support</b>	Mean	2.72 <sup>b</sup>	2.53	2.74	2.74	2.74	2.70	2.75	2.64	2.54	2.52	2.52	2.50	2.72	2.16
	(SD)	(.89)	(.98)	(.89)	(.90)	(.89)	(.88)	(.90)	(.86)	(.98)	(1.03)	(.93)	(1.04)	(.97)	(1.05)
<b>Caregiving</b>	Mean	3.21 <sup>c</sup>	3.05	3.30 <sup>d</sup>	3.33	3.26	3.12	2.95 <sup>efg</sup>	3.29	3.08	2.99	3.01	2.96	2.68	3.07
	(SD)	(.89)	(.93)	(.88)	(.90)	(.87)	(.89)	(.83)	(.90)	(.93)	(.96)	(.91)	(2.93)	(1.10)	(.57)

Note: a indicates significant difference ( $p < .01$ ) in filial attitudes between China and Taiwan.  
 b indicates significant difference ( $p < .01$ ) in attitudes of financial support between China and Taiwan  
 c indicates significant difference ( $p < .01$ ) in caregiving between China and Taiwan  
 d indicates significant difference ( $p < .01$ ) in caregiving between non-rural China and rural China  
 e indicates significant difference ( $p < .01$ ) in caregiving between males and females in rural China  
 f indicates significant difference ( $p < .01$ ) in caregiving between male rural China and male non-rural China  
 g indicates significant difference ( $p < .01$ ) in caregiving between male rural China and female non-rural China.

Filial attitude and attitude of financial support were scored with a seven-point Likert scale: 1 = “strongly agree,” 2 = “fairly agree,” 3 = “somewhat agree,” 4 = “Neither agree nor disagree,” 5 = “somewhat disagree,” 6 = “fairly disagree,” 7 = “strongly disagree”

Figure 1. Mean reports of filial piety in China and Taiwan

