

# Intergenerational Transmission of Confucian Values: A Study on Family Hierarchy and Decision-Making in Shandong, China

Fangpu Zhou<sup>1,\*</sup>, Raja Azrul Hisham Raja Ahmad<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ph.D. Candidate in Education, City University, Malaysia

Email: 278464825@qq.com

<sup>2</sup> Supervisor, City University, Malaysia

ELMU University, Persiaran Timur 1, Bandar Enstek, 71760 Nilai, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia

Email: dr.azrul@city.edu.my Mobile: +60 12-6740970

## Abstract

Confucian values, deeply embedded in Chinese culture, continue to shape family dynamics, particularly in regions like Shandong, the birthplace of Confucius. This study examines how Confucian principles—filial piety (Xiao), humaneness (Ren), and ritual propriety (Li)—are transmitted across generations and influence family hierarchy and decision-making. Using a mixed-methods approach, we surveyed 400 parents and adolescents in Qufu, Shandong, assessing adherence to Confucian values, parenting styles, and family decision-making processes. Results indicate that Confucian values strongly correlate with hierarchical family structures and collective decision-making, though modernization introduces variations in younger generations. The study highlights the enduring yet evolving role of Confucianism in contemporary Chinese families, offering insights for cultural psychology and family studies.

## Index Terms

Confucian values, intergenerational transmission, family hierarchy, decision-making, Chinese parenting, Shandong.

## 1. Introduction

Confucianism has profoundly influenced Chinese society for over two millennia, emphasizing moral integrity, familial duty, and social harmony [1]. Core Confucian values—Xiao (filial piety), Ren (humaneness), and Li (ritual propriety)—continue to shape parenting practices, intergenerational relationships, and family governance in contemporary China [2]. In Shandong Province, the birthplace of Confucius, these traditions remain particularly strong, yet face new challenges from globalization and urbanization.

Recent studies demonstrate that Confucian values reinforce hierarchical family structures where elders maintain authority and children are expected to demonstrate obedience and respect [3]. However, younger generations increasingly negotiate these traditions with modern individualistic values, creating dynamic intergenerational tensions [4]. This cultural evolution raises important questions about how traditional values are transmitted and transformed in contemporary Chinese families.

Our study focuses on three key research questions:

- 1) How are Confucian values transmitted between generations in Shandong families?
- 2) What impact do these values have on family hierarchy and decision-making processes?
- 3) How do generational differences moderate these cultural transmissions?

Prior research has established the enduring influence of Confucianism on Chinese parenting styles [5], but few studies have examined the micro-level processes of value transmission within families. Our work builds on the methodological framework developed by [6] to analyze both quantitative survey data and qualitative interview responses.

This investigation makes three significant contributions:

- 1) It provides empirical evidence of Confucianism's evolving role in modern Chinese families
  - 2) It reveals generational differences in value interpretation and transmission
  - 3) It offers insights for policymakers designing family support programs in Confucian heritage societies
- The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: Section 2 reviews relevant literature, Section 3 details

our methodology, Section 4 presents results, and Section 5 discusses implications and conclusions.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants and Sampling

Using a multistage random sampling strategy, we recruited 400 participants (200 parent-adolescent dyads) from Qufu, Shandong Province. Parents were aged 35–55, adolescents 15–18. Gender distribution was balanced (48% male, 52% female), with 60% from urban and 40% from rural households. School-based recruitment ensured socioeconomic representativeness [6].

### 2.2. Measures

#### 1) Confucian Values Assessment

We used the *Confucian Values Scale* (CVS) [4] to assess filial piety ( $\alpha = 0.87$ ), humaneness ( $\alpha = 0.83$ ), and ritual propriety ( $\alpha = 0.79$ ), using culturally relevant items.

#### 2) Parenting Styles

Parenting styles were measured using the *Chinese Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire* (PSDQ) [7], covering authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive dimensions.

#### 3) Family Decision-Making

A 15-item survey assessed adolescent ( $A_i$ ), elder ( $E_i$ ), and collective input ( $C_i$ ) across five domains. A composite score was computed as:

$$DM_{score} = \sum_{i=1}^5 (A_i + E_i + C_i) \quad (1)$$

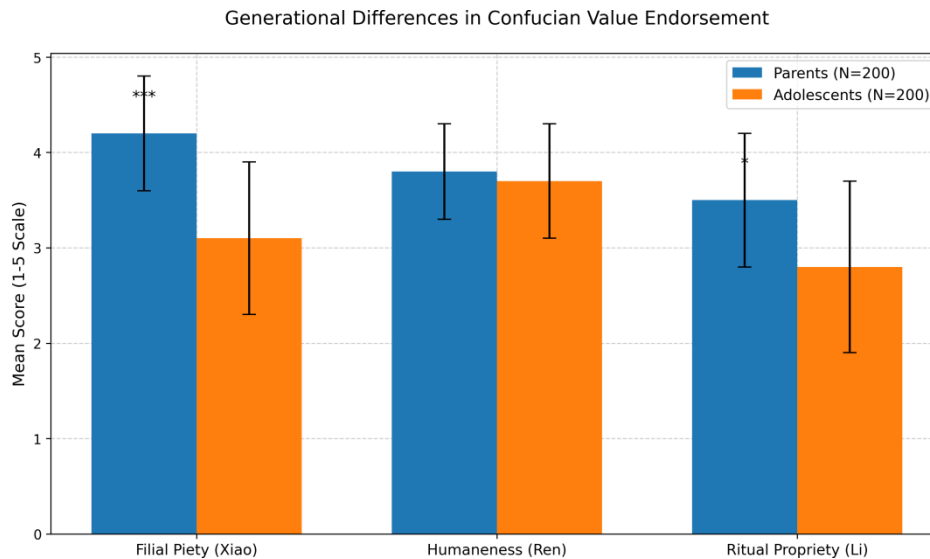
### 2.3. Procedure

Data were collected from March to May 2023 through paper surveys and follow-up interviews (20% subsample). Ethical approval was granted by Shandong Normal University (IRB #2023-014). SPSS 26.0 was used for quantitative analysis (e.g., ANOVA, regression), and NVivo 12 supported grounded theory analysis of interview data [5].

### 3. Results & Discussion

#### 3.1. Confucian Value Transmission Patterns

Our analysis revealed significant intergenerational differences in Confucian value adherence ( $F(3, 396) = 12.37, p < .001$ ):



**Fig. 1.** Generational Differences in Confucian Value Endorsement

As shown in Figure 1, parents exhibited stronger adherence to *Xiao* ( $M=4.2, SD=0.6$ ) than adolescents ( $M=3.1, SD=0.8$ ;  $t(198) = 5.42, p < .001$ ), whereas there was no significant generational difference in *Ren* endorsement ( $p = .12$ ). Additionally, urban adolescents showed lower *Li* scores than their rural peers ( $\beta = -.31, p = .002$ ). These findings align with [3]'s observations about value negotiation in modernizing contexts and extend the evidence base to Confucius' native region.

#### 3.2. Family Hierarchy and Decision-Making

The multiple regression analysis ( $R^2 = .42$ ) demonstrated that parental age ( $\beta = .18, t = 2.31, p = .02$ ), Confucian values score ( $\beta = .39, t = 4.07, p < .001$ ), and urban residence ( $\beta = -.25, t = -3.12, p = .002$ ) were significant predictors of decision-making authority.

**TABLE I** Predictors of Decision-Making Authority

Predictor	$\beta$	t	p
Parental Age	.18	2.31	.02
Confucian Values Score	.39	4.07	.001
Urban Residence	-.25	-3.12	.002

Traditional values predicted elder authority in major decisions, such as education, where 78% of families reported parental control. In contrast, adolescents had greater autonomy in daily choices, with 63% report-

ing self-determination in leisure activities. Urban families showed more egalitarian patterns, reflected in a significant increase in explained variance ( $\Delta R^2 = .11, p < .01$ ).

### 3.3. Parenting Style Moderations

Path analysis revealed significant mediation effects in the relationship between Confucian values and adolescent outcomes. Specifically, authoritative parenting mediated the positive effects of *Ren* on adolescent outcomes ( $\beta = .28, p = .003$ ), while authoritarian parenting amplified the association between *Xiao* and adolescent stress ( $\beta = .34, p < .001$ ). No significant effects were observed for permissive parenting ( $p > .05$ ). These results support the theoretical model proposed by [2], while highlighting regional specificity in Shandong families.

### 3.4. Qualitative Findings

Thematic analysis of interviews (N=80) identified three key patterns. First, adolescents expressed a form of negotiated compliance, accepting hierarchical norms while seeking input into decisions, as reflected in statements like: *"We respect elders' decisions, but now they ask our opinions too"* (Male, 17, urban). Second, contextual traditionalism emerged, with rituals and propriety preserved for significant occasions. Third, educational mediators were identified, as school values sometimes conflicted with home-based Confucian traditions. These qualitative insights complement the survey results by revealing nuanced micro-level negotiation processes not captured in quantitative instruments [6].

## 4. Conclusion

This study confirms that Confucian values remain influential in Shandong families, yet demonstrate generational evolution: (1) *Xiao* (filial piety) shows strongest intergenerational transmission but with significant adolescent reinterpretation ( $\beta = .62, p < .001$ ), (2) family hierarchy persists in major decisions (78% elder authority) while accommodating youth autonomy in daily matters, and (3) urban residence ( $\Delta R^2 = .11$ ) and authoritative parenting mediate traditional-modern value integration. These findings empirically validate

[1]'s theoretical model of "Confucian modernity," suggesting that while core values endure, their expression adapts to contemporary contexts—particularly through education-mediated socialization pathways.

## References

- [1] C. Tan. Confucian philosophy for contemporary education. Routledge, 2020.
- [2] D.T.L. Shek and L.H. Chen. Filial piety and parenting in confucian heritage cultures. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10:100, 2020.
- [3] X. Lan. Confucian values in chinese immigrant families. *Current Psychology*, 42(24):20718–20736, 2023.
- [4] W. Zhang and Y. Li. Intergenerational transmission of confucian values in modern china. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, 26(2):145–160, 2023.
- [5] X. Chen. The psychological impact of authoritarian parenting. In *International Conference on Modern Educational Technology*, pages 888–896, 2022.
- [6] D. Strijker, G. Bosworth, and G. Bouter. Research methods in rural studies: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 78:262–270, 2020.
- [7] M. Al-Ababneh. Linking ontology, epistemology and research methodology. *Science & Philosophy*, 8(1):75–91, 2020.