

Confucian Filial Piety and Altruism and Family Financial Support in the 21st Century

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ABSTRACT

Described as one of the most influential philosophies of East Asia, Confucianism concepts of social order have permeated throughout the region. Its moral teachings have influenced East Asia as a whole, and still his teachings remain in some families to this day. In particular, Confucius' views on filial piety, respect for one's parents, and altruism, caring for others, have been taught in families as a moral model. However, since its creation around the 6th to 7th century, Confucianism has mainly lost its relevance and remains mostly an enigma to many East Asians. The question still remains of how much Confucianism still holds an influence today. This question was undertaken as a survey of Asian families across the United States and Vietnam, asking them about their demographic, respect and acts of service for family, as well as acts for others. A total of 258 people responded, majority females, centralized mainly within Hanoi and Massachusetts. For statements surrounding filial piety, Vietnam respondents tended to have a higher positive/neutral response rate, with its percentage.

Introduction

1. Confucianism

1.1 Introduction to Confucianism

Confucianism (Chinese: 儒家; pinyin: Rújiā) is an ancient philosophy originating from China that has existed for over 2500 years, taught by Confucius (Chinese: 孔夫子; pinyin: Kǒng Fūzǐ), a scholar that lived between 551 to 479 B.C.E.

The main ideas of Confucius regarding ethics, behavior, and moral character are written in many books, including the Analects (Chinese: 論語; pinyin: Lúnyǔ). From there, his work gained popularity and the spread of Confucianism grew in many surrounding communities and nations. Today, it still persists in many known cultures in East Asia, particularly China, Japan, and South Korea.

Confucianism is a term from the West with no equivalent in Chinese. (~ius and ~ism suffixes are western conventions, foreign to Asians). It can be considered a worldview, a political ideology, a social ethic, or a way of living. Confucianism can be viewed as an all-encompassing method of thinking and life that includes reverence for ancestors and a human-centred religiousness and is sometimes seen as a philosophy or a religion. Many East Asians may identify as Daoists, Muslims, Shintists, Buddhists, or Christians, but they rarely cease to be Confucians once declaring their religious affiliations.

2. Filial Piety

2.1 *Introduction to Filial Piety*

In Confucianism, filial piety (Chinese: 孝; pinyin: xiào) refers to the attitude of obedience, care, and respect toward the parents and elder family members. Xiào has shaped the foundation of individual moral conduct and social harmony in East Asian countries such as China, Japan, and South Korea for generations. The basis of filial piety comes from the most fundamental bond between the parent and child, which is the first of the five relationships in Confucianism. These five bonds are known as the “Five Constant Relationships”: Ruler-subject, Father-son, Husband-wife, older brother-younger brother, and Friend-friend. Note the male historical bias in defining the bonds. Therefore in our analysis, we will be looking at the Father-son bond, treating it as a parent to child bond instead.

Even though the child is the junior member in the relationship, it is important to grasp the idea of reciprocity in order to understand filial piety. Reciprocity is included in all five of the mentioned bonds. Confucius himself terms it as the principle that conducts life: “Perhaps the word 'reciprocity': Do not do to others what you would not want others to do to you.”

2.2. *History*

The character used to represent Confucianism (Chinese: 孝; pinyin: xiào) depicts an old man at the top being supported by a young man. Xiào itself was rooted in a Chinese feudal social structure with land being controlled by large clans and society structured in a patriarchal and hierarchical way. Confucist based filial piety as the foundation for humanity (Chinese: 仁; pinyin: ren) itself, and catered the ability to love and care for others.

2.3. *Modern Influence*

Currently, filial piety still holds power within many Asian societies. Chinese society promotes absolute respect to elders which is the backbone of xiào. However, filial piety’s influence is not as large as it used to be, as current standing has been dwindling. For example, in South Korea the percentage of elders living with their children has dropped by half over around half a century. In China as well, filial piety has been waning, so officials in some localities have been requiring support contracts between child and parent. In China’s Qindu district, now newlyweds are required to support their parents after age 60.

3. Altruism

3.1. *Introduction*

In Confucianism, the Sangang Wuchang (Chinese: 三綱五常; pinyin: Sāngāng Wǔcháng), sometimes referred to as the Three Fundamental Bonds and Five Constant Virtues, are considered the three most important human relationships and five most important virtues in Confucianism. They are regarded as the unchanging, eternal "essence of life and bonds of society," as well as the moral and political prerequisites of Confucianism.

As one of the Five Constants (Chinese: 五常; pinyin: Wǔcháng), altruism (Chinese: 仁, pinyin: ren) is one of the foundational Confucian virtues and important moral values of Chinese culture. There are many interpretations of ren, some reflected in English translations such as "altruism" and "benevolence,". Ren is seen as an ideal quality for all humans, and people are encouraged to achieve it. All these different interpretations share two notions, namely that ren is a quality that every individual has the potential to possess, and ren can manifest itself when a person expresses “humaneness” to others. This can be exemplified by acts such as donations and fundraising. (Tu Weiming,

2022) According to Confucius, "...The humane man, desiring to be established himself, seeks to establish others; desiring himself to succeed, he helps others to succeed. To judge others by what one knows of oneself is the method of achieving humanity..." Sources of Chinese Tradition, Wm. Theodore de Bary, ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), Analects VI:28

3.2. *History*

It is widely accepted that ren had existed before Confucianism and was derived from a common custom by a group of tribes known as the Dongyi in early Chinese history (Gang Xu, 2019). However, Confucius and his disciples played a significant role in making the notion a fundamental value of Chinese culture. (*On_the_Origin_of_Ren*)

Confucius was a shi (士), a member of a class between the aristocracy and the peasants, who, by that time, had lost their social status and worked as scholars in the government. Confucius gave moral weight to previous aristocratic ideals which were applied to all people. Ren initially referred to the appearance and bearing of a youthful, virtuous warrior. Confucius converted it into the uprightness of the junzi, who encourages people to act morally by setting an excellent example. (Tu Weiming, 2022)

3.3. *Modern influence*

According to Kang Youwei, a popular scholar and reformer from China, Confucianism contained the ultimate truth (Kang Youwei, . His view of modernity in his new text interpretation of Confucianism holds that the "new world" humankind is advancing toward is characterized by significant technical developments and material abundance. Such Confucian modernity highlights the significant moral progress of individuals as they overcome their selfishness and greed and instead "become one with all under Heaven" under the influence of ren.

Confucianism and its values have resonated in many societies even to this today. Confucianism as a philosophy has shaped many modern Asian values, customs, and traditions. Confucianism originated in Ancient China in the Shandong Province and spread to both Northern and Southern provinces of the country. Even though Confucianism was largely embraced by China, it was not by the West. Followers of Confucianism tried to spread its teachings, but primarily failed, and Confucianism was mainly kept to East Asia. It is thought that Confucianism instead spread to many other countries primarily along East Asia. It is thought that Confucianism spread to Korea around 100 B.C through an established Chinese colony. In Japan, Confucianism was thought to spread from Korea in the 6th and 7th centuries. Additionally, Chinese influence has spread throughout Southeast Asia. In both Japan, Korea, and China, Confucianism has served as a peaceful existence for those living in East Asia. Thus, it can be inferred that such moral behavior is promoted nowadays in part because of Confucianism

For the purpose of this paper, we will refer to rén as altruism, focusing on something other than oneself, and xiào as filial piety.

Methods

We used the snowball sampling method to distribute our cross-sectional web-based survey created through Google Forms with the guidance of a mentor. Our Google Form was reviewed by our mentor. After approval, we shared the URL link to the form along with a brief overview and rationale of the study with our acquaintances and asked them to further disseminate it their acquaintances across the country who likewise shared it with their acquaintances.

The survey was an anonymous survey including eConsent (electronic informed consent). In the survey, there are six separate sections: Demographics, Family Status, Personal Finance, The Presence of Filial Piety in Your (the respondent's) Life, and The Presence of Altruism in Your (the respondent's) Life. The final survey consisted of 48 questions. Questions consisted of mostly multiple choice, answered based on a 5 point Likert scale, ranging from 1 as

“Strongly Disagree” to 5 as “Strongly Agree”. There were only a few free response questions asking for mostly numbers (ex: Number of Siblings, etc.). The survey took around 5-8 minutes to complete. We also included open response questions for respondents to share the amount of time they did something (ex: number of hours volunteering in a week) in order for cross-item and intra-item validity and verification. This helped us prevent respondent bias inherent in self-reporting, subject to respondent bias.

The initial survey was launched in two locations, which is Vietnam and the United States and then snowballed for 21 days. This survey is aimed to be used as a preliminary field test to develop and validate a reliable survey for further research. We cannot make sure that we include people from every state or city in the country, but most of our responses come from respondents in the city of Hanoi and the state of Massachusetts as we are sharing the survey mainly to our acquaintances, who reside in Hanoi and Massachusetts.

The subjects are people from middle school and up, primarily those from age 10-65. The minimum sample size is considered to be 100.

Results

The two surveys we launched in Vietnam and the US included questions which fell under six sections: Demographics, Family Status, Personal Finance, The Presence of Filial Piety in Your (the respondent’s) Life, and The Presence of Altruism in Your (the respondent’s) Life. Below, we have separated the results into each section for clarity purposes.

It should be noted that we initially wanted to analyze responses from four age ranges including the age range 0-14 years old, 15-24 years old, 25-64 years old, and 65+ years old. This was because we wanted to compare the differences between the old and new generations more easily. However, starting from the “Personal Finance of Respondents” section, we will not consider responses from the age group 65+ because we only received 1 response from this age group in the Vietnamese survey and none in the US survey. Therefore, we believe this sample is inadequate for analysis.

Demographic Profiles of Respondents

Table 1: Demographic of US Sample

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Age Range 0-14/15-24/25-64/65+	17/56/36/0	15.6%/51.4%/33.0%/0%
Gender Male/Female/Prefer not to answer/ Other	50/56/2/1	45.9%/51.4%/1.8%/0.9%

Table 2: Demographic of Vietnamese Sample

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Age Range 0-14/15-24/25-64/65+	24/86/37/1	16.2%/58.1%/25.0%/0.7%
Gender Male/Female/Prefer not to answer/ Other	41/102/4/1	27.7%/69.0%/2.7%/0.7%

Family Statuses of Respondents

US version:

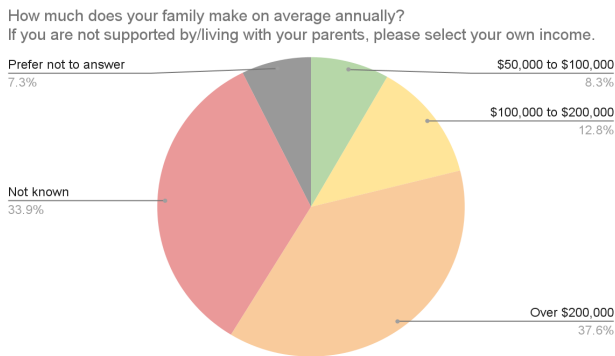
Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Parent's Civic Status Married or remarried/ Separated or divorced/ Widowed/ Never married/ Prefer not to answer	85/12/7/5/0	78.0%/11.0%/6.4%/4.6%/0%
Head of the current household Parent(s) or Step-parent(s)/ Grandparent(s)/ Other relative(s)/ Legal Guardian(s)/ Myself or My spouse/ Prefer not to answer	70/0/0/0/39/0	64.2%/0%/0%/0%/35.8%/0%
How many siblings do you have? (input 0 if you don't have any) 0/1/2/3/4/5	21/48/24/12/2/2	19.3%/44.0%/22.0%/11.0%/1.8%/1.8%
If you do have siblings, are you the eldest, middle, or youngest child? I have no siblings/ Youngest/ Middle/ Eldest	21/40/18/30	19.3%/36.7%/16.5%/27.5%

Vietnamese version:

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Parent's Civic Status Married or remarried/ Separated or divorced/ Widowed/ Never married/ Prefer not to answer	111/12/2/16/7	75%/8.1%/1/4%/10.8%/4.7%
Head of the current household Parent(s) or Step-parent(s)/ Grandparent(s)/ Other relative(s)/ Legal Guardian(s)/ Myself or My spouse/ Prefer not to answer	101/9/0/1/31/6	68.2%/6.1%/0%/0.7%/20.9%/4.1%
How many siblings do you have? (input 0 if you don't have any)		

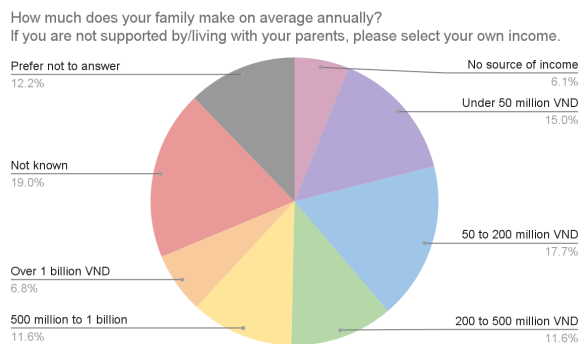
Variables	Frequency	Percentage
0/1/2/3/4/5	20/71/28/19/9/ 1	13.5%/48%/18.9%/12.8% /6.1%/0.7%
If you do have siblings, are you the eldest, middle, or youngest child? I have no siblings/ Youngest/ Middle/ Eldest	16/43/19/24	10.8%/29.1%/12.8%/16.2 %

US version:



We can see that the majority of the respondents in the survey are from the middle-upper class based on their financial income, ranging from \$100,000-\$200,000+. Therefore, the pool of US responses is inherently biased to more wealthy classes.

Vietnamese version:



We can see that Vietnam respondents have greater class diversity compared to those of the US, which is represented by the wider range of choices for different income levels. More specifically, this survey included responses for *no source of income, under 50 million VND, and 50 to 200 million VND* which were supposed to mirror the options *No source of income, under \$10000, and \$10000 to \$50,000* respectively from the US version. This will have an impact on our analysis relating to financial support later.

For the following sections on filial piety, altruism, and financial support, we will only be presenting responses from age groups 0-14, 15-24, and 25-64 because we only received one response from the age group 65+. Therefore, we will not present responses from that age group, as it is not an adequate sample to include for comparison.

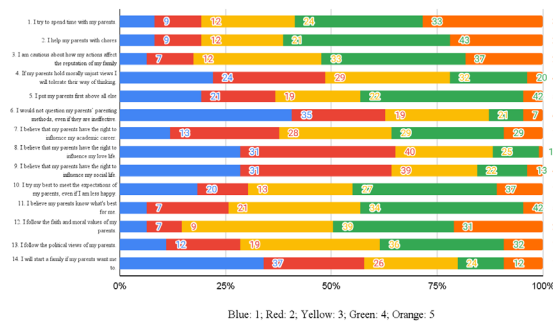
The Presence of Filial Piety in Respondents' Lives

In this section, we, respectively, asked survey participants to respond to statements surrounding filial piety. Each statement followed a 5-point Likert scale in which respondents indicated their level of agreement on a scale of 1-5: (1) Strongly disagree; (2) Disagree; (3) Neither agree nor disagree; (4) Agree; (5) Strongly agree. In this section, we

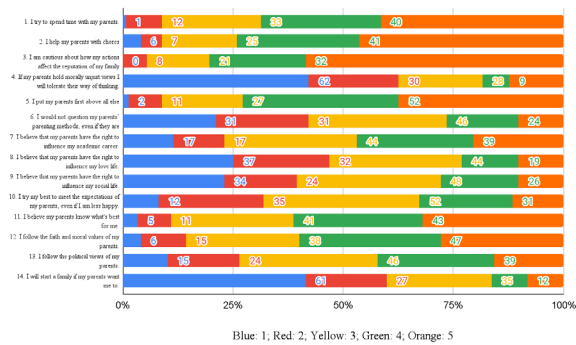
include 14 statements which we believe best represented the aspects and values of filial piety. Many of these statements referred to the beliefs and actions of the respondents. Based on the responses, we measured how much the respondents conformed with the statements. For each version (country) of the survey, we have displayed four graphs: one for all responses, one for responses from age group 0-14, one for responses from age group 15-24, and one for responses 25-64. The chart shows the number of responses to each level of agreement (1-5), with the corresponding percentage of the total responses.

Cross-country analysis:

The Presence of Filial Piety in your Life
All responses from the US



The Presence of Filial Piety in your Life
All responses from Vietnam



Overall, total US responses showed a relatively fair distribution of levels of agreement, with both low and high levels for most of the questions. It should be noted that the majority of responses were 3, 4, or 5 points. However, we observed that a few statements that affected the individual more directly and profoundly, such as statement 6 received lower agreement ratings (40.7% strongly disagree and 22.1% disagree) than statements that affected individuals to a lesser extent.

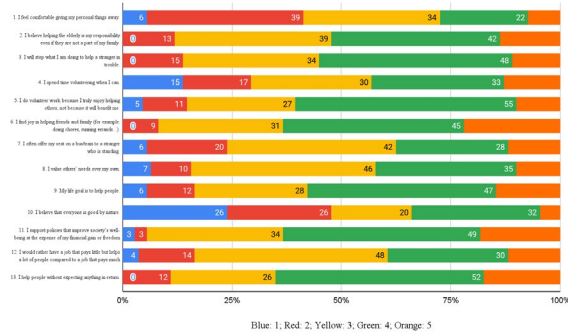
Overall, total Vietnamese responses have a tendency for high levels of agreement (with many 4- and 5-point responses), if the statements require less commitment and effort. For example, compared to statement 3, starting a family (statement 14) appeared to be more extreme for participants, generating lower levels of agreement. However, although the vast majority of participants answered negatively to statements with higher levels of commitment, they still answered positively to statements about the prioritization of their parents in their lives.

Looking at both charts, it seems that the general trend of responses in the US version is quite similar to the Vietnamese version, but the Vietnamese version has a higher proportion of strongly agree (5 points) and agree (4 points) answers. There are 2 statements with a clear difference between the answers, which are statements 4 and 5. For statement 4, Vietnamese respondents showed much higher levels of strong disagreement (41.9%) than US respondents (22%). For statement 5, Vietnamese respondents showed much lower levels of strong disagreement and disagreement (8.8% combined) compared to US respondents who showed higher levels of disagreement (36.7% combined). These distinct differences may indicate that Vietnamese, in general, care more about issues that concern their parents, be it the mindsets and views of their parents or their importance overall.

In general, from these results it can be inferred that there is a stronger presence of filial piety in the lives of Vietnamese respondents.

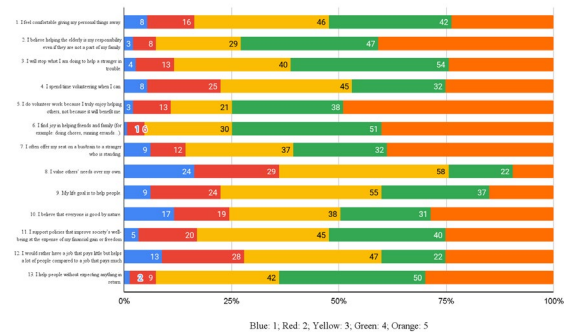
The Presence of Altruism in your Life

All responses from the US



The Presence of Altruism in your Life

All responses from Vietnam



Overall, total US responses included more 3s and 4s than the other points. However, for most statements, agree and disagree made up over 50% of the responses.

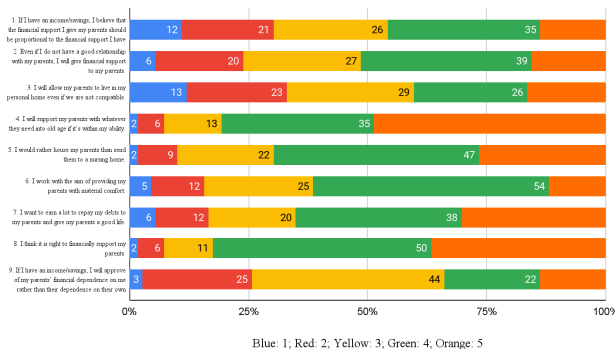
Overall, total Vietnamese responses also consisted mainly of agree and disagree, with a notably high number of 5 responses (over 25% for most statements).

Looking at both charts, it seems that the levels of agreement from both US respondents and Vietnamese respondents are quite similar in terms of patterns and trends. However, there are two statements with a clear difference between the distributions of the responses, which are statements 8 and 10, and it seems that more Vietnamese respondents strongly disagreed and disagreed with this statement (35.8% combined) while US respondents showed less disagreement generally (only 15.6% strongly disagreed or disagreed). Regarding statement 10, the US respondents strongly disagreed (47.8% combined) more than the Vietnamese respondents (24.3% combined).

On the basis of current data, it cannot be clearly concluded which group experiences a stronger presence of altruism in its life, as both groups indicate relatively equally high amounts of strong agreement with the statements. Nevertheless, the fact that there are more “strongly agrees” for the Vietnamese survey may be considered indicating a slightly stronger presence of altruism in Vietnam.

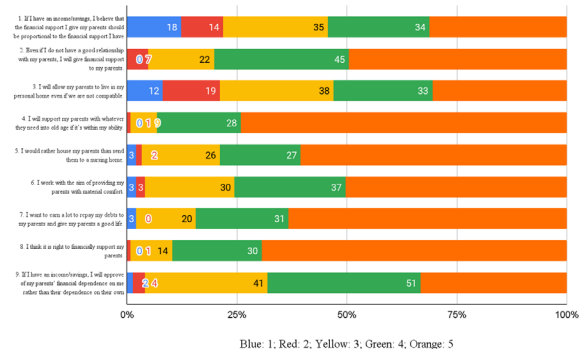
Financial Support to Family

All responses from the US



Financial Support to Family

All responses from Vietnam



Generally, despite the wage difference between US and Vietnamese participants, the majority of Vietnamese responses indicated higher agreement to providing financial support to family. For all statements, Vietnamese respondents had a higher percentage of “Strongly Agree” responses than US respondents. Moreover, generally, Vietnamese respondents “Disagree” and “Strongly Disagree” very rarely and less to all statements than US respondents. This shows quite clearly that Vietnamese respondents are more likely to financially support their family.

The respondents from the US had more diverse responses, meaning there were quite a few 1-, 2-, and 3-point responses as well. However, there were mostly “agree” responses. This finding, combined with the above analysis on filial piety and altruism, confirms that there is a relationship between filial piety and financial support for parents, and this relationship is stronger in Vietnamese respondents than in US respondents. As we have analysed, Vietnamese respondents have a comparatively strong presence of filial piety in their lives, and this is also reflected in the strong beliefs in financial support to family.

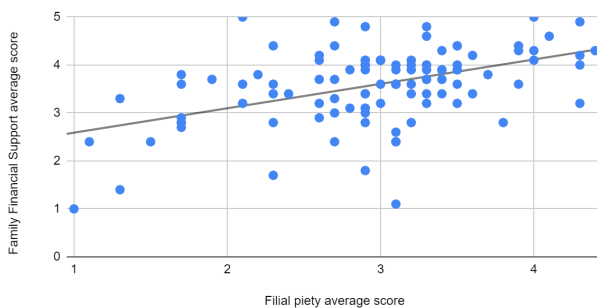
This finding might also be applicable to the US survey. The US survey respondents showed a less strong presence of filial piety than Vietnamese respondents, but they also indicated less strong beliefs about financial support to the family, so this could further strengthen the conclusion that there is a relationship between filial piety and financial support, so that filial piety is proportional to financial support to the family.

There could possibly be a relationship between altruism and financial support, but this may not be as clear and direct as the relationship between filial piety and financial support to the family. This is because, between the US and Vietnam, the presence of altruism has no significant difference, so the findings from those charts cannot be used to draw conclusions.

Because we wanted to further corroborate our findings above, we decided to construct scatter plots to clearly determine whether there was a correlation between family financial support and filial piety and family financial support and altruism or not. We also did this by separating results from the US and Vietnamese surveys.

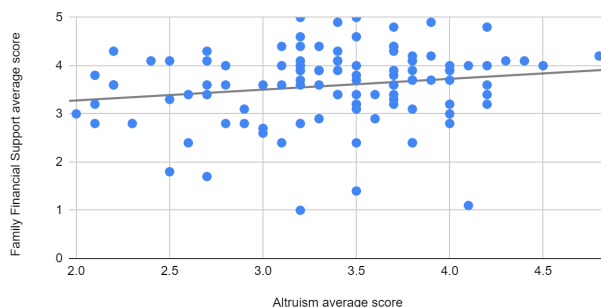
Filial Piety vs. Family Financial Support

The correlation between Filial Piety and Family Financial Support (the US)



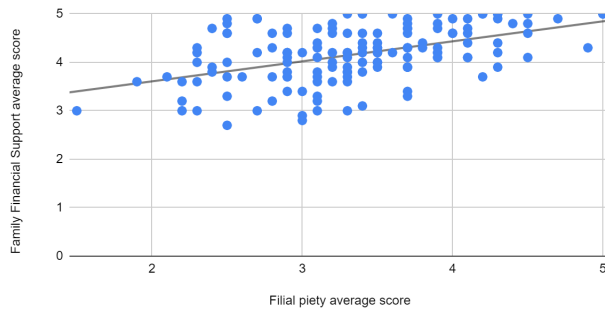
This scatter plot shows the positive correlation between filial piety and family financial support, based on responses in the US. This indicates that family financial support is somewhat proportional to the presence of filial piety in US respondents.

The correlation between Altruism and Family Financial Support (the US)



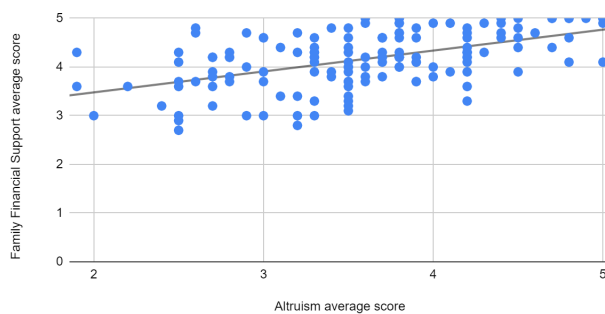
This scatter plot shows the positive correlation between altruism and family financial support, based on responses in the US. The plot points are more dispersed and the line of best fit is less inclined than the chart above, so the correlation might not be as strong as the correlation between filial piety and family financial support. However, in general, this still indicates that family financial support is somewhat proportional to the presence of altruism for US respondents, resolving the issue with the above analysis based on the stacked bar charts.

The correlation between Filial Piety and Family Financial Support (Vietnam)



This scatter plot shows a strong positive correlation between filial piety and family financial support, based on responses in Vietnam. This indicates that family financial support is proportional to the presence of filial piety for Vietnamese respondents, further reinforcing our finding that there is a strong relationship between filial piety and financial support for parents.

The correlation between Altruism and Family Financial Support (Vietnam)

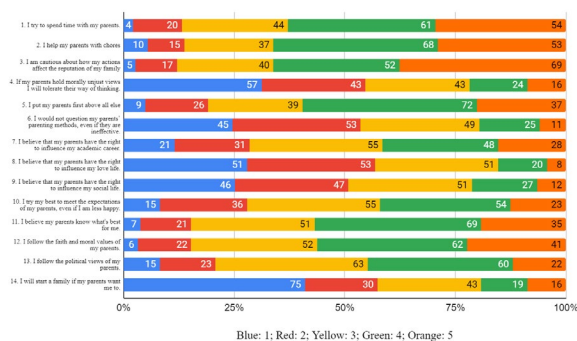


This scatter plot shows a strong positive correlation between altruism and family financial support, based on responses in Vietnam. This indicates that family financial support is proportional to the presence of altruism in Vietnamese respondents, which answers our unresolved question whether there is a strong relationship between altruism and financial support to parents.

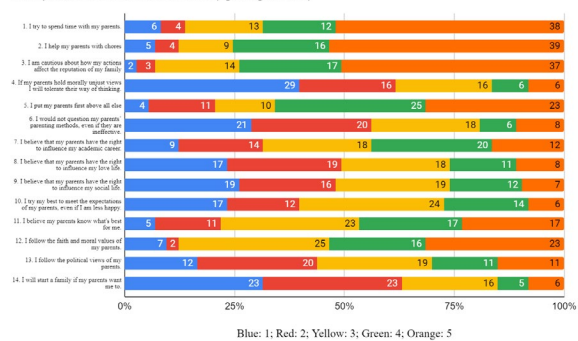
Cross-generational Analysis

For this section, we wanted to compare the responses between different generations: generation Z and millennials and generation X (as one group). According to Beresford research (<https://www.beresfordresearch.com/age-range-by-generation/> - in text later), Gen Z are from the ages of 10-25, Millennials are from the ages 26 – 41, and Gen X are from ages 42 – 57. Although our survey grouped ages 0-14, 15-24, and 25-64 into 3 different age ranges, for the purpose of this paper, our age ranges 0-14 and 15-24 will be called “Gen Z” and our age range 25-64 will be called “Millennials and Gen X”. We wanted to use this approximation because we felt it would be the easiest to understand in terms of generations and generational differences. The charts in this section will focus on age groups, so we will present responses regardless of nationality.

The Presence of Filial Piety in your Life
All responses from Gen Z (age ranges 0-14 & 15-24)

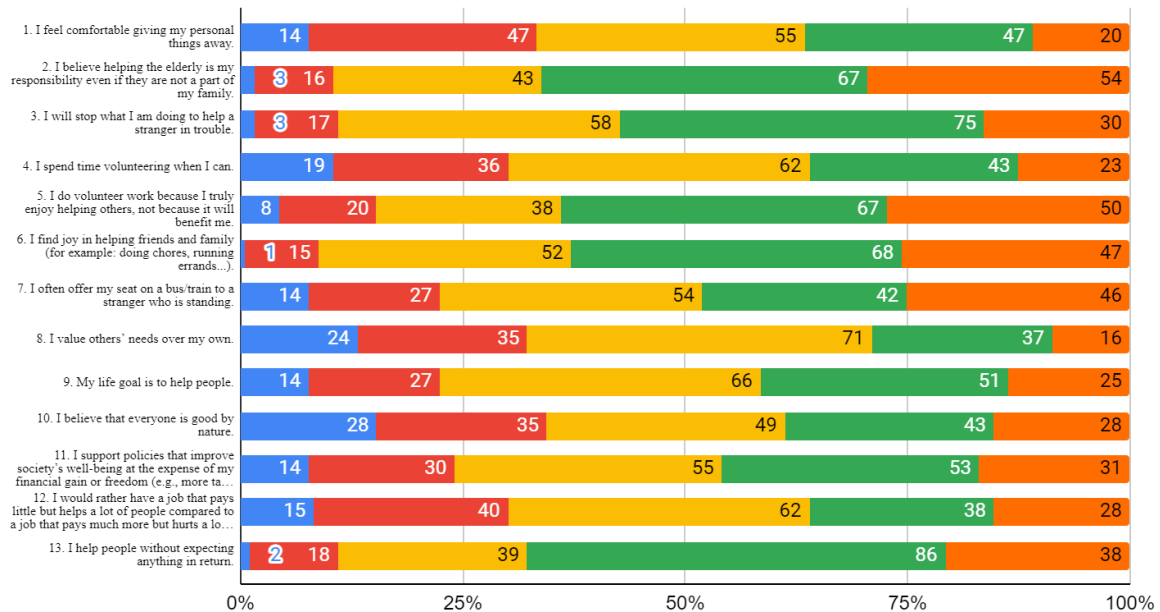


The Presence of Filial Piety in your Life
All responses from Millennials and Gen X (age ranges 25-64)



The Presence of Filial Piety in your Life

All responses from Gen Z age ranges 0-14 & 15-24



Blue: 1; Red: 2; Yellow: 3; Green: 4; Orange: 5

(We have 3 more graphs similar to this - for comparison between age groups)

Limitations

Although our analysis proved significant differences in both ancient to modern views and United States to Vietnam responses, the study sample was small for both US (110 participants) and Vietnam (148 participants) surveys. Additionally, geographically Vietnam does not account for participants in the general East and Southeast Asia regions. In the United States, the participants were vastly concentrated in Massachusetts, only one of 50 states. In terms of the financial situation, participants in the US were mostly grouped into the wealthy category, limiting information to mostly.

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