

Filial Piety Across Borders: Decision-Making and Migration Experiences of Young Chinese in Poland

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Abstract

China's birth control policy and modernization efforts in the late 20th century altered family structures, which made children primarily responsible for elderly care. As a result, Chinese migrants face new challenges in maintaining family obligations, particularly in countries like Poland, which has a relatively small Chinese diaspora. This study analyzes the migration experience, including migration decision-making factors, perception of filial piety (*xiao*), and practices of maintaining family ties abroad for Chinese migrants in Poland. The research is based on Reflective Thematic Analysis (RTA) and draws on 30 interviews conducted between 2022 and 2023 with Chinese individuals residing in Poland for at least a year. The paper studies the complex social, cultural, and emotional factors that influence how migrants fulfill their family responsibilities abroad. Findings reveal that Chinese migrants generally view Poland as a temporary residence, with limited opportunities to develop transnational care strategies. For most participants, the decision to choose Poland as a migration destination was determined by external factors, and they expressed the desire to return to China, anticipating a deeper emotional engagement with their ageing parents upon their return. The migration experience prompts significant changes in their awareness, future plans, and participation in elder care.

Keywords: filial piety, Chinese migration, transnational care, decision making, Poland.

Chinese on the move – brief introduction

By the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, Chinese communities could be found in nearly every country across the globe. It is estimated that in the world (excluding the PRC), over 40 million people have declared that they belong to the Chinese nation

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(Poston and Wong, 2016). Emigration from China after the initiation of Deng Xiaoping's reforms often referred to in academic discourse as "new migration," has given rise to novel settlement patterns in destination countries and has shaped new attitudes among Chinese emigrants. China has maintained a negative migration balance for years, with most migrants relocating to developed nations. Between 1995 and 2004, the number of Chinese emigrants to the thirty OECD countries exceeded 2 million (United Nations, 2022). In 2009–2018, the leading migration destinations were Korea, Japan and the USA (OECD, 2021). The reasons for migration vary from the desire to join a family to job and study migration (Song and Liang, 2019). According to the International Organization for Migration globally, the majority of emigrants originate from the People's Republic of China. However, what warrants in-depth analysis is not simply the growth of the Chinese diaspora over the past four decades but the widening gap between the characteristics of Chinese emigration before 1979 ("old migration") and after 1979 ("new migration"). This distinction reflects significant shifts in Chinese emigrants' motivations, socioeconomic profiles, and integration patterns in the contemporary global landscape. (Kurczewski, 2011). Different naming conventions also underline the non-uniform structure of overseas Chinese migrants. During the Deng Xiaoping period, the distinction was shaped by the terms: *huaqiao* (Chinese citizens overseas) and *huaren* (Chinese people who have become citizens of foreign countries) (Suryadinata, 2017). The modern term *huayi* refers to people of Chinese origin residing outside of China, regardless of citizenship (Pan, 1999).

The history of Chinese emigration reveals a remarkable adaptability, as the Chinese people have shown a willingness to relocate when circumstances demand or when new economic opportunities arise (Gao, 2017). Many Chinese emigrants have historically maintained robust social, economic, and emotional ties with their homeland. These transnational connections have provided essential support to the emigrants while ensuring a continuous flow of financial resources and investment back to China (Démurger & Hu, 2016). Notably, migrants have not only contributed financially to their country of origin; their movements have also prompted visible changes in social norms and practices within their homeland. Scholarly literature frequently underscores the Chinese diaspora's significant role in China's economic development and modernization, particularly since 1979 (Smart & Hsu, 2004). Chinese emigrants' dual belonging means that their origin and destination places tend to have a simultaneous presence in migrant lives (Byrne, 2023)

Historically, the largest concentrations of Chinese communities outside of China were found in Southeast Asia, the United States, Canada, and Australia. However, following the rise of the People's Republic of China's economic potential and its growing influence on the international stage after 2000, an increasing number of Chinese people emigrated to Africa and South America, where Chinese investments have been expanding. In Western Europe, the Chinese diaspora has long been present. Still, it was

and Eastern Europe, that this region gained greater prominence in the consciousness of the Chinese people. Larger groups of Chinese immigrants arrived in Central Europe in the late 1980s and early 1990s, particularly in Hungary and the Czech Republic. In Poland, the influx of Chinese citizens increased following the country's integration into the European Union. Since then, the Chinese population in Poland has grown steadily, now ranking seventh in terms of the number of foreign residents (Wardęga, 2017). Currently, about 7,000 Chinese citizens with valid residence permits live in Poland (Office for Foreigners, 2021). In this group, over 1.5 thousand people are students at Polish universities, which makes the Chinese the third largest group of foreign students among those from a country not neighboring Poland (Ogonowska-Rejer, 2022). Poland's integration into the European Union, combined with the special status accorded by Beijing to its relations with Central and Eastern European countries, has enhanced Poland's appeal as a destination for emigration.

Intergenerational ties hold profound importance in Chinese families, and are deeply rooted in the Confucian value of *xiao* (filial piety). Researchers analyzing the concept of *xiao* emphasize its association with respect, care, and obedience towards one's parents and elders, creating a foundation for family cohesion and moral conduct (Nichols, 2013). It is not merely an individual virtue but a social expectation that shapes relationships across generations. Children are taught from a young age to honor their parents' sacrifices, prioritize their well-being, and maintain familial harmony. This value extends beyond immediate caregiving, influencing decisions related to career, marriage, and even migration, as individuals often prioritize their family's needs and expectations over personal desires. In return, elders provide wisdom, guidance, and a sense of continuity, reinforcing the reciprocal nature of these ties. In Chinese culture, intergenerational relationships are not just private bonds but a reflection of collective identity and societal stability (Linyan and Boqing, 2023).

Long-distance relationships pose significant challenges for the caregivers who often leave their parents behind. As Bifarin and others (2022) pointed out, little attention has been given to the implications of the transnational mobility of young Chinese people on the responsibility of elderly care. The goal of this paper is to fill this gap and explore, on the one-hand factors implicating migration decision-making and, on the other, the migration experience and its impact on the practices and understanding of filial piety. The paper examines the role that is currently played by filial piety in the daily lives of Chinese migrants residing in Poland. In addition, an important goal is to determine how they define their role with an aging parent remaining in China. In the analytical part, the paper is based on in-depth interviews. The study's main findings are enrooted in analyzing filial piety from the perspective of future caregivers. The paper is organized as follows. The ensuing section explores the meaning and practice of Chinese filial piety and existing research on filial obligations, offering a theoretical foundation by reviewing significant literature on filial duties within Chinese culture. The next section focuses on the literature on the filial practices of Chinese migrants,

analyzing how these obligations are preserved or adapted in the context of migration. The “Research Design and Methodology” section outlines the approach used to collect and analyze data. This is followed by the presentation of the major findings of the study, which highlights key insights into the migration decision making and transformation of filial practices among migrants. The paper concludes with final comments, summarizing the main outcomes and providing recommendations for future research.

Filial Piety and Research on Filial Obligations

The Confucian principle of filial piety (*xiao*) has been crucial in shaping Chinese family and societal dynamics for centuries. The deep respect for elders and filial obligation to parents is clearly reflected in the Chinese language itself. The Chinese idiom 百善孝为先 (*bai shan xiao wei xian*) indicates that of all the virtues (literally: one hundred virtues), the most important and perfect is the virtue 孝 (*xiao*) (Wang et al., 2009). *Xiao*, as an important cultural value, survived in the minds of the Chinese despite attempts to eradicate it during the Cultural Revolution (1966–76) and during the erosion of Maoism after the death of Mao Zedong. The attitude of the Chinese towards the elderly started to change due to several factors. Firstly, the economic ones, like the modernization of the country initiated in 1978 by the then-leader of the country – Deng Xiaoping, as well as the accompanying internal migration of the population on a huge scale (currently estimated at around 300 million people) and the one-child policy (1977–2015). Secondly, due to social transformation encompassing the systematic decline in the level of social trust, and finally stress and increased competition at work (Zhang et al., 2021). Maintaining filial relationships while intensively promoted by the government and officially sanctioned by law, e.g. Chinese Law on Protection of the Rights and Interests of the Elderly (Yao and Feng, 2022), remains a challenge (Zhang et al, 2020). Filial piety’s relevance is undergoing significant reevaluation in the backdrop of modern consumerism and economic priorities in China. Young caregivers often face hard-to-resolve conflicts in today’s increasingly utilitarian society. Globalization and the modernization process of the country triggered changes in attitudes and values. At the same time, only children need to face tremendous competition in the domain job market, the challenges of the extremely fast-aging Chinese society, and cope with pressure from parents, society, and the Chinese Communist Party. The pressure comes from legal obligation but also official narrative aligning with the practical need for elder support, moral reconstruction, and the preservation of Chinese cultural identity (Zhang et al. 2020).

In contemporary psychological and family research, an evolution of the conceptualization of filial piety can be observed, suggesting that filial piety is not an element specific to East Asian cultures but rather a universal concept showing a cognitive script, a form of personality constructed for social exchange. The results show the

universal mechanism of the child-parent relationship in different cultures (Różycka-Tran et al., 2021). This field of research is based on the use of commonly accepted scales, such as the Dual Filial Piety Scale (Yeh and Bedford, 2003), which has been shown to model caring relationships in many contemporary societies accurately. The Dual Filial Piety scale distinguishes between two dimensions of filial piety, i.e. Reciprocal Filial Piety (RFP) and Authoritarian Filial Piety (AFP). The RFP focuses on the close bonds created between children and parents in long-term interactions, manifested by children's gratitude and love for their parents (Sun et al., 2019; Yeh and Bedford, 2003). Adherence to the RFP results in fewer conflicts with parents (Li et al., 2014). On the other hand, AFP emphasizes the family order both in terms of norms and roles that involve children's obedience to their parents (Yeh, 2006). In practice, both kinds of filial piety coexist, strengthening family cohesion. However, it is observed that their individual strengths are different and may have a different impact on the psychosocial functioning of a given individual (Yeh et al., 2013).

A significant body of research papers focus on changes in the understanding of the term *xiao* under the influence of modernization processes and the resulting changes in Chinese society. Importantly, Zhan (2005) argues that *xiao* culture is not collapsing. Rather, the structural changes caused by the one-child policy, increasing educational opportunities and increasing geographic mobility have a greater impact on current and future care for the elderly in China. On the other hand, Zhang and others (2021) point out that traditional beliefs in contemporary China are transforming. The Chinese are becoming an increasingly individualized society and are increasingly willing to express themselves as a result of modernization and globalization. Accordingly, the practice of filial piety is also changing and becoming less authoritarian. According to (Zhang et al., 2021), young Chinese people still respect their parents, although they refuse to obey them completely. Liang and others in their study (2023) note, based on their own research analyzing the years 2008–2018, that financial support for the elderly is increasing, while the provision of informal care shows the opposite trend. In a recent study by Wang and colleagues (2023) using the Dual Scale of Filial Piety, the authors argue that there was no significant decrease in attitudes of filial piety between 2004 and 2017. Both reciprocal filial piety (RFP) and authoritarian filial piety (AFP) did not decrease, showing a similar trend for both men and women. At the same time the factors influencing the attitude of filial piety have changed over the 13 years, with the influence of education and employment decreasing and the influence of marital status increasing. The authorities of rapidly aging China, with ever-lower fertility rates, place a greater burden of caring for the elderly on young Chinese people. State elderly care offers a very low level of support. As a result, 90% of seniors depend on family care and will continue to do so in the future (Tu, 2016). Bifarin and others (2023) also note these changes in the model of care while maintaining the traditional value system. During interviews conducted with eight respondents, they explored the contemporary meaning of filial piety. Despite

the inherent stress, participants in the study envisioned providing or arranging care in the future to fulfill their *xiao* commitment. However, the authors also noted that actual care performance does not always match social expectations, leading to a ‘filial disparity’, a gap between societal expectations for care for elderly relatives and the actual effectiveness of care provided.

Filial Obligations and Filial Practices of Chinese Migrants

Over the centuries, the act of leaving one’s home and parents unattended to travel to foreign lands was regarded as contrary to the Confucian tradition, which emphasized filial piety and loyalty. In imperial China, individuals who were perceived as disloyal to their country and ancestors by abandoning their homeland were often subjected to the same punishments as criminals, reflecting the deeply ingrained cultural values of duty and familial responsibility (Kruczewski, 2011). From the late 19th century to the mid-20th century, the term *huaqiao* was used together with a call for overseas Chinese people to remain politically and culturally loyal to the Chinese state. First, the Qing government and then the Guomindang government claimed the right to make political and financial demands on emigrants. For much of the 20th century, Chinese law reflected how ruling elites viewed Chinese people living outside the Middle Kingdom—no matter how many years they had spent abroad, they were still traditionally considered Chinese (Gungwu, 2006).

In the context of this study work, it is worth paying attention to the research on how the *xiao* virtue is understood and practiced by Chinese people living abroad. In this context, the studies were conducted in countries with a large Chinese diaspora. For example, Chappel and Kusch (2007) studied the contemporary face of filial piety among Canadians of Chinese descent. The findings reveal the tendency for elderly people to live with their children even when their spouse is still alive and for sons and sons-in-law/daughters-in-law to provide care – which is mostly practical daily living assistance. The authors, however, claim to have identified the gendered nature of filial piety. It manifests itself in the fact that daughters and their spouses undertake a wider range of forms of help, and their involvement increases as needed while the help from sons decreases.

The perspective of cross-border filial piety – specifically regarding caregivers in the UK and their parents in China – is described in the work (Mengwei and Nehring, 2020) which is based on in-depth interviews with both interest groups. The authors emphasize – apart from the durability of the ties resulting from piety – that both parents and children in this configuration are a minority in their local social environment. Parents due to their status as members of transnational families, and children due to their immigrant status. As a result, both generations had to develop strategies to deal with local social pressures in their immediate daily environment.

The study by Dong et al. (2014) provides a different perspective. It aims to assess the expectations and understanding of filial piety from the perspective of older people of Chinese descent living in the Chicago metropolitan area in the USA. Participants of this survey showed a high level of anticipation of filial piety. The highest expectations and the way of implementing piety as perceived by the elderly were in the domain of respect. In turn, Liu (2016) analyzes filial piety in the Chinese community in New Zealand. At the same time, he emphasizes the obstacles to practicing piety resulting from restrictive immigration law, which requires a thorough analysis of the financial consequences of issuing a visa for elderly migrant parents already residing in the country. He finds interesting patterns of extended families, discovering that New Zealand, for some families, is a “transfer point” on the further migration path, which makes caring for the elderly even more complicated. Interesting themes regarding the adaptation of the understanding of filial piety in the environment of Chinese Australians can be found in the work (Lin et al., 2020). The authors, based on surveys among the elderly, prove that their way of experiencing piety can be described as “they searched for paradise, lost paradise, found it again”. This means that Chinese migrants came to a foreign country with their ideal expectations of some form of piety. Faced with challenges, language barriers, and changed family dynamics, they experienced a sense of disappointment about the gap between expectations and reality and, as a result, developed more realistic expectations (which corresponds to finding paradise again).

The bibliography focusing on the perception of *xiao* of young Chinese students living abroad is not very extensive. Existing studies highlight that young Chinese students abroad largely maintain the core tenets of filial piety – deeply respecting and caring for their parents – but they reinterpret and practice this value more flexibly than traditional doctrine would dictate. Respect for parents remains paramount, while absolute obedience is downplayed, reflecting a move from an authoritarian model of filial piety to a more reciprocal, voluntary one (Dong, 2005; Sun, 2021). Students increasingly view emotional support and personal achievement (such as academic success) as meaningful contributions to filial duty alongside physical care or financial support. Cultural adaptation and acculturation play a nuanced role: exposure to Western individualism encourages greater personal autonomy, yet most youths continue to honour their familial obligations even as they absorb new values, creating a blended identity that values both independence and family responsibility (Sun, 2021).

Research design and methodology

I have designed a qualitative study based on semi-structured interviews to explore migration decision-making and its impact on filial behaviors and the understanding of *xiao* obligation. The interview was constructed around the reasons behind migration and experience of it, the perception of the value of filial piety, and the means

respondents are implementing to practice it. Respondents have been asked about the unique features of Chinese filial piety, personal relationships with their parents, other means of support, and the aspect of gender in elderly care. While the full analysis, along with the examples of responses, is presented in the subsequent section, the full interview scenario is provided as supplementary material.

Numerous steps have been undertaken to ensure the research meets high ethical standards. When designing the research concept, the author followed the guidelines of the Council of the National Science Centre, which co-financed the research. Research participants have been informed about the entry criteria, the possibility of stopping the interview, and that the data collected will be used only for research purposes. The guidelines covered by the Declaration of Helsinki were applied during data collection.

Study participants were found by snowball method. The interviews lasted from 1h to 2h20, and they were conducted in Polish or English with elements of Chinese (specific idioms). The relative proportion of sexes was approximately equal, but more women participated in the study. Regarding age, most of the respondents can be perceived as young – below 30 years old. They were predominantly single and childless. Interestingly, while reporting the parents' age, it was easier for the respondents to tell their Chinese zodiac sign than their age. Most of the respondents had two parents alive. While it was possible to collect responses from people from different parts of China, some did not give clear answers when asking about hukou and place of upbringing (city or village). Respondents clearly did not want to admit they might have a rural background. Rather, they said that they lived in the countryside when they were young but then went to school in the city or that they grew up in the city, but their family home is in the countryside. It might demonstrate that the origin of the village/urban is strongly stigmatizing. Only children predominated in the study, although some of the participants had siblings. Most have a living grandparent or grandmother (at least one). A short summary of the respondent characteristics is provided in Table 1.

Table 1.

Characteristics of the sample

Sample size	Male/Female Ratio	Age range	Proportion of urban residents	Parents age	Time spent in Poland
N=30	40/60%	20–49	70%	43–76	1–15 years

To analyze the data, a reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) was utilized, which in its essence, aims to gain a contextualized understanding (Braun and Clarke, 2014). This method facilitated gathering knowledge and discovering various meanings pertaining to the phenomenon of interest, such as literal, pragmatic, experiential, and existential (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Furthermore, RTA helped to identify patterns of respondents' actions and beliefs as well as uncover unexpected themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The flexibility of this approach aided in capturing both semantic and

latent meanings and employed descriptive and interpretative approaches to the data (Braun and Clarke, 2022). Consequently, the analysis was driven by the data itself. The process followed six iterative phases of RTA, including familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, reviewing and developing themes, refining and defining themes, and finally, writing up the findings (Byrne, 2022).

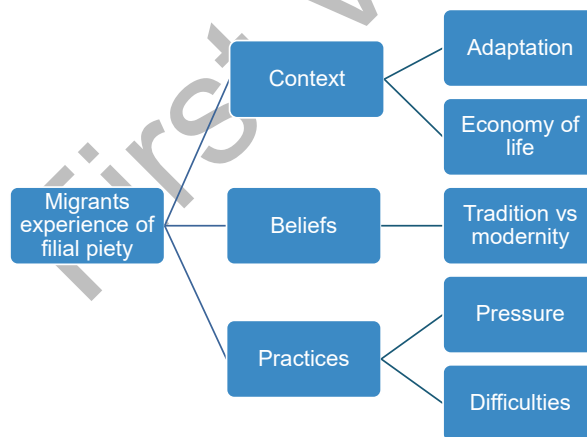
During the data familiarization stage, the transcripts of the interviews were carefully analyzed. Subsequently, a set of initial codes was generated to capture the descriptive content of meaningful text segments. Following descriptive coding, all the codes were compiled into themes and sub-themes, which then organized them into clusters based on shared or similar meanings. Participants' quotes enriched the results of the analysis to ensure that the conclusions were grounded in the text.

Major findings of the study

Figure 1 presents the main themes and sub-themes identified during the research.

Figure 1.

Themes and sub-themes identified in the analyzed material.



The important theme uncovered in the analyzed material was the **context** in which respondents drew their stories.

The difficulties regarding **adaptation** – referring to the process through which individuals or groups adjust to living in a new cultural, social, and physical environment – were significant notions explored during the research. Respondents did not indicate living the “Polish Dream”². For most of them, the choice of Poland as

² A term used here in reference to the 'American Dream,' which symbolizes the pursuit of personal success, upward mobility, and prosperity through hard work and determination.

a migration destination was decided by chance – a random machine drawing the place of studies, or a roulette called the wheel of love and matrimonial arrival. Typically, a desire to migrate was motivated by the willingness to improve professional qualifications (improve language skills) or continue studies. The decisions were rational, dictated not only by the pragmatic reasoning but also by actual economic considerations. i.e., they (or their parents) could afford to come to a country like Poland, and not to Western Europe or the USA. Poland, however, appears in the eyes of migrants to be an attractive European destination in a way because it is in the European Union, but it is not expensive to live in. It is a prospective partner country regarding the possible tightening of economic exchange (e.g., through the Silk Road initiative). In general, the idea of migration is to increase one's chances in the labor market in China through the knowledge of a niche language and the prospect of some business opportunities. None of the interviewees said Poland is their dream country or a country where they would like to live. Poland is just a "stop" on the career path, in life "to gain experience". It is similar belief to the one displayed by Chinese people living in New Zealand, who perceive Australia as a desired final migration destination (Liu, 2016),

Most of the research participants are considering staying in Poland for up to 5 years, but ultimately, they want to live in China. Only a few participants could live abroad; these are people who have been living in Poland for a relatively long time, and it seems that they have largely found themselves functioning in a different society. Not without reason – they are fluent in Polish or English. From the interviews, it can be deduced that a good command of the language is crucial in designing the vision of staying longer and not feeling nostalgic for one's culture.

The most difficult part of living abroad for virtually all participants of the study is the longing for "Chinese food". Everyone talks about "stomach longing", the limited number of vegetables, and the possibility of meeting culinary needs in Poland. This reflects the limited availability of resources and networks established by the Chinese community to address these needs, but also the culture of eating meals in Poland at home, and not outside (and vice versa in China).

Describing Poland, they indicate it as a safe country, that life is slower and calmer (than in China), and that there is also greater freedom. While going deeper into the experience of life in Polish culture, there are comments that Poles are different and that cultural or communication differences are visible:

It really is very difficult. I am considering where I would like to live, maybe in Poland, maybe in China. I don't want to go where I don't speak the language. The problem here in Poland is that I literally don't have a family here, and I don't have any Polish friends either; of course, I have a friend, and I have a Chinese friend too, but it sometimes affects the psyche that I feel helpless and cultural differences are huge, such intercultural communication is not it is easy to integrate into the local community and struggle with two cultures [Respondent no 4]

Few participants in the research spoke about their negative reception of individual Poles stemming from a sense that they lack an understanding of how Chinese people think or hold negative perceptions about China.

Yes, I have a negative attitude towards people from other countries because I have the impression that people from other countries do not really understand how the Chinese think or sometimes have a negative impression of China [Respondent no 5]

At the same time, cultural similarities were noticed regarding family relationships, but also the kindness of people. It seems that in the group of participants, the majority have not entered deeper social relationships with someone from Poland and are looking for relationships with other Chinese people. This aspect is the most distinctive regarding the researcher's observations and existing studies on the Chinese in countries with well-established diaspora. It is highlighted, e.g. by Cross (2006), that the Chinese, while coming to Australia, have been able to adapt well to a change in environment both on the campus/workplace and in the community. Existing local communities and Chinese Students Associations operating in major universities make their adaptation smoother but also facilitate contact with the general population.

While talking about their situation, they also significantly referred to the Chinese **economy of life**³. An important, observed conclusion is the approach of the respondents to having children and ideas related to life in China in the next 20 years. They do not think about offspring because a child costs too much in an economic sense, but also in an emotional sense. They do not want to sacrifice themselves as their parents and grandparents did.

I don't want to have a baby. If you have a child, I have to spend time with him, and he will grow old quickly. I'm scared that if I spend time with my baby, I won't have my life like my mom. [Respondent no 6]

I don't want children at all, because a child costs a lot (...) We ourselves know how much our parents have invested in us, and the situation will only get worse, so what's the point? [Respondent no 1]

They prefer to focus on earnings and financial security for their old age – offspring in the projections of their own old age is not a guarantee of support at all.

There's a famous quote on the Internet, that said, we are the last generation, they mean we don't want to have more younger generation, I mean, children [Respondent no 11]

Of course, the declared perspective was expressed by participants without children – that is, the vast majority. The notion of individualism and materialism is strongly indicated.

³ A reference to Jacques Attali new form of capitalism outlined in the book *L'économie de la vie* (Attali, 2020).

You know, Chinese are selfish. They don't care about each other. They only care about themselves, their money and that's all. And they don't want to fight for their right. You see, and they don't understand if you have more right, your life will be much different [Respondent no 12]

This notion can also be found in other studies on the changes in China's family patterns, e.g. Su and Peng (2017) observe that nontraditional families, such as the exclusively elderly family, empty nest family, grandparents family, Double Income, No Kids (DINK) family, older single family, and single-parent family have emerged in large numbers, driving a need to renegotiate and reinterpret the meaning of filial piety (Cefalo et al., 2023).

The second important theme identified in the responses corresponds to the **beliefs**, on how filial obligation should be understood. What is *xiao* today? Is it an element of the cultural identity of young Chinese or a term that means a lot in theory, but in practice carries little emotional charge? Respondents strongly underlined here the notion of dualism between **tradition and modernity**. They confirmed that the implementation of *xiao* is possible by reproducing the traditional structure – ensuring financial responsibility for their parents; but they often pointed out that material support alone is not enough – being truly caring means providing emotional support in the old age of parents.

A notable departure from the traditional definition involved the issue of “obedience.” Interviewees described what it was like to be a *yuxiao* [so called “foolish filial piety”] to emphasize that obeying one's parents is not always advisable, especially when it would be unwise and harmful. At the same time, they pointed out that social changes result in a greater orientation towards the realization of one's own happiness, without having to sacrifice oneself.

I think this turn in a vision of family is changing more or less in most of the countries in the World. And I have the feeling that China is not traditional in this concept. I mean that this family change in China is obvious, you know, this turn from a traditional attitude to family to this new one, which is connected to more individualistic attitude. [Respondent no 14]

A few respondents have mentioned the term *buxiao* [“lack of filial piety”] in different contexts (e.g. lack of caregiver's obedience).

Xiao traditionally meant obedience; you do what your parents expect. This is no longer the case today. And therefore, some [who disobey – ed. researcher] will consider you a “buxiao” [Respondent no 21]

Interestingly, it was also used in reference to the parents' behavior in the past, suggesting that instances of *buxiao* often stem from the parents' shortcomings.

But if kids are buxiao it's usually because their parents made mistakes. When they were young, their parents beat them a lot, for example, because "the apple doesn't fall far from the apple tree" – yǒu qí fù, bì yǒu qí zǐ [Respondent no 1]

Research participants confirmed the presence of gender issues. The vast majority of respondents emphasized the role of the mother and the bond with her when describing their relationship with their parents. All respondents emphasized that traditional beliefs about the role of children in terms of gender and the role of women and men in society, in general, are still visible.

So my grandparents really wanted a boy. And also, my grandfather's mother was still alive. She was begging my mother to deliver a boy when she was pregnant. And for sure, they want the family to continue the line. My mother was very relieved when I was born. She was really under a big stress when she was delivering. She always talks about this. [Respondent no 12]

Grandfather has more expectations from me than from his granddaughter (cousin – researcher's note) (...) It's our stereotype that a son is more important than a daughter, and he only had two daughters, that's probably why he has such expectations from me [Respondent no 1]

Of course, most do not believe that gender is more important and promote equality. In reality however, both the family hierarchy and the requirements related to fulfilling children's responsibilities strongly depend on gender factors.

Parents always hope that the son must give money, and the daughter seems to give company. (...) aunt always gives a company, but dad gives financial support [Respondent no 2]

While referring to the theme of **filial practices**, a significant notion of **pressure** was uncovered. It is a pressure to realize *xiao* properly, e.g. by providing an adequate level of financial support.

This is the plan, i.e. I have to buy another apartment in Poland for my parents so that they can live here. For them to have choice [Respondent no 3]

In some cases, it also corresponds to the close relationship where parents exhibit controlling behavior and require children being in contact all the time.

I text my mum a lot because sometimes I feel lonely and want to talk, and my mum said I have to send her a good night and a picture every night to confirm I'm in the dorm [Respondent no 22]

Research participants treat the time of migration as a more or less conscious strategy of escaping from the burden of realizing *xiao* in the emotional sense or as a form of loosening strong family ties. Of course, they don't call it explicitly running

away, because it's rationalized – being in another country, and in a different time zone, makes it difficult to practice parental emotional support on a daily basis. This notion of daily negotiations of ambivalent cross-border family relations in an age of always-on connectivity was also identified in the research in the Australian context (Zhao, 2019). Therein it was found that students are detaching themselves from intimate Internet spaces, often temporarily, to escape and resist familial control and surveillance.

In this context, respondents expressed noteworthy viewpoints on **difficulties** while realizing filial obligation. It involved, among others, a dilemma between following their own way of life and realizing their parent's will and choices.

I am at such a crossroads that I have to choose my family or I have to choose the life I want to lead at this moment, and that coincides with the choice of whether I would like to live, work here or go back to China. If I stayed here, I'm leaving my parents in China, and I'm the only child, and that changes a lot. It changes my and my parents' attitude towards me. I think if they had other kids, they probably wouldn't control me like that, I'd tell them I want to stay here [Respondent no 24]

It is an analogous finding to the one Singh made in the Australian context (Singh, 2019). The stated close relationship with parents and care is not supported by the declared practice of talking, exchanging messages, or video calls. Some of the respondents indicated that such contact is by nature only apparent, and it is difficult to really provide support over the phone. It is a similar type of helplessness displayed by Australian respondents: "Water from afar cannot extinguish the fire" (Ho and Chiang, 2017). Unlike Australia or the United States however, Poland is not a country where respondents plan to stay for a long time. The vast majority of research participants assume a return to China and project a vision of being more present in the emotional life of their parents. Similarly, they imagine their involvement when they are faced with the need to take care of their parents due to illness. Still, several of the respondents did not make such declarations, indicating that they are individual human beings and, despite their feelings for their parents, cannot sacrifice their own lives for them, and even believe that their parents have a similar belief and give them full support to live away from them.

Conclusions

As part of the work, valuable information was obtained on the shape and understanding of filial piety among young Chinese adults and their perception of their future in relation to filial responsibilities. It was examined whether the generation of only children, who grew up in an increasingly neoliberal market and in a post-socialist state, make their effort to be a source of both economic security and emotional

support for the elderly. Through the lens of young people's thoughts about their future, I also saw the struggles of migration and its impact on filial obligation. I established that young Chinese in Poland perceive it as a temporary stop and a means to improve their attractiveness in the labor market and enhance future opportunities in China. Adaptation to life in Poland presented notable challenges. Respondents highlighted the difficulties in adjusting to the limited availability of familiar foods and cultural resources, with many expressing a deep nostalgia encapsulated in the term "stomach longing." The lack of established Chinese networks or infrastructure further complicated the fulfillment of culinary and cultural needs. Language proficiency emerged as a critical factor in easing the transition, with those fluent in Polish or English more likely to envision staying longer. However, even these respondents often struggled with cultural differences, particularly around eating habits and social interactions. The study uncovered a duality in how participants understood and practiced *xiao* (filial piety). While the traditional value of providing material support for parents was upheld, many emphasized the importance of emotional support in modern filial relationships. Migration complicated the ability to provide such support, with respondents rationalizing physical distance and time zone differences as barriers to fulfilling daily emotional obligations. This tension often led to a redefinition of *xiao*, rejecting strict obedience in favor of a balance between personal happiness and familial duty. Some participants critiqued the traditional concept of *yuxiao* (foolish filial piety), arguing that blind adherence to parental expectations was neither wise nor sustainable. Gendered expectations within family dynamics were also apparent. While respondents generally advocated for gender equality, they acknowledged the persistence of traditional beliefs about the roles of men and women in family hierarchies and caregiving responsibilities. The bond with mothers was particularly emphasized, reflecting the central role of maternal relationships in their familial lives. Interestingly, migration was sometimes described as a means of escaping the pressures of filial obligations. Respondents framed their time abroad as a temporary reprieve, allowing them to renegotiate familial relationships from a distance. However, this strategy was often accompanied by feelings of ambivalence, as participants grappled with the dilemma of pursuing their own aspirations while meeting their parents' expectations. This finding aligns with previous research on cross-border family relations, where migrants use physical and digital distance to resist familial control and surveillance. When reflecting on their future, most respondents envisioned returning to China to care for their aging parents, albeit on their own terms. Some rejected the traditional notion of self-sacrifice, believing that their parents supported their pursuit of independence and personal goals. Attitudes toward having children were similarly shaped by modern perspectives, with many expressing a reluctance due to the perceived economic and emotional burdens of parenting.

It is worth emphasizing that the issue of filial piety has not yet been addressed, either in the context of Poland or any other country with a similar, historically unrooted

population of Chinese migrants. More and more migrants from this country come to Poland, and it has to be underlined that generally, the problem of care for the elderly – as already identified in the relevant studies, e.g. (Sethi et al., 2022) – has a significant impact on the degree of their integration and settling in the country. With that respect, my findings confirm the observation of Kardaszewicz (2018), who points out that migrants' sense of place, motivation, and future plans are significantly influenced by existing community ties, which often reach beyond Poland. Hence, this study has an important aspect from the research and the practical perspective.

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