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# **Family and Gender Values in China: Generational, Geographic, and Gender Differences**

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## **Abstract**

Previous research has reported on structural changes in Chinese families. However, questions remain as to whether/how social change has influenced family and gender values and how this differs across generations, regions, and gender in China. Drawing on 2006 data from the China General Social Survey, we find that values pertaining to filial piety are traditional, whereas patrilineal and gender values are less traditional. Historic events/ policies provide the context for how social change can shape differential generational, geographic, and gender perspectives. Our hypothesis that generation, region, and gender associations will differ across the various ideational domains is confirmed. We find significant interaction effects in how generation and geography differ by gender in patrilineal, filial piety, and gender values; and higher education erodes patrilineal and traditional gender values but enhances filial piety. Such findings indicate that family values should be understood in the specific sociocultural contexts governing Chinese families across time and place.

## **Keywords**

China, family, gender, values, variations

Family is generally believed to be the “building block” of Chinese society. In the sociological literature, however, there is a dearth of empirical attitudinal research into gender roles and family values (Shek, 2006). Over the past decades, China has undergone drastic social changes, including the founding of P.R. China, Reform and Opening-up, urbanization and globalization, and so on. These changes raise the question of what has happened to the family in China during recent decades: Has it changed, and if so, how?

The changes in Chinese family structure have received considerable attention from researchers. Ma, Shi, Li, Wang, and Tang (2011), for example, have identified such trends as ever-decreasing family size, the decline of patrilocalism (multigenerational coresidence), rocketing divorce rates and hence single-motherhood (Wang & Zhou, 2010), and the rise of dual-earner and DINK (“dual-income-no-kids”) families. These structural changes have been interpreted as going hand-in-hand with changes in family and gender values in China (Zhang, 2008; Zimmer & Kwong, 2003). However, it is far from clear whether structural change necessarily entails value shift, or vice versa. The research of Zimmer and Kwong (2003), for example, demonstrates that change in China’s age structure does not prompt a similar change in filial piety. Also, as Jayakody, Thornton, and Axinn (2008, p. 2) point out, structural changes alone are “insufficient for explaining family change across the globe.” Their approach to understanding family change involves the study of ideational change. They explore how beliefs and values interact with unique historical and cultural circumstances to reveal important variations in behavior and thought. This approach emphasizes the importance of examining both variations across different aspects of family and gender values in China and also the differential effects that Chinese social and cultural changes might have on family views of people of different generations, geographic regions, and gender.

Previous research, particularly transnational studies using data from the EASS (East Asia Social Survey), has compared family and gender values between East Asian countries/regions such as Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, and mainland China (Iwai & Yasuda, 2009; Lin & Yi, 2013; Yeh, Yi, Tsao, & Wan, 2013). However, transnational studies have considered China as a whole instead of reflecting its internal diversity. Since the establishment of a socialist regime in 1949, there has been enormous social and economic change. This would include the Cultural Revolution, the Great Leap Forward, Reform and Opening-up, and the one-child policy (Bauer, Wang, Riley, & Zhao, 1992; Cheung & Kwan, 2009; Deng & Treiman, 1997). Such change has not only influenced the country as a whole, but specific events and policies have affected men and women of different generations and geographic regions differently (Shek, 2006; Whyte, 2005).

Given these internal differences, the notion of “Chinese family values” in the aggregate is problematic. One aim of our research is to explore variations in family and gender values in order to address the following key questions: (a) What family and gender values do people share in contemporary China? (b) How are various aspects of family and gender values perceived differently? (c) How do views differ across time (different generations), place (the various geographic regions), and gender?

In the following sections, we discuss the relevant background context for addressing these questions. First, we review the traditional basis of family and gender values in China. Second, we present a succinct overview of the historical and policy changes in China that may influence views about family life. Third, we introduce the theoretical and empirical literature from which we derive our hypotheses. We then present our empirical analysis of the 2006 Chinese General Social Survey and conclude by discussing the implications of our findings.

## **Family and Gender Values in China: Traditions**

In China, traditional family and gender values inform two major sets of relations within the familial system. Vertically, intergenerational relations are regulated by filial piety; and horizontally, gender roles shape conjugal (husband–wife) relations (Schein, 1997; Yeh et al., 2013). The responsibilities, obligations, rights, and powers of family relations are further underpinned by the norm of patrilineality: the male-centered line of descent (Johnson, 1985).

The patrilineal system is key to traditional Chinese family and gender values. First, it emphasizes the male line of descent, which gives precedence to the eldest male in the family and makes a male heir vital to keep the family lineage intact (Song, 2008). Second, patrilineality regulates the family's economic relations in terms of inheritance. In traditional China, the inheritance would drip down through the family, decreasing in order of priority as determined by gender/age. Chinese tradition also prescribed a certain reciprocity: The eldest male, with the greatest entitlement to inherit, would usually coreside with his parents in order to fulfill his filial obligations. Third, patrilineality was key to the traditional Chinese definition of family boundaries. With unbroken male lineage vital to the family's survival, married women were considered the property of their husbands' families (Baker, 1979). As in the traditional Chinese proverb that one's "married daughter is like the splashed water that cannot be taken back," a woman's husband's family was expected to take precedence over her biological family, especially in the case of clashing benefits. In general, the central message codified by patrilineal traditions was that of obedience to one's superiors, with elder and/or male members deemed superior to those of younger and/or female members.

Built on the basic guidelines established by patrilineality, filial piety prescribes specific relations and obligations between parents and children. As indicated by the Chinese terms for filial piety, *xiao jing* or *xiao shun*, which is expressed in two characters, the concept has two distinct meanings that are complementary and consistent (Bell, 2010). First, *xiao* requires children, especially adult children to reciprocate by caring for parents in later life; thus parents are recompensed for their material investment in bringing up children (Chan & Tan, 2004). In pre-1949 China, which lacked a welfare system, *xiao* was key to the functioning of Chinese families: It preserved family lineage, ensured childcare, and, most importantly, preserved the security of the elderly. The concept of *xiao* was integral to agricultural China, where growing old meant the loss of production capability, and elderly parents were

supported materially by their children. Second, *jing* or *shun* expresses the nonmaterial aspect of filial piety, which signifies respect for and obedience to the elderly. *Jing* or *shun* obliged children to be thankful to their parents for bringing them up, which in turn constituted the moral imperative to observe *xiao* in their conduct. Furthermore, it was considered an ultimate virtue for children, especially males, to honor their parents by making them proud (Chan & Tan, 2004; Deutsch, 2006).

In the Chinese nuclear family, conjugal relations were arranged with the husband at the center of the household undertaking mainly productive activities. The wife's role was complementary: to facilitate her husband's productivity (Whyte & Parish, 1985). Women's major function was reproductive, that is, giving birth (preferably to male heirs) and childrearing. This division of labor was central to conventional gender roles in China. The importance and particularity of economic activities relegated women and the domestic sphere to a secondary status (Bauer et al., 1992; Schein, 1997). Women were associated with domestic chores and men with career-based and productive activities (Deutsch, 2006).

Thus traditional Chinese family and gender values were consistent with the functionality of both the nuclear and extended family, in aspects such as child-rearing, care of the elderly, and so on. Meanwhile, different aspects of family values—filial piety, patrilineality, and gender roles—are closely interweaved and are embedded in the socioeconomic and cultural contexts of traditional China—particularly the agricultural mode of production and the non-welfare, centralized feudal regime. If traditional family and gender values were a consistent self-contained system and were closely affiliated to their specific environment, it makes sense to explore how resilient values are in the face of contextual shifts and whether traditional attitudes have shifted in response to social change.

## **Social Change in China, 1949 to 2006**

In 1949, the founding of P.R. China marked the end of a feudal history lasting for more than 2,000 years. Thence, industries and urban landscapes began to burgeon in China. Upholding an egalitarian ideal, the socialist revolution contributed to gender equity in employment and the subversion of patriarchal traditions. From 1949 to 1952, women's participation in paid labor increased from almost nil before 1949 to 74%, as opposed to 87% for men (Nan & Xue, 2002).

From 1967 to 1977, the Cultural Revolution and Great Leap Forward marked the climax of China's socialist revolution. Gender equity in the public sphere and industrialization were further emphasized (Roberts, 2010; Stockman, 1994). Confucian teachings that were core to traditional Chinese family values were attacked along with patriarchy. The Cultural Revolution also had a pronounced effect on eradicating the educational privilege associated with family background, by making the educational attainment of men more equitable (Deng

& Treiman, 1997). At the same time, both males and females were mobilized to rural areas for the agenda of social construction (Clark, 2008).

Legalized in 1979, the one-child policy substantially altered the traditional family structure, with nuclear “2 + 1” families gradually becoming the norm in China (Greenhalgh, 2008). Although, at one time, the policy was accompanied by numerous female infanticides (Croll, 2012), it has been attributed with helping to undermine patrilineal norms (Deutsch, 2006). However, the one-child policy has not eroded filial piety, despite changing forms of intergenerational support (Yeh et al., 2013; Zimmer & Kwong, 2003). The impact of the one-child policy on women’s roles are somewhat mixed. Policy-makers claimed that family downsizing would liberate women from domestic duties (Greenhalgh, 2001). However, some scholars suggest that the policy might have led to Chinese women’s greater engagement in housework and childcare (Chow & Chen, 1994). Linking policy and gender role outcome is problematic, however, not least because the one-child policy coincided with Reform and Opening-up.

In late 1978, Reform and Opening-up—a State-guided program for economic modernization—opened China’s market to the rest of the world (Wong & Bo, 2010). As the socialist pressure relaxed, it became possible for China’s culture to take its own course albeit directed by the priority of economic development (Boden, 2008; Goodman, 1988). Urbanization and industrialization escalated, and the country has been increasingly exposed to Western culture due to booming commercial connections. For example, feminist thought became more influential, and the importance of economic independence and individualism entered the discourse of gender dynamics (Liu, Karl, & Co, 2013).

Reform and Opening-up, although intended to bring about changes throughout the nation, was in practice unevenly implemented. China’s partial development in the 1980s prioritized economic construction in coastal areas, big cities, municipalities, and provincial capitals—key strategic positions located mainly in urban China. As a result, these areas received the greatest exposure to Western culture in an era of increasing international trade and commerce. Previous research has noted how this affected many spheres of life, ranging from education, language, media and cultural activity to the consumption of daily commodities (Whyte & Parish, 1985). The political importance attached to “development” and economic success led to a valorization of urban, Western, and global trends over their rural, Eastern, and local counterparts (Whyte, 2010). Consequently, urban and Western culture became increasingly popular in China, especially among people born after the 1980s.

In addition to the various sociocultural changes caused by Reform and Opening-up, the *hukou* policy—China’s household registration system—increased sociocultural division. Legalized in 1952, the *hukou* policy was designed to control population mobility and secure enough labor for each sector of production (Wang, 2005). It fixed people geographically by localizing welfare packages such as unemployment subsidies, medical care, and so on. The distinction between rural and urban *hukou* further exacerbated the divide between agricultural

and industrial modes of production (Wu & Treiman, 2007), though the recent reform of the policy has since led to large-scale internal migration in China.

## **Family Values: Explaining Differences**

One of the key insights of ideational research on family change is that rather than producing uniform change, as some of the globalization theorists imply (e.g., Inglehart & Norris, 2003), the interaction of ideational forces with unique historical and cultural circumstances results in important variations (Jayakody et al., 2008). It seems likely that in a country as internally varied as China, there is unlikely to be uniformity in family and gender values. One of our key concerns is to explore what we call “ideational consistency.” We expect some erosion of traditional values, as China has become increasingly global and open to Western values since late 1978. However, it is far from clear whether traditional values regarding patrilineality, filial piety, and gender roles would be challenged to a similar degree.

Our brief review of traditional family and gender values suggested there were two major sets of relations within the familial system: intergenerational

relations regulated by patrilineal norms and the consequent material and non-material strands of filial piety; and conjugal relations governed by gender role norms. It seems plausible, in the light of existing theoretical and empirical research, that gender role ideational change will vastly outpace any erosion of traditional filial piety.

Inglehart and Norris (2003) suggest that there is a “rising tide” of gender equality and cultural change around the world. While we do not subscribe to any notion of global convergence, there is evidence that China has taken steps to promote women’s equality. As we have seen women play an important role in the labor force, despite there being no equal-employment legislation to date (Li & Chen, in press). Women have long had the right to marry who they chose and the right to divorce (Croll, 1981), even though attitudes toward equality in conjugal relations lag behind (Yan, 2003).

But what about intergenerational relations? It is arguable that in China the emphasis on subordination of the young to the welfare of their parents became elaborated to an unusual degree, and that the form of family life within which socialization for filial piety occurred was distinctive (Whyte, 2003). During the changes since the establishment of P.R. China in 1949, state-run educational institutions and bureaucratic assignments to jobs and housing replaced job training and inheritance from parents. But the Chinese Communist Party has at no point systematically attempted to get young Chinese to reject filial obligations. In fact the reverse, education in contemporary China has consistently stressed *jing* as a Chinese virtue, inculcating the moral imperatives of filial obligations (Liu, 2008). Empirical research seems consistently to show that filial obligations are alive and well, even in urban China (Whyte, 2003; Zimmer & Kwong, 2003).

It is one thing to assert that an interaction of ideational forces with unique, historical and cultural circumstances results in important variations (Jayakody et al., 2008). It is another to specify along what dimensions these variations might be structured. In this article, we examine three dimensions, which have received considerable emphasis in the literature on family value change. Following Giddens (1987) we see temporality and space (or time and place) as crucial for understanding social change. In empirical work on ideational change these dimensions can be most easily operationalized as generational and geographic variations. Our third dimension is gender, which, as Therborn (2004) demonstrates, is a crucial dimension of family change, as sex and power are core to the changing politics of family.

### *Generational Difference*

Mannheim's (1952) essay on the importance of generations is a classic work about how generations underpin social change. Generational replacement is a key mechanism of social change, whereby the stance of the public can shift as earlier cohorts, with more traditional values, die out and recent cohorts, with less traditional values, take their place. To the extent that family and gender roles are changing in China we would expect to see marked generational differences in values. However, these are likely to vary by issue, with greater generation differentiation on patrilineality and gender roles, where traditional values are under increasing challenge, than by filial piety where traditional values are expected to hold sway.

### *Geographical Difference*

The importance of geography in understanding family change has been emphasized again and again in cross-national research (Jayakody et al., 2008; Therborn, 2004). Regional differences within countries have been somewhat less well-explored in representative survey research, usually because of data limitations. In China, there is an increasing gulf between the highly developed urban areas in the east and the rural and western regions of China. However, as Whyte (2003) notes market reforms driven by global forces were instituted in Chinese villages earlier than in the cities, which may result in family continuities and changes that span rural and urban China.

### *Gender Difference*

No family research today can ignore the importance of gender. As Therborn (2004) indicates understanding family values means understanding sex and power in a particular cultural setting. Research on international differences in family values and gender roles tends to

report either a surprising degree of similarity between men and women (Braun & Scott, 2009) or women being more likely to challenge traditional values than men because women stand to benefit more from change (Esping-Andersen, 2009). There is a dearth of research on family and gender values in China, and one important goal of our research is to examine whether there are consistent gender differences across the different family and value domains and also whether generation and geography interact with gender in structuring values concerned with patrilineality, filial piety, and gender roles. Women may be less traditional than men regarding patrilineality and gender roles, because women have more to gain by changing the status quo. However, there may be little gender difference regarding filial piety because the intergenerational system of family care is one in which both women and men have invested interests.

## Hypotheses

Drawing on the literature and discussion of the preceding sections, we propose four hypotheses, as below. Our exploration of family and gender values will address the following three key categories: (a) patrilineality, (b) filial piety, and (c) gender roles.

**Hypothesis 1 (ideational consistency):** There is no overall consistency in family and gender values regarding patrilineality, filial piety, and gender roles in China. Instead, we expect patrilineal and gender role values to be less traditional than filial piety.

**Hypothesis 2 (generational difference):** Generational difference will affect family and gender values, with more recent cohorts holding less traditional attitudes in particular domains.

**Hypothesis 3 (geographical difference):** People from rural and western China will have more traditional family and gender values than people from urban, eastern areas.

**Hypothesis 4 (gender difference):** Women in China will hold less traditional attitudes toward certain family and gender values than Chinese men.

## Methods

### *Data*

In this article, we use data from the 2006 China General Social Survey (CGSS). The CGSS was conducted annually from 2003 to 2008, in collaboration with General Social Surveys in Japan, Korea, and Taiwan. CGSS 2006 included a Family Module, which constituted part of the East Asia Social Survey. Recognized by the International Social Survey Program, CGSS data are standardized by the Data Documentation Initiative run by the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research Centre at Michigan University. Led by China's

*Renmin* University and the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, CGSS is one of the largest-scale nationwide social surveys conducted in China and offers the most up-to-date publicly released survey data pertaining to Chinese families.

The general response rate of CGSS 2006 was 51.1%. Using multistage- stratified sampling, CGSS 2006 sampled 10,000 individuals from 500 street areas in 125 cities/towns across China, of which 3,208 individuals further participated in the Family Module—1,754 females and 1,454 males ranging from 18 to 69 years old.

We use CGSS 2006 data for two major reasons. First, CGSS 2006 surveyed different aspects of family and gender values in China, systematically assessing values ranging from filial piety to conjugal roles in the nuclear family. Second, the survey had a wide coverage, ranging from major cities to remote villages and from eastern coast to western hinterland.

## *Variables*

*Dependent Variables: Family and Gender Values in China.* CGSS 2006 measured family and gender values using 7-point Likert-type scales. We have standardized all measures such that “1” represents the most traditional attitudes and “7” represents the least traditional attitudes toward family and gender values. Altogether, 15 items were used to measure attitudes toward traditional family and gender values in China, as presented in Table 1.

[Insert Table 1 Here]

Exploratory factor analysis was used to extract our indexes for Chinese family and gender values (see Appendixes A and B for details). We assessed the factorability of the 15 items relating to family and gender values and found the item correlations to be reasonably high. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.76, and Barlett’s test of sphericity was significant ( $\chi^2 [105] = 21,173.25, p < .001$ ). Principal component analysis and Varimax rotation were used to guide computing composite scores for the indexes. Cronbach’s alpha scores showed high consistency within each of the indexes. No substantial increase in alpha for any of the indexes could have been achieved by eliminating items. Each index is scaled from 1 to 7, with a higher score indicating a less traditional attitude toward traditional Chinese family and gender values. Our sample consists of 3050 cases, after outliers were removed. Indices were within a range sufficient to assume normal distributions.

*Key Predictors and Covariates.* Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics of our key predictors and covariates. Our key predictors are generations, geographic regions, and gender. We coded birth cohorts into four groups based on the different historic events or periods: presocialist (born before 1949), socialist (1950-1966), Cultural Revolution (1967-1977), and Reform/ Opening-up (born after 1978). In CGSS 2006, geographic regions are differentiated by the administrative and development levels as “major cities (municipals, provincial capitals, etc.),” “eastern towns/villages,” “central towns/villages,” and “western towns/villages.” Gender is a dummy variable.

Given the potential influence of such important demographic and personal characteristics as marital status, number of child(ren), level of education, knowledge of foreign language, and employment status we included these attributes as covariates. Education levels are grouped into “primary school and below,” “middle school,” “high school,” and “university and above.” Employment is coded into a dummy variable indicating “working” and “not working.”

[Insert Table 2 Here]

### *Analytical Strategy*

Using analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) on each aspect of family and gender values, we ran three models: (a) only key predictors, (b) covariates added, and (c) interactions between generation and gender, geography and gender, and gender and employment added. Other interaction terms were not significant and are excluded. Comparisons across the models allow us to examine whether generational, geographic, and gender variations in family and gender values are explained (mediated) by the addition of factors such as work, education, and so on.

## **Results**

### *Family and Gender Values*

Figure 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the family and gender values. First, the results show that attitudes toward family and gender values in today’s China generally remain traditional, on the assumption that “4,” the mid-point of the 7-point scale of our indexes, represents a neutral attitude. Second, the findings support our hypothesis that there is no overall consistency in family and gender values.

[Insert Figure 1 Here]

Our results indicate that attitudes are least traditional toward patrilineal values. The detraditionalization of patrilineality (i.e., the central thread of traditional intergenerational family values), however, has not undermined the filial piety it once sustained. Attitudes toward filial piety in terms of both *xiao* and *jing* remain traditional. *Jing*, the moral imperative that obliges one to be obedient and respectful to parents, stays the most traditional among these measures of family and gender values. Attitudes to *xiao*, material support to the elderly, are also relatively traditional, although responses differ depending on whether financial support is to be provided by unmarried or married children. In Chinese tradition, unmarried children usually coreside with their parents, while material support is generally expected from financially independent children.

In contrast, attitudes toward gender roles that specify relations between husband and wife are less traditional. The traditional gender division of labor whereby the husband's role is to earn money and the female's role is to care for her family and support her husband's career is not given overwhelming support in contemporary China.

### *Multivariate Analysis*

Table 3 presents the results of the three ANCOVA models for each of our five dependent variables (patrilineality, “*xiao* [married],” “*xiao* [unmarried],” “*jing*,” and gender roles). In each instance, the three models show main predictors (Model A), predictors plus covariates (Model B), and predictors, covariates, and interaction terms (Model C). Our findings indicate that generational, geographic, and gender variations have diverse effects on different aspects of family and gender values. Controlling for education matters, particularly for explaining some of the generational effects. The addition of interaction terms between predictors and gender somewhat improves the explained variance ( $r^2$ ) of the two least traditional of our dependent variables—patrilineality and gender roles. However, most of the variance in family values remains unexplained by these main independent variables. We consider possible explanations for the low explanatory power of our models in the discussion section. First, however, we present the findings for each of the family and gender values in turn.

[Insert Figure 3 Here]

*Patrilineality.* Our results support our hypothesis that more recent cohorts hold less traditional attitudes toward patrilineal values. The geographic difference hypothesis is only partly supported by our findings. Compared with western rural towns/villages, people from the more urbanized and industrialized regions exhibit significantly less traditional attitudes toward patrilineality, with the exception of eastern towns/villages. The findings also support our gender difference hypothesis and show that women hold significantly less traditional attitudes than men toward patrilineality.

In Model 1b where the covariates are included, the results clearly show the importance of education in reducing traditional patrilineal beliefs. People who are better educated hold less traditional attitudes toward patrilineality. Interestingly, introducing education eliminates the observed generational effects (in Model 1a) and thus for patrilineal beliefs, generational effects can be explained by education. The geographic effect remains when education is included, which suggests that the degree of urbanization and industrialization associated with the different geographic regions operates independently of education in influencing patrilineal beliefs. In Model 1c, which includes the interaction terms between gender and the predictor variables, we can see that females from the Reform and Opening-up generation hold significantly less traditional attitudes toward patrilineality than men and women from other generations. Once interactions terms are included in Model 1c gender is no longer significant.

*Filial Piety (Xiao and Jing)*. Our generational hypothesis is overturned when it comes to filial piety. We find that the more recent generations hold more traditional attitudes toward *xiao*, though attitudes differ between financial support from married or unmarried children. The geographic effects also vary across different aspects of filial piety. Unlike for patrilineal beliefs, there are no gender differences with respect to filial piety.

For “*xiao* (unmarried),” only the Reform and Opening-up generation displays slightly less traditional attitudes than the earliest pre-1949 cohort. Nevertheless, even this generational effect disappears once we include covariates, with married people less likely to support the view that unmarried offspring should provide financial support to parents. People from central towns/villages show less traditional attitudes toward “*xiao* (unmarried)” than those in western towns and villages. In Model 2c, the interaction of work and gender shows that employed women hold more traditional attitudes than either men or women who are not employed toward unmarried offspring providing financial support to parents. Thus, financial independence of women should not be equated with more individualistic or liberal attitudes—at least as far as filial piety is concerned.

For “*xiao* (married),” more recent generations are significantly more traditional in beliefs that married children should provide financial support to parents. While attitudes are generally consistent across geographic regions, people from major cities are less traditional than western town/villages. This geographic variation is further elaborated in Model 3c, which includes the interaction of gender and geographic regions. Model 3c shows that women living in major cities hold significantly less traditional attitudes toward the practice of financial support for parents than do those living in other regions. The results for “*xiao* (married)” echo those for “*xiao* (unmarried)”: Marriage predicts less traditional attitudes, and employed women hold more traditional views about supporting parents financially. People who are relatively highly educated also display a stronger traditional support for “*xiao* (married).”

Our results do not support the generational hypothesis for *jing*. Instead, we find that the moral imperatives for filial piety remain strong and highly consistent across generations. People from eastern towns/villages show significantly more traditional attitudes toward *jing*, though ideations are by and large consistent across geographic regions. As is the case for *xiao*, the results suggest that higher education reinforces the moral imperatives for filial piety.

*Gender Roles*. The Reform and Opening-up generation is by far the least traditional when it comes to gender roles, which is in accordance with our generational hypothesis. There are also marked geographic differences, with those in major cities and central towns least likely to hold traditional gender role beliefs. In Model 5b, our findings suggest that the generational effect is largely explained by the inclusion of the number of children, education, and knowledge of a foreign language. People with more than one child display more traditional attitudes toward gender roles than those who have no children or one child. Thus our findings are consistent with those who suggest that the one-child policy might help endorse more egalitarian gender role beliefs. However, this interpretation is speculative, in part because family planning policy is unlikely to be solely responsible for single-children households. We find that people who have received higher education hold significantly less traditional

attitudes toward gender roles. We also find that people who have knowledge of a foreign language hold less traditional gender role attitudes. One possible interpretation is that education and familiarity with other languages might increase exposure to Western culture and feminist ideas.

The results from Model 5c show that it is women from the Reform and Opening-up generation who are significantly less traditional than men and women from other generations in gender role attitudes. This is similar to our finding concerning patrilineal beliefs. In addition, employed women hold less traditional attitudes to gender roles than employed men or those who are not currently employed. Interestingly, when the gender and generation interaction is included the coefficient for gender is negative, indicating that women in general are not less traditional than men. Thus our gender hypothesis is only partially supported for gender role beliefs.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Previous research has focused on changes in Chinese family structures (e.g., Johnson, 1985; Ma et al., 2011; Zimmer & Kwong, 2003). Citing family downsizing, the decline of coresidence, falling marriage rates, and rising divorce rates, some researchers have inferred that family and gender values are changing, rendering many traditional views outdated in today's China (Shek, 2006; Whyte & Parish, 1985; Zimmer & Kwong, 2003). How accurate are these inferences? The results of our analysis of family and gender values indicate that such claims are only partially supported. In general, traditional family and gender values are still quite widespread in contemporary China. In particular, our respondents strongly endorsed filial piety in its components, *xiao* and *jing*. However, attitudes toward patrilineal beliefs and gender roles prescribing a traditional gender division of labor had significantly less support. Thus the demise of traditional views in one dimension of family and gender values does not imply a similar questioning of traditional values in other dimensions.

We concur with the ideational approach to family research (Jayakody et al., 2008) that insists that structural changes alone are insufficient for explaining family change. This approach expects beliefs and values to vary with unique historical and cultural circumstances, thereby revealing important variations in behavior and thought. The ideational approach questions the transnational family research that has examined Chinese family values in the aggregate. In the light of historic events such as the founding of China's socialist regime, Cultural Revolution and Opening-up, the introduction of *hukou* and one-child policies, it is likely that Chinese social and cultural circumstances might differentially affect the views of people of different generations, geographic regions, and gender.

We find considerable diversity in the way that generations, geographic regions, and gender help structure the distinctive family and gender values associated with patrilineal beliefs, filial piety, and gender roles. Interestingly, women of the Reform and Opening-up generation (born since 1978) display least support for patrilineal beliefs. There are also clear geographic

differences between the western towns and villages who adopt a more traditional stance and the central and metropolis/major cities that are less traditional. Education also matters in eroding support for traditional patrilineal beliefs. However, these same patterns do not carry across to filial piety, where traditional values hold sway in terms of both material support (*xiao*) and nonmaterial (*jing*) obligations to parents. In Chinese tradition, unmarried children usually coreside with their parents, whereas material support is generally expected from financially independent (married) children. Thus it is no surprise that the traditional obligations of “*xiao* (married)” are supported more strongly than for “*xiao* (unmarried).” However, for both, higher education and female employment are associated with more not less traditional beliefs. Thus one cannot infer a “liberating” effect of education or female employment across Chinese family and gender values. Education and female employment do reduce traditional support for patrilineal beliefs, but they have the opposite effect for filial piety as measured by *xiao*. Education also increases support for traditional filial piety as measured by the nonmaterial *jing*.

When it comes to gender roles, we have somewhat more expected findings. Education enhances people’s endorsement of less traditional attitudes, and so does female employment. Women particularly from the most recent cohort (born since 1978) are most likely among the generations of both sexes to endorse less traditional views. Knowledge of a foreign language also decreases support for the traditional gender role divide. Not surprisingly, people with multiple children (two and above) are more likely than those with one or no child to endorse traditional gender roles.

Our findings on gender roles are similar to findings in Western research that more recent generations, higher education, women’s employment, and smaller family size reduce support for traditional gender roles. Models including such explanatory variables in Western cultures could be expected to explain up to one fifth of the variation in gender role beliefs. However, in China family and gender values are not highly differentiated by the social and demographic characteristics that are commonly used by social scientists in their explanatory models. One possible reason might be that China is bureaucratically controlled to a far greater extent than the developed countries of the West. Thus other factors such as personal networks and bureaucratic position might be more important indicators. Unfortunately, we are unable to test such suppositions. Even income, although included in the survey, has major problems with missing data and has had to be excluded from our analysis. Moreover, our categorization of generations and geographic regions is necessarily crude, given the differential impact that China’s far-reaching programs of social and cultural change are likely to have had on family and gender values.

Family values in China have undoubtedly been guided by the familism rooted in Confucian teachings (Li & Chen, in press). However, even in this limited cross-sectional analysis of Chinese General Social Survey, we have established that the Chinese do not cling to “traditional” views in all domains. Patrilineal beliefs and traditional gender roles are being questioned—and education, female employment, and the individualism associated with city life—are likely to erode traditional beliefs still further. So why does filial piety seem

relatively resilient to change? Our data do not allow us to give any definitive explanations. However, neither education nor urbanization is undermining filial piety, or at least not yet. Why? The argument that Whyte (2003) puts forward is that support for filial obligations are alive and well in urban China because (paradoxically) the nature of the urban social order constructed in the Maoist era and continued in the present era supported those obligations in multiple ways while making them fairly nononerous for grown children. Similarly, Zimmer and Kwong (2003) suggest that population aging is not shifting filial piety beliefs or behavior as much as might be expected. Whatever the explanation, it seems clear from our analysis is that in China, complex adjustments in family values are occurring, with traditional views challenged more in conjugal than in intergenerational relations.

The primary purpose of this research is not to challenge modernization theory, in part, because of the limitations of our data set. However, our results might imply that some reconsideration of modernization theory is needed. For example, Goode (1963) suggests that “the underdeveloped countries of the world would eventually make a transition from traditional to modern in a fashion similar to the transition that had occurred in the West” (Cherlin, 2012, p. 581). Goode (1963) predicted that, as industrialization spread, the world’s family pattern should converge to the Western conjugal family model. Fifty years on since Goode predicted a global convergence trend our results demonstrate the distinctive, complex, national context effects in China on differing family and gender values. Such contextual differences merit further exploration in future research.

Predictions about future family change in China are meaningless without good data. To follow through on this base line study we need comparable measures going forwards. Ideally, we also need longitudinal data to unpack individual change across time. With the vast internal migration flows and the dramatic changes in family policy, it remains an ongoing challenge to understand how the changing circumstances of husbands and wives and parents and child(ren) influence traditional family and gender values.

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**Table 1.** List of Indexes and Measures for Family/Gender Values

Indexes	Measures
Patrilineality ( $\alpha=.60$ )	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The eldest male should inherit the largest share from his parents</li> <li>2. To preserve the family lineage, one should give birth to at least one male heir</li> <li>3. A married woman should help her spouse's family first</li> </ol>
<i>Xiao</i> (material filial piety, unmarried) ( $\alpha=.95$ )	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Unmarried men should give parents money</li> <li>2. Unmarried women should give parents money</li> </ol>
<i>Xiao</i> (material filial piety, married) ( $\alpha=.91$ )	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Married men should give parents money</li> <li>2. Married women should give parents money</li> <li>3. Married men should give parents-in-law money</li> <li>4. Married women give support parents-in-law money</li> </ol>
<i>Jin</i> (non-material filial piety) ( $\alpha=.80$ )	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I'm grateful to my parents for raising me</li> <li>2. No matter how parents behave, one should treat them well</li> <li>3. Support parents to help them live a comfortable life</li> <li>4. Children should behave in ways that honor their parents</li> </ol>
Gender role ( $\alpha=.72$ )	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. It is more important for a wife to support her husband's career than to develop her own career</li> <li>2. The husband's role is to make money, and the wife's role is to look after family</li> </ol>

*Note:* Source: CGSS 2006

**Table 2.** Descriptive Statistics of Key Predictor and Covariates ( $N=3,050$ )

Variables	Percentage
Generation	
Pre-socialist (pre-1949)	17.70
Socialist (1950-66)	38.66
Cultural revolution (1967-77)	27.74
Reform/opening-up (1978-)	15.90
Geographic region	
Western town/village	16.26
Central town/village	34.23
Eastern town/village	21.77
Metropolis/major Cities	27.74
Gender	
Female	54.49
Male	45.51
Marital Status	
Never Married	13.51
Married and previously married (divorced/windowed)	86.49
Child(ren)	
No child	17.48
Single child	41.38
Multiple children	41.15
Education Level	
<=Primary school	28.98
Middle school	33.93
High school	25.25
>=University (higher education)	11.84
Foreign language	
Does not know any foreign language	65.51
Knows one (or more than one) foreign language	34.49
Work status	
Not working	37.22
Now working	62.79

*Note:* Source: CGSS 2006

**Table 3 (To continue).** ANCOVA of Generational, Geographic and Gender Differences in Family and Gender Values in China (N=3,050 for all models)

	Patrilineality						Xiao (Unmarried)						Xiao (Married)						
	M1a		M1b		M1c		M2a		M2b		M2c		M3a		M3b		M3c		
	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	
Gen. (Ref=-1949)																			
1950-1966	.186***	-.050	.065	-.053	.170**	-.053	.167*	-.076	-.069	.150*	-.069	.063	-.100	.007	-.047	.015	-.048	-.062	-.069
1967-1977	.268***	-.053	.073	-.063	.073	-.079	-.037	-.061	-.075	-.051	-.075	-.051	-.107	-.078	-.052	-.064	-.052	-.159*	-.074
>=1978	.375***	-.061	.016	-.088	.016	-.089	-.166*	-.025	-.071	.004	-.077	-.056	-.108	.131**	-.049	.183***	-.053	.038	-.075
Geography (ref=W/T)																			
C/T	.188***	-.053	.170**	-.053	.170**	-.076	-.076	.155*	-.069	.150*	-.069	.063	-.100	.007	-.047	.015	-.048	-.062	-.069
E/T	.084	-.057	.052	-.057	.052	-.082	-.082	-.061	-.075	-.051	-.075	-.051	-.107	-.078	-.052	-.064	-.052	-.159*	-.074
M/C	.405***	-.055	.253***	-.059	.257**	-.083	-.083	-.025	-.071	.004	-.077	-.056	-.108	.131**	-.049	.183***	-.053	.038	-.075
Gender (ref=male)	.121***	-.035	.172***	-.037	.174	-.111	.020	-.046	-.048	-.008	-.048	.037	-.156	.015	-.032	-.011	-.033	-.116	-.108
Marital (ref=never)																			
Children (ref=no)																			
Single Child																			
Multiple Children																			
Education (ref=primary)																			
Middle School																			
High School																			
>=University																			
Foreign Lan. (ref=no)																			
Work (ref=no)																			
Generation*Gender																			
1950-66 Female																			
1966-77 Female																			
1978- Female																			
Geography*Gender																			
C/T Female																			
E/T Female																			
M/C Female																			
Women*work																			
Constant	3.385***	-.060	3.533***	-.104	3.683***	-.121	3.031***	-.078	2.796***	-.136	2.792***	-.158	2.603***	-.054	2.481***	-.094	2.544***	-.109	-.109
R <sup>2</sup>	.040		.058		.062		.062		.007		.014		.019		.015		.024		.030

Table 3 (Continued).

	<i>Jin (Filial Piety)</i>						<i>Gender Value</i>					
	M4a		M4b		M4c		M5a		M5b		M5c	
	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	B	S.E.
Gen. (Ref=-1949)												
1950-1966	.003	-.037	-.004	-.041	.022	-.059	.038	-.056	-.039	-.061	-.140	-.131
1967-1977	-.003	-.039	-.015	-.047	-.038	-.066	.035	-.059	-.141*	-.070	-.011	-.087
>=1978	-.046	-.045	-.043	-.065	-.021	-.082	.277***	-.067	-.171	-.098	-.176	-.099
Geography (ref=W/T)												
C/T	-.027	-.039	-.015	-.039	-.048	-.057	.136*	-.058	.130*	-.058	.159	-.084
E/T	-.130**	-.042	-.123**	-.042	-.147*	-.061	.088	-.064	.046	-.063	.036	-.090
M/C	-.056	-.040	-.004	-.043	-.053	-.062	.359***	-.061	.188**	-.065	.155	-.092
Gender (ref=male)	-.007	-.026	-.002	-.027	-.029	-.088	.038	-.039	.088*	-.041	-.371**	-.122
Marital (ref=never)												
Children (ref=no)												
Single Child			-.080	-.068	-.085	-.068			-.170	-.101	-.171	-.101
Multiple Children			-.091	-.072	-.097	-.072			-.285**	-.107	-.290**	-.107
Education (ref=primary)												
Middle School			-.055	-.036	-.058	-.037			.032	-.054	.024	-.055
High School			-.098*	-.044	-.099*	-.044			.124	-.066	.115	-.066
>=University			-.165**	-.058	-.163**	-.058			.283**	-.087	.258**	-.087
Foreign Lan. (ref=no)			-.015	-.037	-.015	-.038			.152**	-.056	.150**	-.056
Work (ref=no)			.084**	-.029	.097*	-.047			.006	-.044	-.135	-.070
Generation*Gender												
1950-66 Female			-.048	-.077							-.014	-.114
1966-77 Female			.040	-.084							.103	-.125
1978- Female			-.044	-.092							.381**	-.137
Geography*Gender												
C/T Female			.063	-.078							-.052	-.116
E/T Female			.046	-.085							.012	-.126
M/C Female			.090	-.082							.067	-.122
Women*work			-.021	-.060							.211*	-.090
Constant	2.260***	-.044	2.299***	-.077	2.314***	-.090	3.102***	-.066	3.391***	-.115	3.556***	-.133
R <sup>2</sup>		.005		.012		.013		.023		.044		.051

Note: \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ ; W/T=western towns/villages, C/T=central towns/villages, E/T=eastern towns/villages, M/C=major cities; Source: CGSS 2006

**Appendix1.** Factor Loadings of Measures for Family and Gender Values in China (N=3,208)

	<b>Patrilin eality</b>	<i>Xiao</i> <b>(unma- rried)</b>	<i>Xiao</i> <b>(marr- ied)</b>	<i>Jin</i>	<b>Gender role</b>	<i>h</i> <sup>2</sup>
A1 It is more important for a wife to support her husband's career than to develop her own career					<b>.87</b>	.78
A2 The husband's role is to make money, and the wife's role is to look after family	.26				<b>.82</b>	.74
B1 The eldest male should inherit the largest share from his parents	<b>.81</b>					.66
B2 To preserve the family lineage, one should give birth to at least one male heir	<b>.66</b>					.46
B3 A married woman should help her spouse's family first	<b>.66</b>				.25	.49
C1 Unmarried men should give parents money			<i>.77</i>			.63
C2 Unmarried women should give parents money			<i>.77</i>			.60
D1 Married men should give parents money			<i>.79</i>			.65
D2 Married women should give parents money			<i>.72</i>			.56
D3 Married men should give parents-in-law money	.25			<b>.94</b>		.95
D4 Married women give support parents-in-law money	.26			<b>.94</b>		.95
E1 I'm grateful to my parents for raising me	<b>.81</b>					.73
E2 No matter how parents behave, one should treat them well	<b>.85</b>					.77
E3 Support parents to help them live a comfortable life	<b>.89</b>					.82
E4 Children should behave in ways that honor their parents	<b>.89</b>					.82
Eigenvalues	1.64	1.85	2.44	3.15	1.52	
% of total variance	10.95	12.36	16.27	20.98	10.12	
Number of measures	3	4	4	2	2	

Note: Factor loadings <.2 are suppressed; Factor loadings >.6 are in bold; KMO=.756, Bartlett's test  $\chi^2$  (105) = 21,173.25 p<.001

Source: CGSS 2006

**Appendix 2.** Correlation Matrix of Measures for Family and Gender Values in China ( $N=3,208$ )

	A1	A2	B1	B2	B3	C1	C2	C3	C4	D1	D1	E1	E2	E3
A2	.493**													
B1	.164**	.229**												
B2	.203**	.285**	.278**											
B3	.271**	.271**	.366**	.206**										
C1	.123**	.029	-.095**	-.002	-.007									
C2	.073**	.030	-.052**	.014	.018	.548**								
C3	.060**	.029	-.100**	.038*	.003	.490**	.474**							
C4	.168**	.124**	-.023	.197**	.081**	.396**	.383**	.508**						
D1	.080**	.065**	-.010	.025	.034	.104**	.099**	.139**	.111**					
D2	.069**	.062**	-.010	.015	.035	.093**	.126**	.140**	.115**	.898**				
E1	.119**	.073**	-.053**	.004	.034	.243**	.214**	.244**	.223**	.381**	.364**			
E2	.098**	.067**	-.055**	-.033	.007	.210**	.197**	.232**	.198**	.356**	.374**	.767**		
E3	.106**	.064**	-.024	.016	.025	.180**	.171**	.208**	.180**	.366**	.371**	.624**	.677**	
E4	.102**	.060**	-.029	.008	.031	.195**	.176**	.227**	.193**	.350**	.371**	.637**	.668**	.858**

Note: \*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.001$ ; Source: CGSS 2006