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Analyzing the Influence of Filial Piety and Compliance on Neuroticism among Chinese Females in the 1970s

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Abstract: This study investigates the impact of environmental factors on neuroticism by focusing on a cohort of Chinese females born in the 1970s. Specifically, it examines the correlation between filial piety as an environmental factor and levels of neuroticism in these individuals. Compliance served as a mediator in the hypothesized model, and the ideal of filial piety was added to identify the effect of belief or thought systems on behavior. The research contains five hypotheses: (1) a positive correlation between filial piety and compliance, (2) a positive correlation between compliance and neuroticism, (3) a negative correlation between neuroticism, (4) a negative correlation between neuroticism and ideal filial piety, and (5) a positive correlation between filial piety and ideal filial piety. The result affirms hypotheses (2), (3), (4), and (5) while failing to demonstrate a correlation between obedience and filial piety. The failure to support this hypothesis may be attributed to limitations including questionnaire translation issues and the random selection of participants. Orientations for future studies have been discussed.

Keywords: Neuroticism, Filial Piety, Compliance, Indigenous Psychology, Confucianism

1. Introduction

Neuroticism, as a personality tendency, has been tested to be negatively related to subjective well-being, emotional stability, and happiness [1-4]. Yet using different scales and perspectives, these studies demonstrate the importance of neuroticism as an indicator for subjective well-being.

The Big Five Model is one of the most extensively tested theories of human personality, demonstrating its universality across various research studies. This model, which includes the traits of Openness, Extroversion, Conscientiousness, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism[5], was the basis for the survey used in this paper. The Big Five traits were derived from the lexical hypothesis, which posits that the key dimensions of human personality are reflected in the words people commonly use to describe behavior [6]. Within DeYoung's framework, neuroticism is defined as a tendency to experience intense negative emotions in response to stress stimuli [7, 8].

Though neuroticism has properties of inherit-ability and is affected by cephalic chemical interactions [5, 9], humans' ability to learn from environmental stimuli made environment and the acquired learning pattern included in terms of analyzing one's personality. In other words, expressions that can identify one's neuroticism, as a phenotype of individual differences, can be further explained when considering the interactions between genes (biological factor), the mind (psychological factor), and the environment (social factors) [10].

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1.1. Different perspectives on forming neuroticism

Biological factors that affect neuroticism have been hypothesized to be related to serotonin, activation in the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal, autonomic nervous system inflexibility, etc [5, 11]. However, environmental and psychological factors associated with forming neuroticism have been interpreted from different approaches, including cognition, development, and behavior [5, 11-15].

The cognition perspective interprets neuroticism from the cognitive process to stimuli and argues that neuroticism is characterized by the negative tendency of a neurotic person's response to environments [2]. The neurotic person commonly experiences high levels of anxiety due to their mental biases, which are two cognitive biases and two memory biases. Attentional bias and interpretive bias are two cognitive biases that lead individuals to attend to threats instead of neutral cues and induce the tendency to understand ambiguous stimuli into threatening ones, respectively. Memory biases, such as explicit and implicit memory biases, influence how we recall threat-related information. Explicit memory bias affects our conscious recollection of such information, while implicit memory bias impacts the unconscious retrieval of negative memories[13, 15].

Studies in developmental psychology view the stability and change of neuroticism in a lifelong process, as the result of environments interplay with genes. As individuals age, the continuity of genetic factors increases and reaches nearly perfect in middle or late adulthood, while the environmental factors might decrease in older age. Traits of biological factors act on personality which makes younger individuals more influenced by it, whereas the environment becomes critical as age. For example, a decrease in environmental stability might explain reduce in personality continuity in one's late decades [12, 14].

From behavioral psychology's perception, the behavioral inhibition system (BIS) concept based on reinforcement sensitivity theory outlined by Jeffrey Gray (1970) was argued to be influential to neuroticism. In addition, the fight-fight-freeze system (FFFS) was theorized as the activator of the BIS system. The BIS is activated when an individual identifies risk stimuli or goal conflict; however, the BIS system plays a more important role when goal conflict occurs. When unable to resolve the goal conflict and alleviate interaction between BIS and FFFS, individuals scoring high on Neuroticism are likely to experience uncertain, anxious, and swinging emotions. The proactive activation of BIS and FFFS is used to interpret volatility and withdrawal from a behavioral perspective, two aspects of Neuroticism [5].

Despite the different interpretive insights, the common one is the promising influence of the environment on an individual's neuroticism. This study views environmental factors from a cultural perspective and examines the impact of thoughts, or beliefs, embedded in the culture throughout history. The belief, or thought system targeted in this research is filial piety (Xiao) derived from Confucianism in China, specified on family traditions, and emphasizes behavioral rules or standards considered right in filial piety belief [16, 17]. In ancient China, since the prevailed Confucianism, concepts, and rules in filial piety formed the family structure and impacted behaviors and attitudes in households [18-20]. Due to the limited research connecting specific personality traits, such as neuroticism, with environmental factors like filial piety to understand Chinese personality tendencies, this mediation model was developed. It aims to investigate how belief in filial piety, the environmental factors, affects minds of neuroticism and obedience (Figure 1). The mediator compliance serves as a pathway to understanding how filial piety impacts neuroticism due to its connection with both filial piety and neuroticism [21-24]. Biological factors are excluded when measuring samples in this paper, they exist as the nonvalid variable since all the participants share the same variability.

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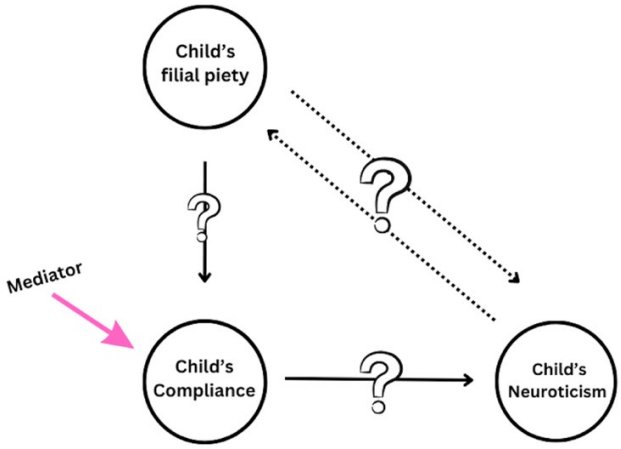

Figure 1: Concept Model of Filial Piety, Compliance, and Neuroticism

1.2. Obedience and Neuroticism

Compliance, or obedience, describes the tendency of individuals to adhere to commands, rules, and requests to obtain immediate instrumental rewards [22, 25]. Among different participants, in distinct contexts, Obedience has been tested to have a different relationship with neuroticism[1, 23, 24, 26-28]. Compliance with destructive order and rules shows a positive relationship with participants' neuroticism[24, 27], whereas Huels and Parboteeah's study shows that it is negatively related to the level of neuroticism in taxpaying circumstances[1]. Gudjonsson and his colleague's study investigated the score of neuroticism and compliance and demonstrated the positive relationship between neuroticism and obedience [22]. For compliance during COVID-19, two studies demonstrated opposite results, Iqbal and his colleagues found a negative relation between neuroticism and compliance, while Han discovered a positive relationship between them [23, 29].

The varying results are understandable because the perception of "threat" can differ based on its circumstances [30], leading to diverse reactions and interpretations. The relationship between compliance and neuroticism may differ depending on specific conditions and contexts. However, studies consistently demonstrate that this relationship does exist, suggesting that neuroticism can influence compliance behaviors, albeit in different ways depending on the circumstances.

Therefore, this study targeted a specific population, females in the 1970s generation, to minimize the difference in environmental and biological impact (age and sex). Given that their parents were less educated [31, 32] and were born around the time the new government was established (the late 1940s and early 1950s), the concept of filial piety received by females born in 1970s would closer resemble the traditional values from the imperial era, in contrast to those of later generations. Despite the Chinese Cultural Revolution's efforts to eradicate Confucianism, Confucian concepts such as filial piety remained ingrained in people's subconscious and daily lives [33], continuing to influence family interactions. Thus, it is crucial to investigate the influence of filial piety as an environmental factor.

1.3. Theoretical and empirical relation between Obedience and Filial Piety

The mediation role of obedience is established by connecting with filial piety. Previous studies have focused mainly on adolescents' or children's compliance with and the parental styles they received [19, 28, 34, 35]. Yet rare studies concentrate on the subsequent impact of high obedience to parents in adulthood. Research on adolescents' compliance and the parenting styles they experience shows a positive relationship between parental behavioral control and adolescent obedience. Ge's study draws

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a connection between filial piety and the obedience of adult individuals, demonstrating a positive relationship between obedient filial piety and compliance [21].

Theoretically, in Confucianism ideas on filial piety, obedience to parents is considered a crucial element [20, 21]. “Xiao Jing” (The Book of Filial Piety) recorded Confucians stating: "When there is injustice, the son must not refuse to argue with his father" [21]. Nevertheless, in The Analects of Confucius, Confucians said “not obeying parents is filial piety” in response to Meng’s question. Though emphasizes obedience, Confucians put the pursuit of truth and righteousness above mere compliance. However, the meaning of filial piety altered into indicating obedience to authoritative figures over time. The emperor of the Tang dynasty expanded “compliance with the father” into “honesty and submission to the emperor” [33]. The authority in society was the emperor [33], and represented by parents in the household. Therefore, in Chinese society, the concept of filial piety evolved from sole "respect" to a notion of "obedience," incorporating a political metaphor of compliance and submission to societal authority [21].

While the extension of filial piety to broader societal compliance with authority may be particular to Confucianism, research indicates that individuals with higher religious devotion generally exhibit greater compliance and a stronger tendency toward cooperative and obedient behaviors [36-38]. The high compliance of individuals who believe in certain thought systems illustrates the impact of ideas on an individual’s behavior pattern.

Overall, the link between obedience and filial piety is supported by both theoretical and empirical evidence, demonstrating a strong relationship between these two factors. Additionally, the connection between obedience and filial piety helps bridge the relationship between neuroticism and filial piety, providing insight into how filial piety might influence neuroticism.

1.4. Hypothesis

Five hypotheses are proposed in this research and represented in Figure 2.

According to the tendency of a positive correlation between filial piety and compliance reviewed in the literature, this research hypothesizes a higher score of children (participants)’s filial piety will induce a higher degree of compliance.

Given that the target population operates within the filial piety framework emphasizing obedience to authority figures [20, 21, 33], and previous studies have identified a positive relationship between obedience and neuroticism [24, 27], this research hypothesizes a positive correlation between participants’ obedience and neuroticism.

Current research from behavioral and cognitive perspectives suggests a negative correlation between Children’s neuroticism and filial piety. Neuroticism focus on negative emotions and anxiety [11-13, 39] might impair life management and reduce adherence to filial piety.

This study also aims to examine the concept of "ideal filial piety" in children and hypothesizes a positive correlation between their actual and idealized levels of filial piety. This hypothesis is based on the premise that environmental influences significantly impact individual development [10], and an environment values filial may elevate an individual’s expectation of its “perfect form”.

Further, this research suggests a negative correlation between a child’s ideal filial piety and neuroticism. High neuroticism, is linked to volatility and heightened anxiety [7, 11, 13, 39], might cause frequent and persistent parent-child conflicts, reducing the child’s idealized view of filial piety [40].

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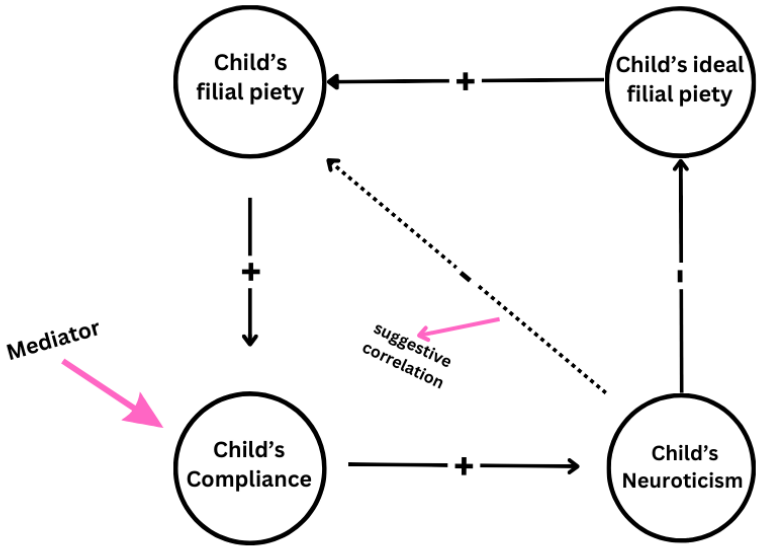

Figure 2: Hypothesize Model of Filial Piety, Compliance, Neuroticism, and Ideal Filial Piety

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

A total of 121 questionnaires were collected, and 117 were analyzed after excluding four that didn't meet the criteria. The study purpose was not disclosed. Among valid participants, 6 % had less than a middle school education, 13.7% had high or technical secondary education, 17.9% attended junior college, 42.7% had undergraduate degrees, and 19.7% had graduate degrees. The average age was 50.53 (SD= 2.929, range 43-55). The sample lacked randomness, targeting females born in the 1970s, mostly distributed by individuals with graduate-level education. Participants came from 26 of the 34 provincial-level divisions in China, and the first 100 received 2 yuan compensation.

2.2. Measurement

Questionnaires were conducted through an online survey application, Wenjuan Star. This application records the location of participants and the total time of answering questions aside from demonstrating their answers. The questionnaire comprised four sections and two demographic questions. The sections assessed neuroticism, actual filial piety, compliance, and ideal filial piety, while the demographic questions investigated age and education level.

2.2.1. Neuroticism

The researcher evaluates neuroticism using the Chinese version of NEO-FFI, a 60-item version of the NEO Personality Inventor [41] translated by Morrison in 1996 [42]. This research used a subset of 60 items to test neuroticism, including 12 questions with four reverse-scored items [43] [44]. Participants were asked about each description's accuracy in depicting their conditions on the 5-point rating scale. "1" (not at all) to "5" (Completely fit my situation).

2.2.2. Degree of Filial Piety and the Ideal Filial Piety

This research uses a 36-item survey developed from Ge's study, which draws on classical Confucian texts, including The Analects, Mencius, The Classic of Filial Piety, and The Book of Rites. These

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texts are part of the "Thirteen Classics" and form the basis of ancient Confucian thought [21]. Ge's survey, which divides filial piety into nine dimensions with high internal consistency ($\alpha > 0.70$), is employed for its contemporary relevance in testing Chinese filial piety compared to Yeh and Bedford's research [21, 42].

The Ideal Filial Piety of Children was tested by converting the first-person narration of the Filial piety survey into third-person narration, producing distance from the questions.

2.2.3. Gudjonsson Compliance Questionnaire

Children's compliance is tested by the Gudjonsson Compliance Questionnaire. Gudjonsson Compliance Questionnaire uses True/False options to evaluate an individual's tendency to obey in 20 items [45]. Additionally, this survey illustrated strong invariant across sex, ethnicity, and group recruitment in a study testing its universality in China [46]. This questionnaire was translated into Chinese by a psychology major student, underwent reverse translations by Chat-GPT several times, and was checked and adjusted by an editor with an undergraduate degree in educational psychology.

2.3. Statistical Method

This research uses the Pearson Correlation Coefficient to analyze the relationship between 4 variables, which are neuroticism, compliance, the child's actual filial piety, and the child's ideal filial piety. Moreover, the current study includes the demographics of the participants, including education level and age.

3. Results

Table 1: Correlation Among Ideal Filial Piety, Filial Piety, Compliance, and Neuroticism

	Ideal Filial Piety	Filial Piety	Compliance	Neuroticism
Ideal Filial Piety				
Filial Piety	.822**			
Compliance	0.008	-0.003		
Neuroticism	-.183*	-.280**	.205*	

** At the 0.01 level (two-tailed), the correlation is significant.
*At the 0.05 level (two-tailed), the correlation is significant.

3.1. Neuroticism and Two Variables of Filial Piety

As expected, neuroticism had a negative correlation with a child's actual filial piety ($r = -.280$, $p = .002$) and a child's ideal filial piety ($r = -.183$, $p = .048$) (Table 1). This means within females born in the 1970s, higher levels of neuroticism are correlated with a lower degree of filial piety. As the individual's neuroticism increases, their ideal concept of filial piety increasingly deviates from the Confucian filial piety model based on traditional books and the population's perception of it.

3.2. Neuroticism and Compliance

Neuroticism of participants is positively correlated to their compliance ($r = .205$, $p = .027$) (Table 1) The positive correlation suggests that among females born in the 1970s, an individual's higher levels of neuroticism are associated with greater obedience. The relation between neuroticism and compliance supports the hypothesis of this research, which assumed a positive correlation.

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3.3. Actual Filial Piety and Ideal Filial Piety

The results indicate a positive correlation between participants' actual filial piety and their ideal filial piety ($r = .822$, $p < .001$). The positive correlation suggests that among females born in the 1970s, higher self-reported levels of filial piety are associated with closer alignment to the ideal filial piety model derived from the Confucian framework.

3.4. Compliance and Two Variables of Filial Piety

However, the child's compliance only significantly correlated with neuroticism and did not show a strong relation with their ideal filial piety ($r = .008$, $p = .931$) and actual filial piety ($r = -.003$, $p = .976$). This result half-counters the hypothesis, which assumed a positive relationship between a child's compliance and filial piety. Compliance did not fulfill its role of mediator in the result, instead, neuroticism connected with the other three variables.

4. Discussion

To investigate the influence of filial piety that derived from Confucianism on the neuroticism of Chinese females born in the 1970s, compliance was used as a mediator to understand how filial piety extracts its impact. The result contradicts the hypothesis of a positive correlation between filial piety and compliance, as no significant correlation was found between these two variables. Aside from failing to find a correlation between filial piety and compliance, all other four hypotheses were supported by the result.

The experiment result demonstrates a positive correlation between children's neuroticism and children's compliance, affirming the hypothesis. Since failed to correlate with filial piety, compliance would be viewed independently in the discussion. A similar correlation between neuroticism and compliance has been found in the previous literature[22, 24, 27]. The positive relation between them has been interpreted in different ways, but common in emphasizing the "harm avoidance" of the neurotic person since their enhanced sensation of environmental stimuli [25, 47]. Within a community, harm avoidance might be depicted by obeying authority, thus increasing their degree of compliance.

Negative correlations were found between children's neuroticism and children's filial piety in the result. Considering cognitive biases induced by neuroticism, individuals who score high on neuroticism are more likely to experience memory biases [13, 15]. Memory bias may affect filial piety by causing individuals to consciously or unconsciously recall negative emotional memories from interactions with their parents. Concentrating on these negative experiences could harm the parent-child relationship [48], thereby affecting filial piety. Further, elevated anxiety and fluctuating emotions in neurotic individuals [5, 12, 14] can reduce concern to parents, potentially due to challenges in managing responses to environmental stimuli. Conclusively, this result indicates environmental stimuli or recalling of the negative experience interplay with the neurotic mind could directly or indirectly affect the parent-child model established in the past, in this case, filial piety. Direct effects could arise from parent-child conflict, whether past or present, while intensified negative input or response to the environment could produce indirect effects.

A negative correlation was found between neuroticism and ideal filial piety, indicating that children's expectations for their filial piety decreased as they became more neurotic. In light of cognitive and behavioral perspectives, neuroticism may intensify discomfort [5, 12, 14] within a parent-child relationship that follows the traditional filial piety model. Resulting in children's adjustments in expectations that diverge from the original concept. Moreover, the negative correlation between neuroticism and filial piety, along with the positive correlation between filial piety and ideal filial piety, illustrates the relationship between neuroticism and ideal filial piety. As neuroticism

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increases, filial piety decreases, leading to a diminished expectation and understanding of the ideal traditional filial piety.

Though not significant, a slightly negative relation was found between children's compliance and children's filial piety, which is against the hypothesis. No previous theory or evidence was found to explain the negative relation between filial piety and compliance. However, Ge's research found a similar result between these two variables [21]. In the nine dimensions he constructed for the filial piety model, obedience to parents and admiring parents showed a significant positive correlation with children's compliance ($r = .21$, $p < .001$; $r = .17$, $p < .01$). Other dimensions were either insignificant related to filial piety or shows a significant negative correlation.

The subsequent analysis of children's compliance's correlation with children's ideal filial piety demonstrates a positive correlation. The positive correlation may stem from increased compliance, which strengthens the desire to adhere to the traditional model as it is reinforced by parental authority.

Strong positive correlations were found between children's filial piety and their ideal filial piety model, which supports the hypothesis and testifies to the influence of the environment.

5. Conclusion

This study examines the impact of filial piety on neuroticism, using obedience as a mediating variable, in a sample of Chinese women born in the 1970s. This population was selected to control for gender and generational environmental influences. Further, the participants, who were exposed to close-to-traditional filial piety values, are reachable and testable through the online questionnaire. By testing the correlation between obedience, neuroticism, and filial piety, the result revealed a negative correlation between neuroticism and filial piety, suggesting the coexistence of filial piety and emotional instability. Though the confounding variables are numerous, the study result generated a pattern in which the decrease in emotional stability could related to an alternation of adults' ideas or attitudes toward their parents. While negatively correlated with filial piety, neuroticism has a positive relationship with compliance. Given that the sample is of working-age individuals, this finding suggests a connection between emotional instability and compliance with authority.

Reflecting on the patterns identified in this research, enhancing emotional stability may lead to greater autonomy in relation to authority. Furthermore, given the inverse relationship between neuroticism and filial piety, improving emotional stability could foster a healthier filial relationship that aligns with social expectations in China.

6. Limitations and Prospect

There were several limitations of this study that might influence the result. First, the translation of the Gudjonsson Compliance Questionnaire does not adequately account for contextualize to the local language, resulting in terms that may induce people's misunderstanding or resentment, potentially affecting the result. Second, samples were lack of randomness, making it difficult to generalize the patterns observed in Chinese females from the 1970s generation to the broader society. Additionally, participants were recruited through a shared questionnaire link, targeting individuals who met the testing criteria. The initial distributors were individuals with education levels above graduate school and residing in China's capital. Consequently, around half of the participants had education levels above undergraduate school, which does not accurately represent the educational and resident profile of the 1970s generation in China.

For future studies, several unsolved questions and overlooked variables warrant attention. First, the causality of the negative relation between filial piety and compliance can be further analyzed by dividing filial piety into dimensions. Further, variables such as economic status could be involved in the correlation model, since the change in economic status or current financial situation was found to

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be effective on mental well-being [49]. Moreover, participants were targeted in this research to show a stronger and clearer tendency of filial piety's influence on obedience and neuroticism. Yet the result could represent a boarder population by increasing age diversity. Nevertheless, the negative correlation between neuroticism and filial piety could be further explored by examining neuroticism's correlations with different dimensions of filial piety.

In conclusion, this research provides an examination of the impact of thought systems or beliefs on personality traits by identifying a negative correlation between filial piety and neuroticism, alongside a positive correlation between neuroticism and compliance. These findings highlight the interplay between personality traits and environment, particularly in the context of cultural values. Moreover, the study demonstrates the influence of the environment on belief systems, as evidenced by the positive correlation between children's ideals and actual filial piety. This positive correlation also underscores the presence and influence of traditional filial values within the 1970s generation.

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