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Filial piety and subjective well-being across adult age groups: evidence from Vietnamese adults

BACKGROUND
This study examines the relationship between filial piety and subjective well-being (SWB) among adult children in Vietnam, addressing the limited body of research that has compared the psychological implications of filial piety across different stages of adulthood.

PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURE
Drawing on the Dual Filial Piety Model, two developmental cohorts were investigated: emerging adults aged 18-23 and adults aged 29-59. Data were collected from a sample of 1,085 participants and assessed using the Dual Filial Piety Scale (DFPS) and the Mental Health Continuum–Short Form (MHC-SF).

RESULTS
The findings indicated that both reciprocal filial piety (RFP) and authoritarian filial piety (AFP) were positively associated with, and served as meaningful predictors of, overall SWB as well as its three constituent domains, namely emotional well-being, psychological well-being, and social well-being. These results suggest that filial piety continues to function as an important value orientation that is associated with positive psychological functioning among Vietnamese adults. Furthermore, notable age-related differences emerged. Older adults reported higher levels of both RFP and AFP than emerging adults, indicating a stronger endorsement of filial values in later stages of life. In addition, the associations between filial piety and well-being were more pronounced among older adults, suggesting that the psychological benefits of filial piety may strengthen with age and life experience.

CONCLUSIONS
While filial piety remains a relevant moral compass across adulthood in Vietnam, its contribution to well-being appears to be most substantial when these values are deeply internalized and integrated into individuals' sense of self. The findings are discussed within Vietnam's sociocultural context, and directions for future research are proposed to further clarify the developmental and cultural dynamics underlying the link between filial piety and well-being.

KEY WORDS
filial piety; subjective well-being; cultural psychology; Vietnam

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BACKGROUND

THE DUAL FILIAL PIETY MODEL AND SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING

Filial piety, a central Confucian concept, refers to the expectation that adult children respect and obey their parents (Hwang, 1999). It is understood as a deeply held belief system and a set of normative actions reflecting the way children treat their parents, grounded in morality, affection, and reverence (Yeh, 1997), encompassing the responsibilities of offspring to respect, care for, and bring honor to the family (Chen, 2014). To navigate the complexity of this construct, Bedford and Yeh (2019) conceptualize filial piety as relatively stable patterns of thoughts, emotions, and behaviors through which children express love and respect toward their parents within particular social contexts. Crucially, the Dual Filial Piety Model (DFPM; Yeh & Bedford, 2003) refines this understanding by distinguishing between two distinct dimensions: reciprocal filial piety (RFP) and authoritarian filial piety (AFP). RFP is conceptualized on the basis of affection toward parents. It posits that parent-child interactions are sustained by natural emotional bonds and reciprocity. Given the parental investment in giving life and providing care, adult children are expected to reciprocate with filial devotion, expressed through affection, concern, and caregiving in later life (Yeh, 2003). AFP is grounded in reverence for parents. It asserts that children should obey their parents, fulfill their obligation to comply with parental expectations, and seek to bring them satisfaction (Yeh, 2003). This distinction is vital for understanding filial piety not merely as a monolithic cultural norm but as a nuanced psychological mechanism that has transcended its origins in China to become a foundational pillar of social stability in Asian countries, including Vietnam (Low & Ang, 2012).

The relationship between filial piety and well-being has received the attention of researchers but remains a complex subject in the existing literature, yielding conflicting findings that can be better understood through the lens of the DFPM. On one hand, filial piety, particularly when driven by RFP, is associated with beneficial outcomes such as healthier family functioning, higher academic achievement, and a lower caregiving burden (Dong & Xu, 2016; Pan et al., 2022); can also enhance harmony, foster affectionate bonds, and promote positive outcomes for personal development and interpersonal relationships (Ho, 2013; Ishii-Kuntz, 1997); and has been shown to be associated with improved intergenerational relationships, reduced parent-child conflict (Yeh, 2003), and higher levels of subjective well-being among young adults (Chen et al., 2016). On the other hand, filial piety can be associated with adverse outcomes when characterized by AFP, including caregiving stress, worse self-rated health, and role strain (Dong & Xu, 2016). Notably, AFP, grounded in obedience and hierarchy, has been linked to impaired impulse control, inhibition of self-expression, and negative correlations with self-esteem and social competence (Ho, 1994; Leung et al., 2010; Schwartz et al., 2010).

Despite these documented negative outcomes, emerging cultural psychology literature suggests that the psychological consequences of AFP are not entirely negative and must be analyzed within specific cultural contexts (Yeh, 2009; Yeh et al., 2013). Within highly collectivist and hierarchical societies, adhering to family hierarchies and exercising self-restraint to meet parental expectations are not simply acts of blind obedience; rather, they are regarded as mature moral practices that foster family harmony and preserve social integration (Bedford & Yeh, 2019; Hwang, 1999). Under these cultural constraints, when AFP is enacted within a cohesive family environment, it can positively correlate with social adaptation, family harmony, and collective belonging (Yeh, 2003; Yeh & Bedford, 2004). By aligning individual desires with collective family goals, offspring often experience a heightened sense of belonging, familial solidarity, and moral alignment, which actively contributes to their social well-being (Yeh et al., 2013). Thus, rather than being inherently maladaptive, AFP can function as a positive moral anchor that enhances specific dimensions of subjective well-being, particularly in collectivist East Asian societies where relational hierarchy and filial obligations are deeply valued.

It seems that filial piety can have both beneficial and negative outcomes, depending on its form and context. While these mechanisms are documented, existing studies predominantly focus on adolescents or the elderly (Guo et al., 2022; Ren et al., 2022; Wu et al., 2018), leaving a significant gap in understanding how these two distinct dimensions of filial piety differentially impact subjective well-being across diverse adult age groups within the Eastern sociocultural context, including Vietnam.

METHODOLOGICAL CHOICE AND FILIAL PIETY IN MODERNIZING VIETNAM

In examining filial piety within Vietnam, it is also useful to consider its distinct historical and sociocultural context. While informed by broader Confucian traditions, filial values in Vietnam have historically evolved in dialogue with indigenous customs, community-oriented village life, and a longstanding cultural emphasis on maternal care and mutual family support. These nuances often allow filial obligations to be experienced not only as hierarchical duties,

but also as affective bonds of gratitude and practical solidarity within the domestic sphere. Rather than representing a direct reproduction of classical tenets, filial piety in contemporary Vietnam reflects localized practices that warrant consideration when examining intergenerational relations and adult well-being.

While filial piety is historically rooted in Confucian philosophical traditions and may exhibit distinct localized nuances in contemporary Vietnam, the current study does not aim to develop or validate a new indigenous filial piety scale. Instead, we examine the applicability and psychological implications of the Dual Filial Piety Model (DFPM; Yeh & Bedford, 2003) using the widely recognized and validated Vietnamese adaptation of the Dual Filial Piety Scale (DFPS; Truong et al., 2020). By employing the standardized DFPS, which measures RFP and AFP, our study ensures a standardized, internationally comparable approach to assessing filial values across developmental cohorts. This methodological choice allows us to directly test how these two distinct dimensions – one based on voluntary emotional reciprocity (RFP) and the other based on hierarchical compliance (AFP) – differentially predict subjective well-being in a rapidly modernizing collectivist society like Vietnam, without causing a misalignment between localized theories and standardized measurement tools.

Under the influence of rapid modernization, urbanization, and integration, Vietnamese family structures have shifted toward nuclear families, emphasizing individual autonomy and egalitarian intergenerational relationships. This has direct implications for the two dimensions of filial piety: (1) Reciprocal filial piety remains a highly salient, universal cultural value across generations. It serves as a central emotional anchor that is not diminished by modernization. (2) Authoritarian filial piety has undergone a profound cultural transformation. In modern Vietnam, absolute obedience is declining as traditional norms evolve. Authoritarian filial expectations are no longer expressed through rigid coercion; instead, parental authority has transitioned toward a more democratic, consultative dynamic between parents and children (Cao, 2018; Truong et al., 2020) – a phenomenon conceptualized here as "softened authoritarianism".

This socio-cultural reconfiguration provides a compelling rationale for why AFP may not be inherently detrimental to psychological functioning in Vietnam, but may instead be associated with positive mental health outcomes through two key mechanisms: (1) The value congruence perspective (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2000) posits that subjective well-being is enhanced when an individual's values and behaviors are congruent with the dominant values of their cultural environment. Vietnam is characterized by high collectivism and hierarchical social structures, meaning that adhering to authoritarian filial norms (such as respecting parental authority and maintaining "family face") is potentially a highly valued social expectation. Fulfilling these expectations may contribute to social approval, high social integration, and family solidarity, which may directly enhance social well-being. (2) Relational autonomy and meaning reconstruction (Bedford & Yeh, 2019; Yeh & Bedford, 2003): Under the lens of "softened authoritarianism", contemporary Vietnamese parents act predominantly as advisory guides rather than coercive figures. Therefore, practicing AFP in Vietnam may be experienced as a voluntary, respectful, and honorable relational obligation rather than rigid psychological oppression.

AGE COHORTS AND THE MODERATING ROLE OF DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES

A critical gap exists in understanding the age-graded nature of filial piety. While shaped in childhood, the full comprehension and capacity to execute filial duties mature only in adulthood (Tsao & Yeh, 2018); however, the period of "emerging adulthood" (18-29 years) presents a distinct context from established adulthood (Arnett, 2011). This is a stage of exploration and experimentation, where individuals often have not yet undertaken traditional adult roles such as home ownership, marriage, or career establishment. This description resonates with the Vietnamese context, where individuals aged 18-23 are frequently still engaged in higher education or vocational training. They often lack stable employment or income, and many of them remain financially dependent on their parents (Truong, 2009). Consequently, their perception and practice of filial piety, and its implications for subjective well-being, may diverge significantly from older adults, who are typically employed with stable incomes and have established their own families (Truong, 2009). The interplay of Eastern and Western cultures, alongside modernization, is inducing shifts in values within Vietnam. Research indicates that Vietnamese university students (18-23 years) prioritize modern values over traditional ones (Truong & Różycka, 2013), whereas older adults (30-60 years) place a stronger emphasis on traditional values such as filial piety, respect for the elderly, and ancestor worship (Truong, 2015a). This generational divergence suggests that the psychological impact of filial piety – whether reciprocal or authoritarian – likely differs significantly between these cohorts.

To theoretically account for such age-graded variations, we draw upon two complementary developmental frameworks: (1) Socioemotional selectivity theory (SST; Carstensen et al., 1999) posits that as individuals age, their future-time perspective is progressively constrained, leading them to prioritize

emotionally meaningful goals and close social ties over knowledge-acquisition or exploratory pursuits. For established adults navigating the realities of aging parents, reciprocal care and maintaining harmonious intergenerational bonds become central sources of emotional fulfillment. Consequently, RFP yields a stronger, direct psychological payoff for their subjective well-being. (2) Adult role transitions and value internalization (Arnett, 2000; Mehta et al., 2020; Ryan & Deci, 2000): While emerging adults (primarily college students aged 18-23) are often financially dependent and actively exploring their identities – making filial obligations feel more like external expectations – older adults (aged 29-59) have undergone major adult role transitions, particularly career stabilization and parenthood. Experiencing parenthood deeply enhances empathy toward their own parents ("Nuôi con mới biết sự tình…" [Only when raising one's own children does one truly comprehend parental devotion]), leading to the deep internalization of filial values into their core identity. Through this experiential shift, filial values are organically internalized into the core self-concept rather than enacted as mere normative compliance (Ryan & Deci, 2000). When personal behaviors align authentically with these deeply internalized cultural values, they generate significantly greater psychological flourishing, life purpose, and well-being through value congruity mechanisms (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2000).

Previous studies did not adequately capture this nuance. For instance, Van Mai and Van Le (2023) examined the interdependence of happiness and filial piety in Vietnam but focused on a specific age group (40-year-olds) and did not explicitly differentiate between AFP and RFP, thereby limiting a detailed understanding of the multifaceted nature of filial piety. Similarly, Liu et al. (2022), while differentiating RFP and AFP in relation to well-being among young adults, limited their scope to a specific subpopulation of Chinese lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) individuals. Therefore, applying Yeh and Bedford's (2003) Dual Filial Piety Model (DFPM), which has demonstrated appropriate structure and high reliability in the Vietnamese context (Truong et al., 2020), is crucial to elucidate how RFP and AFP are differentially associated with the subjective well-being of emerging adults (college, unmarried) versus adults (married, employed).

THE PRESENT STUDY

The primary objective of this study was to elucidate the complex relationships between the dual dimensions of filial piety (RFP and AFP) and the multidimensional construct of subjective well-being (encompassing emotional, social, and psychological well-being) in the rapidly transforming sociocultural landscape of contemporary Vietnam. Although the psychological implications of filial piety are widely recognized in East Asian contexts, research has rarely investigated these dynamics across distinct developmental stages within a single national sample. By using the validated Vietnamese version of the DFPS, this study aims to fill these critical gaps by examining how reciprocal affection and authoritarian obedience differentially predict subjective well-being across different adult life-course cohorts.

To empirically operationalize these developmental contrasts, the present study compared two distinct cohorts of adult children: emerging adults (ages 18-23; Group 1) and established adults (ages 29-59; Group 2). Crucially, we deliberately excluded individuals aged 24-28 to maximize developmental distinctiveness between the two target groups. This intentional gap serves as a practical boundary separating the fluid, transitional phase of early career-entry and identity stabilization from two distinct developmental anchors: emerging adults undergoing academic training and emerging financial independence, and established adults who have typically settled into stable employment and family formation. Rather than establishing definitive developmental causality, this sampling contrast allows for a clearer empirical comparison between two well-delineated stages of adulthood in relation to filial values and subjective well-being.

Based on the integrated theoretical frameworks of the DFPM, value congruence perspective, and socioemotional selectivity theory, we formulated two central hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Both RFP and AFP will be statistically significant associated with the three dimensions of subjective well-being (emotional, social, and psychological) within the collective and hierarchical sociocultural context of Vietnam.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): The positive associations of both filial piety dimensions on subjective well-being will be moderated by age group, such that the predictive paths of both RFP and AFP will be significantly stronger for established adults (Group 2) than for emerging adults (Group 1), reflecting the deeper cognitive and identity internalization of filial values in more mature life stages.

PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURE

PARTICIPANTS

Data were obtained from 1,085 adult children aged 18 to 59, recruited from multiple faculties at Vietnam National University, Hanoi. The sample comprised two groups: Group 1 (N = 535, with 227 male) included full-time undergraduate students enrolled in standard programs (ages 18-23), and Group 2 (N = 550

with 200 male) comprised working adults enrolled in service programs.

MEASURES

Dual Filial Piety Scale (DFPS): The Vietnamese version of the DFPS (originally developed by Yeh & Bedford, 2003; translated and validated in the Vietnamese context by Truong et al., 2020) was used. The scale consists of 16 items measuring two independent dimensions of filial belief: RFP (8 items, e.g., "Talk frequently with your parents to understand their thoughts and feelings", "Be grateful to your parents for raising you") and AFP (8 items, e.g., "Give up your aspirations to meet your parents' expectations", "Do whatever your parents ask right away"). Participants rated the importance of these beliefs on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*extremely unimportant*) to 7 (*extremely important*). In the current study, the Cronbach's α coefficients demonstrated high internal consistency for both subscales: RFP (α = .85) and AFP (α = .87).

Mental Health Continuum-Short Form (MHC-SF): Subjective well-being was assessed using the Vietnamese adaptation of the MHC-SF (originally developed by Keyes, 2002; validated in Vietnam by Truong, 2015b, and Rogoza et al., 2018). The MHC-SF is a 14-item self-report questionnaire measuring three core dimensions of well-being: emotional well-being (EWB; 3 items, e.g., feeling "happy", "interested in life"), social well-being (SWB; 5 items, e.g., feeling "that you had something important to contribute to society"), and psychological well-being (PWB; 6 items, e.g., feeling "that you had warm and trusting relationships with others"). Participants reported their experiences over the past month on a 6-point Likert scale from 1 (*never*) to 6 (*every day*). The internal consistency was highly robust across all dimensions: EWB (α = .87), SWB (α = .87), PWB (α = .86), and the total SWB scale (α = .91).

PROCEDURE

This study was conducted under a research project funded and ethically approved by the Vietnam National Foundation for Science and Technology Development (NAFOSTED; grant No. 501.01-2024.07). All procedures adhered strictly to established ethical standards for research involving human participants. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty.

Participants were fully informed about the study's aims and procedures. The paper-and-pencil questionnaires were completely anonymous, with no identifying information recorded, and all data were used solely for research purposes. Participants were explicitly informed that their participation was voluntary and that they were free to omit responses to any items.

RESULTS

Data analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 22.0. Predictor variables (RFP and AFP) were mean-centered to mitigate multicollinearity, and age group was dummy-coded (0 – emerging adults, 1 – established adults). To evaluate the construct validity and structural stability of the Vietnamese Dual Filial Piety Scale (DFPS) across the two developmental cohorts, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted separately for Group 1 (emerging adults) and Group 2 (established adults). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure indicated excellent sampling adequacy (.88 for Group 1; .91 for Group 2), and Bartlett's test of sphericity was highly significant ($\chi^2(120) = 3032.70$, $p < .001$ for Group 1; $\chi^2(120) = 4731.17$, $p < .001$ for Group 2). Principal component analysis (PCA) with orthogonal Varimax rotation was primarily employed, consistent with the theoretical premise of factor independence in the DFPM (Yeh & Bedford, 2003). For both cohorts, a stable two-factor structure (representing RFP and AFP) was cleanly extracted, accounting for 49.10% and 60.11% of the total variance for emerging adults and established adults, respectively. All 16 items loaded strongly onto their designated theoretical dimensions (loadings ≥ .44) with zero cross-loadings exceeding .30.

Furthermore, because RFP and AFP demonstrated a meaningful empirical correlation ($r = .32$, $p < .001$), we performed an additional sensitivity analysis using a common factor model with oblique rotation: principal axis factoring (PAF) with direct oblimin rotation (δ = 0). The resulting pattern matrices replicated the identical two-factor configuration across both groups, with the same item-to-factor assignments, comparable pattern coefficients (all loadings ≥ .42), and no problematic cross-loadings (> .30). Given that the substantive interpretation of the factor structure remained fully invariant regardless of the extraction algorithm (PCA vs. PAF) or rotation method (orthogonal vs. oblique), the primary PCA solution is retained for reporting.

All scales demonstrated high internal consistency, with Cronbach's α coefficients ranging from .86 to .93. The mean score for RFP ($M = 6.24$, $SD = 0.76$) was higher than that for AFP ($M = 4.33$, $SD = 1.26$); correlations are presented in Table 1.

Regarding RFP, independent samples *t*-tests indicated that the older group (29-59 years) exhibited slightly higher scores ($M = 6.29$, $SD = 0.81$) compared to the younger group (18-23 years; $M = 6.19$,

Table 1

Descriptive statistics, reliability and correlations for the variables

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. RFP	6.24	0.76	(.85)						
2. AFP	4.33	1.26	.32**	(.87)					
3. Total FP	5.28	0.83	.70**	.90**	(.87)				
4. EWB	4.44	1.20	.26**	.21**	.28**	(.87)			
5. SWB	3.96	1.22	.23**	.32**	.35**	.62**	(.87)		
6. PWB	4.33	1.07	.29**	.28**	.35**	.65**	.74**	(.86)	
7. Total SWB	4.23	1.03	.29**	.32**	.37**	.80**	.91**	.92**	(.91)

Note. N = 1,085; $^{**}p < .01$; Cronbach's α coefficients are given in parentheses on the diagonal. FP – filial piety; RFP – reciprocal filial piety; AFP – authoritarian filial piety; EWB – emotional well-being; SWB – social well-being; PWB – psychological well-being.

Table 1A

Independent-samples t-test comparing emerging adults (Group 1) and established adults (Group 2)

Variable	Group 1 (18-23, N = 535) M (SD)	Group 2 (29-59, N = 547-549) M (SD)	t	p	Cohen's d	Effect size
RFP	6.19 (0.71)	6.29 (0.81)	−2.09	.037	0.13	Negligible
AFP	4.00 (1.09)	4.65 (1.33)	−8.76	< .001	0.53	Medium
EWB	4.04 (1.24)	4.84 (0.99)	−11.73	< .001	0.71	Medium
SWB	3.44 (1.19)	4.47 (1.03)	−15.30	< .001	0.93	Large
PWB	3.91 (1.10)	4.75 (0.86)	−14.09	< .001	0.86	Large

Note. RFP – reciprocal filial piety; AFP – authoritarian filial piety; EWB – emotional well-being; SWB – social well-being; PWB – psychological well-being. Group 2 N varies (N = 547 for EWB, PWB; N = 548 for SWB; N = 549 for RFP, AFP) due to pairwise/listwise missing value deletion in SPSS.

SD = 0.71). Although this difference reached statistical significance with $t(1082) = -2.09$, $p < .05$, the magnitude of the effect was negligible (Cohen's d = .13).

In contrast, a more distinct pattern emerged for AFP. The older cohort reported significantly higher adherence to authoritarian norms (M = 4.65, SD = 1.33) than their younger counterparts (M = 4.00, SD = 1.09). The results indicated a statistically significant difference between the two groups, $t(1082) = -8.76$, $p < .001$. The magnitude of the effect was in the medium range (Cohen's d = .53). See Table 1A for the complete age group comparison.

Given the broad age range of the older adult group (29-59 years), a preliminary regression analysis was conducted to examine whether age functioned as a potential confounding variable within this subsample. The results indicated that age was not significantly associated with total SWB (B = .003, p = .659) or with its dimensions (PWB: B = .006, p = .335; SWB: B = −.002, p = .831; EWB: B = .004, p = .624). In addition, the associations between filial piety dimensions (RFP and AFP) and well-being remained consistent regardless of age adjustments. Accordingly, the older cohort sample was treated as a single group in subsequent comparative analyses; see Table 2.

We also conducted hierarchical regression analyses on the full sample. In the first step (Step 1), the main effects of mean-centered RFP, mean-centered AFP, and dummy-coded age group (0 – emerging adults, 1 – established adults) were entered. In the second step (Step 2), the two-way interaction terms (RFP × age group and AFP × age group) were introduced to test the formal moderation hypotheses. The results, reported in Table 3, provide a highly nuanced picture of how filial values are associated with well-being across the adult life course. RFP and AFP together explained 14% of the variance in total subjective well-being scores (Table 2). Specifically, for EWB, RFP was a more pronounced predictor (β = .22, $p < .001$) than AFP (β = .14, $p < .001$). Conversely, for social well-being, AFP was the substantially stronger predictor (β = .28, $p < .001$) than RFP (β = .14, $p < .001$). For PWB, both RFP and AFP exhibited equivalent predictive weights. When interaction terms were added (Table 3), the interaction between RFP and age group was statistically significant for total SWB

Table 2

Associations of RFP and AFP with total SWB, EWB, SWB, and PWB (N = 1,085)

	Unstandardized B	*SE*	Standardized β	*t*	*F*	Adjusted R^2
Model 1: Total SWB						
Constant	1.55	.24		6.44***	88.85***	.14
RFP	.29	.04	.21	7.21***		
AFP	.20	.02	.25	8.35***		
Model 2: EWB						
Constant	1.75	.29		6.09***	51.07***	.09
RFP	.34	.05	.22	7.19***		
AFP	.13	.03	.14	4.47***		
Model 3: SWB						
Constant	1.36	.29		4.68***	75.49***	.12
RFP	.23	.05	.14	4.75***		
AFP	.27	.03	.28	9.24***		
Model 4: PWB						
Constant	1.60	.25		6.32***	76.99***	.12
RFP	.31	.04	.22	7.40***		
AFP	.18	.03	.21	7.09***		

Note. RFP – reciprocal filial piety; AFP – authoritarian filial piety; EWB – emotional well-being; SWB – social well-being; PWB – psychological well-being; ***p < .001.

(B = .227, p = .002) and highly significant for PWB (B = .320, p < .001), indicating a directional moderation where the positive association of RFP is significantly stronger in established adults. For AFP, while its interaction with age group was non-significant for PWB and social well-being, a significant interaction emerged in the emotional domain (EWB: B = .129, p = .026), suggesting that its positive association with EWB is stronger among established adults.

DISCUSSION

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the complex relationships between the dual dimensions of filial piety (RFP and AFP) and subjective well-being across two distinct developmental cohorts of Vietnamese adults. Overall, our empirical findings provide support for the proposed theoretical model, fully supporting hypothesis 1 (H1) and partially supporting hypothesis 2 (H2). Specifically, consistent with H1, both RFP and AFP were significantly and positively associated with subjective well-being, though they showed distinct, domain-specific associations. Furthermore, in line with H2, hierarchical regression analyses demonstrated that these relationships were moderated by age group, with the positive associations of filial piety with specific well-being dimensions being significantly more pronounced among established adults (ages 29-59) than emerging adults (ages 18-23). These overarching findings, along with their cultural, developmental, and psychological implications, are discussed in detail in the following subsections.

DUAL DIMENSIONS OF FILIAL PIETY IN CONTEMPORARY VIETNAM

Our results revealed a positive, moderate correlation between RFP and AFP, corroborating prior research suggesting that these dimensions are not mutually exclusive but can coexist within individuals (Yeh, 2009). However, the significantly higher endorsement of RFP compared to AFP suggests that reciprocal filial values may be more salient in contemporary Vietnam. This higher endorsement of reciprocity suggests that for modern Vietnamese individuals – regardless of age – although authoritarian obligations retain some degree of relevance, RFP garners broader agreement and salience. It may also reflect the sociocultural evolution of Vietnam over the past two decades, where industrialization and modernization have been associated with greater emphasis on independence and autonomy (Do & Phan, 2002; Le, 2016). As Le (2016) noted, while contemporary

Table 3

Interactions of filial piety and age group in relation to subjective well-being

Outcome and predictor	Unstandardized B	*SE*	Standardized β	*t*	*p*
Total SWB					
RFP	.17	.06	.13	3.04	.002
AFP	.10	.04	.12	2.77	.006
Age group	.80	.06	.39	14.58	< .001
RFP × Age	.23	.07	.13	3.06	.002
AFP × Age	.03	.05	.03	0.62	.538
EWB					
RFP	.28	.07	.18	4.03	< .001
AFP	–.03	.05	–.03	–0.60	.552
Age group	.74	.07	.31	10.89	< .001
RFP × Age	.13	.09	.06	1.42	.155
AFP × Age	.13	.06	.10	2.24	.026
SWB					
RFP	.14	.07	.09	2.06	.040
AFP	.17	.04	.17	3.75	< .001
Age group	.90	.07	.37	13.39	< .001
RFP × Age	.18	.09	.08	1.95	.051
AFP × Age	.01	.06	.01	0.25	.805
PWB					
RFP	.14	.06	.10	2.32	.020
AFP	.11	.04	.13	2.84	.005
Age group	.75	.06	.35	12.73	< .001
RFP × Age	.32	.08	.17	4.03	< .001
AFP × Age	–.02	.05	–.01	–0.31	.758

Note. RFP – reciprocal filial piety; AFP – authoritarian filial piety; EWB – emotional well-being; SWB – social well-being; PWB – psychological well-being. Coefficients are from Step 2 (interaction model). RFP and AFP were mean-centered. Age group was dummy coded (0 – younger adults, 1 – older adults).

Vietnamese adult children continue to honor their parents, their expression of filial piety is increasingly characterized by voluntary affection and autonomy rather than unquestioning obedience.

GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES IN FILIAL PIETY AND WELL-BEING

The independent samples *t*-tests revealed that while the difference in RFP between emerging and established adults was negligible (d = .12), a highly distinct generational gap emerged for AFP (d = .53). This generational divergence can be interpreted through the dual lenses of developmental maturation and cohort effects. Born in the late 20th century, established adults (ages 29-59) were socialized in a potentially more traditional, pre-globalized Vietnam where hierarchical family structures may have been more prominent. Furthermore, as individuals enter established adulthood, they typically marry and raise their own children. This developmental transition into parenthood may foster greater understanding of their parents' sacrifices, potentially contributing to greater endorsement of hierarchical respect. In contrast, emerging adults (ages 18-23) were raised in an era of digital connectivity and globalization, where modern ideals of egalitarianism may be highly valued. Moreover, scholars have argued that as individuals age, they increasingly tend to return to, or reaffirm, traditional values (Truong & Różycka, 2013; Truong, 2015a). Thus, they report lower adherence to

hierarchical obedience (AFP) while maintaining high reciprocal affection (RFP), suggesting that reciprocal and authoritarian dimensions of filial piety may show different age-group patterns in Vietnam.

It is important to note, however, that these cohort differences should be interpreted with appropriate caution. Rather than solely reflecting chronological maturation, these patterns are inherently bound to life-stage role transitions (e.g., employment status, marriage, parenthood) and broader socio-historical cohort effects distinguishing generations that grew up under different socioeconomic climates.

PATHWAYS TO WELL-BEING: AUTONOMY, HIERARCHY, AND AGE MODERATION

The results contrast with earlier Western and Chinese studies that often linked AFP with negative psychological outcomes (e.g., Ho, 1994; Schwartz et al., 2010) or showed nonsignificant associations with life satisfaction among adolescents (Chen, 2014; Sun et al., 2019). In the present study, a key contribution lies in demonstrating that both RFP and AFP were positively associated with subjective well-being, but showed domain-specific associations. Our findings are partly consistent with those of Yan and Chen (2018), who reported that although AFP was negatively associated with self-esteem, both RFP and AFP were positively associated with life satisfaction.

The observation that both RFP and AFP were positively associated with overall subjective well-being may suggest that both dimensions of filial piety remain relevant to participants, including treating parents benevolently out of gratitude for their love and sacrifices and obeying parents in recognition of their superior position within the family hierarchy. In practice, both RFP and AFP may serve important social functions, namely sustaining family solidarity and reinforcing the responsibility of adult children to care for their elderly parents.

Moreover, one possible explanation for why AFP was not negatively associated with the well-being of adult children may be that elderly parents in Vietnam are generally not excessively harsh or authoritarian. They do not appear to rely heavily on AFP to compel their children to sacrifice personal needs in order to comply with parental demands. Adult children are largely responsible for managing their own lives, while parents primarily play an advisory role. This shift may be associated with a more relaxed family atmosphere and a lower degree of parental authoritarianism toward their children (Cao, 2018).

In our study, although both RFP and AFP were positively associated with subjective well-being, their associations varied across specific dimensions of well-being. RFP showed stronger positive associations with emotional and psychological well-being, which is consistent with prior literature showing that emotional reciprocity is associated with lower levels of family conflicts and greater internal peace (Chen et al., 2016). Conversely, AFP was the strongest predictor of social well-being. This finding may help reconcile the theoretical tension between hierarchical obedience and well-being. In collectivist Vietnam, conforming to traditional expectations and respecting authority (AFP) are widely recognized social virtues. According to the value congruence perspective (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2000), aligning one's behaviors with cultural norms may facilitate high social integration, community approval, and social security, thus potentially contributing to social well-being. Furthermore, this positive association may be consistent with the "softened" nature of parental authority in modern Vietnam (Cao, 2018), where parents may act as advisory guides rather than coercive authoritarians. Thus, children's practice of AFP may represent voluntary, respectful relationality rather than psychological oppression.

Crucially, the hierarchical regression analyses indicated that the associations between filial piety and well-being were moderated by age group. Specifically, the positive association of RFP with total SWB and psychological well-being was significantly stronger for established adults than for emerging adults. This pattern is consistent with socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen et al., 1999). As individuals age, their future perspective may narrow, leading them to select emotionally meaningful social goals – such as reciprocal care for aging parents – over career exploration. Within this theoretical framework, fulfilling such duties may be associated with a greater sense of life purpose, personal growth, and existential satisfaction. In contrast, AFP's association with social and psychological well-being remained invariant across age cohorts, suggesting that hierarchical respect may represent a stable, cross-generational normative baseline in Vietnam. However, AFP was more strongly associated with immediate emotional well-being among established adults, suggesting that older adults may derive greater emotional satisfaction from adherence to traditional filial values.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this study provides initial empirical evidence supporting the applicability of the Dual Filial Piety Model in examining adult subjective well-being within contemporary Vietnam. Our findings indicate that while reciprocal filial affection (RFP) was positively associated with subjective well-being across age groups, AFP was also positively associated with subjective well-being, particularly social well-being, in contemporary Vietnam. Both RFP and AFP may function as positive moral guides associated with

subjective well-being, with RFP's positive associations with emotional and psychological well-being being significantly stronger among established adults than among emerging adults. These patterns illustrate possible ways in which relational hierarchy and reciprocal bonds might function within collectivist settings, while underscoring the necessity of further validation across broader demographic strata.

LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER DIRECTIONS

Although this study provides valuable insights into the associations of filial piety with subjective well-being among Vietnamese adult children, several limitations should be noted.

First, the participants were recruited through convenience sampling in a university setting (Vietnam National University, Hanoi). This recruitment strategy may have resulted in a sample with relatively high educational attainment and greater familiarity with academic or psychological concepts than the broader Vietnamese population. These characteristics could influence both the endorsement of filial piety and its association with subjective well-being, particularly because education may be related to attitudes toward traditional values, autonomy, intergenerational relationships, and modernization. Therefore, the convenience sampling restricts the generalizability of the findings, and future studies should recruit randomly selected samples across diverse geographic (such as rural) and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Second, the cross-sectional design and convenience sampling preclude causal conclusions and limit broader cross-cultural generalizability. The observed group differences should be interpreted with caution, as they may reflect life-stage or cohort differences – such as employment, marital status, or parenthood – rather than pure developmental maturation. Longitudinal research with representative samples is needed to verify these age-related patterns and test the model's cross-cultural applicability.

Third, the present data reflects only participants' self-reported perspectives on filial piety. Future research should examine the actual enactment of filial behaviors and their implications for the subjective well-being of both adult children and their parents.

Finally, the study did not differentiate between filial obligations toward one's biological parents and those toward parents-in-law. In our view, gender equality in contemporary society may challenge traditional Confucian notions of filial piety, which prescribed that women, after marriage, owed primary filial duties to their husband's parents and lineage. Future studies should therefore explore differences in attitudes and practices of filial piety toward biological parents versus parents-in-law in the present social context.

Disclosures

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Formal ethical review by an independent institutional review board was not sought separately, as the comprehensive research project – encompassing the theoretical rationale, sampling framework, and assessment instruments – had already undergone rigorous peer evaluation and formal approval by the Scientific Committee of the National Foundation for Science and Technology Development (NAFOSTED) under grant No. 501.01-2024.07. The study was conducted in strict adherence to the ethical standards established in the Declaration of Helsinki.

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Table 1B

Exploratory factor analysis of the Filial Piety Scale (AFP, RFP) across age groups (G1, G2)

Rotated factor loadings				
Item	G1/RFP	G1/AFP	G2/RFP	G2/AFP
1	.802		.755	
2	.640		.717	
3	.711		.813	
4	.638		.801	
5	.652		.737	
6	.688		.748	
7	.447		.696	
8	.495		.742	
9		.562		.584
10		.665		.628
11		.657		.694
12		.701		.761
13		.640		.784
14		.586		.717
15		.558		.707
16		.596		.646

Note. RFP – reciprocal filial piety; AFP – authoritarian filial piety. Extraction method: principal axis factoring. Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser normalization. Group 1 and Group 2 were analyzed separately. Bartlett's test was significant in both groups ($p < .001$), supporting factorability of the correlation matrices.