

Older people's relationships with their adult children in multicultural Australia: a comparison of Australian-born people and Chinese immigrants

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ABSTRACT

Against the background of population ageing and increasing cultural diversity in many Western countries, the study examined differences and similarities between Australian-born people and Chinese immigrants in their relationships with adult children. The specific research questions were: (a) are there differences between these groups in the nature of parent–child relationships; and (b) if there were differences, did these differences reflect the Confucian concept of filial piety among older Chinese immigrants. The solidarity–conflict model and the concept of ambivalence were used to quantify parent–child relationships. Data from 122 community-dwelling people aged 65 and over (60 Australian-born and 62 Chinese-born people) were collected using standardised interviews. There were significant differences between the two groups for all relationship dimensions except associative solidarity. Compared to Australian participants, Chinese participants were more likely to live with their children. However, when they did not live with their children, they lived further away. They were also more likely to receive, but less likely to provide, instrumental help. Finally, they reported higher levels of normative solidarity, conflict and ambivalence, and lower levels of affectual and consensual solidarity. The differences in solidarity dimensions persisted when socio-demographic variables were controlled for. The study revealed complex differences in the nature of older parent–child relationships between Australian-born people and Chinese immigrants. Some of these differences, such as more prevalent multigenerational living among older Chinese immigrants, likely reflect the strong influence of filial piety among this group. However, differences in other dimensions, such as lower levels of consensual solidarity, might be associated with the Chinese participants' experience as immigrants. This study also highlights the usefulness of the solidarity–conflict model as a theoretical framework to understand the nature of parent–child relationships among older Chinese immigrants.

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Introduction

Population ageing and increasing cultural diversity were two important socio-demographic changes in many Western countries, such as Australia, Canada, the United States of America (USA) and the United Kingdom (UK), in the 20th century, and are expected to continue throughout the 21st century (United Nations 2011). The number of older immigrants in these countries is also increasing rapidly, both in absolute terms and as a proportion of the population. In Australia, where the current study was conducted, there were 681,500 overseas-born older people (defined as those aged 65 years or over) in 1996, accounting for 31 per cent of the total older population (Gibson *et al.* 2001). In 2011, this number had increased to 1.1 million, accounting for 36 per cent of the older Australian population (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012). This is a 63 per cent increase over a 15-year period, compared to a 30 per cent increase for the Australian-born population during this period.

Against this background, the study explored differences and similarities in the nature of older parent–child relationships between older Australian-born people and older Chinese immigrants. It focused on parent–child relationships because family relationships play a major role in shaping our lives and, of these relationships, those between parents and children are among the most fundamental and emotionally intense ones (*e.g.* Russon 2009; Stanton 1995). There is further evidence that following changes in family structures in the past few decades, such as relatively high divorce rates, smaller family sizes (due to lower fertility rates) and increasing numbers of concurrent generations within families (due to increased life expectancy), vertical family relationships, that is, family relationships across different generations, such as those between parents and children, will become relatively more important compared to horizontal ones, that is, family relationships within the same generation (*e.g.* couple relationships and sibling relationships) (Bengston 2001). Finally, it is important to understand the nature of parent–child relationships as these relationships affect the exchange of care between parents and adult children, which, in turn, impact on social policies and service provision for families in our ageing society.

The study explored differences and similarities in parent–child relationships between older Australian-born people and older Chinese immigrants because there are unique characteristics in the nature of these relationships in Chinese families. Specifically, it is believed that the Confucian concept of *filial piety*, or *Xiao* (孝), defines the nature of parent–child relationships in

Chinese families (Hashimoto and Ikels 2005; Hwang and Han 2010). Filial piety refers to 'the practice of respecting and caring for one's parents in older age, based on a moral obligation that children owe their parents' (Hashimoto and Ikels 2005: 437). In traditional Chinese families, multigenerational co-residence was paramount in carrying out this filial care in everyday life and was considered a key indicator of filial piety. However, filial piety does not only involve providing material support but also showing respect and love to one's parents (Hashimoto and Ikels 2005; Sung 2007).

Although the concept of filial piety is not unique to China, it is particularly associated with Chinese families because of the strong historical influence of Confucianism in China, which considered filial piety as 'the centerpiece of the moral order of society' (Hashimoto and Ikels 2005: 437). Due to this emphasis on filial piety, parent-child relationships occupy a much more central position in Chinese people's family relationships than that between a husband and a wife, as is the case in families in Western countries (Park and Chesla 2007).

The other reason for focusing on this group is that older Chinese immigrants are one of the largest and fastest growing groups of older immigrants in many Western countries, including Australia, where they were the sixth largest group of older immigrants in 1996 and are projected to be the fourth largest immigrant older group by 2026 (Gibson *et al.* 2001). Similar patterns are seen elsewhere; for example, they were the largest group of older immigrants in Canada in 2001, accounting for 3 per cent of the total older population (Turcotte and Schellenberg 2006).

Understanding the nature of parent-child relationships: the solidarity-conflict model and the concept of ambivalence

Many different theoretical perspectives, such as social exchange theory (*e.g.* Homans 1958) and the solidarity-conflict model (Bengtson and Roberts 1991; Katz *et al.* 2004), have been used to understand the nature of parent-child relationships. Among these perspectives, the solidarity-conflict model was used in this study because it provides a clear and comprehensive scheme for describing the nature and for measuring the various components of parent-child relationships (Silverstein and Giarrusso 2010). The solidarity-conflict model is also one of the most frequently cited theories of family relationships in later life (Steinbach 2008) and has been used in several large-scale family studies with various ethnic groups and in cross-national contexts, such as the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study, a longitudinal survey on the nature and strength of family ties in the Netherlands (Dykstra *et al.* 1999) and the Old Age and Autonomy: The Role of Service Systems and Intergenerational Solidarity

study (OASIS), a cross-national project that examines the interacting role of family and the welfare state on autonomy and quality of life in old age (Lowenstein and Ogg 2003).

The solidarity–conflict model conceptualises parent–child relationships as multidimensional, consisting of solidarity and conflict (Bengtson and Roberts 1991; Katz *et al.* 2004). Solidarity refers to ‘feelings of mutual affinity ... and how these are expressed in behavioural terms’ (Dykstra *et al.* 1999: 6) and consists of six dimensions: structural solidarity (*e.g.* living arrangements and/or geographic distance), associative solidarity (*e.g.* frequency of contact), functional solidarity (*e.g.* exchanges of intergenerational help), affectual solidarity (*e.g.* feelings of emotional closeness), consensual solidarity (*e.g.* perceived agreement in opinions, values and lifestyles) and normative solidarity (*e.g.* strength of obligations felt towards other family members) (Bengtson and Roberts 1991).

The early model focused on these solidarity dimensions and was criticised for being normative, as it described how family relationships should be rather than how they are (Marshall, Matthews and Rosenthal 1993). In response, a seventh dimension, namely conflict, was added to the model (Silverstein, Chen and Heller 1996). This revised model considers conflict as a normal aspect of relations and argues that solidarity and conflict are separate dimensions rather than opposite poles of a single continuum (Clarke *et al.* 1999; Parrott and Bengtson 1999).

The solidarity–conflict model might also be of particular relevance for research with older Chinese immigrants (Lin *et al.* 2015). First, the solidarity framework might be used to operationalise the Confucian concept of filial piety. As discussed earlier, it is commonly believed that the Confucian concept of filial piety defines the nature of parent–child relationships in traditional Chinese families. However, this term is generally discussed as an ideology and there is no agreed view on how filial piety should be measured in the context of parent–child relationships. In contrast, the solidarity framework provides a clear scheme for describing and measuring the various components of intergenerational solidarity. Its inclusion of behavioural and affective dimensions is also consistent with the view that filial piety involves both behavioural and emotional support to one’s parents (Hashimoto and Ikels 2005; Sung 2007). Given these features, the solidarity framework might be used to conceptualise the Confucian concept of filial piety in modern society. Because the solidarity–conflict model is currently the most frequently cited theory of family relationships (Steinbach 2008), connecting filial piety to the intergenerational solidarity theory and documenting this link empirically will also be useful for cross-cultural comparative research on family relationships. Second, the conflict dimension might complement the Confucian concept of filial piety when exploring parent–child relationships among

older Chinese immigrants. It is argued that although this concept might persist after Chinese people emigrate to a different country, conflicts also arise in the context of immigration because parents and children might be at different stages of acculturation (Lin *et al.* 2015).

In addition to the solidarity–conflict model, the study also included the concept of ambivalence to reflect recent theoretical advances. This concept was introduced by Luescher and Pillemer (1998) as a competing perspective to the solidarity–conflict model and refers to ‘contradictions in relationships between parents and adult offspring that cannot be reconciled’ (Luescher and Pillemer 1998: 416). They argued that compared to the solidarity and conflict perspectives, ambivalence better reflects the nature of family relationships because ‘relations generate ambivalences’ and, thus, ‘the observable forms of intergenerational relations’ can be seen as ‘efforts to manage and negotiate these fundamental ambivalences’ (Luescher and Pillemer 1998: 414). In response, Bengtson *et al.* (2002) proposed that ambivalence can be operationally defined as the intersection of solidarity and conflict and, thus, it complements rather than competes with the solidarity–conflict model. To reflect these different theoretical perspectives of family relationships and present a more complete picture of the nature of older parent–child relationships, the solidarity, conflict and ambivalence dimensions were all included in the current study.

Differences in the nature of parent–child relationships between older Caucasians and older Chinese immigrants

A recent review on the nature of parent–child relationships among older Chinese immigrants has found that there are currently few studies investigating the differences in these relationships between older Caucasians and older Chinese immigrants (Lin *et al.* 2015). From this limited research, there is evidence of differences in living arrangements (*i.e.* structural solidarity) and filial expectations (*i.e.* normative solidarity). For example, a relatively higher percentage of older Chinese immigrants live with their children compared to the Caucasian population (Lin *et al.* 2015). The percentages ranged from 35 per cent (Kamo and Zhou 1994) to 86 per cent (Phua, McNally and Park 2007), compared to 10–25 per cent reported for older Caucasians (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012; Tomassini *et al.* 2004; United Nations 2005).

With regard to filial expectations, Laidlaw *et al.* (2010) compared the level of filial expectations among three cultural groups (*i.e.* older Chinese immigrants living in the UK, older people living in mainland China and Scottish older people living in Scotland). They found that older Chinese immigrants had similar levels of filial expectations to Chinese people

living in China and that these were significantly higher than those among Scottish-born older people (Laidlaw *et al.* 2010).

The differences in these two aspects are consistent with the view that the influence of filial piety persists even after Chinese people have emigrated to a foreign country (Li, Hodgetts and Ho 2010). It is commonly assumed that older Chinese immigrants have good relationships with their children and are well looked after by them, in that they receive considerable financial, instrumental and emotional support from their children and, as a result, they do not need help from the outside (Chiu and Yu 2001; Lo and Russell 2007).

However, there is also evidence of changes in the practice and meaning of filial piety among older Chinese immigrants (Lin *et al.* 2015). For example, considerable numbers of older Chinese immigrants live independently (*e.g.* Gee 2000; Lee and Angel 2002). Of these, many live in public housing, receive limited support from their children, and rely on the government and community organisations for instrumental and financial support (*e.g.* Li 2011; Lo and Russell 2007; Wong, Yoo and Stewart 2005). Some studies have also found that many older Chinese immigrants have adjusted their filial expectations (Chiang-Hanisko 2010; Ip, Lui and Chui 2007). For instance, some prefer to live independently than to live with their children (Lai 2005; Mackinnon, Gien and Durst 1996). These studies' results suggest that older Chinese immigrants' relationships with their children are also influenced by their immigration experiences, and that the differences in these relationships between this group and older Caucasians might not be as small as was previously believed. However, few of these studies included older Caucasians as a comparison group and, thus, there is little direct evidence on the differences in the nature of parent–child relationships between the two groups.

The aim of this study was to contribute to this limited research and to explore the differences and similarities by examining the relationships of older Australian-born people and older Chinese immigrants with their adult children using the solidarity–conflict model and the concept of ambivalence. Based on the current literature, it was hypothesised that older Chinese immigrants would report higher levels of structural and normative solidarity than older Australian-born people. However, no hypotheses regarding the remaining dimensions were proposed due to the paucity of research in those areas.

Methods

Study design and participants

The study used a between-groups cross-sectional design, in which data were collected in structured interviews. Participants were two convenience samples of community-dwelling older people, specifically, a group of Australian-born

older people (N=60) and a group of older Chinese immigrants (N=62). There were three general inclusion criteria for participation, namely being aged 65 years and over, living in the community and having at least one living child. To enhance comparison between the two groups, additional group-specific inclusion criteria were included to minimise diversity within each group. Specifically, Australian-born participants needed to have both parents born in English-speaking countries, such as Australia, the USA or the UK. Similarly, Chinese participants needed to have been born and lived in mainland China before emigrating to Australia. They also needed to have lived in Australia for more than three years to minimise the impact of cultural adjustment when individuals first emigrate to a foreign country. The theoretical base for this is Oberg's (1960) and Winkelman's (1994) theories of stages of cultural adjustment, which state that people experience four stages (the honeymoon stage, the hostility stage, the gradual adjustment stage and the home stage) when emigrating to a new country. In this study, we restricted Chinese participants to those who had lived in Australia for more than three years to exclude people who were in the early stages of cultural adjustment.

Procedure

The study was conducted as the first author's PhD project, which explored the nature of older parent-child relationships and their associations with older people's psychological wellbeing. This paper reported results regarding the nature of parent-child relationships only.

The recruitment of participants was conducted between 2011 and 2012. A range of recruitment methods were used. Australian-born participants were recruited through advertisements placed in a free newspaper targeted at older people, a regional newsletter of the University of Third Age and the newsletter of the National Ageing Research Institute (NARI), a Melbourne-based research institute that conducts research with older people. Recruitment flyers were also sent to all NARI and some Council on the Ageing Victoria volunteers. Chinese participants were recruited through an advertisement placed in a free Chinese newspaper and flyers distributed to Chinese senior groups across the Melbourne metropolitan area. The first author also conducted recruitment talks to a small number of Chinese seniors' groups.

Potential participants were asked to contact the first author or to leave their contact number with her. In follow-up telephone calls or e-mails, potential participants were provided with further information about the study. For those who confirmed their interest, an appointment was made either at their homes or another place they preferred, such as a public library.

Data were collected through standardised interviews and informed consent was obtained at the start of the interviews. The interviews were conducted by

the first author, who was born in China and is fluent in English and Mandarin. They were conducted in English for Australian participants and in Mandarin for Chinese ones. Participants who were in couples ($N = 8$, three Australian couples and five Chinese ones) had the option of being interviewed separately. However, all chose to be interviewed at the same time. The interviews lasted from one to three hours, depending on how talkative the participants were and whether or not their spouse participated in the study.

Measures

Measures used in the study included socio-demographic variables and variables relating to the participants' relationships with their adult children. Socio-demographic variables included the participants' age, gender, highest education level, marital status, home-ownership, self-perceived financial situation and physical health. The extent to which older people's relationships with their adult children were characterised by structural, associative, functional, affectual, consensual and normative solidarity, along with conflict and ambivalence, was assessed. Questions assessing these dimensions were adapted from those in earlier studies, where their reliability was reported as acceptable (*e.g.* Gans and Silverstein 2006; Lowenstein 2007; Lowenstein and Daatland 2006; Silverstein *et al.* 2010). Table 1 provides details of these questions. For the solidarity dimensions, higher scores indicated higher levels of solidarity. For the conflict and ambivalence dimensions, higher scores indicated higher levels of conflict and ambivalence, respectively.

Statistical analyses

For nominal and ordinal variables, frequencies are reported. For continuous variables, Shapiro–Wilk tests were conducted to determine whether the variables were normally distributed. For variables that were normally distributed, means and standard deviations (SD) are reported. For variables that were not normally distributed, median and interquartile ranges (IQR) are reported. A range of statistical analyses, such as chi-square tests, Mann–Whitney *U* tests and linear regressions, were used to investigate the differences in the eight relationship dimensions.

Results

Participants' demographic characteristics

Participants ranged in age from 65 to 82 years, with a median of 76 years ($IQR = 8$). Most (83.68%) were females and were married (76.62%).

TABLE 1. *Measures of parent-child relationships*

Dimension	Questions	Score meaning and range
Structural solidarity	Do you live with any of your child? (Yes/No) How long does it take to travel to each of your children who do not live with you? (1 = Living together, 2 = Less than 30 minutes, ..., 5 = More than three hours)	Structural solidarity was calculated as the shortest travel time to children, ranging from 1 (all children living more than one hour away) to 4 (living with child/ren)
Associative solidarity	How often in the past 12 months have you be in contact ¹ with each of your children who does not live with you? (1 = Daily or more, 2 = Weekly or more, ..., 5 = Less than once a year)	Associative solidarity was calculated as the highest frequency of contact with non-co-resident children, ranging from 1 (monthly contact) to 3 (daily contact)
Functional solidarity	In the past 12 months, have you provided instrumental help (including help with household chores, house repair or gardening, transport/shopping, child care) to any of your children? ^{2,3} (0 = No, 1 = Yes) In the past 12 months, have you received instrumental help (including help with household chores, house repair or gardening, transport/shopping) from any of your children? ^{2,3} (0 = No, 1 = Yes)	There were six sub-scores of functional solidarity, indicating whether participants had provided help to or received help from their children in three domains (<i>i.e.</i> instrumental help, financial support and emotional exchanges). These scores were either 0 (no) and 1 (yes)
Affectual solidarity	Taking everything into consideration, how close do you feel to this child? ⁴ (1 = Very close, 2 = Close, ..., 5 = Not close at all) Overall, how well do you get along with this child? ⁴ (1 = Very well, 2 = Well, ..., 5 = Not well at all) How is communication between yourself and the child? ⁴ (1 = Very good, 2 = Good, ..., 5 = Not good at all)	Affectual solidarity was calculated as the mean score of the three items, ranging from 1 to 5. Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.95$
Consensual solidarity	How similar are your opinions and values about life to those of the child? ⁴ (1 = Very similar, 2 = Pretty similar, ..., 5 = Not at all similar)	

TABLE 1. (Cont.)

Dimension	Questions	Score meaning and range
Normative solidarity	<p>Please indicate your agreement with the following statements⁵ (1 = Totally agree, 2 = Agree, ..., 5 = Totally disagree)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult children should live close to their older parents so that they can help them if needed. • Adult children should be willing to sacrifice some of the things they want for their own children in order to support their ageing parents. • Older people should be able to depend on their adult children to help them do the things they need to do. • Parents are entitled to some return for the sacrifices they have made for their children. 	<p>Normative solidarity was calculated as the number of statements that participants agreed with. Scores ranged from 0 to 4. Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.77$</p>
Conflict	<p>Taking everything into consideration, how much conflict or tension do you feel there is between you and this child⁴? (1 = Not at all, 2 = A little bit, ..., 5 = A great deal)</p> <p>How much do you feel, this child⁴ is critical of you, or what you do? (1 = Not at all, 2 = A little bit, ... 5 = A great deal)</p> <p>How much does this child⁴ argue with you? (1 = Not at all, 2 = A little bit, ..., 5 = A great deal)</p>	<p>Conflict was calculated as the mean across the three items, ranging from 1 to 5. Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.87$</p>

Ambivalence⁶

Sometimes, family members can have mixed feelings in their relationships with one and other. Thinking about this child, how often do you have mixed feelings in your relationship with him/her? (1 = Never, 2 = Seldom, ..., 5 = Very often)

Every relationship can have both pleasant and unpleasant aspects. Everything considered, how would you evaluate your relationship with this child? (1 = Always pleasant, 2 = More pleasant than unpleasant, ..., 5 = Always unpleasant)

In every family there are situations when family members do everything possible to preserve family harmony or allow conflicts to occur. What about you and this child? (1 = Always try to preserve harmony, 2 = More often try to preserve harmony, ..., 5 = Always allow conflicts to occur)

Ambivalence was calculated as the mean score of the first two questions,⁷ ranging from 1 to 5.
Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.74$

Notes: 1. Including both face-to-face contact and non-face-to-face contact (*e.g.* telephone, mail and e-mail). 2. The same question was also asked for financial support and emotional support. 3. Most participants who lived with their children indicated that they shared household chores, household maintenance and shopping with their co-resident children. Due to the nature of their living arrangements, it was difficult to divide unambiguously these activities into providing or receiving intergenerational help. For this reason, analyses of instrumental help were conducted on the data provided by the 97 participants who lived independently. 4. The questions were asked for a randomly selected child. 5. Based on the scale developed by Lee, Peek and Coward (1998). 6. Based on the questions developed by Lüscher and Pillemer (1998). 7. Only the first two items were included because Cronbach's α was low (0.56) when the third item was included.

Approximately half were home-owners (61.50%), had university or higher education qualifications (57.47%) and considered their financial situation to be 'very comfortable' or 'comfortable' (62.51%). More than half (71.58%) rated their physical health to be 'excellent' or 'good'. Participants had between one and five living children, with a median of 2.00 (IQR = 1.00). Together, they had 303 living children, of whom 158 (52%) were daughters.

Chinese participants had been in Australia for between three and 21 years, with a median of 15 (IQR = 4). Their ages at migration ranged from 52 to 73 years, with a mean of 62 years (SD = 4.01). The most common reasons given for migrating to Australia were to reunite with family (37.60%) and to help look after grandchildren (28.45%). Most Chinese participants either did not speak English well (35.57%) or not at all (25.40%).

The respondents' country of birth was not associated with gender or educational status (*see Table 2*). However, it was associated with their marital status and home-ownership, and there were differences in age and self-perceived physical health and financial situation (hereafter referred to as physical health and financial situation, respectively) between the two participant groups. Australian participants were younger, more likely to be divorced and home-owners, and reported better physical health and financial situation than the Chinese participants. The association between country of birth and home-ownership was particularly apparent when the participants were grouped according to living arrangements. Among those participants who lived with their children, all Australians owned their home whereas all Chinese immigrants lived in a home owned by their children. Among those who lived independently, most Australians (55.98%) owned the home, whereas more than half of the Chinese participants lived in public housing (24.60%) and a quarter (11.28%) lived in a property owned by their children. Finally, Australian-born participants (median = 3, IQR = 1) had significantly more children than Chinese participants (median = 2, IQR = 0, Mann-Whitney $U = 1,114.50$).

Differences in the nature of parent-child relationships

The respondents' country of birth was associated with structural solidarity. Although Chinese participants were more likely to live with their children than Australian participants, they were less likely to have children living within 30 minutes (*see Table 3*). There was no association between country of birth and associative solidarity. However, country of birth was associated with two functional solidarity domains. Chinese participants were less likely than Australian participants to provide instrumental help, but were more likely to receive it. Country of birth was not associated with

TABLE 2. Differences in socio-demographic characteristics between Australian-born and Chinese participants

Variables	Australians	Chinese	<i>p</i>
Age (median, IQR) ¹	73 (7.8)	77 (6.0)	0.001***
	<i>Frequencies (%)</i>		
Gender: ²			
Male	17 (28)	22 (36)	0.397
Female	43 (72)	40 (64)	
Marital status: ²			0.036*
Married	35 (58)	41 (66)	
Widowed	13 (22)	18 (29)	
Divorced	12 (20)	3 (5)	
Education: ²			0.269
Primary/high school	18 (30)	27 (44)	
TAFE	10 (17)	10 (16)	
University or higher	32 (53)	25 (40)	
Home-ownership: ³			<0.001***
Home-owner	59 (98)	2 (3)	
Children own the property	0 (0)	33 (53)	
Private rental property	1 (2)	3 (5)	
Public housing	0 (0)	24 (39)	
Financial situation: ²			<0.001***
Very comfortable/comfortable	41 (68)	21 (34)	
I have to be careful, but I get by	19 (32)	41 (66)	
Physical health: ²			<0.001***
Excellent/good	51 (85)	20 (32)	
Fair/poor	9 (15)	42 (68)	
N	60	62	

Notes: IQR: interquartile range. TAFE, technical and further education. 1. Mann-Whitney *U* test. 2. Chi-square test. 3. Fisher's exact test.

Significance levels: * $p \leq 0.05$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, *** $p \leq 0.001$.

the remaining functional solidarity domains, namely providing or receiving emotional and financial support. Finally, there were associations between country of birth and the remaining relationship dimensions. Chinese participants reported higher levels of normative solidarity, conflict and ambivalence, but lower levels of affectual and consensual solidarity than Australian-born participants.

To understand better the association between country of birth and instrumental help, the different types of instrumental help were analysed separately. There were associations between country of birth and providing child-care support, with Australian participants being more likely to provide such help than Chinese participants. There was no association between country of birth and providing instrumental help in the remaining three areas (*i.e.* household chores, house repairs or gardening, transport or shopping). With regards to receiving instrumental help, there were significant associations in two areas, namely house repairs or gardening, and

TABLE 3. Differences between Australian and Chinese participants in the eight dimensions of parent–child relationships

Dimension	Australians	Chinese	<i>p</i>
	<i>Frequencies (%)</i>		
Structural solidarity: ¹			
Living with a child	4 (7)	21 (34)	<0.01**
Child/ren within 30 minutes	40 (67)	19 (31)	
Child/ren within one hour	11 (18)	10 (16)	
Child/ren further away	5 (8)	12 (19)	
Associative solidarity: ¹			
Daily	16 (27)	7 (12)	0.050
Weekly	41 (68)	45 (75)	
Monthly or less	3 (5)	8 (13)	
Functional solidarity:			
Providing instrumental help: ^{1,2}	48 (86)	19 (46)	<0.001***
Household chores	22 (39)	13 (33)	0.443
House repair or gardening	17 (30)	8 (20)	0.228
Transport or shopping	13 (23)	11 (28)	0.684
Child care	43 (77)	9 (23)	<0.001***
Receiving instrumental help: ^{1,2}	24 (43)	30 (73)	0.003**
Household chores	8 (14)	4 (10)	0.503
House repair or gardening	16 (29)	2 (5)	0.002**
Transport or shopping	11 (20)	29 (73)	<0.001***
Providing financial support ¹	19 (32)	18 (29)	0.752
Receiving financial support ¹	4 (7)	10 (16)	101
Providing emotional support ³	60 (100)	58 (94)	0.119
Receiving emotional support ¹	52 (87)	56 (90)	0.526
	<i>Median (IQR)</i>		
Normative solidarity ⁴	0 (1.00)	2.00 (1.00)	<0.001***
Conflict ⁴	1.00 (1.50)	2.00 (0.75)	<0.001***
Ambivalence	1.50 (1.50)	2.00 (1.00)	0.032*
Afectual solidarity ⁴	5.00 (0.67)	3.67 (1.00)	<0.001***
Consensual solidarity ⁴	4.00 (2.00)	3.00 (1.75)	<0.001***
N	60	62	

Notes: IQR: interquartile range. 1. Chi-squared test. 2. Restricted to participants who lived independently (N = 97). 3. Fisher's exact test. 4. Mann–Whitney *U* test.

Significance levels: * $p \leq 0.05$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, *** $p \leq 0.001$.

transport or shopping. Compared to Australian participants, Chinese participants were less likely to receive help with house repairs or gardening, but more likely to receive help with transport or shopping. There was no association between country of birth and receiving help with household chores.

Differences in the nature of parent–child relationships when socio-demographic factors were considered

Regression analyses were conducted to investigate whether the associations or the differences in the seven relationship dimensions (*i.e.* all except associative solidarity) remained once the impact of socio-demographic

characteristics (*i.e.* age, gender, marital status, education, physical health and financial situation) was controlled for. The model tested in the multinomial logistic regression analysis of the structural solidarity fit the data, $\chi^2(21) = 51.12$, $p < 0.001$, Cox & Snell $R^2 = 0.34$. Of the factors in the analysis, country of birth and education were significant predictors, $\chi^2(3) = 17.95$, $p < 0.001$ and $\chi^2(3) = 11.65$, $p = 0.009$.

The binary logistic regression models which predicted providing and receiving instrumental help fit the data, $\chi^2(15) = 45.63$, $p < 0.001$, Cox & Snell $R^2 = 0.46$, and $\chi^2(15) = 30.24$, $p = 0.011$, Cox & Snell $R^2 = 0.27$, respectively. Of the factors in the model examining the provision of instrumental help, country of birth and age were predictors, Wald's statistic = 6.24, degrees of freedom (df) = 1, $p = 0.012$, Exp (B) = 2.53, and Wald's statistic = 4.02, df = 1, $p = 0.045$, Exp (B) = -0.27, respectively. However, none of the factors predicted the receipt of instrumental help.

Linear regression analyses were used to analyse affectual, normative and consensual solidarity along with conflict and ambivalence. As the variables were skewed, they were transformed using optimal scaling before entering the regression model. All models were accounted for variance in the dependent variables (*see Table 4*). Country of birth was a predictor of affectual, consensual and normative solidarity, but not of conflict and ambivalence. Of the demographic variables, education was a predictor of normative solidarity, physical health was a predictor of normative solidarity and conflict, and financial situation was a predictor of normative solidarity, conflict and ambivalence.

As there were a small percentage of couples included in this study, there was the possibility that their responses towards relationships with adult children might be affected by the presence of the other parent. Separate analyses were conducted with these participants ($N = 16$, eight couples) removed from the data-set. The results regarding differences in socio-demographic variables using couple-deleted data were the same as those using the whole data-set. The results regarding differences in parent-child relationships were also similar to those using the full data-set, except for the dimension of ambivalence, where the difference failed to reach significance using the couple-deleted data-set. This result, however, was consistent with the result that country of birth was not a predictor of ambivalence when the impact of other socio-demographic variables was considered. Consequently, the possible impact of couple status was not further explored in the study.

Discussion

This study is the first to use the solidarity-conflict model and the concept of ambivalence to explore differences and similarities in the nature of parent-

TABLE 4. Results of linear regression analyses examining the predictors of affectual solidarity, consensual solidarity, normative solidarity, conflict and ambivalence

Variable	Affectual solidarity			Consensual solidarity			Normative solidarity			Conflict			Ambivalence		
	β	t	p	β	t	p	β	t	p	β	t	p	β	t	p
Age	-0.04	-0.43	0.666	0.01	0.10	0.921	-0.05	-0.72	0.472	0.02	0.24	0.810	0.05	0.48	0.636
Gender	0.06	0.70	0.489	0.08	0.91	0.367	0.04	0.55	0.583	0.04	0.41	0.685	0.01	0.11	0.910
Marital status	0.07	0.82	0.414	-0.02	-0.27	0.790	0.12	1.72	0.088	0.10	1.09	0.280	0.12	1.15	0.253
Education	-0.11	-1.42	0.157	-0.13	-1.67	0.099	-0.21	-3.35	0.001***	0.12	1.38	0.171	0.10	1.10	0.275
Physical health	-0.08	-1.07	0.288	0.09	0.94	0.348	0.23	2.95	0.004**	-0.27	-2.54	0.013*	-0.09	-0.83	0.408
Financial situation	0.06	0.75	0.452	0.09	1.11	0.269	-0.20	-3.19	0.002**	-0.21	-2.45	0.016*	-0.25	-2.71	0.008**
Country of birth	0.56	6.33	<0.001***	0.47	4.86	<0.001***	-0.79	-9.82	<0.001***	-0.12	-1.07	0.287	-0.09	-0.79	0.432
Model information	$F(7,113) = 9.13$, $p < 0.001$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.32$			$F(7,112) = 7.08$, $p < 0.001$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.26$			$F(7,114) = 13.56$, $p < 0.001$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.42$			$F(7,113) = 4.40$, $p < 0.001$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.17$			$F(7,110) = 2.29$, $p = 0.032$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.07$		

Significance levels: * $p \leq 0.05$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, *** $p \leq 0.001$.

child relationships between older Australian-born people and Chinese immigrants. There were differences between the two groups in all relationship dimensions except associative solidarity. Furthermore, these differences in solidarity dimensions persisted when socio-demographic factors were controlled for, whereas the differences in conflict and ambivalence did not.

Consistent with the hypotheses and the results of previous studies (*e.g.* Chiu and Yu 2001; Gurak and Kritz 2010; Kritz, Gurak and Chen 2000; Laidlaw *et al.* 2010; Phua, Kaufman and Park 2001), older Chinese immigrants were more likely to live with their children and reported higher levels of normative solidarity than Australian participants. These results indicate that filial piety continued to influence older Chinese people's relationships with their children after they emigrated to a Western country.

However, there might be other reasons for the higher rate of multigenerational living among older Chinese immigrants. First, it might be that Chinese participants had lower levels of English proficiency and were not confident in living independently in an English-speaking country. Second, it could be related to the lower home-ownership rate among this group. That is, older Chinese immigrants are more likely to live with their children than Australians because they are less likely to own their own homes. This difference in home-ownership between Australian and Chinese participants is consistent with the 2006 Australian Census data, which showed that older Chinese immigrants were among those with the lowest rates of home-ownership (Khoo 2011). One reason for this low home-ownership rate is that China is a middle-income country and older Chinese immigrants' savings might be of limited value when converted to Australian dollars, and insufficient for purchasing a house.

Due to this difference in home-ownership, the meaning of multigenerational living differs between Australian-born and Chinese participants. Of the Australian-born participants who lived with their children, all lived in their own homes. That is, Australian-born participants were providing their children with accommodation. In contrast, of the Chinese participants who lived with their children, all lived in their children's homes and none owned a home. This pattern of multigenerational living among older Chinese immigrants is also different from that expected in the Confucian concept of filial piety, where married sons live in their parents' houses. These findings highlight the changed meaning of multigenerational living among older Chinese immigrants and the important differences in the nature of such living arrangements to that of older Australian-born adults. As few studies have investigated these different types of multigenerational living, future larger-scale studies need to explore whether these differences apply to other older immigrant groups and whether the different types of

multigenerational living are associated with a range of psychological outcomes among older parents.

Importantly, although Chinese participants were more likely to live with their children, the majority of them lived independently, and the latter were more likely to live further away from their children than Australian-born people. This finding was unexpected because it is commonly assumed that if older Chinese immigrants do not live with their children, filial piety results in them living closer to their children. One possible reason for this is that, as discussed above, most Australian-born participants were home-owners, whereas very few Chinese participants were, and most of the latter lived in public housing. Therefore, compared to Australian-born participants, Chinese participants likely had less choice about the location of their residence and had to live where the provided public housing is located. The finding from this study suggested that one unexpected consequence of living in public housing might be that they live further away from their children compared to those who live in private homes. The other possibility is that compared to Chinese participants, Australian participants had lived in their current houses for a longer time and their children were born and grew up there. When these children moved out to live independently, they might have continued living in these familiar neighbourhoods.

It is also important to highlight that the percentage of Chinese participants living in public housing (39%) in the present study was much higher than that in the general population (6%) (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2007). This result is consistent with previous studies which report that a considerable number of older Chinese immigrants live in public housing (Chiang-Hanisko 2010; Tsang, Liamputtong and Pierson 2004). Together, these results suggest that public housing might be a particularly important way for older Chinese immigrants to achieve independent living in host countries.

Of those living independently, the two groups also differed in three areas of functional solidarity, specifically, receiving help with transport or shopping, receiving help with house repairs or gardening, and providing child-care support. Compared to Australian participants, Chinese participants were more likely to receive help with transport or shopping. One possible reason for this increased help was that most Chinese participants had poor English proficiency and might not have felt confident going out on their own. Unexpectedly, Chinese participants were less likely to receive help with house repairs or gardening. One explanation may be that many Chinese participants lived in public housing and did not need such help compared to their Australian-born counterparts who are more likely to reside in private homes. Chinese participants were also less likely to provide child care than Australians, which is inconsistent with the finding

that helping looking after grandchildren was one of the main stated reasons for migration to Australia. However, one possible explanation was that Chinese participants were older than Australian participants and that age is negatively associated with providing instrumental help (Albertini, Kohli and Vogel 2007; Hoff 2007). Furthermore, their grandchildren might be older, and require less help with child care. Another reason for the reduced likelihood of providing child-care support among Chinese participants was that they lived further away from their children than their Australian counterparts, and thus, might not be able to provide such help.

Importantly, in spite of the common belief that older Chinese immigrants receive a large amount of care from their children (Chiu and Yu 2001), the findings of the present study reveal that, compared to older Australian-born people, older Chinese immigrants are not more likely to receive help from their children, except in the area of transport or shopping. These findings are consistent with those from the study by Dong, Wong and Simon, which was conducted in the USA and found that many older Chinese immigrants perceived a lack of filial care from their children and that there might be 'a disconnection between older adults' conceptualizations of filial piety and the actual receipt of filial care' (2012: 140).

Finally, there is an indication that older Chinese immigrants have poorer relationships with their adult children than older Australians. Chinese respondents reported lower levels of consensual and affectual solidarity and higher levels of conflict and ambivalence. Although the differences in conflict and ambivalence did not persist when socio-demographic factors were controlled for, nevertheless the differences in consensual and affectual solidarity did. One reason for lower levels of consensual solidarity is that as discussed earlier, older Chinese immigrants may maintain their traditional views about filial piety. However, it is likely that their children have acculturated to more Western views, resulting in lower levels of consensual solidarity among older Chinese immigrants. Lower levels of consensual solidarity, together with higher levels of normative solidarity, might further lead to lower levels of affectual solidarity, because different views are likely to alienate older parents from their children, and higher expectations are likely to be associated with more disappointment. However, it is also possible that the differences in affectual solidarity are a result of more prevalent multigenerational living among older Chinese participants because co-residence has been found to be associated with lower levels of affectual solidarity (Millward 1998). Akiyama *et al.* (2003) further suggested that co-residence might result in more negative interactions between a parent and a child, as both parties have less control over the frequency of their interactions, and consequently, are less likely to be able to avoid negative interactions.

In summary, this study's results indicate that there are complex differences between older Australian-born people and older Chinese immigrants in their relationships with adult children. Some of these differences, such as more prevalent multigenerational living and higher levels of normative solidarity, likely reflect the strong influence of filial piety among older Chinese immigrants. This might be particularly true for Chinese participants in this study because most of them came to Australia when they were older. However, differences in other dimensions, such as a greater geographic distance and lower levels of consensual and affectual solidarity, are inconsistent with the concept of filial piety. These differences might be related to their experience as immigrants, such as having a more disadvantaged socioeconomic status and being at a different stage of acculturation compared to their children. Finally, it is possible that these findings might reflect changes in the practice of the Confucian concept of filial piety in China where the Chinese participants in this study had spent most of their lives. For example, multigenerational co-residence is becoming less common in China, and although adult children are still an important source of instrumental and financial support, many older Chinese people do not receive such assistance from them (*e.g.* United Nations 2005; Wang 2004; Whyte 2004).

The findings from this study also provide evidence for the usefulness of the solidarity–conflict model in understanding the nature of parent–child relationships among older Chinese immigrants. As discussed in the Introduction, although the Confucian concept is commonly used to understand parent–child relationships among this group, this term is often discussed as an ideology and there is no clear indication of how it can be measured empirically. The findings of this study suggest that the solidarity framework provides a useful tool to conceptualise this term and that the Confucian concept of filial piety is not peculiar or exotic but related to the universal concept of intergenerational solidarity. This development in the understanding of the Confucian concept of filial piety would enable researchers to conduct cross-cultural comparative work using the solidarity framework. Finally, the results regarding the conflict model suggest that conflict is common in older Chinese immigrants' relationships with their children and that including this dimension complements the Confucian concept of filial piety when understanding parent–child relationships among this group.

Limitations of the current study and direction for future research

The findings of this study should be interpreted in the light of a number of limitations. Firstly, the study was based on a relatively small convenience

sample. Although attempts were made to recruit older people who are more isolated, most participants were recruited through research organisations and social groups. Therefore, this sample is best considered as representing a healthy and active ageing sub-group of the older Australian population, and future larger-scale and population-based studies are needed to explore the generalisability of these findings.

Secondly, the current study was cross-sectional. Therefore, observed differences in parent–child relationships might be due to differences in cultural backgrounds, specifically filial piety, as well as the immigration experience of older Chinese immigrants. This raises questions regarding whether these results reflect the unique experiences of older Chinese immigrants or common experiences among older immigrants regardless of their cultural backgrounds. A longitudinal design which follows older Chinese immigrants or cross-sectional studies with a third comparison group of older people living in mainland China or other non-Chinese immigrants in Australia will help to identify differences attributable to general immigrant status and those uniquely attributable to Chinese immigrants.

Due to the small sample size, it was not possible to include certain potentially relevant covariates in the analyses, such as the number, gender and age of the children. Many of these variables might affect the nature of parent–child relationships and caution should be exercised in generalising findings from this study to the general older immigrant population.

Finally, the cultural background of the interviewer might have affected the group dynamics of the interviews, such that the interviewer is considered to be an in-group or an out-group member by the participants. In other words, the interviewees might have felt that their views are understood better when they were interviewed by an interviewer from a similar cultural background. As only one interviewer was used in the current study, this might have created methodological inconsistencies and future studies should consider employing multiple interviewers to ensure consistency between cultural backgrounds between the interviewees and interviewer.

Conclusion

The current study is the first to use the solidarity–conflict model and the concept of ambivalence to explore differences and similarities in parent–child relationships between older Australians and older Chinese immigrants. Significant differences between older Australian-born people and older Chinese immigrants were found in most dimensions, and the differences in solidarity dimensions persisted when socio-demographic factors were controlled for. These findings highlight the complexity in parent–child relationships in contemporary multicultural Western countries and

have important implications for aged-care planning and provision. For example, of older people living independently, Chinese immigrants are likely to have greater need for aged-care services than Australian-born adults, because their children live further away and, thus, might be less available to provide help. This study also highlights the usefulness of the solidarity–conflict model as a theoretical framework to understand the nature of parent–child relationships among older Chinese immigrants.

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