

A literature review on intergenerational conflicts in Chinese family education

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Abstract: *In recent years, intergenerational conflicts in family education have become a hot topic of social concern. With the rapid development of society, economy, and politics, intergenerational conflicts within families are becoming increasingly intense. This study reviews relevant research on intergenerational conflicts in Chinese family education both domestically and internationally over the past 20 years. In response to the current situation of intergenerational conflicts in family education, scholars have focused on practical responses from three levels: family, society, and school, providing corresponding guidance, suggestions, and strategies for intergenerational conflicts in families, hoping to create a good atmosphere for the healthy development of family education.*

Keywords: *Family education; Intergenerational conflict; Educational concept; Parent child communication; Educational Objectives*

1. Introduction

Since the reform and opening up, with the rapid development of society, there have been serious differences and gaps in the education level and thinking mode of family members in different eras, and intergenerational conflicts in family education have become increasingly severe. "The Law of the People's Republic of China on the Promotion of Family Education states": "Parents or other guardians should establish a sense of responsibility that the family is the first classroom and parents are the first teachers, assume the main responsibility for implementing family education for minors, and use correct thinking, methods, and behaviors to educate minors to develop good thoughts, conduct, and habits^[1]. The promulgation of this bill marks the elevation of family education from the level of "family affairs" to the level of "national affairs".

The "Guidelines for Learning and Development of Children Aged 3-6"^[2] and the "Guidelines for Preschool Education (Trial)" both explicitly state that "the words and actions of parents play a crucial role in the development of children"^[3]. As the first teachers of children, parents should pay more attention to their own parenting style in the process of raising them.

This study analyzes and reviews the literature on intergenerational conflicts in family education over the past 20 years, systematically reviews existing research on intergenerational conflicts in family education, and proposes corresponding suggestions for the issue of intergenerational conflicts in family education.

2. Definition of concepts related to intergenerational conflict

The concept of 'intergenerational conflict' has attracted widespread attention in the field of social sciences since its inception, and is closely related to the level of development of society and technological revolution. Chen Xiao refers to intergenerational conflicts as the "generation gap"^[4], which is a social phenomenon that leads to differences and conflicts in ideas, behaviors, lifestyles, cognitive levels, and other aspects between generations. Li Xiaoran attributed intergenerational conflicts to the post metaphorical culture, which refers to the conflicts and oppositions in concepts, values, and other aspects caused by the rapid development of marketization and informatization, as well as the anti social attitudes of young people towards the elderly in the current era^[5]. With scholars' in-depth research on the behavior of "intergenerational conflict", there has been a distinction between broad and narrow definitions in its concept. Among them, the broad intergenerational conflict refers to the intergenerational group differences that arise from different eras of life, which are regarded as the main cause of intergenerational differences. Narrowly defined intergenerational conflict refers to the

intergenerational differences and conflicts that exist between different generations in the family domain. In summary, this study defines "intergenerational conflict" as: "the differences in cognitive levels and other aspects between the younger and older generations in a family, resulting in family conflicts due to poor communication, that is, conflicts in the concepts of parents and children in family education."

3. The Causes of Intergenerational Conflict in Contemporary Family Education

Currently, scholars have provided systematic discussions and explanations on the causes of intergenerational conflicts in family education. Roughly categorized into the following three aspects.

3.1 The change of the times

3.1.1 The "warming" of the large family structure has increased the frequency of conflicts among intergenerational members

The popular view is that family structure will become more centralized and miniaturized with the changes of the times. But in recent years, some researchers have also proposed that the phenomenon of traditional era cohabitation has shown a "warming" trend in China. Among them, Wang Chaoyue, Luo Feng and others have found that modern family structures are gradually showing a three generation cohabitation structure, and the proportion of nuclear families has shrunk. After the official promulgation of the birth policy, China's basic policies underwent a fundamental reversal, presenting a pyramid shape: "4 elderly people, 2 adults, 1 child"^[6]. Since 2015, there has been a diversified pattern of families in China: the number of single parent families, DINK families, and families with two children has been increasing year by year. The composition of various forms of family structures is constantly evolving, with people from different social and cultural backgrounds and educational levels overlapping and combining to form a diverse family. In the era of commercialization and the internet, utilitarianism, selfishness, hedonism, and ideas continue to erode the living space of traditional family culture, destroying traditional family structures and relationships. People over the age of 60 are now referred to as the elderly population, who are a generation that grew up in poverty; The second generation has been influenced by the reform and opening up, and most of them possess certain knowledge, but their family structures still show significant differences; The third generation is the group born after the 1980s, who have received a complete and good education and have formed different ideological heights after experiencing the new media culture. However, due to the rapid development of society, the ideological level and cognitive level of the younger generation born in the 2000s have risen to a higher level than those born in the 1980s and 1990s. Obviously, ignorant filial piety and excessive frugality are not conducive to the development of the times. As conflicts shift from the family to the social level, the contrast between the two cultures gradually widens until intergenerational culture emerges.

3.1.2 The transformation of information technology exacerbates intergenerational conflicts among family members

The younger generation, who have grown up with the development of digital technology, have stronger acceptance and learning abilities than their parents. The intensification of intergenerational cultural differences and conflicts. The language system has gradually created a significant gap between the elderly and the young, with parents unable to understand the internet buzzwords spoken by their children. Similarly, the popular culture among the elderly is also considered to be out of line with social trends, and even some good moral concepts are considered outdated ideas. In the context of the constantly expanding "technological and information divide", parents are unable to timely learn new cultural concepts based on the internet era and new media technologies, nor can they use existing cultural concepts to understand their children. The phenomenon of "cultural silencing" has become the main manifestation of intergenerational communication conflicts in families. As a typical cause, cultural silencing directly leads to cultural conflicts and oppositions among family members^[7]. Therefore, we need to rely on "cultural feedback" to improve the differences between intergenerational relationships. This is mutual feedback within the family; This is also necessary to ensure normal communication and interaction between families^[8]. Most scholars have shown that current family conflicts have evolved from intergenerational communication to socio-cultural conflicts. In the current context, it is even more necessary for parents and children to strengthen communication and exchange, viewing each other as equal individuals rather than mere appendages.

3.2 Poor parent-child communication

3.2.1 Reduced opportunities for communication between parents and children, accumulation and deepening of conflicts

Scholars such as Wang Na have found that excessive care for children between grandparents can easily lead to the replacement of parenting styles, weakening communication between young children and their parents. As a result, the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren becomes closer, while the role and emotional connection of parents are lacking^[5].

3.2.2 Cultivators hold different opinions and have conflicting parenting concepts

Julie and others have pointed out that grandparents are prone to stubbornness and not listening to each other's advice in the process of communication and exchange with their elders, which is an important reason for conflicts between grandparents and elders^[9]. Meanwhile, research has found that communication breakdowns between parents are also one of the reasons for intergenerational conflicts. Improper communication tone and inability to put oneself in others' shoes during the communication process can lead to the occurrence of the problem.

3.2.3 Parents and children are in an unequal position of coexistence

A survey has found that parents' words and actions play a crucial role in children's development. As the first teachers of their children, parents should pay more attention to their own parenting style in the process of raising them. Different types of parenting styles have different impacts on children's social development and personality formation. Yang Fangjiao mentioned that foreign scholars divide the influencing factors of parenting styles into three categories: social level, parental level, and child level. From a social perspective, parents from different socio-cultural backgrounds, regions, and social classes have corresponding differences in their parenting styles towards their children; From the perspective of parents themselves, their level of education, age, personality, income, and experience all have an impact on the way they raise their children. From a child's perspective, the age and gender of a child will affect the parenting style of parents towards the child, while the child's personality will also affect the parenting style of parents towards the child^[10].

3.3 Wrong parenting by parents

Scholars classify parenting styles into authoritarian, democratic, indulgent, and neglectful. Democratic parents will respect their children's ideas, view them as independent individuals, and communicate with them on an equal footing. Authoritarian parents view their children as vassals and demand that they obey everything they say. In daily life, children's feelings are often ignored, and they are completely required to obey themselves without considering their own feelings. Indulgent parents are those who excessively spoil their children, such as completely taking over their children's affairs and not willing to let them try to do things independently, which leads to poor self-care ability of the children; Neglectful parents have no requirements for their children and pay little attention to their physical and mental health, mainly adopting a free range approach^[11].

For the different types of parents mentioned above, the differences in parenting styles can lead to vastly different outcomes for their children in their future growth process. The authoritarian and democratic parenting styles are the most important parenting styles, with the least being the indulgent parenting style^[7].

The reason for this phenomenon is based on the advanced development of society and economic politics, which has led to an improvement in the cultural knowledge level of parents. Therefore, parents have become more scientific and accurate in their parenting methods for young children.

4. The main content of intergenerational conflicts in family education

After analyzing and investigating the main content of intergenerational conflicts in family education, relevant researchers found that intergenerational conflicts not only exist between father and son generations, but also among grandparents. The main content of conflicts can be summarized into the following three aspects.

4.1 Conflict of educational objectives

In intergenerational conflicts, elders have different expectations and demands for the education of their descendants. Between father and son generations, parents often set higher educational requirements for their children. Xu Youlong and others pointed out that the traditional concept of "expecting children to become successful" in raising children has made parents' expectations for their children's academic performance highly explicit, hoping that their children will study hard and honor their ancestors^[12]. Wang Qi found in his research on Chinese immigrant families in the United States that, unlike the American educational philosophy of "living within one's means," Chinese parents not only pursue their children's personal success, but also hope that they can save face for the family. It can be seen that it is difficult for elders and children to reach a consensus on the emphasis and height of educational goals^[13].

4.2 Conflict in educational methods

In terms of educational methods, conflicts often manifest as contradictions between grandparents and parents' parenting styles towards children. Julie, Li Yan, and others found through interviews that the parenting of older generations advocates for children's independent development, while the parenting of older generations is more singular, and children prefer diverse qualities. Ji Ying pointed out that Chinese parents often use their own experiences as educational motivation, hoping that their children will avoid the same misfortune, but children are more eager for autonomy and respect from their parents. It can be seen that children influenced by modern culture have deep-rooted conflicts in their interactions with their parents. In addition, the conflict between the parenting concepts of grandparents and elders cannot be ignored. Research has found that the parenting philosophy of older generations often manifests as a focus on their children's healthy growth, while parents believe that their children "cannot lose at the starting line" and uphold a competitive parenting philosophy. It can be seen that the ancestors tend to adopt the Rousseau style "negative education", while the elders hold the "competitive" educational philosophy. The conflict between the two ideologies is the most prominent manifestation of intergenerational conflict.

4.3 Conflict in educational methods

There is still a situation where parents have uneven levels of educational methods. Some parents may believe that 'filial piety comes from under the rod', and that only by subjecting their children to verbal and physical scolding can they become successful. However, this is not the case in reality. Modern children emphasize viewing them as independent individuals capable of equal dialogue. By promoting equal communication between children and parents, and through in-depth conversations, they can truly understand each other's thoughts.

5. Strategies for Resolving Intergenerational Conflicts in Family Education

5.1 Control media speech and purify online platforms

Today, under the guidance of the Internet economy, the media emphasize the negative factors of the middle-aged and elderly group and avoid publicizing the positive factors^[14]. Due to the cultural silencing of middle-aged and elderly people, the positive aspects of the group have been denied. The cultural hostility caused by this is reflected in the family and develops into a generation gap between children and parents. This harmful cultural silence phenomenon erodes family relationships, leaving only blood ties and almost no harmonious emotional expression. Media coverage should promote cultural exchange, not become a catalyst for cultural opposition, nor exacerbate the vicious cycle of cultural silence.

5.2 Valuing the fine traditions of family tradition and culture

Creating a good family atmosphere for inheritance is an urgent task. We should actively advocate for a people-oriented family education, continuously optimize the content of family education, and abandon backward ideas such as "filial piety" and "children cannot become successful without being beaten". Family is the fundamental cell of society and the first school of life. No matter how much the times change, no matter how much the lifestyle changes, we must attach importance to family building, pay attention to family, family education, and family traditions. Under the influence of online culture, some traditional family traditions are constantly being challenged and seen as cultural forms that

contradict the development of the times. Therefore, the traditional culture of filial piety has been completely negated. It has been proven that middle-aged and elderly people have long been in a state of cultural silence in the development of online culture. In the era of rapid development of the Internet, young people have basically monopolized the information of the Internet and occupied the public opinion platform. The huge gap in information acquisition and usage has affected the values, attitudes towards life, and social participation of two generations, causing parents to gradually lose their authority in parent-child relationships. Therefore, it is necessary to rethink the construction of traditional family culture and promote the language expression of the older generation that keeps up with the times.

5.3 Community compensation, cultural compensation, intergenerational conflicts

In community service, the entertainment life of the elderly is limited to traditional entertainment life, and they have less exposure to social network culture. The increasing number of older generations who are detached from online cultural exchanges inevitably leads to intergenerational cultural conflicts. Promoting digital technology is undoubtedly an important way to bridge the cultural gap. Only through technological exchanges can middle-aged and elderly people embrace and accept online culture. The focus of community service should be on promoting interaction between young and elderly people, and facilitating communication between the two generations through online cultural forms^[15].

In order to eliminate cultural conflicts within families, it is necessary to innovate family traditions and methods of family education. In times of social change, intergenerational cultural conflicts within families are inevitable, but this does not mean that we cannot resolve cultural conflicts. Different social groups have many commonalities in values, ways of thinking, and ideologies, and cultural integration is completely feasible. The intergenerational conflict in family education cannot be separated from the tripartite education of family, school, and society.

6. Conclusion

This article systematically reviews the relevant research on intergenerational conflicts in Chinese family education both domestically and internationally over the past 20 years, and provides a detailed analysis of the causes, main contents, and current practices of intergenerational conflicts. Through research, it has been found that the main reasons for intergenerational conflicts include differences in values brought about by changes in the times, mismatched thinking and cognition, and communication imbalances. These conflicts are particularly prominent in terms of educational goals, methods, means, and concepts.

In order to address intergenerational conflicts in family education, research has proposed various strategies aimed at promoting mutual understanding and effective communication among family members, thereby reducing conflicts and improving the overall quality of family education.

In the future, further attention should be paid to the dynamic changes and underlying causes of intergenerational conflicts, and more diverse and effective solutions should be explored. This is of great significance for promoting the harmonious development of family relationships and the healthy growth of adolescents. At the same time, families, schools, and society should work together to build a good educational environment and support the continuous improvement and development of family education.

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