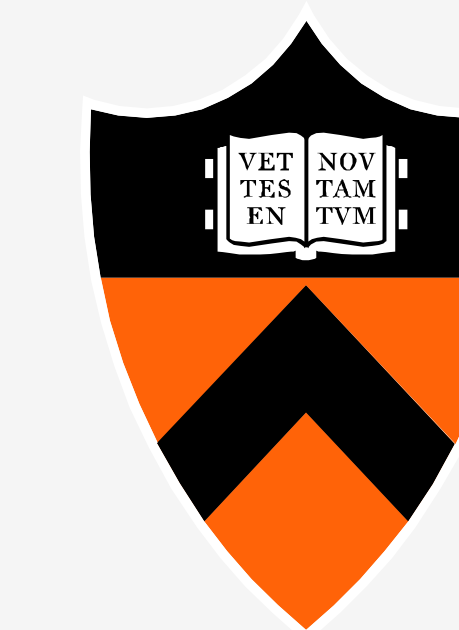# Predictors of Anticipated Instrumental Support From Children Among Older Parents in Urban and Rural China

## Cheng Cheng

### Office of Population Research and Department of Sociology, Princeton University

## Motivation

- **Anticipated** support from children is parents' perception that their children are willing to help them in the future should the need arise. As a form of social support, it is shown to benefit one's physical and mental health. Anticipated support from children is also closely related to social norms of filial obligations.
- Anticipated **instrumental** support is expected tangible help with daily activities such as **eating and dressing**. As it requires physical presence and tangible care, expecting such support as opposed to financial or emotional support from children may entail expectation of a **higher commitment** of children to their filial obligations.
- This study focuses on the case of China, where **filial piety**, implying that children should take care of their parents later in life, is a central virtue. Yet recent socioeconomic and cultural developments in China post significant **challenges** on its traditional norm of filial piety, especially in urban areas.
- This study asks: **which child does the parent expect instrumental support from? How is it different between urban and rural parents?**
- Urban and rural are defined by parents' current **Hukou** status, which entails institutionalized rural-urban social and economic inequality and cultural differences.

## Hypotheses

| Question | Rural | Urban |
|---|---|---|
| Does Child's Gender (*Being a Son*) Withstand All Other Considerations? | **Yes.** Filial piety is son-centered. | *No.* As women gain more control over their lives, other considerations overcrowd gender. |
| Do Other Forms of Support from Children Translate into Expectation of Instrumental Support? — *Financial Support* | **Yes.** It is an important aspect of filial piety. Parents expect instrumental support from those children who are conforming to filial piety. | *No.* As parents become less financially reliant on their children, it is is less important in filial piety and less considered in expectation of instrumental support. |
| Do Other Forms of Support from Children Translate into Expectation of Instrumental Support? — *Emotional Support* | **Yes.** Same reason as above | **Yes.** As the weight of financial support declines, emotional support continues to be an important predictor of future instrumental support, if not more important. |

## Data

- Data are from Chinese Health and Retirement Longitudinal Study (CHARLS) 2011. 7095 respondents (77% rural) aged 50+ and their 20586 children aged 18+ constitute the analytic sample.
- Parent-level predictors: age, sex, marital status, income, education, health
- Child-level predictors: age, sex, marital status, employment, education, parity, financial exchange with parents, proximity, frequency of contact

## Patterns of Anticipated and Received Support

- Rural parents expect support from **sons** more than from daughters.
- Money exchange is mostly from **children to parents**, while asset exchange is the reverse.
- More **rural** parents **receive** money and assets from children, while more **urban** parents **give** money and assets to children.
- More rural parents live with their children, while more urban parents stay in weekly contact with their children.

| | Rural | Urban |
|---|---|---|
| Mean Number of Adult Children | 3.1 | 2.5*** |
| **% Parents Expecting Future Instrumental Support from** | | |
| Any Child | **58.7** | 49.4*** |
| Any **Son** if having a son | **57.0** | 47.7*** |
| Any **Daughter** if having a daughter | 38.7 | **43.0***|
| **Financial Support from Children** | | |
| % Parents Received **Money** from Any Child in the Past Year† | **53.1** | 34.8*** |
| % Parents Received **Assets** from Any Child Ever | 4.1 | 5.5 · |
| **Financial Support to Children** | | |
| % Parents Gave **Money** to Any Child in the Past Year† | 6.9 | 15.4*** |
| % Parents Gave **Assets** to Any Child Ever | 13.0 | **20.9***|
| **Potential for Emotional Support from Children** | | |
| % Parents whose **closest** child lives | | |
|   With Parents | **53.3** | 47.2*** |
|   In the Same Neighborhood | 27.0 | 26.6 |
|   In the Same City/County | 11.5 | **18.8***|
|   In the Same Province | 3.8 | 3.4 |
|   In Other Province/Abroad | 4.3 | 3.9 |
| % Parents **See/Contact** Any Child At Least **Weekly**† | 74.1 | 85.1*** |

*Note: *** p<0.001 ** p<0.01 †applies only to non-resident child*

## Model

Two-level Random Intercept Logistic Model

$$Y_{ij} = A_i + B_k * X_{ijk}$$
$$where\ A_i = \alpha_0 + a_i + \alpha_k * Z_{ik}$$

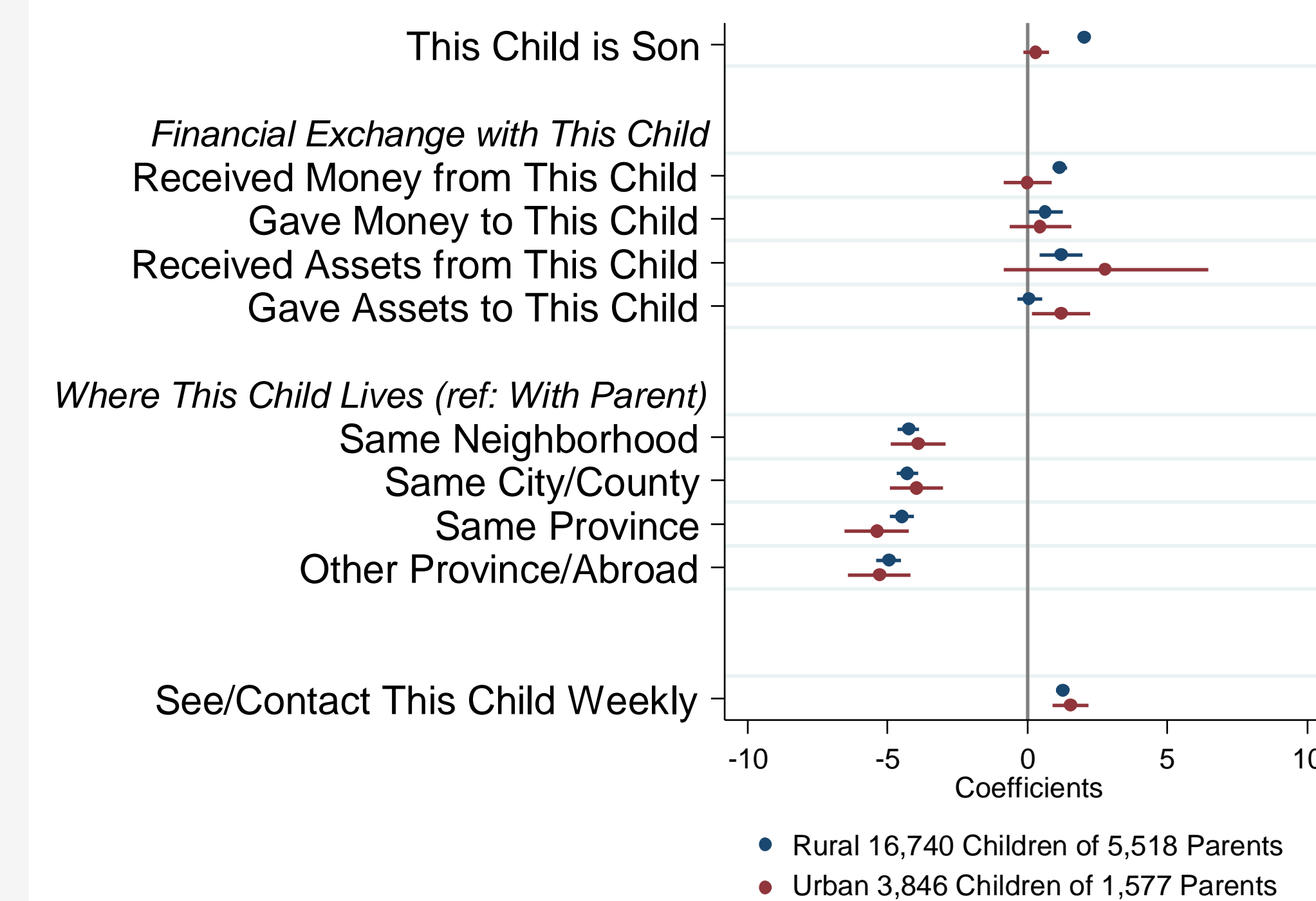$Y_{ij}$ log odds of anticipated support of parent i from child j
$A_i$ parent-level intercepts; $B_k$ coefficients of child-level predictors k
$X_{ijk}$ child-level predictors; $Z_{ik}$ parent-level predictors
$\alpha_0$ parent-level fixed intercept; $a_i$ parent-level random intercept
$\alpha_k$ coefficients of parent-level predictors k;

## Multi-Level Analyses Results



Rural 16,740 Children of 5,518 Parents
Urban 3,846 Children of 1,577 Parents

- Among **rural** parents, the **odds** of expecting a child to provide future instrumental support if the child is a **son** are **7.6** times the odds if the child is a **daughter**, even when holding past financial exchange activities, proximity, frequency of contact, and various child and parent characteristics constant. Among **urban** parents, the ratio is only **1.4**.
- Among **rural** parents, the odds of expecting this child to provide future support if the **child gave money** to the parent in the past year are **3.1** times than the odds if the child did not, all other equal. Among **urban** parents, the ratio is only **1.0**.

## Conclusions

- The norm of **son-centered filial piety** is overwhelming in rural China. Child's gender has high predictive power of anticipated instrumental support, beyond proximity, past financial and contact exchange, and child's and parent's SES. Such gender bias in expectation is not evident in urban China.
- **Past financial support** predicts expectation of future instrumental support in rural China, but not in urban China. This may be related to the lower proportion of urban parents receiving money from children and thus the declining importance of financial support in filial obligations.
- **Proximity and frequency of contact** predict anticipated instrumental support in both urban and rural China. This may suggest the continuing importance of geographical and emotional closeness to children when filial financial support becomes less prevalent in urban areas.

## Limitations

- Small sample size of urban parents and their children
- Lack of direct measure on emotional closeness between parents and children
- Lack of data on cohort changes in expectations
- Comparison to other forms of anticipated support

## Acknowledgement