# Travel in your way or in my way? Resolution of conflict between young adult children and their parents during family vacation decision-making

**Abstract:** In light of the prevalence of travel conflict between young adult children and their parents, it is critical to examine how conflict can be effectively resolved. A mixed-methods approach was adopted in this study, which used interviews and three experiments to examine how young adult children resolve conflict with their parents and what factors affect their conflict resolution. The results have the following implications. 1) Two main styles of conflict resolution are used by young adult children, namely 'doing what I want' (i.e., self-assertion, persuasion) and 'doing as parents expect' (i.e., self-sacrifice, compliance). 2) The conflict attribution of young adult children affects their selection of resolution styles. 3) The main effect of conflict attribution of young adult children on their resolution styles is mediated by their perspective taking and moderated by their decision-making power. This paper provides guidance to practitioners on how to manage conflicts in family travel decision-making.

**Keywords:** Family travel decision-making, conflict resolution style, conflict attribution, perspective taking, decision-making power

# 1. Introduction

Tourists in various stages of family life cycle (FLC) behave differently (Hesse-Biber & Williamson, 1984). Families with young adult children (aged 18 to 30 years old; Yao et al., 2020) represent an important stage in the FLC, but is yet to be thoroughly investigated in tourist behavior studies (Ramer et al., 2020). In this type of family, children have gained competence and developed advanced social skills in such transitionary period (Ramer et al., 2020). They can make travel-related decisions jointly with their parents instead of being completely controlled by their parents like young children (Wang et al., 2004), nor do they attain absolute dominance like middle-aged children (Hesse-Biber & Williamson, 1984). However, such joint decision-making is challenging and may lead to conflicts between two parties as they have multiple needs and expectations (Kozak, 2010). The intense conflict between young adult children and their parents in relation to travel decision-making has been confirmed (Yao et al., 2020).

Although conflict is a normal part of human interaction (Yang, Ryan, & Zhang, 2013), it can have constructive or destructive outcomes, depending on how it is handled (Rizkalla, Wertheim, & Hodgson, 2008). Being able to resolve conflict effectively improves tourists' satisfaction, and help them to achieve their initial goals (Song, Sparks, & Wang, 2016). Conflict resolution is therefore an important aspect of travel for young adult children and their parents (Kang & Hsu, 2005). Although studies have explored conflict resolution between adolescents and parents on family holidays (Yen et al., 2020), it may not be appropriate for young adult children since conflict resolution styles employed was significantly associated with FLC (Tamm, Tõugu, & Tulviste, 2014). Specifically, influenced by the collective culture, young adult children in China tend to show great filial piety to parents (Wang et a., 2018). Travelling with their parents is becoming a popular way for them to express filial piety (Wang et a., 2018). Conflict can also arise in family travel taken by Chinese adults and parents (Yao et al., 2020), but how to resolve conflicts is still a large research knowledge gap within Chinese families.

Conflict resolution is often influenced by individual and situational characteristics (Tamm et al., 2014). Conflict attribution – an individual's understanding of the cause of conflict – is an important individual factor (Hurt & Welbourne, 2018). Meanwhile, compared with adolescents, young adult children are better at perspective taking, i.e., considering others' viewpoints (Doorn, Branje, & Meeus, 2011), and have gained more power in family decision-making (Rojas-de-Gracia & Alarcón-Urbistondo, 2020). Therefore, the roles of perspective taking and decision-making power in conflict resolution deserve thorough investigation. Based on this, the current study incorporated these factors into the research framework, and focused on Chinese families with adult children, seeking to solve the following problems: (1) What strategies are frequently used by young adult children to resolve conflict with their parents during travel decision-making? (2) Does the conflict attribution of young adult children affect their selection of conflict resolution styles? If so, (3) does perspective taking play a mediating role in this effect, and (4) does their decision-making power serve as a boundary condition in this effect?

This study used a mixed-methods approach to address the above questions. First, an exploratory approach through interviews was adopted to identify specific conflict attributions

of young adult children and their selection of conflict resolution styles; initially explore the underlying relationship between conflict attributions and resolution styles; and preliminarily verify the role of perspective taking and decision-making power. Three experiments were then adopted to confirm the main effect of conflict attributions on resolution styles (Study 1); the mediating role of perspective taking (Study 2); and the moderating role of decision-making power in this effect (Study 3). According to our understanding, this research is among the first to explore how and why the conflict attribution of young adult children influences their conflict resolution styles. 'Conflict' in this study refers to disagreements, explicit or implicit, between young adult children and their parents (Yao et al., 2020).

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Conflict in family travel decision-making

Family travel decision-making is considered more complex than individual travel decision-making (Gram et al., 2019), as it requires the joint participation of family members (Rojas-de-Gracia, Alarcón-Urbistondo, & Casado-Molina, 2019). Since the family members have multiple needs and values, disagreements may arise in a process of joint decision-making. This is especially true when young adult children make decisions with their parents (Song et al., 2016). On the one hand, young adult children appear to take over some of the parental roles in family decisions as they develop more independence (Wang et a., 2018). On the other hand, many still depend on their parents for multiple types of support, including financial, social and emotional (Ramer et al., 2020). The increased autonomy from parental authority coupled with continued dependence on parents may create significant friction in their relationship with parents.

Failure to resolve such disagreements is costly for all group members, but once effectively solved, it can bring constructive results (Song et al., 2016). Research attention on conflict resolution styles in relation to family vacations has been given to adolescent children and their parents, such as bargaining and emotional tactics (Yen et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2004); and to couples' negotiation and giving priority to the other (Bronner and Hoog, 2008; Kozak, 2010). Less attention has been paid to young adult children - parent vacations. However, it is known that conflict resolution strategies used in parent–child relationships change as children age (Doorn et al., 2011). Since adults' power and cognitive abilities develop with age, their understanding of their parents' feelings advances (Tamm et al., 2014). A more mature style of conflict resolution develops, characterised by more perspective taking (Doorn et al., 2011). Moreover, resolution strategies heavily rely on a conflict's specific situation and participants (Gzkan, 2019). Strategies used in conflict between couples may not work for young adult child–parent conflict. There is a need to acquire more in-depth knowledge of conflict resolution between young adult children and their parents.

### 2.2 Conflict attribution and conflict resolution

Attribution theory states that individuals attempt to understand social phenomena by inferring causes. Conflict is a situation that is especially likely to motive individuals to search for attributions (Hurt & Welbourne, 2018). Conflict attribution is considered to play a critical role in determining how an individual responds to conflict. For example, individuals'

attribution of their partner's behavior determined their responses to conflict, thus influencing subsequent decision-making outcomes (Hurt & Welbourne, 2018). Adolescents attributed their parents' behavior during conflict to selfish (self-concern) and unselfish (other-concern) motivations and an attribution of selfishness would lead the adolescents to adopt poor resolution skills (Grace, Kelley, & McCain, 1993).

Studies have explored the effect of attributions of partners' behavior on conflict resolution (MacKinnon-Lewis et al., 2014; Sanford, 2010). The influence of individuals' attributions of their own behavior has not been evaluated thoroughly. However, individuals make attributions not only about others' behavior but also about their own (Graham, 2020). When people experience conflict, they are able to describe how they perceive their partners' experience as well as their own (Sanford, 2010). What's more, individuals' own behavioral factors can also influence their choice of conflict resolution strategies (Tamm et al., 2014). Therefore, we argue that individuals' responses to conflict may be affected not only by their attributions of partners' behavior, but also by attributions of their own behaviors. 'Conflict attribution' in this study refers to young adult children's attribution of their own behavior in conflict with their parents. The following hypothesis is proposed:

**H1**: Young adult children's conflict attribution is associated with their resolution style.

*2.3 The role of perspective taking*

Perspective taking is the cognitive ability of adopting the viewpoint of others (Ku, Wang, & Galinsky, 2015). A high level of perspective taking means that individuals tend to infer the content of a target's perceptions, feelings, and thoughts (Liu et al., 2021). Conflict is a common situation that motives individual to engage in perspective taking (Candice, Jessica, & Simon, 2020). When a conflict occurs, individuals tend to take their partners' viewpoint and to understand whether their behavior upset or hurt their partners (Candice et al., 2020). In addition, the occurrence of perspective-taking depends on one's cognitive ability and motivation to consider another's viewpoint (Ku et al., 2015). Behavioural attribution consists of explaining individuals' motivation, it is closely related to perspective taking (Grace et al., 1993).

In addition, the process of perspective taking can be a means of facilitating conflict resolution. Perspective taking at different levels might result in different resolution styles of conflict (Jin, Li, & Liu, 2020). For example, greater perspective taking could lead to greater forgiveness, greater yielding conflict style, and lesser fighting style (Rizkalla et al., 2008). Based on this, we expect that conflicts with parents in travel may stimulate young adult children's perspective taking, and different attributions of conflict are associated with different degrees of perspective taking, perspective taking further affects their conflict resolution styles. Hypothesis is as follows:

**H2**: The effect of conflict attribution on resolution styles is mediated by perspective taking.

*2.4 The role of decision-making power*

Power refers to the capacity to influence the behavior of others (Dunbar & Gordon, 2010). Resource theory is a theoretical framework useful for studying power (Hesse-Biber & Williamson, 1984), which suggests that the group member who contributes more resources to

the group is perceived to possess higher decision-making power (Shu, Zhu, & Zhang, 2012). In this way, the power of family members in travel decision-making is determined by the resources (i.e., money, skills) they contribute to the trip (Dunbar & Gordon, 2010).

Decision-making power determines whether individuals conform to others' expectations, and how they deal with a conflict (Dunbar & Johnson, 2015). In general, individuals with higher power tend to achieve their goals in conflicts (Recchia et al., 2010), and those with less power tend to submit to their partner (Dunbar & Johnson, 2015). In household consumption, family members who gain more power are more likely to emerge as the winners, even though they are actually responsible for the conflict (Recchia et al., 2010). Besides, according to the approach/inhibition theory of power, possessing power influences individuals' behavior. People with high power tend to be more approach-oriented (Li & Chen, 2017). They have more freedom to do what they want (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006). However, powerless is associated with inhibition. People with little power face more behavior restrictions (Li & Chen, 2017). They tend to conform for fear losing favor among the powerful (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006). Thus, in this study, how young adult children resolve conflicts with different attributions may vary according to their decision-making power. The following hypothesis is proposed:

**H3**: The effect of conflict attribution on resolution styles is moderated by decision-making power.

Research has shown that power makes people more selfish and less concern about others' ideas (Ku et al., 2015). Particularly, family members usually use power (i.e., authority, knowledge, money) to pursue their own interests (Recchia et al., 2010). Couples with more power in modern families tend to be more self-directed, and expect to fulfil their individual desires (Ndubisi, 2007). Children who possess more power (i.e., exhibiting knowledge) eager to gain more control in family decision-making and spend less energy caring for parents (Flurry & Burns, 2005). Otherwise, children with less power are more parents-focused and have greater concern about parents' ideas (i.e., perspective taking) in conflict resolution (Recchia et al., 2010). Therefore, we hypothesised that decision-making power moderates the mediating effect of perspective taking on the main effect. That is, highly powerful children will exhibit less perspective taking ability in conflict resolution, and less powerful subjects will exhibit greater perspective taking ability. The level of perspective taking further predicts the conflict resolution types. Specifically, we proposed the following hypothesis:

**H4**: The mediated relationship between conflict attribution and resolution styles via perspective taking is moderated by decision-making power.

## 3. Overview of this research

Both interviews and experiments were used in current study. According to the existing research and theoretical results, four overall hypotheses were first proposed in the literature review section to estimate the main effect of conflict attributions on resolution styles (H1), the mediating role of perspective taking (H2), and the boundary condition of decision-making power (H3-H4). An exploratory study was then adopted to identify the specific types of conflict attribution and resolution style in the Chinese young adults-parents context. Through conducting 29 interviews, it is found that the conflict attributions of Chinese young adults

included self-concern and other-concern, and their conflict resolution styles included 'doing what I want' and 'doing as parents expect'. Interestingly, different conflict attributions were associated with different resolution styles. Perspective taking was preliminarily confirmed to play a mediating role in such relationship, and decision-making power acted as a boundary condition variable.

Based on the findings of qualitative research, we further proposed more specified hypotheses to examine the effect of different conflict attributions on resolution styles (H1a, H1b); the mediating role of perspective taking (H2a, H2b) and the moderating role of decision-making power (H3a, H3b) in different attribution-resolution relationships. Further, we developed three scenario-based experiments to test these hypotheses. Study 1 examined the main effect of conflict attributions on resolution styles (H1, H1a, H1b) in the situation of destination choice. Study 2 checked the mediating effect of perspective taking (H2, H2a, H2b) in the condition of accommodation choice. Study 3 tested the moderation effect of decision-making power (H3, H3a, H3b, H4) in the context of restaurant choice.

## 4. Exploratory study

The purpose of this study was to identify the specific conflict attributions and conflict resolution styles in the young adult children-parents scenario; to initially explore how different conflict attributions of young adult children affect their resolution styles. In addition, as literature only implies the mediating effect of perspective taking and the moderating effect of decision-making power in general decision-making context, both roles were empirically explored and confirmed through interviews.

*4.1 Method*

*Data collection.* Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data, which were conducted in mainland China and took six months, from October 2019 to March 2020. Only respondents who were between 18 and 30 years old, single, and had participated in one or more family holidays with their parents in the past year were eligible. This age range ensured that the participants had developed strong decision-making ability and their parents were 'mid-life seniors' who retained certain decision-making influence, so disagreements between them would be overt (Yao et al., 2020). The singlehood restriction was to limit the findings to young adult child–parent conflict, precluding additional obligations (i.e., marital obligation) from confounding the findings on intergenerational conflict (Yao et al., 2020).

Interviewees were recruited by purposive sampling through friends, colleagues, and relatives with the defined criteria. Specifically, this research adopted a combination of face-to-face and online interviews to record the voices of interviewees. With the COVID-19 outbreak in China in January 2020, our interviews were changed from face-to-face to online. Finally, twenty-nine subjects were interviewed to reach the theoretical saturation (see Table 1). Among these participants, both students and those who already have jobs were included, which helps to improve the diversity of subjects and ensures that they have different decision-making power (i.e., money, information) when traveling with their parents. Each interview lasted approximately 50 minutes. During the interviews, the participants were asked to recall disagreements that they had had with their parents during travel decision-making; what

strategies they had used to resolve the disagreements; and what factors they had taken into account when they selected resolution strategies. They were encouraged to provide detailed descriptions of such disagreements, including their intentions, feelings and contributions to the vacation. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

[Insert Table 1 here]

*Data analysis.* Thematic analysis, a useful method to seek a deeper, richer, more nuanced understanding of empirical material, was used to analyse the interview transcripts (Esfehani & Walters, 2018). Specifically, the researchers implemented a three-step thematic analysis procedure comprising open coding, developing themes, and deriving networks (Esfehani & Walters, 2018; Wu & Gao, 2019). The resulting coding structure was organized into three themes: conflict resolution styles that encompassed four strategies, conflict attributions with two types of concern, and the links between conflict attributions and resolution styles. Based on this, a model that contained the underlying mechanism and boundary conditions of conflict attributions and resolution styles was developed. To ensure the trustworthiness of the category development, two independent researchers first analysed the transcripts separately and regularly discussed their coding results. A third researcher reviewed the results and reached an agreement on the coding and data interpretation.

*4.2 Results*

*Conflict resolution styles.* Through qualitative analysis, we found four typical strategies for adult children to resolve conflicts with their parents, namely self-assertion, persuasion, self-sacrifice and compliance. Although other conflict resolution strategies (i.e., compromise) also appeared in the interview, they were not considered in this study as their low frequency of appearance. Particularly, these four typical strategies were further classified into two general styles: 'doing what I want', through self-assertion or persuasion, and 'doing as parents expect', through self-sacrifice or compliance (Sugimura et al., 2009). For example, one interviewee said, '*When I had a disagreement with my parents, I would rather sacrifice my own interest to satisfy them*'. An interviewee who experienced conflict with his parents over choosing a restaurant said, '*I persuaded my parents to listen to me by giving them some appropriate reasons*'. This result shows that family members on vacation may attempt to resolve conflict actively to make a final effective decision (Singh & Nayak, 2016).

*The relationship between conflict attributions and resolution styles.* The interviewees expressed two types of concern when they described the causes of conflict, namely concern for self-interest (i.e., satisfying personal preference) and concern for non-self-interest (i.e., caring about their parents' benefit or improve the quality of family travel). For example, speaking about hotel selection, a participant who was concerned about his own preference said, '*My parents prefer traditional hotels, while I really like staying in a B&B. Our preferences are different, so there is a conflict between us*'. However, another participant, who was concerned about his parents' interest, said, '*I wanted to choose a high-end hotel to make my parents comfortable on the trip because they were older, but they thought it was too expensive, so we had a disagreement*'. This implies that conflict with parents is not only due to self-interest; it

may sometimes be due to concern for others.

Young adult children's behavior in conflict can be attributed as motivated by self-concern or other-concern depending on whether their concern is for self-interest or non-self-interest. Interestingly, we found that participants tended to use different styles to resolve conflict under different attribution conditions. For example, an interviewee who was concerned about his own preference in food choice stated, '*I really wanted to wait in line for local special snacks, but my parents didn't like to. I yielded to them eventually, because it would have been a little selfish for me to focus on my own needs*'. However, a subject who wanted to improve the quality of the family's travel experience claimed, '*To make our trip more memorable, I wanted to take a hot spring bath with my parents, but they were reluctant to get involved. I persuaded them eventually*'. Thus, we suggest that if the conflict was caused by participants' self-concern, self-sacrifice and compliance were common strategies for conflict resolution. In contrast, if the conflict was caused by their other-concern, they believed they were right and frequently used strategies of self-assertion and persuasion.

*The role of perspective taking.* This study found preliminary evidence to support the mediating effect of perspective taking in the young adult children-parents context. Specifically, we can infer from the interviews that when conflict with parents is due to self-concern, children tend to consider their parents' ideas and, as a result, tend to do as their parents expect. For example, one interviewee who wanted to watch the Northern Lights, but whose parents were not interested. She said, '*Then I put myself in their shoes and understood they might be afraid of the cold. They were too old to put up with the cold, so I needed to comply with their wishes*'. However, another interviewee, who claimed that he was concerned with family travel quality, did not put himself in his parents' shoes. He said, '*I suggested a hotel in the city centre. My parents didn't agree at first, but I persuaded them eventually, because I wanted to make our trip more convenient*'. We thus expect that if conflict with parents is due to other-concern, the children will be less likely to put themselves in their parents' shoes and, as a result, will be inclined to do what they themselves want.

*The role of decision-making power.* This study found that participants with different levels of decision-making power showed different responses to conflicts with the same attribution. Many subjects suggested that though their choices were for the best experience of the whole group, they had to obey their parents as their parents provided more resources for the family trip. For example, one interviewee, who conflicted with parents over hotel choice, said, '*Although I thought I was right [for the sake of the whole family], I had to listen to them [parents], because the two of them had more power than I did, and the money was in their hands*'. This provides a preliminary evidence that participants with low level of decision-making power tend to do as their parents expected, even when conflict was motivated by their other-concern. In contrast, interviewees who had more power said that they were inclined to do what they want. Interviewee F claimed, '*I paid for the trip and made most of the decisions, so I could persuade my parents to listen to me when we had disagreements*'.

*4.3 Discussion*

Four main findings were obtained from the qualitative study. First, Chinese young adult children frequently used two styles of conflict resolution, namely 'doing what I want' and

'doing as parents expect'. Second, their conflict with parents can be attributed as motivated by self-concern or other-concern. Then, perspective taking was initially supported to play a mediating role in this effect, and decision-making power acted as a moderating role to influence the aforementioned relationships. After obtaining the specific conflict attributions and resolution styles, as well as the initial evidence for the underlying mechanism between them, more detailed hypotheses were further put forward in the following section.

## 5. Hypothesis Refinement

### 5.1 The relationship between conflict attributions and resolution styles

Given the strong parent-oriented values, children are often concerned about meeting parental expectations. They believe it is necessary to sacrifice self-interest to please parents (Komarraju, Dollinger, & Lovell, 2008). Thus, when young adult children conflict with their parents due to self-concern, to avoid hurting their parents psychologically, they will give up their own needs and yield to their parents (Komarraju et al., 2008). Moreover, young adult children sometimes conflict with their parents due to a non-self-interest (Yao et al., 2020). In this type of conflict situation, they do not have to worry too much about hurting their parents' feelings and can confidently insist on their goals (Grace et al., 1993). We therefore subdivide Hypothesis 1 into the following hypotheses:

**H1a**: If the conflict attribution of young adult children is from self-concern, they are inclined to do as parents expect to resolve the conflict.

**H1b**: If the conflict attribution of young adult children is from other-concern, they are inclined to do what they want to resolve the conflict.

### 5.2 Mediating role of perspective taking

Due to their advanced perspective-taking capacities, young adult children are able to consider what their parents think, want, and feel during conflict (Doorn et al., 2011). This is particularly true for children who conflict with parents in pursuit of self-interest, because they believe that such conflict might hurt their parents' feelings (Komarraju et al., 2008), which in turn makes them feel guilty (Doorn et al., 2011). Guilt can force them to engage in further perspective taking (Ku et al., 2015). However, for young adult children who conflict with their parents is due to other-concern, they believe that they have considered their parents' interests and feel less guilty (Yao et al., 2020). Thus, they are less likely to give further consideration to their parents' position.

In addition, perspective taking is associated with conflict resolution styles (Rizkalla et al., 2008). Greater perspective taking predicts greater yielding and compromising and less fighting and dominating (Jin et al., 2020). With greater use of perspective taking, individuals are more likely to do as others expect, and less likely to assert themselves (Rizkalla et al., 2008). In line with qualitative study, when children conflict with parents due to self-concern, they are more likely to take perspective taking and tend to do as their parents expect. While when they conflict with parents for non-self-interest, they are less likely to engage in perspective taking and more inclined to do what they want. We therefore proposed two sub-hypotheses of Hypothesis 2:

**H2a:** If conflict is caused by young adult children's self-concern, they are more likely to

take perspective taking and tend to do as their parents expect.

**H2b:** If conflict is caused by young adult children's other-concern, they are less likely to take perspective taking and tend to do what they want.

*5.3 Moderating role of decision-making power*

Decision-making power has been reported to influence family conflict solutions (Shu et al., 2012). The more powerful someone is, the more dominance they will possess in decision-making, and the more likely it is that their partner will conform (Liang, 2013; Recchia et al., 2010). Low-power individuals tend to accommodate a conflict (Dunbar & Gordon, 2010), and rely on those who have more resources (Dunbar & Johnson, 2015). Specifically, the asymmetry of parent-child power is related to their win-loss conflict resolutions (Recchia et al., 2010). In our qualitative study, participants who contributed more resources to family travel possessed greater decision-making power and tended to use their power to do what they wanted although their conflict attributions were based on self-concern. Otherwise, participants who possessed less power tended to resolve conflict as their parents expected even if their conflict attributions were based on other-concern. We therefore proposed the following sub-hypothesis:

**H3a***: Young adult children who have greater decision-making power are more inclined to do what they want, even though their conflict attributions are based on self-concern.

**H3b***: Young adult children who have less decision-making power are more inclined to do as parents expect, even though their attributions for conflict are based on other-concern.

The conceptual framework of our research, based on the above hypotheses and findings of qualitative study, is depicted in Figure 1.

[Insert Figure 1 here]

## 6. Experiment

*6.1 Study 1: Main Effect*

Three experiments were constructed to test our four hypotheses. In exploratory study, the major components of conflict in the decision-making of the young adult children and parents were destination choice, accommodation choice and restaurant choice. These real conflict situations were imitated to design a conflict vignette in experiments.

*6.1.1 Method*

*Design and procedure.* A single-factor (conflict attribution: self-concern vs. other-concern) between-subjects design was used to check the main effect of conflict attributions on resolution styles (H1, H1a, H1b). Conflict about destination choice was first selected as the experimental scenario. The participants were asked to imagine that they were planning to travel with their parents, but they had a disagreement over where to go. Participants in the self-concern condition were told that they wanted to choose a novel destination that could satisfy their own preference. Those in the other-concern condition were told that they wanted to choose a novel destination that would leave their parents with good memories as their parents rarely travelled.

To ensure the scenarios could be contrasted in terms of children's conflict attribution, the participants were told that their parents disagreed with their choice but the reason was not given. The participants were then invited to select which strategies they would use to resolve the conflict.

*Pre-test.* A pre-test was conducted to check the manipulation of conflict attribution. Two vignettes were presented to 60 young adults who rated the degree to which the conflict was caused by their self-concern or other-concern on a 7-point scale (1 = self-concern, 7 = other-concern). The results showed that participants assigned to the other-concern condition scored much higher than participants assigned to the self-concern condition ($M_{Self-concern}$ = 6.07, $M_{Other-concern}$ = 2.53, $t$ = 16.787, df = 58, $p$ < 0.001). Hence, the manipulation of conflict attribution was successful.

*Measurement.* Exploratory study indicated that young adult children often use one of two resolution styles, namely, 'doing what I want' through self-assertion or persuasion, and 'doing as parents expect' through self-sacrifice or compliance. These two styles of conflict resolution are unlikely to co-occur; that is, in a conflict situation, if individuals select self-assertion or persuasion, they are unlikely to select self-sacrifice or compliance (Sugimura et al., 2009). Thus, these two styles of conflict resolution can be seen as two extremes. A 7-point bipolar rating scale from −3 to 3 was adopted. Participants rated the extent to which they would use the strategies of 'compliance' (anchor −3) versus 'persuasion' (anchor 3) or 'self-sacrifice' (anchor −3) versus 'self-assertion' (anchor 3) to resolve the conflict. Positive values indicated they would tend to do what they want and negative values indicated they would tend to do as parents expect. The participants' demographic characteristics (i.e., gender, age) were considered as control variables in all experiments.

### 6.1.2 Results

*Participants.* College students represent a specific group of young adult children who have no traditional responsibilities (i.e., parenthood), and the family trips by college students and their parents are becoming increasingly common (Ramer et al., 2020). Therefore, undergraduate and graduate students from mainland China were invited to participate in Study 1 by means of e-mail and a snowballing technique. Two links to the experiment were created and randomly sent to participants. Eighty-eight valid responses were obtained, the demographic characteristics of the subjects are shown in Table 2.

[Insert Table 2 here]

*Manipulation check.* The results of an independent sample t-test revealed that the participants in the other-concern condition scored significantly higher than the participants in the self-concern condition did ($M_{Other-concern}$ = 6.18, $M_{Self-concern}$ = 2.44, $t$ = 22.981, df = 86, $p$ < 0.001), in support of our manipulation.

*Main effect.* One-way ANOVA was used to explore the effect of conflict attribution on the conflict resolution styles. The results showed that subjects in the self-concern condition scored more negatively on resolution style ($M_{Self-concern}$ = −1.604), which indicates they tended to do as

their parents expected to resolve the conflict. Subjects in the other-concern condition scored more positively ($M_{Other-concern} = 1.038$, F (1, 86) = 95.806, $p < 0.001$), indicating they tended to insist on their own ideas and do what they wanted in the conflict resolution process (Fig. 2). Thus, H1, H1a, and H1b were supported.

[Insert Figure 2 here]

## 6.2 Study 2: Mediating Effect

### 6.2.1 Method

*Design and procedure.* The purpose of Study 2 was to explore the mediating role of perspective taking (H2, H2a, H2b). A single-factor (conflict attribution: self-concern vs. other-concern) between-subjects design was conducted. The design of the experiment was identical to that of Study 1. However, to test the generalisability of the findings, this study used a different conflict scenario, namely accommodation selection. The subjects were asked to imagine they had a disagreement with their parents over accommodation choice for a family trip. Those in the self-concern condition were told that they thought mainly of their own needs in the initial stages of conflict and wanted to choose a hotel that they really liked, while those in the other-concern condition were told that they would like to select a hotel that can improve the quality of family travel and make the whole family's stay comfortable. However, their parents' opinions were not consistent with theirs. The participants answered questions on their evaluation of conflict attribution, the extent to which they engaged in perspective taking, and their selection of conflict resolution strategies.

*Measurement.* The manipulation check of conflict attribution and measurement of conflict resolution styles was as for Study 1. In addition, to measure the perspective taking, a five-item scale adapted from Davis (1980) was used. Sample items include 'I will try to understand my parents better by imagining how things look from their perspective' and 'I'm sure I'm right, so I will not waste much time listening to my parents' arguments (−)'. For each item, the participants' responses were based on a 7-point Likert scale from "1 = strongly disagree" to "7 = strongly agree". The measure's Cronbach's alpha was 0.831.

### 6.2.2 Results

*Participants.* This research data was collected from Credamo.com, a popular professional online platform for conducting research experiments and surveys in China. Samples from mainland China were recruited, after removing subjects who failed to understand the scenario, the final sample comprised 103 participants (see Table 2).

*Manipulation check.* The results of t-test revealed that participants in the other-concern condition scored significantly higher for conflict attribution than participants in the self-concern condition did ($M_{Other-concern} = 6.44$, $M_{Self-concern} = 2.33$, $t = 39.22$, df = 101, $p < 0.001$). Thus, the manipulation of conflict attribution was successful.

*The mediating effect of perspective taking.* The main effect was examined using ANOVA. The results revealed that participants in the other-concern condition tended to select 'doing

what I want' ($M_{Other-concern}$ = 1.233), while subjects in the self-concern condition tended to select 'doing as parents expect' ($M_{Self-concern}$ = −1.612, $F$ (1, 101) = 180.463, $p < 0.001$). This result further supports H1. Bootstrapping was used to test the mediating role of perspective taking. The PROCESS macro in SPSS (Model 4) was selected (dummy code of conflict attribution: self-concern = 0, other-concern = 1). The results showed that conflict attribution had a significant negative effect on perspective taking (β = −0.839, 95% CI = [−1.172, −0.506]) and perspective taking negatively affected conflict resolution style (β = −0.802, 95% CI = [−1.044, −0.561]). The indirect effect of conflict attribution on resolution style was significant ($\beta$ = 0.673, 95% CI = [0.373, 1.043]). This implies that subjects in the self-concern condition undertook more perspective taking than those in the other-concern condition did; perspective taking negatively predicted the resolution style of 'doing what I want' and positively predicted the style of 'doing as parents expect'. After controlling for perspective taking, the direct effect of conflict attribution on resolution style was also significant (β = 0.594, $p < 0.001$). This suggested that perspective taking played a partial mediating role in the main effect. Thus, H2, H2a, H2b were supported.

## 6.3 Study 3: Moderating Effect

### 6.3.1 Method

*Design and procedure.* The objective of current study was to verify the moderating role of decision-making power (H3, H3a, H3b, and H4). A 2 (conflict attribution: self-concern vs. other-concern) × 2 (decision-making power: high vs. low) between-subjects design was used. We changed the conflict situation to restaurant choice, as suggested by our qualitative research. Participants in the self-concern condition were told that they wanted to select a restaurant that suited their own eating preferences. Those in the other-concern condition were told that they expected their parents to experience unique food to enrich their hard-won trip. The manipulation procedure of conflict attribution was identical to that for Study 2.

After that, the participants were asked to read a second scenario, which operationalised decision-making power using the amounts of resources they contribute to family travel. Following the idea from resource theory that resources (i.e., money, information) are a key source of power (Dunbar & Gordon, 2010). Participants in the high-power condition were informed that they had provided all of the financial and information support for the family holiday and their parents had followed them on the trip. In the low power condition, participants were told that their parents had paid for the whole trip and conducted the information search, and they had followed their parents. Participants then completed a manipulation check of decision-making power, the extent to which they engaged in perspective taking, and their selection of resolution strategies.

*Measurement.* This study included decision-making power as a moderator variable. Two items were adapted from Dunbar and Gordon (2010) for a manipulation check of decision-making power: 'Who contributed more resources to the family holiday?' and 'Who has more decision-making power in this family trip?' The participants responded on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 'my parents' (1) to 'me' (7). A higher score thus indicated that the participants held more decision-making power.

*6.3.2 Results*

*Participants.* Two hundred and forty adult participants in China were recruited from the online commercial panel Credamo.com. After excluding invalid data from the analysis, the final sample included 201 respondents (see Table 2). Each was randomly assigned to one of the four conditions.

*Manipulation check.* The results of t-tests indicated that participants in the other-concern condition assigned a significantly higher value to conflict attribution than participants in the self-concern condition did ($M_{Other-concern}$ = 6.400, $M_{Self-concern}$ = 2.430, $t$ = 42.926, df = 199, $p <$ 0.001). Meanwhile, participants in the high power condition scored significantly higher than those in the lower power condition ($M_{high}$ = 6.005, $M_{low}$ = 2.053, $t$ = 28.520, df = 199, $p < 0.001$), in support of our manipulation.

*The moderating effect of decision-making power.* ANOVA analysis showed that subjects in the self-concern and other-concern conditions had significantly different conflict resolution styles ($M_{Other-concern}$ = 0.227, $M_{Self-concern}$ = −1.628, F (1, 199) = 69.341, $p < 0.001$), which further confirmed H1. Two-way between-subjects ANOVA was then used to examine the interaction between conflict attributions and decision-making power and revealed significant interaction effects between them on resolution styles (F (1, 199) = 16.823, $p < 0.001$).

As Fig. 3 shows, participants with low decision-making power were more inclined to do as their parents expected, regardless of their conflict attribution ($M_{Other-concern}$ = −0.661, $M_{Self-concern}$ = −1.956), H3b was supported. However, in the high power condition, participants whose attributions were based on other-concern were more likely to do what they wanted in the conflict resolution process ($M_{Other-concern}$ = 1.538). Participants whose attributions were based on self-concern still tended to do as their parents expected ($M_{Self-concern}$ = −1.368). This implies that when young adult children conflict with their parents in the pursuit of self-interest, no matter how much power they have, they are still inclined to yield to their parents eventually. Thus, H3a was not supported, and H3 was partially supported.

[Insert Figure 3 here]

*The moderated mediation analysis.* To verify that the indirect effect of conflict attribution on resolution style was conditionally mediated by perspective taking, a moderated mediation analysis was conducted using PROCESS model 8. As shown in Table 3, the indirect impact of conflict attribution on resolution style via perspective taking was more significant among participants with high decision-making power ($β_{high}$ = 0.780, 95% CI = [0.549, 1.033]) than those with low decision-making power ($β_{low}$ = 0.217, 95% CI = [0.051, 0.398]). The moderated mediation effect was significant (95% CI = [0.303, 0.842]). This implies that when subjects with high decision-making power conflict with their parents due to other-concern, they were less likely to engage in perspective taking and therefore more inclined to do what they want. Thus, H4 was supported.

[Insert Table 3 here]

## 7. General discussion and conclusions

### 7.1 Conclusion

A mixed-methods approach including 29 interviews and 3 experimental studies was used to examine how young adult children in China handle conflict with their parents in their joint travel decision-making. First, the conflict attributions of young adult children and their resolution styles were confirmed by a qualitative study. Then, among the three scenario-based experiments, Study 1 showed that conflict attributions did have an impact on resolution styles. Participants who attributed the cause of conflict to their self-concern were inclined to do as parents expect; those who attributed the cause of conflict to their other-concern were more likely to do what they want.

A deeper insight into the mediation mechanism by which conflict attributions affect resolution styles via perspective taking was obtained from Study 2. Participants whose conflict with their parents was due to self-concern engaged in more perspective taking than those whose conflict was due to other-concern. Perspective taking further positively predicted the resolution style of 'doing as parents expect' but negatively predicted the style of 'doing what I want'. This confirms the previous research that the greater use of perspective taking can help individuals understand others better and respond to conflict with more compliance and less domination (Ku et al., 2015).

Finally, a significant interaction effect between conflict attributions and decision-making power on conflict resolution styles was revealed in Study 3. For participants who attributed conflict to other-concern, the selection of resolution styles depended on how much power they had. However, participants who attributed conflict to self-concern, no matter how powerful they were, still tended to do as parents expect. This is probably because in China, young adult children's decision-making related to conflict resolution is influenced by the value placed on filial piety, which emphasises children should put concern for parents before their own interests (Komarraju et al., 2008).

### 7.2 Theoretical implications

This research makes several theoretical contributions. First, it extends previous work of conflict resolution, which focused mainly on conflict resolution between couples or younger children and parents (Yen et al., 2020). This study explored how young adult children in China deal with conflict with their parents, and its findings suggest that 'doing what I want' (i.e., self-assertion, persuasion), and 'doing as parents expect' (i.e., self-sacrifice, compliance) are resolution styles that Chinese young adult children frequently use. This differs from adolescents, who often influence their parents using bargaining, requesting and emotional tactics (Su et al., 2019; Yen et al., 2020), and couples, who tend to use strategies of negotiation, avoidance, intimidation and giving priority to the other (Kang & Hsu, 2005; Kozak, 2010). This finding confirms that conflict-management strategies change depending on the relationship context and the FLC (Kozak, 2010).

Second, this research shows that conflict attribution is an important variable explaining resolution styles, which reveals a novel perspective of conflict research. Although the attributions of partners' behavior have been found to affect conflict resolution (MacKinnon-

Lewis et al., 2014), the effect of the attribution of one's own behavior has not been fully explored. Given the complexity of sources of conflict and their impact on conflict resolution (Tamm et al., 2014), children's attributions of their own behavior should not be overlooked in exploring their conflict resolution.

Third, this research advances understanding of conflict management in family holidays by examining the mediating role of perspective taking, which is an important yet understudied concept in the tourism and hospitality area. However, given the collectivist culture in China, and the highly parent-oriented values of children (Komarraju et al., 2008), it is necessary to explore whether children in China take their parents' perspective in family conflict resolution. Thus, this study can be regarded as a valuable addition to the existing literature of family conflict management.

Finally, the current study makes a significant contribution to knowledge about power and conflict management. It found that the general findings about parent-child conflict, such as parents' leadership roles and relative expertise in conflict management (Liang, 2013), may not always hold in the young adult child–parent relationship. Developed social skills, improved education and rising income promote young adult children' relative power in family decision-making (Lien et al., 2018), which thus increase their influence over conflict resolution. The conditional effect of decision-making power in young adult children's conflict resolution reported here contributes to a more thorough understanding of this phenomenon.

*7.3 Managerial implications*

This research makes some contributions to managerial practice. First, it can help destination marketers to enhance their business performance by better serving family tourists. Given the inconsistencies in values, attitudes and preferences between parents and their young adult children, marketers should adopt strategies to reduce conflict in their joint vacation. For example, in customer engagement and customer service stages, marketers can promote an open communication environment for family members to encourage them to discuss their various preferences and choices, help them to understand the diverse expectations from family members and thereby avoid many conflicts.

In addition, this study ensures that conflict could be effectively resolved, and reveals that it is necessary for practitioners to grasp tourists' conflict patterns and target communication messages to improve the effectiveness of conflict resolution. For example, advertisers in tourism industries could present arguments in advertisements that a family member could reasonably use to persuade other members. Meanwhile, as young adult children tend to insist on their opinions if they perceive the choice is for the best interests of their parents, add-on services for those parents such as personal introduction to products and virtual reality destination glimpse prior to departure could be adopted aiming to mitigate the highly possible group conflicts and achieve agreements.

Finally, young adult children tend to do as their parents expect in conflict resolution if the conflict attribution is self-concern. This means that young adult children often put parents' interests ahead of their own. Marketing specialists should therefore recognise the influence of parents in household consumption and pay attention to parents' requirements in the design of

travel products. That is, to capture more family tourists, destinations should design products that prioritize middle-aged to senior parents' specific requirements, such as good accessibility, wellness concerns, and strengthening family ties.

*7.4 Limitations and future directions*

First, this study was conducted with samples of young single adult children. Future research should compare conflict resolution among middle-aged or married children with the findings of this research. Second, this study considered the impact of children's conflict attribution of their own behavior on their resolution styles, but the children' attribution of their parents' behavior may also play a role in their conflict resolution, which should be verified in future research. Third, it would be meaningful to explore how parents resolve conflicts with their children. Fourth, the four conflict resolution strategies are limited to illustrative examples rather than exhaustive representations of conflict resolution. Further research aimed at understanding family travel conflict resolution could complement our findings. Fifth, the cultural values and traditionality were also important factors that could influence the conflicting solving process between young adult and their parents, which could be considered in future research. Finally, to improve the external reliability of the experiment, it is best to test all hypotheses in all three experiments in the future.

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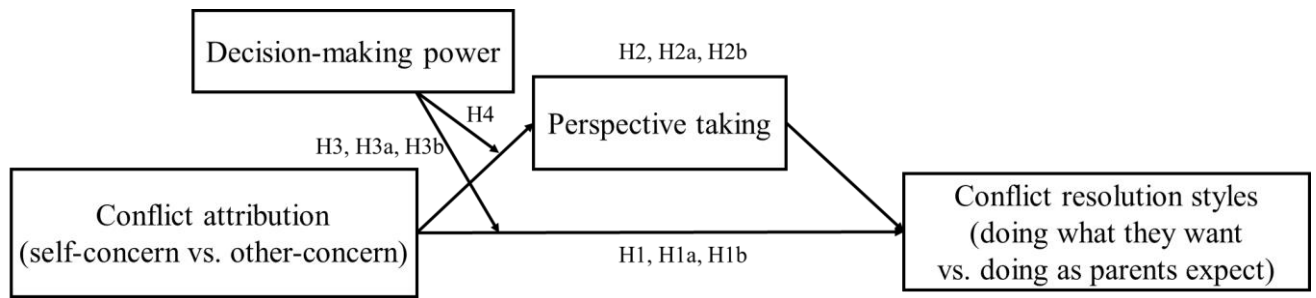**Figure 1.** Conceptual framework of this research.

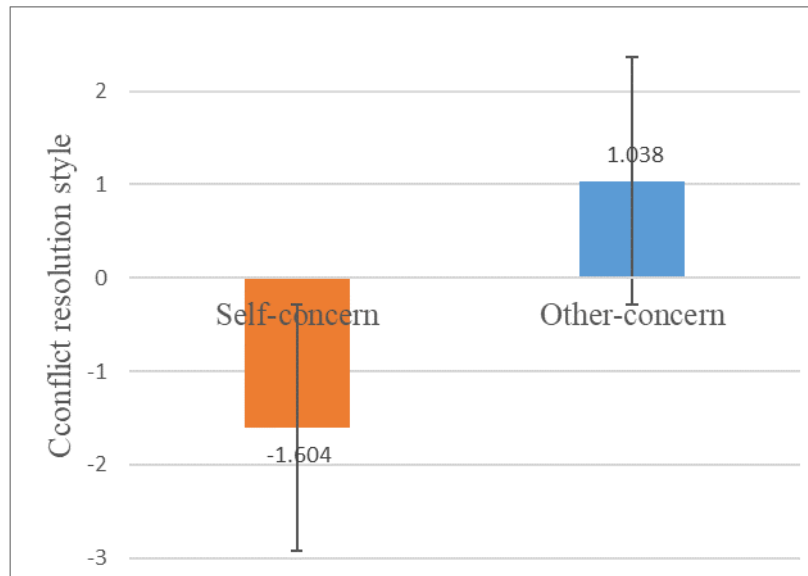**Figure 2.** The main effect of conflict attribution on conflict resolution style.

**Figure 3.** The moderating effect of decision-making power on resolution style.
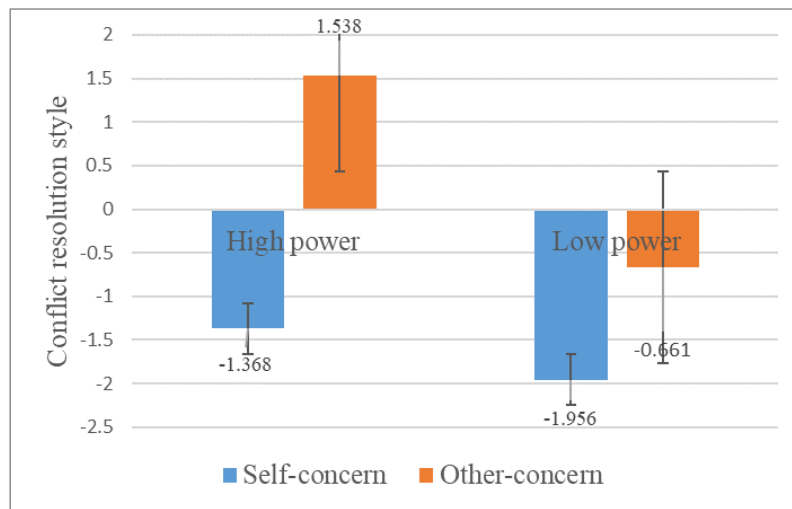
**Table 1.** Demographic profile of interviewees.

| Demographic characteristic | | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Male | 7 | 24.1 |
| | Female | 22 | 75.9 |
| Travel companion | Only mother | 4 | 13.8 |
| | Only father | 1 | 3.4 |
| | Father and mother | 24 | 82.8 |
| Travel form | Independent travel | 23 | 79.3 |
| | Package travel | 6 | 20.7 |
| Destination | Overseas | 6 | 20.7 |
| | Domestic | 23 | 79.3 |

**Table 2**. Sample demographic characteristics

| Variables | | Study 1 | | Study 2 | | Study 3 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | N | Percentage | N | Percentage | N | Percentage |
| Gender | Male | 51 | 58.0 | 50 | 48.5 | 102 | 50.7 |
| | Female | 37 | 42.0 | 53 | 51.5 | 99 | 49.3 |
| Age (years) | 18–24 | 65 | 73.9 | 26 | 25.3 | 69 | 34.3 |
| | 25–30 | 23 | 26.1 | 77 | 74.7 | 132 | 65.7 |
| Education level | High school or less | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1.0 | 2 | 1.0 |
| | Bachelor's degree | 78 | 88.6 | 90 | 87.4 | 176 | 88.6 |
| | Masters' degree and above | 10 | 11.4 | 12 | 11.6 | 23 | 11.4 |
| Personal monthly income (RMB) | Less than 2,000 | 57 | 64.8 | 14 | 13.6 | 25 | 12.4 |
| | 2,001–6,000 | 18 | 20.5 | 26 | 25.3 | 62 | 30.8 |
| | 6,001–10,000 | 13 | 14.7 | 58 | 56.3 | 106 | 52.7 |
| | More than 10,000 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 4.8 | 8 | 4.1 |
| Number of trips with parents | 0 times | 1 | 1.1 | 1 | 1.0 | 3 | 1.5 |
| | 1-2 times | 34 | 38.6 | 38 | 36.9 | 69 | 34.3 |
| | 3-4 times | 37 | 42.1 | 50 | 48.5 | 94 | 46.8 |
| | 5 times and above | 16 | 18.2 | 14 | 13.6 | 35 | 17.4 |
| Family location | Large city | 12 | 13.6 | 18 | 17.5 | 31 | 15.4 |
| | Town | 71 | 80.7 | 83 | 80.6 | 154 | 76.6 |
| | Rural area | 5 | 5.7 | 2 | 1.9 | 16 | 8.0 |

**Table 3**. Test of moderated mediation effects

| Moderator variable | Mediator variable | Moderator level | Indirect effect | Boot SE | 95% CI | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | LLCI | ULCI |
| Decision-making power | Perspective taking | Low: −1SD | 0.217 | 0.088 | [0.051, 0.398] | |
| | | High: +1SD | 0.780 | 0.125 | [0.549, 1.033] | |

Note: LLCI = lower level of confidence interval; ULCI = upper level of confidence interval.