

## Parent-Youth Relationships and the Self-Esteem of Chinese Adolescents: Collectivism versus Individualism

By: Gary W. Peterson, Jose A. Cobas, Kevin R. Bush, Andrew Supple, Stephan M. Wilson

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**Abstract:** This study sought to determine how several child-rearing behaviors within the Chinese parent-adolescent relationship were predictive of youthful self-esteem through either collectivistic or individualistic socialization approaches. Theoretically based relationships were tested with structural equation modeling to examine whether dimensions of parental behavior (i.e., support, reasoning, monitoring, and punitiveness) influenced the self-esteem of Chinese adolescents through the mediating influences of either conformity (i.e., collectivism) or autonomy (i.e., individualism) in reference to parents. The sample for this study consisted of 497 adolescents from Beijing, China, ranging in age from 12-19 years of age. Data were acquired with self-report questionnaires administered in school classrooms. Results provided support for parental behaviors as predictors of self-esteem development through individualistic patterns of socialization. Although collectivistic parent-adolescent patterns did not predict the self-esteem of Chinese adolescents, several results supported a collectivistic conception of socialization through significant relationships involving parental behaviors as predictors of adolescent conformity to parents. Some results of this study highlight the significance of parental support and dimensions of moderate parental control (e.g., reasoning and monitoring) within the Chinese parent-adolescent relationship, while identifying only a minimal role for punitive behavior.

**Keywords:** Chinese parent-adolescent relations, Chinese self-esteem, Chinese parental behavior, collectivism, individualism

### INTRODUCTION

A person's sense of self, a focus of western social science for more than a century, is both a constantly changing social process and a product of development (Cooley, 1902; Gecas & Burke, 1995; Harter, 1999; James, 1890; Mead, 1934; Rosenberg, 1965, 1979). Adolescence, in particular, is a time when the self becomes more complex, resulting partly from emerging cognitive abilities, but also from dynamic interaction within diverse social-cultural contexts (Gecas & Burke, 1995; Harter, 1999).

The most frequently researched aspect of the self is a person's self-esteem, the criterion variable for this study, designating the positive or negative feelings adolescents have about themselves (Gecas & Burke, 1995; Harter, 1999; Rosenberg, 1965, 1979). A positive self-esteem is commonly viewed as a psychological resource for competent psychosocial development and a protective mechanism that shelters the young from involvement in problem behavior (Covington, 1992; Gecas & Burke, 1995; Lui, Kaplan, & Risser, 1992; Owens, 1992; Rosenberg, 1965, 1979).

### *Parent-Adolescent Socialization and Self-Esteem in China: Mediated Effects Model*

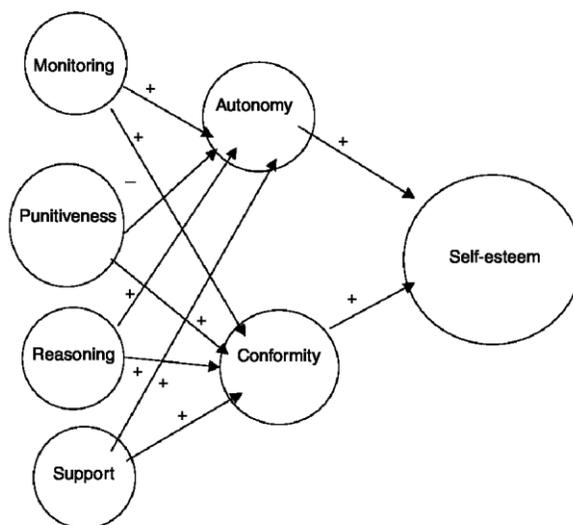
Belief in the importance of youthful self-esteem has led to substantial cross-cultural interest in how parents either foster or inhibit this attribute in children and adolescents (Bush, Peterson, Cobas, & Supple, 2002; Gecas

& Burke, 1995; Kagitcibasi, 1996). Extensive Western research demonstrates that youthful self-esteem is encouraged by parents who use support and firm control, whereas negative self-evaluations are fostered by being punitive and non-supportive (Barber, Chadwick & Oerter, 1992; Demo, Small, & Savin-Williams, 1987; Gecas & Schwalbe, 1986; Peterson & Hann, 1999).

The purpose of this study, in turn, was to examine these issues with data provided by adolescents from Mainland China. The intent was to examine how several child-rearing behaviors were predictive of youthful self-esteem within a society often viewed as fostering the “self” through more collectivistic (i.e., group-oriented) socialization approaches compared to Western patterns. A collectivistic pattern of socialization is often thought to be more characteristic of Asian cultures, whereas an individualistic pattern is proposed to be more common in Western societies (Triandis, 1989, 1995; Kagitcibasi, 1996). Consequently, a theoretical model was tested with structural equation modeling to determine whether the influences of parental behaviors on the self-esteem of Chinese adolescents are conveyed through mediating variables that are indicators either of a collectivistic or an individualistic pattern of socialization (see Figure 1). A collectivistic pattern of socialization would be evident if dimensions of parental behavior (i.e., reasoning, monitoring, punitiveness, and support) predict the self-esteem of Chinese youth through the mediating influence (or indirect influence) of conformity to their parents’ expectations (see Figure 1). The variable conformity to parents is an indicator (at the family relationship level) of a collectivistic socialization pattern to the extent that youthful self-development is rooted in extensive orientation toward one’s family, and particularly by being responsive (or conforming) to parents’ expectations.

In contrast, a more individualistic pattern of socializing adolescent self-esteem occurs if the influences of parental behaviors are conveyed indirectly through the process of gaining autonomy from parents, a specific indicator (at the family relationship level) of individualistic socialization patterns within families (see Figure 1). Results consistent with an individualistic pattern would be evident if dimensions of parental behavior (i.e., reasoning, monitoring, and support) predict the self-esteem of Chinese adolescents through the mediating influence of increased autonomy from parents (see Figure 1). According to Western conceptions, youthful self-esteem develops in association with the process of gaining autonomy from family and parents (Fulgini, 1998; Peterson, 1995; Sessa & Steinberg, 1991).

FIGURE 1. Theoretical Model



Note--The following predictions for the direct effects of parental behaviors on self-esteem are not shown: Parental educ +, Monitoring +, Punitiveness -, Reasoning +, Support +

## ***GENERAL CULTURAL ORIENTATIONS AND THE SELF: INDIVIDUALISM AND COLLECTIVISM***

Investigators of socialization issues in Chinese cultures often utilize the general cultural orientations collectivism and individualism to conceptualize how socialization patterns differ across societies. Scholars who view Asian socialization as differing substantially from Western patterns have frequently attributed many of these variances to collectivistic patterns that appear to characterize Chinese culture (Lam, 1997; Meredith, Abbott, & Shu, 1989; Triandis, 1989, 1995; Yang, 1981, 1986). China is commonly viewed as emphasizing familistic or group-focused values, whereas Western societies, such as the United States, are thought to focus on individualistic values, including personal agency and autonomy (Lam, 1997; Triandis, McCusker, Hui, 1990; Yang, 1981, 1986). Frequent contrasts are made between the differing cultural patterns used in eastern and western societies to foster the “self” (Tafarodi & Swann, 1996).

Collectivistic societies, such as China, are commonly thought to encourage interdependence and connectedness, or relationship patterns in which self-concept development is associated with family loyalty, responsiveness to group expectations, interpersonal togetherness, and conformity (obedience) to authority figures (Ho, 1994). Compared to *individualistic values* of Western parents, Chinese parents are expected to place less emphasis on independence and to discourage such things as the expression of hostility, aggression, and impulsive behavior by the young (Ho, 1986; Meredith et al., 1989). Chinese youth are socialized to think of themselves as being prepared more extensively to serve societal rather than individual goals (Ho, 1994; Lam, 1997; Meredith et al., 1989). Consequently, self-esteem in Chinese society is supposed to be rooted in relational aspects of collectivism such as the Confucian doctrine of filial piety and the economic-political ideology of socialism (Ho, 1994; Lam, 1997; Wang & Hsueh, 2000). Perhaps to a greater degree than Western youth, Chinese adolescents may base their self-esteem on how effectively they view themselves as connected to parents by conforming to their elders’ expectations (Gecas & Burke, 1995; Tafarodi & Swann, 1996).

In contrast, individualistic societies are described as emphasizing independence, freedom, and personal assertiveness as socializing climates in which a person’s self-esteem develops (Kagitcibasi, 1996; Triandis, 1989; 1995). A Western view of self-awareness is based on the idea that one’s “private self” resides within each person consistent with such cultural themes as the separateness and distinctiveness of each person (Gecas & Burke, 1995). Central goals of Western parenting include encouraging freedom of action, refraining from severe restrictiveness, and encouraging self-confidence for exploratory behavior.

Although such theoretical distinctions exist, current scholarship on the *individualistic* versus *collectivistic* basis of self-esteem in Chinese and Asian youth is characterized by much contradiction. Most of the theory and some of the research indicates that Asian, Chinese, and Asian-American socialization patterns are collectivistic in the sense that a “connected” self is fostered (Berndt, Cheung, Hau, & Lew, 1993; Chun & McDermid, 1997; Fuligni, 1998; Ho, 1986; Lam, 1997; Stevenson, Chen, & Lee, 1992). In contrast, other research conducted with Chinese samples, focusing on parental behavior as predictors of self-esteem, has revealed patterns quite similar to the individualistic approaches found in Western cultures. Specifically, socialization behavior such as independence-granting, warmth, and parental organization (i.e., a non-authoritarian form of firm control) were found to encourage adolescent self-esteem (Cheung & Lau, 1985; Lau & Cheung, 1987). Contrary to collectivistic conceptions, such findings suggest that the self-esteem of Chinese youth may be anchored in psychological autonomy and moderate, but firm types of parental control.

An important qualification is that most existing studies have significant methodological limitations that may explain some of the current inconsistency. Studies on the self-esteem of Chinese adolescents, for example, have been conducted quite frequently either with samples of Chinese-American adolescents or samples of youth from Hong Kong. A problem with these studies is that, given Hong Kong’s unique Western history, Chinese

populations from this location are more likely to be exposed to Western values than are populations located elsewhere in Mainland China (Cheung & Lau, 1985). More precise examination of these issues has been hampered because, until recently, little data was gathered on parent-youth relationships within The People's Republic of China. Moreover, Chinese-American populations are likely to be more attuned to Western values associated with the dominant culture in the U.S. through acculturation processes (Cheung & Lau, 1985; Yau & Smetana, 1996).

### ***Chinese Parent-Adolescent Relations and Adolescent Self-Esteem***

Further theoretical understanding is needed (see below) about the specific predictions proposed in Figure 1 involving parental support, punitiveness, reasoning, and monitoring as either direct or indirect influences on adolescent self-esteem.

*Parental support as a predictor of adolescent self-esteem.* Some of the previous scholarship on Chinese and Chinese American parents has portrayed their socialization strategies as being less warm (i.e., less supportive) (Bond & Wang, 1983; Wu, 1986) and more restrictive, coercive, and authoritarian than European-American parents (Chao, 1994; Chiu, 1987; Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, & Fraleigh, 1987; Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992; Yang, 1981; 1986). Current work includes a debate about the efficacy of parental nurturance as a means of socializing Chinese youth (Wang & Hsueh, 2000). Compared to European-American parents, for example, some observers have reported that Chinese, Chinese American, and other Asian parents are less warm (supportive) or less emotionally demonstrative toward adolescents (Bond & Wang, 1983; Bush et al., 2002; Chao, 2001; Chiu, 1987; Dornbusch et al., 1987; Stevenson et al., 1992; Wu, 1996). One possibility is that Chinese parents convey supportiveness differently, not as emotional demonstrativeness, but as care and concern that becomes evident through their efforts to control and provide governance (Chao, 2000).

Such conceptions suggest that clear distinctions may not exist between supportive and controlling dimensions in the Chinese socialization process. However, contradictory results, similar to scholarship on Western samples, indicate that supportive behavior from parents is a prominent positive predictor of self-esteem in Chinese adolescents (Cheung & Lau, 1985; Ho, 1989; Lau & Cheung, 1987; Lin & Fu, 1990). Consequently, this study addresses this issue by examining the *extent to which parental support, as a separate variable, is either a direct or indirect influence on adolescent self-esteem* (see Figure 1).

If it were found that parental support predicts adolescent self-esteem in China, in turn, a question remains about the precise mechanism through which this influence is conveyed (see Figure 1). Current scholarship in the West suggests that support contributes both to the autonomy of adolescents from parents as well as continued conformity to their expectations (Peterson & Hann, 1999; Peterson, Bush, & Supple, 1999; Peterson, Rollins, & Thomas, 1985), though comparable conceptualizations for China do not exist. Western parents appear to use supportive behavior as a means of encouraging adolescents to balance their progress toward self-direction (i.e., autonomy) with the need for continued receptiveness (i.e., conformity) to parental influences (Peterson & Leigh, 1990). Another objective of this study, therefore, is to examine *whether parental support influences the self-esteem of Chinese adolescents primarily through one of the following means: (1) autonomous processes (i.e., an individualistic pattern), (2) conforming processes (i.e., a collectivistic pattern), or (3) some combination of these paths* (see Figure 1). Moreover, besides the indirect tests specified in Figure 1, additional analyses were conducted to determine if parental support was a direct positive predictor of self-esteem.

### ***Punitive Behavior versus Organized Control as Predictors of Adolescent Self-Esteem***

Another controversy in the Chinese parent-youth scholarship concerns the role of authoritarian, restrictive, or punitive child-rearing behavior. A conclusion in some of the research and theoretical scholarship is that, beyond the early years of childhood, Asian parent-youth relationships are characterized by restrictive or authoritarian discipline, perhaps often more so than in Western socialization processes (Chao, 1994; Chiu, 1987; Kelley & Tseng, 1992; Ho, 1989; Wolf, 1970). Compared to Western patterns, this strict or authoritarian parenting style

is viewed by some as having fewer problematic or even possibly positive consequences for Asian youth. Authoritarian parenting, for example, has been shown to be less strongly linked to poor academic achievement by Asian American youth as occurs within European American samples (Steinberg et al., 1992; Steinberg, Lamborn, Darling, Mounts, & Dornbush, 1994).

Such a benign conception of punitive or restrictive parenting might have important implications for additional outcomes in Chinese youth such as self-esteem. Authoritarian parenting by Chinese parents might foster a variety of psychosocial outcomes that are consistent with traditional Chinese cultural values but differ from consequences commonly found in the West. Examples of such outcomes might be strong connections to others (e.g., conforming to parent's expectations) and subordinating one's concept of self to the interests of the group. Compared to Western parenting, therefore, higher self-esteem in Chinese youth might result from more restrictive (even autocratic) forms of parental control that encourage feelings of intergenerational solidarity with others and greater receptivity to parental influences (i.e., conformity to parents' expectations).

Such conceptions of restrictive child-rearing practices are a source of much controversy in the study of Chinese parent-child relations. Chinese scholars, in particular, have criticized Western researchers by for failing to articulate the cultural meaning of the proposed "restrictive" character of Chinese parenting (Chao, 1994; Gorman, 1998). According to this perspective, Western researchers tend to use rather global conceptions of parenting that fail to capture essential elements of Chinese child-rearing. Western parenting concepts, such as the "authoritarian style," are composed of several parental behaviors, expectations, and emotional qualities (Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Peterson & Hann, 1999), some of which may be expressions of values specific to a particular culture. Such multi-dimensional parental styles (e.g., authoritarian parenting) may fail to generalize effectively from one cultural setting to another and, at worst, may simply be reflections of cultural bias that mask subtle differences in meaning. Of particular concern is the tendency for cultural meanings of Chinese parenting to be inadequately captured by such ethnocentric Western constructs as authoritarian parenting (Berndt et al., 1993; Chao, 1994, 2000, 2001). A multifaceted conception of child-rearing, *authoritarian parenting*, is prevalent when parents have uncompromising expectations associated with hostile and mistrustful feelings toward the young. Strict behavior codes are expected as parents seek to dominate the young through excessively forceful and arbitrary behaviors. A frequent intention of authoritarian parenting (without much scientific evidence of effectiveness) is to prevent children from drifting into problematic or deviant involvements. These purposes of punitive/authoritarian parenting are deeply rooted in Judeo-Christian and Puritan traditions of Western and American thought (Day, Peterson, & McCracken, 1998; Peterson & Hann, 1999).

A contrasting viewpoint of Chinese parental guidance is provided by current scholarship on *dysfunctional control* within Chinese and Chinese-American families. Specifically, dysfunctional control, a construct used in studies of Chinese parenting, seems similar to Western versions of restrictive or authoritarian parenting, and has been reported by some scholars to *inhibit*, not foster, self-esteem in Chinese youth (Cheung & Lau, 1985; Lau & Cheung, 1987). Adding to the complexity of this debate are the proposals by some observers that Chinese parenting is rooted in distinctive traditions of strict control having their origins in traditional Chinese culture. Thus, in contrast to Western thought, traditional parenting themes, based in Confucian thought, emphasize responsibility to others, the importance of group interests, filial piety, parental authority, and the provision of guidance as goals of restrictive control (Berndt et al., 1993; Chao, 1994; Gorman, 1998). Rather than harshly punitive strategies, these parenting approaches are consistent with the traditional Chinese principles of *chiao shun* and *guan*, which refer to processes of *training* or *teaching*. Although emphasizing firm restrictiveness and obedience, *chiao shun* and *guan* differ from Western punitive approaches by being expressions of care and concern, not simple demonstrations of arbitrariness and hostility aimed at dominating the young. As such, Chinese parenting may be more accurately characterized as firm and demanding, with the goals being harmony, guidance, teaching, monitoring, and supportiveness (Berndt et al., 1993; Chao, 1994, 2000, 2001; Gorman, 1998).

Scholarship on parent-adolescent relationships within Chinese or Chinese American families often deals with such concepts of firm and non-punitive behavior in terms of the concepts *parental organization* or *functional control* (Cheung & Lau, 1985; Lau & Cheung, 1987). Instead of authoritarian or punitive behavior (i.e., dysfunctional control), Chinese parental control appears more comparable to such Western conceptions of non-authoritarian control as reasoning and monitoring. Such forms of functional control are used to foster an atmosphere of structure, order, and clear rules, combined with expressions of parental support. Contrary to punitive strategies, current conceptions of Western research indicate that monitoring and reasoning are aspects of firm control that contribute both to growing autonomy from parents and to continued conformity to parental expectations (Baumrind, 1991; Peterson et al., 1999; Peterson & Hann, 1999; Peterson & Leigh, 1990; Peterson et al., 1985). Based on these ideas, therefore, this study sought to determine which form of control, *punitiveness* (i.e., *dysfunctional/authoritarian control*) or *reasoning/ monitoring* (i.e., *functional or firm control*) fosters positive self-esteem in Chinese adolescents through either direct or indirect paths (see Figure 1). Specifically, the theoretical model tested whether these forms of control influenced the self-esteem of Chinese adolescents through one of the following pathways: (1) autonomous socialization processes (i.e., an individualistic pattern), (2) conforming socialization processes (i.e., a collectivistic pattern), or (3) some combination of these paths (see Figure 1). Additional tests were conducted to test for the direct effects of both forms of parental control (i.e., punitiveness versus reasoning and monitoring) on adolescents' self-esteem.

A particular contribution of this study was the effort to avoid some of the cultural bias involved in using global parental styles (e.g., authoritarian or authoritative styles) to predict adolescent self-esteem. Criticisms of parental styles have prompted the present investigators to use adolescent reports of specific dimensions of parental behavior instead of global parental styles (e.g., authoritarian or authoritative) composed of diverse but often culturally specific (or culturally biased) attributes. Well-defined dimensions of perceived socialization behavior, such as punitiveness, reasoning, monitoring, and support, are less constrained by cultural limitations than are multidimensional styles—or complex collections of expectations, motivations, values and behavior that are encompassed by parental styles (Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Peterson & Hann, 1999).

## **METHODOLOGY**

### ***Sample***

Participants consisted of 497 adolescents selected from six state-funded high schools in Beijing, China, who volunteered to complete the questionnaire. Contacting adolescents through the schools was a convenient and cost-effective means of sampling a diverse population of sufficient size so that statistical models with multiple predictors could be examined. The selected high schools were classified in terms of test score standards required for enrollment. Although probability sampling was not possible, the socio-demographic characteristics (age, gender, and family characteristics) of the participants varies sufficiently to be a reasonable representation of a larger population of adolescents from Beijing, the economic, social, and political capital of the People's Republic of China.

Adolescent respondents were drawn from schools classified in terms of four different test score classifications in proportionate numbers (i.e., high to below average test scores). In Beijing, a particular school's academic level may reflect, in part, the socio-economic status of an adolescents' family, though class definitions are difficult to determine in a society that remains influenced by Marxist thought.

The final sample consisted of adolescents who ranged in age from 12 to 19 years having a mean age of 15.42 years. The gender of these participants was fairly evenly distributed, with 242 of the youthful respondents being female, and 238 being male. Average scores on the parental education variable were "some high school" for fathers, and "completion of middle school" for mothers. For their fathers' education, adolescents reported that 1.6% completed grade school, 28.8% completed middle school or technical school, 18.5% completed high school, 41.9% had attended or completed undergraduate college, and 1.2% attended or completed graduate school. For their mothers' education, adolescents reported that 1.6% completed grade school, 41.6% completed

middle school or technical school, 19.9% completed high school, 26% had attended or completed their undergraduate years in college, and 0.2% attended or completed graduate school.

### *Procedure*

Six hundred questionnaires were distributed in classrooms of the participating secondary schools, 497 (or 83%) of which were completed and/or provided useful data for this study. Teachers were trained to administer a standard protocol for the survey to the participating students. Respondents were instructed to complete the questionnaire independently in their classrooms and answer each item in a way that best corresponded with their experience. During administration, teachers provided assistance to participants by remaining in the classroom to answer questions of clarification about the items.

### *Measurement*

The questionnaire for the larger project consisted of survey items that assess adolescents' self-reports of their own self-esteem, dimensions of social competence, several aspects of the parent-adolescent relationship, family relationship dimensions, and sociodemographic variables. Questionnaire translation was conducted using the technique of back translation in which the survey first was translated from English to Chinese and then from Chinese back to English. This procedure sought to ensure that both versions of the questionnaire conveyed item meanings that were as comparable as possible.

Specific measures used for this study assessed parental support, monitoring, reasoning, punitiveness, conformity to parents' expectations, behavioral autonomy from parents, and adolescent self-esteem. Research on the dependent variable, adolescent self-esteem, has demonstrated that youthful perceptions of parental behavior are more strongly predictive of their own self-perceptions than are parents' reports of their own child-rearing behavior (Buri, 1989; Gecas & Schwalbe, 1986). Moreover, assessing parental behaviors directly from parents' perceptions is subject to possible response bias from parents who may attempt to conceal certain behaviors (e.g., harsh or punitive behaviors) that are socially sanctioned (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1986; Peterson & Hann, 1999). A methodological (and theoretical) assumption of this study, therefore, is that adolescents' self-perceptions (e.g., self-esteem) are more likely to be influenced by their own constructions of reality (i.e., their own perceptions of parental behavior) than would their parents' conceptions of the same phenomenon.

*Self-Esteem.* Adolescents' global self-esteem was measured with 4 items taken from the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965, 1979). The participants responded to the items in terms of a four-point Likert scale which varies from "Strongly Agree" (SA) to "Strongly Disagree" (SD). The items were phrased as positive assessments (e.g., "I feel I have a number of good qualities") involving evaluations of (1) one's personal worth, (2) good qualities, (3) ability to do things, and (4) satisfaction with self. Moderate internal consistency was demonstrated for these items with a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of .71.

*Parental Behaviors.* The parental behaviors examined in this study were assessed by items from the Parent Behavior Measure (PBM). The PBM is a self-report instrument that measures adolescents' perceptions of several supportive and controlling dimensions of behavior that parents direct at adolescents (Henry & Peterson, 1995; Peterson et al., 1985; Peterson et al., 1999). The PBM assesses several parental behaviors, including support, reasoning, monitoring, punitiveness, and love withdrawal and is indebted, in part, to other investigators for its conceptualizations (Barber et al., 1992; Devereaux, Bronfenbrenner, & Rodgers, 1969; Heilbrun, 1964; Hoffman, 1980; Schaefer, 1965; Small, 1990). Most items composing the scales of the PBM are from previously existing instruments and were selected based on having the highest loadings on identified factors in previous factor analytic studies (Peterson et al., 1985). Many of the PBM items were taken from the 80 item Rollins and Thomas Parent Behavior Inventory that was, in turn, a distillation of the best items from the 192 item Schaeffer's Parent Behavior Inventory (Schaefer, 1965). Items that measured parental support originated from a scale developed through a factor analytic study that examined the Heilbrun (1964) and Cornell measures (Devereaux et al., 1969) of parental support. The items measuring reasoning were developed from Hoffman's

(1980) conception of induction, whereas monitoring items were based on the work of several previous researchers (Small, 1990; Barber et al., 1992). Participants responded to the items composing the PBM in terms of a four-point Likert scale varying from “Strongly Agree” (SA) to “Strongly Disagree” (SD).

Perceptions of parental support were measured by three items assessing the degree to which adolescents viewed mothers and fathers as being accepting, warm, and nurturant. Specifically, the items assessed adolescents’ perceptions of their parents’ tendencies (1) to be there if needed, (2) give love, and (3) give approval to him/her. The 4 items that measured parental reasoning assessed the extent to which mothers and fathers are perceived as explaining to (or use reasoning with) adolescents concerning how they should feel about disciplinary circumstances and how their behavior affects the internal feelings of others. Specifically, the items provided teenagers’ perceptions of their parents’ tendencies to explain (1) how good adolescents should feel when something was shared with other family members, (2) how good adolescents should feel when they have done what is right, (3) how good other family members feel when something was shared with them by the adolescent, and (4) how good others feel when adolescents had done what is right. Parental punitiveness was assessed by 6 items measuring adolescents’ perceptions of their mothers’ and fathers’ use of verbal coerciveness, physical punishment, and the imposition of arbitrary control (i.e., dysfunctional control). Specifically, the items provided adolescents’ perceptions of their parents’ tendencies to (1) yell at them, (2) hit them, (3) hit them when they are wrong, (4) not give them any peace, (5) not let them do what they really enjoy, and (6) not let them do things with other teenagers. Parental monitoring was measured by 4 items that assessed how much mothers and fathers are perceived as supervising adolescents’ activities. The items assessed the adolescents’ perceptions of the degree to which (1) parents are told where adolescents are going when the young go out, (2) parents know where the adolescents are when they are away from home, (3) parents know the adolescents’ friends, (4) parents know how adolescents spend their money. When combined into scales, these observed measures of parental behavior demonstrated moderate to good internal consistency reliability, with Cronbach’s alphas ranging from .71 to .84.

*Conformity and Autonomy.* Adolescents’ reports of their conformity to mothers’ and fathers’ expectations were assessed by three self-report items from the Rollins and Thomas Adolescent Conformity Scale (Peterson et al., 1999; Peterson et al., 1985; Thomas, Gecas, Weigert, & Rooney, 1974). The participants responded to these items separately for mothers and fathers in terms of a four-point Likert-type items ranging from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree.” The constituent items assessed the extent to which adolescents conformed to parents’ expectations about their choices of friends, decisions about education, as well as their parents’ general expectations for their behavior. Specific content of these items dealt with whether the adolescent would (1) choose friends their parent preferred, (2) go to a different school that their parent wanted, and (3) would do, in general, what the parent wanted.

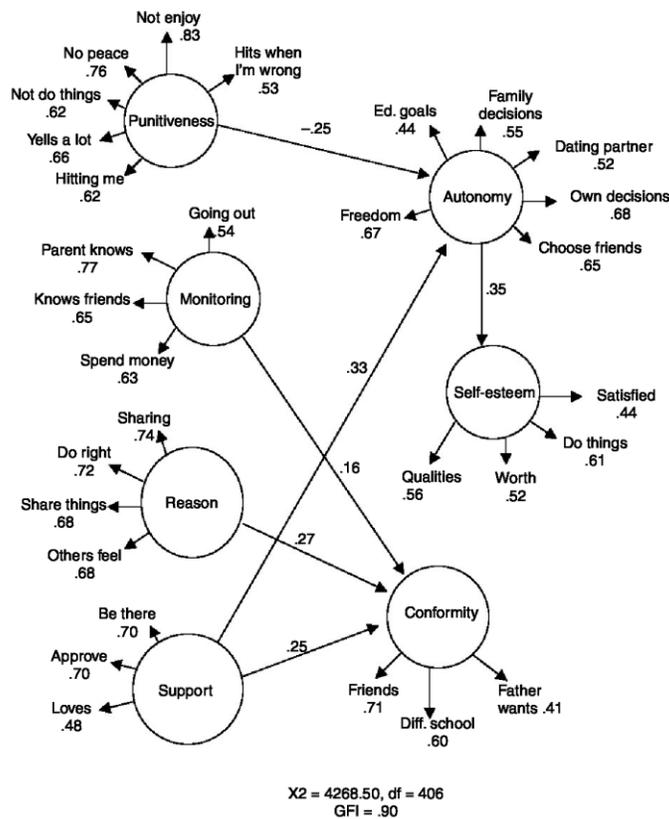
Moderate internal consistency was demonstrated with Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficients of .73 for adolescents’ conformity to fathers’ and .70 for youthful conformity to mothers’ expectations.

Autonomy from parents was measured by 6 items from a scale dealing with the growth of self-direction (behavioral autonomy) by the young (Peterson et al., 1999; Sessa & Steinberg, 1991). These items measure the extent to which mothers and fathers were perceived as allowing adolescents to make their own decisions and engage in activities without excessive parental intrusion. Specific content of these items dealt with whether adolescents viewed their parents as allowing them (1) to choose their own friends, (2), enough freedom, (3) to make their own decisions, (4) to help make decisions about family matters, and (5) to make their own decisions about educational goals. Good internal consistency was demonstrated for the scale composed of these observed measures, with Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficients of .85, both for autonomy from mothers and fathers.

## ***ANALYSIS AND RESULTS***

The theoretical relationships represented by Figure 1 were tested with structural equations models consisting of five exogenous and three endogenous latent variables. Structural equation models combine the features of confirmatory factor analysis with simultaneous equation models to test theoretically based predictions in a system of variables (Bollen, 1989; Hayduk, 1987). The central idea is that sets of observed variables (e.g., quantitative measures on questionnaire items) are dependent on latent or unobserved variables that are defined through confirmatory factor analysis. The results of structural equation modeling (SEM) commonly include (1) a measurement model of latent constructs based on measured data, (2) a derived structural model that includes latent variables, (3) estimates of observed variables that are dependent on latent constructs, (4) linear structural equations reflecting theoretically based predictions. Advantages of SEM over OLS multiple regression approaches include the capacity to correct for the biasing effect of measurement error and the prevention of multicollinearity. Two empirical models, one dealing with adolescents' relationships with fathers and the other concerning adolescents' relationships with mothers, were fitted with the LISREL 8 statistical package. Results for the father's model are shown in Figure 2, while the mother's model is shown in Figure 3. Estimates were obtained through maximum likelihood, the appropriate method when the observed variables approximate a continuous level of measurement.

FIGURE 2. Model for Fathers



Tables 1 and 2 present the descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations for the data consisting of the means, standard deviations, and ranges for each variable. Results for the structural equations models are shown in Figures 2 (fathers) and 3 (mothers), with particular focus on the significant paths for the theoretical model and their associated coefficients. Both models demonstrate an adequate fit to the data, as manifested by the diagnostic values Critical N and Goodness of Fit Indices (see Figures 2 and 3), which in both cases fall within acceptable ranges. This is further supported by the RMSEA values of .05 for both the mothers' and fathers' models. Moreover, the lambda coefficients, which are akin to factor loadings, are fairly strong for all the variables, indicating that the constructs in this model have merit.

Perhaps the most central set of findings indicate that conformity to parents' expectations does not function as a mediating variable for the influence of either mothers' or fathers' parental behavior on self-esteem (see Figures 2 and 3). Although parental behaviors are moderate predictors of conformity to parents, the subsequent linkage between conformity to parents and adolescent self-esteem was not significant. Consequently, the expectation was not supported that self-esteem for Chinese adolescents would result from a collectivistic socialization pattern. Instead, both the mothers' and fathers' models sustained individualistic conceptions of self-esteem, with significant indirect paths leading from both parental punitiveness and support to self-esteem as conveyed through the mediating variable, autonomy from parents (see Figures 2 and 3). Specifically, both maternal and paternal punitiveness were negative predictors, whereas both maternal and paternal support were positive predictors of adolescent autonomy from parents. This was followed in sequence by strong predictive relationships for adolescent autonomy from both mothers and fathers on the self-esteem of Chinese youth (see Figures 2 and 3).

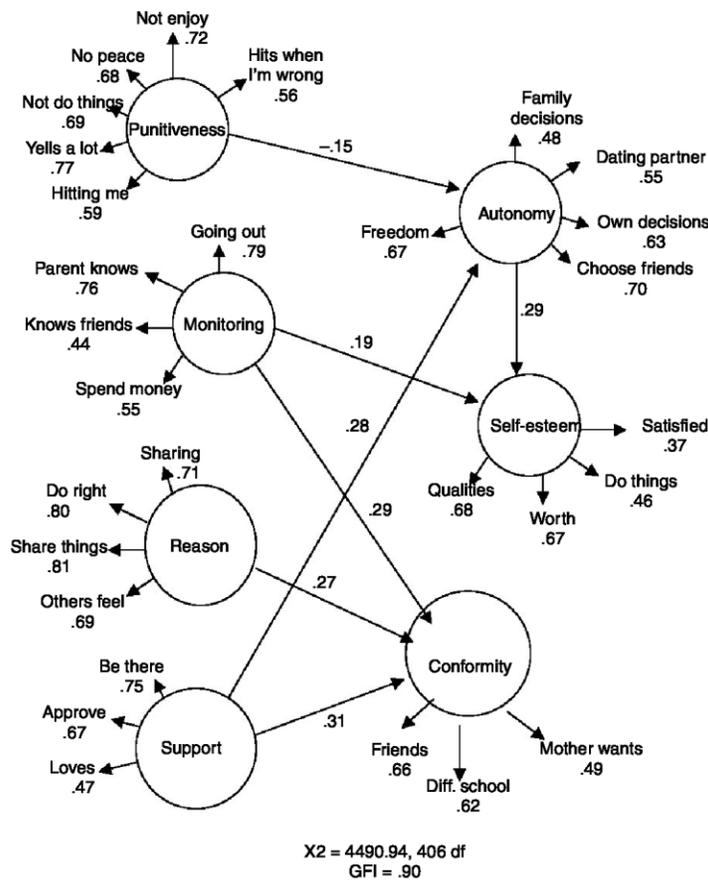
TABLE 1. Descriptive Statistics

Latent	<i>Maternal Model</i>		<i>Paternal Model</i>	
	Observed	M SD	Observed	M SD
<b>Punitiveness</b>		<b>5.70 (5.15)</b>		<b>6.12 (5.37)</b>
	Hltf	1.13 (1.11)	Hltm	1.03 (1.10)
	peacef	1.22 (1.28)	peacem	1.50 (1.35)
	enjoyf	1.07 (1.24)	enjoym	1.14 (1.26)
	yellf	.81 (1.10)	yellm	.95 (1.20)
	punishf	.63 (1.05)	punishm	.72 (1.13)
	hittingf	.87 (1.07)	hittingm	.83 (1.07)
<b>Monitoring</b>		<b>7.37 (3.95)</b>		<b>8.04 (3.90)</b>
	wheref	1.75 (1.38)	wherem	1.91 (1.39)
	withf	2.22 (1.35)	withm	2.38 (1.27)
	whof	1.57 (1.22)	whom	1.74 (1.24)
	moneyf	1.85 (1.37)	moneym	2.01 (1.33)
<b>Reasoning</b>		<b>7.64 (3.76)</b>		<b>7.86 (3.94)</b>
	sharef	1.84 (1.20)	sharem	1.89 (1.22)
	dorightf	2.45 (1.10)	dorightm	2.48 (1.14)
	thingsf	1.50 (1.21)	thingsm	1.58 (1.29)
	rightf	1.89 (1.24)	rightm	1.94 (1.24)
<b>Support</b>		<b>5.67 (2.79)</b>		<b>6.36 (2.80)</b>
	needf	2.00 (1.23)	needm	2.27 (1.22)
	appovef	2.26 (1.10)	appovem	2.37 (1.05)
	lovemef	1.44 (1.34)	lovemem	1.74 (1.37)
<b>Autonomy Gmt.</b>		<b>17.2 (3.20)</b>		<b>17.1 (3.20)</b>
	freedomf	3.00 (.73)	freedomm	3.00 (.69)
	friendsf	3.01 (.70)	friendsm	2.94 (.72)
	datingf	2.60 (.85)	datingm	2.60 (.85)
	confidnf	2.84 (.76)	confidnm	2.80 (.76)
	encourgf	2.90 (.81)	encourgm	2.92 (.80)
	educf	3.05 (.71)	educm	3.05 (.69)
<b>Conformity</b>		<b>7.14 (1.61)</b>		<b>7.10 (1.67)</b>
	schoolf	2.34 (.74)	schoolm	2.34 (.75)
	groupf	2.20 (.71)	groupm	2.19 (.71)
	wantsf	2.64 (.71)	wantsm	2.62 (.75)
<b>Self-Esteem</b>		<b>11.7 (2.04)</b>		
	satisfy	2.52 (.75)		
	dothing	2.90 (.77)		
	worth	3.30 (.70)		
	quality	3.10 (.75)		

Although not a mediating construct, the findings were notable that conformity to parents' expectations was moderately predicted by all of the mothers' and fathers' parental behaviors, except for punitiveness (see Figures

2 and 3). Specifically, three of the exogenous parental behaviors (i.e., parental monitoring, reasoning, and support) have significant positive effects in reference to conformity to parents' expectations. Of considerable importance, therefore, is the finding that parental punitiveness failed to predict adolescent conformity to parents' expectations, whereas more moderate forms of firm control and parental support were positive predictors of responsiveness by the young to their parents' expectations. Consequently, these Chinese adolescents were more responsive to parents who use forms of parental behavior based on supervision (i.e., monitoring), rationality (i.e., reasoning), and supportiveness, rather than more dysfunctional (punitive) kinds of control. These results also indicate that maternal monitoring is the only exogenous variable to *directly* predict the self-esteem of Chinese adolescents.

FIGURE 3. Model for Mothers



An important general result of this study, therefore, was the empirical support provided for the latent constructs in the proposed model, both in terms of the confirmatory factor results (i.e., the latent variables) and some of the relationships among these constructs that were consistent with theory. Consequently, the constructs self-esteem, autonomy from parents, conformity to parents' expectations, support, monitoring, reasoning, and punitiveness were provided empirical support as meaningful constructs within the Chinese parent-adolescent relationship.

TABLE 2. Pearson's Correlation Coefficients for Paternal and Maternal Model

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Self-Esteem	1.00						
2. Punitiveness	-.094	1					
3. Monitoring	.127**	.016	1				
4. Reasoning	.150**	-.024	.209**	1			
5. Support	.120**	-.176**	.273**	.498**	1		
6. Autonomy granting	.264**	-.273**	.063	.178**	.255**	1	
7. Conformity	.090*	-.019	.182**	.120*	.193**	.039	1

Note. Maternal correlations are in the upper diagonal and paternal correlations are in the lower diagonal; \*p < .05; \*\*p < .01

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The primary purpose of this study was to determine whether parental behaviors provided either an individualistic or collectivistic socialization climate for the development of self-esteem in Chinese adolescents (see Figure 1). Tests of a mediated effects model indicated that parental behavior influences the self-esteem of Chinese adolescents by way of indirect paths emphasizing an individualistic rather than either a collectivistic theme or one conveyed by direct effects. That is, the development of self-esteem in Chinese adolescents is the mediated consequence of two types of socialization behaviors, parental support and punitiveness, the effects of which are conveyed as adolescents either acquire or are denied autonomy (or individuality) from their parents. Rather than a collectivistic climate, adolescent self-esteem is fostered through a pattern of socialization that conveys such “individualistic” themes as the need for self-direction and personal separateness (indicated by autonomy as the mediating variable) (Cheung & Lau, 1985; Lau & Cheung, 1987).

Besides the identification of autonomy as a mediator, the fact that conformity to parents' expectations failed to predict adolescent self-esteem provided further evidence that a collectivistic conception of the self was not supported. That is, conformity to parents' expectations, an indicator of collectivism at the relationship level, failed to function as a mediator for the influences of child-rearing behaviors (i.e., reasoning, monitoring, punitiveness, support) on the self-esteem of Chinese adolescents (Gecas & Burke, 1995; Taforadi & Swann, 1996). Consequently, these results, for the particular type of self-esteem measured, did not sustain traditional Chinese conceptions of self development, but seemed more akin to Western patterns rooted in the affirmation of one's individuality. Adolescent self-esteem was encouraged by Chinese parents who fostered individualism by granting a form of autonomy facilitated by supportiveness and by avoiding punitive behavior. These findings do not preclude, of course, the possibility that other dimensions of self-esteem may exist that are based more extensively in collectivistic or relational sources (Kagitcibasi, 1996; Taforadi & Swann, 1996).

Prominent was the present finding that Chinese parents who use supportive behavior often encourage the young to become more autonomous, which, in turn, creates a relationship climate that fosters the development of adolescent self-esteem. In contrast, punitive parenting contributes to a highly restrictive climate, diminishes the ability of Chinese adolescents to assert their autonomy, and inhibits self-esteem development. In general, therefore, adolescent self-esteem is fostered when Chinese parents are supportive, refrain from dysfunctional control, and encourage autonomous behavior by the young.

Despite this evidence for individualism as the basis for self-esteem development, some findings provide moderate support for the view that Chinese parents use child-rearing strategies to foster a collectivistic relationship climate by encouraging adolescent conformity to their expectations. Specifically, several parental behaviors (i.e., reasoning, monitoring, and support) were direct positive predictors of youthful conformity to parents, suggesting that an important goal of Chinese parenting efforts is to retain influence over adolescents (though conformity is not linked, in turn, to self-esteem). Thus, while youthful self-esteem is not rooted in collectivism, other objectives of Chinese parents, such as maintaining influence over adolescents, may be moderately evident in the findings of this study.

These complicated and seemingly contradictory findings raise the possibility that general efforts to classify the socialization patterns of particular cultures as either collectivistic or individualistic may be too simplistic for the complex realities of social life. A more complicated conception is necessary, in part, due to rapid value changes occurring both across and within societies through the process of globalization. Instead, both individualistic and collectivistic orientations may coexist in varying degrees within cultures, depending upon how they are relevant to particular outcomes of socialization and are compatible with other aspects of the culture (Kagitcibasi, 1996; Peterson, 1995). Urban Chinese parents may use complementary socialization strategies to foster an individualistic form of adolescent self-esteem, while simultaneously encouraging conformity through more traditional, collectivistic approaches.

This "duality" in socialization approaches avoids the view that individualism and collectivism are contradictory forces in favor of the idea that autonomy and interdependence, at the relationship level, can potentially coexist and complement each other (Kagitcibasi, 1996). Conceptualizing the coexistence of these cultural orientations also avoids such value-laden pitfalls as equating individualism with progressive "modernity" in "advanced" societies and collectivism with "traditional" and "less advanced" cultural circumstances (Kagitcibasi, 1996; Stevenson et al., 1992; Wang & Hsueh, 2000). Instead, both individualism and collectivism are potentially complementary themes that may function together, especially when expressed in degrees appropriate to unique cultural and familial circumstances.

Results for specific parental behaviors provide additional insights into current controversies about Chinese parent-youth relations. First, these results for the supportiveness of Chinese parents stand in sharp contrast with traditional themes suggesting that warmth, compared to Western parenting, may be either emphasized or conveyed, not as a separate dimension, but more subtly as part of the control dimension (Chao, 1994; 2000; 2001). Instead, the present data indicate that support is a distinct dimension of parental behavior that operates

independently of parental control and is a positive predictor of both autonomy from and conformity to parents (Bond & Wang, 1983; Chiu, 1987; Dornbusch et al., 1987; Stevenson et al., 1992; Wu, 1996). These findings are consistent with earlier studies on Chinese parent-youth relations indicating that parental support is an important predictor of positive socialization outcomes for adolescents (Cheung & Lau, 1985; Lau & Cheung, 1987; Lin & Fu, 1990).

An interesting paradox that occurs is the way that both autonomy and conformity are jointly encouraged by supportive behavior from Chinese parents. Parental support, on the one hand, may communicate how much the young are valued and accepted and is used to foster the conformity of adolescents to their parents' expectations by fostering trust, internalized commitment, and receptivity to parental influence (Peterson et al., 1985; Rohner, 1986). Paradoxically, parental support provides the basis for a seemingly opposite development, that of the progress of adolescents toward autonomy. Specifically, supportiveness by parents provides the emotional context or a secure base, rooted partially in the acceptance of parental standards (i.e., internalized conformity to parents), from which the young safely explore beyond family boundaries (Peterson et al., 1999; Peterson & Hann, 1999). Chinese adolescents appear to use supportive parent-youth relationships as a secure base from which to engage with confidence the world outside the family and face both the risks and benefits of self-directed activities (Kobak & Sceery, 1988). Consequently, adolescents who receive sufficient parental supportiveness are more likely to balance the seemingly contradictory attributes of individuality with responsiveness to others, or prosocial attributes central to social competence (Peterson & Leigh, 1990).

Results for parental punitiveness also address a controversy on the type of parental control that is characteristic of parent-adolescent relations in China. Specifically, punitiveness failed to foster self-esteem, both by not predicting conformity to parents' expectations through the collectivistic path and by inhibiting adolescent autonomy (i.e., as a negative predictor) through the individualistic path. Such findings contradict the view that Chinese parents commonly use restrictive, autocratic, or punitive approaches to foster self-esteem or related prosocial outcomes (Chao, 1994; Chiu, 1987; Dornbusch et al., 1987; Steinberg et al., 1992; Yang, 1981, 1986). Instead, similar to Western research (Peterson & Hann, 1999), punitiveness either inhibits self-esteem by restricting the autonomy of adolescents or fails to predict self-esteem through socializing approaches emphasizing conformity to parents.

In contrast to results for punitiveness, parental reasoning and monitoring are consistent positive predictors of adolescent conformity to parents' expectations. Moreover, monitoring was the only behavior to directly predict adolescent self-esteem, demonstrating a positive relationship in the mothers' model. According to Western scholarship (Baumrind, 1991), firm control is a central feature of the authoritative parenting style and includes such practices as clearly defining rules, consistently enforcing discipline, using reason, and supervising the activities of youth (Peterson & Hann, 1999). Although disagreements exist about the comparability of Western and Chinese parenting concepts (Chao, 1994), firm control seems similar to a culturally specific form of influence defined by Chinese and Chinese-American scholars as "functional or organizational control." Specifically, functional control involves providing guidance, a clear definition of rules, firm and demanding influence, high parental involvement, and a quest for harmony (Lau & Cheung, 1987; Chao & Sue, 1996). A central feature of the similarity between "firm" and "functional" control is their shared rejection of coercive or arbitrary control, without surrendering the parents' abilities to be in charge. The results of the present findings, in turn, support the view that adolescent self-esteem and conformity to Chinese parents are fostered primarily by functional control that is neither punitive or arbitrarily restrictive (Chao, 1994).

The first dimension of functional control that fosters conformity to mothers and fathers, parental reasoning, refers to rational explanations that provide guidance and convince children to voluntarily accept their parents' viewpoints and modify their behavior (Baumrind, 1991). Adolescents use these internalized expectations as guides or standards in reference to which their behavior is governed (Peterson & Leigh, 1990). Parents often use reason to explain why role expectations and rules are important, why certain behaviors are forbidden, how the actions of adolescents will influence others, and how to take responsibility for one's own mistakes (Peterson & Hann, 1999). Such conceptions of reasoning are consistent with the Chinese emphasis on child training or

teaching as embodied in the concept chiao-yang. This idea emphasizes that parents should actively teach and structure the child's environment, encourage character development, and mold the young to become functional members of society, all of which are compatible with fostering adolescent conformity to parents' expectations (Bernt et al., 1993; Chao, 1994, 2000, 2001; Ho, 1989; Lin & Fu, 1990).

A second dimension of functional control, parental monitoring, was a positive predictor of both conformity to parents (both mothers' and fathers' monitoring) and adolescent self-esteem (mothers' monitoring only). Monitoring refers to the extent that parents are aware of and seek to manage their adolescents' schedules, free time activities, peer associations, school work, and physical whereabouts (Barber et al., 1994; Peterson & Hann, 1999). Effective monitoring requires that parents maintain a clear set of rules about such things as the expected time to return home from school, when homework should be finished, what school grades are expected, when to return from peer activities, with whom to associate, and places to venture. Effective monitoring also requires that parents "verify" their youngster's compliance by "checking up" on them and by implementing consequences when rules are violated. Studies on children and adolescents in the U.S. have long supported the idea that self-esteem is fostered by firm (not arbitrary) parental control that provides structure and clear expectations to the young (Gecas & Seff, 1990). Chinese adolescents appear to assess their personal self-worth more favorably when the standards that parents set are clear and relatively easy to use for making self-evaluations.

Combined assessments of parental support, reasoning, and monitoring as predictors of adolescent self-esteem and conformity seem consistent with the principle of *guan*, or the Chinese belief that parents should create an atmosphere combining control and governance with care and concern (Chao, 2000; Ho, 1989). That is, common practices used by Chinese parents include supervising, governing, and controlling so that order, discipline, self-control and conformity are fostered firmly but not through punitiveness (Wu, 1996). Such aspects of firm control are complemented by parental care and concern that fosters both self-esteem and conformity, which apparently is neither a muted form of parental warmth nor one that is simply embedded in parental control. Instead, supportiveness by Chinese parents is a clearly expressed, distinctive behavior that fosters both individualistic (e.g., self-esteem) and collectivistic outcomes (e.g., conformity to parents' expectations) in the young. This finding contrasts with previous research indicating that traditional Chinese parents, especially fathers, are less warm and emotionally expressive than Western parents (Bond & Wang, 1983; Wu, 1996). Another possibility is that parental support may be an expanding dimension of Chinese parenting that fosters both newer individualistic themes as well as maintaining the traditional focus on respect for parents and filial piety (Wang & Hsueh, 2000).

Despite the logic of these results, certain methodological and sampling issues may limit the interpretation of these findings. One shortcoming was the restricted geographic area (Beijing, China) from which the sample was drawn and the resulting limitations for generalization. Moreover, the use of cross-sectional and predictive approaches means that the proposed directions of influence in the theoretical model (i.e., parental behavior as an influence on adolescent outcomes) were offered for heuristic value only. Other limitations involve validity issues when all the variables in the model (i.e., predictor and criterion variables) are measured from one person's (or the adolescent's) perception.

A general way of interpreting these findings, however, is that a pattern of parent-youth relationships may be emerging in China, with the result being a mixture of individualistic and collectivistic patterns, referred to as psychological interdependence (Ho, 1989; Wang & Hsueh, 2000). Depending upon the particular outcome addressed, parental behaviors such as support and dimensions of functional control (i.e., reasoning and monitoring) may prepare the young to pursue both personal goals that encourage their individuality and collectivistic values that sustain the more traditional focus of Chinese culture on interpersonal relatedness.

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