

Abstract of thesis entitled:

“Perceived Parental Socialization of Self-reliance and Individuality among Chinese Early Adolescents”

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Prior research contrasting Chinese parenting with Western parenting within the framework of independence vs. interdependence often portrayed Chinese parents as deemphasizing offspring’s independent development. However, a small body of evidence contradictory to this stereotypical picture and modernization occurring dramatically in urban China cast doubt on this conclusion. In order to enlighten the debate on Chinese parental socialization of independence, the current research, guided by the notion of multifaceted independence, attempted to differentiate two essential forms of independence – self-reliance (i.e., individual effort, ability and responsibility) and individuality (i.e., assertiveness and distinctiveness). It included a focus group study as a preliminary step to accumulate evidence of distinction of self-reliance and individuality and a correlational study as a primary step to examine the conceptual and functional distinction between parental promotion of self-reliance and promotion of individuality in the perception of urban and rural Chinese early adolescents.

In the study 1, a focus group study on a sample of 23 Chinese university students showed that Chinese people tended to interpret self-reliance as an ability to handle personal

affairs on one's own and individuality as a capacity to have independent thinking rather than following the crowd. Study 2 was based on the reports of 314 urban and 536 rural early adolescents. Overall, the findings suggest that adolescents' perceived parental promotion of self-reliance and promotion of individuality were two overlapping yet distinct constructs. The former was reported to a higher degree than the latter cross the urban vs. rural group, but both were reported higher in the urban than in the rural group. Perceived parental promotion of self-reliance (vs. promotion of individuality) was more likely to predict adolescents' enhanced academic adjustment and reciprocal filial piety attitudes (i.e., attitudes toward caring and supporting parents out of appreciation and reward) reported concurrently cross the urban vs. rural group. Perceived parental promotion of individuality, however, was effective to predict adolescents' heightened emotional adjustment reported concurrently, but more likely to work in the urban vs. rural context.

The findings fill in the omission of parental socialization of multiple forms of independence when offspring enter into adolescence, and shed light on the multifaceted nature of independence in adolescent development. They also add to extant evidence documenting the effects of sociocultural changes on parental socialization, which reflects the dynamics and complexity of contemporary Chinese parenting and provides implications for future studies with multiple cultural groups.