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Globalization and Identity Development: A Chinese Perspective

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Abstract

This chapter begins with a discussion of the unique experience of adolescents and emerging adults who grew up with globalization in China and how it has affected their sense of self. We then discuss the effects of globalization on identity development in general, with a special focus on the sociohistorical context of China. We also review and critique the psychological literature that has been conducted on identity within Chinese and Chinese American populations. Finally, we discuss the applicability of Western concepts of identity on a culture that does not necessarily share the same value structure. © 2012 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

Coming of Age in a Globalized World

Globalization refers to the flow of thoughts, products, and personnel across national boundaries at unprecedented speed, scope, and quantity (Jensen, Arnett, & McKenzie, 2011). In the past three decades, China has gone through spectacular economic and social reform within the context of globalization. For Chinese youth who came of age under globalization, identity development has taken on unique meanings. On one hand, some elements of local culture have lost their original charm. For example, state-sponsored discourses on nationalism have lost their appeal for many Chinese youth who identified with a global community where China is often viewed as inferior (Fong, 2004). On the other hand, many young people find it difficult to relate to the global culture because it differs drastically from their local culture (Arnett, 2002). For example, global culture is centered around individualism (Erez & Gati, 2004) and consumerism (Paek & Pan, 2004), values that are in contrast to the cultural tradition of collectivism and frugality in China. Navigating a traditional Eastern culture that is going through drastic social and economic change, therefore, has made the process of identity formation among Chinese adolescents and emerging adults especially fascinating for us to study.

The current generation of Chinese youth are coming of age in a transitional period in Chinese history. In the late 1970s, the country's communist ideal was replaced by a more pragmatic emphasis on economic openness and political reformation. As a consequence of the "open door policy" of Xiaoping Deng (former leader of the Chinese Communist Party), China has experienced unprecedented economic growth from 1980 to 2010, with gross domestic product (GDP) growth rates ranging from 7.8% to 14.2% (except of a GDP rate of 3.8% in 1993; Moghaddam & Redzuan, 2012). Culturally, with the collapse of old ideologies and value systems, a variety of alternative values and beliefs entered the social realm, including socialism, nationalism, and Confucian traditions (a philosophic system that emphasizes family obligation and social cohesion). In terms of social policies, the "one-child policy" was adopted and enforced around the same time as a solution to the country's population crisis. This policy permitted each couple to have only one healthy biological child (Hesketh, Li, & Zhu, 2005). The one-child policy has far-reaching impacts on China's youth culture today. As reported by Watson (2004), a new generation of Chinese young people grew up as the only child in the household, locally known as little emperors or little empresses. In recent years, another term has been coined and widely used on the first cohort of only-children born between the years of 1980 to 1989: the *Balinghou* generation (literally translated as "post-80ers"; Liu, 2011). As noted by Liu (2011), this cohort of youth has been placed into the center of attention in a national debate about Chinese youth and is often accused of

being self-centered. However, the nation was taken by surprise when young people from the *Balinghou* generation acted with great compassion and responsibility during times of national crisis or in response to events such as the Wenchuan earthquake relief work and the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games (Liu).

Today, the *Balinghou* generation, as well as other urban Chinese youth, enjoy most of the entertainment and leisure as their counterparts in the Western world: They grow up watching Disney cartoons and Japanese *manga*; they frequent McDonald's and KFC for food and Starbucks for coffee; they prefer brand names such as Nike and Adidas; they communicate with their friends via cell phones (if not iPhones), e-mail, QQ (a local version of MSN Messenger), Kaixin or Xiaonei Net (local versions of Facebook), and Weibo (also called Microblog, the local version of Twitter); and they download songs and music videos to their iPods and personal computers. They know how many points Jeremy Lin scored in the latest NBA basketball game, and they scream at the top of their lungs when they see their idols performing on reality TV shows, such as *Super Girls* (the local version of *American Idol*). One of their favorite escapes is the Internet café (*wangba* in Chinese), where urban Chinese youth relax by surfing the Internet, engaging in online games, and participating in online forums—all for a sense of fun and virtual freedom, something that is scarce in a society characterized by “sharp social stratification, fierce competition, lack of security, consumerism, corruption, and unfairness in the distribution of resources” (Liu, 2009, p. 167).

Meanwhile, underneath the single-hearted pursuit of pleasure and excitement among Chinese youth, there may very well have been an existential and moral crisis. Wang (2006) proposes that, as the larger society transitions under the context of ever-intensifying globalization, Chinese young people are undergoing major value changes, such as “individualism, materialism, and moral crisis” (p. 233). Wang argued that there is a “collective inferiority complex” (p. 233) among youth in China as a result of their perceptions of inferiority regarding their national status as compared with developed countries such as the United States.

Identity Crisis: Risks and Opportunities

In Chinese, the word for *crisis* is a combination of two characters: *wei* (危) and *ji* (机). Whereas *wei* means “risks,” *ji* means “opportunities.” Therefore, from a Chinese perspective, crisis is conceptualized as a risky situation that simultaneously harbors opportunities. The Chinese conception of “crisis” has a similar flavor to what Erikson described as an identity crisis in his stage theory of identity development. According to Erikson (1956, 1963), individuals pass through eight life stages, each of which is characterized by an existential psychosocial crisis. For adolescents and late adolescents, the crisis is that of identity formation versus role

confusion. As adolescents transition from childhood to adulthood, they may be initially confused about their roles in the society and may start experimenting with different roles, behaviors, and activities. This experimentation and exploration eventually may help adolescents to achieve a sense of identity regarding who they are and how they can fit into the larger society in which they live. Successful resolution of the identity crisis is essential to beneficial psychological development. The Chinese conceptualization of “crisis” coincides with that of Erikson in that they both indicate a time of both risks and opportunities—which tends to characterize adolescence in general. For young Chinese people grappling with local versus global cultures, role confusion takes on new meanings as they weigh their allegiance to either the local or global cultures.

Marcia (1964) utilized two dichotomized concepts: exploration and commitment to measure young people’s journey through identity formation. The need to develop a sense of self promotes exploration whereby young people actively seek out experiences with different ideologies, values, and role models. Commitment, however, refers to the dedication, devotion, and group loyalty one has enacted in relation to a set of goals, values, and beliefs. More recently, Luyckx and colleagues (2008) expanded Marcia’s model by adding a new dimension, namely, ruminative (or maladaptive) exploration, where individuals are clearly aware of the need to search for identity alternatives but are not able to do so in a coherent and systematic fashion. Their study also indicated that the ruminative exploration is positively associated with distress and self-rumination.

Typically, in Western societies, individuals start from a state of diffusion (low in crisis/exploration, low in commitment), move through the active exploration status of moratorium (high in crisis/exploration but still low in commitment), and reach a stage of resolution, or achievement (completed exploration, high in commitment). Those who have committed to a set of preconceived beliefs without exploring other options are described as foreclosed (low in crisis/exploration but high in commitment). As is discussed later, this conceptualization of normative identity development, as well as its value judgment on specific identity statuses (e.g., foreclosure is considered undesirable), is rooted deeply in the individualistic culture of Western, especially American, society. It is not necessarily universal or readily applicable to adolescents and emerging adults from other cultural contexts (Berman, You, Schwartz, Teo, & Mochizuki, 2011).

Adolescents and emerging adults who came of age in the context of globalization are presented with both risks and opportunities in their transition from childhood to adulthood. Not only must they navigate the universal developmental tasks that earlier generations of Chinese people have faced, but they also must confront issues that are unique to their generation, especially the impact of globalization. In an increasingly globalized world, exposure to diverse cultures and a global world further complicates

and diversifies the process of identity formation for adolescents (ages 10–18) and emerging adults (ages 18–29) in vital areas such as sexuality, marriage, work, moral values, language, diet, and media (Jensen et al., 2011). Arnett (2002) defines *global identity* as “a sense of belonging to a worldwide culture and includes an awareness of the events, practices, styles, and information that are part of the global culture” (p. 777). In addition, he defines *local identity* as “one based on the local circumstances, local environment, and local traditions of the place where they grew up.” He further suggests the development of a typology similar to one that has become popular in the ethnic identity/acculturation literature (Berry, 1993; Phinney, 1990) whereby people are surveyed in terms of strength of identification with both the dominant national culture and their particular subgroup minority culture.

Based on Arnett’s suggestion, some scholars have borrowed Berry’s (1997) model of acculturation in their conceptualization of cultural identity formation in the context of globalization (Jensen et al., 2011). According to this conceptualization, adolescents and emerging adults navigate their local culture and global culture in one of four possible pathways:

1. *Assimilation*. Individuals reject their local cultural identity and embrace an entirely new global culture.
2. *Separation*. Individuals hold on to their local cultural identity and avoid contact with the global culture.
3. *Integration*. Elements of both the local culture and the global culture are combined to form a new integrated culture.
4. *Marginalization*. Individuals reject both their local and global cultures.

In a cross-national study of the effects of globalization on identity development among 713 undergraduate students from China ($N = 102$), India ($N = 231$), Colombia ($N = 103$), and the United States ($N = 277$), Cheng, Briones, Caycedo, and Berman (2008) proposed a new typology of identity formation that includes four globalization statuses:

1. *Globally assimilated*. Low in local identification, high in global identification”
2. *Locally encapsulated*. High in local identification, low in global identification”
3. *Bicultural*. High in both local and global identification
4. *Alienated*. Low in both local and global identification

Globalization was measured with the Global Identity Survey (GIS; Cheng et al., 2008), where participants indicated their preference for local or global culture by responding to 20 statements asking their attitudes and behaviors toward their local culture (e.g., I am very proud of my Chinese

heritage) and the global culture (e.g., I prefer to label myself as a “global citizen”). The Cronbach’s alpha was .70 for the local subscale and .60 for the global subscale. For all countries except the United States, the statuses were differentiated by exposure to the global community, openness to experience, identity exploration, and identity commitment. In all four countries, greater identification with the local culture predicted lower psychological symptom severity and less identity distress. Those in the bicultural and locally encapsulated identity statuses reported significantly less identity distress compared to those in the alienated identity status. Both these results indicated a strong relationship between firm local identification and better psychological adjustment. The authors believed that a strong grounding in local culture provides young people a secure base from which to branch out and explore other cultures without feeling inferior, disempowered, or disoriented, leading to less identity confusion and identity distress.

As a result of the complications involved in the process of identity formation, Jensen (2003) proposed that youth in non-Western traditions are at higher risk for identity confusion, as they are constantly challenged to reconcile messages sent from their local culture and those sent from the global culture. More recently, Jensen et al. (2011) expanded this idea and proposed that, for young people throughout the world, exposure to different cultures and a global world leads to both risks and opportunities. They proposed that the risks involve cultural identity confusion (e.g., lack of commitment and marginalization, p. 294), mental health issues (e.g., substance abuse, prostitution, and suicide, p. 295), and cultural gaps within families between adolescents and their parents (e.g., divergent ideas and values about parental authority and adolescent autonomy, p. 296); whereas the opportunities involve youth civic involvement (Jensen et al., 2011). This sort of dissonant acculturation has been studied with regard to immigration, but it may also be applicable to globalization. Chen, Benet-Martinez, and Bond (2008) distinguished between immigration-based acculturation (i.e., cultural adaptation as a result of immigration) with globalization-based acculturation (i.e., cultural adaptation as a result of coming into contact with other cultures through globalization) in terms of their central tasks. Whereas immigration-based acculturation focuses on adding the mainstream cultural identity to one’s ethnic cultural identity, globalization-based acculturation focuses on selective incorporation of both one’s local culture and the global culture (Chen et al.). The authors also concluded that perceiving one’s cultural identities as integrated is related to better psychological adjustment when the acculturation process is long term, whether through immigration or globalization. Smokowski and Bacallao (2006) examined the acculturation gap-parent-adolescent conflict-adolescent problem behavior hypothesis (p. 661) in a socioeconomically diverse sample of 481 Latino adolescents and found parent-adolescent conflict as the strongest risk factor for adolescent aggression.

The effects of acculturation conflicts (together with cultural involvement) on adolescent aggression were found to be mediated by parent–adolescent conflict and familism, thus supporting the above-mentioned hypothesis. Similarly, Unger, Ritt-Olson, Soto, and Baezconde-Garbanati (2009) examined the relationship between parent–child acculturation discrepancy and adolescent risk behaviors (e.g., substance use). Results indicated that acculturation discrepancy was related to a lower level of family cohesion, which in turn was related to higher levels of substance use. Both these studies seem to point to the acculturation gap as a risk factor for immigrant youths; this gap may be beneficial to study with the effects of globalization since similar patterns of discrepancy may exist in how parents and children identify with the global culture.

Bhat and Rather (2012) conducted an extensive literature review on socioeconomic risk factors posed by globalization in India and China. They identified a number of mental health consequences of globalization in these two countries, including increased (relative) poverty and deprivation, social inequality, urban migration, educational competition, unemployment and underemployment, and occupational stress. Although some of these factors have been in existence long before the advent of globalization, Bhat and Rather note that globalization has further aggravated social inequality in developing countries by exerting differential distributive impact. In other words, differential access to resources as a result of globalization has furthered the economic gap within many countries. In China, for example, Bhat and Rather observed that, although the current annual GDP growth rate is as high as 8.9% (Humphrey, 2006), the “Gini ratio” (a measurement of income distribution in a country that ranges from 0 to 1, where 0 represents perfect equality and 1 represents perfect inequality) jumped from 0.2 to 0.45 between 1980 and 2005, indicating drastic economic polarization and social unrest (Yang, 2005). Bhat and Rather further found that these socioeconomic risk factors are associated with higher rates of suicide in vulnerable populations in these countries, such as adolescents from lower classes, migrant youth, and students.

Another consequence of globalization is its effects on youth culture. Youth culture is highly globalized in many parts of the world. However, Kjeldgaard and Askegaard (2006) challenge the myths of a homogenized global youth culture, pointing out that global youth culture usually becomes localized as young people in different parts of the world try to incorporate the global culture, along with its symbols and meanings, into their locality and everyday life (Bennett, 1999). In China, Western culture, as the main ingredient of global culture, was once taken as synonymous with capitalism, decadence, and hedonism—values that threatened the foundation of a socialistic and collectivistic society. In recent years, however, young people in China are no longer timid about adopting cultural symbols or practices from the global culture. For example, both Facebook

and Twitter have local versions (Kaixin Net and Weibo) that have gained great popularity among Chinese youth.

A final phenomenon as a consequence of globalization is the so-called urban–rural split (Arnett, 2000). Within the United States, a country often viewed as the exporter of globalization, rural youth are often much slower than their urban counterparts in their recognition of and move toward joining the global community (Arnett, 2002). In developing countries, young people in urban areas are faced with different social realities from their counterparts in rural areas: whereas urban youth usually have better access to education and health care, they are at greater risk for exploitation by adults in the form of prostitution and industrial labor (Jensen et al., 2011). Lustyik (2007) has argued that, although computers and the Internet provide a powerful platform for global communication and interaction across national boundaries, they also function to divide and exclude young people between countries (wealthy developed countries versus poorer developing countries) and regions (wealthier urban and suburban areas versus poorer rural areas). Arnett (2002) has noted that, within the context of globalization, the gaps between rural and urban communities have remained and, in some places, have even expanded in recent years. Urban and rural areas differ dramatically in terms of access to the Internet; exchange of people, commodities, and values; as well as exposure and social acceptance of different lifestyles, ideologies, and beliefs. Nelson and Chen (2007) have noted that, given the scarcity of research on noncollege students in China, little is known about the “missing majority” (p. 90) of Chinese youth who do not attend college, especially those living in rural areas, in terms of identity development and feelings of instability. They urged that future studies focus on rural youth in China and their experience of navigating identity development. Given the different exposure to global culture and different social realities faced with rural and urban youth, it is interesting to compare how their identity development trajectories are impacted by globalization.

Identity Research with Chinese Youth

Before reviewing literature on identity research on Chinese youth, it seems vital to define what we mean by “Chinese.” Here we are using the term *Chinese* loosely, referring to anyone who identifies with the traditional Chinese culture (e.g., collectivism, Confucianism, filial piety, etc.), whether they are from mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau, Canada, or the United States. If we mean anything else in a specific place in the chapter (e.g., Taiwanese, Singaporean), we say so explicitly. In our literature review, it seems that, although there is a wealth of literature on identity development among Chinese American youth (e.g., Hunt, Moloney, & Evens, 2011; Juang & Nguyen, 2010; Kiang, Witkow, Baldelomar, & Fuligni, 2010; Kim & Chao, 2009; Yip, 2009; Yip & Douglass,

2011; Yip, Gee, & Takeuchi, 2008; Yip, Kiang, & Fuligni, 2008), there is a relative scarcity of literature on Chinese youth outside of the United States, such as those in mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan (e.g., Berman et al., 2011). Also, most of what has been written on the Chinese American population has focused on specific areas of identity development, such as ethnic identity (e.g., Juang & Nguyen, 2010; Kiang et al., 2010; Yip, 2009; Yip & Douglass, 2011; Yip, Kiang, et al., 2008;) and sexual identity development (e.g., Chan, 1995; Chow & Cheng, 2010) rather than personal identity development in general (for examples of personal identity research with Chinese youth, see Lam, 1997; Lee & Beckert, 2012). Another point to note is that most of the research done on Chinese youth has been conducted in urban settings (e.g., Liu, 2011; Nelson, Badger, & Wu, 2004; Nelson & Chen, 2007), and the much larger rural population has been only sparsely studied (e.g., Lee & Beckert, 2012). Moreover, most of the cross-cultural comparative studies involving Chinese youth have used the United States as a reference group (e.g., Egri & Ralston, 2004), leaving unanswered questions such as whether there are different developmental trajectories between Chinese adolescents and those in other Asian countries and what differences exist, if any, between youth in China and those on other continents, such as Europe, South America, and Africa.

In addition, understanding the Chinese psyche would be impossible without a general understanding of fundamental Chinese values: shame, Confucian philosophy, filial piety, and collectivism. In the next paragraphs, we closely examine these key constructs in Chinese culture and their relationships to Chinese adolescent identity formation. As noted by Nelson and Chen (2007), Confucian traditions and collectivistic cultural values are considered to be the mainstream ideologies in mainland China. These ideologies place great emphasis on the collective good and social order, therefore valuing individuals who control or sacrifice their own needs and desires for the welfare of the family, group, or society in general (Nelson & Chen). In addition, whereas the Judeo-Christian tradition conceptualizes individuals as created by God and therefore functioning individually and independently, the Confucian tradition believes that one's life is inherited from one's ancestors—and therefore that one functions within a network of family members and significant others (Bedford & Hwang, 2003).

An interesting case of how culturally specific constructs such as filial piety impact Chinese youth's identity development can be found in a study conducted by Nelson et al. (2004). Their results showed that 89% of their Chinese adolescent participants rated the item "capable of supporting parents financially" as a marker for adulthood, whereas only 16% of American adolescents ranked this criterion as necessary for achieving adulthood (Arnett, 2003; Nelson, 2003). Given the value placed on filial piety, it is not surprising that Chinese youth would consider taking care of their

parents (and often parents-in-law) as a basic responsibility and as a marker for adulthood. This pattern sheds light on how culture shapes the way people conceptualize constructs such as adulthood.

Some scholars have creatively connected Western constructs such as sexual identity and internalized heterosexism with the culturally specific construct of shame in their study of identity development among Chinese youth. As noted by Chow and Cheng (2010), shame is more ubiquitous in the Chinese culture as compared to Western cultures. Whereas guilt and objective morality are effective methods of social control in individualistic societies such as the United States, shame and subjective (relational) morality are more effective within Confucian societies such as China (Bedford & Hwang, 2003). Bedford and Hwang (2003) proposed that not only are there cultural differences in terms of the situations that tend to trigger guilt and shame but that the subjective experiences of these emotions are different for Chinese versus Americans. Bedford and Hwang identified three main types of guilt (i.e., *nei jiu*, *zui e gan*, and *fan zui gan*) and four types of shame (i.e., *diu lian*, *can kui*, *xiu kui*, and *xiu chi*) in Mandarin Chinese. Each of these types is linked with different targets, “causal” transgressions, and differing extents to which an “audience” is required for the expression of the emotion. Chow and Cheng (2010) studied the coming-out process and its relationship to shame, internalized heterosexism, lesbian identity, and perceived social support in Chinese lesbians from mainland China ($N = 244$) and Hong Kong ($N = 234$). Results indicated that, for participants in both samples, shame was related to internalized heterosexism and to devaluation of lesbian identity, which in turn were related to decreased likelihood of coming out to others. Therefore, in Confucian societies that use shame as a method of social control, homosexuality is greatly discouraged through internalized heterosexism and through devaluation of homosexual identity. Chow and Cheng also discuss the cultural practice of shaming that Chinese parents use to socialize their children.

The construct of shame has also been mentioned in literature on ethnic identity development among Asian American youth. For example, Yeh and Huang (1996) collected empirical data on a sample of 87 Asian American undergraduates using the Ethnic Identity Development Exercise (EIDE), a projective assessment of ethnic identity development where participants are asked to illustrate their process of ethnic identity development. Results indicated that, although traditional stage models and theories consider ethnic identity development to be a “linear, intrapersonal, and individualistic” process where individuals are motivated by anger or frustration toward the dominant culture (Yeh & Huang, p. 654), ethnic identity within Yeh and Huang’s Asian American sample was mainly influenced by interpersonal relationships and other external forces. Additionally, the avoidance of shame was found to be closely related to participants’ ethnic identification. Forty percent of participants listed shame as a

determining factor in their ethnic identity development—specifically, participants conform either to mainstream society or their ethnic culture to avoid shame and embarrassment. The externally determined nature of identity development and the cultural construct of shame are central to research on identity formation among Chinese and Chinese American youth.

Additionally, the theme of collectivism often emerges in studies on identity development among youth from Chinese-based societies. One study found a link between collectivism and the foreclosed identity status (Lee & Beckert, 2012). In this study, the authors investigated psychosocial development of Taiwanese youth by examining cognitive autonomy (i.e., the ability to conduct evaluation of thoughts, decision making, and self-assessment) and personal identity development (i.e., foreclosed and moratorium identity statuses) in relation to collectivism and to region of residence. Lee and Beckert (2012) surveyed a total of 1,149 Taiwanese adolescents (mean age = 16.83 years, standard deviation = 1.17) in both urban and rural areas near Taipei City. Identity status was measured using the Modified Extended Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status scale (Akers, Jones, & Coyl, 1998), where identity statuses were measured as continuous scores rather than as categories. Results indicated that identity status distribution varied by urban/rural location, with the rural locations predicting achievement, moratorium, and diffusion scores. Additionally, higher family income predicted higher cognitive autonomy scores and lower diffusion scores. Higher endorsement of collectivistic values, not surprisingly, was associated with foreclosure scores. Parental attachment was found to be associated with both higher cognitive autonomy and higher foreclosure scores. Finally, resiliency was found to be associated with higher cognitive autonomy and with identity statuses associated with greater levels of exploration (i.e., moratorium and achievement). Lee and Beckert questioned the current practice of applying Western theories of adolescent psychological development to Taiwanese youth, arguing that rural and urban areas have varied levels of Westernization and that Western concepts of identity may not be equally applicable across rural versus urban areas. They also discussed the dilemma of using culturally adapted measures, arguing that there is a delicate balance between emphasizing test validity on a certain sample and valuing generalizability across cultures and populations.

In sum, in reviewing the extant literature on adolescent identity formation, we have identified at least two gaps in terms of research on personal identity development with adolescents living in China and its territories. First, most of what has been done on this population has focused on only a small portion of the Chinese population, namely urban Chinese college students. Because college students are a very selective population, research with Chinese college students may not represent the Chinese population at large. Second, American adolescents have been

used as the norm for conducting research on identity formation outside of the United States (Arnett, 2008; Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2009). As an indicator of progress, culturally relevant constructs, such as shame, Confucian philosophy, filial piety, and collectivism have been studied and incorporated into research on adolescent identity formation with Chinese adolescents and emerging adults.

Issue of Applicability

Some scholars have started to question the validity of applying concepts such as “self” and “personal identity” to a culture that is fundamentally different from the West. As argued by Lam (1997), much of what we know about the so-called normative adolescent development is embedded in the Western individualistic culture. According to Lam, this general framework leads to “an unexamined assumption that the White, middle class and male paradigm is the norm and that other patterns are to be treated as deviant” (pp. 95–96). The author goes on to argue that the Western conceptualization of adolescent development is a deficient and biased model that needs to be modified for different cultures. She proposes a cultural perspective on the study of Chinese adolescents wherein culture and context are taken into consideration. More recently, both Arnett (2008) and Henrich et al. (2009) have noted that individuals from non-Western countries need to be better represented in psychological research, and that findings from American samples may not be generalizable to people from other countries.

In reviewing literature on adolescent development, Lam (1997) identifies two dominant themes that are salient in Western conceptualizations of normative adolescent identity development: autonomy and self. She suggests a reexamination of these dominant themes, in that they are either inapplicable or have different meanings for Chinese versus Western youth. Sheldon and colleagues (2004) investigated the relationship between self-concordance (i.e., career aspirations and choices based on one’s own interests and values rather than conforming to external persuasions) and subjective well-being (SWB) in four different cultures: the United States, China, South Korea, and Taiwan. Results indicated that self-concordance was positively associated with SWB in all four cultures, pointing to the cross-national applicability of the positive impact of self-concordance. These findings may also suggest that a certain degree of autonomy (at least in terms of career choices) is desirable across cultures. Conversely, Suh (2002) examined the relationship of self-consistency with self-knowledge, assertiveness, and self-experiences. Compared to North American participants, Korean participants considered their identities to be more flexible across situations, and their SWB is less predictable from their level of self-consistency. Cross, Gore, and Morris (2003) argued, and empirically demonstrated, that in cultures that are more relational and interdependent, the

relationship between self-consistency and psychological well-being is weaker. Although the match between person and goals is important across cultures, the nature of the self appears to differ between Asian and Western cultural contexts. It is therefore important to take cultural contexts into consideration when conducting psychological research on concepts such as self. Lam advocates an alternative theory of self in Chinese contexts, which she defined as a “process of becoming”:

The process of becoming involves a process of developing, of connecting and of relating. The ultimate goal is to develop a web of good-fitted, harmonious, appropriate, socially accepted and additive interpersonal relationship networks in the adult world. The criteria for maturation therefore becomes: whether or not an adolescent is appropriately positioned in his/her social network and to what extent an adolescent is capable of mastering both vertical and horizontal interpersonal relationships. (p.108)

In other words, the ultimate goal of Chinese adolescent development is a “self-in-relation” rather than an “autonomous self” (Lam, 1997, p. 108). Markus and Kitayama (1991) noted that the different construals of the self between Western and Eastern cultures contributed to the different approaches to identity formation; while individuals in Western societies establish self-identity through self-discovery and self-expression, those in Eastern cultures strive to create a harmonious interdependence with their family members and the larger society as a way of obtaining identity. In a similar line of research, Pratt (1991) proposed a model of “self” based on interactions of three factors: cultural values and traditions, social norms and political ideologies, and psychological attributes. Based on this model, he argued that the Chinese conception of self stresses “continuity of family, societal roles, the supremacy of hierarchical relationships, compliance with authority, and the maintenance of stability” (p. 285). Therefore, identity is “largely externally ascribed, subordinated to the collective, and seeks fulfillment through performance of duty, ordained roles, and patterns of filial loyalty.” Bedford and Hwang (2003) have proposed the idea of the “great self” (*da wo*), whereby the boundary of self is extended to include family members.

Chan (1995) also discusses the lack of a concept of an “individual identity” in the Chinese culture. He proposed that in East Asian cultures such as Chinese, Japanese, and Thai, there is only a group identification and one is always placed in a network of kinship. He also used an interesting linguistic example to illustrate this point:

In both Cantonese and Mandarin, the main languages of China, individuals are rarely called or referred to by their given names but are consistently named only by their family role of first daughter, second son, big sister, little brother, or fourth paternal aunt, to the extent that an individual's exact

position in the hierarchy of the family structure is described by what she or he is called. A relative's exact relationship is signified by his or her "name," with different terms for relatives on the maternal and paternal side along with attached numbers indicating birth order from eldest to youngest. (pp. 95–96)

This linguistic example is not incidental, in that in Chinese, one's last name/family name (inherited from one's family, usually the paternal side) always goes before the first name (given at birth by one's parents or other significant people), which is opposite to the Western tradition of having one's first name go before the last name. In other words, one's heredity and family are identified before one's individual self. In addition, in China, the same generation within an extended family is usually given the same middle name, signifying their position in the hierarchical family kinship system.

Some have challenged the cultural validity of the construct "emerging adulthood" with regard to the Chinese population. Nelson et al. (2004) hypothesize that, as a result of placing more emphasis on practices that lead to early transition into adulthood (e.g., marriage, education, and obligation to others), "emerging adulthood" may be abbreviated, or may not exist at all, in traditional, non-Western cultures. Nelson et al. surveyed 207 college students in a large urban university located in Beijing, China, and asked them about issues pertaining to emerging adulthood. Results revealed that the majority of their participants in their early 20s (a) believed they had reached adulthood, (b) have culturally specific criteria for adulthood (e.g., "Accept responsibility for the consequences of your actions," "become less self-oriented, develop greater consideration for others"), and (c) demonstrated values and behaviors that differ from their counterparts in Western cultures (e.g., the item "capable of supporting parents financially" ranked near the top). Although the theme of self-sufficiency and self-reliance has been reported repeatedly as among the primary criteria for adulthood in the West (e.g., "accepting responsibility for one's self," "becoming capable of making independent decisions," and "becoming financially independent"), Chinese college students seemed to have endorsed collectivistic criteria such as compliance with social norms and family responsibilities.

Finally, some scholars have questioned how identity should be measured in cross-national research. Berman and his colleagues (2011) conducted an empirical study to examine the cross-cultural validity of three identity constructs—identity exploration, identity commitment, and identity distress—by testing the factor invariance among participants from mainland China, Taiwan, Japan, and the United States using the Ego Identity Process Questionnaire (EIPQ) and the Identity Distress Scale (IDS). The IDS was found to be characterized by the same factor structure across all four countries. However, factorial invariance was not found for the

EIPQ Exploration scale and was only partially found for the Commitment scale. The authors questioned the cross-cultural validity of the EIPQ—especially the Exploration subscale—and suggested that Western conceptions and measurement of identity formation may not be applicable to non-Western countries. In particular, whereas the Western model of identity formation, rooted firmly in values of individualism and independence, conceptualizes the process of identity formation as active exploration and experimentation, Asian cultures that are rooted in collectivism and interdependence may promote a different route to identity formation that emphasizes accepting and embracing one's social and familial roles (Berman et al., 2011). In other words, it is possible that some patterns of identity formation, such as those associated with the foreclosed identity status, may be more adaptive in Asian cultures than in the West.

Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter, we have focused our attention on a non-Western population, namely Chinese adolescents and emerging adults. The lived experiences of these youth may provide a perspective on the challenges and opportunities faced by youth in developing countries in an increasingly globalized world. As we discussed earlier, the current generation of Chinese youth is a product of unique cultural values (e.g., Confucianism, filial piety, and collectivism), internal social political reforms (e.g., “open door policy” and “one-child policy”), and external influences (e.g., globalization)—forces that provide non-Western youth with mixed messages and conflicting values to reconcile. As a result, the already challenging process of identity formation is further complicated for Chinese youth: Although some embrace the global culture with great enthusiasm by proudly announcing themselves to be global citizens, others hold on to their local culture; and still others find themselves either trying to balance or reject both the global and the local cultures. Although identifying with the global culture may be desirable, preliminary empirical data points to the psychological benefits of maintaining contact with one's cultural roots and heritage, both for immigrants and for those who deal with globalization in their own nations.

In reviewing the extant literature on identity formation among Chinese adolescents and emerging adults, we found gaps in several areas: The majority of research has been conducted on Chinese Americans rather than on Chinese youth in China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan; and research that has been conducted in Chinese contexts has focused primarily on urban youth. Additionally, youth in the United States have been used routinely as the norm for comparison, which may result in viewing other cultural contexts as pathological or non-normative. On a positive note, we observed how culturally relevant constructs, such as shame, Confucian

philosophy, filial piety, and collectivism, have been studied and incorporated into research on Chinese adolescent identity formation. We argue that, without an understanding of these key concepts in the Chinese culture, identity formation cannot be properly studied within this population. A more comprehensive understanding of the Chinese psyche and identity calls for both a strong theoretical framework and empirical research that encompasses and interconnects indigenous concepts into a holistic system.

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