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PREVIEW

**CHINESE ADOLESCENTS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE FAMILY
DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES AND THE PARENT-ADOLESCENT
COMMUNICATION AND RELATIONSHIP**

by

Yan R. Xia

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

**Interdepartmental Area of
Major: Human Resources and Family Sciences**

Under the Supervision of Professor John DeFrain

Lincoln, Nebraska

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Chinese Adolescents' Involvement in Family Decision-Making Processes

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GRADUATE COLLEGE
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA

**CHINESE ADOLESCENTS' INVOLVEMENT IN FAMILY
DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES AND ITS ASSOCIATION WITH THE
PARENT-ADOLESCENT COMMUNICATION AND RELATIONSHIP**

Yan R. Xia, Ph.D.

University of Nebraska, 2000

Adviser: John D. DeFrain

A survey was conducted to examine Chinese adolescents' involvement in the family decision-making processes, and its' association with the parent-adolescent communication and relationship. Seven hundred and sixty-eight Chinese youths and their parents participated in the study. Structural equation modeling was used to analyze the data, which included testing both the measurement model and the structural model.

Chinese adolescents reported the highest input in decisions regarding homework and allowances. Chinese parents made the most decisions over curfews. Both parents and children decided the college major and the level of education jointly. Chinese parents in this study were observed to be less controlling than what was portrayed in the present literature.

The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) has yielded psychometric information about the Parent-Adolescent Communication Scale used with a Chinese population. The CFA has shown that the Open Communication subscale has an acceptable degree of validity and reliability while the Problem subscale has a less desirable one. The CFA has also confirmed that family systems theory can explain and help understand family dynamics, parent-adolescent relationships,

and communication in Chinese families. The open communication between Chinese parents and adolescent children led to a closer, less conflictive parent-adolescent relationship. The problems in the parent-adolescent communication increased the parent-adolescent conflicts. Like their American counterparts, Chinese adolescent boys and girls also experience emotional distance from their parents, particularly from their fathers during adolescence.

The findings in terms of parent-adolescent communication from this study show that Chinese adolescents, both boys and girls, found it easier to talk to their mothers than their fathers. However, adolescents reported increased conflicts with mothers, but not with fathers. One explanation could be the differences in maternal and paternal involvement in parenting. The results of this survey showed Chinese mothers were more engaged in care-giving, and decision-making over daily life issues. The more frequent interactions or communications would increase the occasions where adolescents disagree with their mothers.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Adolescent involvement in family decision-making has been well documented in the last two decades (Belch, Geresino & Belch, 1985; Brown & Mann, 1990; Dornbusch & Retter, 1990; Hanks, 1993; Harbin & Madden, 1983; Liprie, 1993; Mann, Harmoni & Power, 1989; Poole, Sundberg & Tyler, 1982; Rettig, 1993). It has been examined mainly from the perspectives of adolescent autonomy development and competence in problem solving, adolescent delinquency, parent-adolescent relationship, and family environment. The findings from these researches are based on the data that were gathered mainly in the United States, Canada, Britain, Australia, and other countries in western cultural contexts. Little research has been done to investigate the issue about other ethnic groups.

China has the world's largest youth population, but little is known about Chinese adolescents' involvement in the family decision making process, and its association with parent-child relationship as well as their parent-adolescent communication. Chinese tradition values children's obedience to their parents (Ho, Sprinks, & Yeung, 1989). Young people are discouraged from disagreeing and negotiating with their parents. By the same token, autonomy development is not considered as the central task in adolescence as is emphasized in western societies. However, with the rapid economic development in China in the last two decades, this tradition has been challenged a great deal (Yau & Smetana, 1996). In addition, the endorsement of the One Child Family

Policy was believed to have an impact on the way that Chinese parents raise their children (Xia, *et al.*, 1998).

This study used adolescent involvement in family decision making as the central arena of parent-adolescent communication to investigate Chinese parent-adolescent relationship in mainland China. It provides a picture of how Chinese teenagers are involved in family decision-making process, and what Chinese parent-adolescent communication is like. It shall also offers information about how Chinese adolescent involvement in the family decision-making and parent-adolescent communication influence parent-child relationship.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this survey study was to describe Chinese adolescent participation in family decision-making process and its association with parent-adolescent communication as well as parent-adolescent relationship.

Hypothesis

Chinese Adolescent Involvement in Family Decision-Making Process

1. Adolescent involvement has no negative effect on parent-adolescent conflict.
2. Adolescent involvement has no positive direct effect on parent-adolescent cohesion when age, education, openness in parent-adolescent communication, and problems in parent-adolescent communication are controlled.

Parent-Adolescent Communication

1. Openness in parent-adolescent communication has no positive direct effect on

Adolescent Involvement in decision-making process.

2. Problems in parent-adolescent communication have no negative direct effect on adolescent involvement in decision-making process.
3. Openness in parent-adolescent communication has no positive direct effect on parent-adolescent Cohesion.
4. Openness in parent-adolescent communication has no negative effect on parent-adolescent Conflict.
5. Problems in parent-adolescent communication have no positive effect on parent-adolescent Conflict.
6. Openness in parent-adolescent communication has no indirect effect on parent-adolescent cohesion mediated by Adolescent Involvement in decision-making process.
7. Openness in parent-adolescent communication has no indirect effect on parent-adolescent conflict mediated by adolescent involvement in family decision-making process.
8. Openness in parent-adolescent communication has no indirect effect on parent-adolescent Conflict mediated by Problems in parent-adolescent communication.

Parent Education

1. Parent education has no effect on Adolescent Involvement in family decision-making process.
2. Parent Education has no effect on Openness in parent-adolescent communication.
3. Parent Education has no effect on Problems in parent-adolescent communication.

4. Parent Education has no effect on Cohesion in parent-adolescent relationship.
5. Parent Education has no effect on Conflict in parent-adolescent relationship.

Age

1. Adolescent age has no positive effect on Adolescent Involvement in family decision-making process.
2. Adolescent age has no positive effect on Openness in parent-adolescent communication.
3. Adolescent age has no effect on Conflict in parent-adolescent relationship.

Gender

1. There is no difference in adolescent involvement in family decision-making between teenager boys and teenager girls.
2. There is no difference in path coefficients (the direct effects do not differ) between adolescent boys and adolescent girls. Specifically:
 - A. There is no difference in path coefficients from openness in parent-adolescent communication to adolescent involvement in family decision-making processes across the groups (Openness → Ado-Inv).
 - B. There is no difference in path coefficients from problems in parent-adolescent communication to adolescent involvement across the groups (Problems → Ado-Inv).
 - C. There is no difference in path coefficients from parental education to adolescent involvement across the groups (Edu → Ado-Inv).

- D. There is no difference in path coefficients from adolescent age to adolescent involvement across the groups (Age \rightarrow Ado-Inv).
- E. There is no difference in path coefficients from openness in parent-adolescent communication to cohesion in parent-adolescent relationship across the groups (Openness \rightarrow Cohesion).
- F. There is no difference in path coefficients from adolescent involvement to cohesion in parent-adolescent relationship across the groups (Ado-Inv \rightarrow Cohesion).
- G. There is no difference in path coefficients from parental education to cohesion in parent-adolescent relationship across the groups (Edu \rightarrow Cohesion).
- H. There is no difference in path coefficients from adolescent involvement to conflict in parent-adolescent relationship across the groups (Ado-Inv \rightarrow Conflict).
- I. There is no difference in path coefficients from openness in parent-adolescent communication to conflict in parent-adolescent relationship across the groups (Openness \rightarrow Conflict).
- J. There is no difference in path coefficients from problems in parent-adolescent communication to conflict in parent-adolescent relationship across the groups (Problems \rightarrow Conflict).
- K. There is no difference in path coefficients from parental education to conflict in parent-adolescent relationship across the groups (Edu \rightarrow Conflict).
- L. There is no difference in path coefficients from adolescent age to conflict in parent-adolescent relationship across the groups (Age \rightarrow Conflict).

- M. There is no difference in path coefficients from parental education to problems in parent-adolescent communication across the groups (Edu → Problems).
- N. There is no difference in path coefficients from openness to problems in parent-adolescent communication across the groups (Openness → Problems).
- O. There is no difference in path coefficients from parental education to openness in parent-adolescent communication across the groups (Edu → Openness).
- P. There is no difference in path coefficients from adolescent age to openness in parent-adolescent communication across the groups (Age → Openness).

Definition of Key Terms

Family decision-making: Decision making on issues relevant to adolescent children within a family.

Involvement in family decision-making: The proportion of decisions relevant to an adolescent that are made by adolescent alone, parent alone, and parent and adolescent child jointly.

Parent-adolescent communication: The mother/father/adolescent's perception of parent-adolescent communication measured by Olson's Parent-Adolescent Communication Scale (Olson, 1982).

Parent-adolescent relationship: Cohesion and conflict between parent and adolescent child perceived by mother, father, and adolescent child. The cohesion is measured by cohesion subscale of Family Adaptation and Cohesion Evaluation Scale II (Olson, Sprenkle, & Russell, 1979). The conflict is measured by the family accord

subscale of Family Strengths (Olson, 1982).

Theoretical Base

This study is steeped in family systems theory, which can find its roots in General Systems Theory and Cybernetics. General Systems Theory defines a system as an organization of inter-related parts that have purposeful outcome (von Bertalanffy, 1968). It assumes that “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.” Family systems theory applied the key concepts of General Systems Theory — morphostasis and morphogenesis to understand the family. Morphostasis refers to a state where the family acts in a stable and predictable manner. Morphogenesis refers to the ability to change as situation requires. In family systems theory, a family has a tendency to resist the change and to maintain stable (homeostasis). A family is an open and closed system with its own boundaries (wholeness). A family is bounded by time and space. A family has a hierarchical structure of power (Boss, 1992).

Bateson introduced cybernetics to the study of family. Cybernetics describes the interconnectedness of parts within a system or a functioning entity. In cybernetics, a system is self-correcting. Information is transferred in this system in feedback loops. The feedback loops are processes by which the system gets information necessary to correct itself in order to maintain stable. Positive feedback encourages deviation and change while negative feedback reduces deviation and change. Cybernetics makes a shift from a linear to a circular way of thinking. It focuses on the process rather than content (Nicols & Schwartz, 1995).

The implications of family systems theory for family study are that we should not only concentrate on the individuals that compose the family but on the patterns, structure, interaction and communication of the family members. We can focus on process rather than content. Family systems theory provides a framework that allow us to examine events and individuals in familial and social context. Base on this theoretical framework, this research will focus on investigating the family decision making process as the central arena of family communication and the relationship among its members.

Significance of the Study

This study is expected to have an impact on understanding whether and how Chinese adolescent are involved in family decision-making, what the communication and relationship with their parents are like, and how these variables are related. With this information, educators may be able to work more effectively with parents who lack skills of parenting their older children, and who have difficulties adapting their parenting style to meet the changing needs of their adolescent children. With this information, youth advocates may be better equipped to help families with adolescent children with their communication skills so as to bridge the generation gap broadened with the changes in the rapidly-changing Chinese society. With this new knowledge, parents may be better able to deal with problems or conflicts with their adolescent children who seek independence in a culture that emphasizes conformity and collective interests. In the long run, I hope that this research will help educators, youth advocates, social workers, and parents understand and effectively prevent adolescent run-away and adolescent delinquency which have

become a serious concern of China today.

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