Emerging Depressive Symptoms from Early Adolescence to Young Adulthood: Examining the influence of Early Affiliated Collectivistic Values/Traditions

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**Introduction**

Collectivism represents the interconnectedness between individuals where the larger social group (e.g., family, community, and society) encompasses an individual’s own needs. Most often, we think of Eastern cultures as collectivistic and Western cultures as individualistic. Indeed, eastern (collectivistic) cultures emphasize interdependent relationships, group goals, group cohesion, and community cooperation (Matsumoto & Kupperbush, 2001). In these collectivistic societies, all individuals, including adolescents, are expected to give priority to family goals over their own personal aspirations (Fuligni, Yip, & Tseng, 2002). Because cultural contexts have marked influence on social development (Chen & French, 2008), researchers commonly attempt to evaluate social (family) obligations/duties and interdependence within Asian societies (Fuligni, et al., 2002; Phinney, Ong, & Madden, 2000).

Taiwan has maintained a traditional collectivistic Chinese culture for hundreds of years. This tradition emphasizes interdependence with hierarchical authority (Lee, 1996). Taiwanese society, in general, expects youth to respect elders and authorities within the family, at school, and in the workplace. Young people are encouraged to be obedient and conforming and maintain harmony with others. Therefore, to a large measure, their elders’ expectations determine or influence a number of youth decisions and behaviors (Yeh & Yang, 2006).

However, to assume that all individuals in a particular society ascribe to the same collectivistic values in this global environment may not be accurate (Lee & Beckert, 2011). Taiwan westernized rapidly after World War II (Hung, 2004) and much of what was understood about the influence of collectivistic traditions and what was changed by globalization became unclear, especially in understanding adolescent development (Gabrenya, Kung, & Chen, 2006). There has been some evidence, as communication and technology have evolved, that the
value of many Taiwanese youth are rapidly shifting away from collectivism through frequent contact and identification with western culture, via the Internet and mass media (Chattopadhyay & Marsh, 1999; Deaton & Paxson, 2000). Likewise, the degree of abandonment of collectivistic values may differ by regional area within Taiwan (Hung, 2004; Lee, Beckert, & Goodrich, 2010). Lee et al. (2010), in a study of Taiwanese high school students, found that both collectivistic and individualistic values were pervasive, especially in urban areas of Taiwan. Thus, they conclude that, because there are individual differences in cultural value orientations within regions, it is important to assess an individual’s cultural value orientation rather than assuming cultural value orientations based on geographic location (Lee et al., 2010).

Many adolescents born in collectivistic societies, like Taiwan, accepted the family duties when they were young. However, as they get older, they begin to question the emphasis placed on family obligations (Costa, Jessor, Turbin, Dong, Zhang, & Wang, C., 2005). Because of the strong emphasis of academic achievement in Taiwanese culture (Yi, Wu, Chang, & Chang, 2009), Taiwanese adolescents are under added pressures from important adults, including parents and teachers, to perform well in school in preparation for high school entrance exams (Liu, Cheng, Chen, Wu, 2009). The stress to get into good schools could lead adolescents to question why they do not have sufficient individual choices, especially when they are exposed to multiple western models of autonomy and individuation. These feelings might lead to a more convergent and submissive approach in their psychosocial development, more depressive symptoms, and negative consequences to future developmental outcomes. Lee and Beckert (2011) in a survey of over a thousand Taiwanese adolescents found that a complex interaction of situational and agential factors influenced psychosocial developmental patterns in Taiwanese youth. These findings led the researchers to conclude that developmental outcomes, including depression are
influenced by individual factors and environmental factors like cultural expectations and family values.

As Chou (2000) found in a large sample of Chinese adolescents from Hong Kong, depression was quite prevalent in Chinese youth, even for those who scored themselves high in emotional autonomy. Also, recently researchers who study negative outcomes in adolescent development such as aggression (Yan, Wang, Wang, & Shi, 2010) and risk taking behavior (Auerbach, McWhinnie, Goldfinger, Zhu, & Yao, 2010) have found similar trajectories for collectivistic youth from Chinese cultures whereas Le and Stockdale (2005) found delinquency of Asian Americans were strongly correlated with deviation from their collectivistic traditions. In addition, research on parental influence on adolescent self-esteem among Chinese youth found that collectivism was still more closely associated with conformity to parental wishes (Peterson, Cobas, Bush, Supple, & Wilson, 2005) and which in turn serve as a protective factor for youth from problem behaviors. According to the mixed findings in previous literature, the influence of collectivistic traditions on adolescent development remains unclear. No studies to date, in our best knowledge, report the link between adolescent depression, the adolescents’ connection to collectivistic values, and in the context of developmental and educational transitions. Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to identify patterns of affiliated cultural values among Taiwanese youth and their relationship with emerging depressive symptoms at later time point.

**Method**

**Data**

Taiwan Youth Project (TYP) is a longitudinal study on Taiwan’s youth led by the Family and Life Course Research Group of the Institute of Sociology in Academia Sinica. TYP employs
a multi-stage stratified cluster sampling method, with the division of county and city as the first stratum and division of town, county, city, and district respectively as the second stratum. After that, cluster sampling is applied to divide the second stratum into two sub-strata for random sampling. “School” is further used as the sampling unit at the first sub-stratum while “class” is used as the final unit at the second sub-stratum. According to the sampling methods and steps mentioned above, TYP has randomly selected 40 junior high schools (16 from Taipei City, 15 from Taipei County, and 9 from Yi-Lan County). In each of the schools, two classes were randomly chosen and all the students and their parents in the 81 classes were surveyed.

**Participants**

The study sample of present study composted of 2,458 youth from TYP, who completed self-reported surveys on six separate occasions from 1999 to 2004. About 36.5% of this sample were recruited from the urban area, 41.1% were from the sub-urban area, whereas the rest of the youth lived in the rural area. The gender ratio is one in this sample. The majority of the participants reported a family income either between 30,000NT to 50,000NT dollars (24.1%) or between 50,000NT to 60,000NT dollars (22.1%), representing a group as middle class. Most parents of the studied adolescents earned a high school diploma (25.1%) or completed junior high school (24.5%).

**Measures**

*Depression. A mean score of five depressive symptoms (i.e., sad, headaches, loneliness, sleeping problem, and fatigue) was generated for the 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 3\textsuperscript{rd}, 4\textsuperscript{th}, and 6\textsuperscript{th} waves. The response options ranged from one (none) to five (yes, very serious) in this study. Alpha coefficients were .64, .67, .81, and .80. Higher scores represent a severe depression tendency.*
Independent thinking. Three items were used to assess adolescent independent reasoning (e.g., regardless what my parents or teachers’ expectation, I will try my best to work on something I think is important). The response options ranged from one (strongly disagree) to four (strongly agree) in this study. Alpha coefficient was .62. Higher scores represent a higher tendency in independent thinking.

Family relationships. A mean score of seven items (e.g., whenever I am frustrated, I can always get a lot comforts from my family members) were assessed for evaluating adolescent family relationships. The response options ranged from one (strongly disagree) to four (strongly agree) in this study. Alpha coefficient was .85. Higher scores represent a better quality of family relationships.

Respecting authorities. Four items (e.g., obey parental wishes) were used to compose a mean score of respecting authorities. The response options ranged from one (strongly disagree) to four (strongly agree) in this study. Alpha coefficient was .79. Higher scores represent a higher tendency in respecting authorities.

Conforming societal expectations. Five items were asked to evaluating the tendency of adolescents in terms of conforming societal expectations. The response options ranged from one (strongly disagree) to four (strongly agree) in this study. Alpha coefficient was .73. High scores represent a greater confirmatory tendency of youth.

Maintaining harmony. Four items were used to compose a mean score of harmony. The response options ranged from one (strongly disagree) to four (strongly agree) in this study. Alpha coefficient was .85. Higher scores represent a higher tendency in respecting authorities.
Control Variables: gender (1= male vs. 2= female), residency (1= urban vs. 0= suburban and rural), family income (range 1 to 13, a higher rank represents greater family income), assess-ability to massive communication and technology (rank from 1 to 7) and parental educational level (range 1 to 7, 1= elementary school diploma whereas 7= post bachelor degree).

**Result Summary**

The affiliations of personal values as well as practices were subjected to latent profile analysis (LPA) while controlling the influences of gender, residency, family income, media assess-ability, and parental educational level, using the computer program *Mplus, version 6.1*. LPA is a statistical technique that identifies subgroups that characterize the heterogeneity of the population, operating under the assumption of conditional independence. The decision regarding how many classes to fit was made based on Bayesian information criterion (BIC), Entropy, and Bootstrapped Likelihood Ratio Tests (BLRT) (Nylund et al., 2007). The BLRT value tests for incremental model fit, comparing a solution with $k$ classes to a model with $k-1$ classes (Nylund et al., 2007, Vermunt & Magidson, 2002). Lower BICs indicate better fit, but promote parsimony by penalizing models with large numbers of parameters. Higher Entropy value indicates greater precision of classification (Magidson & Vermunt, 2002).

A four-class model was sustained with a lowest BIC, good Entropy coefficient, and a significant BLRT test. These four classes can be loosely labeled as: It is worthy to notice that among these subgroups, they had similar patterns in terms of independent thinking, implying that collectivistic affiliation did not repress or conflict with independent thinking of youth. Gender, assess-ability of media, and parental education had significantly differentiating most pairs of class comparisons. For example, being male with lower assess-ability of media was more likely to be in the group manifest the most traditional values (class 4) than class 1 and 2.
Results from a series of equality test of means of depression scores across posterior probability-based multiple imputations showed that a couple marginal significant differences in terms of depression score were found between class 1 and class at wave 4 (1.275 vs. 1.306, \( p = .05 \)) and wave 6 (1.143 vs. 1.131, \( p = .02 \)), and between class 3 and class 4 at wave 6 (1.248 vs. 1.131, \( p = .03 \)).
References


