



Maternal cultural values and parenting practices: Longitudinal associations with Chinese adolescents' aggression

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A B S T R A C T

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Interrelations among cultural values, parenting practices, and adolescent aggression were examined using longitudinal data collected from Chinese adolescents and their mothers. Adolescents' overt and relational aggression were assessed using peer nominations at Time 1 (7th grade) and Time 2 (9th grade). Mothers reported endorsement of cultural values (collectivism and social harmony) and parenting practices (psychological control and inductive reasoning) at Time 1. While controlling for Time 1 adolescent aggression, maternal collectivism and social harmony indirectly and longitudinally linked to adolescent aggression through maternal parenting practices. Specifically, maternal collectivism was positively related to inductive reasoning, which, in turn, negatively related to adolescent overt aggression at Time 2. Similarly, maternal social harmony negatively related to psychological control that positively predicted later adolescent relational aggression. Results of the present study shed light on mechanisms through which culture may indirectly influence adolescent aggression.

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Researchers have been actively investigating the familial and contextual contributions of adolescent aggression, which has detrimental effects on adolescents' social and emotional adjustment (Dodge, Coie, & Lynam, 2006). Children's behavior develops within a multi-layered ecological system that encompasses both the immediate familial environment and the greater societal and cultural contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). Contextual development models propose that parents endorsing culturally prescribed values adjust their parenting practices in order to promote culturally desirable behavior in their children (Chen & French, 2008; Super & Harkness, 2002). Studies have only partially supported these theoretical models by relating parenting practices to children's aggression (e.g., Chang, Schwartz, Dodge, & McBride-Chang, 2003; Chen, Wu, Chen, Wang, & Cen, 2001; Nelson, Hart, Yang, Olsen, & Jin, 2006) and by relating national and adolescents' cultural values to adolescent aggression (Bergeron & Schneider, 2005; Li, Wang, Wang, & Shi, 2010). However, limited research has examined whether parenting practices that influence the development of adolescent aggression are related to parental endorsement of cultural values. Furthermore, cultural values are largely variable within a nation and parents may also endorse multiple cultural values (Bond & van de Vijver, 2011; Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2008). Therefore, it is necessary to investigate the within cultural associations of parental cultural values and parenting practices and how they function together to influence adolescent aggression. The present research extends the literature by examining the associations between maternal cultural values and parenting practices in the Chinese culture and by investigating how they longitudinally relate to the development

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of adolescent aggression. In particular, we examine how maternal cultural values may indirectly influence adolescent aggression via the mediating role of parenting practices.

Cultural values

Cultural values function to guide an individual's attitudes and behaviors in accordance to what the greater culture considers to be important (Bardi & Schwartz, 2003; Triandis, 1995). Collectivism and individualism are the most commonly researched cultural value dimensions, representing different orientations toward the importance of interpersonal reliance (Hofstede, 2001; Oyserman, Coon, & Kimmelmeier, 2002). Collectivism emphasizes a preference for close ties with other in-group members and interdependent family units (Triandis, 1995). As shown by a recent meta-analytic study, Chinese culture is more collectivistic than individualistic (Oyserman et al., 2002). Although observing cultural values on a national-level is useful for interpreting cross-cultural differences, recent research has acknowledged the importance of investigating variations of cultural values within single cultures (Bond & van de Vijver, 2011; Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2008). Within Chinese culture, the diversity of subcultures, the influence of globalization and the nation's shift toward a market economy (Chen, Cen, Li, & He, 2005) all illuminate the possible variations in Chinese parents' endorsement of collectivism.

In addition, to better understand how culture contributes to Chinese adolescents' aggression, it may be beneficial to observe indigenous values important to Chinese socialization. In Chinese culture, social harmony is a prominent cultural value that promotes positive interpersonal relationships (Bond & Chi, 1997; Bond & Wang, 1982). Although valuing harmonious interpersonal relationships has been viewed as part of collectivism, social harmony has a distinct origin from collectivism in Chinese culture. Social harmony is rooted in Confucianism, an indigenous philosophy that has a long historical standing in Chinese culture (Li, 2006). Moreover, the major measures of collectivism used in previous studies do not include items assessing distinct social harmony (Triandis, McCusker, & Hui, 1990). Although some research has treated social harmony as a personality trait (Zhang & Bond, 1998), it should be acknowledged that, consistent with the common definitions of values (Bardi & Schwartz, 2003), social harmony has a profound philosophical ground (Li, 2006) and conveys what is important to individuals' lives in Chinese culture. Therefore, it is appropriate to treat social harmony as a value construct. Bond and Chi (1997) identified a broadly defined social harmony factor (e.g., national security, social justice) among Chinese adolescents. However, the interpersonal harmony emphasized in Confucianism (Li, 2006), which may be more relevant to Chinese adolescents' socialization, has not been adequately examined. We have therefore created a measure to assess social harmony across different interpersonal contexts in the lives of Chinese parents.

Cultural values and aggression

Recent research among Chinese children and adolescents demonstrates individual differences in overt and relational aggression (Chang et al., 2003; Chen et al., 2001; Li, Putallaz, & Su, in press; Li et al., 2010; Nelson et al., 2006; Xu, Farver, & Zhang, 2009). Similar to American children, aggressive Chinese children experience adjustment difficulties (e.g., peer rejection) (Chen et al., 2005). To explain how cultural environments can influence individuals' aggression, previous theorists have proposed that cultural values regulate the appropriateness and social acceptance of aggressive behaviors between individuals (Bond, 2004). Past research has linked national-level cultural value differences to cross-cultural variations in youth aggression. Using meta-analysis, Bergeron and Schneider (2005) demonstrated that peer directed aggression is less prevalent in collectivistic nations than in individualistic nations. Consistent with these findings, adolescents in predominantly collectivistic cultures showed less aggressive tendencies than their Western counterparts (e.g., Crystal et al., 1994; Farver, Welles-Nyström, Frosch, Wimbarti, & Hoppe-Graff, 1997).

Research relating cultural values to adolescents' aggression has demonstrated that personal values account for more variance in misconduct (including aggression) than cultural origins (Feldman, Rosenthal, Mont-Reynaud, Leung, & Lau, 1991). Additionally, Li et al. (2010) recently revealed that Chinese adolescents' endorsement of collectivism was negatively related to their overt and relational aggression and that their endorsement of individualism was positively related to their aggression. Furthermore, the relationships between adolescent values and aggression were mediated by adolescents' interpersonal and intrapersonal factors. These findings shed light on how value endorsements can account for individual behavioral differences.

Considering that Chinese individuals heavily endorse collectivism (Oyserman et al., 2002), we expect collectivistic values to play a significant role in Chinese adolescents' development with respect to aggression. Overall, a negative association between collectivism and aggression is expected given that individuals valuing collectivism emphasize interpersonal reliance and cooperation and discourage interpersonal conflict, both of which contribute to reduced aggressive behaviors (Li et al., 2010; Triandis, 1995). Similarly, social harmony, a prominent indigenous cultural value in Chinese culture, should also be given more attention in adolescent aggression research. To date, limited empirical research has investigated the relationship between social harmony and adolescent aggression. However, researchers have proposed plausible inhibitive effects of social harmony on aggressive behaviors (Bond & Chi, 1997; Bond & Wang, 1982). In order to promote harmonious interpersonal relationships, individuals are inclined to censure aggressive and disruptive behaviors that interrupt such relationships.

Although there is a growing amount of research on the relationship between adolescents' values and outcomes, little has been done to explore the relations between parental values and adolescent aggression. As children are initially exposed to the greater culture through interactions with their parents, parental cultural values and practices should be taken into consideration when studying children's development of aggressive behaviors.

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