



Personality, career decision self-efficacy and commitment to the career choices process among Chinese graduate students [☆]

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the mediating effect of career decision self-efficacy on the relationship between the Five-Factor Model of personality and the career commitment process (i.e., vocational commitment and the tendency to foreclose) in a sample of 785 Chinese graduate students. The multiple regression analyses showed that neuroticism and conscientiousness related significantly to progress in vocational commitment both directly and indirectly through career decision self-efficacy. High agreeableness related to less premature foreclosure. In addition, career decision self-efficacy associated with greater progress in vocational commitment but also a strong tendency to foreclose. The implications for career development theory and practice are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Career decision making among Chinese graduate students has recently attracted research attention. Due to the expansion of higher education and fierce competition in the free job market, graduate admission has become a top priority for most undergraduates (PRC Ministry of Education, 2006). Nevertheless, most graduate students do not engage in career decision-making activities until in their graduate studies. Surveys have showed that a considerable number of Chinese graduate students have great difficulty in making career exploration plans and lack confidence in identifying their first jobs (He & Zhou, 2006; Wang, Ma, & Cao, 2006). More evidenced-based research is therefore necessary to identify the factors that foster career decision-making progress among graduate students in the Chinese context.

Although substantial research conducted in Western contexts has investigated certain intrapersonal and contextual factors relating to career decision making, we do not know if the identified factors exert similar influence for individuals with collectivism-oriented cultural values (Brown, 2002; Leong & Hardin, 2002). From a social-cognitive perspective, this study examined the effects of personality and career decision self-efficacy on the career commitment process among Chinese graduate students.

As career theorists have claimed, for individuals who first experience the school-to-work transition, commitment to a career choice is a vital developmental task (Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996). Those with high levels of career commitment would have clear occupational preferences and engage in adequate preparation for implementing their career goals. Blustein, Ellis, and Devenis (1989) proposed two operational dimensions of the career commitment process: *vocational exploration and commitment* (VEC) and the *tendency to foreclose* (TTF). VEC describes the progression from a phase of indecision, through sufficient exploration, to a highly committed phase. TTF, on the other hand, involves open attitudes toward diverse experiences

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in committing to a career goal. Given that VEC and TTF represent two different aspects of the goal mechanism, they can be understood in terms of Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994), wherein VEC and TTF would be affected by person inputs (i.e., predisposition) through social cognitive constructs such as self-efficacy.

Although limited studies have examined the relationships between personality traits (e.g., self-esteem and instrumentality) and the constructs of VEC and TTF (Betz & Serling, 1993; Caldera, Robitschek, Frame, & Pannell, 2003), it is still hard to draw clear conclusions regarding the effects of personality due to inconsistent measures used. The Five-Factor Model (FFM; Costa & McCrae, 1992), as the most widely accepted descriptive model of personality, has not been directly linked to VEC and TTF. In fact, related studies have provided several connections. It has been found that conscientiousness, extroversion, and low neuroticism are the prominent personality traits consistently relating to increased career information-seeking and decidedness (Lounsbury, Hutchens, & Loveland, 2005; Reed, Bruch, & Hasse, 2004), whereas low openness is strongly correlated with high identity foreclosure (Clancy & Dollinger, 1993).

Career decision self-efficacy (CDSE) denotes beliefs in one's ability to successfully complete tasks necessary in making career decisions (Taylor & Betz, 1983). The direct evidence has confirmed a significant relationship between high CDSE and great vocational commitment among U.S. college students (e.g., Brown, George-Curran, & Smith, 2003). Likewise, Chinese college students with high CDSE appear to engage in adequate self-exploration and career-exploration (Shen & Shi, 2006). In contrast, the relationship between CDSE and TTF has received less attention. It remains unclear whether individuals with high CDSE would likely adopt an open and flexible approach in committing to a career choice. According to SCCT (Lent et al., 1994), limited efficacy-building experiences and weak self-efficacy beliefs lead to premature foreclosure. Empirical research has further implied that low CDSE is related to high identity foreclosure (Nauta & Kahn, 2007), whereas positive self-appraisal of decision-making abilities is negatively associated with the tendency to foreclose (Berger, 1992). In addition, studies have displayed significant relationships between CDSE and the FFM of personality (e.g., conscientiousness, extroversion, and low neuroticism) for both U.S. and Chinese college students (Chen, Feng, & Zuo, 2006; Hartman & Betz, 2007).

A growing body of studies has extended this research by examining the mediating role played by CDSE in the linkage of personality and adaptive career behavior (e.g., Rogers, Creed, & Glendon, 2008). In particular, it has been found that individuals with different ethnic/racial backgrounds might negotiate the career commitment process differently. Wang, Jome, Haase, and Bruch (2006) reported that, for White college students, personality seemed independent from the commitment process, that is, CDSE fully mediated the relationship between extroversion and career commitment. In contrast, for students of color (e.g., Asians and Asian Americans), neuroticism and extroversion affected career commitment both directly and indirectly through CDSE. However, the study by Wang, Jome, et al. (2006) did not encompass the dimensions of conscientiousness, openness, and agreeableness.

Based on the above studies, the following hypotheses were generated:

Hypothesis 1. Neuroticism (negatively), extroversion, and conscientiousness (positively) relate to progress in vocational commitment. These effects are partially mediated by career decision self-efficacy.

Hypothesis 2. Neuroticism (positively), extroversion, openness, and agreeableness (negatively) relate to the tendency to foreclose. The effects of the first three personality traits are partially mediated by career decision self-efficacy.

Hypothesis 3. Career decision self-efficacy relates positively to progress in vocational commitment and negatively to the tendency to foreclose.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants and procedure

Participants were 785 graduate students (i.e., 428 males, 350 females, and 7 not recorded) recruited from six Beijing universities. They had a mean age of 24.54 years ($SD = 1.37$) and reported no formal work experience before entering graduate schools. They were enrolled in the first year (281, 35.8%), second year (247, 31.5%), and third year (251, 32.0%). Six students (0.8%) did not indicate their study year. The questionnaires were distributed and collected during regular classes. The participants completed the questionnaires voluntarily and their identifying information was kept confidential.

2.2. Instruments

2.2.1. Commitment to career choices scale (CCCS)

The CCCS (Blustein et al., 1989) included two subscales. The 19-item Vocational Exploration and Commitment subscale (VECS) measures progress in attaining career commitment, while the 9-item Tendency to Foreclose subscale (TTFS) assesses openness to career commitment experiences. Participants indicated their agreement with each item on the VECS and TTFS using a 6-point Likert scale ranging from *Never True About Me* (1) to *Always True About Me* (6). Low scores on the VECS represent high commitment to a career goal, whereas high scores on the TTFS indicate a strong tendency to foreclose. The English version of the CCCS was translated into Chinese and translated back into English independently by two Chinese doctoral

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