

Parenting and Emotion Regulation in the Adaptive and Academic Competencies of Chinese American Youth

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This research was supported by a grant from the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health to Jeffrey Liew. In 2010, Liew launched Project CASL (Chinese American Successful Living) to study adolescents' social-emotional and academic adjustment, and project findings are shared in this report. Project CASL 2.0 is in progress, with data being collected on the original adolescent sample who are now emerging adults in college. The Liew Human Development Lab expresses gratitude for the families that participated in this research, as well as the Asian American community organizations and social services agencies and all the research assistants who helped and contributed to the efforts of Project CASL.

Chinese parenting has often been characterized as overly strict and controlling. While strict parental control has been considered a defining feature of traditional Chinese parenting that dates back to Confucian, Buddhist, and Taoist teachings (Shek, 2007), modern Chinese parenting practices appear to have changed with the times with developmental science and a growing body of studies confirming changes in Chinese parenting practices (Kim, Wang, Orozco-Lapray, Shen, & Murtuza, 2013; Way et al., 2013). In the 21st century, Chinese parenting is a combination of traditional and modern ideologies and practices, consisting of *guǎn* (管) and *jiào xun* (教訓) with autonomy support; this type of strictness-supervision counterbalanced by autonomy support is the *yin and yang in parenting* (Liew, Kwok, Y. Chang, B. Chang, & Yeh, in press). This report highlights study findings that challenge the popular notion that overly controlling or restrictive parenting is the best way to raise academically successful children from Chinese and immigrant backgrounds.

Chinese parenting and semantics

Guǎn and *jiào xun* are Chinese concepts that exemplify Chinese parental duties (Chao, 1994). The literal translation of *guǎn* (管) is "to rule" or "to control", and the literal translation of *jiào xun* (教訓) is "to reprimand" or "to punish". However, literal translations often lead to mistranslations or misinterpretations. Semantic translation may better capture or signify the semantics and nuances of the original concepts. From a semantic translation approach, *guǎn* (管) could be interpreted as "to look after or govern" and "to

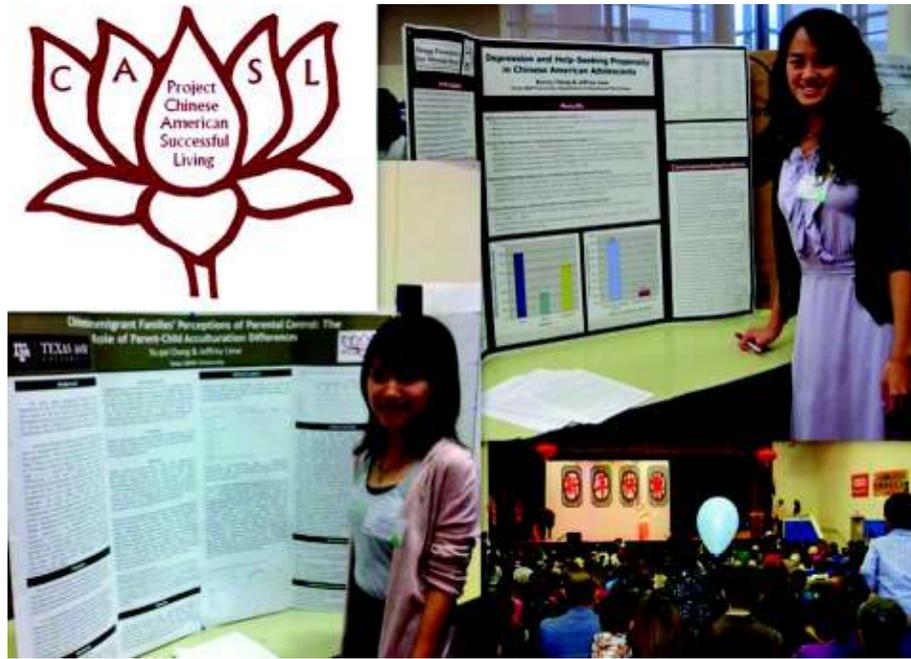
safeguard" while *jiào xun* (教訓) could be interpreted as "to teach or train" and "to discipline." While the literal translation conveys cold harshness, the semantic translation conveys Chinese parental duties of safeguarding and demanding excellence from children (Liew et al., in press).

To those unfamiliar with Chinese culture, *guǎn* and *jiào xun* may easily be interpreted as intrusive or oppressive. However, Chinese parents practice *guǎn* and *jiào xun* out of love and caring for their children. In fact, these parenting concepts overlap with constructs in the developmental science literature on parental control (Shek, 2007). In the study of parental control, it is important to distinguish between parental structure and parental psychological control (Grolnick & Pomerantz, 2009). Parental structure includes monitoring and setting limits, whereas parental psychological control includes pressuring and being intrusive. In our research, we view *guǎn* and *jiào xun* as more aligned with parental structure than psychological control. We propose that when *guǎn* (safeguarding) and *jiào xun* (demandingness of excellence) are counterbalanced by parental autonomy support, this form of parental control is akin to authoritative parenting which consists of high responsiveness and high demandingness.

Autonomy support and emotion regulation

Parental autonomy support is often reflected in parental warmth, support, and responsiveness that predict adolescents' emotional well-being, and this pattern has been found in studies conducted in North America and Asia (Wang, Pomerantz, & Chen, 2007). Emotion regulation research indicates that empathic and encouraging parenting behaviors promote children's self-regulation. Parents' expressions of warmth and positive emotions predict children's effortful control two years later (Eisenberg et al., 2005), and parents' expressions of warmth and positive emotions predict children's physiological and behavioral self-regulation (Liew, Johnson, Smith, & Thoemmes, 2011). By contrast, parental psychological control undermines children's emotion regulation (Wang et al., 2007).

Emotion-related self-regulation (henceforth termed *emotion regulation* for brevity) refers to "processes used to manage and change if, when, and how one experiences emotions and emotion-related motivational and physiological states, as well as how emotions are expressed behaviorally" (Eisenberg, Hofer, & Vaughan, 2007, p. 288). The voluntary and "top-down" aspects of emotion regulation include capacities such as effortful control and executive functions (Blair & Raver, 2012; Liew, 2012). In contrast, negative emotionality



Project CASL members: Yu-pei Chang (lower left) and Bonny Chang (upper right) at the Asian American Psychological Association Annual Convention.

is a dimension of temperament that is more reactive. In our research, we conceptualize the construct of emotion regulation as representing high levels of voluntary aspects of self-regulation and low or modest levels of negative emotionality.

Findings from Project CASL

Project CASL was launched to study factors associated with social-emotional and academic competencies in Chinese American adolescents from immigrant backgrounds. We targeted this sample because these youths often experience bicultural and intergenerational pressures or conflicts. Families were recruited from the Houston area in Texas, USA. Texas is the second most populous and the second-largest of the 50 U.S. states, with Houston being the largest city in Texas. In terms of Asian population in the U.S., Texas ranks third largest in the U.S., with the Houston area having the largest Asian population in the state (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Our sample consisted of 92 Chinese American adolescents aged 14 to 18 years and their parents. While the majority of adolescents (80%) were born in the United States, all parents were first generation Chinese immigrants (majority born in China or Taiwan).

Data for this study were collected with online surveys on 92 parent-adolescent dyads, with the parent and adolescent completing surveys separately. Measures included parental autonomy support, adolescent emotion regulation, adolescent adaptive skills, and adolescent academic achievement. Parental autonomy support (low parental psychological control) was assessed using parent and adolescent ratings of reverse-scored items from the Parental Control Scale (PCS; Barber, 1996). Adolescent emotion regulation and adaptive skills were assessed using parent ratings on the

adolescent version of the Behavior Assessment System for Children - 2 (BASC-2; Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2004). Adolescents reported on their school grades in the subjects of English, math, science, and social studies.

We tested a measurement model for the latent construct of emotion regulation, consisting of emotional self-control, negative emotionality, executive functioning, and anger control. Our measurement model fit the data well. In addition, we examined the mechanisms by which parenting may influence academic achievement. Our findings showed that emotion regulation mediated the effect of parental autonomy support on adaptive skills, while adaptive skills mediated the effect of emotion regulation on academic achievement. Our findings are consistent with the view that overly controlling and restrictive parenting is not the only way to achieve academic success (Kim et al., 2013). For Chinese American adolescents with first generation immigrant parents, parental autonomy support and emotion regulation are promotive factors in adaptive and academic competencies.

Future directions

Our research group has begun work on Project CASL 2.0, a follow-up study on the original sample of adolescents to examine their adjustments as emerging adults and their transition to college and work life. While we used the reversed score of parental psychological control as a proxy for autonomy support in Project CASL, we have included direct measures of parental autonomy support in the follow-up study. For children from collectivistic cultures such as Chinese Americans, limited data exists on parenting and child factors that relate to adjustment outcomes during the transition period from adolescence to early adulthood.



Jeffrey Liew with Project CASL 2.0 team members Xin Dong, Michelle SooHoo and Amanda Lomax (from left to right).

Collectivistic cultures tend to emphasize family obligations and respect for the parents, and a sense of family obligation may have implications for educational, employment, and adjustment outcomes (Fuligni & Pedersen, 2002). The Liew Human Development Lab is committed to continuing research on child and parent factors that contribute to children growing into socially, emotionally, and academically competent young adults.

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