Academic achievement and self-concept: Chinese and Japanese adolescents

Luo Lu
Department of Psychology
Fu-Jen Catholic University, Taiwan

Yu-Chun Lin
Graduate Institute of Behavioral Sciences
Kaohsiung Medical University, Taiwan
Academic achievement and self-concept: Chinese and Japanese adolescents

Luo Lu*
Department of Psychology
Fu-Jen Catholic University, Taiwan

Yu-Chun Lin
Graduate Institute of Behavioral Sciences
Kaohsiung Medical University, Taiwan

Abstract

The present study examined, on the multicultural level, and in the Eastern cultural context, the relationship between academic achievement and self-concept in general and specific domains. Using the multidimensional Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (TSCS, Roid & Fitts, 1988), data from 370 high school students from Taiwan (Republic of China) and Japan indicated that high achieving students had superior views in overall as well as some specific domains of self (physical, moral-ethical, family, identity, self-satisfaction). Mainly for Japanese adolescents, satisfaction with parental relations was positively associated with all aspects of self-concept. The Japanese adolescents were also superior in general as well as some domains of self-concept (physical self, family self, and identity) to the Chinese. Results are discussed in a cross-cultural context taking into account characteristics of the East Asian Confucian societies.

Key Words: academic achievement, self-concept, parental factors, cross-cultural study, Chinese and Japanese adolescents

* Corresponding author. Tel: +886-2-29031111 ext.3812, fax: +886-2-29010171
E-mail address: lulu@mails.fju.edu.tw
INTRODUCTION

Theorists like Erik Erikson (1968) believe that developing a coherent personal identity is a major task of adolescence. Numerous psychological studies have shown that the formation of a stable and positive self-concept is not only one of the major challenges in adolescence but also has widespread and long-lasting effects in many aspects of life (Marcia, 1980; Felson, 1984; Tenner & Herzberger, 1987; Lu & Wu, 1998). Undoubtedly, the school, as a fundamental socialization agent and a focal life domain, has an important influence on adolescents’ development of self-concept.

The nature and development of self-concept

Self-concept as a theoretical construct has both numerous synonyms and definitions. Broadly defined, self-concept consists our perceptions of ourselves (Shavelson & Bolus, 1982). According to Burns (1979), self-concept is a psychological entity which includes our feelings, evaluations, and attitudes, as well as descriptive categories of ourselves. In other words, it is the term we use to represent what people know and believe about themselves. This term also implies that at least the conscious part of our self-knowledge is largely coherent and integrated. However, the full stock of self-knowledge may contain gaps, contradictions, inconsistencies, and loose connections (Baumeister, 1999). It could be concluded that self-concept is cognitive generalization about the self (Cross & Markus, 1994). As a psychological construct, self-concept is manifested outwardly by our personality traits and behaviors, and inwardly by our perceptions and feelings of ourselves and the social world. For instance, the quality of self-concept is related to depression (Lu & Wu, 1998) or happiness (Diener, 1984), to behavioral performance such as task effort and persistence (Felson, 1984).

Psychologists have long been interested in the nature and formation of one’s self. As one of the most articulate theorists of the self, William James (1890) believed that the self-concept is very much a social experience. In agreement with his emphasis on the social nature of the self, Charles Cooley (1902) introduced the term “looking-glass self” to convey the idea that self-concepts reflect the evaluations of other people around us. George Herbert Mead (1934) and Harry Stack Sullivan (1953) further elaborated this idea into the principle of reflected appraisals, we see ourselves as others see us. Other people are clearly important to the development of our self-concept, and research has shown that parental appraisals as well as peer evaluations are vital for the self views of adolescents (Hoel, 1984).

However, the self is active and the outcomes of our own actions contribute to our self-concept too (Gekas, 1982). More crucial perhaps is our interpretations of these actions and outcomes. According to the self-perception theory (Bem, 1972), we become aware of ourselves by watching what we do, much as outside observers form judgments of us based on what they see. It can be concluded then both our own action and the views of others contribute to our self-concept. For adolescents, school work is a focal task in their life, hence understandably a major target of others’ evaluations of them as well as their own perceptions of themselves. Indeed, the relationship between academic achievement and self-concept has attracted much scientific interest, but the issue is far from conclusive.

Academic achievement and self-concept

Several studies have demonstrated that in adolescents, self-concept might be closely related to academic achievement (Marsh, 1990). Nonetheless, the causality of the relationship is still under debate. Two contrasting views purport different directions of the causal relationship. The self-enhancement theory proposes that students’ self-concept is the causal determinant of academic achievement. For instance, in a prospective study, House (1993) found that US college students’ self-concept of their overall academic ability was the most powerful predictor of their actual academic performance. However, the opposing skill-development theory argues that self-concept is shaped at least partly by academic achievement. For instance, in a two-wave panel study, 3 cohorts of Norwegian elementary and middle school students were surveyed (Skaalvik & Valas, 1999). Results were consistent with a skill-development model in all cohorts, and no evidence was found to support the self-enhancement model. In the light of conflicting research evidence, it seems plausible to postulate that the relationship between academic achievement and self-concept is a mutual and reciprocal one. Indeed, this reciprocal influence was found among Chilean elementary school children in a recent study (Villarroel, 2001).

Other researchers have looked at the issue of specificity regarding the self-concept and achievement relationship. Most studies have ascertained a low correlation between academic achievement and domain-specific self-concept (Marsh, 1990, 1994; Watkins & Gutierrez,
1990; Marsh & O’Neill, 1984; Kobal & Musek, 2001), but found very little contribution of academic success to other self-concept domains (e.g. the sexual component), and vice versa (Marsh & O’Neill, 1984; Offer et al., 1988; Kobal & Musek, 2001). It seems that academic success is related primarily to the academic or scholastic components of self-concept. However, the puzzling incompatibility between academic achievement and general self-concept may be due to both methodological and theoretical flaws in the extant literature.

Methodologically, in order to systematically examine the relationship between academic success and general self-concept, the measure of latter must include all major categories of the self components. Although the most popular Self-Description Questionnaire (SDQ, Marsh, Smith & Barnes, 1983; Marsh & O’Neill, 1984) purports to measure multidimensional aspects of self-concept, its specificity seriously limits its utility as a measure of overall evaluation (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991). In addition, its earlier versions are susceptible to response bias and social desirability responding. Thus much of the research has flaws for using the SDQ. As an alternative, the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (TSCS, Roid & Fitts, 1988) offers a balance between general and specific facets similarly based on a multidimensional view of the self-concept. Particularly, the five categories measured by TSCS, physical self, moral-ethical self, personal self, family self, and social self, are comprehensive and theoretically meaningful. We therefore adopted TSCS to examine the relationship between academic achievement and non-academic aspects of self-concept.

**Academic achievement, self-concept, parental factors and culture**

The theoretical issue involved in the academic success and general self-concept relationship is related to culture. According to cross-cultural studies of self-concept of adolescents (Robinson, Tayler & Piotat, 1990), the structure of students’ self-concept may vary interculturally (from low- to high-achievers amongst different countries). For instance, Robinson and Tayler (1989) founded that Japanese pupils showed the culturally expected signs of modesty on self-concept in a 3-country study. A recent Slovenia-France comparison study (Kobal & Musek, 2001) found significant correlations between academic achievement and various indices of self-concept, which varied in a nationality-dependent fashion. However, no significant differences were found between English and Latvian students (Robinson & Breslav, 2000). It is obvious that cross-cultural studies in this area are still a rarity, and even fewer involved non-Western participants.

It has now been widely recognized that culture has an immense effect on its members’ self views, which in turn has significant implications for cognition, emotion, motivation, and subjective well-being (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Lu et al., 2001). Culture also affects the relationship between academic achievement and self-concept. In the Confucian East Asian societies, most notably the Chinese and Japanese, self is viewed as interdependent with others and intrinsically embedded in social relations. Achievement is important as a means to preserve and expand the prosperity and vitality of one’s family, the most important collective for the Chinese and Japanese (Lu, 2001). Achievement is not only socially oriented (Yu & Yang, 1994), but also regarded as fulfillment of a sacred social duty (Lu, 2001). Markedly different from Western societies, education and academic success have tremendous value for both parents and children in the Chinese and Japanese societies. Social institutions also sanction this emphasis on education and academic success. In both societies, students have to pass a string of entrance exams to move up the educational ladder. As higher education is prerequisite for a privileged social status and affluent life, stress related to entrance exams is phenomenal for parents and students alike (Kao & Lu, 2001). We can thus hypothesize that academic achievement would have a prevailing effect on non-academic aspects of self-concept for both Chinese and Japanese students.

In addition, previous research showed that parental factors were also important to adolescents’ self-concept (Hoelter, 1984), and academic performance (Kao & Lu, 2001). For instance, after reviewing extensive Chinese research on the relationship between parental rearing attitudes and various indices of children behaviors, Yang (1986) concluded that positive parental rearing attitudes and behaviors are conducive to children’s positive self-concepts, improved self-esteem, enhanced academic performance, better life adjustment in general, and prevention of behavior deviations. Negative parental rearing attitudes and behaviors generally produce the opposite effects on children. A more recent study also found that negative parental factors, such as rejection, inconsistency, and excessive expectations, contributed to Chinese adolescents’ trait anxiety, which in turn heightened feelings of stress (Kao & Lu, 2001). As in Confucian societies such as the Chinese and Japanese, parents hold a critical role in their children’ socialization, including the shaping and formation of the self (Lin & Wang, 1995), the relative importance of academic achievement and parental factors to adolescents’
self-concept is thus an interesting empirical question to explore. The general impression is that with a more prevailing authoritarian family climate in Japan (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), parental factors may be more important to Japanese adolescents’ well-being than that of their Chinese counterparts.

Traditionally, the focus of psychology has been on negative states rather than on positive ones. The study of parental factors is no exception, as most of the extant work focuses on negative aspects of the parent-child relationship, such as authoritarian control and rejection. However, recently more attention is being paid to the study of human strengths and optimal functioning. This “positive psychology” is seen as an alternative to the predominant focus on pathology and deficits. Our present enquiry on academic achievement and positive self-concept is in accordance with this perspective. Furthermore, we felt that much of the effects of various parental factors could be captured in a positive construct of psychological quality of the parent-child relationship, supplementing the often negatively phrased constructs of parental attitudes and behaviors. Adolescents’ perceived satisfaction of the parent-child relationship was thus used as an overall index in the present study.

To sum, although the relationship between academic achievement and self-concept has been the subject of a number of psychological studies, mostly in the West, some questions are still unresolved. We therefore designed a cross-cultural study to further systematically examine the relationship in a non-Western cultural context. The main thrust of the present study was to examine, on the multicultural level, and in the Eastern cultural context, the association between academic achievement and non-academic aspects of self-concept in general and specific domains. Specifically, our hypotheses were: (1) Differences in the levels of academic achievement in adolescents would be reflected in both general and specific components of self-concept. Specifically, for both Chinese and Japanese adolescents, high-achievers would have more superior overall and specific self-concept than low-achievers.

(2) Chinese and Japanese adolescents would differ in various components of self-concept, though we did not have sufficient grounds to make specific predictions and treated the issue as an empirical exploration.

(3) The relative importance of academic achievement and parental factors to adolescents’ self-concept would differ across cultures. Specifically, parental factors would be more important to Japanese adolescents’ self-concept than that of their Chinese counterparts.

METHODS

Subjects

A total of 370 high school students (162 males, 208 females) from Taiwan (Republic of China) and Japan took part in the study. They were in the final year of high school and facing an impending university entrance exam, the most important qualifying exam in their lives. The Taiwanese sample (153 participants) was drawn from one high school in a northern county, and the Japanese sample (217 participants) from a central county. They were selected on the grounds of comparable educational programs, school prestige, and similar age (17-18 years).

Measurements and variables

1. Self-concept. Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (TSCS, Roid & Fitts, 1988) was applied as a measure of self-concept. TSCS is designed to be simple, widely applicable, and multidimensional. It is intended for use with adolescents aged 12 and over. The scale can produce a total score and 5 categorical scores: physical self, moral-ethical self, personal self, family self, and social self. Three additional scores: behavior, self-satisfaction, and identity are also produced. TSCS is one of the most popular self-concept scales, and validation support is present (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991). The special reason for choosing TSCS is the availability of its Chinese and Japanese versions, and its frequent use with Chinese students (Wang, 1991; Chen, 1995).

2. Academic achievement. School marks were used as the basis to quantify academic achievement. In the realm of the school scenario, school marks remain the predominant determinants of the subjective interpretation of academic success. Thus, for our purposes, school marks are more relevant and appropriate indicators of academic achievement as related to self-concept.

However, the operationalization of school marks were different for the Taiwanese and Japanese samples to reflect the different educational systems and practice in the two countries. In Taiwan, a long-standing practice exists to sort students into different classes according to their school marks. Research has shown that students in “special (gifted) classes” and “ordinary classes” were markedly different in academic motivation, academic performance, exam
stress, and anxiety (Wang, 1991; Kao & Lu, 2001). Thus, class labeling does reflect students' actual academic performance and other school-related factors. We had two special classes and two ordinary classes in our Taiwanese sample. Students of the former were grouped as high-achievers (coded "2"), and those of the latter as low-achievers (coded "1").

In Japan, a different conversion exists. Since 1960s the “reference score” was introduced and has been used to judge the likelihood of students’ entry to universities. The reference score represents the standing of a particular student in a group, calculated based on the standardized z score in a nation-wide mock exam. In Japan, the reference score corresponds to the levels of university prestige. A reference score above 50 usually enables a student to enter prestigious national universities, and a score below 50 means entering private universities at best. Thus in our Japanese sample, those with a reference score of 50 and above were grouped as high-achievers (coded “2”), and the rest as low-achievers (coded “1”).

3. Parental factors. Adolescents’ perceived satisfaction of the parent-child relationship was used as an overall index in the present study. This was rated on a 5-point scale, ranging from “very satisfied” (5) to “very dissatisfied” (1).

Some general demographic information (e.g. age, gender, socio-economic variables) was collected too.

Procedure and statistical treatment of data

The collection of data took place in one high school in Miaoli (Taiwan), and one high school in Hyogo (Japan). The participants completed the entire questionnaire battery (in the appropriate language) in class. The data were then analyzed with SPSS 10.0.

Results

As the operationalization of academic achievement was different in our Taiwanese and Japanese samples, data were first analyzed mono-culturally. This treatment of the data enabled us to systematically examine the relationship between academic achievement and various aspects of self-concept within the distinct social and educational context of each country. Later, data on self-concept were contrasted between Taiwan and Japan for a direct comparison.

Academic achievement and self-concept

Independent sample t tests were conducted to explore differences in self-concept between high- and low-achievers in Taiwan (N=79 and 74). Three significant results were found, indicating that high-achievers were superior in physical self, moral-ethical self, and self-identity to low-achievers (see Table 1). Similar t tests were conducted with the Japanese data, to explore differences in self-concept between high- and low-achievers (N=78 and 41). Five significant results were found, indicating that high-achievers were superior in family self, moral-ethical self, self-satisfaction, self-identity, and overall self-concept (also see Table 1). These results were generally consistent with our first hypothesis that for both Chinese and Japanese adolescents, high academic achievement was associated with a more positive self-concept, specifically with those aspects seemingly unrelated to academic ability.

Table 1. Differences in self-concept between high- and low-achievers in Taiwan and Japan.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Self-concept</th>
<th>Chinese Mean</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Japanese Mean</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical self</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>37.09</td>
<td></td>
<td>37.93</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L</td>
<td>36.00</td>
<td>2.01*</td>
<td>37.05</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral-ethical self</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>38.46</td>
<td></td>
<td>38.46</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L</td>
<td>37.28</td>
<td>2.07*</td>
<td>34.76</td>
<td>3.27**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal self</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>33.76</td>
<td></td>
<td>34.47</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L</td>
<td>34.57</td>
<td>-1.61</td>
<td>33.54</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family self</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>35.32</td>
<td></td>
<td>38.79</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L</td>
<td>35.08</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>35.55</td>
<td>2.17*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social self</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>35.63</td>
<td></td>
<td>36.37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L</td>
<td>35.99</td>
<td>-72</td>
<td>33.93</td>
<td>1.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>59.91</td>
<td></td>
<td>64.94</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L</td>
<td>57.70</td>
<td>3.20**</td>
<td>60.98</td>
<td>2.00*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-satisfaction</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>58.72</td>
<td></td>
<td>59.30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L</td>
<td>59.57</td>
<td>-1.08</td>
<td>54.79</td>
<td>2.04*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavior</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>61.62</td>
<td></td>
<td>61.66</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L</td>
<td>61.65</td>
<td>-0.4</td>
<td>59.18</td>
<td>1.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>180.25</td>
<td></td>
<td>183.90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L</td>
<td>178.92</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>173.83</td>
<td>2.02*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<.05  **p<.01
Relative importance of academic achievement and parental factors to self-concept

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to explore the relationship between perceived parental satisfaction and self-concept for the Chinese and Japanese students separately. There was only one significant correlation (self-identity) for the Chinese adolescents, but all correlations were significant for the Japanese sample (see Table 2). Taken as a whole, these results suggested that a satisfying parental relationship is associated with a positive general self-view as well as positive views in specific aspects of the self, more pronounced perhaps for the Japanese students.

| Table 2. Pearson correlation between self-concept and parental satisfaction. |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Physical self   | 0.05             | 0.15*             |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |
| Moral-ethical self | 0.30             | 0.18**           |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |
| Personal self   | 0.02             | 0.26***         |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |
| Family self     | 0.11             | 0.38***         |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |
| Social self     | 0.06             | 0.19**          |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |
| Identity        | 0.15*           | 0.28***          |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |
| Self-satisfaction | 0.01           | 0.31***        |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |
| Behavior        | 0.02             | 0.25***         |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |
| Total           | 0.05             | 0.30***         |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |

*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001****

In order to further explore the relative unique contribution of academic achievement and parental satisfaction to self-concept, stepwise method was used in a series of regression analysis. Academic achievement (dummy coded) and parental satisfaction were independent variables, and various aspects of self-concept (9 in all as listed in Tables 1 & 2) were dependent variables. For the Chinese sample, in all nine regression models, academic achievement predicted physical self (β=.16, p<.05), moral-ethical self (β=.17, p<.05), and self-identity (β=.25, p<.01). Parental satisfaction however, did not add significant contributions to self-concept over and above academic achievement.

For Japanese students, in all nine regression models, academic achievement predicted moral-ethical self (β=.32, p<.05), family-self (β=.29, p<.05), self-identity (β=.33, p<.05), and overall self-concept (β=1.40, p<.01). Parental satisfaction predicted family self (β=.48, p<.001), personal self (β=.39, p<.01), social self (β=.35, p<.01), self-identity (β=.31, p<.01), self-satisfaction (β=.48, p<.001), and overall self-concept (β=.40, p<.01). Taken as a whole, our results suggested that academic achievement was more important than parental factors to self-concept of the Chinese students, whereas the two were equally important to the Japanese students. Our third hypothesis was thus generally supported.

Self-concept: Chinese vs. Japanese

A direct comparison between the Chinese and Japanese samples on self-concept was conducted using independent sample t tests. Results showed that Japanese students exceeded Chinese in some domains of self-concept: family self (37.97 vs. 35.20, t=5.00, p<.001), physical self (37.90 vs. 36.56, t=2.56, p<.01), self-identity (64.85 vs. 58.84, t=7.86, p<.001), and overall self-concept (183.71 vs. 179.61, t=2.17, p<.01). The two samples were not different though in their perceived parental satisfaction. Our second hypothesis regarding possible cultural differences in adolescents self-concept was generally supported, with results showing a superior pattern of Japanese students over their Chinese counterparts.

DISCUSSIONS

In the present study, we hypothesized that high academic achievement would be associated with a more positive self-concept, specifically with those aspects seemingly unrelated to academic ability. Our data from both the Chinese and Japanese adolescents generally supported this hypothesis. These results were also concordant with previous observations that gifted and high-achieving Chinese students had higher achievement motivation, better self-concept, lower exam anxiety (Wang, 1991), as well as lower trait anxiety, and perceived lower entrance exam stress (Kao & Lu, 2001), than their average counterparts.

The fact that both Chinese and Japanese high-achievers possessed a more positive moral-ethical self-concept, and a clearer sense of overall self-identity underlines the strong cultural sanction and moral values attached to educational success in Confucian societies (Yu & Yang, 1994). Virtue is the central theme of the Confucian world view, and morality is the necessary condition for human happiness (Lu, 2001). For scholars and social elite, the self-
completion of moral and ethical ideas (i.e. virtue) should be aspired as the highest state of being and their primary achievement goal. For ordinary people of the mass, family is the center of everyday existence, as one is conceived as only a link in the family lineage and a continuation of one’s ancestors. Therefore, success through intellectual labor and passing exams is traditionally the most prominent way to acquire respectable social status and subsequent wealth for the family. In traditional and modern Confucian societies, state-organized and certified exams (e.g. university entrance exams) have been regarded as fair competitions with equal opportunities for all walks of life. For adolescents of modern Taiwan and Japan, core traditional values (e.g. education and family values) still hold strong (Lu & Kao, 2002). It is thus understandable that academic success is seen as a moral-ethical achievement, as well as a contribution to the family glory. Academic success also helps to strengthen the self-identity of a useful, good person and promotes self-satisfaction in general. This is exactly what we found in the present study.

We also hypothesized that parental factors would be important to adolescents’ self-concept along with academic achievement. However, the relative importance of the two may vary across cultures, with parental factors being more important to Japanese adolescents’ self-concept than that of their Chinese counterparts. This hypothesis was generally supported. We found that a satisfying parent-child relationship from the adolescents’ perspective was associated with a superior self-concept across the board in the Japanese sample. The perceived satisfaction towards parents was also associated with a superior self-identity in the Chinese sample. Regression analyses further confirmed that while academic achievement was important for both the Chinese and Japanese adolescents, parental factors had unique incremental power in predicting Japanese students’ positive self-concept.

These findings are concordant with previous research on parental rearing attitudes. Parish and McCluskey (1992) found that students’ self-concept was associated with the caring parenting style. Many studies with Chinese students have also found a consistent pattern: parents’ confidence in, caring, acceptance, and encouragement of their children is advantageous to the development of self-concept (Li, 1988; Lu, 1980; Chen, 1981). Our present findings are also complimentary to previous observations that negative parenting attitudes (e.g. rejection) were conducive to students’ anxiety and exam stress (Kao & Lu, 2001). On the other hand, positive and harmonious family relationships contribute to personal well-being across cultures (Lu et al., 2001). Thus our current findings have clarified that positive parental factors are related to adolescents’ self-concept development.

With regard to possible cultural differences in adolescents’ self-concept, we found that the Japanese adolescents to be more successful in overall as well as certain domains of self-concept. As both the Chinese and Japanese students reported similar levels of parental satisfaction and were drawn from schools of comparable local prestige, the discrepancies in self-concept cannot be attributed to either academic achievement or parental factors. However, sample bias may be part of the reason. The Japanese students were residing in a metropolitan city in the most developed and prosperous central region of the country. The Chinese students in contrast, were residing in a relatively remote, agriculture-based county. Therefore, the national differences in self-concept found here may be reminiscent of the urban-rural or socioeconomic status-related differences within a single country (Wylie, 1979; Song & Hattie, 1984). Due caution should be exercised in interpreting these results.

It is also possible though that the results obtained in our study reflect to some extent the cross-national personality differences, notably the differences in modesty and self-presentation. Traditionally, both Chinese and Japanese youngsters are socialized to be modest and restrained, especially in self-presentational styles (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). However, the popular young culture is changing fast in both societies following societal modernization and cultural invasions from the West. There is evidence that a traditional interdependent view of self is now coexisting with a modern (Western) independent view of self in East Asian countries (Lu & Kao, 2002; Lu et al., 2001), especially among the educated young urban population (Sinha & Tripathi, 1994). Nonetheless, the Japanese adolescents seem to be leading the popular culture of self-expression at every front in the Asian region, and Taiwanese adolescents are eager to follow the steps (Ju & Lu, 2000). Thus the superiority of the Japanese self-concept may reflect their power position in the young pop culture in East Asia.

CONCLUSIONS

Using a cross-cultural design, and a multidimensional measure of non-academic self-concept, we were able to discern several significant findings regarding adolescent Chinese and Japanese students.
1. High achieving students had superior views in overall as well as some specific domains of self, notably physical self, moral-ethical self, family self, self-identity, and self-satisfaction. Therefore, our first hypothesis was confirmed that differences in the levels of academic achievement in adolescents would reflect in their self-concept.

2. Mainly for Japanese adolescents, satisfaction with parental relations was associated with all aspects of self-concept in a positive manner. Therefore, the theoretical proposition of self-concept being a social experience has received empirical support, in the context of adolescents' familial relationships.

3. While academic achievement was important to self-concept of both the Chinese and Japanese adolescents, parental satisfaction was also important to the Japanese, with a significant incremental power. Therefore, our third hypothesis was confirmed that academic achievement and parental factors would have different relative importance to self-concept across cultures.

4. The Japanese adolescents were superior in general as well as some domains of self-concept, notably physical self, family self, and self-identity to the Chinese. Therefore, our second hypothesis was confirmed that nationality would influence various components of self-concept.

In general, our study has contributed to the existing literature with cross-cultural data outside the usual Western world of psychological research. Our findings with both Chinese and Japanese adolescents have also unequivocally clarified that academic achievement is indeed associated with a wide range of self-concept domains, not least those academic-related ones. It is fair to generalize further that in all cultures that strongly emphasize education and vocational achievement, academic success should be of great importance to adolescents' views of self. These contributions underline the value of cross-cultural studies, especially those sensitive to cultural milieu other than the Western world. In addition, parental factors are strongly implicated in the development of Chinese and Japanese adolescents' self-concept, which deserve more concerted research in the future. Finally, the possible nationality bias in self-concept is an important area too for future research.

REFERENCES

(17) Kao, S.F. & Lu, L. (2001). The relationship between parental rearing attitudes and the
perceived stress of JHSEE among junior high school students. Research in Applied Psychology, 10, 221-250.


received August 13, 2003
revised October 15, 2003
accepted November 4, 2003

學業成就與自我概念：台灣與日本青少年的比較研究

陸 洛
輔仁大學心理學系

林 部 君
高雄醫學大學行爲科學研究所

摘 要

本研究在文化比較的層次上，探討東亞文化圈內青少年的學業成就與其整體及特定自我概念間的關係。研究者對370位台灣及日本的高中生施測「多向度田納西自我概念量表」，並收集其學業成績資料。結果發現：學業成就高的學生其整體及某些特定面向（身體、道德、家庭、認同及自我滿意）的自我概念較優。對日本青少年而言，親子關係的滿意度與各方面的自我概念均有正相關。相較於台灣學生，日本學生在整體及某些特定面向（身體、家庭、及認同）的自我概念較優。研究者在跨文化比較及東亞儒家文化圈的雙層脈絡中討論了研究結果的可能意涵。

關鍵詞：學業成就，自我概念，親子關係，跨文化比較，台灣與日本青少年