



Introduction

Urban China has experienced dramatic large-scale economic growth and social changes over the past four decades. Corresponding to these socio-economic transitions, family socialization and child development have been changed in the Chinese families. **Yet, little is known about how such cultural changes may change the ways in which the self develops in the changing urban China.**

In traditional Chinese society, the cultural values and ideologies about the other-orientation, harmony and emotion suppression were highly encouraged and incorporated into the children's own self-construction (Ho, 1986; Wang, 2004). After moving toward the market-oriented society, developmental trajectories and demands of Chinese children are inconsistent with their parents. Few emerging studies have suggested that as function of such change, Chinese parents are now raising their children to be autonomous, socially and emotionally competent so as to fit in the changing society that is characterized by the open economy and fierce competition (Way et al., 2013). Moreover, youths now are embracing more diverse values (e.g., individualism and liberalism) than before due to the process of globalization and the Internet use (Liu, Chen, Li & French, 2012). **Consequently, the cohort of individuals growing up after the reform (i.e., youth generation) would attain a different sense of self from the cohort of individuals growing up before the economic reform (i.e., parent generation).**

Storytelling as situated within the context of culture is particularly crucial for self-construction and self-understanding. Self-story is not only an integrative narrative of self, but also a psychosocial construction, whereby the role of culture in shaping the self-construction could be adequately captured (McAdams, 2001). Within a changing cultural context, the sense of self associated with the changing cultural values would be manifested differently in the process of meaning-making.

This study thus examined differences in self-development via life stories between parents and youths residing in changing urban China. Based on extant research, we hypothesized that **(1) within-generation, youths would equally reference autonomy and relatedness and yet would express more negative than positive emotions. Parents would reference more relatedness than autonomy; (2) between-generation, parent would reference more relatedness than youths and youths would reference more autonomy, competitiveness and emotions than their parents.**

Method

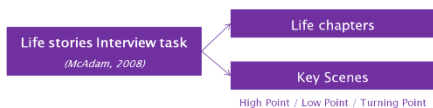
Participants

50 emerging adults (21 males, 29 females) and their parents (13 fathers, 37 mothers) residing in the first-tier cities of Shenzhen and Guangzhou in China.

The youths aged 18 - 25 years old (M = 21.08 years, SD = 2.29) and parents were aged 44 - 57 years old (M = 49.94 years, SD = 3.72).

Materials & Procedure

Part of data was collected in the laboratory in CUHKSZ or at the participants' homes. Due to Covid-19 pandemic, the rest were collected via zoom online meeting room.



Coding

Narrative Themes	(1) Achievement (2) Self-mastery (3) Relationship (4) Health
Narrative Volumes	(1) Word (2) Propositions (subject-verb)
Narrative Contents	(1) Autonomy (2) Competitiveness (3) Relatedness (4) Emotional terms

Autonomy: refer to the tendency of being self-governing and subject to one's law.

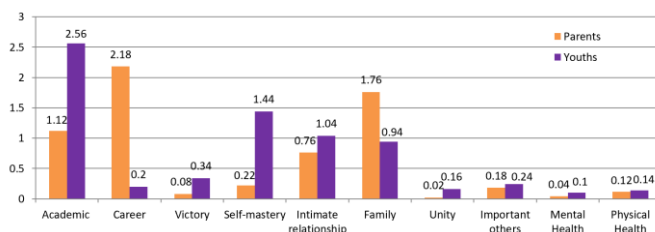
Competitiveness: refer to the desire and motives for comparing self with others or competing with others.

Relatedness: refer to the tendency of being connected with others.

Emotional terms: categorized based on the valence of emotions (Positive vs. Negative)

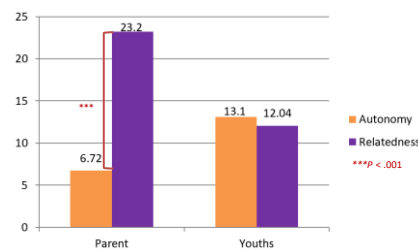
Result

Narrative themes

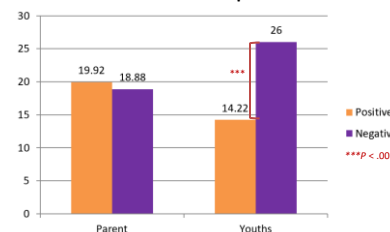


Within-generation

Frequencies of autonomy and relatedness

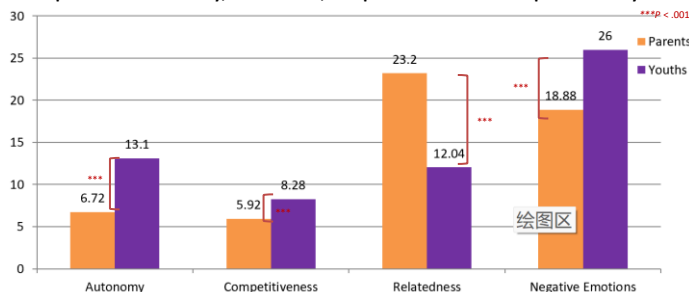


Frequencies of emotional terms



Between-generation

Frequencies of autonomy, relatedness, competitiveness between parents and youths



Discussion

The findings illustrated the patterns of change in self-development between generations as function of the changing urban Chinese context. In the analysis of narrative themes, it suggested that parents still put more emphasis on close connection with family by providing support and sacrificing self for the whole family. On the contrary, youths not only **have strong sense of agency in learning**, but also strive for **perfecting self and enlarging self-knowledge**.

As expected, young people have changed to develop the **autonomous-relatedness self, competitive self and more emotionally expressive** in order to meet the high demand of intense economic development. While, parents still maintain the values of harmony and connectedness and they continued to endorse the **relational self and have less emotional expression**.

In this research, we collected data only in the **first-tier cities** where it took the leading place for the economic transitions and social changes. However, other urban are also experiencing the economic growth with the process of urbanization. Moreover, the uneven economic development constitutes the dual structure society (rural-urban) in the changing China, and thus it would be necessary to incorporate **other regions** into future studies in order to fully understand the changes of self-development in changing Chinese context.