

**Finding Someone to Be:
How Emerging Adults at Universities Conceptualize Their Transition to Adulthood in
North America and China**

by

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Abstract

This article reviews the literature on how contemporary emerging adults view their transition to adulthood with a focus on North America and China. The research will not only provide suggestions for Chinese international students but also the whole population of international students from various cultural backgrounds who are experiencing their emergence into adulthood in North America. The complexity and diversity of emerging adults' development should be explored from various social and cultural perspectives.

Finding Someone to be: How Emerging Adults at Universities Conceptualize their Transition to Adulthood in North America and China

The transition to adulthood is often regarded as a time involving traditional role shifts in the process of entering and settling into long-term adult roles. However, demographic changes—such as delayed marriage and parenthood, increased participation in higher education, and globalization—have taken place not only in industrial societies but also in some developing countries over the past half-century. These changes have altered the period of transition to adulthood into a distinct life course. Arnett (2000) proposed a new concept, “emerging adulthood,” for this distinct life course. It is a unique and prolonged life stage occurring between adolescence and adulthood (between the ages of 18 and 30), during which young people experience frequent changes and exploration with regards to love, work, and worldview. For many young people today, the transition to adulthood is no longer a simple process of fulfilling a series of adult roles, but a journey of multi-layered explorations. This article reviews the literature on how contemporary emerging adults view their transition to adulthood by focusing on North America and China. After comparing the views of young people and their parents in North America and China, some implications will be proposed to

help Chinese international students who are experiencing their emergence into adulthood in North America.

As young people enter adulthood, they may have different perspectives on how to identify their maturity. According to Molgat (2007), everyone has their own set of criteria with which to pinpoint their attainment of adulthood. Those criteria could be psychological, such as making independent decisions or becoming less self-oriented, or transitional events, such as autonomy from parents, finishing education, marriage, and parenthood. This variety of perspectives presents a series of questions that are worth exploring: What are the indicators that young people use to identify their transition to adulthood today? Are those indicators different in developed countries and developing countries?

One of the characteristics of contemporary young people's life paths is the extension of education due to a shift to a knowledge-oriented labour market. According to Global Higher Education Rankings (Usher & Medow, 2010), in some developed countries such as Finland, Germany, France, UK, USA, and Canada, the participation rate (the number of students of a certain age group enrolled in higher education as a fraction of the country's entire population of the same age; p. 42) in higher education for young people aged 18-24 years is over 25%

and up to approximately 40%.

Another report shows that over half of the growth in global higher education enrolment will be in the developing world, with more than half in China and India alone by 2025 (Maslen, 2012). According to the latest data from the People's Republic of China Ministry of Education, in 2015 the average population rate of enrolled college students including undergraduate, Master's, and PhD students is 36% of the college-aged population (18-30 years).

According to the above data, it is evident that an increasing portion of contemporary young people between the ages of 18 to their late 20s are spending their transitional years at higher education institutions all over the world. Studying young people's conception of their transition to adulthood in a college or university context could give us new insights into emerging adulthood. This research will therefore focus on a population of college or university-educated emerging adults.

One of the manifestations of globalization is the growing number of international student sojourners around the world (Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen, & Van Hom, 2002). In accord with the increase in higher education enrolment, the percentage of students

who attend university in a foreign country instead of their home country has risen dramatically in recent years. According to Foreign Affairs, Trade, and Development of Canada (2013), in the year 2013, international students made up approximately 12% of the Canadian university student body, and this population continues to grow. International students comprise a unique subgroup of emerging adults who hold different cultural, ethnic, social, and economic characteristics from the young people native to host countries. Those diversities may influence the international students' understandings of what becoming an adult entails.

A survey of Canada's Performance and Potential in International Education (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2015) shows that students from China make up fully one-third (33%) of Canada's international student population. Accordingly, Chinese international students merit particular attention as they represent the largest population of international students attending Canadian universities. In this case, Chinese international students studying at Canadian universities would be emerging into adulthood in a foreign cultural context. Compared with domestic emerging adults, Chinese international students often face a double challenge during their transition to adulthood—not only are they

acculturating into a new country, but also they are emerging into adulthood (Wintre, Kandasamy, Chavoshi, & Wright, 2015). Those two challenges may be interrelated. The differences with regard to culture, social environment, and language that come with the acculturation process may influence their values and worldviews, therefore changing how they view their transition to adulthood. Experiencing emerging adulthood and entering adulthood in another cultural context means not only understanding what it means to be an adult in their home culture but also an adjustment of their criteria according to the new cultural context. They may feel confused or stressed by the conflict between those two differing cultural and social expectations. The particularly complex challenge of entering adulthood for Chinese international students needs to be explored.

This review will focus on the following questions: (a) what are the indicators that college or university students endorse to identify their transition to adulthood in North America, (b) what are the indicators that college or university students endorse to identify their transition to adulthood in China, and (c) are those criteria for entering adulthood different in North America and China?

The analysis of previous research on emerging adulthood and their perspectives of the

transition to adulthood from two different cultural contexts will shed light on Chinese international students as a particular group who study at North American colleges or universities. The current research will provide Chinese international students with an updated comprehensive overview of how emerging adults view their transition to adulthood in North America and China, thus helping them to better understand their own situation while in a position between two cultures. The research will not only provide new insight for Chinese international students but also give suggestions to the whole population of international students from various cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, the research will also provide implications and suggestions for international educators or mentors, international student offices, and counselling services. Finally, the present study will contribute significantly to the understanding of the development of international emerging adults. This knowledge may provide more comprehensive support for youth and young adult services and allow them to be better designated to meet the needs of emerging adults from different sociocultural backgrounds.

For this paper, I reviewed research on emerging adulthood in North American (USA and Canada, but not Mexico) and Chinese contexts. Relevant research for the review was

gathered through database search engines such as Educational Resources Information Centre (ERIC), the University of Victoria's Library, Social Science Index (EBSCOhost), and the China Knowledge Resources Integrated Database (CNKI). Articles chosen for this literature review include those from peer-reviewed journals, edited volumes, government official websites, dissertations, and theses. Since emerging adulthood is a relatively new area of research, there are few empirical studies on the topic. In this case, the reviewed studies will be limited to highlights of the current body of research. The conclusions analyzed from the research will be tentative. The areas of uncertainty will be identified and we will therefore call for further research.

The search terms used for identifying the relevant literature were: college students, young people, young adults, youth, North American, China, criteria, characteristics, indicators, incentives, challenges of becoming or entering adults, perspectives or conceptions of transition to adulthood, markers or meaning of adulthood, reflection on transition to adulthood, individualistic attribute of achieving adulthood, transition markers or transition role or transition events.

The literature review will include three sections. In the first section, the evolution of

concepts of emerging adulthood from the perspectives of different researchers will be reviewed. The second section of this paper will focus on exploring North American college students' criteria for the transition to adulthood. The third section will examine Chinese college students and their criteria for the transition to adulthood. The inclusive analysis will be provided based on those studies. In the reflection section, the challenges Chinese international students experience in terms of how to navigate the transition to adulthood in a different cultural context will be addressed by offering some suggestions and implications.

Literature Review

What is Emerging Adulthood?

The theoretical framework for emerging adulthood could be traced back to some earlier stage theories of life course development. In 1968, Erikson proposed an eight-stage theory of psychological development, which covers different tasks in each developmental period.

During the adolescence stage, the main task for young people is *identity crisis*. He suggested that young people need an extra period of prolonged immaturity and engaging in role experimentation in order to answer the question, "who am I?" Thus, he termed this time as a

“psychological moratorium” (Erikson, 1968, p. 156).

Levinson (1979) followed up Erikson’s theory and proposed another stage theory of adult development. According to him, young people aged 17 to 30 experience a stage called “novice phase,” which is the early stage of adulthood. During this period, young people prepare to gradually separate from their family of origin (emotionally, financially, geographically) in order to build their adult identity.

Recently, Arnett (2004) proposed a new term, “emerging adulthood,” to refer to young people aged 18 to 30 years, with an emphasis on the age range between 18-25 years, who have left the dependency of adolescence but have not yet fully entered the enduring responsibilities of adulthood (p. 469). Arnett also lists the features of emerging adulthood: identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling in-between, and possibilities/optimism (p. 9).

Both Erikson and Levinson’s theories focus on the age range from late adolescence to adulthood, which is similar to the age of emerging adulthood. Both also believe that an alternative period of time is needed for young people to explore different things, which is also emphasized by Arnett as a feature of emerging adulthood. Moreover, both Erikson and

Levinson mentioned a new identity needed to be built up during this phase, which Arnett termed identity exploration. Thus, it is reasonable to believe that those earlier stage theories are consistent with more recent models of emerging adulthood.

In order to explore how college students identify their transition to adulthood in North America and China, the following sections will review the literature on North American and Chinese young people's perspectives respectively.

Emerging Adults' Criteria for Transition to Adulthood in North America

Many sociologists who study youth transitions mainly define young people's transitional periods according to individual life course transitions such as graduating from school, leaving home, marriage, acquiring a long-term job, and parenthood (Hogan, 1978; Hogan & Astone, 1986; Molgat, 2007). As Arnett (1997) wrote, early research on the transition to adulthood has only focused on examining the standardized timing of role transitions, assuming the life course is defined by different life events. In other words, the investigation of how young people view their transitions was mainly conducted using a standardized series of transition events. Young people's perspectives, in this case, were influenced by those

traditional criteria for the transition to adulthood and they identified their adulthood via specific transitional events (Arnett, 1997; Kohli & Meyer, 1986).

Gfellner & Bartoszek (2015) reported that since the later half of the 20th century, young people have been postponing life events due to macro-level changes, such as globalized economic development, digital and technological developments, and increased participation in higher education. It is possible that contemporary young people's perception of the transition to adulthood may have been changing as socio-economic changes take place at unprecedented levels in North America.

Are young people still using these "old" criteria today? If not, what other criteria do young people take into consideration when identifying their transition to adulthood today? The research that follows all employed the questionnaire developed by Arnett (1994) as a tool to examine contemporary young people's perspectives. Arnett (1994) developed the items of this questionnaire based on literature concerning the transition to adulthood in the fields of sociology, psychology, and anthropology. There are 40 items on the questionnaire, all organized into six criteria categories: role transition criteria (e.g., "finishing education" or "getting married"), psychological criteria (e.g., establishing an equal relationship with

parents), norm compliance criteria (e.g., avoiding using illegal drugs), biological criteria (e.g., becoming capable of bearing children), chronological criteria (e.g., reaching age 18) and family capacities (e.g., becoming capable of supporting a family financially). Arnett's 1994 and 1997 studies all employed this questionnaire. However, he modified this questionnaire in 2001. "Psychological criteria" was replaced by "individualism criteria." What is worth noting is that the items "financially independent from parents" and "no longer living in parents' household" were moved from role transition criteria into individualism criteria, but items within other categories remained the same. In 2003, Arnett divided "individualism criteria" into two categories: (a) "independence criteria" (establish equal relationship with parents; financial independence from parents; no longer living in parents' household; not deeply tied to parents emotionally; accept responsibility for the consequences of actions; decide on personal beliefs and values independently of parents) and (b) "interdependence criteria" (committed to long-term love relationship; make life-long commitments to others; learn to have control over emotions; become less self-oriented), which counted with the other five categories together as seven categories. The researchers who followed Arnett's study employed different versions according to the needs of their studies. For example, Lowe,

Dillon, Rhodes, and Zwiebach (2013) grouped all items into six categories: individualism, role transition, family capacities, norm compliance, chronological transitions, and biological transitions. Cheah and Nelson (2004) employed seven categories. Other researchers have renamed the categories “independence,” “interdependence,” and “role transition” according to their different research purposes and research analyses. For example, Nelson and Chen (2007) organized the items into six categories and renamed “individualism criteria” as “relational maturity.” Nelson, Badger, and Wu (2004) and Molgat (2007) combined the “independence criteria” and “interdependence criteria” as “individualistic criteria” or “individualistic-oriented criteria.” Gfellner and Bartoszek (2015) combined “role transition criteria” and “norm compliance criteria” into “collectivistic-oriented criteria.” No matter what the categories are in each study, the items and framework of the entire questionnaire remain the same.

In research on college students’ conception of the transition to adulthood, Arnett (1994) reported that fewer than 30% of college students consider “role transition criteria” (e.g., graduation, marriage, and parenthood) as important markers of adulthood. However, “psychological criteria” including accepting responsibility for the consequences of actions,

deciding on own beliefs and values, and establishing an egalitarian relationship with parents were highly endorsed by the majority of college students.

Arnett's later research (1997) also found that items that are part of the psychological criteria such as deciding on own beliefs, and establishing an egalitarian relationship with parents were endorsed widely by college students as the significant indicator of transitioning to adulthood. However, the items in role transition criteria were rejected by a majority of participants.

In his follow-up research, Arnett (2001) examined the different perspectives on the transition to adulthood among college students (20-29 years of age) and young adults (30-35 years of age). He found that individualism criteria were endorsed by over 70% of college students as an important indicator of becoming an adult, while role transitions were considered important by less than 20% of college students. In this case, the alteration of individualism criteria and role transition criteria ("financially independent from parents" and "no longer living in parents' household" was moved from role transition to individualism) doesn't influence participants' perspectives.

Nelson and Barry (2005) used a seven-category questionnaire to conducted research on

American college students. The results showed that the item “deciding on your own beliefs and values” within the independence category and the item “committed to long-term love relationship” within the interdependence category were widely endorsed by participants. It is possible that the high rating for identity exploration and intimate relationships during emerging adulthood leads young people to emphasize both the independence and interdependence categories.

Those four consistent studies were focused on a population of white American young adults. Afterwards, in order to examine an ethnically and racially diverse sample of emerging adults, Arnett (2003) conducted more research to investigate how young adults from ethnic minority groups in the U.S. view their transition to adulthood. The results indicated that less than 32% of participants endorsed the items within role transition criteria such as “finish education,” “get married,” and “have at least one child” as important for their maturity. Yet, the items within independence criteria such as “establish equal relationship with parents,” “gain financial independence from parents,” “accept responsibility for the consequences of your actions,” and “decide on personal beliefs”; and items within interdependence criteria such as “become less-self-oriented” were endorsed by more than 70% of the participants.

To further this body of research, Lowe and colleagues (2013) conducted research among ethnically and racially diverse college students at an American urban university. The findings of this research are consistent with Arnett's in that individualism criteria were considered more important than role transitions as indicators of adulthood attainment.

In conclusion, a striking similarity appears from the above research. Nowadays, American college students across ethnic groups emphasize independence and interdependence (make independent decisions, become financially independent, responsible for yourself, etc.) to express their concept of adulthood. In other words, the "old" traditional transition criteria are becoming disassociated from young people's conception of the transition to adulthood, while individualistic qualities are favoured more by young people. Perhaps this shift from role transition criteria such as marriage, graduation, and parenthood to psychological and individualistic criteria is due to extended education in America. The majority of young people of the current generation are attending college or university in order to adjust to our knowledge-oriented labour market. Young people delay marriage in order to gain more education and skills, which would accordingly postpone parenthood. Thus, the discrete events such as graduation, marriage, or parenthood gradually lose prominence

and can occur at various times. This interpretation is supported by Molgat (2007). Molgat explained that young people in their late teens and twenties are not identifying their transition to adulthood as the completion of traditional standardized events. However, does this mean the transition events lose their function as markers on people's life course? The current reviewed research only focused on samples of college students. The other half of the population of young people who do not continue with higher education after high school need to be studied in future research.

Another reason for this trend may be the unique self-focused feature of emerging adulthood. Arnett (2015) explained that emerging adulthood is a self-focused age, thus this age group have a strikingly high intention to explore their internal psychological and emotional growth (e.g., making independent decisions, having control over one's emotions), and demonstrate to themselves and others that they can stand alone as a self-sufficient person. College students spend the majority of their time on campus, thus it allows them sufficient time and space to concentrate on what they're interested in and what they've struggled for in terms of identity, career, and romantic relationships. In this case, young people will never find a more ideal period for free, self-focused, self-exploration time through the course of

their lives.

The third reason for the shifting of beliefs about emerging adulthood could be the influence of North America's mainstream culture. Given that contemporary American young people grow up in an individualistic culture that focuses on personal identity and autonomy, it is natural they would stress their own well being over that of the group or society. Therefore, the criteria they value for the transition to adulthood are generally internal, psychological, and individualistic, which could indicate the extent to which they view themselves as an independent person (Arnett, 1994). In this case, contemporary American young people's perspectives on the transition to adulthood have been changed from "old" criteria to "new" and "individualistic" criteria.

Canada and the United States are relatively similar in their socioeconomic and cultural conditions. This raises the question of whether emerging adults in Canada have the same conception of their transition to adulthood. Such an inquiry will provide insight into the potential role of national or regional influences on emerging adulthood.

Most research was conducted in the United States—the amount of research examining Canadian college students' criteria for entering adulthood is limited. Molgat (2007)

conducted research among college students in Quebec and found individualistic criteria (e.g., autonomy from parents, financial independence, and responsibility for others) were widely endorsed by respondents with regard to their self-perception of adulthood. However, it is worth mentioning that alongside the items within individualistic criteria, almost every respondent mentioned different transition events (such as finishing school, leaving parents' home, getting a real job, marriage, and parenthood) to indicate their adulthood attainment.

Gfellner and Bartoszek (2015) examined whether there are differences in criteria for achieving adulthood among Canadian university students and American university students. The results indicated that even though university students from both countries emphasized individualistic-oriented criteria, the Canadian students showed more endorsement of collectivistic-oriented criteria, which emphasize traditional values and family attachment.

Based on limited evidence, although emerging adults in the United States and Canada appear to have similar individualistic-oriented criteria for adulthood, the extent to which they endorse the criteria is still slightly different. Canadian college students rated collectivistic-oriented criteria including role transition events and norm compliance behaviours higher than did American college students. The reason for the difference, as

Gfellner and Bartoszek (2015) analyzed, is that macro-environmental factors (economic, political, social, and cultural) in different countries shape that country's perception of young people. For example, according to Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov's (2010) description of the national characteristics of Canada and the United States, respect for traditions was higher in Canada than in the U.S. The high respect for traditions of Canadians is reflected in their conservative views on abortion. According to the Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada (2006), Canada is the only democratic and industrialized country in the world that has no laws restricting abortion, however, has a relatively low rate of abortion compared to the U.S. Another reflection is the reconciliation between Canada and First Nations people. During the process of reconciliation, Canadians learned about how First Nations manage and protect their tribes and families, which also have an impact on Canadians' attitudes towards their families. People in Canada, in this case, value family connections and family responsibilities more than people living in the United States. Perhaps this high respect for traditions and family impact the perspectives of the current generation, and the extent to which Canadian young people endorse the individualism criteria is lower than their American peers.

To sum up, young people's perspectives on their transition to adulthood are different

between Canada and the United States. Nonetheless, there is a need for more research to examine Canadian university students and their perspectives on the transition to adulthood.

At the scale of comparing national tendencies, Canada and the U.S. are different. This raises the question about whether there are other differences within national cultures.

The above research suggested that American young people across ethnic groups shared a similar perspective on identifying their transition to adulthood (Arnett, 2003; Lowe et al., 2013). However, some research indeed found that young people from minority groups value family obligations and family relationships more than their white peers due to their cultural heritage of close-knit family relationships.

In a comparison of criteria for adulthood between Canadian Aboriginal college students and their peers of European descent, Cheah and Nelson (2004) found that the Aboriginal groups of emerging adults emphasized role transition criteria (e.g., getting married or finishing education), biological transition criteria (e.g., becoming capable of bearing children), and norm compliance criteria (e.g., avoiding drunkenness) higher than their Canadian peers of European descent. In Aboriginal culture, having children and establishing family are regarded as important parts of community or tribe life. The role transition criteria

and biological transition criteria, in this regard, reflect the collectivistic nature of Aboriginal culture. Also, people are expected to behave properly in order to maintain the reputation of their tribes. As Bear (2000) stated, “the collectivistic need of traditional aboriginal culture is to maintain the balance and harmony of the group” (p.79). Thus, it is no wonder why Aboriginal young people emphasize collectivistic criteria more.

Therefore, young people from different ethnic groups may still have different perspectives on their transition to adulthood. In other words, emerging adults’ ethnicity could impact their choices of criteria.

Another factor that could influence young people’s perspectives is their upbringing environment. Individuals’ upbringing environments often involve residence location (urban or rural area) and their parents’ education level (Fuligni & Pedersen, 2002). In order to explore the possibility that one’s upbringing environment is related to their conception of the transition to adulthood, research on those two factors will be examined.

Arnett (1997) studied how parents’ education level could influence young people’s views of the transition to adulthood. The results showed that emerging adults whose fathers had less than a high school diploma considered family responsibility criteria (e.g., becoming

capable of supporting a family financially) more important than their peers whose fathers had post-secondary undergraduate or graduate degrees. Perhaps an emerging adult's father's education level would influence her own expectations for becoming an adult. The fathers with relatively low education levels did not have extended educational opportunities for self-exploration in terms of their identity and career. They often had early marriages and early parenthood. After they graduated from high school (some did not even attend high school), they had to make a living in order to support their families. Therefore, those fathers were not interested in psychological a criterion that involves cognitive and emotional development, instead, they were more likely to focus on how to undertake their family responsibilities. The young people who come from these families, therefore, are often influenced by their parents' expectations. It is understandable that their endorsement of family capacities is influenced by their parents.

In other research examining the extent to which Canadian university students endorse the transition event as their adulthood criteria, the findings indicated that role transition criteria (graduation, obtaining driver license, marriage, parenthood, etc.) were more likely endorsed by emerging adults who live in rural areas than those in urban areas (Cheah,

Trinder, & Gokavi, 2010). The reviewed literature suggests that Canadian young people consider collectivistic criteria (role transition and norm compliance) to be more important than do their American peers (e.g., Gfellner & Bartoszek, 2015; Molgat, 2007). It is possible that in rural areas of Canada—known for having fewer educational opportunities, lower income levels, limited job options, and greater emphasis on family obligations—collectivism is highly emphasized. Young people who live in rural areas are isolated from opportunities pertaining to career, education, culture, and entertainment, which restrict their exploration and experimentation with regards to self-development. Accordingly, they still place higher value on discrete transition events to mark their adulthood. As Cheah and colleagues analyzed, “different livelihood and socialization experiences may lead to different attitudes with regard to adulthood attainment” (2010, p. 343). In this case, the upbringing background would also impact how emerging adults conceptualize their transition to adulthood.

To sum up, young people’s endorsement of criteria with regard to adulthood attainment could also be different within the nations. Factors such as ethnicity and upbringing background could shape young people’s attitudes toward maturity.

After an overall review of the literature pertaining to emerging adults in North America,

we can suggest that the issue of whether contemporary college students in North America are using individualism criteria or role transitions to indicate their adulthood cannot be generalized as a whole phenomenon to everyone. As Molgat (2007) asserted, further research should be conducted to understand emerging adulthood within ever-changing and dynamic national, cultural, demographic, and socioeconomic contexts. In other words, individual emerging adulthood should be explored and understood by considering various factors, thus, the pathway to adulthood would also be achieved diversely.

All of the criteria that are highly endorsed by college students in the above research, such as an egalitarian relationship with parents, financial independence from parents, and moving out of parents' house, involve the parent-child relationship. If parents play an important role in young people's journey to adulthood, it would be worthwhile to know what expectations parents have for their children's maturity and whether parents share the same criteria with their children.

To investigate expectations or criteria parents deemed necessary for their children's adulthood, Nelson and Chen (2007) conducted a study among college students and their parents, comparing differences in their views. The results indicated that parents' indicators

for entering adulthood were similar to emerging adults' criteria on the aspects of relational maturity (e.g., accepting responsibility for the consequences of their actions, establishing an egalitarian relationship with parents, and developing greater consideration for others).

Despite the consensus on relational maturity criteria, parents and their emerging-adult children appeared to disagree on the endorsement of norm compliance. Parents considered norm compliance criteria (e.g., avoid drunk driving and avoid committing petty crimes) to be more important than did their children.

Jablonski and Martino (2013) examined how parents and their college children communicate children's adulthood status. They found that both parents and children consider items such as financial responsibilities, decision-making, and an egalitarian parent-child relationship as important indicators of entering adulthood.

Based on limited research, both parents and emerging adult children considered relational maturity criteria important in identifying adulthood. In this case, parents and young adults seem to have similar perspectives on the transition to adulthood in North America.

Despite the consensus, there are also disagreements between parents and children in Nelson and Chen's (2007) study. Parents considered norm compliance (e.g., avoiding illegal drug

use or drunk driving) to be more important than did their children. It is possible that parents, as they too were once young, understand and allow their emerging-adult children to have a period of time with which to explore and experiment. However, they don't accept certain behaviours exclusive to emerging adulthood, such as binge drinking, experimenting with drugs, and having more than one sexual partner. Thus, parents expect their children to comply fully with societal norms and behave as moral people.

Furthermore, both studies (Jablonski & Martino, 2013; Nelson & Chen, 2007) had very broad samples including many ethnicities and social classes. Previous research (Arnett & Tanner, 2006; Cheah & Nelson, 2004; Cheah et al., 2010) found that emerging adults' criteria for entering adulthood differs by ethnic background or social class. Therefore, it would be worthwhile to examine whether parent's views on young people's adulthood status would be influenced by those factors in the same way. I did not locate any research that examined this issue.

In order to know how Chinese emerging adults identify their transition to adulthood, the following section will examine the criteria that Chinese college students endorse. Afterwards, the comparison between Chinese young people and North American young people will be

analyzed.

Emerging Adults' Criteria for Transition to Adulthood in China

Arnett (2015) mentioned that the phenomenon of emerging adulthood is not restricted to developed industrialized countries; it is increasingly happening in developing countries as well. The above research found that nationality factors (economic, political, social, and cultural) could impact young people's perspectives of emerging adulthood (Gfellner & Bartoszek, 2015; Molgat, 2007). In this case, emerging adulthood in non-Western societies, such as China, may have specific social and cultural characteristics (Nelson & Chen, 2007).

As a collectivism-oriented country, China has cultural and socio-economic characteristics distinctive from those in North America. For example, Chinese society places greater emphasis on family obligations and group or other-oriented goals due to traditional Confucian beliefs (Triandis, McCusker, & Hui, 1990). Confucian doctrine as the root of Chinese cultural and social values has been imbedded in Chinese culture for over 2000 years (Nelson et al., 2004). Confucius emphasized putting family's or others' needs before one's own and constraining one's behaviours and emotions, also that taking care of family, obeying

parents, and living close to them while they are still alive—so called, “filial piety”—was an essential part of the social order (Lau, 1992). Those beliefs restrict young people from exploring various opportunities with regards to romantic relationships, academic majors, career paths, and identity. For example, in order to fulfil the filial duty, a young male should become capable of supporting his parents financially and bearing children to carry on the family line as early as he can. A young female should be able to marry a decent husband to take care of their parents together as early as she can. Those social duties deprive young people of the chance for self-exploration as they are striving to complete those transitional events (e.g., marriage, finishing school, getting a job, and childbearing) to become a “well-behaved” adult.

Since the late 20th century, China has been going through a series of reforms in economy, culture, and politics, resulting in big changes to the Chinese economic and social structure. For example, the globalization and development of social media introduced the values of freedom and personal achievement into the country, and had an increasing influence on Chinese young people’s ideologies, beliefs, and behaviours (Nelson et al., 2004; Nelson & Chen, 2007).

The new Chinese marriage policies delayed the legal marriage age to 25 years for men and 23 years for women, which also delayed the average childbearing age (United Nations, 2003). Furthermore, the extended education among Chinese young people also delayed their commitment to family and career, allowing them to spend more time exploring and learning new things. In consideration of all these changes, are contemporary Chinese young people using traditional events to identify their transition to adulthood? If not, are they using individualistic criteria endorsed by their North American peers?

Yeung and Hu's (2013) research examined multiple cohorts of Chinese young people born from the 1970s to 2000s and their attitudes toward transition events. A striking difference was found for the youngest cohort, who are now in their twenties. The young people in this cohort were less likely to value role transition as an important indicator of entering adulthood as compared to the older cohorts studied. The surveyed group includes both non-college students and college students. Due to the extended time spent at college, students are usually not in a rush to find a job or get married. In this case, the role transition events seemed unimportant to them compared to other groups.

Nelson and colleagues (2004) conducted research at a university in Beijing. The results

demonstrated that independence criteria such as “responsible for oneself” and “financially independent,” and interdependence criteria such as “controlling one’s emotions” and “become less self-oriented” are highly endorsed by college students. However, transition events (e.g., graduation, marriage, and parenthood) were rated very low.

Pang (2011) interviewed 12 Chinese university students to examine their experiences of emerging adulthood. According to the results, 11 out of 12 participants stated they would consider themselves to be adults when they achieved independence criteria such as “making independent decisions” and “becoming financially independent.” However, most participants expressed they didn’t achieve any of the items despite their expectations to do so. For example, they still received financial support from their parents, and they still asked for their parents’ help when making decisions. The discrepancy between what they expect and what they do may reflect the close bond in family relationships in China.

The above three research studies indicate that contemporary Chinese young people are emphasizing individualistic-oriented criteria instead of traditional events to identify their transition to adulthood. Compared to American college students’ criteria, independence criteria (making independent decisions, being financially independent, being responsible for

yourself, etc.), and interdependence criteria (e.g., controlling one's emotions and becoming less self-oriented) are both endorsed by American young people and Chinese young people. In this regard, the criteria that contemporary Chinese young people deemed necessary for becoming adults seems more Western. However, a second glance at these criteria may reflect some differences between Chinese and American young people.

Within the criteria of independence and interdependence, the items such as “controlling one's emotions” and “becoming less self-oriented” are highly endorsed by 93% of surveyed Chinese young people (Nelson et al., 2004). However, in Arnett's (2003) research on American college students, only 73% of surveyed American young people considered these two items important for adulthood.

In the comparison of American college students and Canadian college students, it was found that different national features such as the Canadian collectivist-oriented context impacted young people's perspectives. Would China, as a typical collectivistic-oriented society, have the same reason for differences?

The reason for this difference might be the different understanding toward these criteria. Nelson and colleagues found that certain criteria might be endorsed in both cultures but for

different reasons (Nelson et al., 2004). For instance, the criteria such as “controlling one’s emotions” might be understood by American young people as an important tool for self-regulation. Chinese young people, however, might understand it as the manifestation of valuing group and community interests over one’s own interests.

Chinese young people’s individualistic criteria can still reflect the Confucian values of concern for others’ needs over one’s own, which is not reflected among the top criteria for North Americans. As Badger, Nelson, and Barry (2006) concluded, there appears to have developed a bicultural conception of transition to adulthood in China in which they endorse individualism and independence as is traditional in American culture, while still valuing their own collectivism-oriented attitudes drawn from traditional Chinese culture. In this case, even though Chinese young people are using individualism criteria to identify their adulthood, they are still reflecting aspects of Confucian values.

As mentioned earlier, the comparison of perspectives on indicators of emerging adulthood between parents and their emerging adult children was surveyed in North America. Since Chinese society places great emphasis on family obligation, it is necessary to know what are the criteria Chinese parents endorse in acknowledging their children’s maturity. Are

the criteria parents and children endorse similar or different?

Nelson, Duan, Padilla-Walker, and Luster (2012) conducted a study at a Chinese university to examine how emerging adults' parents view their children's adult status and what types of criteria parents use to determine children's attainment of adulthood. The results showed that the only item in the individualism criteria that was considered necessary and important for adulthood by both college students and their parents was "accept responsibility for the consequences of your actions." However, parents and children held different attitudes towards "norm compliance criteria." Parents rated norm compliance criteria higher than did their children. At first glance, there appeared to be agreement on emphasizing "responsibility" between parents and children. A second look at the different attitudes towards "norm compliance" could reveal a differing understanding of "responsibilities." Chinese parents hold strong views on morality. They expect their children to avoid behaviours as an adult that could lead to a degradation of the family's reputation. As Hwang and Han (2010) stated, Chinese parents place greater emphasis on family reputations due to the value of maintaining "face." In this case, Chinese parents consider "maintaining family reputation" as an adult's prominent responsibility. Young people, therefore, need to comply with the "norm

compliance criteria” in order to be responsible adults. On the other hand, Chinese young people might understand “accept responsibility” as taking care of their own studies and life, and having the courage to admit to their mistakes, which are irrelevant to Chinese societal norms.

Compared with the findings of North American parents’ perspectives, with regard to the endorsement of individualistic criteria, North American parents and their children shared similar attitudes, while differing views were apparent between Chinese parents and their children. This might be due to the Chinese controlling parenting style; for instance, according to Nelson and colleagues (2012), Chinese parents overly interfere with children’s lives; parents don’t expect children to face the complexity of the adult world. In this case, Chinese parents usually don’t expect their children to explore individualistic qualities. For example, Chinese parents would support their children financially until their late twenties, Chinese parents would not allow children to date before the age of 24, Chinese parents would control decisions regarding their children’s school, major, and job. Hence, Chinese parents don’t view individualism criteria as important for reaching adulthood, whereas young people tend to endorse those criteria to identify their adulthood. North American parents,

instead, usually adopt a more free parenting style than Chinese parents. They would allow their children to try different things in terms of dating, deciding on majors, traveling alone, and getting a part-time job. North American young people, therefore, have sufficient space to develop their individualistic qualities.

A similarity does appear between North American parents and Chinese parents in that both of them consider norm compliance more important than their children did. It is nearly impossible to guess the reason for this phenomenon based on the limited available research. Thus, there is a need for more research comparing Chinese parents' and North American parents' perspectives.

These cultural values (individualism and Confucian values) could influence Chinese and North American young people's endorsement of criteria for identifying adulthood. In American studies, upbringing background was determined to be the factor impacting American young people's perspectives within the nation. It is worthwhile to know whether the factor of upbringing background could also impact young people's views within Chinese society. According to the National Bureau Statistics of China (2014), over 20 million young people aged 18-30 attend college or universities. Meanwhile, the 6th national population

census (National Bureau Statistic of China, 2011) stated that approximately 50% of the population lives in rural areas. According to the China Ministry of Education (2014), rural Chinese college students represent 52.5% of the national enrolment population. In this regard, the population of Chinese college students with rural upbringings represents nearly half of the college student population. Fuligni and Zhang (2004) acknowledged that families in rural areas are mostly living agricultural lives, distant from cities, thus young people who come from rural families may hold stronger values of family obligation than their urban peers. However, there exists a dearth of studies examining whether there are differences of criteria endorsement regarding the transition to adulthood among Chinese college students with urban upbringings and Chinese college students with rural upbringings, therefore, it is necessary that future work begin to examine the effect of substantial regional differences on Chinese young people's conception of the transition to adulthood.

Another factor worth exploring is gender difference. Sexism has dominated traditional Chinese culture and influenced its social division of labour throughout the history of China. Chinese women for a long time were considered to be less important in family, education, and employment than men. They were educated to fulfill their socially defined gender roles,

such as getting married early, devotion to the family, and giving up their careers, which are extremely different from male gender roles. Therefore, the gender gap between Chinese females' and males' expectations for becoming an adult was wide. However, the Chinese government has been trying to promote gender equality and women's development in recent decades. For instance, the gender gap in education and employment has been markedly narrowed. According to the China Ministry of Education report (2013), China maintained a balanced male to female ratio in university enrolment, which stood at 50.3 percent and 51.9 percent respectively in 2013. Contemporary Chinese young women, in this case, enjoy more equal opportunities with regards to education and employment. Would the gender gap in their attitudes towards adulthood narrow? What are the differences or similarities between young females' and males' perspectives?

No published research was found in this literature review to directly inform those questions. There was one study that investigated Chinese young women's conception of adulthood (Zhong & Arnett, 2014), but this was conducted among migrant women workers who came from rural areas. The results showed that family capacity criteria including learning to care for parents and becoming capable of caring for children, and role transition

criteria (e.g., motherhood, getting a long-term career) were considered important by those Chinese women. Individualistic criteria such as making independent decisions and becoming financially independent ranked relatively low with this group. The higher endorsement of criteria pertaining to family and transition events might be a feature of the study participants' more traditional, rural background and not reflect much about the possible changing status of women. When those women migrate to the city to make a living, they are often distant from their rural families. Some of them became the main source of family income, and sent money to their parents. Some of them attended night school to enrich themselves. They were forced to become financially independent, and to make decisions without the help of their families. Even though the individualistic criteria was rated low in this study, these women's perspectives will continue to change as they settle into the city.

Nonetheless, future research should further investigate the comparison between Chinese young college females' and young college males' attitudes toward adulthood.

All the studies of emerging adulthood in China employed Arnett (1994)'s conceptual model to collect Chinese college students' data. But those criteria were created based on an American cultural and socioeconomic context. China, as a collectivism-oriented developing

country, has its own unique characteristics. Over past decades, China has undergone dramatic changes with the influence of the globalized market economy, one-child policy, and the popularization of higher education (Goh & Kuczynski, 2009; Pang, 2011). The criteria model, in this case, may not be applicable to a Chinese context. Certain items within criteria may be endorsed in both cultures but for different reasons (Nelson et al., 2004). For example, one of the dually endorsed items, “accepting responsibility,” could be seen by American college students as autonomy from parents, while it could be understood by Chinese college students as being responsible for family and conforming to community (Badger et al., 2006; Nelson et al., 2004). Taken together, the criteria of becoming adulthood should be applied respectively according to different cultural and socio-economic conditions, and future work should propose an alternative model, which considers current Chinese contexts to further examine Chinese young people’s emerging adulthood.

The findings from both North America and China revealed a new insight that, in a globalized world, the concept of becoming an adult has both societal and cultural sides to it. As Jensen and Arnett (2012) mention, the transformations of globalization shape the complexity and diversity of emerging adults’ development (p. 487). Perspectives from

different social groups and different cultural contexts could make the phenomenology of the transition to adulthood more complex. Therefore, future research should examine how young people conceptualize the transition to adulthood from various perspectives.

Reflection

In the review of literature some differences and similarities were found in the criteria that are considered to be features that distinguish the transition to adulthood. Similarities and differences were found between American college students and Canadian college students, between American college students and Chinese college students, and between American parents and Chinese parents. Within America and China, some similarities and differences were also found between different ethnic groups, between rural and urban areas, and between parents and children. Differences were found in factors like upbringing background, ethnic background within each group, and cultural values between two groups. Chinese international students should be helped through the transition to adulthood in a Canadian cultural context via two aspects: acculturation transition and the transition to adulthood. Based on the major findings from the literature review, some implications with regard to

these two aspects will be proposed. Limitations of the current project will follow.

Acculturation Transition

In the literature review it was found that the endorsement of collectivistic-oriented criteria was much higher among Chinese college students than American college students. Between Canada and the U.S., it was found that Canadian college students shared similar perspectives to American college students with regard to individualistic-oriented criteria, while the endorsement of collectivistic-oriented criteria was slightly higher in Canada. It is possible that the difference between America and China is larger than that between America and Canada. Even though there is no existing research examining the difference between Canadian college students and Chinese students, it can be speculated that differences still exist due to the different cultural values that college students are raised with and influenced by: an individualistic culture that emphasizes the value of individualism and independence and a collectivistic culture that values others' needs over one's own as well as conforming to parents' and family's expectations.

When Chinese international students sojourn in Canada, the submersion into a new

cultural context could lead these differences to cause conflict in the form of culture shock. In order to address the conflict, these students will experience a series of adjustments. This process is called acculturation, which happens to every international student. The process of acculturation adjustment often involves cultural, academic, and psychological transition. The purpose of these findings is to help Chinese international students with acculturation. Efforts from universities should consider those aspects.

The international service in a college or university setting is uniquely positioned to provide support to Chinese international students as they acculturate. Mentorship programs (such as UVic's global community mentorship program, 2016) could help international students with their cultural transition to Canadian society. Chinese international students who are involved in this program are set up with a mentor whose first language is English or who has lived in Canada for more than two years. As a pair, they can meet for coffee and the Chinese student can learn about Canadian culture from their mentor's experiences. They could also engage in different social and cultural events, such as watching hockey games, movie nights, or hiking in the mountains. During this process, they can personally engage in learning about a new culture.

Academic centres in every university play an important role in helping with academic transitions. For example, The Centre for Academic Communication (CAC) at the University of Victoria offers help with writing, speaking, reading, and academic expectations. With regard to the writing, speaking, and reading skills, tutors can be provided for international students to help them with difficulties and challenges. Another place that can provide substantial resources for students who speak English as a second language is the English Language Centre on campus (e.g., UVic English Language Centre). Collaborations between the academic centre and English language centre could be proposed, such as with an “international learning festival.” On “international learning festival” day, international students from different cultural backgrounds would get together to share their experiences of learning in Canada, thus, making friends and supporting each other with academic challenges. Making a successful academic transition not only involves learning English language skills but also having cultural knowledge. When I began the master’s program in the school of Child and Youth Care, my lack of awareness of Canadian history such as First Nations history and the sexual revolution was a big barrier to engaging in group discussions and writing assignments. In this case, the academic centre could provide workshops that cover

topics such as Canadian laws, racial discrimination, gender studies, and indigenous studies for Chinese international students. Professors and local students from different faculties could volunteer to be facilitators of different workshops.

In order to address the psychological adjustment, the counselling center could play an important role in helping international students. Chavajay and Skowronek (2008) suggested that the acculturation adjustment could give rise to psychological stresses, such as homesickness, anxiety, loneliness, powerlessness, and mistrust. Those stresses could be intervened by professional counsellors through psychological intervention programs. The counselling service at the University of Victoria could invite registered professionals who have been working with cultural issues in psychology for many years. Psychological interventions could be designed and implemented based on the needs of students (Smith & Khawaja, 2014). In this case, UVic counselling services could offer various individual counselling and group interventions based on different psychological issues caused by acculturation, such as negotiating multiple identities, anxiety and depression coping strategies, and dealing with interpersonal relationships. Some of the sessions could be offered in Mandarin Chinese for those students who are struggling with the language barrier.

Emerging Adulthood Transition Pilot

Some suggestions have been made above in order to help Chinese international students acculturate. In order to help young people with the transition to adulthood, Lane (2014) suggested a developmental model that consists of attachment (parental involvement) and social support.

In the literature review it was found that North American parents and their emerging adult children share similar attitudes about individualistic criteria. A different view with regard to the individualism criteria appears between Chinese parents and their children.

Chinese parents didn't consider individualistic criteria as important for becoming an adult.

When Chinese international students sojourn in Canadian society, they are exposed to a society where independence and individualism are emphasized. As they are immersed in individualistic values, the different view between them and their parents could become even stronger. Sometimes, it may even evolve into conflict between parents and children. In order to address the conflict between parents and children, the question of how parents should be involved in their children's growth needs further consideration.

One method could be an adjustment of parenting style. The process of emerging adulthood in North America involves different kinds of experimentation and explorations, such as dating, changing majors, finding jobs, joining the church, etc. As Ong (2009) mentions, some Chinese parents are over-protective and domineering of their children, which prevents them from becoming independent (p. 158). Instead of making decisions for their children, Chinese parents therefore need to give enough space for young people to explore individualistic qualities, make their own decisions, take responsibility for their actions, and make mistakes.

Another suggestion would be proposed for university institutions. Taking the University of Victoria as an example, I didn't find any support services that help to deal with the conflict between parents and international students. In this case, I suggest that a developmental service should be set up for helping college students with the transition to adulthood. These educators will be responsible for establishing a bridge between Chinese international students and their parents. Many parents don't have the opportunity to visit their children in Canada, thus their knowledge and understanding of Canadian society consists of word of mouth information from websites or friends, which is sometimes

inconsistent with what their children experience. The educators can help students and their parents to create an online platform. Through this platform, students can share the experiences and knowledge of their living environment with their parents (stories or photos of daily life, for example, volunteering, making new friends, travelling to new places, and obtaining higher grades. Parents could comment on their children's postings and share their understanding of these stories and photos. When different ideas from both sides appear, educators could explain the situation and mediate conflicting ideas. In this way, parents will gradually understand what their children face in other countries. They can set up more realistic expectations for their children. Once the expectations are consistent with their children's real life, the conflict would be easier to address.

In both Chinese and North American studies, it was found that upbringing environment including parents' education level and location of residence could impact young people's understanding of adulthood. Most Chinese international students come from urban families, since their parents could support the expense of living and studying in Canada. However, the change from residing in a Chinese urban city to a Canadian community was challenging for these young people. Thus, the need for social support and social engagement is urgent for

those students. Block (2008) mentions that community allows people to interact with each other and share experiences so that they don't have to handle their issues on their own. The community also has a fundamental impact on youth development (Block, 2008). In light of this, in order to provide Chinese international students with social support, universities should launch various collaborations with different community agencies. Different communities have different population features. For example, the Golden Head community has a large Chinese immigrant population. In this case, universities could create events such as "community day," inviting Chinese international students to meet with other Chinese people. Community resources and activities could be offered to students so they can learn about available volunteer work. Based on my experience of working with some intercultural agencies in the Greater Victoria area, hardly any programs are provided for international students aged from 18 to 25 to support their transition to adulthood. Most youth programs are only geared to the needs of immigrant and refugee youth. The needs of immigrant and refugee youth might be different from those of international college students due to their longer length of residence in Canada. Therefore, the intercultural agencies should provide transition to adulthood programs geared to international students. Those young people can

participate in workshops that are facilitated by experienced youth workers and community members. The workshops will be designed to meet their needs such as future goal planning and employment training. In this way, those young people can have various community resources and participate in different community events.

Conclusion

The very act of living and studying in another country could encourage Chinese international students' transition to adulthood. International students are often faced with more challenges and concerns about becoming independent (e.g., financial issues, limited jobs, multiple identities, new relationships) because of their sojourner status in the host country (Wintre et al., 2015). Therefore, the unique experience of managing and developing themselves informs their sense of responsibility and individualistic qualities through the whole sojourn.

Limitations

In the review of the literature it was found that the cultural origins and upbringing environment of emerging adults could affect how they conceptualize their transition to adulthood in North America. In Chinese studies, even though there was no research examining upbringing environment and gender difference, they were still proposed as potential factors. There may be other factors to consider when examining the criteria of the transition to adulthood. For example, in Yeung and Hu's (2013) research, they found that different age cohorts have different attitudes towards adulthood. The younger cohort, in their twenties, considered role transition less important than the older cohort, in their thirties. Therefore, age difference might also impact young people's perspectives. The emerging adults who receive higher education are usually between the ages of 18 to early 30s. Such a large age span may result in some differences among young people's perspectives. Since Lane (2014) mentioned emerging adults are increasingly likely to change perspectives during this period, it is possible that young people in their early 20s may have different attitudes towards their adulthood compared to the young people in their early 30s. In this case, future research should consider age as a factor to examine how it would affect emerging adults' conception of the transition to adulthood.

This changing pattern could also affect Chinese international students. When they are experiencing their transition to adulthood, their attitudes or worldviews and associated value systems may change several times and in differing directions (Schwartz et al., 2012).

Therefore, different age groups of Chinese international students may face different challenges such as first-year transition, applying for jobs, and deciding on their status in Canada. In order to take into account all age groups, different programs according to different phases of college life need to be set up. Currently, the University of Victoria doesn't have a relevant program. Therefore, I suggest that a developmental service can develop first-year and fourth-year transition programs for different age groups. International students who have just arrived in Canada may participate in the first-year transition program and learn independent living skills, college academics, and language transition. Fourth-year students will receive employment training and career planning essential for their lives post-graduation. The program educators should keep track of students' development in different programs, thus providing first-hand data that would be useful for future research.

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Appendix (List of Criteria for the Transition to Adulthood)

Role Transition for example, finishing education or getting married.

Finish Education

Married

Have at least one child

Settle into a long-term career

Purchase a house

Become employed full-time

Biological transitions such as indicators of physical maturation

Grow to full height

If a woman, become biologically capable of bearing children

If a man, become biologically capable of fathering children

Have had sexual intercourse

Independence by living independently from one's parents.

Financially independent of parents

No longer living in parents' household

Not deeply tied to parents emotionally

Decide on personal beliefs and values independently of parents or other influences

Accept responsibility for the consequences of your actions

Establish equal relationship with parents

Interdependence

Committed to long-term love relationships

Make life-long commitments to others

Learn always to have good control over your emotions

Become less self-oriented, develop greater consideration for others

Norm compliance

Avoid becoming drunk

Avoid illegal drugs

Have no more than one sexual partner

Drive safely and close to the speed limit

Avoid use of profanities or vulgar language

Use contraception if sexually active and not trying to conceive a child

Avoid drunk driving

Avoid committing petty crimes such as vandalism and shoplifting

Family capacities

If a man, become capable of supporting a family financially

If a woman, become capable of supporting a family financially

If a man, become capable of caring for children

If a woman, become capable of caring for children

If a man, become capable of running a household

If a woman, become capable of running a household

If a man, become capable of keeping family physically safe

If a woman, become capable of keeping family physically safe

