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**Order Number 8825471**

**The development of the self-concept in urban Chinese children**

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**Iowa State University, 1988**

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The development of the self-concept in urban Chinese children

by

Zemin Zhang

A Dissertation Submitted to the  
Graduate Faculty in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Child Development

Approved:

Signature was redacted for privacy.

In ~~Charge of~~ Major Work

Signature was redacted for privacy.

For the Major Department

Signature was redacted for privacy.

For the Graduate College

Iowa State University  
Ames, Iowa

1988

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## INTRODUCTION

All things are already complete in me. There is no  
greater delight than being sincere in self-examination.  
Mencius (372-298 B.C.)

In the last decade, the resurgence of research interests in the self-concept is found in both psychology and sociology in the West. However, under the influences of the collectivist tradition, such study has been lacking in China. The understanding of the Chinese self-concept will shed light on the development of theoretical and empirical studies on the topic.

Due to the absence of the systematic empirical study of the self-concept in Chinese children, an exploratory study is necessary. Based on Western research, it is possible to generate some feasible hypotheses regarding the development of the Chinese self-concept. Social-cognitive studies have demonstrated that the formation of the self-concept is not just a gradual and additive process. Some rapid turning points can be found. For instance, between late childhood and early adolescence, a qualitative change in the self-concept can be perceived. Developmental psychologists assert that consistency and change live side by side as essential interacting parts of an integrated whole (Brim & Kagan, 1980). Two seemingly contradictory properties of human behavior, consistency and variability, are also reflected in the whole process of the self-concept development.

When children grow older, based upon Western studies, an increasing number of content categories will be found in defining themselves. New categories appear during development demonstrating

that the antecedent self-organization becomes insufficient. Also, new psychological and social content inside the same category can be observed. Older children tend to emphasize their psychological and moral beings while younger children focus on their physical characteristics and behavioral competences.

Older children are less dominated by the concrete and observable features in defining the self. They are more able to go beyond the concrete information than younger children. Thus, it is predictable that younger children will describe the self based on external and surface characteristics. The primary development with age will consist of an increasing ability to make more abstract judgments requiring inference and to describe self in terms of internal or psychological characteristics. The above processes of differentiation will be paralleled by a simultaneous process of integration and hierarchical organization. Along with content change, the structure of the self-concept will also change with age.

Self-evaluation will also be found to have age-related change. Early adolescence is a period of self-evaluation disturbance. Young adolescents tend to have lower self-evaluation than children in their late childhood.

An alternative semantic perspective on the development of social concept focuses on social transmission. Development is viewed as following a variable course with cultural factors determining the direction of the self-concept development. For example, organization of Chinese society will influence the content,

and even the structure, of the self-concept of Chinese children. The socially desirable personality characteristics, through strong cultivation and pressure of conformity, will affect the child's self-concept, especially the content of the self-concept. The overwhelming collective orientation in Chinese society will hardly impose an ontogeny of self-concept development which will lead to an abstract thinking of "individual".

## THE SELF-CONCEPT IN PERSPECTIVES

## In Approaching the Self

The understanding of the self holds a unique position in human knowledge. According to Socrates, the self is not identical with the body in which it lives. A human being must include not only a human body, but also a "self". The self is conceived of as what can be referred to by the personal pronoun, "I". Some philosophers, such as Descartes (1952), further distinguished the self from both the body and the mind. They claimed that a human being consists of a body, a mind, and a self which is the processor of the former two. The self, they concluded, can initiate changes in the body and the mind.

Panpsychism maintains that the body is explicable in terms of the mind, and only the mind is the essence of defining the self. The reality of physical events occurring within an individual existence totally depends on the state of the mind. On the other hand, mechanical materialists (e.g., Hume, 1978) reject the notion of mind of the knower, and define the self strictly in terms of varying perceptions of physical components. They insist that a person's spiritual processes are composed of a flux of perceptions. Hume concluded that the self must be analyzed as a "bundle" or a "collection" of perceptions and experiences; the self is not a "thing" but a series of perceptual experiences. To most philosophers and psychologists, it is clear that one can never gain

understanding of the self by means of observing a piece of wood because the self is not a simple object of perceiving and does not exist in the same way for everyone. Yet, the self is never something purely subjective, which is exclusively the possession of only one individual. Even without a comprehensive discussion of earlier philosophical thoughts about the self, one can learn to be cautious when analyzing and separating the self into reflective and introspective components.

#### Theoretical Approaches of the Self-Concept

##### W. James: System of the self

Modern psychologists' interests in the self can be traced back to James (1890/1950), who elaborated thoroughly his theory of the self in Principles of Psychology. He considered a man's self the sum total of all he<sup>1</sup> can call his, such as his body, his clothes, his wife, and his reputation. His theoretical discourse begins with a description of three different aspects of the self: constituents, feelings and emotions (i.e., self-feelings), and self-seeking and self-preservation.

The constituents include the material self, the social self, the spiritual self, and the pure ego (a consciousness of self in distinction to a not-self), or the Thinker. The material self consists of the personal body, the clothes, the immediate family, the home, and things in the environment that one identifies with or feels belongs to him or her. The social self is based upon other

persons' recognition. According to James, a man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him and carry an image of him in their mind. The recognitions take the forms of group memberships, relationships, fame and honor. By the spiritual self, James (1890/1950) means a man's inner or subjective being, his psychic faculties or dispositions that are most enduring and intimate parts of the self. It consists of "no things" (e.g., pleasures, pains, emotions), "non-existent things" (e.g., errors, fictions), and existent things in symbolic form (e.g., abstract ideas, concepts). One's intellectual, moral, and religious aspirations are also included in the spiritual self.

The "Pure Ego", which is the fourth constituent of the self, is also called "Thinker" or "Owner". James' descriptions of the Pure Ego are hard to comprehend and obscure. The difference between the spiritual self, inner self, and the Pure Ego is not evident. He tended to explain the complicated phenomenon without even giving it substance in a material sense and without defining the notions of transcendental forces at operation.

Despite the great number of self-esteem studies since James' time, his discussion of self-feeling is relatively neglected. James (1890/1950) treated the second aspect of the self, self-feeling, as a certain average emotional tone, which each one of us carries about and which is independent of the objective reasons we may have for satisfaction or discontent. According to James, the two opposite classes of self-feelings, satisfaction and discontent, are primary

feelings because they are direct and elementary endowments of the nature. The normal provocative of self-feeling is one's actual success or failure, and the good or bad actual position one holds in the world.

Self-seeking and self-preservation take place differently in three constituents of self--body, social, and spiritual self. The bodily self-preservation leads to ordinary reflex actions and movements of alimentation and defense. The bodily self-seeking includes hunting, acquisitive, and home-and-tool-constructing instincts. The social self-preservation and self-seeking relate to desires to attract notice, admiration, and love. In spiritual self, self-preservation and self-seeking ought to include every impulse towards psychic progress, whether intellectual, moral, or spiritual.

The structure of the self proposed by James is more significant than the above fragmented descriptions of the self. He thought the self to be in a "...hierarchical scale, with the bodily self at the bottom, the spiritual self at top, and the extracorporal material selves and various social selves between" (p. 202). Self-seeking would lead one to aggrandize all these selves and to give up deliberately only those among them which one cannot keep. In each "layer" of the structure of self (material, social, and spiritual), one further distinguishes between the immediate and actual, and remote and potential self, between the narrower and wider view.

Twenty years later, James (1910) reconstructed his terminology system by using "Me" to denote the material, social, and spiritual

selves and "I" to denote the Pure Ego or the Knower. The distinction, thus, is interpreted as two fundamental aspects of the self--the Known (the object) and the Knower (the subject). Partly because of the influences of G. H. Mead's social behaviorist theory, the simple interpretation of James' dualistic self is broadly accepted and alleged to be James'. Some researchers even tried empirically to detect the "I" aspect of the self (e.g., Damon & Hart, 1986). James (1910) made it very clear that "the problem who that knower is would have become a metaphysical problem which carries us beyond the psychological or naturalistic point of view" (p. 258). Since there is no value to the self as a knower for understanding behavior, James preferred to banish it to the realm of philosophy. Thus, the psychological study tends to focus on the self as an object of one's knowledge and to investigate the constituents of the self (e.g., material, social, and spiritual self), self-feelings (self-evaluation), and structural schemes in self-seeking and self-preservation.

C. Cooley: The looking-glass self

In defining the concept of the self, Charles Cooley (1902) made his significant contribution to social psychology. The self is treated as the process by which individuals see themselves as objects in their social environment. Cooley (1908) argued that the self emerges out of interactions with others through interpreting others' gestures and taking others' views towards oneself. The

theorists who proposed the "looking-glass self" (Cooley, 1902; Sullivan, 1953) have a long-standing influence on sociology and social psychology in general, and on studies of the self in specific. Cooley formulates a looking-glass self in which an individual perceives himself in the way that others perceive him. In Cooley's theory of self, his undertaking is to locate and define the "solid facts of society", and ignore the philosophical problem.

It is well to say at the onset that by the word "self" in this discussion is meant simply that which is designated in common speech by the pronouns of the first person singular, "I", "me", "my", "mine", and "myself". "Self" and "ego" are used by metaphysicians and moralists in many other senses, more or less remote from "I" of daily speech and thought and with these I wish to have as little to do as possible (Cooley, 1902, p. 168).

Cooley proceeds to regard society as a living whole made up of differentiated members with their "self-idea". There are three components of the self-idea: 1) the imagination of one's own appearance to other person; 2) the imagination of that person's judgment of one's own appearance; and 3) "self-feelings", e.g., pride, or mortification. According to Cooley, since "I" is known to our experience primarily as a feeling or has a feeling-ingredient in our ideas, it cannot be described or defined without suggesting that feeling. Thus, defining self means defining its varying self-feeling states, such as positive, encouraging, discouraging, regarding, and negating states.

G. H. Mead: Symbolic role-taking

Under the influences of James and Cooley, Mead (1934/1970) emphasized that individuals can symbolically represent themselves as an object in the same way they symbolically designate other actors in their environment. As one matures, the transitory self-representations derived from others in social interactions eventually become crystallized, forming a more or less stabilized self-concept about oneself as a special type of object.

In Mind, Self and Society (1934/1970), Mead started to use the concepts of "I" and "Me" in the way broadly accepted today. The "I" both calls out the "Me" and responds to it. Taken together, they constitute a personal identity as it appears in social experiences. According to Mead, the two distinguishable phases, I and Me, function to make one consciously responsible and to create novelty in one's experiences.

Mead faced the same difficulty as James in conceptualizing the experiencing "I". According to him, the "I", a capacity for spontaneity, is expressed when the individual alters his ongoing response or creates a new response to the "Me". Individuality and originality arise from the inner conversation between the "I" and the imported role of the other. The action of the "I" is something the nature of which one cannot tell in advance.

Mead's social behaviorism emphasizes reflexivity, which is the ability of a person to reflect upon himself. It is the necessary condition for the emergence and development of mind within the

social process. In the process of reflexivity, the social experience is internalized and, in turn, serves to alter one's ongoing acts. The internally carried social act thus could exist without external movement occurring. The internalized role of the other is denoted by Mead as the "Me". Following Mead, symbolic interactionists (e.g., Berger, 1966; Hewitt, 1983; Felson, 1985; Schater & Keith, 1985) emphasize that the self-concept is always formulated in the context of some specific social world and in the process of internalizing the social world.

Since the self is reflexive in nature, the individual is standing outside himself, looking at an object which is himself, describing it, evaluating it, and responding to it. The self develops through the process of role-taking. Mead (1934/1970) argued:

It is necessary to rational conduct that the individual should thus take an objective, impersonal attitude toward himself, that he should become an object to himself....For he enters his own experiences as a self or individual, not directly or immediately, not by becoming a subject to himself, but only in so far as he first becomes an object to himself just as other individuals are objects to him or in his experiences; and he becomes an object to himself only by taking the attitudes of other individuals toward himself within a social environment or context of experience and behavior in which both he and they are involved (p. 138).

One may have as many selves as there are social roles. Some roles have considerable significance for the individual and some are specific to particular situations. The self becomes increasingly immersed in the perspectives of others with the implication that the individual, with increasing age, shows greater reliance on the

other for reference of the self.

Compared to James, Mead's theory is significant for having a view about the development of self. "The self is something which has a development; it is not initially there by birth, but arises in the process of social experience and activity, that is, develops in the given individual as a result of his relations to that process as a whole and to other individuals within that process" (Mead, 1934/1970, p. 135). Mead proposes a three stage developmental process of the self. In the initial stage, one can assume the perspective of a very limited number of others. Particular attitudes and evaluations of one or two others become organized into one's self-concept. Then, the maturing individual starts to organize more general social attitudes of a greater number of others to derive multiple self-representations. The final stage occurs when an individual can take the role of the generalized other in a society. One can assume the overall perspective of a society in forms of general beliefs, values, and norms. Each stage leads to a change in the kinds of transitory self-representations, as well as to a more stabilized self-concept.

J. Piaget: The cognitive structure of conception

Jean Piaget treated the self as the beginning of theoretical and empirical concerns. As he said, "in estimating the child's conception of the world, the first question, obviously is...can the child distinguish the self from the external world?" (1926, p. 33).

Nevertheless, the development of the self-concept has never been a focus in Piaget's work. Piaget and his followers (e.g., Piaget, 1932) posited a parallelism between the development of cognitive structure and development in the affective domain, which has great importance to a self-concept study. Piagetian psychology suggests that one's internal cognitive structures play a crucial role in mediating and organizing mental and behavioral interaction with the environment. The notion that one's concepts, including the concept of the self, is a direct and exclusive product of the environment, was seriously challenged (Piaget, 1970). In the formation of the self, one has to go through a series of cognitive developments in decentration which functions importantly in elaborating the self and self-other relationships. At the elementary level, "there is not yet any differentiation or frontier between the world of objects and the world of actions or powers of the self. Objects lack permanence; the self does not exist" (Piaget, 1985, p. 74). Piaget never used the term "role taking". However, he introduced the analytic construct, egocentrism, which is the basis of contemporary studies of children's perspective-taking (or role-taking). The young child tends to confuse the self with non-self, or his own perspectives with others' perspectives. Piaget (1985) called this phenomenon egocentrism. The development of understanding the self, like that of understanding the material world, moves towards a state of cooperation characterized by differentiation and consequent reciprocal interchange between the self and the other. This

development involves two related factors. First, the individual is able to simultaneously focus on at least two dimensions. Second, these dimensions are coordinated through a system of transformations (e.g., conservation of volume, height, and width). Decentration is also reflected in the acquisition of self-criticism that one can challenge one's own perspectives and values. One may question or reject the value which one has internalized. This is a phenomenon behaviorists have great difficulty explaining (e.g., Bandura & Walter, 1963).

Piaget's ingenious studies of children's concept formation greatly contribute to the understanding of structural changes in self-concept. The young child tends to label only concrete characteristics of the self, such as gender and age. He is not able to systematically test hypotheses about those characteristics that define the self. He has no perspective-taking skill. When growing up, the child acquires the ability of hierarchically classifying the concrete characteristics. One can organize the events, concrete objects, and people into a system of the self. After acquiring perspective-taking skills, one can make social comparison in defining the self. In adolescents and young adults, hypothetical-deductive reasoning is applied to define the self. One's own thoughts, feelings, and motives can be reflected as important constructs to define the self.

Flavell (1985) asserts that one can predict much of the cognitive-developmental story with respect to the self by consulting

the patterns concerning social cognition. Also, it is argued that social cognition follows the same structural constraints as the case of the physical world in Piaget's works (Gelman & Spelke, 1981; Shantz, 1983; Flavell & Ross, 1981).

Piaget has found (Piaget, 1952, 1960a; Inhelder & Piaget, 1958), at the earlier level, children lack the consistent criterion for their choices in classification. Thus, they have difficulty embracing all the elements of the collection simultaneously. In seriation, differences are not retained, nor are positive and negative characteristics considered. At Level 2, seriation is characterized by forming pairs and trios of elements (e.g., traits). In classification, equilibrium starts to be established between similarities and differences. However, superordinate classes that would include collections as subclasses are still lacking. The subclasses are constructed by their particular characteristics subordinated to qualities they all have in common. At Level 3, equilibrium of similarities and differences is attained. The higher order and "larger" class will bring the smaller collections together. The hierarchical structure is formulated for the first time. Children, however, do not succeed in quantifying inclusion because of lacking negation and inverse operation subtraction. Differences are integrated into the system, but relationships between positive and negative characteristics are not yet established. Finally, at Level 4, "differences and similarities are equilibrated completely. This means that differences are understood

as partial negation" (Piaget, 1985, p. 104).

Among social-cognitive studies, especially among few Piagetian studies on the structure of the self-concept, researchers have not paid enough attention to Piaget's theory of logic structure of cognition and equilibration, and have too often spoken in verbal intuitive terms, such as egocentrism and artificialism, that were emphasized by Piaget at the earlier period of his research. Sometimes, studies even confound the cognitive structure with verbal description of content development when using the content changes in self-description to define the structural development of the self-concept.

L. Kohlberg: Stages of perceiving self-other relationships

Kohlberg's study of moral development, as Gilligan's (1982) presented, clearly establishes the connection between moral issues and one's views about oneself, as well as about others. Other studies (e.g., Gfellner, 1986) have found close relationships between the self-concept development and moral development.

In attempting to retain the best of Piaget's study of moral reasoning and to refine it into a more comprehensive and logically consistent framework, Kohlberg (1969) constructed his model of moral development that occurs in a series of six qualitatively distinct stages. In these stages, one can distinguish three perspectives (i.e., levels) on moral conflict and choice. In Kohlberg's terms, these perspectives are preconventional, conventional, and

postconventional in reflecting the expansion in moral understanding from an individual to a societal, and, then, to a universal point of view which transcends social and cultural context. Preconventional reasoning is egocentric and derives moral constructs from individual needs, but not from societal viewpoints. Conventional morality judges the right and the wrong, the good and the bad, according to whether the existing social norms and values are well maintained. The conventional judgment is based upon the shared norms and values of certain groups, communities, and societies. Departing from conventional reasoning, postconventional morality transcends the vision of specific societies, holds a relative perspective on norms, and establishes universally applicable moral principles.

According to Kohlberg (1969, 1976), each developmental stage establishes upon, reconstructs, and encompasses the preceding one and is therefore more sophisticated and more comprehensive in making moral evaluations. Also, he tries to prove that each stage is a homogeneous type of moral reasoning strategy which is consistent across different domains of moral issues. He differentiates the content of moral values from the structure of moral reasoning and claims that the content plays no role in defining a stage. By separating the content from the structure of moral reasoning, Kohlberg further asserts that all individuals, regardless of culture or life experiences, will go through the stages (structural changes) in the same order, varying only in the speed and ending stage of development. The stages are constructed by the individual when he

tries to make sense out of his own experiences, rather than revealed through socialization in certain culture.

Clearly relating the moral development with the development of the self-concept, Kohlberg (1984) recommended that moral reasoning levels are "different types of relationships between the self and society's rules and expectations" (p. 173). Kohlberg's most important contribution is that his work has stimulated a large number of social cognitive studies on social concept development, including the development of the self-concept (e.g., Turiel, 1983; Damon, 1977, 1983; Selman, 1980; Kegan, 1982; Broughton, 1978). Most social-cognitive developmental studies of the self-concept have followed Kohlberg's framework of developmental stages.

Kohlberg's ahistorical view of moral development is criticized by many researchers. Since his model moves beyond any dependence on cultural definitions of morality, each individual, as the model views, can ultimately discover for himself the basis of a morality that owes nothing to cultural or historical heritage. Thus, Kohlberg seems to suggest that morality is invented out of the sheer power of individual reason (Hogan & Emler, 1978).

Kohlberg assumes that a homogeneous stage holds a high degree of uniformity in a person's moral reasoning level in various situations. The assumption contradicts a number of empirical studies (e.g., Fishkin, Keniston, & Mackinnon, 1973; Hudgins & Prentice, 1973; Damon, 1977). The high degree of variation obtained in these studies leads to an approach of domain specific study that

depicts the developmental structure more accurately.

### The Multidimensional Self-Concept in Empirical Studies

#### Dimensionality of the self-concept

Contemporary studies of the self-concept have emphasized its multidimensional nature (Epstein, 1973; Brim, 1976; Smith, 1978). However, the term dimension has been used under different connotations in studies of the self-concept. James (1890/1950) proposed a three dimensional model of the self-concept: constituents, self-feelings, and self-seeking and self-preservation. The relationships of James' dimensions can be best depicted in a geometric model, in which one specific dimension (e.g., constituents) can be considered as a mode of measurable spatial extension in a particular direction which is co-existing with extensions in other directions (e.g., self-feelings).

A specific definition of the self-concept indicating its multidimensional nature is provided by Turner (1968, 1976). The self-concept is "a vague but vitally felt idea of what I am like in my best moments, of what I am striving toward and have some encouragement to believe I can achieve, or of what I can do when the situation supplies incentives for unqualified effort" (1968, p. 98). Besides the descriptive ("What I am like") and motivational dimensions ("What I am striving for"), Turner's formulation also includes structural (the sense of spatial and temporal continuity) and evaluative dimensions.

Rosenberg (1979) defines the self-concept broadly as "the totality of an individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object" (p. 7). Rosenberg (1986) has argued that an adequate description of the self-concept must consider its dimensions. For instance, it includes a dimension of self-feeling (i.e., favorable or unfavorable), a dimension of structure (i.e., "Are people's self-concepts firm and stable or shifting and volatile?"), a dimension of awareness, etc. Besides the content of the self-concept, Rosenberg emphasizes the dimension of self-esteem (feeling) and of self-concept stability (structural changes). Accordingly, these dimensions may change between childhood and adolescence.

According to Gecas' review (1982), "the self-concept is conceptualized as an organization (structure) of various identities and attributes, and their evaluations, developed out of the individual's reflexive, social, and symbolic activities" (p. 4). Identity focuses on the meanings comprising the self as an object, gives the structure and the content to the self-concept, and anchors the self to the social system. Self-evaluation refers to the evaluative and affective dimension of the self-concept (Wells & Marwell, 1976; Gecas, 1982). In the last two decades, a disproportionate amount of research on the self-concept has focused on the evaluative dimension. In Wylie's (1974, 1979) extensive reviews, over 80% of the 151 "developmental" studies focus exclusively on self-evaluation (self-esteem).

In a recent review, Harter (1983) summarized a multi-dimensional self-system. The content dimension refers to the categories that represent various characteristics (e.g., physical attributes, behaviors). The structural dimension refers to how the contents are organized (e.g., traits, abstractions, hierarchies, and networks). The third dimension, self-esteem, focuses on the value or worth that people attach to "self-descriptors". Damon and Hart (1982) have posited a developmental model of self-conception with three dimensions. The basic constituents include physical, active, social, and psychological self. In addition to the content dimension, the structural dimension discusses how the developmental levels represent some dominant characteristics in the structure of reasoning. The third dimension is called "the understanding of self-as-subject" with regard to the understanding of continuity, distinctness from others, volition, and self-reflection. However, systematic research on the third dimension of self-understanding is basically absent.

The construction of multidimensional models of the self-concept basically relies on research about young adults or children from middle childhood upward (Rosenberg, 1979; Brim, 1976). The origin and evolution of dimensionality is far from clear. With advancing age, the dimensionality of the self-concept becomes more observable. As Werner's (1957) orthogenetic principle suggested, "Whenever development occurs, it proceeds from a state of relative globality and lack of differentiation to a state of increasing

differentiation, articulation and hierarchic integration" (p. 126). Relatively, more light has been shed on mainly three dimensions (i.e., the content, structural, and evaluative dimensions) among many others. Although some researchers (e.g., Rosenberg, 1979) mention the change and interaction of dimensions along the line of development, most studies tend to focus on changes of only one specific dimension. More comprehensive studies which consider all three major dimensions are needed.

#### Facets of the content dimension

While the unity notion of the self-concept becomes less convincing, contemporary studies argue for a multifaceted interpretation of the self-concept (Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976; Shavelson & Marsh, 1986; Fernandes, Michael, & Smith, 1978; Michael, Smith, & Michael, 1975; Marsh, Smith, & Barnes, 1983, 1985; Marsh & Smith 1986; Epstein, 1973; Fleming & Watts, 1980; Wylie, 1979). According to Shavelson and Marsh (1986), the particular facets reflect the category system adopted by a particular individual and/or shared by a group. Examples of "facets" can be found in James' (1910) discussion of material, social, and spiritual self, as well as in Mead's (1934/1970) various social role-takings. Accordingly, a facet of the self-concept is defined as one of the descriptive sides of the content dimension. Some studies (e.g., Mortimer & Lorence, 1981; Piers & Harris, 1964, 1969; Piers, 1983, 1984) use the terms such as "multidimensions" and "multi-factors" to

connote different sides (facets) of major dimensions reviewed, mostly of the content dimension of the self-concept.

In Rosenberg's (1979) comprehensive study of the self-concept, he drew his discussion of facets (parts, elements, or components) from solid empirical material. The content of the self-concept consists primarily of social identity elements, dispositions, and physical characteristics.

Social identity is constituted by the groups, status, or categories to which one is socially recognized as belonging. They are expressed in a language of nouns. Six major categories are included in social identity: social status, group memberships, social labels based on behavioral norms, status labels based on individual's history, social types, and personal identity.

Dispositions, the second facet of the content, refer to abstract categories, such as one's attitudes (e.g., liberalism, conservatism), traits (e.g., generosity, morality), abilities (e.g., specific skills), values (e.g., belief in peace), personality traits (e.g., extroversion), likes or preferences (e.g., to be interested in music). The content of the self-concept is largely made up of these abstract qualities. The social identity facet represents solely one's social exterior whereas the "real me" is depicted in the dispositions.

In addition to the two facets (i.e., social identity and dispositions), an individual's self portrait will not be complete without one's various physical characteristics. Similar to James'

physical self, what Rosenberg called "physical characteristics" are mainly perceptual aspects of the self, such as height, weight, or body build. According to Schilder (1968), the physical self consists of "body-image", "the picture of our own body that we form in our mind". It is the way in which the body appears to oneself.

Empirical studies of the content of the self-concept were conducted through factor analysis mainly by researchers who aimed to construct instruments for measuring the self-concept (e.g., Piers & Harris, 1969; Michael, Smith, & Michael, 1975; Coopersmith, 1967; Gordon, 1969). Coopersmith (1967) identified four major facets (factors): academic performance, parental acceptance, peer relations, and general reference to the self. Piers and Harris defined the self-concept as "a set of relatively stable self-attitudes which are not only descriptive but also evaluative" (Piers, 1976, p. 1). Their initial factor analysis of the self-concept scale using 457 sixth graders as subjects revealed ten factors, including six interpretable factors: behavior, intellectual status, physical appearance and attributes, anxiety, popularity, and happiness/satisfaction. These six factors account for 42% of the common variance in item responses. Among the six factors, the first three are weighted significantly. The last two appear to be the weakest factors, but not necessarily the least important ones. The factors of self-description are only relatively stable. Cardwell and Dunn (1986) suggest that as the child grows up and interacts with the social context, his content categories of

self-concept keep expanding.

Based upon her review of empirical studies of the self-concept, Harter (1986a) summarized five major types of content: physical attributes (e.g., size, age, gender, race), behavioral descriptions (e.g., actions, skills, preferences), emotional descriptions (e.g., feeling states, affect modes), motivational descriptions (e.g., perceived intentions, causal attribution), and cognitions (e.g., attitudes and the nature of one's thought, cognitive constructions). Damon and Hart's (1982) model of the self-concept includes four types of content: physical self, active self, social self, and psychological self. The physical self-scheme includes one's body and material possessions; the active self-scheme includes one's activities and abilities; the social self-scheme includes one's social personality characteristics, one's social relations, and social interactions; and the psychological self-scheme includes one's emotions, thoughts, beliefs, and cognitive processes (Damon & Hart, 1986; Hart & Damon, 1985). Similar to James, they deal with motivational attributes of the self in the dimension other than content.

Both Harter's and Damon's content dimensions include a number of facets that refer to physical, behavioral, social, and psychological features. Then, each facet further includes some specific characteristics. The most comprehensive and widely applied categorization of the content of the self-concept was developed by Gordon (1968). The system was designed to capture the major

varieties of self-representations. The categories in the system are mutually exclusive and exhaustive. However, the thirty categories (e.g., sex, age, interpersonal styles, artistic activities) are not under certain facets like the ones in Damon's system. Applying Kuhn and McPartland's (1954) Twenty Statement Test, Gordon asked children to freely respond to the question "Who Am I" to elicit varieties of descriptive categories. He did not aim to construct a hierarchical category system as did typical cognitive developmental studies (Damon & Hart, 1982; Harter, 1982a).

In a well-designed study on person perception of children and adolescents (Livesley & Bromley, 1973), 989 different kinds of statements were identified and 33 categories were required to catalogue the statements. The categories were further classified into 13 clusters: objective information (i.e., appearance, general information and identity, routine habits and activities, actual incidents, possessions); contemporary and historical circumstances (i.e., life history, contemporary social circumstances, physical condition); personal characteristics and behavioral consistencies (i.e., general personal attributes, specific behavioral consistencies, motivation and arousal, orientation, expressive behavior); aptitudes and achievements (i.e., intellectual aptitudes and abilities, skills); interests and preferences (i.e., preferences, interests, and hobbies); attitudes and beliefs (i.e., beliefs, attitudes, values, perceived person's opinions and attitudes towards the perceiver); evaluation; social factors (i.e.,

social roles, reputation, friendships and playmates); subject-other relations (i.e., mutual interaction, subject's opinion of others); comparison against standards (i.e., comparison with self and with others); family and kinship; illustration, collaboration, and explanation (i.e., collateral facts and ideas); and residue (i.e., irrelevant and unclassifiable facts and ideas). Livesley and Bromley's study has been broadly referenced by researchers who believe that one's conceiving of the self is basically the same process as one's conceiving of others. The content categories listed above can be compared and contrasted with those described by Gordon (1968). The two taxonomies of the self-concept are quite similar except for some minor modifications. The researcher's basic assumptions, concepts, methodologies, and purposes of study will decide the system he might use to categorize the self-concept information.

In cognitive-developmental studies of the self-concept, researchers find that an exhaustive system with a large number of content categories will create complications and will not facilitate the discovery of relations between dimensions (i.e., structural and content dimensions). For example, Keller, Ford, and Meacham (1978) conducted a developmental study of the self-concept in 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds by using the open-ended measures. Their study generalized a simpler content system with only nine categories: actions that are subdivided into habitual acts, acts of competence, and helping and obedient behaviors; relationships that are

subdivided into relationships with adults and peers; body image; possessions; personal labels; gender; age; evaluation; and personal characteristics and preferences. With the "simpler" system, researchers can concentrate on discovering developmental changes in facets without going deeply into the details of content analysis. Most research on the content facets of the self-concept has focused on one or two specific areas, such as the academic self-concept (e.g., Shavelson & Bolus, 1982; Shavelson & Marsh, 1986). Some researchers (Guardo, 1968; Guardo & Bohan, 1971) have applied rather idiosyncratic content categories of the self-concept. For instance, Guardo (1968) classified the child's self-identity into four categories: perception of one's humanness differentiated from lower animals; one's gender identity; individual's perception of oneself as an individual distinct from other same-gender children; individual's sense of self as continuous from the past to the future.

Wylie's comprehensive two-volume book (1974, 1979) has reviewed hundreds of studies of the self-concept. However, studies aiming to document developmental changes in the content of children's self-concept have been very limited in number and relatively recent (Rosenberg, 1979; Livesley & Bromley, 1973; Bannister & Agnew, 1977; Montemayor & Eisen, 1977; Damon & Hart, 1982; Harter, 1983, 1985; Fahey & Phillips, 1981; Broughton, 1978, 1981; Keller, Ford, & Meacham, 1978; Secord & Peevers, 1974; McGuire & Padawer-Singer, 1976). Although the supporting evidence for content change is limited, some generalizations of developmental tendencies associated

with advancing age can be made.

With advancing age, individuals show a decrease in references to observable or external qualities (e.g., material and activity) and an increase in references to inferred or covert qualities (e.g., psychological and relational characteristics) (Damon & Hart, 1982, 1986; Livesley & Bromley, 1973; Rosenberg, 1979; Secord & Peever, 1974). Focusing on the content rather than the structure of the self-concept, Montemayor and Eisen's study (1977) adopted the orthogenetic principle as the framework to investigate age differences in self-description. They applied a nonreactive method which permitted children to formulate their own responses. They found that children and adolescents (10-18 years) increased their use of the following categories: occupational role, existential self, ideological and belief reference, sense of self determination, sense of unity, interpersonal style, and psychic style (i.e., how one typically feels or thinks). At the same time, the subjects tended to decrease the use of territoriality, citizenship, possession, physical self, or body image.

Rosenberg (1979), who conducted a study on subjects from age 8 to 19 with open-ended interviews, basically confirmed above findings. Younger children were more likely than the older ones to describe the self in overt behavioral terms. Thirty-five percent of the 8-9 year-olds responded in terms of behavior, compared with only nineteen percent of those 16 years or older. The younger children were also more likely to focus on abilities or achievements and to

define themselves in terms of physical characteristics (e.g., hair color, weight, height, health status) or social identity elements (e.g., sex, age, race, class). The younger children showed a greater tendency to mention those object or activity preferences that are clearly recognized by overt behavior. Rosenberg found 73% of those 8-9 year-olds responded in terms of one of the external characteristics, compared with only 26% of those 16 years old or older. Studies on the content of the self-concept of younger children (i.e., 3 to 9 years) (Keller, Ford, & Meacham, 1978; Secord & Peevers, 1974) have found that they tended to think of the self in terms of activities rather than in terms of body parts or material attributes. Secord and Peevers (1974) went further to study the different kinds of activities children of different age groups used to describe themselves. Older children (up to the third grade) focused more on active abilities. For instance, they might say, "I can ride a bike better than my brother." They changed their focus from the self's habitual action to the self's action competences. McGuire, McGuire, and Cheever (1986) found significant age effects in the content of the self-concept of children during their middle childhood. When growing older, children tended to describe themselves in terms of a state (physical or mental) rather than in terms of actions. Older children focused more on covert than overt features compared with younger children. Moreover, older ones paid more attention to social interaction rather than to physical actions.

Livesley and Bromley (1973) found that younger children tended

to describe themselves by using physical appearance, general identities (e.g., name, age), and possessions. On the other hand, older children were more likely to refer to their thoughts, beliefs, personality quality, and self orientation (e.g., wishes, expectations, self-reproaches). Sometimes, large differences were observed between groups of children separated by only one year. It is hard to give a theoretical explanation for the phenomenon. For instance, Bromley (1977a) found a sharp drop in the frequency of statements about appearance and identity from age 7 years and 10 months to age 8 years and 10 months, and a later increase from 14 years and 3 months to 15 years and 3 months. While the facet shift in describing the self is confirmed by a number of studies, little attention has been paid to the assumption that the self-concept becomes increasingly multifaceted with increasing age (Shavelson & Marsh, 1986; Marsh, 1987).

#### Structural dimension of the self-concept

After reviewing the work of Kohlberg (1969), Loevinger (1976), and Selman (1980), Leahy (1985) proposed a model of three levels of self-conception. He focused his discussion on qualitative changes in the content dimensions describing the self. For the young child (about age 5), the self and others are often seen as having a similar interpretation of reality, or as sharing similar activity (Chandler & Greenspan, 1972; Scarlett, Press, & Crockett, 1971). The inner experiences of both self and other cannot be well

articulated by the young child and, thus, cannot be real to him. The physical qualities (e.g., appearance, body image), possessions, or activities are the focus of the child in describing himself. Leahy (1985) called this the objective self, the self engaging in a simple description of peripheral or observable qualities of events.

The subjective self, in Leahy's term, emerges at about age 10 when one's internal attributes (e.g., personality, motivations) become more important. Through social comparison, the child realizes the significance of differences between self and others. He has a uniquely defined self, yet he can share the self's views through the newly-developed ability of role-taking. The hallmark of self-development is the awareness of one's personal reputation within a peer group.

At the third level, the subjective-process level, there is an increasing tendency towards decentering. The self's morality, self-chosen principles, and other subjective qualities are weighted heavier than consideration of stereotyped roles. The conflicting qualities of the self can be integrated into a system. There is an increasing awareness that others may have an inaccurate impression of the self. Thus, a sense of isolation and scepticism is often developed in adolescents (Chandler, 1975; Broughton, 1978). Leahy's levels of the self-conception, as he said, are "largely dictated by belief that the self is a social construction, that is, a recognition that the self exists with others and apart from others" (Leahy, 1985, p. xiv). His construction is mostly based on his

experiences in cognitive therapy, rather than traditional empirical studies.

Aimed to elaborate developmental pattern of self-understanding in children and adolescents, Secord and Peevers (1974) conducted a study applying the free-response method to collect self-descriptions. The authors found that a developmental change occurred at the beginning of adolescence when subjects described the self in abstract terms and general evaluation. Prior to that, children in middle childhood could only define themselves in terms of specific acts and features. During middle adolescence, the subjects developed notions of self-reflection and self-evaluation when the subjects recognized that inner processes (e.g., motivation) determine the course of one's life events. Thus, one became more active in shaping the self and in evaluating the self by inner criteria (e.g., personal belief and morality).

The self-concept is broadly defined by empirical researchers as a person's perception of himself or herself (e.g., Rosenberg, 1979; Shavelson & Marsh, 1986). However, one's perception can neither mirror the complicated world nor randomly reflect any physical or mental features of the self. The self-concept is constrained and defined by the structure through which people categorize the vast amount of information they have about themselves and relate the categories to one another. One of the most important contributions of structural-cognitive psychology, especially Piagetian psychology, is the understanding that the self-concept is a result of the

general developmental differentiation process. It is dependent in its nature on the cognitive structure available to the individual, and it is subject to change as a result of later cognitive development.

Psychologists for generations have studied the structure of the self-concept empirically since James (1890/1950) first constructed his hierarchical model of the self. However, researchers are still trying to find more satisfactory answers to the two major questions about the hierarchical model: 1) What does it mean to define the self-concept as a superordinate construct? 2) What exactly is being hierarchicalized? Sarbin (1962) derived a cognitive structure of the self-concept from various empirical studies. The self-concept "is subject to continual and progressive change, usually in the direction from lower-order inference about simple perception to higher-order inference about complex cognitions" (p. 12). According to Epstein (1973), as one moves from lower-order inferences (e.g., specific abilities) to higher-order inferences (e.g., mental and physical competences), the inferences become increasingly important to the maintenance of the individual's self-concept ("self-theory" in Epstein's term). The self-concept is also organized into a core-peripheral structure (Kelly, 1955; Stryker, 1980, 1986). The core constructs are essential for a person to maintain identity and existence while the peripheral constructs can be altered without serious modifications of the core structure.

After a century of study, the hierarchical structure of self

constructed by James (1890/1950) seems to be sketchy. James' legacy of the self defined by its content (i.e., material, social, spiritual self) still dominates the field of research. Too often researchers try to employ the content changes to describe the hierarchical structure (e.g., Leahy, 1985; Leahy & Shirk, 1985). Confounding structural dimensions with content dimensions blurs the focus of studies on the structure of the self-concept. Despite the confusion of structure and content in many cognitive-developmental studies, Piaget has treated his terminology very carefully. The structure provides the pattern of operation in processing and organizing information from different content facets (e.g., physical, active, social). "Structural dimensions refer to simple descriptions of isolated attributes, to the subsequent organization of such attributes into trait-like constructs about the self, as well as the later organization of trait labels into higher order abstractions" (Harter, 1986a, p. 143). Self-concept studies, as Harter (1983) urged, should separate the structural dimensions of self-description from the specific content facets to which these structures are applied.

In an investigation of the origin of the self-concept, Lewis and Brooks-Gunn (1979a, 1979b) studied the self-recognition of infants. They provide evidence that a solid beginning of self-recognition has been established by two years of age although a logically ordered or hierarchically arranged structure of the self-concept is still a long way off. According to their study,

Lewis and Brooks-Gunn formulated two principles: 1) any knowledge gained about the other must also be gained about the self; 2) what can be demonstrated to be known about the self can be said to be known about the other.

Following the long tradition in psychology of the study of the self-concept (Baldwin, 1902; Piaget, 1932; Mead, 1934/1970; Kohlberg, 1969, 1973), Livesley and Bromley (1973) asserted that the growing child's attained knowledge and conception regarding himself is usually not very different (in terms of the developmental level) from that regarding other selves. They conducted a study of 320 children age 7 to 15 about their self-concept. They found increased abilities to organize and integrate impressions of others as well as of the self. Older subjects tended to use more qualifiers (i.e., very, often, always, etc.) to modify the relative importance of traits and to focus attention on certain qualities to make them more salient than others. While younger children perceived a person in terms of a set of independent and somewhat unrelated qualities, the older subjects perceived a "gestalt". In describing a person (used in the research as "stimulus"), older children offered explanations for their actions. "Presumably, they felt that a mere description of its behavior was misleading, in the sense that its causal origins would probably be misconstrued unless made explicit" (Livesley & Bromley, 1973, p. 204).

While younger children treat traits as if they have rigid and salient meanings, older children seem to possess an implicit

understanding that uses trait for convenience and treats simple social rules and stereotypes as popular views and agreements. Thus, trait implications are not absolute and invariant relationships, but flexible and selectively modifiable according to the nature of the stimulus person. Children are able to formulate and reformulate systems of psychological concepts and apply them in actual interpersonal judgments. They are able to coordinate observations of people with reasoning about people. Their thinking becomes flexible, reversible, and capable of self-correction. According to Bromley (1977a, 1977b), the structure of self-description, demonstrated by syntax, style, and phraseology of their descriptions, develops greatly after the age of 13 years. That enables children to integrate and qualify their ideas, to introduce explanatory and comparative terms, to distinguish real from apparent characteristics, and to use tense and suppositions.

Livesley and Bromley (1973) observed the structure of self-conception through the change in the number of statements children used to describe themselves. They found that the children they tested wrote an average of 12 statements (words or phrases) per description about themselves compared with nine statements for their description of the stimulus persons. The average length of the self-description also decreased in the older subjects (Bromley, 1977a). For example, children at 7 years 10 months used 14.2 statements for self-description, but only 10.7 at 15 years 3 months. Bromley attributed the differences in self- and other description to

the egocentric outlook in the younger group.

In searching for evidence of the self-concept development, some widely reviewed studies (e.g., Selman, 1980) have not clearly differentiated the content from the structure as Piaget urged. For example, according to these studies, on the less sophisticated stage the child mentions body image and on a higher stage the child refers to his mental ability and states. The structures are too often defined by the content of the self-concept, but not how content categories are cognitively processed or conceptualized.

Based upon clinical interviews, Selman (1980) points out that children tend to understand themselves by using one principal level of reasoning, and levels of reasoning develop coherently and consistently over time. The "underlying" explanation for conceptual development, according to Selman, is the child's change in perspective-taking abilities. At the first level of his five-level model, the Egocentric Level, the child does not show any differentiation between the perspectives of self and others. Then, at the Subjective Level, the young child can understand that others have different emotional states and social perspectives, but does not yet understand that others know the differences too. He may focus only on one perspective. When the child reaches the Self-Reflective Level, he can appreciate others' understanding of his feelings and he understands that the self may become the object of others' cognition. At the Mutual Role-taking Level, the child can observe the self as both actor and object simultaneously. He

understands that the self and others may be reconstrued from a third-person perspective. Finally, the Conventional System Role-taking Level entails the recognition that conventions may help unify the understanding of different people in interaction, even though they have different needs, interest, and perspectives. The position of the "generalized other" can be taken by children 10 to 15 years old. The child goes through different developmental experiences. At first, he believes that both self and others are incapable of having more than one feeling, motive, or attribute at a time. Thus, the self is described as all smart or all dumb. When the child realizes the co-occurrence of bipolar attributes, he directs them to different events or circumstances. The integration of positive and negative feelings or motives does not come until adolescence, when one acquires the ability of abstract thinking.

To avoid confounding the content dimension with the structural dimension of the self-concept, Harter (1983, 1985) has constructed a model of structural change with four sequential stages, each of which has two levels. Movement from one stage to another involves constant integration, as Piaget described in his stages of cognitive development. The intra-stage changes always involve differentiation. At the first level of a given stage, the attributes, traits, or abstractions are typically global and overgeneralized. Later, the descriptions become more differentiated and situation specific.

In stage 1 of Harter's model, "self-descriptions are couched

in very specific labels, which designate specific skills" (1985, p. 77). The self-descriptions exist in conceptual isolation from one another. An integrated or hierarchical structure has not yet emerged. During stage 2, the child can integrate specific labels to form traits (e.g., smart, or dumb), which is the first step of abstraction. At the first level of stage 2, the child can control only one trait label in the pair, which always contains two polar opposites (Harter, 1977). Beginning at about age 8, the child depicts himself as having two polar opposites (i.e., part smart and part dumb). At stage 3, single abstractions emerge (Fischer, 1980). The existing trait labels from stage 2 are integrated. For example, the traits of smart and dumb are framed into a single abstraction of intelligence. By the end of this stage, single abstractions have become more differentiated from each other. However, the contradictions between single abstractions are unsolvable for children at this stage. For example, one may not be able to understand why someone who is intelligent in general might act very dumb in another sphere. Further re-integration involves the formation of higher-order abstractions at stage 4. An apparent contradiction will no longer confuse children at stage 4 and the self will no longer seem fragmented.

From the structural perspective of Piaget and Kohlberg, Robert Kegan has constructed a developmental model of the self-concept, with "meaning-making" as the core of development (Kegan, 1979, 1982; Kegan, Noam, & Rogers, 1982). Kegan (1982) claims that he has

identified a sequence of six "evolutionary truces" based on his clinical interviews and behavioral observations. The changes of the underlying structure of the self-other relationships are considered key to understanding the self-concept and its development. The initial stage of the self is defined by the absence of a self-other boundary. At Stage 1 (the second stage), the child is limited to his own perceptions and impulses. The child is subject to his perceptions of the world and cannot separate himself from these perceptions. Two feelings cannot be held simultaneously by children between age 2 to 6. At Stage 2, the new system of the self can coordinate impulses over time. However, children's conflicting needs cannot be integrated into a whole. The child can now take himself as the object of his attention and clearly find the boundary of subject and object. The construction of mutually reciprocal relations can be established at Stage 3. Thus, the ability to view the world through the eyes of another person leads the self to transcend one's own experiences. At Stage 4, the new self coordinates mutuality and the different interpersonal contexts of the previous stage. Emotions are more internally controlled. The new characteristics of the self at Stage 5 coordinate the institutional selves and create a new sharing of the self which permits the emotions and impulses to live in the intersection of systems, to be organized between one self-system and another. Each higher stage is a new form of meaning-making and a new construction of the subject's relations to significant others and to the self.

While his book, The Evolving Self, has provoked great interest in the topic, Kegan's stages lack clarification and confirmation from empirical studies.

Implicitly, Kegan's system has important similarities to both Broughton's and Selman's systems of viewing the self in relation to the social world. Selman focuses on the influence of social setting on the self's ability to structure its interpersonal interactions. For Kegan, social relations among family and between friends provide support for the evolving self. Both of them believe that researchers with the structural-developmental tradition should not isolate the individual self from its social context.

#### Evaluative dimensions of the self-concept

In the last two decades, a great number of studies on self-esteem have been conducted (Wiley, 1974, 1979; Harter, 1983; McGuire, 1984). However, the term self-esteem is never clearly defined but taken as given, or is treated like a "concrete" entity which is measurable by various instruments (e.g., Coopersmith, 1959, 1967; Piers & Harris, 1969; Harter, 1982a). The lack of a conventional operational definition of self-esteem is the major obstacle to conducting studies in this area. Some self-esteem measures concentrate heavily on skills and achievements while others focus on morality, physical appearance, popularity, acceptance by parents and peers, or behavioral tendencies. According to Wylie's (1979) summary, despite of the large number of studies in

self-evaluation, the state of research "is very disappointing and ambiguous" (p. 700).

James (1890/1950) considered self-esteem to be the ratio of one's "successes" to one's "pretentions". In other words, one's feeling of worth is determined by the ratio of one's actual accomplishments to one's supposed potentialities. He also acknowledged that we make evaluative judgments about our specific successes and failures. Beyond these judgments, "there is a certain average tone of self-feeling which each one of us carries about with him, and which is independent of the objective reasons we may have for satisfaction or discontent" (p. 171). Arguing for a similar global self-esteem, Cooley (1902) claimed that one could possess a sense of "balanced self-respect" in which there was a stable image of self, not being influenced by momentary praise or blame.

Some other psychologists (Kaplan, 1975; Allport, 1955) define self-esteem as a source of motivation. "The self-esteem motive is considered universally and characteristically a dominant motive in the individual's motivational system" (Kaplan, 1975, p. 10). The self-esteem motive is manifest in the general tendency to distort reality in the service of keeping a positive self-concept. The strategies for that goal include selective perception (Rosenberg, 1979), reconstruction of personal history (Greenwald, 1980), and ego-defensive mechanisms (Hilgard, 1949).

Coopersmith constructed a widely-used psychometric instrument for assessing self-esteem (Coopersmith 1967; Roberson & Miller,

1986). According to Coopersmith (1967), self-esteem refers to "the evaluation which the individual makes and customarily maintains with regard to himself; it expresses an attitude of approval or disapproval, and indicates the extent to which the individual believes himself to be capable, significant, successful, and worthy. In short, self-esteem is a personal judgment of worthiness that is expressed in the attitudes the individual holds toward himself" (p. 5). Beside Coopersmith's self-esteem inventory, Piers and Harris (Piers, 1976) have a widely-applied measure that holds the self-concept as "a set of relatively stable self-attitudes", which "are not only descriptive but also evaluative" (p. 1).

Rosenberg (1986) suggests that self-esteem "primarily involves feelings of self-acceptance, self-liking, and self-respect, both conditional and unconditional. Feelings of competence or efficacy contribute importantly to self-esteem, but are not identical with it or exclusively responsible for it" (p. 120). Following James and Cooley, who constructed the intellectual foundation for researchers of the self-concept, Rosenberg claims that we retain the notion of global self-esteem. However, he also claims the notion of constituent parts of the whole because the parts and the whole are not identical, but separated and distinguishable entities. Global self-esteem is not simply constructed by adding the constituent parts of the whole. For the assessment of one's global sense of self, Rosenberg constructed a unidimensional measure with 10 item scales. It taps the degree of general satisfaction with one's own

life (i.e., feeling the excellent quality of the self, having a positive attitude towards oneself or feeling useless, desiring self-respect). The study by Rosenberg (1979) clearly demonstrates that one can reliably assess general self-worth in adults, as well as in children over the age of eight years.

Harter's (1978, 1982a) approach to the issue of global versus differentiated evaluation of the self is in agreement with Rosenberg's. She isolated three competence domains--cognitive, physical, and social skills. In her Perceived Competence Scale for Children (1982a), a general self-worth subscale indicates the degree to which the child likes the way he is, feels good about the way he acts, thinks that he is a good person, and so forth. The notion of a global self-esteem and a focus on constituent parts should both be retained.

An hierarchical organization of the dimensions of self-evaluation is suggested by some researchers (Shavelson, Huber, & Stanton, 1976; Brim, 1976; L'Ecuyer, 1981). Epstein (1973) assumes that the postulates one has about the self are hierarchically arranged. He points out:

Under a postulate evaluating overall self-esteem, there will be second-order postulates relating to general competence, moral self-approval, power, and love worthiness....lower order postulates organized under competence include assessments of general mental and physical ability. The lowest order postulates under competence include assessments of specific abilities. As one moves from lower order to higher order postulates, the postulates become increasingly important to the maintenance of the individual's self-theory (p. 411).

Through broad theoretical and empirical efforts (Coopersmith,

1967; Fitts, 1965; Hales, 1979a, 1979b; Harter, 1978, 1982a; Harter & Connell, 1982), researchers have attempted to isolate several self-evaluative dimensions. For instance, Coopersmith (1967) isolated four dimensions of self-evaluation: competence (success in meeting achievement demands), virtue (adherence to moral and ethical standards), power (ability to control and influence others), and significance (the acceptance, attention, and affection of others). Harter (1978, 1982a) generalized several self-evaluative dimensions, including the dimensions of competence, social acceptance, and sense of control over the outcomes in one's life, in addition to the assessment of feelings of general self-worth. All dimensions seem to follow the differentiation of content facets of the self-concept as discussed before. The attempt to isolate self-evaluative dimensions reflects the state of the self-concept studies, which overwhelmingly focus on self-evaluation (self-esteem) without simultaneously considering the content of the self-concept as an independent dimension.

In the most thorough review in the field of self-esteem (self-evaluation) studies, Wiley (1979) concludes that self-esteem changes between middle childhood and adolescence yield inconsistent patterns in different studies. The available studies have failed to find a consistent association between age and self-esteem. However, some longitudinal studies (e.g., MaCarthy & Hoge, 1982) have revealed increases in self-esteem with age. MaCarthy and Hoge found significant increase in self-esteem between grades 7 and 12.

According to O'Malley (O'Malley & Bachman, 1983; Bachman & O'Malley, 1986), adolescents and young adults (age 13 to 23) showed age-related differences in self-esteem. Global self-esteem appears to be consistently increase.

Between middle childhood and adolescence, the child involves stressful social and physiological changes, such as the transition from elementary school to junior high school, and many pubertal events, and heralds the end of childhood and the beginning of adolescence. Thus, the child tends to have various behavioral problems (Lipsitz, 1977; Brooks-Gunn & Peterson, 1984; Peterson & Taylor, 1980). This transition will also influence one's self-evaluation. Piers and Harris (1964) found a significant decline in self-esteem in late middle childhood and early adolescence. Simmons, Rosenberg, and Rosenberg (1973) found self-esteem reached its lowest point at age 12 in their research of children from grade 3 to grade 12. Between ages 8 and 11, the proportion with lower self-esteem appeared to be average (25%). Then, from age 12 to 14, the proportion of people with low self-esteem increased to 30%. Thereafter, the figure declined in later adolescence to 22%. Rosenberg (1979) suggests that early adolescence is somewhat more apt to be a period of self-esteem disturbance. Since data from different sources (e.g., Simmons & Blyth, 1984) are inconsistent with the above trends, any firm conclusions are not available. The lower self-esteem at age 12 or 13 was found to correlate with the transition from elementary school

to junior high school (Simmons, Rosenberg, & Rosenberg, 1973; Simmons, Blyth, Van Cleave, & Bush, 1979). The change in school context is associated with depressed self-esteem. They argued that the decline of self-esteem is an environmental rather than a developmental effect. The findings were confirmed by Harter and her associates (Harter, 1982a; Harter & Connell, 1982). Self-esteem scores from the Perceived Competence Scale declined in the seventh grade. However, some recent studies (Nottelmann, 1987; Hirsch & Rapkin, 1987) have concluded that early adolescence appears to be a relatively stable period in self-esteem. Children's perceived competence increased and was stable across the transition period. Berndt (Berndt & Hawkins, 1985, Berndt, Hawkins, & Hoyle, 1986) found no change in one's global self-esteem over the course of the transition to junior high school. These very diverse results can be related to the insufficiency of the existing self-esteem measurements that fail to reflect how the child evaluates himself under dramatic physiological, cognitive, social, and environmental changes. Also, the standard measurements fail to indicate dimensional changes in self-evaluation. Thus, it will be difficult to make any solid conclusions given the various interpretations of diverse researchers.

Sex, socioeconomic status, parental influences

Gender influences on the self-concept, especially on self-evaluation, have been the focus of a large number of studies in

recent decades. Sex differences in the self-concept relate to a broadly spread belief that society has damaged the self-esteem of females. However, the exhaustive review by Wylie (1979) on overall self-regard, the self-concept in relation to sex-role identity, and self-reported sex group affiliation finds little consistent differences between boys and girls although boys show greater self-confidence. Wylie's conclusion agrees with the careful review by Maccoby and Jacklin (1974). In the thirty studies they reviewed, sex differences of self-rating on standardized self-esteem scales are seldom found. In the studies that reported some differences, it was as often girls as boys who received higher than average scores. The similarity of the two sexes in self-esteem was remarkably uniform across age levels through college age. In their recent studies, O'Malley and Bachman (1979, 1983) found differences of self-esteem between teenage boys and girls were about one-tenth of a standard deviation in the boys' favor. Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) suggest that girls appear to have lower self-confidence than boys. However, the interpretation of the evidence is very important as well. They conclude that it is not the girls' self-confidence that is unrealistically low but the boys' self-confidence that is unrealistically higher. Also, an obvious explanation of sex differences is that women do not define themselves in terms of the success using features that are related to a favorable self-image by social biases.

Livesley and Bromley (1973) reported sex differences in the use

of content categories in person perception. Girls used more personality constructs than boys. However, similar to the situation in global self-esteem studies, few consistent results could be found about sex differences in content categories used in self-description. Little (1968) found no significant sex differences in the use of personality constructs, but boys used more role constructs than girls.

The only particular content category of the self-concept that appears to be consistently more negative among girls is the quality of physical attractiveness (Rosenberg, 1979; Simmons & Blyth, 1984). Girls were found to be less satisfied than boys with their physical attractiveness. This has been confirmed by Jersild, Brook, and Brook (1978). They reported that at all grade levels, from sixth through twelfth, more girls complained about their physical characteristics than boys did. Offer, Ostrov, and Howard (1981) also found that over 40% of normal girls expressed frequently their feelings of unattractiveness and ugliness of their body images. Sex differences can be found in some other aspects of the self-concept. For example, comparing boys' and girls' self-concepts by age, studies (Rosenberg & Simmons, 1972; Simmons & Rosenberg, 1975) discovered that although the self-esteem of boys and girls differed only modestly, at adolescence girls showed considerably higher instability of the self-concept. Girls' ideas about themselves tended to change more quickly. They showed significantly higher self-consciousness. For instance, they thought more about other

people's reactions to them at public gatherings; they felt uneasy if someone watched them work. With increasing age, the relationships between self and social self-evaluation follow different courses for males and females. Although there is considerable convergence between self and social self-evaluations for males in later childhood, there is a marked trend towards greater divergence during adolescence (Shirk, 1983). When growing older, there is a decreasing association between self-view and perceived social views of the self. For female subjects, a slight trend towards increasing convergence is found.

Since a multifaceted self-concept involves role-taking, sex-stereotypes from a given society are more likely to influence the self-concept in certain content areas (Wylie, 1979). For instance, sex-role stereotypes were found to relate to one's occupational aspiration, which is especially subject to societal influences (Rosenberg & Rosenberg, 1981). Thus, learned sex-stereotypes also influence people's self-perception.

Psychologists, sociologists, and educators have long assumed that socioeconomic status would be a significant variable in influencing one's self-concept (e.g., Rosenberg, 1979; Kohn, 1969). However, the literature on relationships between social class and the self-concept (especially self-esteem) is fraught with contradictory, inconsistent, and generally weak findings (Wylie, 1979). The work of Rosenberg and his colleagues is an exception. Rosenberg and Pearlin (1978) demonstrated the way social class

impinges on adult self-esteem through four processes of the self-concept formation (i.e., reflected appraisals, social comparisons, self-attribution, and psychological centrality). They also attempted to explain why the operation of these four processes lead less clear social-class differences in children's self-concept. Rosenberg and Simmons (1972) have proposed the mechanism of value selectivity, by which one may de-value the specific domain in which one has low status to mitigate the effects of the low economic status.

Social class means varying degrees of prestige, respect, possessions, and power. All these meanings have clear self-esteem implication. However, the child might never perceive social class in an adult way. His peer groups and school environment tend to be more homogeneous in terms of social class. Thus, the child would not be sensitive enough to pick up references to socioeconomic status beyond their immediate environment. As Rosenberg (1979) pointed out, "the differential association of social class to self-esteem for children and adults stem from the different social experiences and psychological interpretations associated with this structural fact in these age groups" (p. 147).

The socioeconomic effects are mediated through the parents' child-rearing practices that are heavily affected by the subculture of certain social classes. Socialization studies have long paid great attention to a wide variety of family variables that are relevant to children's self-concept. Wylie (1979) summarizes the

the most frequently mentioned variables as the following: 1) parental variables, such as parents' characteristics, values, self-acceptance, and child-rearing practices, etc; 2) family role structures and role specialization; 3) family size; and 4) the birth order of the child. The self-concept, especially self-esteem, related to the family context is studied by many researchers (e.g., Rosenberg & Simmons, 1972; Rosenberg, 1975).

In a study of influences of parental characteristics on self-esteem of fifth- and sixth-grade boys, Coopersmith (1967) found that the parents of higher self-esteem boys set higher standards (expectations) for competence and obedience, and consistently enforced the standards. Parental control was exercised in such a way that it appeared fair and reasonable to the child. The parents of children with higher self-esteem were accepting and affectionate. They preferred noncoercive discipline and democratic decision-making that considered children's opinions. However, as Wylie (1979) pointed out, there were numerous methodological problems with Coopersmith's study. For example, the sample size was small and restricted to boys with a narrow age range (10 to 12).

Coopersmith's study found that power-assertive parenting was associated with low self-esteem, whereas firm rule enforcement accompanied by warmth and democratic family decision-making was associated with high self-esteem. High parental control, according to the hypothesis, implies lack of trust in the child and hence fails to foster the child's self-esteem. McEachern (1973) reports

that high-esteem children tended to perceive their parents as exercising fairly high levels of firm control. It seems to be that neither authoritarian control nor unalloyed freedom and permissiveness is crucial for the development of children's high self-esteem. The pattern of interaction will also influence the child's self-esteem. When parents make reasonable and firm demands that are accepted as legitimate by children, higher self-esteem is more likely to be developed.

Rosenberg's analysis of the effects of the family influences (social context influences) on self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1975; Rosenberg & Simmons, 1972) found that the influences of such structural variables as birth order and dynamics of the family (e.g., two-parents family or broken family) on the self-esteem of children is substantially affected by a number of conditional variables--religious background, age of the mother at her divorce or separation, the child's age, and number and sex of siblings. Parental interest in and support of the child is also affected by the structural and conditional variables and is considered an important intervening variable. Parental interest towards the child is positively related to the child's self-esteem. In studies of family influences on self-esteem formation, the positive relationship between parental support and affection and the child's self-esteem is one of the most consistent findings (Coopersmith, 1967; Gecas, 1972; Hales, 1979a).

Hales (1979a) attempted to look at the implication of

Baumrind's (1971) parenting typology for self-esteem. Her findings concluded that self-esteem was higher for girls having parents who exhibited warmth and acceptance, encouraged independence, stressed firm enforcement of rules and regulations, gave clear direction and help, and required the child to assume responsibility at home. The findings were very consistent with Coopersmith's observations. However, Hales only dealt with the influences towards girls while Coopersmith reported the effects upon boys.

Wylie (1979) reviewed studies examining the relationships between family variables and the self-concept in an entire chapter of her comprehensive volume. According to her, in these reviewed studies, problems with unclear definitions of constructs, experimental design, correlational techniques used to infer causal links, and inadequate measuring instruments limit the conclusions one can draw from the literature. Evidence shows that a child's self-regard is associated with the parent's reported level of regard for the child. Between the child's self-perceptions and his perceptions of parental attitudes towards him, a strong relationship is found.

#### Culture and the Self-Concept

The influences of cultural variations on the nature of the self-concept have not been extensively studied by social scientists (Gergen, 1977, 1984). Since the 1940s, anthropologists from the "culture and personality" approach, including Benedict, Mead,

Lindon, and Kardiner, have devoted their efforts to the study of cultural influences on personality, and thus, only indirectly, on the nature of the self-concept. The few empirical studies on the relationship between culture and the self-concept appear in contemporary literature of psychological anthropology. The findings of these research projects (e.g., Hsu, 1963; DeVos, 1976; Geertz, 1973) clearly suggest that the formation of the self-concept differs across cultural boundaries. While different cultural experiences shape human values and ways of relating to the world and to the human society, they also create the self. However, surprisingly few studies have been done on the relation between culture and self by psychologists, especially by developmental psychologists. Semantic problems combined with definitional problems (Wylie, 1961, 1974, 1979) might make the situation extremely difficult for psychological study, especially regarding the relationships between culture and the self-concept. Although some Western psychologists (e.g., Kohlberg, 1969) claim that there are universal sequences of the self-concept formation, nothing has given credibility to this conclusion. Therefore, there is considerable need for research on the different developmental sequences of the self-concept in different cultures.

The self-concept: The West and the East

For people residing in the Western culture, analytic and deductive modes of thinking are reported as prominent (Johnson,

1985). There is a tendency to see reality as an aggregation of parts. The parts in Western thinking could be divided into yet smaller parts and pieces. The mode of analytic thinking could have a strong influence on the notion of the self-concept as composed of parts (e.g., physical, social, academic). On the other hand, the Chinese mode of thinking tends to be inductive and synthetic, emphasizing temporarily defined dynamic relations (Gregory-Smith, 1979).

In the West, the stress on individualism might direct the formation of the self-concept. The belief that each individual is an entity separated from every other and from the group is deeply rooted in Western social institutions (Spence, 1985) and is endowed with "natural law". The best example would be Kohlberg's (1969) universal ethical orientation, which reflects a particular set of Western values. Kohlberg (1969, 1976) puts the individual's transcendental conscience at the top of the ladder of individual moral development and considers high levels of logical reasoning the best. On the other hand, conventional anthropological and sociological wisdom indicate that Chinese culture has always emphasized the importance of collective bonds of human solidarity over individualized bonds. For instance, a child's education is associated with a strong emphasis on collectivism, which defines the academic success of the child as an important source of pride for the entire family and academic failure as a stigma to the family.

The cross-cultural evidences do not support the assumption that

the construction of the self-concept under the influences of one's cognitive development will inevitably lead to individualization and alienation of the individual from the societal consensus. The self-concept does not necessarily have a clear boundary that stops at one's skin and demarcates self from non-self (Spence, 1985). In contrast to Western children, as Wilson (1981, 1970) has observed, Chinese children are encouraged to develop a self-perspective with regard to a particular group (e.g., school). Individuals do not define themselves as detached from their relationships, their family, and society.

In Western culture, as Miller observed (1974), explanation systems, whether theological, political, philosophical, or psychological, are mainly following very rigid and absolute logic (monotheism in Niebuhr's term, 1970). The self-concept, like many other concepts, operates according to fixed categories which are controlled by a consistent logic that demands a rigorous "either/or solution"--either true or false, either good or evil, either God or Satan. However, Chinese culture can be considered as manifesting a situational ethic as opposed to the more universal ethic built around moral absolutes. Danto's (1985) observation about Chinese way of reasoning is very precise:

The moral organ would be judgment concerned to apply principles to circumstances in which it requires all the guidance it can get and from which life must be the ultimate teacher... So the Chinese mind moves by case to case through cases, and universalization would be something his wisdom would make him diffident to try (p. 390).

According to Hsu's (1981) instance, it is not uncommon for a single

individual to pass through different religious affiliations without manifesting signs of conflict and dissonance. The self-concept in Chinese culture might not strongly depend on cognitive consistency as is the case in the Western culture.

As some psychologists argued (Buck-Moss, 1975; Gergen, 1973; Sampson, 1977; Logan, 1987), psychological theories, including theories of the self-concept, are forms of social construction having origins in historical and social cultural conditions. What developmental studies of the self-concept need the most is to consider cultural influences and put all the discussed variables and considerations (e.g., family experiences, social economic status, gender) into the cultural context in which the child lives. Only a few cross-cultural developmental studies of the self-concept have been conducted (e.g., Stigler, Smith, & Mao, 1985). Self-evaluation seems to be the overwhelming dimension focused by these studies as cases in Western societies. However, what does it mean to say that American children tend to have higher self-esteem than their Chinese counterparts, or vice versa? It is clear that a simple comparison is not the purpose of cross-cultural studies.

#### Children's lives in urban China

About 40 percent of a billion Chinese people, among which 16 percent are 9 to 14 years old, live in urban area (Population Census Office, 1984). Urban life in China is under the strict control of the regime that constructs bureaucratic measures to restrain urban

residence. The state allocation of urban jobs, housing, rations, and social services brings the residents under extensive bureaucratic influences. Children, therefore, are subject directly to the processes of state socialization. Political campaigns are readily and effectively transmitted to them and to their parents through the social structure, through the public school system and social service institutions, and through state sector employment and mass political organizations (Stacey, 1983; Whyte & Parish, 1983).

A unique study on Chinese personality characteristics was conducted by Ridley, Godwin, and Doolin (1971). Although the study was finished in the early 1970s, the findings remain insightful for understanding the officially propagated moral standards and conventional behavioral patterns that reflect age-old traditions rather than momentary political fluctuations. In the study, the authors assumed that the content of children's readers and textbooks often bear a close relationship to the apparent needs of a society under a given condition of development. They conducted an extensive content analysis of a set of elementary school grammar readers (Yu Wen) used by Chinese schools. The set contained ten volumes and covered the first five grades of elementary schools. Much of the material in the readers are still broadly used today. According to the study, socially desired character traits were related to a deep concern for the development of the country, emotional stability, and a love which is to serve as the basic motive in the complete subordination of the individual to the state. The aim of the

cultivation of these moral personality qualities is to guide young people in their daily lives. Informational themes have increased in elementary school reading textbook since the end of the Cultural Revolution. However, the moral and political dimension retains a high priority (Straka, 1985; Burton, 1986). The discrepancy between the political and ideological preach and people's real lives and beliefs has long been observed (e.g., Stacey, 1983; Wolf, 1985). It is not clear that how Chinese children's self-concept is influenced by the political and ideological propaganda, by their real lives, and by the discrepancy between the above two.

A recent study (Stigler, Smith, & Mao, 1985) aimed to explore cultural differences in self-perceptions of competence between Chinese and American elementary school children. Harter's Perceived Competence Scale for Children was applied to both Chinese and American children. Chinese children were found to underrate their competences, except those in the social domain where a higher rating was judged to reflect a different social context from what American children experienced. Judging oneself as "important" to one's peers loaded on the cognitive subscale for the Chinese children, but on the social subscale for the American children. In other words, Chinese children thought that having certain cognitive qualities would be important for them to win respect from peers while American children treated social qualities as more important. The findings also revealed some unique characteristics of Chinese children's self-evaluation. The researchers found the phenomenon of so-called

"self-effacement" in Chinese children who tended to down-rate self-competence and self-worth. They rated themselves significantly lower on the cognitive, physical, and general subscales. The socially desired self-effacement in China serves as means of enhancing harmony in social relations (Bond, Leung, & Wan, 1982). It is possible that the scale requirement that children compare themselves to others might strongly activate Chinese children's self-effacing tendencies and thereby lessen the validity of their responses. Stigler and his colleagues suggest assessing Chinese children's perceived competence by asking questions about absolute levels of competence that do not require explicit comparisons with other children. Thus, the conventional standard scales developed in the West might not serve the study of the self-concept in a very different culture, such as Chinese culture.

In China, systematical studies of children's self-concept have been lacking. Some casual observations, however, have revealed significant characteristics of ways that Chinese children define themselves. For instance, Zuo (1985) investigated self-consciousness of Chinese adolescents (11 to 14 years old). While peer relations become more important for children at this age level, the conflict between the way they look at themselves and the way adults look at them becomes more severe. In a peer group, the child can taste independence without being strictly disciplined. So at this stage, there could be a period of time that adolescents confront the conventional values and mode of behavior represented by

adults. The conflict could be due to the disparity between the adolescents' desire of being independent and their competences for being independent.

The self-evaluation of Chinese children was observed by several researchers (e.g., Shi & Wang, 1985). They noticed some consistent phenomena. For instance, female elementary school students tended to show higher self-evaluation than males in the same group. Thereafter, the male subjects demonstrated significantly higher self-evaluation than female subjects until late adolescence. Gender differences in the self-conception could be attributed to different factors, such as social, cultural, or physical factors.

## METHOD

## Subjects

The study was conducted in the urban area of Nanjing, an Eastern China city with a population of 2.2 million. It is among the 50 largest cities in China with a population over half a million. Although Nanjing is located in the most prosperous area in China and its residents have a higher educational level than average, the fabric of people's daily lives is very typical for major cities. It is neither an industrial city like Anshan, nor a central administration city like Beijing.

A total of 390 subjects in the third and the fifth grade of elementary schools and the first grade of junior high school (grade 7) were involved. The average age was nine years and five months for the third grade students, eleven years and eight months for the fifth grade students, and thirteen years and five months for the seventh grade students. All these figures matched with the city-wide average age of students in each grade. They were from nine different schools, six elementary schools and three high schools. All schools were among average size and had about average standard test scores used by district education bureau to measure quality of education. There were 207 males and 183 females (see Table 1). In each school, an entire class in either grade 3, grade 5, or grade 7 participated in the study. Students were identified only by their identification numbers. The nine schools were located

in different districts of the city where residents took various occupations. The "key schools" were avoided for their selected population of students from intellectuals' and officers' families and their privileges of better teachers and a larger budget. All above considerations aimed to make the composition of sample more representative among the school population. Representativeness led to a slight sex imbalance, in that the percentage of females was 47%.

Table 1. Subjects of the study

GRADE	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
3	65	71	136
5	70	55	125
7	72	57	129
TOTAL	207	183	390

The subjects represented various family backgrounds, in terms of parents' occupations and educational levels (see Table 2 and Table 3). The percentages of parents' occupations and educational levels were very close to the average of Chinese urban population (Tianjin Women's Federation, 1985). Because of rapid urbanization and the government policy of one child family, the size of the urban family has changed in the last two decades (Wang, 1986; Pan & Pan, 1982;

Ansley, 1984). In this study, the proportion of families with different sizes was similar to the national average (see Table 4).

Table 2. Educational background of subjects' parents

LEVEL OF EDUCATION	GRADE 3	GRADE 5	GRADE 7	TOTAL
Primary/Below				
Father	12.40 <sup>a</sup>	9.17	7.29	9.82
Mother	17.46	20.72	13.33	17.43
Junior high				
Father	32.23	35.78	21.88	30.37
Mother	46.03	37.84	30.00	38.84
Senior high				
Father	35.54	33.94	27.08	32.52
Mother	27.78	27.93	32.22	29.05
Some college				
Father	11.57	3.67	6.25	7.36
Mother	3.97	0.90	6.67	3.67
University/Above				
Father	8.26	17.43	37.50	19.94
Mother	4.76	12.61	17.78	11.01

<sup>a</sup>Figures in the table are percentages.

#### Instruments

Each subject was asked to complete two tests, the "Who Am I" Test (see Appendix A<sup>2</sup>) and the Sentence Completion Test (see Appendix B).

In self-concept studies, many researchers have used different open-ended measures in which children are required to describe themselves, familiar persons, or actors in the study (Livesley &

Table 3. Occupations of subjects' parents

OCCUPATION <sup>a</sup>	GRADE 3	GRADE 5	GRADE 7	TOTAL
High professional <sup>b</sup>				
Father	10.74	14.68	28.42	17.23
Mother	3.17	3.60	15.73	6.75
Low professional <sup>c</sup>				
Father	0.83	0.92	10.53	3.69
Mother	3.97	5.41	7.87	5.52
Administrator				
Father	20.66	10.09	14.74	15.38
Mother	3.17	1.80	8.99	4.29
Managerial cadre				
Father	20.66	34.86	15.79	24.00
Mother	18.25	33.33	16.85	23.01
Worker				
Father	38.02	36.70	25.26	33.85
Mother	54.76	42.34	41.57	46.93
Service attendant				
Father	4.13	1.83	2.11	2.77
Mother	11.90	12.61	7.87	11.04
Self-Employed <sup>d</sup>				
Father	4.96	0.92	3.16	3.08
Mother	4.76	0.90	1.12	2.45

<sup>a</sup>Figures in the table are percentages. The seven categories are revised according to Parish's study (1984). Since there is no systematic research about socio-economic status in China, occupation is the best available predictor of one's social status.

<sup>b</sup>High professionals include scientists, engineers, doctors.

<sup>c</sup>Low professionals include high and primary school teachers.

<sup>d</sup>Housewife is included in this category.

Bromley, 1973; Secord & Peevers, 1974; McGuire & Padawer-Singer, 1976). In the 1950s, Bugental and Zelen (1950) proposed an

Table 4. Number of siblings

SIB NUMBER	GRADE 3	GRADE 5	GRADE 7	TOTAL
0	39.39 <sup>a</sup>	22.88	11.21	25.49 <sup>b</sup>
1	46.97	51.09	61.68	52.94
2	11.36	21.19	21.50	17.65
3	2.27	4.24	5.61	3.92

<sup>a</sup>Figures in the table are percentages.

<sup>b</sup>On the national level, 21.2% of all families have one child (Scherer, 1987).

open-ended method in which a subject was asked to respond to the question, "Who am I", in several sentences. Then the content of the responses was analyzed to reveal the subject's self-concept. Kuhn and McPartland (1954) constructed an alternative version of the test (i.e., Twenty Statement Test) by asking the subject to give 20 responses to the questions (i.e., Who am I). The method aims to measure the spontaneous self-concept in order to explore what aspects of the self are salient in consciousness and to identify the factors that determine what is salient.

Unlike the self-concept tests developed by psychologists (e.g., Adjective Check List by Gough & Heilbrun, 1965), the main interest in the Twenty Statement Test was originated by sociologists, especially those from the Symbolic-interaction School (e.g., Kuhn). They argued that traditional psychological methods of testing the self-concept underestimated the importance of the "special

interaction context" in determining relevant aspects of the self-concept and their expressions. Thus, self-attitudes are meaningless without considering their particular context. Moreover, the Twenty Statement Test functions to facilitate self-description to include "categories" in addition to "attributes". As Gordon (1968) has pointed out, sociologists are especially interested in self-description of roles, group memberships, activities, and values that are often in "noun form". The traditional instruments for testing the self-concept (e.g., Q Sorts, check lists, questionnaires, and rating scales) will not reveal the above information, but only attributes represented by adjectives or adverbs.

Traditional self-concept instruments, with forced choices and artificial distinctions, will limit expressions of personal constructs. The subject is forced to choose among limited alternatives to circumscribed questions causing the subject to give a response that does not accurately reflect his feelings. On the other hand, the unstructured format of the Twenty Statement Test is supposed to give the subject the best possible situation to express his self-concept in his own way (Hickman & Kuhn, 1956; Kuhn, 1960; Gordon, 1969) without imposing a researcher's structure upon the subject and without having specific a priori chosen dimensions. The subject has many choices in selecting the information upon which he bases his impression and he is free to respond as he thinks. Thereby, the instrument acts in a relatively natural fashion.

Secondly, some factors, such as anxiety, duplicity, embarrassment, and lack of skills in communication may influence the self-description, but to a lesser extent in natural situations. Thus, the Twenty Statement Test may reveal the cognitive processes more clearly. By leaving the subject as free as possible to respond in his own way, the test may reduce the effects of bias caused by the experimenter's own assumptions about the self-concept.

In an open-ended instrument like the "Who Am I" Test, an obvious question is how to handle the different number of responses from the subjects. The most commonly applied way is to find percent scores. Wylie (1979), however, argues that the attempt to control responses by using percent scores is a dubious practice when the total number of responses used as basis for computing percents may be very few. This is especially true for the study of the child's self-concept.

This study set up the request for the minimum number of responses that each subject is supposed to give. To determine a reasonable number of required responses, a pilot study was conducted on 20 Chinese children from age nine to age thirteen. Surprisingly, the younger subjects tended to give more responses and to answer more rapidly than the older subjects (e.g., subjects from grade 7). For all age groups, ten responses were found to be a reasonable length.

## Coding System

Since the "Who Am I" Test requested subjects to write only one sentence on each line of the provided answering sheet, long and complex sentences were not very common. This enabled the researcher to take an entire sentence as the recording unit, based upon its central theme. Related to the problem of an uneven number of responses, an open-ended instrument also faces the difficulty of coding the responses of non-standard length. Researchers code each response into only one of the categories. This might lead to serious information loss. In order to exhaust the information from the data, Gordon (1968) has suggested coding each meaning unit (usually a sentence) in several different ways--content category, tense, evaluation, and importance as ranking by the subject. Multiple coding of the same data is the only way to keep both reliability and richness of data (North, Holsti, Zaninovich, & Zinnes, 1963; Holsti, 1969).

A number of social-cognitive studies on the self-concept (e.g., Kohlberg, 1969; Loevinger, 1966, 1976; Selman, 1980) have suggested that the child's responses reveal not only the specific content facets of the self-concept, but also the underlying structure of reasoning. In every specific response, its length, its pattern of combination of elements, and its word choices (i.e., abstract vs. concrete) provide salient information about the reasoning structure of the respondent. In this study, every response is coded for not only its content category, but also for

its reasoning structure.

### Content coding

Most researchers, especially sociologists, who apply the "Who Am I" Test tend to focus on content categories of the self-concept. The method assumes that each response can be assigned to a content category with reasonably high inter-rater reliability. Thus, the researcher can avoid the danger of imposing his own idiosyncratic and invalid system of ideas upon the data. The most commonly used and researched content categorization has been proposed by Gordon (1968, 1969), who composed a thirty-category system of content coding. The inter-rater reliability for studies using Gordon's categorization has been generally high. For instance, Yarrow and Campbell (1963) established a reliability of 77%; Montemayor and Eisen (1977) 85%; Chassin and Young (1981) 88%. Even the lowest reliability found reached 70% (Bond & Cheung, 1983).

The content coding scheme (see Appendix C) for this study was constructed by studying a number of coding systems in previous studies, especially Gordon's system. Instead of large number of categories, such as in Gordon's system, the present study used 18 categories because the more narrow and specific categories might lead to unreliable coding and low frequencies of occurrence of responses in certain categories. The 18 categories were under five exhaust and mutually exclusive content sections, which represent physical, active, psychological, social-relational, and social

conventional and moral aspects of the self-concept. The rater first coded each response in one of the five sections; then, he could be more confident and reliable when further coding responses in each section into relatively large number of categories. Thus, the coding led to higher reliability and better statistically discriminating power.

The Physical Aspects of the self-concept included seven categories: Name, Sex, Age, Native Place and Nationality, Physical Attributes, Possession and Resource, and Address. Under Active Aspects, there were two categories: Occasional and Habitual Actions, and Action Competence and Performance. The Social-Relational Aspects consisted of three categories: Kinship Roles, Interacting Group Memberships, and Interpersonal Relationships.

The Social Conventional and Moral Aspects include categories of Social Conventions and Conscience/Morality. Many researchers emphasize the necessity of differentiating conventions and social values from morality. Rest (1983) asserts that not all human values are moral values. According to Turiel and his colleagues (Turiel, 1977, 1983; Nucci, 1981, 1982; Tisak & Turiel, 1984; Smetana, 1981), children's moral thinking differs from social-conventional thinking. Conventions are context-specific rules which children are quite careful to distinguish from more universally applicable moral considerations. Conventions are the "home rules" based on social consensus. These rules govern a whole range of things such as the

time one has to be in at night, table manners, etc.

The Psychological Aspects were divided into three categories: Characteristics in Cognition, Personality Traits, and Feelings, Attitudes, and Aspirations. Finally, for exclusiveness, there was a category of Uncodable Items. The inter-rater reliability of the content coding using the above scheme was .926, established by having two raters code all responses of ten subjects independently.

#### Structural coding

The Structural Coding System (see Appendix E) for this study is based on those used in various social-cognitive studies (e.g., Kohlberg, 1969; Selman, 1980; Loevinger, 1976; Leahy, 1985; Damon, 1977, 1983; Damon & Hart, 1982; Harter, 1983, 1986a; Watson & Fischer, 1980; Ruble & Rholes, 1981). The responses are coded into four qualitatively different structural levels: Unconstrained Reasoning, Concrete and Stereotyped Reasoning, Abstract and Relative Reasoning, and Holistic and Autonomous Reasoning. The levels of structure are somewhat parallel to the Piagetian stages of cognitive development. Unconstrained reasoning refers to a self-conception that is a fragmented and incoherent. The "real meaning" of the self-conception is determined by the child's momentary experiences. In middle childhood, the self-conception depends on concrete and initial logic. The integration of fragmented experiences leads to specific trait labels (e.g., dumb, smart). External experiences convey deeper meanings than it is implicated by the immediate and

observable features. In later middle childhood and early adolescence, the specific trait labels can be organized into more advanced integration. Apparent contradictions in reasoning and observation can be solved and accommodated. The fourth level of the structure of reasoning in the self-concept involves the high-level synthesis developed in coping with a multitude of diverse objects and events. The sophisticated self-conception is able to reconcile contradictions by mapping and organizing them into different facets and layers of a system.

The structural coding followed a specific manual, consisting of five sections. Each section dealt with responses from one of five content aspects. Four structural levels were constructed for each of the five categories in considering the specific differences in the categories. The "domain specific" structural treatment ensured higher coding reliability because raters dealt with only one domain at a time and matched the response to a specific example in the manual. Inter-rater reliability was established by having two raters code one hundred protocols independently. It revealed a reliability of .776.

The overall score of the child's reasoning structure was based on averaging his scores (i.e., Level 1 to 4) on all responses.

#### Evaluative coding

Gordon (1968) and McPhail and Tucker (1972), among other researchers, studied subjects' self-evaluation through their

responses to the Twenty Statement Test and assigned positive, neutral, or negative evaluations to each separate statement. Also, the Twenty Statement Test responses can be coded for self-favorability or self-unfavorability (e.g., Spitzer, Stratton, Fitzgerald, & Marsh, 1966; Zelen, 1954). Such a coded score is expected to correlate with total scores from commonly applied personality questionnaires, checklists, and rating scales. That has been found to be the case. For instance, Zelen (1954) found a correlation of .73 between coded self-acceptance on the Twenty Statement Test and "Feelings of Personal Worth" from the California Test of Personality. However, the evaluative coding of the Twenty Statement Test (or the "Who Am I" Test) is criticized for depending heavily on the experimenter's opinions. Thus, the score would not be consistently phenomenological (Wylie, 1974).

A scheme of evaluative coding (see Appendix F) was established for this study. The judgment led to three categories of self-evaluation: Favorable (2), Neutral (1), and Unfavorable (0). The overall self-evaluation score was calculated by averaging all evaluative codings for each respondent. Since the coding unit, a sentence, is relatively small, some words conveying favorable-unfavorable meanings (e.g., smart vs. dumb) were used as important clues for evaluative coding. For sentences that gave only factual descriptions, no "evaluative words" could be the basis for coding (e.g., "I respect old people", or "I love physical labor"). Conventional preferences were relied on by the raters who were

familiar with the respondents' culture (Chinese). One hundred randomly selected protocols were coded by two independent raters on the basis of the evaluative meaning conveyed by the responses. The inter-rater agreement was 71.6%.

#### The Sentence Completion Test

The Sentence Completion Test was applied as a second instrument to gather information about the content of the respondent's self-concept. Respondents were requested to complete the sentences already begun for them. This test is broadly applied in research on the self-concept. For instance, Loevinger and her colleagues (Loevinger & Messler, 1970; Loevinger, 1976) have conducted a series of studies of ego development in the last 20 years by using the Sentence Completion Test as the major instrument. She has successfully constructed a manual of the Sentence Completion Test and proved its validity for studying ego development. Keller, Ford, and Meacham (1978) applied the test, together with open-ended questions similar to the "Who Am I" Test, to study young children's (3 to 5 years old) self-concept. Using a nine-category coding system (i.e., actions, relationships, body image, processions, personal labels, gender, evaluation, and personal characteristics and preferences) constructed by themselves, the authors established an inter-rater agreement as high as 97%.

The Sentence Completion Test in the present study consisted of 13 sentence stems that assess different facets of the content of the

self-concept. A response to one sentence stem, whether an explanation point, a word, a phrase, a sentence, or a paragraph, was counted as one response. The stems of the sentences were tested in a pilot study. Ten subjects (9 to 13 years old) were asked to complete sentences to provide information for revising the stems. The content coding of the test used the same manual as the content coding for the "Who Am I" Test. An independent inter-rater reliability for coding the completed sentences was calculated, revealing a high reliability of .911.

Item 9 of the Sentence Completion Test functioned to investigate children's self-concept relating to their fear that reflects the central consideration in his life at a certain age (He, 1986). Also, in Markus' view (Markus & Nurius, 1987), one's fears and anxieties, showing the perceived potential selfhood, "are deft blendings of the representations of one's roles and social categorizations with views of one's particular features, attributes, or habits" (p. 158). Item 10 provided information about children's self-concept relating to their role models. A special coding scheme (see Appendix D) was applied to code these two items.

#### Construction of coding manuals

The responses of 15 extra subjects (age 9 to 14) were used at different stages of manual construction. Ten of them entered into construction of the preliminary manuals (i.e., Content, Structural, Evaluative Coding manual). The responses of remaining five subjects

provided data for revision upon completion of the manuals. An effort was made to achieve as much ethnographic validity for the coding manuals as possible while still enabling comparative analysis. For instance, the Content Coding Manual was based on Gordon's system, but revised by combining or deleting the categories, such as "Sense of Self" and "Existential Self", which are culturally remote to Chinese subjects. More emphasis was put on the categories of social relational characteristics compared to Gordon's manual.

#### The Parental Questionnaire

The parental questionnaire (see Appendix G) was constructed to gather demographic data on children and their parents (e.g., the child's age, number of siblings, school performance, parent's educational level and occupation). The questionnaire especially emphasized the information about parental expectations towards the child and parental helping and disciplining behaviors. The preliminary questionnaire was revised after a pilot test using Chinese parents to clarify all questions.

The parental expectations towards the child were revealed in the following items:

1. Living competence expectations, including seven expected ages of the child to acquire some competences--studying independently, following regulations and rules, understanding parent, taking care of his daily life, being

- trusted to discuss some important matters, differentiating right from wrong, doing some routine housework;
2. School expectations for the child (i.e., non-key school vs. key school);
  3. Future occupation expectations (e.g., worker, clerk, teacher, scientist);
  4. Performance expectations comparing the child with students in his class (i.e., normal, good, and best student);
  5. College attendance expectations (i.e., considering it very important, important, average, and not important).

An average of seven expected ages of acquiring living competences was classified into one of three categories--high, medium, and low expectations. With higher expectations, parents hoped the child would gain competences at a younger age (mean age less than nine and half years). Those who hoped the child to gain the same competences in an older age (older than thirteen and half) were considered to have lower expectations. Parents with expected ages in between were considered to have medium expectations.

The coding of expected future occupation for child was based on a study conducted in Shanghai (Lan & Zhang, 1982). The study ranked 38 most common urban occupations according to their social prestige as evaluated by students in junior high school. The highest rank included scientist, engineer, and doctor, followed by teacher, artist, athlete and cadre. The lowest rank included worker, clerk, service job, and soldier.

An overall score of parental expectations was calculated by averaging the above five expectation scores (i.e., competence, occupation, performance, school attendance, and college attendance expectation). Higher expectations in each item were assigned a 3, medium 2, and lower 1. This average general expectation score was categorized into three levels (i.e., high, medium, low) for data analysis.

The parental helping and disciplining behaviors were indicated by the following: time spent daily for helping with the child's study, time spent weekly for planning and sharing with the child, and talking about school life with the child. The first indicator was coded into three levels according to actual hours spent in helping the child to do homework and to review learning material. For those who spent only 15 minutes or so every day, the helping behavior was considered low (1); half an hour to one hour, medium (2); two hours or so high (3). The time spent weekly for sharing was also coded into one of three levels (i.e., 2 hours or less, low; 3 hours, medium; 4 hours or more, high). The last indicator, talking about school life with the child, was coded into one of three levels (i.e., never, 1; sometimes, 2; and everyday, 3). An overall score of parental helping behavior was created by adding the above three scores and then coding the sum into low, medium, and high (1 to 3). The specific coding scheme for the parental responses is in Appendix H.

## Test Administration

The "Who Am I" Test and the Sentence Completion Test were administered to all 390 subjects of nine classes during regular class hours. The researcher first read general instructions to explain the nature of the study and to encourage responses based on real feelings without worrying about the correctness of the responses (see Appendix I). Following this, the two tests, with brief and specific instructions, were handed out to students. They were required to complete the forms in class (about 40 minutes). The tests were collected at the end of the class. Each subject was asked to take home a brief explanation letter for his/her parents (see Appendix J) and two copies of the parental questionnaire to have each parent fill it out. The next day, the parental questionnaires were collected in the schools. While no students refused to take the two tests, a few student did not bring back the parental questionnaires, especially the subjects from junior high school. However, the total returning rate of parental questionnaires was .92. Four subjects in each class were asked to identify their own recorded answers to the "Who Am I" Test and the Sentence Completion Test ten days after they had responded to them while their responses were mixed with others' responses. An average respondent reliability of .70 was established to ensure that subjects did not respond tests randomly.

## RESULTS

For the analysis of the content dimension, the data were summarized according to the percentage of subjects who used each content category at least once in describing the self. Since the sample size was large and a large number of chi-square tests were conducted, only significant levels of .005 or less were applied in the analyses.

In the data analysis, the subjects' grades (i.e., grade 3, grade 5, and grade 7) were used to index age. The correlation between age and grade was extremely high ( $r=.92$ ,  $p<.0001$ ). This also enabled better control of some important factors, such as school experiences and school-related self-expectations.

With the age factor collapsed, chi-square tests for sex differences in the self-concept were performed for each content category. The analysis revealed no significant sex differences in using content categories. Data for both sexes were then combined for all subsequent analyses ( $N=390$ ).

Statistically reliable age changes in the content of the self-concept were found for 14 of the 18 categories based upon the results of the "Who Am I" Test. Table 5 shows the percentages of subjects of each age group using a particular category at least once.

There were significant increases between grades 3 and 7 in the percentage of subjects who used the following six categories: Native Place and Nationality,  $\chi^2(2)=17.92$ ; Interpersonal

Table 5. The percentages of responses to the "Who Am I" Test by categories

CONTENT CATEGORY	GRADE 3	GRADE 5	GRADE 7
Name	41.18	28.00	2.33
Sex	5.15	4.80	5.43
Age	4.41	16.80	6.20
Native place	6.62	3.20	17.83
Physical attributes	5.88	29.60	10.85
Possession/Resource	1.47	0.80	0.78
Address	6.62	12.00	1.55
Action	73.53	92.00	57.36
Competence	45.59	33.60	20.93
Kinship roles	15.44	6.40	14.73
Group memberships	68.38	41.60	46.51
Relationships	38.97	43.20	66.67
Social conventions	60.29	48.80	37.98
Conscience/Morality	12.50	24.80	35.66
Cognition	6.62	17.60	20.16
Personality	38.24	73.60	81.40
Feelings/Attitudes	27.21	32.80	72.09
Uncodable items	6.62	3.20	1.55

Relationships,  $\chi^2(2)=23.22$ ; Conscience and Morality,  $\chi^2(2)=19.45$ ; Personality and Traits,  $\chi^2(2)=61.01$ ; and Feelings, Attitudes, and Aspirations,  $\chi^2(2)=63.29$ ; and Characteristics in Cognition,  $\chi^2(2)=11.04$ . Except for the category of Native Place and Nationality, which was not probed by the Sentence Completion Test, the same categories as those in the "Who Am I" Test had significant increases by grade (see Table 6): Interpersonal Relationships,  $\chi^2(2)=33.91$ ; Conscience and Morality,  $\chi^2(2)=19.52$ ; Personality and Traits,  $\chi^2(2)=88.87$ ; and Feelings, Attitudes, and Aspirations,  $\chi^2(2)=17.20$ .

Table 6. The percentages of responses to the Sentence Completion Test by categories

CONTENT CATEGORY <sup>a</sup>	GRADE 3	GRADE 5	GRADE 7
Physical attributes	5.88	4.80	6.98
Possession/Resource	8.09	4.80	1.55
Action	100.00	98.40	93.80
Competence	66.91	52.80	61.24
Kinship roles	5.88	0.40	0.78
Group memberships	41.91	28.80	32.56
Relationships	39.71	46.40	73.64
Social conventions	88.97	81.60	56.59
Conscience/Morality	16.18	32.80	40.31
Cognition	8.82	18.40	19.38
Personality	44.12	77.60	95.35
Feelings/Attitudes	40.44	55.90	65.89
Uncodable items	5.88	0	1.15

<sup>a</sup>Data were based on responses to the items in the Sentence Completion Test, except for Item 9 and 10.

There were significant decreases between grades 3 and 7 in the percentage of subjects for the following five categories: Name,  $\chi^2(2)=56.15$ ; Occasional and Habitual Actions,  $\chi^2(2)=39.72$ ; Action Competence and Performance,  $\chi^2(2)=18.05$ ; Interacting Group Memberships,  $\chi^2(2)=21.57$ ; Social Conventions,  $\chi^2(2)=13.20$ ; The stems of the Sentence Completion Test did not function to probe the responses in some categories, such as Name, Sex, Address, and Native Place. However, the results of the Sentence Completion Test confirmed the significant decrease in using the category of Social Conventions in self-conception,  $\chi^2(2)=41.22$ . These categories which showed significant decreases generally indicated concrete

descriptions and direct observations of one's activities and relationships with others.

Finally, there were significant curvilinear age changes in the percentage of subjects for the following three categories: Age,  $\chi^2(2)=14.05$ ; and Physical Attractiveness,  $\chi^2(2)=32.28$ ; and Address,  $\chi^2(2)=11.14$ . One's age, physical attractiveness, and address are concrete objective aspects of self, and the use of terms referring to these characteristics produced U-shaped changes. The concrete designation of oneself reached a peak at grade 5, and declined thereafter.

Based on the percentage of those who used a certain category at least once, the most popular categories among grade 3 children were the following: Activities (73.53%), Group Memberships (68.38%), Competence/Performance (45.59%), Name (41.18%), Interpersonal Relationships (38.97%), Personality (38.24%), and Feelings (27.21%). For the fifth grade children, the most popular categories were Activities (92.00%), Personality (73.60%), Social Conventions (48.80%), Group Memberships (41.60%), Interpersonal Relationships (43.20%), Competence and Performance (33.60%), Feelings (32.80%), and Physical Attributes (29.60%). In the junior high school group, the most popular categories were Personality (81.40%), Feelings (72.09%), Interpersonal Relationships (66.67%), Activities (57.36%), Group Memberships (46.51%), Social Conventions (37.98%), Conscience and Morality (35.66%), and Competence and Performance (20.93%).

Chi-square tests were also conducted on the responses of

the subjects classified by parental educational backgrounds, by parental occupations, by parental expectations (i.e., father's and mother's expectations), and by parental rearing behavior (i.e., father care and mother care). The most consistently significant result was related to the subjects' use of the category of Social Conventions. The subjects with fathers having a higher educational background tended to use fewer social conventions to describe themselves,  $\chi^2(4)=21.24$ ,  $p<.000$ . The same result was found for those with mothers having a higher educational background,  $\chi^2(4)=24.14$ ,  $p<.000$ . Only 24.62% of subjects with fathers, and 27.78% of subjects with mothers, who had a university education used the category of Social Conventions in self-conception, compared with 53.13% of those with fathers, 71.93% of those with mothers, who had only elementary education. The results were supported by the finding that subjects with mothers in higher professions were less likely to use the category of Social Conventions,  $\chi^2(6)=21.56$ ,  $p<.001$ . Among the subjects having mothers in higher professions (e.g., doctor, scientist, engineer), only 22.73% of them used the category of Social Conventions while 75.00% of those with mothers in the lowest professions (i.e., self-employed/house wife) did so.

Subjects with higher expectations from mothers mentioned fewer personal feelings and attitudes (i.e., Category 17),  $\chi^2(2)=15.41$ ,  $p<.000$ . Also, those who had more mother caring showed the same tendency,  $\chi^2(2)=11.44$ ,  $p<.003$ . Mother's expectations also negatively related to the child's use of the category of action in the

self-concept,  $\chi^2(2)=12.54$ ,  $p<.002$ . The subjects with higher mother expectations mentioned their activities less. Father's caring behavior was found to relate negatively to the child's use of the categories of Interpersonal Relationships,  $\chi^2(2)=12.21$ ,  $p<.002$ , and Personality,  $\chi^2(2)=12.82$ ,  $p<.002$ , in the self-concept. Subjects with fathers who showed more caring behavior tended to mention Interpersonal Relations and Personality in self-conception less.

For the "Who Am I" Test, the mean number of categories used at least once by subjects in each group (i.e., grade 3, 5, and 7) was as follows: 4.65, 5.13, and 5.00. The analysis of the number of content categories used was conducted in two steps. First, a 2 x 2 (Grade x Sex) analysis of variance was performed. The main effect of grade,  $F(2, 389)=3.92$ ,  $p<.05$ , and the interaction effect of sex and grade,  $F(2, 389)=6.80$ ,  $p<.001$ , were significant. Because of the significant interaction effects between grade and sex, clarification was necessary. A set of nine planned comparisons of group means was performed by applying Dunn's a priori comparison procedure (Kirk, 1982). The analysis revealed significant contrasts between the third grade boys and the fifth grade boys ( $+D=2.86$ ,  $p<.05$ , one-tailed), and between the third grade boys and junior high school boys ( $+D=3.77$ ,  $p<.01$ , one-tailed). Also, a significant contrast was found between the boys and girls in grade 7 ( $+D=2.58$ ,  $p<.05$ , one-tailed), showing a higher mean for the boys. No significant difference were found between girls of different age groups and between the fifth grade and the seventh grade boys (see Table 7).

Except in junior high school, the mean of the girls was higher than the mean of the boys for the same age level.

Table 7. Dunn's Multiple Comparison on means of number of categories used by subjects

$\bar{Y}_{ij}^a$	$\bar{Y}_{3m}$	$\bar{Y}_{3f}$	$\bar{Y}_{5m}$	$\bar{Y}_{5f}$	$\bar{Y}_{7m}$	$\bar{Y}_{7f}$
$\bar{Y}_{3m}=4.32^b$		-2.50	2.86 <sup>c</sup>		3.77 <sup>d</sup>	
$\bar{Y}_{3f}=4.94$				1.20		-1.21
$\bar{Y}_{5m}=5.03$				-.85	1.07	
$\bar{Y}_{5f}=5.25$						-2.27
$\bar{Y}_{7m}=5.29$						2.58 <sup>c</sup>
$\bar{Y}_{7f}=4.63$						

<sup>a</sup>  $i(\text{grade})=3, 5, 7; j(\text{sex})=m, f.$

<sup>b</sup>  $MS_{\text{error}}=2.08, df=384, c(\text{number of planned contrasts})=9.$

<sup>c</sup>  $t_{D} .05, 9, 384=2.54.$

<sup>d</sup>  $t_{D} .01, 9, 384=3.07.$

The analysis of the structural dimension revealed that the effect of age was significant:  $F(2, 357)=24.03, p<.0001.$  A 3 x 2 (Grade x Sex) analysis of variance revealed a significant overall result on the structural development,  $F(5, 357)=9.83, p<.001.$  However, the effect of sex alone was not significant,  $F(2, 357)=.49.$  The average overall structural score of each age group was as follows: 1.64, 1.88, and 2.17. Higher percentage of Grade 7 subjects gave Level 3 and Level 4 reasoning in self-concept (see Table 8). The effects of school performance,  $F(3, 328)=.71,$

number of siblings,  $F(3, 327)=1.71$ , father's and mother's educational background,  $F(4, 299)=1.82$  and  $F(4, 298)=.56$ , father's and mother's occupation,  $F(6, 298)=1.86$  and  $F(6, 297)=.44$ , and father's and mother's expectation,  $F(2, 297)=.58$  and  $F(2, 357)=2.55$ , were not significant. The influence of father's and mother's caring behavior was significant for the reasoning structure of self-conception,  $F(2, 357)=4.19$ ,  $p<.05$ , and  $F(2, 357)=4.97$ ,  $p<.01$ .

Table 8. The percentages of responses of four structural levels in 3 grades

LEVEL	GRADE 3	GRADE 5	GRADE 7
1	43.22	26.25	10.89
2	56.31	66.20	62.43
3	.31	7.14	25.26
4	.16	.41	1.42
TOTAL	100.00	100.00	100.00

Similar analysis of the evaluative dimension were conducted. Grade was the only factor that influenced the self-evaluation significantly,  $F(2, 360)=3.22$ ,  $p<.05$ . A 3 x 2 (Grade x Sex) analysis of variance revealed no significant overall result. The means of the evaluation scores for grades 3, 5, and 7 were 1.49, 1.45, and 1.29. The older group had a less positive self-evaluation.

Item 9 of the Sentence Completion Test probed for information about children's self-concept concerning their fears. In grade 3, 24% of the subjects claimed that catastrophic experiences (e.g., war and disaster) were the worst things that could happen to them; 20% children worried about possible misconduct; 19% mentioned their fear of failure in school. In the fifth grade, 34% children worried about their school performance. A crisis in human relationships was the major fear mentioned by 24% of grade 5 children. In the junior high school group, almost half of the subjects (48%) revealed a fear of poor school performance. Another 20% of the subjects feared a crisis in human relationships (see Table 9).

Table 9. The content of fear

CONTENT OF FEAR <sup>a</sup>	GRADE 3	GRADE 5	GRADE 7
Failing school	19.12	33.60	48.06
Crisis in relation	14.71	24.00	20.16
War/Disaster	24.26	17.60	12.40
Physical pain	18.36	5.60	8.53
Misconduct	19.85	15.20	5.43
Others	1.47	3.20	3.10

<sup>a</sup>Data were based on responses to Item 9 in the Sentence Completion Test. Figures in the table are percentages.

Item 10 of the Sentence Completion Test provided information about how subjects in different age groups perceived their role models. Data revealed significant differences between younger

children (i.e., grade 3 students) and older children (i.e., junior high school students) in choosing their role model (see Table 10). In the grade 3 group, 60% of the children chose their model from their classmates and friends, compared to only 5% of the young adolescents who did so. While about half of the older subjects (48%) had an ideal model (e.g., hero figures), only 7% of grade 3 children did so. Grade 5 children were in a transition period from younger group to the older group in terms of their pattern of choosing a role model.

Table 10. Types of role models

ROLE MODEL <sup>a</sup>	GRADE 3	GRADE 5	GRADE 7
Classmate/Friend	60.29	20.80	5.43
Parent/Relative	11.03	12.80	8.53
Teacher	13.97	7.20	4.65
Scientist	3.68	11.20	10.85
Writer <sup>b</sup>	0.74	14.40	9.30
Hero/Heroine	7.35	30.40	48.06
Other	2.21	3.20	6.20

<sup>a</sup>Data were based on responses to the first blank in Item 10 of the Sentence Completion Test. Figures in the table are percentages.

<sup>b</sup>This category includes public figures, such as writers, artists, athletes.

## DISCUSSION: SELF-CONCEPT OF CHINESE URBAN CHILDREN

## Gender and the Self-Concept

Wylie (1979), in the most systematic review of studies on the self-concept in the last two decades, found no consistent evidence of sex differences. However, sex differences in young people's descriptions of occupational aspirations, social roles, and physical characteristics have been repeatedly confirmed by studies (e.g., Rosenberg & Rosenberg, 1981). All the differences reflect how young people perceive sex stereotypes in Western society.

In the content analysis of this study, above sex differences were not found for urban Chinese subjects of the three age groups. Subjects of both sexes weighted all content categories, including social group memberships and physical characteristics, in similar patterns. The absence of sex differences in the content of the self-concept might relate to the changing social context of men's and women's daily lives where sex stereotypes of the society are rooted. In the last three decades, one of the most significant social changes in the urban area of China is that millions of women have found jobs outside the home. Although the government's commitment to sexual equality is never a priority and is always subject to the consideration of economic or political matters (Stacey, 1983), society seems to widely accept the idea that taking part in social productive labor is a prerequisite for women to gain "emancipation". At the end of 1986, among the 62 million of China's

urban women who were between the ages of 16 and 54, 51 million of them (82%) have been taking part in all kinds of social labor. This figure is higher than the percentage of working women in the United States (54%), Britain (35.7%), and France (33.3%). The educational level of urban women has also markedly improved. In 1986, 81% of the female workers had a junior or senior high school education, compared to 73% for male workers (State Statistical Bureau, 1987). Although Chinese women earn 15 to 20 percent less than men, both men and women make their own contribution to family income and are involved in similar social activities in the working place and in educational institutions. The image of the traditional mother who works in the home and the traditional father who earns money for the whole family has gradually disappeared from the fabric of urban social life. This social change might influence young people, especially those elementary school students who engage in a smaller but more ideologically controlled environment, to perceive their own image in society.

While the analysis indicates no sex differences in the content of the self-concept, it does not mean that there are no differences between a rough "boyish" style and a less aggressive "girlish" style in terms of activities and human relations. For instance, for the category of Activity, girls tended to mention more feminine activities, such as growing flowers and raising silkworms; boys preferred more physical activities, such as playing soccer and hunting. Girls tended to mention affective relationships with

people (e.g., "My father loves me the most") while boys showed more independence and autonomy in human relations (e.g., "I don't listen to my mother sometimes. I fight against her"). The categorization applied in this study did not aim to differentiate the special styles (i.e., masculine and feminine style) within one category (e.g., Activity, Personality).

#### Age and the Content of the Self-Concept

Chinese urban children were found to follow a similar developmental path as Western children in choosing the content of the self-concept (e.g., Rosenberg, 1979; Livesley & Bromley, 1978; Hart & Damon, 1985; Secord & Peevers, 1974). The results of the present study support the general hypothesis that with increasing age, the content of an individual's self-concept tends to focus more on references to internal qualities and less on references to observable or external qualities. Younger children focused more on observable characteristics and overt behavioral description. For older children, on the other hand, the psychological characteristics (e.g., personality, feelings, attitudes) and personal values (e.g., justice, beauty, kindness) became more salient and more crucial in defining the self. Thus, age can be used to predict how children will describe themselves.

### Name and the self-concept

For the youngest children (grade 3), their names were very important representations of the self. After acquiring the minimum linguistic capacity, children start to differentiate themselves as special objects in their world. The most frequent, most convenient, and perhaps the first way to designate themselves is by their own names (Denzin, 1972). A large percentage of younger children started their self-description with their names. That was rarely the case with the older children, who treated names as only representative of the self. Names could be changed without leading to a change in self-identity. Even in a few cases when adolescents mentioned their names, they used some deeper meanings (e.g., psychological characteristics, morality) rather than the nominal usage of the names. One child said, "My name is Xiaojing ("peacefulness" in Chinese). So, I am quiet and peaceful." They tended to find something more essential than the names which were given.

### Active aspects in the content of the self-concept

The subjects in this study clearly demonstrated the developmental trend found in research on Western children that behavioral descriptions of the self appear at an earlier age and fade away later (e.g., Rosenberg, 1979, 1985; Secord & Peevers, 1974; Keller, Ford, & Meacham, 1978). The younger children were more likely than the older to describe the self in behavioral terms

(i.e., Occasional and Habitual action, Action Competence and Performance). For kindergarten children, the self-description is exclusively dominated by terms of activities, such as their games and other playful experiences (Keller, Ford, & Meacham, 1978). By the third grade (about nine years old), children develop a new quality in self-statements: comparing their characteristics (e.g., active abilities) with others'. For instance, one might say, "I can play chess better than my brother." According to Secord and Peevers (1974), this is a shift from a focus on the self's habitual action to a focus on the self's action competences because children at this stage can distinguish themselves from others in comparative rather than absolute terms.

Occasional and Habitual Activities      The percentage of active description (i.e., mentioning occasional and habitual activities) had peaked (92%) on the fifth grade. A temporary increase was found during the period from the third grade to the fifth grade. However, the quality of active descriptions of the fifth grade children was different from those of the third grade children. The third graders tended to simply mention only favorite or unfavorable activities (e.g., "I like to play soccer", or "I don't like to ride bike"). In the fifth grade children, simple description of activities no longer dominated, as was the case with the third graders. They always described the consequence, the degree, or the reason for favoring specific activities. For example, to express how much he favored a specific activity a fifth grade child said, "I like to play soccer

so much that I couldn't even have my dinner when we lost." Another fifth grade child said, "I like to do exercises in the morning because it makes me feel fresh all day long." He gave his reason for favoring the activity. They started to combine their activities with other meanings, such as feelings and relationships with others. This might be the reason for a temporary increase in the use of active terms in self-description compared to the third graders.

From age 12 (grade 5) onward, Chinese children showed a clear decline in using category of Occasional and Habitual Activities. For those who mentioned their activities, they tended to give reasons, conditions, and value preferences for the activities. For instance, a junior high school student said, "I like to play basketball very much, but I never play until I finish my study and some housework because people should be able to control themselves." When children grow older, pure descriptions of their actions decline and become less meaningful to them.

Action Competence and Performance When comparing younger children (5 to 7 years) with older children, Secord and Peevers (1974) found a shift in self-description using active terms. Older children tended to focus more on their abilities and achievement of their actions as compared with younger children. Their findings have been supported by Ruble (1983), who found that children younger than 7 made almost no reference to information about other children's performances. In their studies, comparative competence and performance descriptions would increase with age in

self-description while simple active terms would decline. However, their studies did not cover the development after late childhood.

In the present study, a consistent decline is found in using the categories of Action Competence and Performance from the third grade on. About half of the third graders mentioned competences and performances of their actions; one third of the fifth graders and only about one fifth of the junior high school students did that.

Although when growing older children tend to use their increasing abilities of comparison and to make sense in relative terms in self-description, the action competences and performances of the self tend to move out of their central focus. They start to compare features other than actions, such as feelings and personality, that are considered more crucial to the self.

Across age groups, the dominant concerns in the categories of Action Competence and Performance are their academic affairs. They mention their action competence in school-related activities, such as games in the school and learning activities. Children also mention their school performances overwhelmingly. Children demonstrate increasing fear of failure in school performance with increasing age. This might reflect their struggles with an ever heavier school burden year after year. Also, it indicates that their socially recognized roles as students with satisfied performances are always important to them. For younger children, the school tends to be the whole universe outside their homes. They feel up and down depending on their competence and performance in

school-related activities. In early adolescence, however, children greatly broaden their horizons. They might not be satisfied to describe themselves by using the same school-related action competences and performances only. Beyond home and school, they discover an even larger world in which they have less sense of control and are less capable to act and function well by themselves at this age. This can be another reason for the decline in using competence and performance categories of self-descriptions.

#### Age and group memberships in the self-concept

Based on some Western studies (e.g., Kohlberg, 1969), the concept of the self emphasizes the ideal of development towards autonomy and the transcendence of the self from social constraints and external authorities. However, the present study revealed seemingly contradictory results. From birth to death, a Chinese individual is always a member of more than one explicit and formal organization, such as school, Young Pioneer Team, and work unit. Thus, group membership is one of the most important features of one's self-description. About 68 percent of the third graders mentioned their group memberships in describing themselves and more than 40 percent of children in the other two groups still did so.

Studies of traditional Chinese society depict the path of Chinese socialization that tends to legitimize authority rather than autonomy (Hsu, 1981; Wilson, 1973). During the socialization of Chinese children, great stress is placed upon learning and

internalizing an appropriate set of ideals concerning proper behavior. "Failure to behave in terms of these ideals will subject the individual to a loss of positive identification about himself" (Wilson, 1973, p. 434). Chinese individualism lacks institutional support (Tuan, 1982). Group solidarity and cooperative behavior are heavily stressed.

As the percentages in this study showed, group memberships, which represent relationships for a more or less coercive nature, tended to be less emphasized by older children. Also, the actual content of group memberships was different in the younger group than in the older group. The younger children (grade 3 and grade 5) overwhelmingly mentioned their school affiliation. They usually said, "I am in Class 4 Grade 3," or "I am a student of Guanghua Elementary School." The older children, on the other hand, tended to refer to their memberships of less immediate, less constrained, and less formal groups. For instance, one child said, "I am a young citizen within a billion Chinese people," or "I am a little master of New China." Children in junior high school rarely described themselves in reference to their exact school year or specific school affiliation. They identified themselves in various groups, including those created by themselves. For instance, a child said, "I am a member of the group organized by those students who are interested in mathematics and physics." At the same time, while growing older, children became more likely to refer to their native place, race, and nationality. In some way, these considerations

functioned as a kind of more general group category with less coercive and constrained power towards one's daily behavior.

Social conventions and moral values in the self-concept

In Chinese culture, people exercise forms of self-regulation based on very explicit social conventions that make them appear to be extremely conforming to the society. In all age groups, Chinese children showed great consideration towards a conventional way of life. For the third grade children, acting in a similar way as the majority of people and being accepted by norms were dominant considerations in their self-descriptions. Being accepted by others was equated as being good to a younger child; being different would cause great anxiety. The third grade children said:

"I should correct my mistakes to be a good child of our time."

"My best point is that I follow the rules of the school."

"I listen to teachers and try my best to do what they want."

While growing older, consideration of social conventions becomes less important. Older children gave proportionally fewer statements referring to social conventions. Older children showed less fear about their conduct that might violate social conventions.

Moreover, even in the older children's statements referring to norms, children became confused, antagonistic, and critical towards conventional ways of perceiving the world and dealing with life. In recent years, the Chinese media have brought attention to the young adolescent's critical view towards social conventions and cynicism

about official values (Huang, 1981; Chu, 1985). Young people express their disillusionment with life, abhorrence of the hypocrisy in conventional ways of behavior, and feelings of personal isolation and helplessness (Zhongguo Qingnian, 1981; Rosen, 1985). In a very well-known public debate, young adolescents asked, "Why is it the path of life is ever narrowing as one walks along?" Subjects in the present study demonstrated very similar feelings when considering the social self. They openly expressed their disappointment in lacking autonomy and being forced to conform. A number of subjects put their statements in the form of questions, such as:

"Why do people always talk about rules to us?"

"Why should we please people and be what they want us to be?"

Many adolescents clearly showed their boredom towards conventional ways of life. For instance, one said, "I don't like others to think that I have to do what others used to do." In attempting to re-evaluate social conventions, young adolescents gained more autonomy.

Because external constraints (e.g., social conventions) turn out to be less powerful in influencing older children's behavior and their understanding of themselves, older children develop more autonomous and internalized system of self-control and self-understanding based upon their conscience and morality. They manifest some highly internalized social standards. In the present study, only one eighth of the third graders showed internalized constraints (e.g., conscience and belief). One fourth of the fifth

graders and more than one third of the adolescents did so. A few third grade children described themselves in terms of restricted moral values, such as kindness, honesty, and good will to people. Also, to some degree, this self-understanding reflected their perception of how others viewed them.

By early adolescence, beliefs and moral values are in the process of being organized into a system that functions to deal with broad matters of daily life. Unlike social conventions with coercive power, belief systems relate to specific events and individual conduct in rather indirect and more general ways. In other words, they will not provide specific restrictions of specific matters. Thus, young adolescents are more likely to consider themselves autonomous and independent beings with systems of internal judgments of goodness and badness. For instance, the older subjects in this study defined themselves as follows:

"I believe in the good nature of human being."

"I love all beautiful things and hate those oppressive ones."

"I'm not afraid of those who are strong; yet, I'll not treat those who are weak unfairly."

"I am honest towards myself. I shall never try to cover my own mistakes."

"I'm a person who is searching for love anywhere in the world."

A traditional Chinese notion is the belief that external standards of conduct will be internalized and will serve to

eliminate conflicts and generate harmony in one's mind. It seems that the older subjects in this study experienced a rapid development of internalization. Sometimes, external constraints of norms and conventions were contradictory to internalized standards and values. Social norms were seriously questioned. At the same time, harmony between self-understanding and an autonomous value system remained to be achieved in the future.

#### Interpersonal relationships and the self-concept

In this study, the category of Interpersonal Relationship, like Group Membership, was the most frequently mentioned category in self-conception from early on. From grade 3 to junior high school, a significantly high percentage of children mentioned interpersonal relationships in defining themselves. They showed increasing concern about problems in their social relations that threatened their understanding about themselves. While group memberships are less emphasized when one grows older, the more autonomous and more varied interpersonal relations become more important. This is not as contradictory as it seems to be. Memberships, as a type of human relationship, tends to be passive and obligatory for individuals who accept the relationship willingly. Interpersonal relationships, however, are actively interpreted and evaluated constantly, especially by older children who are socially and cognitively better equipped to do so. Thus, they tend to be weighted more in older children's self-descriptions. As found in the study of Paget and

Kritt (1985), the relational concept of self, characterized by differentiation from and integration with the external world, is a developmental achievement that becomes very important in adolescence.

The third grade child can well establish a network of relationships with the self on the focus. By relating to different people (e.g., classmates, teachers, friends, parents) in different dynamics, the child conceptualizes the self. The third graders, for example, said:

"I hate Cheng Ming the most because he always beats me."

"I would like to learn from Pan Jian."

"Our teacher, Mr. Sheng, is strict, especially with me."

"My Mom and Dad love me the most."

After about age 12, human relationships become even more crucial in the child's understanding of the self. They are no longer something external being imposed on the individual, but the child's autonomous interpretation of interaction between the self and others. Also, the older child talks about human relationships in a more general sense and in less specific people- or situation-related ways.

Young adolescents in this study showed great concern about whether they would be accepted by others. As Kohlberg (1969, 1976) has described, children of this age value the mutual expectations derived from interpersonal relations. Interpersonal relations are the major context for defining the self. Thus, trying to be a good

person and to be oriented to the needs of those to whom one is closely associated with are of primary importance. However, young adolescents seem to experience a systematic reconstruction and re-evaluation of their interpersonal relationships. The structure and dynamics of interpersonal relations have changed, especially in regard to significant others. Some people, such as classmates and parents, who were important before are less so after the reconstruction (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984; Hartup, 1983; Youniss & Smollar, 1985). The changes cause frustration and confusion among young adolescents. To express these feelings, young adolescents in this study said:

"I feel that teachers and parents don't understand our generation."

"I hope teachers and parents could understand us and make us live better lives."

Young adolescents also had more feelings of personal isolation and helplessness. Some subjects in this study said:

"I like to make friends, but I have only one friend who knows me deeply."

"I would like to be a person who has many friends."

"I would like to win others' praise."

"I can't help to be full of grievances because of being misunderstood."

A great number of young adolescents felt confused in locating the self in a broader world with more complicated human

relationships that they could not perceive before. They felt lonely and sometimes angry towards the relationships they could not understand. Thus, they put statements of self-description in the form of a question:

"Why do schoolmates feel jealous towards each other?"

"Why do teachers like others, but not me?"

"Why do relationships with others become more and more difficult and indifferent when growing older?"

In discussing the formation of the Chinese self, Chu (1985) claims that the relationships with significant others are always of crucial importance. The significant others in one's life are themselves the product of the general cultural milieu. The significant others, however, do not have a free hand in influencing the development of one's self. Only through interactions with significant others does an individual perceive the ideological content of his society. According to anthropological studies, the Chinese personality consists of a much broader interpersonal layer than the Western personality (Wolf, 1974; Hsu, 1970). Group solidarity is heavily stressed by Chinese culture. The self, then, is treated as the center of one's relationships (Tu, 1985), but not the absolute and transcendental individual. The social orientation of the Chinese would presumably have some impact on the relative frequency with which certain categories are used to describe the self, especially the categories of Interpersonal Relationship and Group Membership. The emphasis on individualization in the

self-concept development, as Turner (1987) has criticized, is due to the individualistic bias in the Western social sciences. It is also the product of a rapidly changing Western society (Zurcher, 1977; Snow & Phillips, 1982). Thus, the assumption of individualization in the self-concept lacks the consideration of social and cultural differences.

#### Physical attributes and the self-concept

Similar to Western children (e.g., Livesley & Bromley, 1973; Rosenberg, 1979), older Chinese children, compared with younger ones, were less likely to identify themselves in terms of physical characteristics (e.g., appearance, height) or social identity elements (e.g., gender). However, the peak of the attention to these features was found in the group of grade 5 children, not the younger group of children. According to Fisher (1986), from age 9 upward, there is an upsurge in knowledge about the body in the ability to create realistic depictions of the body. At about age 12 (grade 5), the children gave more specific descriptions of their physical features. For instance, third grade children simply said:

"I am tall."

"I am very strong."

The fifth grade children, on the other hand, described themselves as others saw them. They started with eyes, then other facial features, and then the whole appearance in detail. Piaget (1960b) has found that after about age 9 the child reaches the point at

which the ability to coordinate different perspectives first occurs developmentally. The young adolescents (from junior high school) rarely referred to their physical characteristics. For those who mentioned these features, they tended to put more social meanings or subjective preferences in their descriptions. For instance, they said:

"In other people's eyes, I always have casual and elegant bearing."

"My skin color is a little dark which fits my sense of beauty." Adolescents showed great attention towards internal characteristics. Thus, the external and physical features were no longer critically important in the self-concept.

#### Psychological aspects of the self-concept

Research findings of the self-concept in late childhood and early adolescence (Barenboim, 1981; Damon & Hart, 1982; O'Mahony, 1986) reveal the widely observed pattern of the shift from physicalistic to psychological self-conceptions. According to these studies, children in the elementary school years understand persons and self by comparing people's overt behavior. In early adolescence, persons, including the self, are defined through "psychological constructs" that posit stable personality characteristics of people. The psychological constructs gradually become the main consideration in understanding persons.

The significant increase in using the categories of

psychological characteristics (i.e., Personality, Feeling and Attitudes) was found in content changes along ages. Only about one fourth of the third grade children referred to their feelings in the self-concept, compared with 72 percent of the adolescents. From the third grade to junior high school, there was a two-fold increase in the percentage of those using personality in self-conception.

In Damon and Hart's model (1982) of the development of self-understanding, children in late childhood, to some extent, treat psychological aspect of the self in concrete ways. They tend to focus on activity-related emotional states or personality traits. In this study, children from the third grade and the fifth grade showed the same characteristics. For instance, in describing the self as a reticent person, a child said, "I don't like to talk; I am quiet." The personality or emotional state definitions of the self were always related to specific events, activities, or situations. Some children, for example, said:

"Once after being scared, I got sick because I am timid."

"I'm not a brave person because I'm afraid of walking alone in the night."

"I am happy. People can always see smile on my face."

"I like to laugh. My classmates can hear my laughter all day long."

"Every time I got into trouble, I blamed others and got mad with them."

"I always speak out what I think without hesitation and

reservation."

Thus, even in expressing subjective and psychological states, the young children used empirical and concrete descriptions. They tended to treat the "interior" characteristics by mentioning their observable reactions and exterior features.

For the junior high school students, the psychological traits became the most basic part of the self-concept. They were more stable and consistent across time and from case to case. Their self-descriptions tended to be neither activity-related nor specific event-bonded. For example, some said:

"I am an emotional person."

"I am not very persistent."

"I am an emotionally stable person."

These consistent psychological traits are generalized from the subjects' own experiences. They are authentic but transcend the specific situations and events. In their early adolescence, the subjects no longer needed to describe the self by referring to their activities. From the fifth grade to the first grade of junior high school, the subjects experienced a significant change in understanding themselves as psychological beings with an inner world that is conscious of itself. The psychological interior is related to, but different from, the social and physical exterior. Younger children, compared with adolescents, are less likely to aware of their own thinking and to inspect their own feelings.

The present study confirms the ever-increasing emphasis on

psychological aspects (i.e., personality, feelings, characteristics of cognition) in defining the self as children grow older.

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake, according to this study, to describe the developmental sequence as simply "physical towards psychological" or "overt to covert". More than half of the Chinese children from the oldest group emphasized interpersonal relationships and activities in self-conception. The seemingly overt descriptions of the self (e.g., social relational aspects) remain important to most Chinese children throughout middle childhood to early adolescence, probably throughout their lives, even after they are capable of predominantly psychological self-conceptions.

#### Content diversity, age, and sex

The age-related shift of the self-conception favors, along a continuum, the physical, active, social, and then psychological aspects of the self (Broughton, 1978; Barenboim, 1981; Damon & Hart, 1982). The present study indicates that the above account has erred in its too exclusive focus on a single developmental movement. The age-related content changes are towards the direction of being more differentiated and more diverse in self-conception. Bernstein (1980) has pointed out that older subjects demonstrate a greater differentiation in their self-system conceptions than younger subjects by making statements from a larger number of content categories. In the present study, four categories in the early

adolescent group are referred to by more than 50% of the subjects, compared with three in the youngest group and two in the fifth grade group. In other words, subjects from junior high school tend to define themselves in a broader scope as active, psychological, and social relational beings.

In terms of the average number of categories used, this study found a consistent increase among male subjects. When growing older, male subjects became more diverse in applying content categories. Male subjects from junior high school showed more variety in describing themselves and used significantly more content categories than their female classmates. In contrast, female subjects from the other two grades tended to have slightly more content categories in self-description than male subjects. The interruption of Wernerian othogenetical processes in female self-conception is more likely due to the social constraint. No evidence has suggested that the cognitive explanation of sex differences might be valid.

Rosenberg and Simmons (1972) found that girls in early adolescence experience more instability in self-conception. They follow different developmental trends than boys, considering their different physical and social experiences. McGuire and McGuire (1981) also found that, in defining the social self, the female subjects' interests are more channeled towards certain domestic concerns, and their more sheltered upbringing leaves their interpersonal relations less "cosmopolitan" (in McGuire's word) than

boys. In terms of the number of content categories used, gender differences become more pronounced with age. Based upon observations by Chinese educators (e.g., Zhang, 1981), performances of female students in elementary school tend to surpass their male classmates. Starting from junior high school, however, boys become more conscious, aggressive, and active in searching for knowledge. They tend to have more alternatives in their activities and interests and less conforming constraints than girls. The society seems to accept more various roles for males than for females. Young adolescent girls, while broadening their world, tend to perceive more delicate and deep-rooted sex discrimination and stereotyped views about the nature of men and women, beyond the ideological propaganda of sex equality (Korabik, 1986; Biaggio, 1986). Starting from secondary school, the percentage of woman students decreases further at each level (Scherer, 1983). Young adolescent girls can better foresee their disadvantaged roles in their future educational and working settings. Sociological studies (e.g., Stryker, 1980; Sieber, 1974) have found that if societies can distinguish more roles for people, the average size of the identity set of individual members will be greater. This could be the case in the self-concept development of Chinese male adolescents.

#### Family background and the content of the self-concept

In the present study, children of highly educated parents tended to use fewer social conventions to define themselves than

those from families with lower educational background. Also, parents with higher education paid more attention to children's needs, including needs in school and in other areas (e.g., needs for play and needs to develop relationships with different people). They communicated more with children about their experiences in schools and in their daily lives.

According to Moscovici (Moscovici & Personnaz, 1980; Moscovici, 1987), any society imposes conformity based on the consensus of the majority to transform beliefs and practices into obligations which dictate how one must act, think, and feel. People from a minority group tend to refuse the consensus and are less likely to recognize the obligations. To them, understanding is the basis of obeying. Thus, they emphasize less obedience and conformity towards social conventions.

People with higher education (i.e., university education) comprise a minority group in the Chinese society. A study by the State Statistical Bureau (1987) found that of the 6 million woman workers and staff members from the 8,000 big and medium-sized industrial enterprises, only 4.5 percent have had a university education. This minority group tends to be more reluctant in enforcing conformity of their children. They tend to be more conscious about the difference between majority values (social norms) and their own sense of right and wrong.

According to Baumrind (1971), who has studied patterns of child rearing, authoritarian parents attempt to shape, control, and

evaluate the behavior and attitudes of their children in accordance with an absolute set of standards. Also, they value obedience, respect for authority, tradition, and preservation of order. On the other hand, authoritative parents tend to encourage the child's independence and individuality through open communication between parents and children. Researchers of child rearing (Loeb, Horst, & Horton, 1980; Hoffman, 1975) have tried to establish relationships between pattern of parenting and the child's psychological characteristics and the self-concept. For instance, Hoffman (1975) found mothers who emphasized obedience tended to use power assertion which was related to a higher external moral orientation. Authoritarian parenting, or directive parenting in Loeb's term, tended to mold children with a high external locus of control. All of these might relate to the strong emphasis of conforming to social conventions in one's self-conception.

#### Explanations of content changes

Piagetian developmental psychology provides the cognitive explanation for the exterior-to-interior shift in self-conception. Viewing himself in terms of a psychological interior, the child has to be conscious of his own thoughts. The younger child has only the habit of watching himself acting, but not thinking. This means that he lacks the habit of constantly detecting the emotions that are guiding him in the direction he is pursuing (Piaget, 1928). During the concrete operational period, the emergence of logical thinking

gives the child the ability to hierarchically classify and logically organize concrete events and objects. This enables the child to consolidate and verify certain contents of the self and to inductively put together bits of data from daily experiences to construct the self-concept. However, the child cannot yet think about either his own thinking, or the process of more complicated theory-building. On the other hand, older children, such as the junior high school students in this study, become "capable of theorizing... and no longer only of 'concrete', although logically structured, reasoning" (Piaget, 1976, p. 352). The older child, equipped with cognitive abilities, is able to reflect on the world of thought, feeling, and motivation.

From a social psychological view, G. H. Mead (1934/1970) has pointed out that the older child develops the ability of role-taking for the need to communicate. He learns to put himself in the position of other people, and to view situations or events from others' perspectives. The older child tends to survey and assess in the inner world of thoughts, feelings, and motivation because he no longer simply thinks, but also thinks about his own thoughts. By role-taking, he is more able to evaluate, criticize, and modify what he is thinking. The younger child, lacking cognitive competences, is inadequate in taking others' roles for communication. Thus, he has no way to consciously be aware of his own thinking processes and the whole complicated inner world.

The child makes inferences to construct the content of the

self-concept based on different but interrelated sources of information. First he observes the way people, especially those significant ones (e.g., parents, teachers, peers), react to him, and takes the reactions as references to perceive himself (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934/1970; Sullivan, 1953). Since the reference group has been changing with age, the child's content of the self-concept inevitably keeps changing.

The child's sources of information in the self-conception also relate to his social comparison processes. He compares his achievements, opinions, conducts, and characteristics with those of others to reveal similarities and differences in conceptualizing the self. The newly gained abilities of social comparison lead to a shift in the content, as well as in the evaluation, of the self-concept.

The child makes inferences about himself by observing his own characteristics, behaviors, and situations in which these behaviors occur (Bem, 1967, 1972). For instance, the child describes himself as a happy person because he finds himself laughing often. The child also, when getting older, makes inferences about himself by looking into his own subjective world, including his feelings, psychological characteristics, and wishes. The ever-changing cognitive processes, which bring the child more sophisticated means of inference, together with changes in his social environment, including the people with whom he interacts, facilitate changes in the self-concept.

### The Structural Changes of the Self-Concept

The existence of a connection between cognitive development and the self-concept, especially the structure of the self-concept, has long been considered plausible by psychologists (e.g., Erikson, 1968; Adams, Abraham, & Markstrom, 1987). For instance, Erikson (1950, 1956, 1968) argued that the development of competencies is necessary for adolescents to revise their self-concept. Obviously, he tried to establish the relationship between the self-concept and cognition. Epstein (1973) and Brim (1976) both interpret the self-concept as a personal theory of the self. A key aspect of self-theorizing, according to them, is knowledge acquisition about the self which is constrained by cognitive functioning. Thus, the structure change of the self-concept would reflect the discontinuity of the development of cognitive competencies from the concrete to the formal operations.

The present study clearly demonstrates the development of the reasoning structure in children's self-concept while growing up. In accordance with studies on Western children (Harris, 1983; Harter, 1977, 1982b; Selman, 1980), most younger children (e.g., the third graders) showed that they are incapable of considering several different attributes, feelings, or motives at the same time. They are not capable of dealing with the fact that they might experience seemingly opposing emotional states simultaneously. They feel difficult in dealing with bipolar attributes. Their self-conception is fragmented and incoherent. For instance, the child might define

himself starting with his own name, then going on with his father's and mother's names, father's and mother's working places, and his activities. It is hard to find any systematic logic exigencies.

Most third graders, however, showed some ability to integrate fragmented experiences into specific trait labels. For instance, in this study children said, "I like sports, such as soccer and table-tennis." The interest in sports is used as a label that designates some isolated and random events (e.g., playing soccer, swimming). Some hierarchical relationships between the concept of sports and specific games (e.g., soccer, tennis) have been established at the third grade. Also, in their reasoning, younger children indicate the ability to see clear and direct cause-effect relations. For instance, the child relates his poor performance with his classroom behavior, such as not listening the teacher carefully. The child can judge the self in some comparative relations between different occasions (i.e., now and then), different events (i.e., this and that), or different persons (i.e., others and I). To show his ability of comparison, the child uses adjectives and adverbs, such as most, very, more, or less, in comparing himself with others. Thus, the self is neither the only existence nor the very center of the child's world.

The child rarely has higher order abstractions before the junior high school years when the self become less and less a pure perceptual object, and more and more a conceptual trait system (Murphy, 1947). The formation of higher order integration

facilitates the child's ability to accommodate and tolerate apparent contradictions between concrete objects and events. For instance, one child said, "Although I'm lazy to do my homework sometimes, studying is my first interest and I'll spend my life studying." Children start to understand that any characteristic, whether positive or negative, will have counter-characteristics in different circumstances. The seemingly contradictory parts can be accommodated into a consistent self-concept. Thus, it is possible for them to be critical towards their negative features without leading to a depressed self-concept. The apparent contradictions no longer confuse them. Since opposite traits could coexist, they no longer need to deny part of their characteristics (negative or positive) in an all-or-none fashion. For example, a young adolescent said, "My health is not good, but I have very strong will power." Cognitive abilities enable them to understand the salience of deep, sometimes hidden, meanings of daily events and situations. For instance, another said, "My shining eyes show my kindness and peaceful mind." The appearance tells not only what other people might perceive but also what might relate to one's inner world.

While the adolescent accepts the contradictions and ambiguities in understanding the internal and external world, he becomes more aware of the dualism between the body and the mind, and the differences between the social and the psychological self. He compares his physical features with his mental power and moral quality (e.g., physical beauty and inner beauty), social conventions

with his own moral senses, the social exterior with the psychological interior, and social desirability with individual willingness.

Children in elementary school persistently fixate on the perceptible and inferable reality in front of them. Inhelder and Piaget (1958) argued that adolescents, on the other hand, tend to differ from children in the way they conceive of the relation between the real and the possible and between the appearance and the real. As found in this study, some typical adolescents' responses that reflect the ability to differentiate the appearance from the truth are as follows:

"I have the talent to look through phenomena to get to the very nature of things."

"The way others see me is not necessarily the real me."

"Declaring one's good will verbally doesn't mean he has commitment to the virtue deep down in his heart."

"In front of strangers, I am gentle and quiet. However, facing those I know well, I am very lively and show my real personality."

Adolescents also showed the ability to face the disparity between the possible and the real, or the desire and the reality:

"I would like to be loved by everyone. Actually, I know that's impossible. Nobody will be loved by everyone. "

"I always think a lot, but I never act as much. I always dream a lot but hardly achieve as much."

"The person who works hard could possibly, but not always,

achieve his goal because one's will is different from the reality."

The structural analysis of Chinese children's self-concept provided evidence supporting the general developmental trends across age groups reported by studies on Western children (Harter, 1983; Damon & Hart, 1982; O'Mahony, 1986). More specifically, the expected developmental changes, with children's age as index, was confirmed. The developmental shift with age towards more complex and differentiated levels of the self-concept was highly significant. A clear change took place from the younger children's rather egotypical, concrete, and peripheral oriented conception to the older children's socio-centric, abstract, generalized, and qualitative oriented conception. The qualitative changes occurred during the years between fifth grade and junior high school, at which point the child was 12 to 13 years old. This is the approximate age at which transitions to formal operational thinking are occurring (Piaget, 1952, 1968). The discontinuity of children's reasoning patterns could relate to the differing cognitive competencies of concrete and formal operational individuals.

The structural analysis of the self-concept also revealed that age is the only factor that has the power to predict the structural change. Thus, the change is developmental in nature. It does not seem to relate to other factors, such as sex, school-related experiences (e.g., school performance), family environment (e.g., number of siblings), parental educational level, or parental social status. The findings suggest that, compared with the content

changes, the structure of the self-concept is less subject to environmental influences. The content analysis demonstrated that children tend to closely respond to the experiences of their daily lives. For instance, the content of the self-concept was found to be influenced by people's expectation (e.g., social conventions), activities in school, and home environment (e.g., dynamics of family relations, interactions with family members). The structure of the self-concept determines how these experiences (i.e., contents) are organized into traits, labels, abstractions, hierarchies, and networks.

#### Changes in Self-Evaluation

According to Harter (1983), children of all age groups tend to regard positive characteristics as the core of the self. Of the self attributes that are deemed most important, 75% are positive characteristics. Harter's findings suggest that the more negative and fewer positive attributes that are described as central to the self, the lower one's self-worth. In the self-descriptions of the Chinese subjects from the two younger groups, 65% to 70% were positive, compared with only about 55% that were positive in the young adolescent group. The decline of self-evaluation with age might be the result of pressure from the social environment (Erikson, 1959), as well as the influence of one's cognitive advances that provide a pressure towards integration of the self (Epstein, 1973).

Social and environmental changes and self-evaluation

The transition from childhood to early adolescence seems to bring changes in self-evaluation. Harter and Connell (1982), as well as Simmons, Rosenberg, and Rosenberg (1973), have found a decrease in self-esteem during early adolescence. They suggest that the shift from elementary school to junior high school is the primary factor responsible for the decrease. The environmental changes put demands on the young adolescents that heighten self-consciousness, create instability of self-image, and lower self-esteem.

This study bolsters the above results. Self-evaluation scores dropped significantly during the first year of junior high school. During this period, adolescents in China experience some tremendously influential events. For example, they must take an entrance examination for junior high school. In some way, this is the first time that young people are formally categorized based upon societal criteria. According to their performance on the examination, students are assigned to different junior high schools (i.e., good or bad schools). In Chinese urban areas, parents, as well as students themselves, tend to relate the consequence of the categorization (i.e., the junior high school that the student attends) to the children's future (i.e., the possibility of attending college, or even future professions). Also, in the last year of elementary school, children take only four to five courses, compared with seven to eight courses in the first year of junior

high school. The dynamics of the learning environment are also changed, including interactions between teachers and students, teaching methods, etc. Studies (e.g., Eskilson, Wiley, Muehbauer, & Dodder, 1986) have reported that adolescents who feel unduly pressured to achieve in school are likely to have low self-esteem. The vulnerability of young adolescents in their self-evaluation may also be due to the fact that their value systems are changing and that great emphasis is placed on the consideration of their peer groups. Thus, they may react negatively to the disruption and reorganization of peer networks during school transition (Epstein & Karweit, 1983).

#### Reference groups of comparison and self-evaluation

Besides the changes in the child's immediate social environment, increased cognitive sophistication will also influence their social comparison, and thus their self-evaluation. The cognitive changes are exemplified by the development of concrete operational and then formal operational thought (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958). The cognitive changes function as the prerequisite for social comparison in which the child will show an appreciation of his performance relatively to others' performance. A number of studies (Ruble, Feldman, & Boggiano, 1976; Ruble, Parsons, & Ross, 1976; Ruble, Boggiano, Feldman, & Loebel, 1980; Feld, Ruhland, & Gold, 1979) have found that as children grow older their social comparison increases. Thus, they compare themselves more with

similar others rather than with adults (e.g., parents and teachers) for their self-evaluation.

As the child's social world develops, adults, such as parents, teachers, and older siblings, become less focused in their self-conception, while peer groups become increasingly significant as standards for comparison in self-evaluation. As some studies (Bronfenbrenner, 1970, 1977; Berndt, 1979; Piaget, 1932, 1954; Devereux, 1970) have found, from middle childhood to adolescence the child increasingly conforms to peers but conforms less to adults. The adolescents in this study also referred to their social relations and competences compared to others in their self-concept. For instance, some said:

"I am a person who always wants to perform better than my classmates."

"I have a very high reputation among my schoolmates. That is very important to me."

"I always want to stay with people of my age because they understand me better."

The adolescents felt less satisfied, compared with young children, about their relationships with people, especially with adults. Typical responses referring to their dissatisfaction are as follows:

"I don't think that teachers and parents understand our generation."

"I don't want to be watched by adults all the time."

"I don't like my parents to criticize me without really

understanding young people."

"I feel miserable not being understood by my parents. I would like to discuss important matters with my friend rather than with my parents."

"I hope that adults can understand us and make us live better lives."

As Walker and Greene (1986) have pointed out, adolescent global self-esteem is related to the perceived quality of their relationship with parents and peers. In reconstructing a new network of peers and experiencing dissatisfaction with relationships with adults, their global self-esteem is inevitably threatened. The transition from later childhood to early adolescence, as Suls and Mullen (1982) have summarized, is characterized by the mode of social comparison in self-evaluation. In late childhood, the child tends to make dissimilar comparisons (i.e., comparing oneself with adults) while young adolescents use mostly similar comparisons (i.e., comparing oneself with his peers).

The present study, however, gave a more complicated picture. The elementary students, especially the third graders, always mentioned their performance rank in their class and their interests compared to their schoolmates. Also, referring to their role model (by completing the sentence: The person I respect the most is \_\_\_), the elementary school students always picked a person similar to themselves (e.g., peers, classmates). Through making similar comparisons, the elementary school child evaluated not only his

school performance but also his conduct.

Quite the opposite, the junior high school students never mentioned similar persons, such as classmates or friends, as their role models, or as persons with whom they compared their own conduct. Rather, they mentioned people who were relatively remote from their daily lives, such as war heroes, sports stars, historical figures (e.g., Napoleon), scientists, etc. The adolescents tended not to use similar persons (e.g., classmates, peers) to be their models in judging their moral conduct. At the same time, they used similar comparisons for their daily performance (e.g., performing in the school, handling daily matters). Also, peers were treated more importantly in terms of emotional support. It is reasonable to assume that the transition from similar comparison to both similar and dissimilar comparison has already begun by the time the child reaches early adolescence. The child's concern moves away from daily activities and behavioral competences towards psychological and moral considerations. His cognitive development facilitates his ability to make abstractions and generalizations. Thus, comparisons in his self-evaluation will be based upon not only similar people in the immediate environment, but also persons and situations that transcend his direct experiences.

#### The disparity between understanding and constraints

Dramatic environmental, physiological, and cognitive changes lead to children's instability of their self-image and raise

questions about their personal competences and social relations. To adjust to the new situation is not easy for young people. One adolescent in this study asked, "Why did I have excellent performance in elementary school but not in high school even though I always studied hard?" Many young adolescents experienced severe anxiety about the changes. For instance, some typical responses of subjects from junior high school were as follows:

"The most important thing for me is to know how to free myself from worries about study and examinations."

"I hope that I can finish the extremely long way of my study some day."

"I am afraid some unfortunate thing could happen in my uncertain future."

When trying to locate themselves in a larger society, the adolescents extend even further their feelings of dissatisfaction with adult relationships (Huang, 1981). Their newly gained cognitive power enables them to have a broader landscape in observing different social phenomena. However, they also experience anxious feelings about the social and physical constraints that limits what they can achieve. The disparity between what they can understand and what they can achieve leads to some negative feelings towards themselves. As Fromm (1941) argued, societal conditions foster a feeling of insignificance in people, especially in young adolescents. Chinese children live in an adult-dominated world where young people hardly establish a sense of control. For

instance, children made the following complaints:

"I could be a capable person, but I know clearly that I am not able to use my talent in today's world."

"Although others think that I am an easy-going person, I am a rebel against the society."

"I don't like the way we are treated. However, what can I do about that?"

"What I think about is always beyond what I can possibly do."

#### Changes of focus in self-evaluation

Since this study applied open-ended questions for probing the self-concept, a basic assumption is that children of different age groups will mention the content which is most important and most salient to themselves in defining their self-concept. Thus, their self-evaluation will certainly base upon the content they specifically mentioned. As Damon and Hart (1982) have found, the adolescent is more likely to have doubts or contradictions related to his social competence and beliefs, including his general views towards life. The younger child may be more concerned with inadequacies in his action competences. The differences make children of different age groups change their focus in self-evaluation.

The younger child's typical responses about his activities or action competences carry the message about his positive or negative self-evaluation. For instance:

"My first strong point is my excellent penmanship."

"I love to play soccer the most because I am very good in it."

"I have only an average performance in my school work."

Also, Kohlberg (1969) has argued that the younger child (7-9 years) tends to rely on punishment and rewards controlled by authorities (e.g., parents, teachers, or social conventions) to tell him that he is competent and virtually good. What the child feels good about is often what authority feels good about. Thus, adults, such as parents and teachers, are important in determining the younger child's (i.e., the third and the fifth graders) self-evaluation (Suls & Mullen, 1982). This causes the social conventions and adults' opinions to function as the evaluation standards. For instance, the younger child tends to emphasize good manners, being a good student (e.g., following orders, obeying teachers), and diligence in school work. Goodness and badness are sustained by adults by their rewards and punishments.

On the contrary, the young adolescents' responses concentrated more on their moral values and psychological characteristics. These content categories carry their self-evaluation. For an adolescent, the higher self-evaluation is often related not to his action competences but to his moral values and psychological qualities.

Subjects of all age groups in this study emphasized the importance of human relationships in the self-concept. The child's self-evaluation is always influenced by his relationships with others. In other words, better social relationship will lead to

higher self-evaluation; unsatisfying social relationships will cause lower self-evaluation.

#### Emergence of global self-evaluation

The comparison between adolescents and elementary school children raises the developmental question: When is the child capable of developing a sense of global self-evaluation? From the responses of the third and fifth graders, it is obvious that the younger children's self-evaluation relies heavily on concrete events or situations (e.g., activities, specific competence). Thus, self-evaluation is situation- and moment-oriented with a less global sense that transcends specific time and occasions. Their self-evaluations are less likely to be what Coopersmith (1967) has defined: the personal judgment of worthiness that is expressed in the attitudes the individual holds toward himself. The elementary school children's judgment inhibits, as Harter (1982b) has named, the differentiated evaluation of the self. Only after the child has gained cognitive sophistication with formal operational thinking, and experienced environmental challenge within a broadened social-relational landscape, can one possibly have a sense of global self-evaluation which is the higher-order evaluation. The instability of self-evaluation during the period of 12-14 years might signal the development of global self-evaluation beyond differentiated self-evaluation.

## SUMMARY

Mechanistic and organismic paradigms, as Deana Kuhn (1978) has observed, have tended to be narrowly applied to the particular phenomena in human development they handle best. The mechanistic paradigm (e.g., social learning theory, role-internalization theory) traditionally deals with the content acquisition of various social concepts and changes of social behavior. The organismic paradigm (e.g., Piagetian theory) focuses on the structural development of cognition. The study of self-concept development is found at the point where these two approaches intersect. In recent years, social-cognitive developmental studies (e.g., Harter, 1982a) call for distinguishing between the content and the structure of the self-concept, which are lumped together by most studies in the cognitive approach. The differentiation and the interaction of these two dimensions demand more studies from a broader theoretical scope. Neither an ahistorical cognitive approach nor a passive and mindless learning theory will be sufficient enough in dealing with the complex processes of self-concept formation.

By focusing on the structure of cognition, traditional cognitive developmentalists have devoted their attention to discovering those aspects of cognitions that are completely general and irrespective of particular contexts or contents. Development, thus, goes through transformations which are universal to all individuals. This approach ignores the specific environmental context in which an individual develops, and fails to conceptualize

the complex and delicate interaction between the developing individual and the rich and various environmental situations in which development takes place.

The content domain of the self-concept follows a more complicated line of development than the overt-towards-covert, or simple-to-differentiated, line predicted by the organismic approach. The Chinese subjects of the three age groups did not show sex differences in choosing content categories for defining themselves. However, during early adolescence, male subjects were found to have more alternatives in perceiving and behaving themselves than female subjects. Thus, their self-conception tended to respond to the degree of societal tolerance towards diversity in males and females at this age level.

Children of the different age groups in this study indicated clearly differences in choosing content categories of the self-concept. While growing up, they focused less on physical characteristics and active aspects and more on psychological aspects. At the same time, they became less coercive towards social conventions and group memberships, and showed more autonomous self-description by following their own values and beliefs. However, being in a collective oriented society, the subjects always strongly viewed themselves in light of their relationships with others. Interpersonal relationships were always found to be one of the most important content categories of their self-concept. Being more autonomous in human relations and focusing more on

psychological characteristics, indeed, do not at all mean being more individualized or detaching from one's social surroundings.

Under the mechanistic paradigm, role-learning theory focuses its analysis on overt descriptions. The elements (or dimensions) of the role-taking picture tend to be discrete. The acquisition of the self-concept is dominated by the process of internalizing the external roles. One does not define himself as an object "from the inside out" (Hewitt, 1983). Thus, a theoretical formulation to explain how these cognitions are formed and internally organized is lacking and seems to be unnecessary. The explanatory power of this approach, thus, is severely limited.

Contrary to the mechanistic approach, the Piaget-Kohlberg cognitive approach asserts that sequences of thought are organized into a hierarchy because of a natural ordering of concepts. The logical structures internal to the description of developmental changes determine the ways that an individual selectively activates interactions with the environment to construct his understanding of the self. Chinese children presented the same structural sequences of self-conception in their development as Western children. From age 8 onwards, the subjects moved from the state of lacking systematic logic exigencies towards integrating fragmentary experiences into specific trait labels, then towards making higher-order abstractions that enabled them to solve apparent contradiction in the self-concept and adapt counter-characteristics in a harmonious self-concept.

Psychologists in both paradigms prefer to describe developmental changes by referring to an increase (or decrease) in this or that dimension. The "increase" or "decrease" can be noted in children's abilities of perspective-taking, or role-taking, in their logical reasoning abilities, and in specific aspects of content domain in self-conception. Wohlwill (1973) considered the dimensionalization of developmental trends the ideal strategy for theorizing and researching. Dimensional models allow empirical testing of considerable scope and power because increases and decreases in specific dimension can be directly qualified. Although having paid most of his attention to the structural changes of human cognition, Piaget (1970) argued that absolute "structure", or absolute "content", does not exist. Rather, the structure-content distinction is a relative one. What is "content" in relation to a given structure in turn becomes "structure" in relation to another more subordinate level of content. An isolated dimensional study focusing only on content or structure will not reveal a complete picture of self-concept development. Based upon understanding the differentiation of the content and the structure of the self-conception, a study that synthesizes dimensional considerations but does not confound content with structure will shed more light on the processes of reestablishing and reconstructing the self-concept. The study of the self-concept, thus, deserves both differentiation and synthesis of features in different dimensions.

With increasing age, there is an increasing ability to

differentiate and articulate a variety of characteristics in self-evaluation. Also, the hierarchical structure and reconstructing content of self-conception results in the tendency to view only certain qualities of the self as central. These features then become more clearly concentrated in self-evaluation. There are substantial changes in the content of self-evaluation associated with age (Leahy & Shirk, 1985). Younger children tend to be more concerned with behavior characteristics whereas young adolescents tend to be more concerned with personality characteristics. Thus, general self-evaluation is based only upon the central qualities of a given age.

From about age ten onward, a decline in positive self-evaluation was found in this study. The decline was coincidental with the transition from elementary school to junior high school. The increasing diversity of social expectations and cognitive ability are also related to the decline of self-esteem. Social comparisons which are involved in self-evaluation change with years of development. Unlike younger children, young adolescents transcend the specific experiences and immediate contact in social comparison and focus more on general mental abilities.

Many points appeared with such consistency throughout the research (e.g., content changes, structural advance, self-evaluation decline) that their validity can be considered with a fair degree of certainty. However, some questions remain to await further research for clarification. Above all, the relationships among the content,

the structure, and the evaluation of the self need to be examined. The present data generated from coding responses of the "Who Am I" Test limit the explanation of the above relationships. Multi-method research that might reveal data about the three dimensions of the self-concept independently will be more promising in shedding light on the relationships and dynamics of the different dimensions.

The regularity of the progressive developmental reorganization of the self-concept needs further studies that cover more extended age groups, especially the middle and late adolescent groups.

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## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>For the simplicity of presentation, this study used he, him, his, and himself wherever a singular third person pronoun was needed. No specific sex was suggested in these cases.

<sup>2</sup>The original instruments (i.e., "Who Am I" Test, Sentence Completion Test, and Parental Questionnaire), as well as coding manuals and quotations of responses were translated from Chinese into English by the researcher and two raters. However, the whole coding was based upon original Chinese responses.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

No standard acknowledgment, no usual thanks, can express my gratitude to Jacques Lempers, whose support, advice, patience, and friendship furnished the work on its every step.

My sincere thanks goes, also, to Anne Mabry, for her help with the manuscript. Her contribution made this work moving and kept me lively.

I give thanks, too, to Dr. Dahlia Stockdale, who taught me much more than she thought; to Dr. Robert Strahan, Dr. Charles Kniker, and Dr. Albert King for their valuable counsel.

Over the years, the unconditioned support and affection from my parents and my aunt, Mrs. Nancy Chang Ing, in spite of the distance, have been of more importance to me than they have realized or I have cared to admit.

## APPENDIX A: THE WHO AM I TEST

"Who am I?" Have you thought about this question? Now, please think a while. Ask yourself in your mind. Then, put your answers on the following lines. You need to give at least ten answers. On each line, put only one answer. You are encouraged to put any answer as long as you feel it is important. An answer can be a complete sentence, a phrase, or even a single word. Do as you want without worrying about grammar, or correctness and wrongness of your answers. There is no correct or wrong answer as long as it is what you really think.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_
9. \_\_\_\_\_
10. \_\_\_\_\_
11. \_\_\_\_\_
12. \_\_\_\_\_
13. \_\_\_\_\_
14. \_\_\_\_\_
15. \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B: THE SENTENCE COMPLETION TEST

Please complete the following sentences. This is not a test. Do as you think. There are no correct or wrong completions because they all reflect your own description of yourself. Do not worry about grammar. Please make sure that you have completed all sentences.

1. I want to be the person who \_\_\_\_\_.
2. I don't want to be the person who \_\_\_\_\_.
3. The most important thing to me is \_\_\_\_\_.
4. I like to \_\_\_\_\_.
5. I don't like to \_\_\_\_\_.
6. The most significant characteristics of myself is \_\_\_\_\_.
7. I am \_\_\_\_\_.
8. Other people think that I am \_\_\_\_\_.
9. The thing I am afraid of happening is \_\_\_\_\_.
10. The person I respect the most is \_\_\_\_\_.
11. The characteristic I like about myself is \_\_\_\_\_.
12. My main problem is \_\_\_\_\_.
13. When I feel relaxed, I would \_\_\_\_\_.

## APPENDIX C: THE MANUAL OF CONTENT CODING

The manual is constructed into five content sections, which represent physical, active, psychological, social relational, and social conventional and moral aspects of the self-concept. The basic coding units are 17 content categories under the above five content sections. A special category is added for uncodable items. The basic recording units are sentences in the "Who Am I" and the "Sentence Completion" tests according to their main themes. Proper coding is made possible by requiring the child to express only one theme in each sentence. For a few sentences with two or more component themes, a pilot sorting will unitize them before content coding. Pseudo-confound sentence (see Rules for Structural Coding) should be treated as a single theme. Evaluative components of the sentence will be neglected until Evaluative Coding. For promoting coding reliability, the coder should first code responses into sections, then further into categories.

## Physical Aspects

Ascribed characteristics, including described roles and category designations conferred on the individual at birth, which typically remain with her throughout the life-time; material objects and personal facts which serve as elements of personal identification.

01 Name

02 Sex

03 Age

04 Native Place, Race, and Nationality

05 Physical Attributes:

Personal physical characteristics (e.g., height, weight, hair, sight), dress, or appearance.

06 Possession and Resource

07 Address

#### Active Aspects

Occasional or habitual action which is defined as the process or condition of acting, including activity competences and plans of activities.

08 Occasional and Habitual Actions:

Occasional practice; customary or involuntary manner of acting:

"I play basketball every afternoon after classes."

"I listen to the teacher very carefully in classes."

09 Action Competence and Performance:

Sufficiency of qualification in an action; capacity to deal adequately with an action; working out of anything ordered or undertaken:

"I am good in playing table-tennis."

"I cannot take good care of my things."

Note: Behaviors considered as illustration of one's personality are coded under "Personality."

## Social-Relational Aspects

The self in relation with others; actual or perceived relations; positions with others' recognitions; interaction and exchange between the self and others.

## 10 Kinship Roles:

"a member of the family", "a nice big sister."

## 11 Interacting Group Memberships:

Roles in groups involved; professions or dispositions of future professions; status, sometimes family's social status, in the social groups:

"I am a young Pioneer."

"I am a student of Red Star Elementary School."

"I will be a doctor."

"I'll be an astronaut to discover the universe."

"I am an ordinary citizen among millions."

"I am from a poor family."

"I am the team leader of the First Group."

## 12 Interpersonal Relationships:

Interactions, opinions, or feelings about interactions with other persons (e.g., family members, teachers, and peers):

"I have many good friends."

"My relations with many classmates are not so good."

"I wish Dad and Mom would not beat me."

"I don't want others to treat me like a small kid."

### Social Conventional and Moral Aspects

Norms of behavior and thinking; codes of conduct held by society or individuals voluntarily; personal opinions and attitudes towards social phenomena that reflect one's sense of morality and social conventions.

#### 13 Social Conventions:

Norms, rules, customs, or practices, forceable upon an individual's conduct, based upon general consent, or upheld by society:

"I should correct my mistakes to be a good kid."

"I don't like others to talk about rules to me."

"I don't want to be restricted by others. I am myself."

"I am a polite person."

"I always follow the majority of people."

"In somebody's view, I'm bad for having no progress."

"I don't like people to think that I'm a hooligan."

#### 14 Conscience and Morality:

Senses of justice and moral virtue to which one voluntarily conforms; personal beliefs, mental acceptance of propositions, statements, or facts as true transcending specific situations and time:

"I don't want to be a person who is harmful to people."

"I love life and believe in the good nature of man."

"Although I'm selfish, I'm always very kind to people."

"I like to be a huge tree to bring goodness to people."

"I wish to eliminate all bad guys who do harm to kids."

"Shouldn't ask others to do what we don't want to do."

"I don't want to dream rather than face reality."

### Psychological Aspects

Distinctive marks, traits, or features; essential qualities of a person, including aspirations, inclinations, and longings for having certain traits.

#### 15 Characteristics of Cognition:

Faculty of knowing in its broadest sense, including sensation, perception, conception, etc.; features of one's knowing processes.

"I enjoy thinking things very hard."

"I can't recall English words for lacking good memory."

"I catch up with things fast although I don't work hard."

"I am a very good learner."

#### 16 Personality and Traits:

Qualities, or assemblage of qualities, which make a person who he is as distinct from other persons; distinctive personal or individual characteristics:

"Braveness is the important quality one should have."

"I'm a very hateful person."

"I have very strong self-respect."

"I can always control myself when getting excited."

"As a tough guy, I'm eye-to-eye to those who hurt me."

"I'm a very shy girl, especially in front of strangers."

17 Feelings, Attitudes, and Aspirations:

General feeling about the self which may not involve specific characteristics; perception of one's position or condition in life:

"I am a person with a bright future."

"I'm a piece of sand and never overlook timely success."

"I'm myself with my own feelings and wishes."

"I'm a unique being who is different from anyone else."

"I'm a person who has her life in her own hands."

18 Uncodable Items

Not direct response to the stems of Sentence Completion; do not make sense in the coder's judgment:

"I am a king."

"I am God."

APPENDIX D: SPECIAL CONTENT CODING FOR SENTENCE COMPLETION TEST

About Fear (The Item 9)

21. Performance: "Fail in the final examination."

22 Crisis in Human Relations:

"Being looked down and misunderstood," or "Having no friend."

23 War and Disaster: "Earthquake," "Flood," or "Car accident."

24 Physical Pain and Harm: "Being sick," or "Having nightmare."

25 Misconduct: "Breaking someone's pencil," or "Wrong doing."

26 Others: "Eating chicken," or "Studying on Sunday."

About Role-Model (The Item 10)

31 Classmate and Friend

32 Parents and Relatives

33 Teachers

34 Scientists and Doctors

35 Writers, Artists, and Athletes

36 Heroes and Heroines

37 Others: "Leaders of the people."

## APPENDIX E: THE STRUCTURAL CODING MANUAL

The structural coding aims to identify qualitative differences in the successive stages of reasoning in the understanding of the self. Every response is matched against the sequence of qualitative stages and assigned to the level it most closely matches.

The basic tasks for the structural coding (as well as other coding) are translating qualitative data into quantitative data and reducing the diversity of responses, which means to change the distribution of ratings into a single rating.

The structural coding is built upon the given content coding. The raters will match responses in the same content category into four structural levels. Then, they will go on to the next content category.

The manual includes a general structural description about the four levels, a set of coding rules, and a coding system with extended coding examples for each structural level.

## Structural Level Description

Unconstrained reasoning

The self-conception is in a fragmented and incoherent manner without clear logic exigencies. The synthesis of a variety of momentary and random experiences is absent. The obscured taxonomic labels designate trivial and jumbled activities, appearances, interested materials, and immediate contacts. The child believes that

each sensible, substantive, and playful experience has its independent and real meaning in self-conception.

#### Concrete and stereotyped reasoning

The self-conception is based upon a concrete and initial logic. The fragmented experiences start to be integrated into specific trait labels. Thus, the child defines the self by relatively persistent and consistent behavior patterns (e.g., dumb, smart) manifested in a wide range of circumstances (e.g., poor at games, music, and painting). The child tends to depict himself by dichotomizing different features with an all-or-none logic (i.e., either all good, or all bad).

The external experiences are endowed with meanings more than their immediate and observable features. For example, one's physical appearance is related to the ability to play games or gain favorable relationships. A concrete reference group is introduced into the child's conception. The child defines the self by comparing himself with other children and with "ideal types" based on stereotypes and conventional cliches.

#### Abstract and relative reasoning

A more advanced integration emerges by establishing some single abstraction (Fischer, 1980) from specific existing trait labels. The characteristic is abstracted from some concrete objects or events. For example, a child could construct an abstraction of his intelligence by collecting related traits that showed his high performance in different school subjects, such as mathematics or physics.

The formation of higher-order integration makes it easier for one to accommodate and tolerate apparent contradiction between concrete features. For example, one can be self-critical towards his personal quality, see his positive features, yet accept the negative characteristics without leading to a depressive self-concept. Some internal or abstract characteristics (e.g., reputation, feeling, attitude, personality) becomes salient in one's self-conception.

The reference group of depicting the self becomes less rigid and more relative while one takes on perspectives of different individuals who also have their recognized internal characteristics. Consequently, the stereotypes and conventions are considered individual preferences with only contingencies and less coercive power.

#### Holistic and autonomous reasoning

The synthesis in reasoning ability develops as a result of coping with a multitude of diverse objects and events, concrete and abstract, external and internal, consistent and contradictory. Consequently, a multifaceted and multi-layered self-concept is constructed.

The higher order abstraction is based upon a combination of fragmented single abstractions (e.g., conventional intelligence). One can reconcile contradictions in conception by mapping and organizing them into different facets and layers of more sophisticated systems. On the other hand, the child realizes the limitation of cognitive reconciliation of contradictions in reality at an individual level. Thus he is more tolerant to contradictions and ambiguity.

While one perceives all his characteristics from both his own perspective and other individuals' perspectives, he also locates himself in a social network which contains the collective interest of different individuals, including himself. Understanding the collectiveness leads to the establishment of one's sense of virtue (e.g., belief, value), which serves as the highest criterion of self-conception.

#### Coding Rules

Every response in "Who Am I" is matched against the sequences of qualitative levels and is assigned to the level it most closely matches. The rater will code every response which is treated as a whole. Coding of level is based on the meaning of responses, although in-depth meaning inferences are excluded. Before starting to code, the raters should study the whole coding scheme thoroughly. However, no response should be coded without reference to the manual. The raters will only code responses under one aspect, then go on to those under the next aspect. Only identification numbers, not any other demographic data, will appear on the coding sheets.

#### Rule 1

Match the response with a structural level under the given content category. Before coding, inspect the examples given under different structural levels and decide whether the response at issue is in common

with one of the specific examples. However, when the match of the response is dubious, the rater should follow Rule 2 and Rule 3.

When a response is neither a simple sentence (e.g., "I am a strong person"), nor a repetitive sentence (e.g., "I am a smart and fast person"), it will be treated as a compound one that contains two or more contrasting ideas or alternative aspects of a situation, for instance, "I'm a happy person, but I feel hard sometimes." If there is not an example in a certain structural level, follow the procedure under Rule 2.

#### Rule 2

When the combination of two or more elements in a compound response generates a more complex level of conception, rate the response one-half level higher than the highest element. Conceptual complexity (i.e., contrasting more ideas or aspects) is an important clue to the higher structural level.

#### Rule 3

In the case of a meaningful response, where there is no appropriate example under any aspect at a certain level and Rule 2 does not apply, use the general structural description to obtain a rating.

#### Rule 4

When a response is too fragmentary to make sense, it is rated as "n", which will not contribute generalizing the structural level.

Rule 5

One's word choice, spelling errors, and grammar mistakes should not be considered in the coding criterion.

Rule 6

Before stating coding, always read the relevant section of the manual first. For every twenty minutes of coding, stop for a while to read the manual again.

## Coding System

The system includes 5 sections (A through E), according to the content coding. Each section will have several content categories. The sections of the system makes it possible for the rater to deal only with homogeneous data, thus ensuring a higher reliability of coding.

Physical Aspects (Content Category 1 to 7)

Level 1 The child gives a simple and unrelated list of body features or possessions. The self continuity is based on some physical features and names. Thus to the child, each feature is a fact with its absolute, rigid, and independent meaning. The child conceptualize the self by relating only external features and specific and concrete experiences.

"I am a boy."

"I am 9 years old."

"I was born in Nanjing."

"I am big."

"I have some beautiful clothes."

Level 2      The physical attributes are related to activities one is involved in. Several physical features of the same kind or different kind are integrated into a trait label. Comparison with others gives the physical features relative meanings.

"I am the strongest in my class."

"I am tall and rather thin, but I am very strong."

"My hometown is Fuzhou where I can eat delicious fruit."

"I have a good dictionary that helps me to learn. So, it is a teacher although it never speaks."

Level 3      The physical qualities are important descriptions of the self only as they reveal the person's internal and more basic characteristics.

"My name is Jianhua. That means I should devote myself to the construction of a strong China."

"I am age 12, so I am mature enough to know many things."

"My shining eyes show my kind and peaceful nature."

"I have many books. They bring me lots of knowledge."

"My health is not very good, but I have strong resistance to any disease."

Level 4      Personal physical qualities bear social values and moral senses. Simple descriptions of physical characteristics become meaningless to this level. One develops a dualistic view that separates physical aspects from more essential features,

internal characteristics, and the mind.

"Physical beauty is less important to me, compared to one's internal beauty."

"I was born in the countryside. So, I'm obligated to contribute to its prosperity."

"I have many wonderful music tapes that make me transcend the ugly and chaotic world."

Behavioral Aspects (Content Category 8 to 9)

Level 1 The child can only simply list his typical and habitual behaviors. He mentions "what I do", or "what I don't do", without real understanding of behavioral competence in its relative and comparative sense.

"I play soccer."

"I like to read the book about Monkey King."

"I sing well."

Level 2 The child makes relative comparisons between others' and his behavioral abilities. His behavioral qualities become the focus of his self-description. The use of comparison can also be found in the child's choice between several activities. He gives reasons for his choices. Instead of mentioning some specific behavior, he can integrate and generalize the type of activities he tends to be involved in. He realizes that his behavior might differ from his will and intention. Consequences of behavior are related to external reward and punishment. The child tends to use

more general terms (e.g., sport, study) to describe his activities rather than specific terms (e.g., football, Chinese lesson). Sometimes, he mentions a series of activities rather than a single one. This indicates that he is consistently involved in certain types of activities. Being able to make comparisons in defining the self, the child tends to use comparative words, such as "the most", "more", "less", and "relatively".

"I like performing art. On Sunday, I always sing and dance."

"I didn't do well in the exam. I'm afraid Father'll beat me."

"Among many things, the most important one to me is reading."

"I like Waltz the most, and rock'n'roll the least."

"I like to learn things, including math and physics."

"When I read, I tend to keep my head very close to the book.

It's bad for my eyes, but I can't help it."

"I reviewed my lessons very carefully before the exam, but I still couldn't do well."

Level 3 Behaviors are seen as having some reason or motive, not only their surface descriptions. The child tends to use words such as "because" and "so" to give reasons and cause-effect relations. He is able to discover different aspects of his behavior and consequences of his behavior. Thus, he tends to use conjunctions or adverbs for meaning transformation in his expressions. One's psychological characteristics are shown through activities. Also, activities reflect certain value judgments. For example, by doing something, one can consider himself "a good

person"; by not doing something, one can avoid being "a bad person". The activities are related to the psychological satisfaction of the child (e.g., comfort, relaxation, happiness). The child tends to use more abstract and general ways to describe his interests, such as "discovering the unknown world" and "understanding the very depth of people's mind".

"I'm too lazy to do the dishes after the meal; I leave it to my parents even though I don't think that's good."

"I'm fond of studying. In some sense, I'll be a student all my life."

"I didn't perform well in my study because I lack will power."

"I'm really good at learning new things. I feel easy to pick up exciting things."

Level 4 Activities are important insofar as they have a bearing on social interactions. One can perceive important social effects and meanings of his own activities, such as gaining personal attractiveness and influencing others' view towards himself. Active attributes reflect one's conscience, moral conduct, and social obligation.

Social-Relational Aspects (Content Category 10 to 12)

Level 1 The child is confined to an enumeration of his essential social relationships in the family and the school on a one-to-one basis (e.g., "I'm the son of my father"). The child puts himself at the very center of the social network. He tends to focus

only on his own perspective rather than coordinating others' viewpoints. The basis of his relationship with others is his feeling about how others treat him (i.e., "Someone's good because he is nice to me "). The child seems unaware of mutuality or reciprocity between people. For him, people are seen as sources of supply.

"I have my mother."

"I love my father."

"I am a student of Lique Elementary School."

"I hope my dad will not beat me."

"I would like to learn from Pan Jian."

Level 2 The child can relate to persons in his social network in more complex ways. He defines the self and indicates the uniqueness of the self by comparing himself with others. He mentions not only his group memberships, but also the quality of his memberships (e.g., good, bad, sometimes good) and the feeling of being in certain groups or relations. He can form a coordinated chain of perspectives but still can not abstract from the process to the level of simultaneous mutuality. Interpersonal interaction is described in terms of activities and performances. He depends on popularity and expressions of social approval. Belonging makes him feel secure. He can differentiate his desired status (in relationships or in groups) from reality. So, he often expresses his desire to be in certain groups or relationships in the future.

"I'm the son of my father and the nephew of Uncle Hong."

"I'm a very significant member of my family."

"I respect my grandpa more than my grandma because he is always very serious."

"I am the baby of Dad and Mom, so is my younger brother."

"I respect my parents. I greet them everyday."

"I often argue with people; I don't have friends in my class."

"My brother and I like each other and have fun together."

Level 3      The social relationships of the child reflect his personality. He can relate to others based on common features as well as differences. He uses his social relationships to refer to his psychological characteristics. He responds differently to people because of their different characteristics. Social statuses indicate not only simple comparisons of concrete situations or property, but also differences in psychological characteristics. Interpersonal interactions are described in terms of differentiated feelings, motives, or personality traits.

"I am nice to people, and they like me."

"I preserve my own mind and personal plans. But I never try to keep anything away from my friends."

"I treat people nicely because I am a sincere and modest person."

"Compared with most people I know, I often have a different way of thinking."

"I respect those good students, also I look down on those who do not enjoy studying."

"I make friends easily because I love to meet new people."

Level 4 Interpersonal interaction is significantly important and intensive in the child's self-description. The child displays a clear conception of mutuality, companionship, sympathy, identification and so on. He has more differentiated ideas, such as trust, respect, needs, and emotional support. The child's social relationship reflects his moral standards. Interpersonal interaction focuses more on general and broader senses rather than on specific persons. Compared with his moral and intellectual features, social stratification and stereotypes are considered less important in defining the self. There is more complexity in perceiving himself in interpersonal relationships. Not only do persons affect others, but the relations between persons affect others and are, in turn, affected by circumstances. The evaluation of social relationship is mainly based upon beliefs and personal values.

"When I'm with a friend, I consider his needs, and I hope that he'll do the same to me."

"I would not have those who pick on the smaller and the weaker for my friends."

"I sympathize with other people and am able to feel what they feel."

"The difficult experiences make me more closer to the Chinese people."

"I always appreciate people, even though they are treated

unfairly by social prejudices."

Social Conventional and Moral Aspects (Content Category 13 to 14)

Level 1      The child's understanding of convention and fairness is restricted to the physical or the hedonistic consequences of his actions. The avoidance of immediate punishment and enhancement of his momentary satisfaction are the main concerns. The criterion of judgment follows the physical power of those who initiate the rules:

"I am afraid of fighting."

"My good thing is that I go home immediately after class."

"I always listen to adults."

"I am a good person."

"I am a useful person."

Level 2      The child tends to dichotomize the world into good and bad, mean and nice. Stereotypes and cliches are the most conspicuous signs of this level. The child recognize his responsibilities in concrete terms. However, because of his self-centeredness, responsibilities are looked upon as burdens with compulsory power to his conducts. To the child, social convention is concrete and uniform when dealing with peripheral matters (appearance, behavior, possessions, etc.) The child's opinions are usually only concerned with immediately observable matters in his surrounding world, the only place where he can apply his conventional and moral judgments:

"I am a polite person to my neighbors."

"I don't talk to other children when the teacher is speaking."

"I don't want to be a thief."

"I love physical labor."

"I should study hard and make good progress everyday."

"I can help people."

"I think our school could be better."

"I am a kind person."

"Some classmates were peeking during the examination."

Level 3 Conventions are assumed to be essentially arbitrary, not necessary social regularities; thus they are not seen as compulsory. The mere fact of observed regularity no longer carries mandatory force. Moral judgment enhances maintaining mutual interpersonal expectations. The child needs to be good in order to live up to other people's expectations. While differentiated good-bad polarities decrease, The child gives more reasons for his judgment:

"I don't like to cheat others. People should be honest with each other."

"I like to help others. Whenever they need me, I will go."

"When the teacher criticizes me for my mistakes, I pretend to respond to her, but I don't correct anything."

"Sometimes, I leave my mistakes there without correcting them."

"I don't like to fight with anybody. It will bring a bad reputation to our class."

"I am a kind yet selfish person."

"After doing good things for others, I feel that I am the happiest person in the world."

Level 4      The child follows conventions for social order.

However, the conventional rules are different from the moral rules. Convention is considered a matter of individual preference without inherent validity. Also, not all conventions will help the social system to function well. Unconventional acts are considered to be relatively unimportant violations of the social system. Thus, the child might have some antagonistic thoughts about rules, especially when they contradict the child's moral senses. Moral rules are based on the consideration of the well being of close ones as well as people in general. A social group is generated from broader people with collective feeling of goodness or badness. The child's focus is broadened from people and events close to them to other things not in the immediate environment. He can be critical towards social rules and social stereotypes:

"I don't like the way others talk to me about rules and those good teachings."

"I am not a person who always follows the rules."

"I love peace and the great nature."

"I don't like selfish persons, but I myself sometimes become selfish too."

"Examination is not a good reason for studying."

"Someone who is able to learn should learn; one who is not

should not be forced to learn. Not everyone needs to go to the university."

"In our society, I don't like those who aren't good but still want to be leaders."

Psychological Aspects (Content Category 15 to 17)

Level 1 The child tends to refer his own preferences although occasionally he will mention a transient emotion. His cognitive competence refers only to the feedback he gets from his close persons. The personality description is merely the projection of powerful and authoritative figures. Self-feelings are momentary unclear and with limited emotional range:

"I have smart eyes."

"I am a high-minded child."

"I am afraid of fire."

"I cry a lot."

Level 2 The child is most concerned with self-knowledge, either alone or in comparison with other, and also frequently with how knowledge might relate to the active qualities of the self. Psychological characteristics are momentary and often related to one's actions. The child deals with bi-polar situations in all-or-none fashion (e.g., all smart or all dumb; all happy or all sad). The child uses a significant amount of trait labels:

"I am the smartest one in the class."

"I am fond of thinking hard. For example, I am eager to answer

questions in my math class."

"I am a careless person who always makes mistakes in homework."

"I am a quite frank person. I'll speak what I think directly without trying to cover anything."

"I am a piece of sand and a drop in the ocean. Why should I be overly proud about being elected as the model student?"

(Notes: Trait labels include quiet, shy, impatient, proud, naive, active, timid, etc.)

Level 3      The child synthesizes more psychological characteristics of the self. He can abstract more generalized categorizations about the self without referring specific events or actions. He has a vivid sense of individual psychological uniqueness in the long-term dispositions that underlie behavior. He begins to understand the inconsistencies, or contradictions, between others' perception of the self and his self-understanding:

"I have high self-respect."

"I am smart, but do not work hard."

"I am impatient, but I can control myself."

"I am a happy person, but occasionally I feel upset."

"I have my own future in control."

"I am always indifferent towards things surrounding me."

Level 4      All psychological traits are integrated into a system. The psychological qualities often directly relate to the competence in seeking truth, personal belief, and interpersonal understanding. The child also develops the notion of

unconsciousness that makes the self more complicated than he can realize at the beginning:

"I have the talent to look through phenomena to get to the very nature of things."

"My greatest happiness is being able to devote my knowledge to people."

"I can handle my life according to my own principles."

"I am a person who seems to be very quiet and peaceful, but deeply inside, I am impetuous. I feel that I have some crazy things in my mind."

Random Responses (Content Category 18)

Since the proportion of responses in this category to all other responses is very small, the coder will drop this category for assigning structural levels, coding them into 9.

## APPENDIX F: THE MANUAL OF SELF-EVALUATION CODING

The semantic judgment of raters will lead to three categories of self-evaluation: favorable(2), unfavorable(0), and neutral(1). The average of all coding results for each respondent will be the overall self-evaluation score applied in statistic analysis.

The crucial point for reliable coding is the coder's sensitivity to evaluative elements in each sentence. Since the coding unit (sentence) is relatively small, the evaluative element in the sentence could be represented by: 1) certain words, negative or positive; 2) conventional preference underlying the sentence, e.g., "finishing homework on time", positive; "love physical labor", positive.

Some rules of coding should be considered by the coders:

1) Since factual information (e.g. one's age, address, and possessions) usually bears no evaluative meaning, key words (see Table 11) should serve as the basis for coding responses in the following content categories:

- 01 Name
- 02 Sex
- 03 Age
- 04 Native Place, Race, and Nationality
- 05 Physical Attributes
- 06 Possessions and Resources
- 07 Address
- 10 Kinship Roles

## 11 Interacting Group Memberships

Table 11. Key words of evaluation

POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
good	bad	better	worse
friendly	unfriendly	polite	rude
pretty	ugly	right	wrong
sweet	sour	funny	sad
brave	not brave	strong	weak
fast	slow	new	old
first	last	honest	not honest
beloved	lonely	fair	unfair
sharp	dull	interesting	boring
careful	careless	clear	confusing
gentle	rough	responsible	irresponsible
relaxed	tense	happy	unhappy
calm	angry	warm	cold
active	passive	thoughtful	absent-minded
smart	dumb	valuable	worthless
lively	dull	useful	useless
healthy	unhealthy	capable	incapable
competent	incompetent	joyful	worry
respected	looked down upon	broad	narrow
meaningful	meaningless	open	jealous
industrious	lazy	significant	insignificant
patient	impatient	kind	cruel

Sentences with neither favorable nor unfavorable modifiers

(see Table 11) should be coded as neutral.

"I live in a nice apartment." (Favorable)

"I'm an insignificant one in a billion Chinese." (Unfavorable)

"I am a Chinese." (Neutral)

2) Coding of the sentence with a main noun clause or a predicate should rely on the key words.

3) A sentence with both a positive and a negative subordinate clause should be coded as Neutral.

4) Existential individualizing (e.g., "I am myself.") in content category 17 should be coded as Neutral.

5) Responses in the form of question (e.g., "Shall I become an acceptable person?") should be coded as Unfavorable.

6) Responses referring to desired conduct according to convention (e.g., "I want to be a person who does not talk to others in the class") should be coded as Unfavorable.

Conventional preferences adapted by a respondent usually indicate a clear orientation to either a positive or a negative self-evaluation. For instance, "Listen to the adults" is regarded as a positive self-evaluation while "Could not do homework" is a negative one. Unconventional responses without some positive reasoning are coded as negative evaluations. The underlying conventions or values should be captured by experienced raters who are familiar with Chinese culture. A try-out coding with no less than 50 sentences of conventional preferences will serve to establish the inter-coder reliability.

## APPENDIX G: THE PARENTAL QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Age of your child: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Number of siblings the child has: \_\_\_\_\_, including \_\_\_\_\_ older sibling(s) and \_\_\_\_\_ younger sibling(s).
3. General grade point average of the child for last semester: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Based on your knowledge of his (her) achievement, which high school do you want him (her) to attend? \_\_\_\_\_
5. How much time do you spend every day for helping and checking your child's homework? (Circle the most likely answer.)
  - a. Less than 15 minutes
  - b. 15 minutes or so
  - c. Half an hour or so
  - d. 1 hour or so
  - e. 2 hours or so
  - f. More
6. What profession do you expect the child to have in his (her) future? \_\_\_\_\_
7. Beside helping with homework, what other activities do you do together with the child? \_\_\_\_\_ Approximately how many hours do you spend weekly for those activities? \_\_\_\_\_ hour(s).
8. How often do you talk to the child about what happened in his (her) school? (Circle the most likely answer.)
  - a. Every day
  - b. Very often
  - c. Sometimes

d. Never

9. What do you think about the opportunity for your child to study in a college? (Circle the most likely answer.)

a. Very important

b. Important

c. No opinion

d. Not important

10. What kind of student do you expect your child to be? (Circle the most likely answer.)

a. The best

b. Good

c. Average student

11. According to your expectation, by which age should your child have acquired the following abilities? (Fill in the blanks with expected age.)

To study independently: \_\_\_\_\_

To follow regulations and rules: \_\_\_\_\_

To understand parents: \_\_\_\_\_

To discuss some important daily matters with: \_\_\_\_\_

To differentiate the rightness from the wrongness: \_\_\_\_\_

To take good care of his daily life: \_\_\_\_\_

To do some house work (e.g., cleaning, cooking): \_\_\_\_\_

12. Your age: \_\_\_\_\_; your occupation: \_\_\_\_\_; your educational level: \_\_\_\_\_.

## APPENDIX H: THE CODING SCHEME OF PARENTAL RESPONSES

Age:	Future occupation of the child:
Based on chronological age	1--Low: worker, clerk, service job, soldier
GPA:	2--Median: teacher, cadre, artist, athlete
1--Low: 70% and below	3--High: scientist, engineer, doctor
2--Average: 71% to 89%	Expected type of student:
3--Good: above 90%	1--Low: average
Parental occupation:	2--Median: Good
1--Scientific, technical, professional services	3--High: the best
2--Teaching profession	Importance of college attendance:
3--Administrator (cadre)	0--Not important
4--Clerk	1--Average important
5--Worker	2--Important
6--Service Attendant	3--Very important
7--Self-employed, house wife	Time spent to help with homework:
8--Others	1--15 minutes or less
Parental educational level:	2--One hour or less
1--Primary school and below	3--Two hours or more
2--Junior high school	Time spent for other activities:
3--Senior high school	1--Two hours or less
4--Some college	2--Three hours or more
5--University and above	3--Four hours or more

## Expected school attendant:

1--Low: non-key school

2--High: key school

## Talking about school life:

0--Never

1--Sometimes

2--Often

3--Every day

## APPENDIX I: THE GENERAL INSTRUCTION TO SUBJECTS

This questionnaire is constructed by Nanjing Normal University. It has nothing to do with your school work and examinations. Your teachers will not read what you write; people of the university will. Nobody will criticize you for what you write. So, try to finish your statements to express your real thinking. The researchers want to find out what people of your age think about themselves.

Thank you for your help.

## APPENDIX J: THE LETTER TO PARENTS

June 20, 1986

Dear Parents:

This questionnaire is constructed by Nanjing Normal University for studying how children understand themselves. The research will be very useful to those who help children to deal with their problems in their study and daily life. We would like to know your opinion on some questions. Please try your best to give your answers. Since your responses are based on your personal opinion, they will not be judged as right or wrong. Both parents should answer the questions independently without consulting with each other. Don't worry about possible discrepancies in your answers.

Thank you for your help.

Nanjing Normal University