FAMILY COMMUNICATION PATTERNS, COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION
AND SOCI-COMMUNICATIVE ORIENTATIVE ORIENTATION:
A STUDY OF CHINESE STUDENTS

A Thesis
Presented to
The Graduate Faculty of The University of Akron

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

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August, 2010
FAMILY COMMUNICATION PATTERNS, COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION
AND SOCI-COMMUNICATIVE ORIENTATIVE ORIENTATION:
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Yuan Huang

Thesis

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to explore the relationships among the four types of family communication patterns (Protective, Consensual, Laissez-faire and Pluralistic) and two communication traits: communication apprehension (CA) and socio-communicative orientation (SCO). This study surveyed 136 Chinese college students studying in a Mid-West University in the United States, and 118 completed questionnaires for the data analysis. Findings showed that Chinese students from protective and laissez-faire families have a higher level of CA than those from pluralistic families. In terms of SCO, Chinese students from pluralistic families tend to be more assertive than those from laissez-faire families and students from pluralistic families tend to be more responsiveness than those from protective families. This study improves the understanding of the relationships between family communication patterns and communication traits, especially among this Chinese population.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Communication traits are subsets of personality traits concerned with human symbolic behavior. According to Infante, Rancer, and Womack (1997), communication traits were described as the explanation of “enduring consistencies and differences in individuals’ message-sending and message-receiving behaviors” (p. 150). To understand individuals’ tendency to behave during communication process, it is significant to study how communication traits formed and developed.

Bandura (1977) provided the Social Learning Theory that focuses on how individuals learn how to communicate within a social context. The theory considers that people learn from one another. According to the Social Learning Theory, individuals’ environmental experiences influence the formation of their traits. Bandura suggested that people are often reinforced from modeling the behavior of others, and the environment also reinforces modeling. In order to emphasize the role that cognition plays in the learning process, Bandura (1986) modified his Social Learning Theory as Social Cognitive Theory that indicates individuals can learn from observing others and by participating themselves in social interaction.

One of the significant social environments is the home. Among the five dominant socialization agents: family, school, peer, environment and mass media, family is the
primary socialization context in which children develop beliefs, attitudes and knowledge from their parents (Gecas, 1992). Parent-child communication, therefore, has been considered “one of the most pervasive forces” that can affect individuals’ traits and personality developments (Chaffee, McLeod, & Wackman, 1973).

As the family communication environment is critical to children’s behavioral development, researchers began to examine that environment. To study family communication structure, Chaffee et al. (1973) first developed the concept of Family Communication Patterns (FCP) and two major dimensions of family communication patterns: socio-oriented and concept-oriented. By using these two dimensions, McLeod and Chaffee (1972) first categorized family patterns. According to whether the family members’ responses were high or low on each of the two variables, researchers categorized families into four different types. The four types are: protective, pluralistic, laissez-faire and consensual.

Since then, many researchers turned their attention to the relationship of family communication patterns on communication trait development. Ritchie and Fitzpatrick (1990) reformulated socio-orientation and concept-orientation into conformity-orientation and conversation-orientation, respectively. Later on, Elwood and Schrader’s (1998) study indicated that conversation-orientation was a significant and negative predictor of communication apprehension in groups and interpersonal contexts. Huang’s (1999) research focused on the relationships between family communication patterns and children’s set of personality characteristics, including self-esteem, self-disclosure, self-monitoring, and desirability of control, social desirability, shyness, and sociability. The outcomes of this study indicated that higher conversation-orientated communication
pattern helps cultivate individual’s self-disclosure, desire for control, self-esteem and sociability, whereas higher conformity-oriented communication pattern was more likely to lead to high degree of shy and lower self-esteem. Avtgis (1999) investigated the relationship between the general tendency to approach or avoid communicative situations and family communication patterns and reported that individuals from higher conversation oriented families reported a tendency to see communication as rewarding whereas individuals from decreased conversation oriented families reported the tendency to avoid communication.

Concerning the environmental factors, researchers have argued that a culture in which individuals are socialized influences the way they communicate (Gudykunst, 1997). One of the studies (Avtgis & Rancer, 2002) examined differences in aggressive communication traits of people among the cultures of the United States, New Zealand, and Australia. The results of the study indicated that Australians reported both higher levels of verbal aggressiveness and tendency to argue than either New Zealand or United States samples. Americans reported the lowest levels of verbal aggressiveness among the three culture samples. Many researchers also focused on the influences of family communication patterns on communication behaviors in and even among other cultures. One study found that Chinese family communication patterns are more conversation-oriented than conformity-oriented, and the collaborating and accommodating styles are the children's most preferred and the competing style the least preferred (Zhang, 2007). Another study compared the difference of family communication patterns between American culture and Japanese culture (Shearman & Dumlao, 2008). Results showed that the consensual family type was most common in the United States, while the laissez-faire
family type was most common in Japan. One past study also examined the racial differences in family communication patterns (Allen & Chaffee, 1977). Their study focused on the comparison of white and black samples to find out that the two-dimensional model of family communication patterns fits the white subculture much better than it does the black subculture.

Researchers are very interested in examining the relationship between family communication patterns and personal traits, and did a lot of studies. The present study focused on the family communication patterns and two communication traits: communication apprehension and socio-communicative orientation. The purpose is to explore the relationship between the FCP and communication traits.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Family Communication Patterns (FCP)

Family communication patterns reflect how parents communicate with their adolescent children. Chaffee, McLeod, and Wackman (1973) first developed two major dimensions of family communication patterns: social-oriented and concept-oriented. The social-oriented families are authoritative and controlling families. Children in this type of families should defer to parental authority, maintain harmonious relationships and to avoid any conflict with their parents or others. Conversely, concept-oriented communication emphasized individual ideas, beliefs and feelings. This type of families encourages children to express ideas openly and to challenge the views of others.

By using these two dimensions, McLeod and Chaffee (1972) first categorized families into four different types and created a model of family communication pattern. Researchers categorized families according to whether individuals’ responses are high or low on social-oriented and concept-oriented. Four family communication types are identified, they are protective (low on concept-orientation and high on socio-orientation), pluralistic (low on social-orientation and high on concept-orientation), laissez-faire (low on both dimensions) and consensual (high on both dimensions). (See Figure 1) The
protective communication shows little concern about conceptual matters. In protective families, children are discouraged from expressing different opinions and encouraged to keep harmonious relationships. In pluralistic families, children are not only exposed to controversial issues, but are encouraged to develop strong and different opinions without fear of punishment. The laissez-faire families are concerned about neither conversation nor conformity. This communication pattern encourages neither the challenge of other’s opinion nor harmonious relationships. On the other side, consensual families stress both relational harmony and open communication between parents and children.

McLeod and Chaffee (1972) first developed the Family Communication Patterns instrument which has a set of questions to measure family communication patterns. This FCP instrument assumed that communication patterns develop from experience in interactions rather than from personality characteristics. The instrument includes ten questions, five for measuring the social-oriented communication pattern and the other five for measuring the concept-oriented communication pattern.

McLeod and Chaffee’s (1972) original model of family communication patterns was conceptualized within a socialization framework. Therefore, it has been challenged and revised by numerous communication researchers to make the scale much more useful to family communication researchers (Tims & Masland, 1985; Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990). Ritchie and Fitzpatrick (1990) modified the original FCP dimensions and revised the model by substituting two new dimensions of family communication patterns. They have shown that the socio-orientation emphasizes the use of parental power to enforce the child’s conformity and the concept-orientation means parents encourage conversation among family members. Therefore, Ritchie and Fitzpatrick reformulated social-
orientation and concept-orientation into conformity-orientation and conversation-orientation, respectively. In addition, the revised model also suggested that the social-orientation should be measured by perceived parental control while the concept orientation should be measured by assessment of communication (Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990).

![Four-fold typology of family communication patterns](image)

According to the previous two dimensions and the family communication pattern instrument, Ritchie and Fitzpatrick (1990) developed a Revised Family Communication Pattern instrument (RFCP) to measure relative use of conversation and conformity by different family types. A set of 26 questions is used to measure the family communication patterns, 11 items for measuring the conformity-orientation and the other 15 items for measuring the conversation-orientation. This revised instrument offers a way
to assess parent-child schemata. It includes how children interpret their parents’ verbal and nonverbal behavior, for example, “my parents often say something like ‘You will know better when you grow up.’”, and “when anything really important is involved, my parents expect me to obey without question.” The Revised Family Communication Patterns instrument categorizes families’ patterns into the same four-fold typology as the previous: pluralistic, protective, consensual, and laissez-faire families. Comparing with the original model, the revised family communication patterns model is much more useful to family communication scholars. Therefore, the present study is going to use the Revised Family Communication Patterns instrument to measure the family communication patterns.

Based on the two dimensions, researchers began to examine how family communication patterns are related to children’s development in various aspects. Fowler (2007) indicated that laissez-faire and protective parent communication styles were associated with poorer outcomes for their children, such as: low in self-esteem, closeness and relational satisfaction, affection, than were consensual or pluralistic styles. Ledbetter and Schrodt (2008) examined the unique and combined associations among family communication patterns and young adult children’s informational reception apprehension. Punyanunt-Carter’s study (2008) investigated how college-aged daughters’ reports of communication satisfaction between themselves and their fathers. Results revealed that conversation but not conformity orientation was associated with both daughters’ and father’s communication satisfaction.

Family communication patterns not only have effects on the development of children’s traits, but also on their development of beliefs and behaviors. Studies suggest
that open family communication, concept-oriented, creates opportunities for parents and children to discuss subject of risky behavior. For example, Booth-Butterfield and Sidelinger’s (1998) study examined how family communication patterns relate to attitudes and behaviors of college-aged students about sexuality and alcohol use. Fisher (1987) shows that college students from the concept-oriented communication families that with the open discussion about sexual interactions are more likely to have the similar attitude with their parents.

Regarding the relationship between family communication patterns and communication apprehension, Elwood and Schrader’s (1998) study indicated that conversation-orientation was a significant and negative predictor of communication apprehension in groups and interpersonal contexts. Hsu (1998) also reported that levels of communication apprehension were positively related to the conformity-oriented or socio-oriented families, and were in a negative relationship to the conversation-oriented or concept-oriented families.

Lin, Rancer and Kong (2007) focused their study on FCP and argumentativeness and took the Chinese college students as the study’s participants. The old items for measuring FCP were used and results showed that Chinese students from either consensual or pluralistic families are more argumentative than those from protective families. However, there is no significant difference among students from consensual, pluralistic, and laissez-faire families. The differences of the conceptual understanding about the term “argumentativeness” might have an impact on the results of the study. In the Western cultures, argumentativeness is conceptualized as a positive behavior and a socially desirable trait. In the Chinese cultural contexts, argumentativeness is much more
considered as a disobedience to the harmony concept. Therefore, children are not expected to have any arguments with their parents. Due to the cultural differences, conceptually, there is no word in Chinese can accurately interpret the meanings of the term “argumentativeness”. Even the Argumentativeness Scale was translated by a bilingual people between English and Chinese versions back and forth; I believe there were still some significant discrepancies in terms of the meaning of the term “argumentativeness.” However, the importance of the studies above suggests that family communication patterns share a relationship with communication personality traits.

The cultural differences have been one of the significant explanations of personal traits differences between Eastern and Western people. The traditional Chinese culture consists of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, and emphasizes the concept of “harmony” (Lin, Zhao & Zhao, 2010). When interacting in a personal relationship, Chinese traditional culture encourages people to maintain a balance and a harmony. Hofstede (1980) indicated that Chinese culture is highly collectivistic. Conversely, Western culture, which is individualistic, encourages individuals to express their own opinions.

Past studies indicated that personal traits are influenced by cultural context. Therefore, the present made an attempt to explore the relationship between Chinese family communication environment and Chinese students’ personal traits.
2.2 Communication Apprehension (CA)

The personal trait Communication apprehension (CA) is described as an “individual’s level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons” (McCroskey, 1977, p.78).

Numerous studies on CA have demonstrated that this anxiety directly affects how people interact with others. McCroskey (1977, 1982) framed three propositions regarding the effects of high levels of CA. First, people with high levels of CA are more likely to withdraw or seek to avoid communication when it is possible. Second, those people with high levels of CA will be perceived less positively than those who with lower levels of CA. Third, as the product of high CA, those people will be negatively impacted in their economic, academic, political, and social lives.

Later on, studies on CA have supported the three propositions and illustrated that high CA have negative consequences in various aspects of daily life. Socially, people with high levels of CA are perceived as less popular than people with lower levels of CA (Richmond, Beatty, & Dyba, 1985). Psychologically, people with high levels of CA tend to feel inhibited that makes them difficult to participate actively in social activities (Watson et al., 1984). Individuals with high CA are also perceived as less competent, less attractive, less sociable, and less composed than those with lower levels of CA (McCroskey, Daly, Richard, & Cox, 1975).

Since the negative consequences associated with CA are well documented, much attention has focused on the causes of CA. From the 1970s through 1990s, most communication scholars agreed that CA is learned through the environment, such as
reinforcement patterns in the family and school (Ayres, 1988; Hsu, 1998). A reinforcement explanation focuses on the feedback that children receive from their parents about their communication behavior, and the modeling explanation beliefs that children attend more to what parents do (Daly & McCroskey, 1984; Fitzpatrick & Vangelisti, 1995). The studies above indicated that children who engaged in positive communication with their parents tended to sustain those patterns of interaction.

Since the late 1990s, however, some researchers changed their opinion to a genetic-based explanation of CA. Beatty, McCroskey, and Heisel (1998) proposed the communibiological paradigm, which focused the role of neurobiological structures in the development of CA. This claim, however, has not been supported by some other researchers. For example, Condit (2000) disagreed that CA is determined by genetic factors and called for a multi-causal model that includes both biological and environmental factors. Ayers (1997) indicated that an individual’s CA is developed during the process of the interaction between his or her self-perception of communication competence, negative evaluation, and motivation in a given situation.

Communication apprehensive as a communication trait has been a focus of many studies. Some studies have looked at communication apprehension in a second language context (Burroughs, Marie, & McCroskey, 2003; MacIntyre, Noels, & Clement, 1997; Matsuoka & Evans, 2005). Fayer, McCroskey, and Richmond (1982) first reported communication apprehension in the second language in their study and showed that communication apprehension in the first language was a predictor of communication apprehension in the second language.
Neuliep and McCroskey (1997) introduced the intercultural communication context in which people may experience CA. The intercultural communication apprehension (ICA) is experienced when people are confronted by communication with people who are from different ethnic or cultural backgrounds. Subsequent researches have examined communication apprehension in wide variety cultural contexts. Hansford and Hattie (1992) found there was no difference in the level of communication apprehension between Australia and the United States. Later on, Hackman and Barthel-Hackman (1993) found New Zealand students reported greater communication apprehension than United States students. Hsu (2004) did a comparison of Chinese and American’s CA level and results indicated that Chinese scored significantly higher in CA than Americans.

The studies above are all about the personal trait: communication apprehension. The present study also examined the relationship between family communication environment and Socio-communicative orientation.

2.3 Socio-Communicative Orientation (SCO)

Psychologist Bem (1974) first built up the masculine scale which includes the characteristics are more desirable for a man and feminine scale which includes the characteristics are more desirable for a woman. Based on this, Richmond and McCroskey (1990) created a scale to measure individuals’ perception of her or his personality, called the Socio-Communicative Orientation. Socio-Communicative Orientation (SCO) is the degree to which an individual sees her or himself as both assertive and responsive in her
or his communicative interactions with others (Richmond & McCroskey, 1990). It is self-reported.

Comparing with SCO, the Socio-Communicative Style (SCS) also has the same two dimensions: assertiveness and responsiveness. While SCO is the individual’s perception of her/himself about assertiveness and responsiveness, SCS is described as a pattern of behaviors assigned to an individual by others. Wooten and McCroskey (1996) pointed out that there may be no correlation between an individual’s self-reported SCO and their SCS by others.

Assertiveness is generally described as one’s ability to stand up for oneself and without attacking another. Assertiveness looks similar with aggressiveness, but they are different. Assertive persons make request whereas aggressive persons make demands. Responsiveness is the capacity to be sensitive to others’ opinions and feelings during the communication. Later on, Richmond and McCroskey (1992) identified four socio-communicative orientations: competence (people who have high level in both assertive and responsive skills), aggressiveness (people who are assertive but not responsive), submissiveness (people with responsive but not assertive skills) and noncompetence (people who are neither assertive nor responsive).

Anderson and Martin (1995) reported that people who are competent reported communicating more for pleasure, affection, and inclusion, while noncompetents reported the motive for escape. Competent communicators are also more argumentative than submissive and noncompetents, while being less verbally aggressive than the aggressive individuals (Martin & Anderson, 1996). Cole and McCroskey (2000) examined the relationship between assertiveness and responsiveness with the
temperament traits (three- and five-factor models). Both three- and five-factor models have been defined as measuring of genetically-based dimensions of temperament. Therefore, results of this study suggest that social-communication orientation is likely genetically based. A study about instructional communication has found that highly assertive and responsive teachers are perceived as more trustworthy, more humor, and more nonverbally immediate (Myers, Martin, & Mottet, 2002).

Based on all the research that has been reviewed, the present study focuses on the Chinese college students abroad in the United States. Moreover, this study broadens the focus from one single communication trait to two: communication apprehension and socio-communicative orientation, and explores the relationships between Family Communication Patterns and these two communication orientations (traits). The research questions are followed:

RQ1: What is the relationship between family communication patterns and Communication Apprehension?

RQ2: What is the relationship between family communication patterns and Socio-Communicative Orientation?
CHAPTER III

METHOD

3.1 Participants

The study chose the Chinese college students and graduate students abroad in the United States as participants. Participants were collected from a Mid-West large public university, and participated voluntarily in this study. In total, 136 questionnaires were returned for the data analysis, 118 of them were completed and are qualified for the study. The participants included 55 females (46.6 percent of the participants), 63 males (53.4 percent of the participants). The average age of the participants was 26.36 years old. Their ages ranged from 19 to 33 years old ($SD=2.96$). A question about how long they have been in America was included in the questionnaire to make sure all of the participants have English ability to understand the instruments well. The average year the participants have been in America is 2.50 ($SD=2.33$).
3.2 Instrumentation

3.2.1. Family Communication Patterns

Family communication patterns will be assessed through the Revised Family Communication Pattern instrument by Ritchie and Fitzpatrick (1990). A set of 26 questions measures the family communication patterns, 15 items for measuring the conversation-orientation, and the other 11 items for measuring the conformity-orientation. These terms used a 5-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) to rate dimensions of family communication patterns. For example, one item measuring the conversation-orientation states, “My parents encourage me to express my feelings.” One item regarding the conformity-orientation states, “My parents often say something like ‘you will know better when you grow up’.”

3.2.2 Communication Apprehension

To assess communication apprehension, McCroskey (1982) created the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension-24 (PRCA-24). The PRCA-24 scale gives a measurement of trait CA and measures individuals’ levels of CA in four general situational contexts: public speaking (e.g., "I like to give a speech or speak in front of the class"), interpersonal (e.g., "I am not afraid to speak up in conversations"), group (e.g., "I do not like to participate in group discussions"), and meeting (e.g., "I am afraid to talk a lot in meetings"). The original instrument is ranged from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). In order to make all the measurements consistent, however, the scale range of
CA in the questionnaire for the present study was revised as “1= strongly disagree” to “5=strongly agree”.

3.2.3 Socio-Communicative Orientation

Richmond and McCroskey’s (1996) measures of the Socio-Communicative Orientation was used in this study. Participants were asked to indicate the degree to which they believe each item applies to them by using the 5-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). In the SCO scale, two factors are measured: assertiveness and responsiveness. For example, one item measuring the assertiveness is, “Defends own beliefs”. One item regarding the responsiveness is, “responsive to others.”
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

4.1 Measurement reliability

The Cronbach’s alpha for the 15-items measurement of conversation family patterns \((M=50.71, SD=9.05)\) was 0.75, and it was 0.87 for the 11-items measurement of conformity patterns \((M=31.80, SD=8.02)\).

The Cronbach’s alpha for the PRCA-24 in the present study was 0.92 \((M=64.65, SD=13.43)\). The assertiveness of socio-communicative orientation items \((M=32.76, SD=5.67)\) showed a reliability of 0.80 (Cronbach’s alpha), while the responsiveness of socio-communicative orientation items \((M=39.25, SD=3.79)\) showed a reliability of 0.71 (Cronbach’s alpha).

4.2 Analysis

Following the median split method of categorizes the family communication patterns (Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990), the median scores of conformity orientation dimension and conversation orientation dimension were 31 and 50, respectively. Based on subjects’ responses, the communication patterns of the families were categorized into one of the four family types. 35 subjects assigned to protective type, 23 subjects assigned
to consensual type, 25 subjects assigned to laissez-faire type and 35 subjects assigned to pluralistic type.

4.2.1 Communication Apprehension

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine the relationships among four types of FCP and CA. As shown in Table 1, this output revealed

Table 1: ANOVA Summary Table for Communication Apprehension among Four Types of Family Communication Patterns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type of family</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2420.696</td>
<td>806.899</td>
<td>4.92</td>
<td>0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within group</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>18686.058</td>
<td>163.913</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>514341.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N=118.  
* p<.01

a significant difference on individuals’ scores on CA among four types of family communication patterns, *F* (3, 114) = 4.92, *p*<.01. Table 2 showed the multiple comparisons and indicated that significant differences on individuals’ scores on communication apprehension between protective (*M*=68.54, *SD*=12.43) and pluralistic families (*M*=58.31, *SD*=12.78), *p*<.01 and between Laissez-faire (*M*=68.96, *SD*=13.98) and pluralistic families, *p*<.05. There was no significant difference on individuals’ scores on CA between protective and pluralistic families. The results also showed no
relationship of individuals’ scores on CA between consensual families ($M=63.7, SD=12.04$) and other three types of family.

Table 2: Comparisons for Communication Apprehension among Four Types of Family Communication Patterns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Type</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Protective</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>68.54*</td>
<td>12.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consensual</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>63.70</td>
<td>12.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laissez-faire</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>68.96**</td>
<td>13.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pluralistic</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>58.31</td>
<td>12.78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* $p<.01$ when compared to “Pluralistic”; ** $p<.05$ when compared to “Pluralistic”

4.2.2 Socio-communicative Orientation

In Socio-communication Orientation scale, two factors are measured: assertiveness and responsiveness. MANOVA was conducted to test the research questions about assertiveness and responsiveness. Wilks’ Lambda indicated there is a significant difference on individuals’ scores on socio-communication orientation among 4 types of family communication patterns, $p<.01$. As shown in Table 3, the output revealed the significant differences on individuals’ scores on assertiveness among four types of FCP, $F(3, 114) =3.754, p<.05$, and responsiveness among four types of FCP, $F(3, 114) =4.730, p<.01$. 
Table 3: MANOVA Summary Table for Socio-communication Orientation among Four Types of Family Communication Patterns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
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<th>SS</th>
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<td>Type of family</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assertiveness</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>337.653</td>
<td>112.551</td>
<td>3.754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Responsiveness</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>186.235</td>
<td>62.078</td>
<td>4.730</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assertiveness</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>3417.703</td>
<td>29.980</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Responsiveness</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>1496.138</td>
<td>13.124</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assertiveness</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>130416.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Responsiveness</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>183508.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N=118.

$p<.05$

Table 4 gave the multiple comparisons and indicated there was a significant difference on assertiveness between Laissez-faire ($M=29.72$, $SD=4.81$) and pluralistic families ($M=34.31$, $SD=6.81$), $p<.01$, and difference on responsiveness between protective ($M=37.57$, $SD=2.93$) and pluralistic families ($M=40.77$, $SD=3.77$), $p<.01$. Results showed no relationship on both assertiveness and responsiveness among other types of family.
Table 4: Comparisons for Communication Apprehension among Four Types of Family Communication Patterns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Type</th>
<th>Assertiveness</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Responsiveness</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protective</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>32.74</td>
<td>4.81</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>37.57*</td>
<td>2.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consensual</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>33.74</td>
<td>4.76</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>39.74</td>
<td>4.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laissez-faire</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>29.70**</td>
<td>4.81</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>39.04</td>
<td>3.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pluralistic</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>34.31</td>
<td>6.81</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>40.77</td>
<td>3.77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<.01 when compared to “Pluralistic”; **p<.01 when compared to “Pluralistic”
The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between four types of Chinese family communication patterns and two communication traits: Communication apprehension (CA) and socio-communicative orientation (SCO). The results indicated that Chinese students from protective and laissez-faire families have a higher level of CA than those from pluralistic families. Chinese students from pluralistic families tend to be more assertive than those from laissez-faire families and students from pluralistic families tend to be more responsive than those from protective families. There was no relationship in both CA and SCO among students from the consensual families and other three types of families.

The different characteristics of family orientations are associated with the differences on students’ personal traits. In conversation-oriented families, children are encouraged to show feelings and express ideas, even if they disagree with others. In contrast, children are encouraged to avoid controversy and expected to obey parents’ ideas in conformity-oriented families (Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990). The results of present study indicated that students from both protective and laissez-faire families tend to have higher CA than those from pluralistic families. This might indicate that conversation orientation was negatively associated with CA. Past researches also
provided the support to this finding. Hsu (1998)’s study illustrated that the conversation-oriented families, where children are encouraged to express ideas, discourage the development of CA. In contrast, conformity-oriented families, where children are taught to avoid discussion, may foster the development of CA. Elwood and Schrader (1998) found that families high in conversation orientation have several norms that may deter the development of CA. Those norms, for example, are encouraging participation in the decision-making process, supporting constructive disagreement, facilitating the expression of emotions, feelings.

Meanwhile, results also indicated that Chinese students from protective ($M=68.54$) and laissez-faire families ($M=68.96$) showed no difference on their CA level. Both protective and laissez-faire families do not encourage students to express ideas (lower in conversation orientation). However, protective families are in high level of conformity orientation, and laissez-faire families are in the opposite. Therefore, in conditions where the conversation orientation was low, the conformity orientation might not have significant influence on individuals’ CA level. Elwood and Schrader (1998) also found the similar results from their study. One reason from their study for the non-significant findings was that modeling (children attend more to what parents do) may play a larger role than reinforcement (children attend more to what parents say) in conformity oriented families than in conversation oriented families. Under the modeling conditions, children might simply emulate their parents’ dominant behavior. Therefore, the children’s susceptibility to CA was reduced.

In pluralistic families, Chinese children are encouraged to participate in the decision-making process, to express feelings and different opinions. The more chances
they get to express themselves’ viewpoints, the less anxiety they have in communication with others. On the opposite side, in protective families, Chinese children are discouraged from expressing different opinions and encouraged to keep harmonious relationships and obey parents. Under this family environment, children are getting used to follow parents’ orders without questions, and keep silent about their own opinions. Therefore, it is not surprising that students from pluralistic families would have less fear or anxiety in communication behaviors and show a lower level of CA than those from protected families.

The laissez-faire families are concerned about neither conversation nor conformity. Therefore, this communication pattern encourages neither the expression of children’s own opinions nor harmonious relationships. The discouragement of expressing different opinions and challenging the views of others would make the students from laissez-faire families tend to be more anxious in communication contexts. Therefore, Chinese students from laissez-faire families have higher CA than those from pluralistic families as well.

Families high in both conversation and conformity orientation fall into the consensual family type. Results of this study indicated that there were no significant differences in CA level among Chinese students from consensual, protective, and laissez-faire families. One possible explanation would be that despite the fact that children from consensual families are encouraged to actively participate to any family discussion and express different opinions openly, they typically are pressured to adopt their parents’ views and keep silent about their own opinions in order to maintain the harmony. Chinese culture is based on collectivism and guided by Confucius’ principles.
People are expected to keep the harmony relationships in social contexts. Children are expected to show obedience to parents. In Chinese consensual families, therefore, conformity orientation may also have a strong influence on the development of Chinese children’s traits as well as, even more than, conversation orientation. The conformity oriented families would force the development of children’s CA, even though the families also encourage their children to participate in family conversations. Therefore, it was complex to find out the relationship among CA of individuals from consensual families and of those from other families. For the further study, larger sample size would be necessary.

In addition, results also indicated that Chinese students from pluralistic families tend to be more assertive than those from laissez-faire families, and students from pluralistic families tend to have higher level of responsiveness than those from protective families. There was no relationship in socio-communicative orientation among students from the consensual families and other three types of families.

Both pluralistic and laissez-faire families are low on conformity orientation. However, pluralistic families are higher on conversation orientation than laissez-faire families. The result indicated that the conversation orientation was positively associated with Chinese students’ assertiveness. As mentioned before, in conversation-oriented families, children are encouraged to bring up opinions and participate in controversy discussion. Assertive persons tend to express positive or negative personal rights and feelings and stand up for themselves without attacking another. Therefore, it is not surprising that Chinese students from pluralistic families would be more assertive than those from laissez-faire families.
Responsiveness is the capacity to be sensitive to others’ opinions and feelings during the communication. Results indicated students from pluralistic families have higher level of responsiveness than those from protective families. There was one possible reason for this result. Socio-communicative orientation is substantially genetically based (Cole & McCroskey, 2000). While children’s assertive or responsive behaviors could be affected by the family environments, the genetic traits often change a little or not at all. Since SCO is the individual’s perception of her/him about assertiveness and responsiveness, SCS is described as a pattern of behaviors assigned to an individual by others, future study would better combine both SCO and SCS in one study to get a overall glance of individuals’ behaviors.

Comparing the total means for assertiveness and responsiveness, the results also showed that Chinese students tend to be more responsive ($M=39.25$) than assertive ($M=32.76$). One explanation on this would be that the Chinese traditional culture encourages people to keep the harmonious relationship in all the social contexts rather than give prominence to personal ideas or feelings.

There are several limitations in this study. First, the sample size in this study is relatively small, and the participants are not representative of all Chinese students in the U.S. Second, participants may not have good memory to recall their family interaction patterns because most of them have been away from home for several years. Future study should enlarge the sample size to get a better examination about the population and choose the students in college or just graduated from college as the participants.

Past research also examined the influence of birth order and family size on children’s development of personal traits. Infante (1982) argued that the more children in
one family, the more opportunity to develop an argumentativeness. However, the finding did not support this. The one child in one family policy is the unique policy in mainland China. Therefore, the growing environments for children in one child families may be different from that in several children families. Future studies can choose the participants from both one child families and families of multiple children to examine the relationships between family communication patterns and individuals’ traits.
REFERENCES


APPENDICES
APPENDIX A. QUESTIONNAIRE

Questionnaire

Thank you for your participation. There are a total of 4 pages. Please don’t skip any question. Your responses are very important.

1. Your gender: Female_____ Male_____  
2. Your age: ______________  
3. Your major: ______________  
4. Years in America: ______________  
5. Do you have any brother or sister?  Yes _____ No_____
6. Did you live with both parents before you graduated from high school?  Yes_____ No_____  

The following statements relate to family communication structure between parents and children. Please concern the experience before you started college and indicate the degree to which you agree with the following statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. ____ In our family we often talked about topics like current affairs and cultures where some persons disagree with others.

8. ____ My parents often said something like “Every member of the family should have some say in family decisions.”

9. ____ My parents often asked my opinion when the family is talking about something.

10. ____ My parents encouraged me to challenge their ideas and beliefs.

11. ____ My parents often said something like “You should always look at both sides of an issue.”

12. ____ I usually told my parents what I am thinking about things.

13. ____ I could tell my parents almost anything.

14. ____ In our family we often talked about our feelings and emotions.

15. ____ My parents and I often had long, relaxed conversations about nothing in particular.
16. ____I really enjoyed talking with my parents, even when they disagree.

17. ____My parents liked to hear my opinions, even when they don’t agree with me.

The following statements relate to family communication structure between parents and children. Please concern the experience before you started college and indicate the degree to which you agree with the following statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

18. ____My parents encouraged me to express my feelings.

19. ____My parents tended to be very open about their emotions.

20. ____We often talked as a family about things we have done during the day.

21. ____In our family we often talked about our plans and hopes for the future.

22. ____My parents often said something like “You’ll know better when you grow up.”

23. ____My parents often said something like “My ideas are right and you should not question them.”

24. ____My parents often said something like “A child should not argue with adults.”

25. ____My parents often said something like “There are some things that just shouldn’t be talked about.”

26. ____My parents often said something like “You should give in on arguments rather than risk making people mad.”

27. ____When anything really important was involved, my parents expect me to obey without question.

28. ____In our home, my parents usually had the last word.

29. ____My parents felt that it is important to be the boss.

30. ____My parents sometimes became irritated with my views if they are different from theirs.

31. ____If my parents didn’t approve of it, they didn’t want to know about it.

32. ____When I was at home, I was expected to obey my parents’ rules.

33. ____I dislike participating in group discussions.

34. ____Generally, I am comfortable while participating in group discussions.
35. ___ I am tense and nervous while participating in group discussions.

36. ___ I like to get involved in group discussions.

The following 24 statements concern feelings about communicating with other people. Please indicate the degree to which each statement applies to you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

37. ___ Engaging in a group discussion with new people makes me tense and nervous.

38. ___ I am calm and relaxed while participating in group discussions.

39. ___ Generally, I am nervous when I have to participate in a meeting.

40. ___ Usually I am comfortable when I have to participate in a meeting.

41. ___ I am very calm and relaxed when I am called upon to express an opinion at a meeting.

42. ___ I am afraid to express myself at meetings.

43. ___ Communicating at meetings usually makes me uncomfortable.

44. ___ I am very relaxed when answering questions at a meeting.

45. ___ While participating in a conversation with a new acquaintance, I feel very nervous.

46. ___ I have no fear of speaking up in conversations.

47. ___ Ordinarily I am very tense and nervous in conversations.

48. ___ While conversing with a new acquaintance, I feel very relaxed.

49. ___ Ordinarily I am very calm and relaxed in conversation.

50. ___ I’m afraid to speak up in conversations.

51. ___ I have no fear of giving a speech.

52. ___ Certain parts of my body feel very tense and rigid while I am giving a speech.

53. ___ I feel relaxed while giving a speech.

54. ___ My thoughts become confused and jumbled when I am giving a speech.

55. ___ I face the prospect of giving a speech with confidence.

56. ___ While giving a speech, I get so nervous I forget facts I really know.

Continue
The questionnaire below lists 20 personality characteristics. Please indicate the degree to which you believe each of these characteristics applies to YOU.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

57. ____Helpful
58. ____Defends own beliefs
59. ____Independent
60. ____Responsive to others
61. ____Forceful
62. ____Has strong personality
63. ____Sympathetic
64. ____Compassionate
65. ____Assertive
66. ____Sensitive to the needs of others
67. ____Dominant
68. ____Sincere
69. ____Gentle
70. ____Willing to take a stand
71. ____Warm
72. ____Tender
73. ____Friendly
74. ____Acts as a leader
75. ____Aggressive
76. ____Competitive
APPENDIX B. INFORMED CONSENT

Informed Consent
Please read this consent document carefully before you decide to participate in this study.

Title of Study: Family communication patterns, communication apprehension and socio-communicative orientation: A study of Chinese students.

Introduction: You are invited to participate in a research project being conducted by Yuan Huang, a student in the School of Communication, at The University of Akron. This project is a part of her Masters’ thesis.

Purpose: The purpose of this research is to examine the relationship between family communication patterns and two communication traits: Communication apprehension and socio-communicative orientation.

Procedures: Participants in this study will be Chinese students abroad in the United States. It is hoped that 120 students will participate in this study. Every participant will be asked to answer the questionnaire.

Exclusion: Participants in this study have to be Chinese.

Risks and Discomforts: There are no obvious risks in this study.

Benefits: You will receive no direct benefit from your participation in this study, but your participation may help us better understand the relationship between family communication patterns and the communication traits.

Payments to Participants: There are no payments for participating in this research.

Right to refuse or withdraw: The participation is voluntary and the refusal to participate or withdraw from the study at any time will involve no penalty or loss of benefits.

Anonymous Data Collection: No identifying information will be collected, and your anonymity is further protected by not asking you to sign and return the informed consent form.

Confidentiality of records: Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. Your information will be assigned a code number. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, all the questionnaires will be destroyed.

Who to contact with questions: If you have any questions about this study, you may call Yuan Huang at 330-701-4962 or Dr. Yang Lin of the School of Communication at 330-972-.8264. This project has been reviewed and approved by The University of Akron Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call the IRB at (330) 972-7666.

Acceptance: I have read the information provided above and all of my questions have been answered. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. My completion and return of this questionnaire will serve as my consent. I have been given a copy of this consent form for future reference.
APPENDIX C. NOTICE OF IRB APPROVAL
NOTICE OF APPROVAL

Date: September 15, 2009

To: Yuan Huang
    473 Summer Street
    Akron, Ohio 44304

From: Sharon McWhorter, IRB Administrator

Re: IRB Number 20090907 “Family Communication Patterns, Communication Apprehension and Socio-Communicative Orientation: A study of Chinese Students”

Thank you for submitting your IRB Application for Review of Research Involving Human Subjects for the referenced project. Your application was approved on September 15, 2009. Your protocol represents minimal risk to subjects and matches the following federal category for exemption:

☐ Exemption 1 - Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices.

☒ Exemption 2 - Research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior.

☐ Exemption 3 - Research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior not exempt under category 2, but subjects are elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office.

☐ Exemption 4 - Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens.

☐ Exemption 5 - Research and demonstration projects conducted by or subject to the approval of department or agency heads, and which are designed to study, evaluate, or otherwise examine public programs or benefits.

☐ Exemption 6 - Taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies.

Annual continuation applications are not required for exempt projects. If you make changes to the study’s design or procedures that increase the risk to subjects or include activities that do not fall within the approved exemption category, please contact me to discuss whether or not a new application must be submitted. Any such changes or modifications must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

Please retain this letter for your files. If the research is being conducted for a master’s thesis or doctoral dissertation, the student must file a copy of this letter with the thesis or dissertation.

☒ Approved consent form/s enclosed

Cc: Yang Lin - Advisor
Cc: Stephanie Woods - IRB Chair

Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs
Akron, OH 44325-2102
330-972-7666 • 330-972-6261 Fax

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