

## **Promoting Connectedness Through Developmental Interventions: Adapting the Cross-Age Mentoring Program (CAMP) for Youth in Asia**

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The growth of positive youth development (PYD) programs in the United States (U.S.) reflects a shift from a focus on pathology to potential, which is a change welcomed by the counseling field. However, the roles of collectivist, individualist, and relational worldviews have not yet been factored into any assessments of whether PYD programs in the U.S. may be equally useful or necessary in Asian societies like China, Korea, and Taiwan. This article describes the Cross-Age Mentoring Program (CAMP), a highly structured, developmental mentoring program for adolescents and youth, and reports the changes in adolescent connectedness it effects among participating mentees and mentors. Problem-behavior theory is used to consider whether the changes CAMP fosters in conventional connectedness would occur in more collectivistic or relational societies and whether such changes would be the best, most useful and primary outcomes of CAMPs implemented in those countries.

*Keywords:* Asian youth; connectedness; collectivism; mentoring

There are arguments against the blanket application of Western theories of human development and psychological intervention to youth in Asian societies, such as in China, Taiwan, and Korea. However, there is growing evidence that as part of the increasing globalism, youth in Western and Eastern societies face many of the same struggles. It is increasingly assumed that many youth in both societies struggle to integrate individualistic and collectivistic worldviews (Bush, 2000; Q. Wang & Li, 2003), yet the importance of dyadic relationships had been given much less attention and may provide a particularly useful cross-cultural bridge.

The primary place in which youth struggle to establish a consistent sense of self is in the school context (Zhou, Peverly, Xin, Huang, & Wang, 2003). It is therefore beholden upon school counselors and administrators to help their students integrate their sense of self (both presently and in the future) through curriculum and programs, such as service learning, that allow opportunities for fostering both self-development as well as connectedness; it has been known for twenty years that the most effective programs are those that foster enduring interpersonal relationships that help bridge the youth's social worlds (Schorr, 1989).

In the United States (U.S.), a movement is taking place that prioritizes the promotion of competences over the remediation of problems. Connectedness has therefore been identified as one of the five "C"s which Lerner, Brittian, and Fay (2007) suggest that youth development programs, such as mentoring programs, must target. This is because increasingly research illustrates that connectedness is a predictor of a number of developmental competences as well as risk behaviors (see Karcher, 2003). It has therefore served as a primary target of most youth development programs (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2003) reviewed a host of youth development programs

and found most attempted to promote one or more forms of connectedness. But connectedness may be just as or more important in collectivist and relational cultures as in individualistic ones, and it may deserve equal attention through school-based programs in Asian societies. To do this effectively may require us to take a closer look at dimensions of individualism, collectivism, and relationalism.

### **Individualism, Collectivism, and Relationalism**

Hofstede's (1980) individualistic and collectivistic model has been utilized in several different disciplines to describe and compare cross-cultural communication (G. Wang & Liu, 2010), but recent work suggests that a third dimension may be useful for work in Asian societies. Individualistic cultures tend to focus on independence, while collectivistic cultures appear to favor interdependence (G. Wang & Liu, 2010). Relationalism, in contrast, is suggested by G. Wang and Liu (2010) as an important addition to the individualistic/collectivistic model.

Relationalism is described as favoring interdependence, reciprocity, and self-reliance. G. Wang and Liu (2010) define relationalism as "any social outlook or moral and political stance that stresses the importance of reciprocal relations" (p. 56). Additionally, G. Wang and Liu argue that Chinese cultures are more relational than collectivistic. This understanding of relationalism may be important for understanding the potential impact of connectedness-promoting interventions with Asian youth.

Some argue that connectedness reflects primarily a collectivistic phenomenon, while others believe that the phenomenon of connectedness can also include a self-oriented, individualistic emphasis (Cooper, 1999), but such dichotomies leave unnamed the importance of dyadic relationships in the formation of connectedness (Karcher, Holcomb, &

Zambrano, 2008). For most youth, the nature of connectedness is context-dependent. Connectedness to and in school is largely focused on individual achievement because this is how teachers assess learning (individually). Connectedness may be seen as most valuable and plentiful in collectivist countries that value harmony and interdependence in relationships, whereas connectedness may be seen as in short supply in countries that prize individual achievement, autonomy, and distinctiveness (Brew, Hesketh, & Taylor, 2001). But at its core, the dyadic nature of relationships in families, friendships, and romantic relationships should draw our attention to the fact that connectedness is fundamentally about reciprocal and supportive interactions. This underscores the importance of viewing connectedness through the lens of relationalism.

In an era of increasing globalization, youth are looking more similar across the globe and what they may share most fundamentally is their need for strong, lasting, and meaningful relationships (Lee, Beckert, & Goodrich, 2010). There is growing cross-cultural evidence that connectedness during adolescence is multifaceted, requiring a broader and more relationally inclusive definition to be fully useful as a target of youth development programs. The purpose of this article is to describe connectedness and its role in positive youth development, to describe an intervention for improving connectedness in youth and adolescents, and to suggest the intervention's use with Asian groups.

### **Connectedness Defined: Action and Affect**

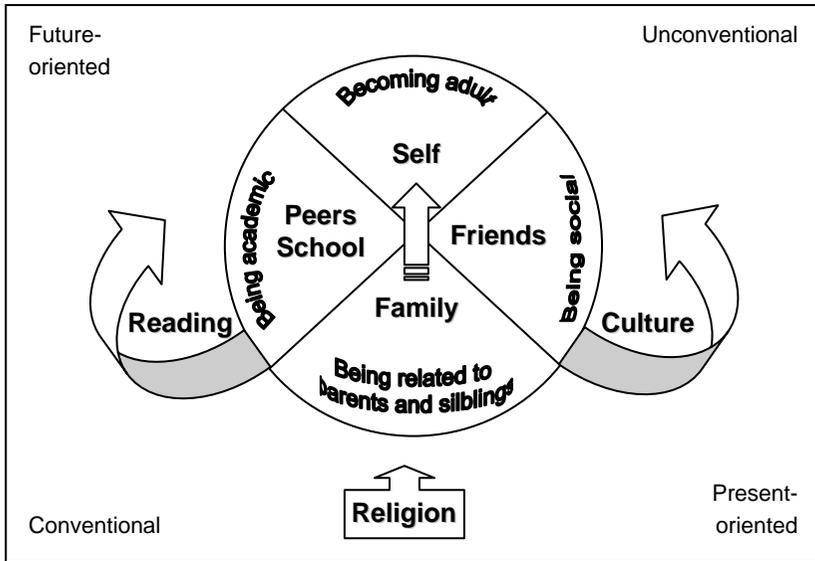
One definition of connectedness, provided by Townsend and McWhirter (2005), defines connectedness as the degree of *activity* and positive *affect* individuals report directing toward important people, places, and things in their lives. Like plugging a power cord into a power outlet, youth connect through active and energetic connection — they plug in to their worlds.

We are connected in terms of what we do in the world and how much we care about a world and the people in it. Cooper (1999) talks about worlds of connection, such that one's connectedness can be to one's self, with others, or to society. From this perspective, connectedness to society involves connectedness to the collectives of schools, neighborhood, and religious communities; and connectedness to self can be seen in youth's connection to reading, as well as in their connections to a self-in-the-present and a self-in-the-future. Yet most programs target that third element, connectedness to others, in the form of action and affect with parents, siblings, peers, friends, and teachers.

### ***Connectedness as Affectional Bonds in Activity Contexts***

This definition of adolescent connectedness as affect and action is consistent with the two main elements of the attachment behavioral system: proximity seeking and experiencing pleasure and security in specific relationships and contexts. It is consistent with Ainsworth's (1989) proposition that "attachment tendencies" become more differentiated during adolescence. A view of connectedness as affectional bonds that differentiate into consistent modes of relating to others in the contexts of home, school, and peer/social worlds provides a theoretical model for testing a higher-order structure for adolescent connectedness. Viewing attachment tendencies as precursors to adolescent connectedness (Karcher et al., 2008), there should be three higher-order factors: academic, familial, and social connectedness (see Figure 1) with each connectedness subscale serving as an indicator of one of these factors. For example, the measures of connectedness to parents and siblings would reflect a higher-order *family connectedness* factor (for youth with siblings). Similarly, measures of connectedness to peers, teachers, and school would load on a second higher-order *academic connectedness* factor. Connectedness to neighborhood and friends scales would load on a third higher-order *social connectedness* factor.

**Figure 1. Worlds of Adolescent Connectedness**



Source: Adapted from *Hemingway Measure of Adolescent Connectedness* (<http://adolescentconnectedness.com>).

One measure of adolescent connectedness that utilizes this definition is the *Hemingway: Measure of Adolescent Connectedness* (Karcher, 2003). It assesses each of the domains noted above for connectedness to self, others, and society; has been used in multiple intervention studies; and has been subjected to considerable, cross-cultural psychometric investigation (Karcher & Sass, 2010).

The *Hemingway* has been shown to demonstrate multi-cultural (within society) validity evidence (Karcher & Sass, 2010). In the U.S., validity evidence has been yielded through tests of item- and scale-level factorial invariance as well as through measures of predictive, concurrent, and convergent validity (Karcher, 2003).

The *Hemingway* also has been translated into other languages and yielded positive evidence of cross-cultural validity (both factorial and

predictive) in many international contexts including China, Korea, and Taiwan (Karcher & Lee, 2002; Sass, Castro-Villarreal, McWhirter, McWhirter, & Karcher, in press; Yu, 2010; Yuen, 2010). Most of the subscales have yielded good psychometric properties across settings. However, and not surprisingly, items in the connectedness to self scales (self-in-the-future and self-in-the-present) have not held together as well in these collectivist countries as they have in the U.S.

What remains unclear from research on this measure (e.g., Karcher, 2003) is whether the subscales should be grouped into higher-order factors (to capture the phenomena more parsimoniously) that may better reflect theories such as individualism–collectivism or problem-behavior theory. Karcher and Lee (2002) tested the measure with Taiwanese high school students and found that a factor model in which the separate subscales were indicators of three higher-order factors (i.e., academic, familial, and social connectedness) was best, and may reveal the distinct characteristics of individualism, familism, and collectivism (perhaps, relationalism). Yet with a multiethnic sample of youth in the U.S. (including adjudicated youth and preparatory school students), the best fitting model included a subset of the connectedness scales under two higher-order factors, one reflecting peer connectedness and one reflecting adult connectedness (Karcher, 2003), which is more consistent with the dimension of conventional-unconventional connections.

### **Problem-behavior Theory**

Because improvements in connectedness often are targets of prevention and counseling efforts, problem-behavior theory has proven useful to explain the two higher-order factors that emerge in data from adolescents in the United States. Problem-behavior theory (Jessor & Jessor, 1977) draws upon research on factors that contribute to delinquency. It holds that there are two primary forms of interpersonal

and ecological engagement during adolescence: conventional and unconventional, which parallel serious versus playful relationships (Karcher & Nakkula, 2010).

### ***Conventional Connectedness***

Jessor and Jessor (1980) explain that “conventional behavior, e.g., church attendance or working hard in school, is behavior that is socially approved, normatively expected, and codified and institutionalized as appropriate for adolescents and youths” (p. 107). Therefore, *Hemingway* scales that reflect conventional connections are the connectedness to parents, school, teachers, and self-in-the-future scales. The conventional and future-focused connectedness worlds are depicted on the left side of Figure 1.

Most positive youth development programs are designed explicitly to facilitate these forms of conventional connectedness (Roth, Brooks-Gunn, Murray, & Foster, 1998) because conventional connectedness has been found to predict abstinence, prosocial behavior, and other developmental assets (Karcher et al., 2008). Cultural differences do exist across and within countries. Connectedness to teachers is reported at higher rates by mainland Chinese than among Caucasian U.S. adolescents (Chen, Greenberger, Farruggia, Bush, & Dong, 2003) which suggests that perhaps Chinese youth are less likely to need interventions that promote connectedness to teachers (or by extension to school or a self-in-the-future).

### ***Unconventional Connectedness***

Unconventional connections are those emotional and physical engagements that are governed primarily by youth themselves (Karcher et al., 2008). Jessor and Jessor (1980) suggest that, at their extreme, unconventional behaviors can become problem behaviors whose

“purpose may be to express opposition to conventional society ... Its meaning may lie in defining, for self and others, important attributes of personal identity ... [and] to establish solidary relations with peers, or to enable access to youth subgroups” (p. 107). Additionally, they suggest, “a single summarizing dimension underlying the differences between [adolescent drug] users and nonusers might be termed conventionality-unconventionality” (p. 109). Given these definitions, an unconventional connectedness higher-order factor would include the *Hemingway* connectedness to peers, friends, neighborhood, and self-in-the-present scales. Indeed, high levels of unconventional connectedness relative to conventional connectedness have been found to predict higher levels of substance use, violence, and dropout (Karcher, 2003; Karcher & Finn, 2005). Its potential as a risk factor in China, Korea, and Taiwan is less well known.

One phenomenon to consider is the compensatory function that connectedness may play in youth’s response to different degrees of belonging across their social ecology. Karcher et al. (2008) describe connectedness as the response to belonging, such that when individuals experience a sense of belonging and worth in a given relationship or context, they reciprocate these feelings through high levels of activity and positive affect. Connectedness also increases in one world to offset decreased connectedness (resulting from decreased experiences of belonging) in other contexts. That is, it serves a compensatory function — when an individual in one social ecology does not experience belonging and relatedness, he or she will become more connected to other social ecologies as a compensatory act (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). For example, when adolescents become disconnected from school, they often seek connectedness outside of school in their neighborhood (see Joo & Han, 2000). Most proximally, however, the absence of belonging in a context starts with and reflects most immediately the quality of specific relationships therein. Where there

are few significant, important relationships, one's sense of relational connectedness — one's connectedness to others — will shape his or her overall belonging. For this reason, interventions should target the promotion of stronger conventional relationships in school and beyond school, and to do this, a relational framework may be more useful than either an individualistic or collectivistic framework.

## **Interventions Promoting Connectedness**

### ***The Ecology of Adolescent Connectedness***

Increasingly we believe that programs will be most successful if they target all four major worlds of connectedness. The four major worlds that should be targeted through strengthening youth's sense of belonging and therefore dyadic connections in each context are the worlds of connectedness to *school* (school and teachers), *family* (parents and siblings), and *friends* (peers/classmates and, indirectly, to romantic partners), with additional attention to the world of the *self* (both now and in the future) which serves to cement the connections that are formed with others as part of the youth's self-understanding now and in the future.

These worlds of connectedness can provide targets for the curricular focus of youth development programs. Mentoring programs are one form of intervention that can address all of these worlds by nesting the mentoring relationship within a well-structured program within larger systems of influence (school, family). Such programs also can directly engage the youth in educational, family-inclusive, and future-oriented activities within the context of an ongoing and personally meaningful mentoring relationship. The importance of such relational connections and the use of peer mentoring to promote them among Chinese immigrants in the U.S. has been reported (C. J. Yeh, Ching, Okubo, & Luthar, 2007), and suggests that peer mentoring may be a useful

intervention for Asian youth in general. In the next section, we describe one such program and explain how it uniquely fosters connectedness. We also underscore the ways in which this program relies on and emphasizes relational connections as the mechanism of change.

### ***A Developmental Approach to Promoting Connectedness: CAMP***

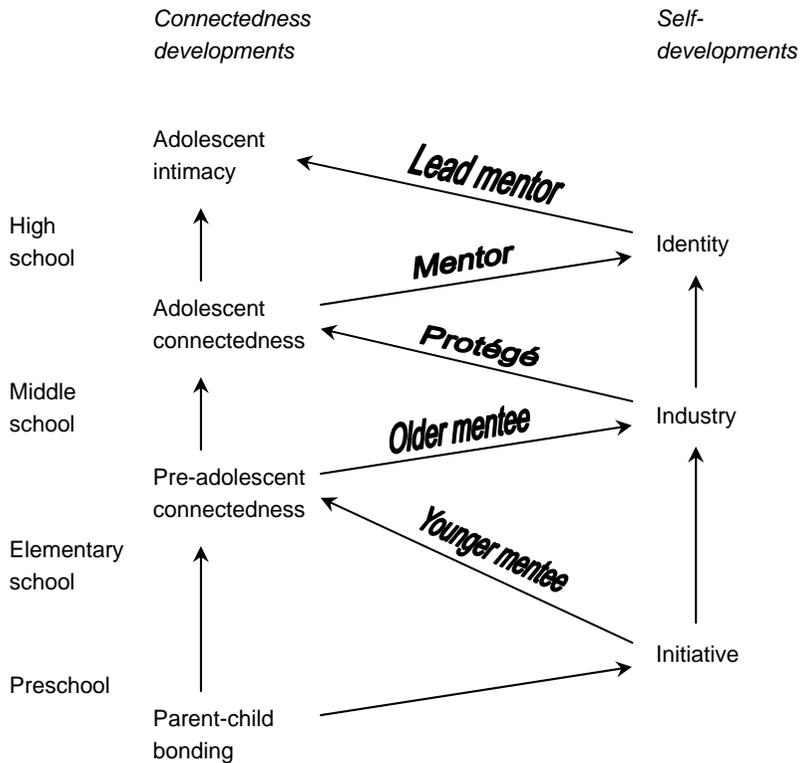
The Cross-Age Mentoring Program (CAMP) for children with adolescent mentors is a comprehensive, highly structured developmental mentoring program. The CAMP model links high school students with students from 4th through 6th grades in a mentor-mentee relationship (see Karcher, 2008). Like adult mentors, cross-age peer mentors are paired with mentees for the purpose of providing the younger youth guidance, social support, and limited academic assistance. Unlike adult mentors, however, these teen mentors must be provided much more training, supervision, and help to structure their interactions. For these reasons, extensive mentor trainings, accompanied by (and further explained in) a mentor handbook, trainer's guide, and intervention curriculum were developed (Karcher, in press). These materials provide information regarding training activities, suggestions for conducting mentoring sessions, and the theoretical basis for the program.

CAMP provides structured interaction opportunities for the mentor and mentee to engage in together (e.g., the curriculum), has mentors meet with mentee's parents on several Saturday events during the year, and includes a five- to ten-day summer CAMP program that maintains connections built during the year. Meetings typically take place in the school context, after school and on weekends, and the mentor-mentee dyads are embedded within a larger peer group context. All of these elements are designed to foster a positive peer culture, to provide added academic enrichment opportunities for the mentees and service learning opportunities for the mentors, and to facilitate both forms of

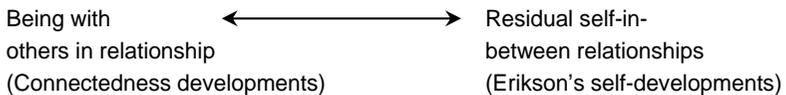
pre-adolescent and adolescent connectedness as well as the “self-developments” described by Erikson (1950) (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Fostering Connectedness and Self-developments via CAMP Roles**

*School period*



“Weaving tension of developmental growth” (Joan Erikson)



Source: Adapted from Karcher (in press), with permission from Education Northwest.

## **Stages of Connectedness: A Model Integrating Self and Connectedness Development**

One important aspect of the CAMP program is that it offers students a path for continued growth and development through a staged progression of involvement in the program. Mentees are encouraged to become protégés, who assist mentors as they are trained to become mentors themselves. Mentors can take on more responsibility as advanced and lead mentors. In this way, a student who enters the program as a mentee in 4th grade could become a protégé in 7th grade, a mentor in 9th grade, an advanced mentor in 10th and 11th grade, and a lead mentor in 12th grade. This offers students the somewhat uncommon opportunity for continued involvement in a school-based program, and especially one that structures a series of developmentally appropriate goals to strive toward, and a sense of program continuity and community that carries forward from year to year.

Such developmental opportunities may help both mentees and mentors successfully bridge from one developmental task to the next. At least for some youth, the school provides ample rewards for individual success, for the mastery of individual talents, and for self-examination. But far less attention has been paid to this “developmental glue” we are calling connectedness. Therefore, it warrants some explication and perhaps illustration of its differing role for mentees and mentors.

Pre-adolescent connectedness is different from adolescent connectedness. Pre-adolescent connectedness, for example, does not include as many contexts or differentiated relationships. At early stages in adolescence, one’s peers are not distinguished from culturally different peers, as they are in adolescent connectedness. Similarly, friends in pre-adolescence are later differentiated into romantic friends and non-romantic friends.

Pre-adolescent connectedness to family, school, peers, and friends serves as a foundation for the kinds of attitudes, social skills, and self-perceptions that are developed among older mentees (and protégés). With whom youth affiliate (like and spend time with) will shape the identity they later adopt as teens. That later identity then shapes the subsequent connections youth form with culturally similar versus different peers, romantic partners, and friends. Schools should consider ways to use programs like CAMP to help shape self-developments through opportunities for connectedness formation.

For older mentees and protégés, especially, this process of establishing, experiencing and affirming important connections through the CAMP program can help them master social skills, develop a positive attitude toward school, and build self-esteem. For high school students, CAMP affords opportunities to view themselves in novel ways in their search for a cohesive identity. Therefore, the role that CAMP plays in youth development is different for older mentees, protégés, mentors, and lead mentors.

The 4th-grade mentee may use developmental mentoring to first establish pre-adolescent connectedness within the ecology of the school, and then to develop social skills, academic achievement/attitudes, and self-esteem (industry, see Figure 2). The two steps (as described by Kohut, 1977) of receiving empathy, praise, and attention, and then the development of skills by modeling and internalizing those of an idealized other, provide the two main ingredients of a developmental mentoring relationship for mentees that help promote their connectedness to classmates, teachers, and school.

Older mentees (those entering middle school or Grade 6) may utilize the CAMP program to capitalize on the strengths (e.g., social skills, school attitudes, self-esteem) they have achieved and move toward

establishing a more ecologically broad form of adolescent connectedness; these older mentees often need a formal structure, ideally a prosocial community in which to use or exercise these strengths. Children in middle school who have grown beyond their role as mentee and who are in need of a broader, prosocial, inclusive social network in which to exercise their new self-developments can become protégés (or “mentor in training”).

Being a protégé allows the pre-adolescent to draw on previously developed social skills, school attitudes/achievement, and their budding self-esteem to build a broader form of adolescent connectedness through their cooperative work as an aid to another mentor and mentee. The protégé then affirms this larger sense of adolescent connectedness in a way that propels the identity development process. This occurs when the protégé uses those new skills to manage and contribute to those new relationships. The protégé’s adolescent connectedness (within a larger ecology) is increased when the protégé makes efforts to take others’ points of view as well as to take an abstract perspective on the relationship.

For teenagers, being a mentor allows them to draw on experiences of prosocial connectedness and to more fully develop their identity through volunteering and by regularly exercising their ability to take another’s (3rd-person) perspective on their own actions or on situations. The practice of this somewhat more self-less focus on caring for others (the mentee primarily) likely fosters the ability to achieve deeper levels of intimacy with others. This is why the friendship of pre-adolescence evolves into the “best friends,” close friends, associates, and romantic friends in adolescence. Similarly, a clearer sense of one’s ethnic identity and the formation of social groups in adolescence leads to a differentiation of culturally different peers from simply peers. This widening of the social ecology — which mentors can appreciate but their mentees

cannot — is what differentiates mentee and mentor's worlds of connectedness. In these ways, participation in the CAMP program helps students develop a sense of relational connectedness that should, in turn, help them to be successful in later developmental stages.

### **Impacts: Does CAMP Successfully Strike Its Target?**

#### ***Unconventional Connections***

CAMP appears to have a modest effect on unconventional connectedness among youth in the United States. Studies of its effects on mentees in the U.S. suggest it can positively affect connectedness to parents, school, and the future (Karcher, 2005; Karcher, Davis, & Powell, 2002). Studies of its effect on mentors suggest that CAMP may influence broad gains in academic self-esteem and connectedness. Participation in the CAMP program as a mentor has been associated with increased levels of connectedness to friends, self-in-the-present, and culturally different peers, as well as on sports self-esteem (Karcher, 2009). This suggests that the effects of the CAMP program for mentors may go beyond increases in conventional connectedness and include improvements in unconventional connectedness too.

#### ***Are Cross-cultural Program Adaptations Necessary?***

Would CAMP be useful with Asian youth if it only promoted the type of conventional connectedness, such as to teachers, on which they may already score higher than other cultural groups? Or might CAMP implemented in Asian societies actually affect improved unconventional connectedness simply because it is in this area that Asian youth seem to have the greatest room for growth? We don't know.

There do appear to be ways in which CAMP, both in structure and programmatic content, may be particularly well suited for Chinese, Korean, and Taiwanese youth. Liu and Chen (2003) provide evidence

that the peer groups may be preferable to dyadic relationships with peers for Chinese adolescents in China. This may mean that Chinese adolescents would prefer that their mentoring relationships take place in a group format like CAMP. The group format also would be useful, perhaps, in fostering unconventional peer connections. For example, in the U.S., a group-based peer mentoring program for Chinese immigrant youth yielded positive effects for mentees in attachment to peers and desire for closeness (C. J. Yeh et al., 2007), suggesting that there is room for gains in unconventional connectedness for many Chinese youth in the U.S. as well. Yet in the U.S., research suggests that Chinese–American youth report lower levels of connectedness to teachers (Zhou et al., 2003), suggesting improvements in both forms of connectedness may be beneficial to Chinese–American youth. Thus, given CAMP has yielded impacts on connectedness to teachers in two prior studies, CAMP may be particularly useful for Chinese–American youth. In this way, CAMP may be useful for Chinese youth in China and in the U.S. albeit for different reasons.

The CAMP program emphasizes essential aspects of connectedness that are given priority in the relationalism framework but are given limited attention in individualism and collectivism frameworks. G. Wang and Liu (2010) describe relationships in Chinese culture as “fluid and constantly revised” (p. 50) — that is, relationships are developed based on the rules of reciprocity. In the CAMP program, one’s roles evolve from mentee to mentor, and each role is defined in relation to an important other — there can be no mentor or protégé without a mentee.

## **Conclusion**

The relationalism framework suggests that individuals in Asian societies, particularly in China, are increasingly bound by the rules of reciprocity (K. Yeh, 2010). These individuals are both interdependent

and self-reliant defying the commonly referenced collectivism–individualism continuum. In some instances, they might favor the group over their individual preferences and desires, and in other cases, they might place themselves as the priority. However, of greater importance may be specific relationships that change over time based on the various relationship roles they move in and out of. The CAMP program emphasizes such a reciprocal dance between the self and others in terms of evolving roles and responsibilities to specific others. An individual starts as a mentee, earns his/her place as a protégé, and then moves on to become a mentor. This intervention design depends on the processes of reciprocity. As mentees take on the different roles of protégé and mentor, they are effective largely to the extent they engender in others the positive feelings that they themselves experienced with their mentors. Through these reciprocal exchanges, both youth are provided with the opportunity to engage in prosocial, conventional but also positive unconventional (playful) relationships, which ultimately may foster their development. While CAMP has yet to be empirically tested in an Asian country, its fit with the relationalism framework bodes well for its potential as a tool for promoting positive youth development among Asian youth.

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透過發展導向的介入活動提升聯繫感：  
為亞洲青少年引進跨年齡導師計劃

在美國，青少年正面發展計劃的冒起反映出服務的重點已由尋找病理轉為發展潛能。對這種轉變，輔導界是認同的。然而，對於美國的青少年正面發展計劃是否同樣有益於亞洲社會如中國、韓國和台灣，從未有任何評估考慮過集體主義、個人主義和關係主義世界觀的因素。本文描述一項高度結構化的發展性導師計劃——跨年齡導師計劃（Cross-Age Mentoring Program，簡稱 CAMP），並指出它能增進參與導師和受導者的聯繫感。文章並以問題行為理論，探討 CAMP 對符合社會規範的聯繫感的促進作用會否同樣在集體主義或關係主義的社會中出現，以及在該等社會推展 CAMP 能否得出最佳、最有效的結果。

關鍵詞：亞洲青少年；聯繫感；集體主義；導師制度