

Features of Separation and Perception of the Parental Family among Russian and Chinese Students

Zheng Xiang*, Shirokova Kseniia

*PhD in Art History, Faculty Member, Lecturer, Department of Painting
Xinyang Normal University,
Xinyang, Henan Province, China*

*Master's Student in Philology,
Xinyang Normal University,
Xinyang, Henan Province, China*

Abstract:

This study investigates the features of psychological separation from the parental family and its perception among Russian and Chinese university students. A cross-cultural comparative design was employed, involving 62 participants (31 Russian, 31 Chinese). Methods included the Psychological Separation Inventory (PSI), the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA), and the Family Assessment Device (FAD). Statistical analysis using the Mann-Whitney U-test revealed significant differences. Russian students demonstrated significantly higher levels of conflictual independence (freedom from excessive guilt, mistrust, and anger towards parents) and functional independence (ability to live separately and plan financial autonomy) compared to Chinese students. Conversely, Chinese students rated the general functioning of their parental families significantly higher, indicating better family dynamics and stability. A significant difference was also found in maternal alienation, which was higher among Chinese students. The results confirm the hypothesis of statistically significant cross-cultural differences in separation aspects and family perception. The findings can be used to provide differentiated psychological support to young people in achieving autonomy.

Keywords: *Separation, parental family, cross-cultural study, attachment, family functioning*

1. Introduction

The problem of young people's separation from the parental family is highly relevant, as it is a natural phase of age-related development that accompanies humanity at all historical stages. It affects various spheres of life and activity, determining personal and social well-being.

*Corresponding Author

The modern situation is characterized by rapid technological advancement and cultural shifts, where young people increasingly strive for independence, often holding values distinct from previous generations. While researchers such as J. Bowlby [2], J.A. Hoffman [7], M. Mahler [9,10,11], P. Blos [1], and A. Varga [15] have foundational theories on separation, much of the existing research focuses on early childhood, leaving the phenomenology of separation in later stages, particularly youth, insufficiently explored. This transition to adulthood involves not only the classic "crisis of youth" [16], but also a parallel family crisis described as a "separation from parental roots" [15]. This process is not instantaneous but unfolds across specific age stages, each presenting unique developmental tasks. Successful psychological separation requires both a restructuring of the parent-child relationship and the parents' readiness to accept their child's autonomy, a stage that for parents signifies the completion of their primary educational role, often evoking mixed feelings of pride and apprehension [5]. Consequently, student age emerges as a critical final phase in this prolonged separation process, offering a vital opportunity for forging autonomy and solidifying identity. The novelty of this study lies in its cross-cultural approach, aiming to delineate the specific features of separation and the perception of the parental family during this period—a topic that remains underexplored in Russian academic literature.

The purpose of the study is to identify and examine the features of separation and perception of the parental family among Russian and Chinese students.

The object of the study is the personality of the young person.

The subject of the study is the features of separation and perception of the parental family among Russian and Chinese students.

The hypothesis of the study is that there are statistically significant differences between the aspects of separation and perception of the parental family among Russian and Chinese students.

The personality of a young individual encompasses a range of individual characteristics, including emotional and cognitive processes, as well as patterns of interaction with the environment and social groups. This is a complex concept that examines the formation of personality, its variability, and the impact of various factors on its development.

Separation, in turn, represents an emotionally autonomous existence. Young individuals make independent decisions and have the capacity for autonomous living, while maintaining connections with significant others.

During the study of theoretical material, the following model of the research subject was developed. The model illustrates the key aspects under investigation for

Russian and Chinese student groups: aspects of separation (conflictual, emotional, attitudinal, functional independence from mother, father, and parents), aspects of family functioning (problem solving, communication, roles, affective responsiveness, affective involvement, behavior control, general functioning), and parents and peers (trust, communication, alienation, overall attachment score in relation to mother, father, and a close friend). This comprehensive model serves as the basis for the empirical study.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

The study involved 62 respondents (39 female, 23 male), divided into two groups: 31 Chinese students studying in Russia (15 female, 16 male) and 31 Russian students (24 female, 8 male).

2.2. Instruments

2.2.1. Psychological Separation Inventory (PSI) in the adaptation of V.P. Dzukaeva, T.Yu. Sadovnikova (2014). Assesses four components of separation from each parent (conflictual, emotional, attitudinal, functional independence).

2.2.2. Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA). Adaptation by N.V. Sabelnikova, D.V. Kashirsky, T.Yu. Sadovnikova (2023). Assesses trust, communication, and alienation in relationships with mother, father, and a close friend.

2.2.3. Family Assessment Device (FAD) – McMaster model. Adaptation by T.Yu. Sadovnikova (2014). Assesses family functioning across seven scales: Problem Solving, Communication, Roles, Affective Responsiveness, Affective Involvement, Behavior Control, and General Functioning.

2.3. Data Analysis

Due to the non-normal distribution of most data (checked using the Shapiro-Wilk test), the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U-test was used for intergroup comparison. Significance was accepted at $p < 0.05$.

3. Results

3.1. Descriptive Statistics for the Entire Sample (N=62)

3.1.1. Psychological Separation (PSI).

The overall level of psychological separation among the surveyed students can be characterized as medium to high. The highest average values were observed for functional independence from father ($M=3.91$) and conflictual independence from both parents ($M=3.65$ - 3.66). The lowest scores were recorded for attitudinal independence from mother ($M=3.12$) and emotional independence from mother ($M=3.17$). Detailed descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Psychological Separation Indicators (PSI) for the Entire Sample (N=62)

Independence	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Dev.
Conflictual from Mother	3,64	3,65	3,45	0,67
Conflictual from Father	3,66	3,50	3,15	0,67
Conflictual from Parents	3,65	3,51	3,38	0,58
Emotional from Mother	3,17	3,05	2,36	0,78
Emotional from Father	3,53	3,50	3,36	0,94
Emotional from Parents	3,35	3,36	Mult.	0,77
Attitudinal from Mother	3,12	3,07	Mult.	0,80
Attitudinal from Father	3,41	3,32	2,86	1,01
Attitudinal from Parents	3,27	3,16	3,75	0,79
Functional from Mother	3,59	3,42	3,42	0,74
Functional from Father	3,91	3,92	3,17	0,74
Functional from Parents	3,75	3,65	3,42	0,61

Abbreviations: Std. Dev. – Standard Deviation; Mult. – multimodal distribution.

3.1.2. Attachment to Parents and Peers (IPPA).

Analysis of attachment indicators revealed the highest level of trust in mother (M=3.80). The level of communication with mother was also relatively high (M=3.27). The highest degree of alienation was observed in relationships with a friend (M=3.71), which may be characteristic of the student period when peer relationships are re-evaluated. A detailed breakdown is provided in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Attachment Indicators (IPPA) for the Entire Sample (N=62)

Indicator	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Dev.
Trust in Mother	3.80	4.00	5	1.00
Communication with Mother	3.27	3.33	2.83	0.68
Alienation from Mother	2.34	2.30	2.2	0.76
Overall Attachment to Mother	2.11	2.20	3	0.74
Trust in Father	3.63	3.83	4.44	0.88
Communication with Father	2.77	2.81	3	0.33
Alienation from Father	3.18	3.25	3.66	0.63
Overall Attachment to Father	1.55	1.61	1.86	0.30
Trust in Friend	2.93	3.00	3	0.41
Communication with Friend	3.26	3.38	4	0.66
Alienation from Friend	3.71	3.80	4.8	1.03
Overall Attachment to Friend	1.60	1.61	1.60	0.22

Abbreviations: Std. Dev. – Standard Deviation.

3.1.3. Family Functioning (FAD).

According to the FAD results, the average scores on most scales are within the medium range, which generally indicates satisfactory family functioning. The highest scores were recorded for "General Functioning" (M=28.44) and

"Behavior Control" (M=20.47). The lowest average score was for "Problem Solving" (M=10.65). See Table 3.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Family Functioning Indicators (FAD) for the Entire Sample (N=62)

Scale	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Dev.
Problem Solving	10.65	10.50	10.00	2.40
Communication	13.42	13.00	13.00	2.53
Roles	19.89	21.00	22.00	2.70
Affective Responsiveness	12.48	13.00	13.00	1.88
Affective Involvement	15.87	16.00	15.00	2.46
Behavior Control	20.47	21.00	Mult.	2.93
General Functioning	28.44	29.00	29.00	3.29

Abbreviations: Std. Dev. – Standard Deviation; Mult. – multimodal distribution.

3.2. Testing for Normality of Distribution

The Shapiro-Wilk test showed that the distribution of most studied indicators significantly deviates from normal ($p < 0.05$). In particular, non-normal distribution was found for: conflictual independence from father; emotional independence from father; functional independence from mother, father, and parents (PSI); Communication, Roles, Affective Responsiveness, Affective Involvement, General Functioning (FAD); Trust and Communication with mother and father, Communication and Alienation from a friend (IPPA). This justified the use of non-parametric statistics (Mann-Whitney U-test) for cross-cultural comparison.

3.3. Cross-Cultural Comparison (Russian vs. Chinese Students)

3.3.1. Psychological Separation.

Comparison of the groups revealed statistically significant differences in several aspects of separation (Table 4).

Table 4. Comparison of Russian and Chinese Students on Separation Indicators (PSI, U-Mann-Whitney Test)

Independence	Mean (China)	Mean (Russia)	U-criterion	p-value
Conflictual from Mother	3.34	3.94	216.5*	0.000
Conflictual from Father	3.33	3.98	215.5*	0.000
Conflictual from Parents	3.34	3.96	185*	0.000
Emotional from Mother	3.11	3.23	457	0.746
Emotional from Father	3.47	3.58	415	0.360
Emotional from Parents	3.29	3.41	434	0.517
Attitudinal from Mother	3.13	3.12	468.5	0.871
Attitudinal from Father	3.38	3.44	450	0.673
Attitudinal from Parents	3.25	3.28	460	0.778
Functional from Mother	3.48	3.70	426.5	0.451
Functional from Father	3.62	4.20	262.5*	0.002
Functional from Parents	3.55	3.95	272.5*	0.003

*Significance of differences at $p < 0.05$

Russian students showed significantly higher levels of conflictual independence from both mother and father, indicating greater freedom from feelings of guilt, anxiety, mistrust, and anger towards their parents. Significant differences were also found in functional independence from father and parents in general, with Russian students scoring higher, suggesting a greater ability to live separately and plan financial independence.

No significant differences were found in emotional and attitudinal independence, indicating similar levels of independence from parental approval/disapproval and the ability to form their own views based on personal experience in both groups.

3.3.2. Family Functioning (FAD)

A significant difference was found only on the "General Functioning" scale (Table 2).

Table 2. Results of Statistical Analysis Comparing Groups on Family Assessment Indicators

Components	Mean (China)	Mean (Russia)	U-criterion	p-value
Problem Solving	10.94	10.35	413.5	0.349
Communication	13.61	13.23	452	0.693
Roles	20.39	19.39	370.5	0.123
Affective Responsiveness	12.84	12.13	355	0.078
Affective Involvement	15.90	15.84	479	0.989
Behavior Control	21.00	19.94	394.5	0.229
General Functioning	29.42	27.45	326.5*	0.031

*Significance of differences at $p < 0.05$

Chinese students rated the general functioning of their parental families significantly higher, indicating better perceived family dynamics and stability.

3.3.3. Attachment to Parents and Peers (IPPA)

A statistically significant difference was found only for "Alienation from Mother" (Table 3)

Table 3. Results of Statistical Analysis Comparing Groups on Attachment Indicators

Indicator	Mean (China)	Mean (Russia)	U-criterion	p-value
Trust in Mother	3.77	3.82	446	0.632
Communication with Mother	3.15	3.39	365.5	0.107
Alienation from Mother	2.57	2.10	294*	0.009

Overall Attachment to Mother	2.00	2.21	398.5	0.251
Trust in Father	3.58	3.67	441.5	0.588
Communication with Father	2.79	2.75	453	0.704
Alienation from Father	3.26	3.10	422	0.414
Overall Attachment to Father	1.52	1.59	404	0.285
Trust in Friend	2.94	2.92	433	0.508
Communication with Friend	3.24	3.28	464	0.822
Alienation from Friend	3.76	3.65	475.5	0.949
Overall Attachment to Friend	1.59	1.62	434.5	0.522

*Significance of differences at $p < 0.05$

Chinese students reported a significantly higher level of alienation from their mothers, which may manifest as distance, misunderstanding, and discomfort in communication.

4. Discussion

The results confirm the research hypothesis about the existence of cross-cultural differences in the process of separation from the parental family among students.

Russian students demonstrate a higher level of separation in its conflictual and functional aspects. They are freer from negative emotions towards their parents and are more ready for independent living and financial self-sufficiency. This may be due to cultural norms in Russia that encourage earlier autonomy.

Chinese students, while showing a similar level of emotional and attitudinal independence, experience greater internal conflict in relationships with their parents (lower conflictual independence) and find it more difficult to imagine a separate life from the family (lower functional independence). This can be explained by the influence of traditional Confucian values, which emphasize family hierarchy, respect for parents (filial piety - xiao), and strong intergenerational ties. The phenomenon of the "little emperor," where the child is the center of the family, may lead to both strong emotional investment and increased pressure, complicating the

separation process. The higher assessment of family functioning among Chinese students may reflect a cultural tendency to perceive the family as a more cohesive and stable system, as well as a possible social desirability bias.

The identified higher alienation from the mother among Chinese students, combined with lower conflictual independence, creates a complex picture: on one hand, there is a perceived distance, and on the other, a strong emotional connection that can cause feelings of guilt and anxiety. This ambivalence is a characteristic feature of the separation process in cultures with strong family ties.

5. Conclusion

The theoretical and empirical research yielded the following main results:

Separation is a process of achieving emotional and psychological independence while maintaining connection with significant others. The perception of the parental family includes an analysis of its functioning, relationships, communication, and emotional connections.

A profile of a Russian student was compiled: characterized by freedom from guilt, mistrust, and anger towards parents; independence from parental approval; reliance on their own attitudes and personal experience; readiness for separate living and financial planning. Their families are perceived as functional with open communication, distributed roles, and balanced emotional expression.

A profile of a Chinese student was compiled: burdened by excessive feelings of guilt, anxiety, mistrust, and anger towards the parental family, yet independent in their views and assessments. They find it more difficult to separate functionally from the family. At the same time, they perceive their families as more stable and well-functioning systems with effective problem-solving and open communication, but report greater alienation from the mother.

Thus, the features of separation and perception of the parental family among Russian and Chinese students were identified. The hypothesis was confirmed, the research tasks were solved, and the goal was achieved.

The results can be used for differentiated psychological assistance to young people in gaining autonomy, setting and achieving life goals, and personal development.

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