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Alcohol Expectancies among High School Students in China

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ALCOHOL EXPECTANCIES AMONG HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN CHINA

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ALCOHOL EXPECTANCIES AMONG HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN CHINA

Abstract

Objective: There is little systematic information on the patterns of Chinese adolescents’ alcohol expectancies and the influence of expectancies on drinking behavior. The purpose of this study was to examine Chinese high school students’ alcohol expectancies and gender and drinking status (non-drinker, occasional drinker, regular drinker) differences in expectancies.

Method: We administered the Chinese Adolescent Alcohol Expectancy Questionnaire (CAEQ) to a convenience sample of 1244 high school students (M = 627; F = 617) from schools in Huhhot City, Chayouhou Qi, and Tongliao City in Inner Mongolia, China.

Results: We identified eight expectancy factors: three negative (general negative consequences, harm to person/reputation, and negative uses of alcohol) and five positive (general positive perceptions, tension reduction/relaxation, drinking as social courtesy, social facilitation, and beneficial drinking/moderation). MANOVA results indicated that males had higher positive perception expectancies than females. Regular drinkers had lower negative consequences and higher positive perception expectancies than non-drinkers or occasional drinkers. Non-drinkers had higher harm to person/reputation expectancies than occasional or regular drinkers. Occasional drinkers had higher beneficial/moderation and lower harm to person/reputation expectancies than non-drinkers.
Conclusions: The findings suggest that Chinese adolescents have some expectancies that are similar to those of U.S. adolescents and some expectancies that show cultural specificity. Expectancies are associated with Chinese adolescents' drinking in ways similar to those found for U.S. adolescents.
Alcohol Expectancies Among High School Students In China

Introduction

Current Alcohol Situation In China

China will become the world's larger producer of beer in the next couple of years. In 1999, China produced 20.88 million metric tons of beer, slightly less than the 23 million metric tons of beer produced in the U.S. in 1997, its record year of production (Kyodo News Service, 03/27/00). In 1996, the last year data were available, China was the world's larger producer of distilled spirits (WHO, 1999). In 1997, China established 100 new wineries. Wine production in 1997 was 52% greater than in 1995 (Xinhau News Agency, 8/22/97; Asian Information Service, 5/27/99).

In the period 1970 to 1996, in China, reported per capita consumption for the population over the age of 15 (in liters of pure alcohol) rose 401.91% from 1.03 liters in 1970-72 to 5.17 liters in 1994-96. In 1996, it was estimated that 81.3% of this alcohol consumption was distilled spirits, 17.6% was beer, and 1.1% was wine (WHO, 1999). The most recent estimate for the year 2000 is 5.17 liters per capita (WHO, 2003). None of these data account for unrecorded home production of alcohol, which could be significant, especially in rural areas.

Since 1983, there has been a rising prevalence of alcohol-related disorders in the medical records of the Chinese health care system. In 1989, a nationwide survey suggested 5.7% of men and 1% of women were alcohol-dependent (WHO, 1999).
The History Of Alcohol Culture

China has a long history of alcohol production and use (Heilongjiang Business College and Beijing Food Production Cooperation, 1980). Archaeologists have recovered alcohol vessels made 6,000 to 7,000 years ago, suggesting that alcohol use in China originated at least as early as 5,000 BC. Cases of alcoholism were recorded in Chinese traditional medicine texts as early as 2200 BC (Deng and He, 1990) and there is historical evidence of government control of alcohol as early as the reign of Emperor Yu in 2298-2205 BC (Lee, 1987). During the Zhou Dynasty (1122-22 BC) the first law was passed to regulate alcohol use (Zhan, 1996). Punishment for violation of alcohol laws was often severe. For example, under the Wei regime (221-264 BC), the sentence for non-governmental brewing of alcohol was death (Lee, 1987). Occasionally the fall of a dynasty was attributed to alcohol (Hook, 1982).

Alcohol use is considered an integral part of Chinese culture and is frequently referred to in well-known classical literature. Alcohol use often accompanies music, dance, and other literary and artistic activities (Shen and Wang, 1998). There is frequent reference to alcohol by poets in their poems. In a number of classic and notable poems, poets praised the beauty of alcohol associating it with emotions such as happiness, joy, love, worry, sympathy, longing, anger, hate, homesickness, and sadness. Some of the famous poets were known as “alcohol immortals.” Li Bai and Du Fu reportedly wrote their great poems under the influence of alcohol. The Chinese believe that alcohol can stimulate the poetic mood.
Jiu (alcohol in Chinese) is regarded as the representation of happiness and the embodiment of auspiciousness, but jiu is also considering one of the Four Vices, or "disasters": womanizing, gambling, drinking, and smoking (Singer, 1972). Nevertheless, alcohol has been closely integrated into Chinese life as socially acceptable since earliest times. Alcohol is a staple at weddings, banquets, celebrations, family association meetings, ceremonies, and other auspicious occasions. The Chinese especially enjoy alcohol at their traditional festivals in part because it symbolizes luck, auspiciousness, health and long life.

The Chinese government does not appear to officially encourage alcohol use, but it is encouraging the population to switch from the more potent grain-based liquor to beer and wine, which have lower alcohol content. As a result, in 1999, beer production increased 21 percent and liquor production fell 14 percent (WHO, 1999).

**Chinese Adolescent Alcohol Use**

There are few studies available of Chinese adolescent alcohol use. A review of the available literature (Li et al., 1996) and three previous studies conducted by the second authors' research group (Newman and Qu, 1998; Qu, 1998; Zhang, 1997) suggest the following:

- Drinking begins between 12 and 15 years of age.
- The proportion of adolescents who are drinkers in Shanghai and Beijing is similar to proportion of American adolescents who are drinkers, but the rate of frequent drinking is lower among Chinese adolescents than among US adolescents.
Adolescent alcohol use in China varies by region in terms of drinking proportion and frequency. Adolescent alcohol use in more isolated areas is lower than in the large urban areas, at least for beer.

- Male and female patterns of alcohol use differ significantly.
- Parental and peer alcohol use influences young people’s alcohol use;
- Beer is the most popular alcoholic beverage among adolescents
- Traditional and cultural values appear to shape alcohol use by, for example, discouraging drinking among children and females and by limiting bad outcomes from drinking.

**Alcohol Expectancy Theory**

Expectancy theory has served as a conceptual basis for studying adolescent alcohol use for the past 20 years in the USA. Expectancy theory is a memory-based cognitive learning theory. An expectancy is the repeated perception of an association between a given behavior and certain outcomes which leads to the storage of these associations in memory in the form of if-then relationships between a behavior and its consequences. These memorized associations then influence decisions made at future times of choice. In this manner, early learning experiences influence later behavior by means of the expectancy concerning the behavior (Smith and Goldman, 1995).

Expectancies incorporate many influences, including parental modeling, personality characteristics, biological vulnerability, peer influences, sociocultural factors, mass media, and cultural influences. Alcohol expectancies are formed at an early age, even before the actual consumption of alcohol, based on observations of other people’s alcohol use.
Expectancies can be revised subsequently, based on experiences of one’s own alcohol use. In brief, expectancies have been found to be useful in predicting drinking behavior, patterns of use, the onset of use, and patterns of problematic use (Smith and Goldman, 1995).

**The Objective of This Study**

There is little systematic information on the patterns of Chinese adolescents’ alcohol expectancies and the influence of expectancies on drinking behavior. The purpose of this study was to examine Chinese high school students’ alcohol expectancies and gender and drinking status (non-drinker, occasional drinker, regular drinker) differences in expectancies.

**Method**

**Participants**

Participants were a convenience sample of 1244 (M=627, F=617) high-school students from schools in Huhhot City, Chayouhou Qi, and Tongliao City in Inner Mongolia, China.

**The Chinese Adolescent Alcohol Expectancy Scale**

Following three months of fieldwork in 1998 that involved in-depth interview and focus group discussions exploring alcohol expectancies with 64 adolescents in Inner Mongolia, a 131-item Chinese Adolescent Alcohol Expectancy Questionnaire (CAEQ) was developed. Also contributing to the process was a review of previous alcohol expectancy scales (Qu, 1998) and a review of available literature. On the CAEQ,
expectancy items are answered using a 6-point Likert scale from 1 (strongest disagree) to 6 (strongest agree). In previous studies on a sample of 919 students from Inner Mongolia, China (Newman, et al., 1999, 2000; Qu, et al., 2000), factor analyses of the CAEQ identified 8 factors representing sub-categories of expectancies.

**Procedures**
Participants completed the CAEQ and answered demographic and alcohol use questions.

**Analysis used for CAEQ Instrument Validation**
We conducted a factor analysis of the CAEQ using Principle Components with Varimax rotation. We then compared our results to the 8-factor solution obtained previously (Newman et al., 1999, 2000; Qu et al., 2000). Differences were resolved by examining alternative factorings of the two samples and considering the conceptual coherence of the items in a factor.

**Analysis used for Expectancies and Alcohol Use**
Expectancy scores were computed as the mean score of the items in each of the 8 CAEQ factors. For drinking status, non-drinkers were those who reported never drinking or not drinking within the past year, occasional drinkers were those who drank in the last year but not in the last 30 days, and regular drinkers were those who drank within the last 30 days. Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was used to examine whether expectancies differed for gender and drinking status (non-drinker, occasional drinker, regular drinker). A significance level of Alpha = .01 was used for all tests.
Results

CAEQ Validation

Results of the CAEQ validation confirmed the 8-factor model identified previously (Newman et al., 1999, 2000; Qu et al., 2000). The final CAEQ instrument contained 88 items. The scales with sample items and their coefficient Alpha reliability estimates are shown in Table 1. Alpha values for most scales were satisfactory, although the harm to person/reputation, negative uses of alcohol, and beneficial drinking/moderation scales were somewhat low. Given that the final instrument scales were derived from comparisons to the previous study’s sample and from conceptual as well as strictly statistical considerations, the reliability estimates seem acceptable. The alpha values for the CAEQ are within the same ranges as the test-retest reliabilities reported for the Alcohol Expectancy Questionnaire (AEQ), in both the adult and adolescent formats (Brown, et al., 1987)

Expectancies and Alcohol Use

Significant main effects were found for gender [Wilk’s Lambda = .975, F (8, 1231) = 4.02, p<.001, Eta² = .025] and drinking status [Wilk’s Lambda = .928, F(16, 2462) = 5.83, p<.001, Eta² = .036]. The interaction effect was not significant [Wilk’s Lambda = .977, F (16, 2462) = 1.79, p = .028, Eta² = .011]. Mean scores and MANOVA results for the gender comparisons are shown in Table 2. Males and females differed only in general positive perceptions. Males had higher positive perception expectancies than females. The effect size for general positive perceptions was approximately one-third of a standard
deviation indicating a moderate, likely meaningful, difference. There were no other significant differences, although males generally tended to rate positive expectancies higher and negative expectancies lower than females.

Mean scores and MANOVA results for the comparisons based on drinking status are shown in Table 3. Regular drinkers had lower negative consequences and higher positive perception expectancies than non-drinkers or occasional drinkers and lower harm to person/reputation expectancies than non-drinkers. Occasional drinkers had higher beneficial/moderation expectancies than non-drinkers. The effect sizes for all significant differences were approximately one-third of a standard deviation indicating a moderate, likely meaningful, difference.

Discussion

CAEQ Validation

The factor structure of Chinese adolescents’ alcohol expectancies is similar to that found for U.S. samples of adolescents and adults on the AEQ (Brown, et al., 1987; George, et al., 1995; Kline, 1996). The similarities and differences are summarized in Table 4.

Most of the scales on the adult and adolescent versions of the AEQ are reflected in the CAEQ scales. This suggests a substantial degree of cross-cultural consistency in basic expectancies concerning alcohol. The most prominent component of the AEQ that was missing for the Chinese adolescents was the sexual enhancement factor. Given that the CAEQ was developed from interviews (Qu, 1998), it is possible that the Chinese
adolescents who were used for scale development simply did not have enough sexual experience for them to mention sexual enhancement prominently. On the other hand the lack of emergence of sexual enhancement as a major expectancy for Chinese adolescents could be the result of cultural differences. Clearly further study is needed to resolve this discrepancy in the CAEQ and AEQ.

In addition to the scales found in the AEQ, the CAEQ factors contained three scales that appear to reflect unique aspects of Chinese culture. This suggests that in addition to somewhat universal cross-cultural expectancies, people develop expectancies that reflect the particular culture and experiences to which they are exposed. These findings are consistent with alcohol expectancy theory, which proposes that expectancies are shaped by experience. The findings, however, do suggest caution in generalizing findings about the structure of expectancies across cultures and nationalities and a need to consider local customs, beliefs, and practices when assessing the expectancies persons may have about alcohol. Further research into culturally specific expectancy patterns in China and other countries is needed to extend these findings.

**Expectancies and Alcohol Use**

Males had higher general positive perception expectancies than females. This suggests that males are more likely to drink because they expect positive things to happen, both socially and physically. There were no other significant differences, although males generally tended to rate positive expectancies higher and negative expectancies lower than females. These results are consistent with other studies (e.g., Kline, 1996) that have found few differences in expectancies between males and females.
Regular drinkers had higher general positive perceptions and lower general negative consequences perceptions than either occasional drinkers or non-drinkers. These results suggest that those who drink regularly may react more to somewhat global expectations for more positive outcomes and fewer negative consequences in general than to expectations about more specific physical or social outcomes. These findings also suggest that expectancies may play an important role in the amount and frequency of drinking done by Chinese adolescents.

Non-drinkers had higher harm to person/reputation expectancies than either occasional or regular drinkers. This suggests that the expectation that drinking could damage one’s reputation or cause one to be looked on unfavorably may play an important role in Chinese adolescents’ decision making concerning abstinence. Occasional drinkers had higher beneficial drinking/moderation expectancies than either regular drinkers or non-drinkers. This perhaps reflects that occasional drinkers expect benefits from pursuing a moderate course of drinking rather than either frequent drinking or total abstinence.

Among Chinese students, those who drink regularly appear to be influenced mostly by general expectancies about alcohol that are cross-cultural and similar to those that influence drinking in the U.S. Non-drinkers and Occasional drinkers appear to be influenced more by culturally specific expectancies that reflect aspects of Chinese culture, tradition, and society. These differences suggest that cultural specific expectancies potentially play an important role in moderating drinking. These effects need to be examined further, particularly in societies that are undergoing cultural changes or experiencing an influx of Western societal influences that may be weakening these potentially beneficial cultural influences on persons’ expectancies.
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Table 1

Chinese Adolescent Alcohol Expectancy Questionnaire Factors and Alpha Values

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Alpha</th>
<th>Sample Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Negative Consequences</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>Drinking alcohol causes dizziness or headache. Drinking alcohol tends to get me in trouble. Drinking alcohol is harmful to health. Drinking causes delay of work or business.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harm to Person/Reputation</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>Females drinking can influence her reputation. Drinking alcohol will influence one’s social development. Students with good academic records drink less frequently.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Uses of Alcohol</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>People may act excessively on opposite sex by using alcohol as an excuse. I may drink alcohol when I am feeling bad. The purpose of drinking is to show off oneself before other people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Positive Perceptions</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>Drinking is welcome behavior. Drinking should be filled with joy. A person drinking a large amount of alcohol is admired. Drinking is worth its cost.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tension Reduction/Relaxation</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>Drinking can relieve mental pressure. Drinking alcohol makes people relax. Drinking makes people forget displeased things. Drinking makes fun.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinking as Social Courtesy</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>I am afraid to hurt others’ feeling when I refuse their toast. People would be disappointed without alcohol at parties. Toasting shows respect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Facilitation</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>It is easier to handle affairs when drinking. Drinking can boost one’s courage. Drinking helps improve interpersonal relationship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beneficial Drinking/Moderation</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>Drinking but not drunkenness is delighted. Drinking a little is acceptable. A little drinking is beneficial for health.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectancy</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Negative Consequences</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harm to Person/Reputation</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Uses of Alcohol</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Positive Perceptions</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tension Reduction/Relaxation</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinking as Social Courtesy</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Facilitation</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beneficial Drinking/Moderation</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** ES = effect size computed by Cohen's d. Male, n=627; Female, n=617.

*p < .001.
### Table 3

**Students' Mean Scores on Alcohol Expectancies by Drinking Status**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Occasional</th>
<th>Regular</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Drinker</td>
<td>Drinker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>$SD$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Negative Consequences</td>
<td>4.28&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harm to Person/Reputation</td>
<td>3.72&lt;sub&gt;ab&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Uses of Alcohol</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Positive Perceptions</td>
<td>2.81&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tension Reduction/Relaxation</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinking as Social Courtesy</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Facilitation</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beneficial Drinking/Moderation</td>
<td>3.49&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** Non-drinker, n=891; Occasional drinker, n=132; Regular drinker, n=221. Means with the same subscript differ significantly in pairwise comparisons using Bonferroni adjustment. Cohen’s $d$ for pairwise comparisons: General Negative Consequences, Regular drinker to Occasional Drinker = -.33, Regular drinker to Non-drinker = -.32; Harm to Person/Reputation, Regular drinker to Non-drinker = -.32, Occasional drinker to Non-drinker = -.34; General Positive Perceptions, Regular drinker to Occasional Drinker = .39, Regular drinker to Non-drinker = .52; Beneficial Drinking/Moderation, Occasional drinker to Non-drinker = .38. $^*p < .001$. 
## Table 4

*Similarities and Differences Between the CAEQ Factors and AEQ Factors*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CAEQ</th>
<th>AEQ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Negative Consequences</td>
<td>Cognitive &amp; Motor Impairment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Uses of Alcohol</td>
<td>Aggression &amp; Arousal; Power &amp; Aggression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Positive Perceptions</td>
<td>Physical &amp; Social Pleasure; Change in Social Behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tension Reduction/Relaxation</td>
<td>Tension Reduction &amp; Relaxation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Facilitation</td>
<td>Social Assertiveness; Social Expression</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CAEQ Which Factors Reflect Unique Aspects Of Chinese Culture</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harm to Person/Reputation</td>
<td>Reflects the emphasis placed on reputation and correct behavior in Chinese society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinking as Social Courtesy</td>
<td>Reflects the role of alcohol in formal social occasions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beneficial Drinking/Moderation</td>
<td>Reflects the historical and religious traditions calling for moderate living.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>