



2020

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Recommended Citation

Sharp, Allie (2020) "The Adaptations of Immigrant Chinese American Mothers' Parenting with their Reticent Young Children," *Family Perspectives: Vol. 2 : Iss. 1 , Article 4*.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/familyperspectives/vol2/iss1/4>

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The Adaptations of Immigrant Chinese American Mothers' Parenting With Their Reticent Young Children

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Maternal warmth, or the expression of affection to a child by their mother both physically and emotionally, can play a critical role in encouraging healthy social development among reticent children, meaning children who are less likely to be social with their peers. However, recent research is beginning to recognize that this maternal warmth, which was typically defined as an open expression of affection, may look differently in other cultures. For example, Chinese parenting is generally rooted in Confucian values, which emphasizes group orientation and collectivism, compared to European American societies that typically promote self-expression and individualism. While cultural contexts may influence the form maternal warmth takes, this literature review discusses beneficial forms of integrated, bicultural parenting among Chinese immigrant mothers raising their reticent children within a Western context as they prepare their children to socially adapt to their new environment in the United States.

In recent years, studies have emphasized the impact of maternal encouragement, maternal warmth, and maternal emotional responses on young children's development (Balkaya et al., 2018; Cheah et al., 2015; Chen et al., 2015; Chen et al., 2014; Root & Rasmussen, 2017; Yu et al., 2018; Yu et al., 2019). As mothers interact with their developing child, maternal warmth has been shown to positively affect children's emotional and social behavior (Balkaya et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2014). This parental warmth refers to the quality of the affectional bond between mother and child expressed in both physical and emotional ways (Cheah et al., 2015). Research has shown that a lack of warmth can create negative trajectories for children in their social and emotional behavior (Root & Rasmussen, 2017).

While maternal warmth has been defined as crucial for children's healthy social and emotional growth, current research recognizes the differences between various cultures' expression of warmth in these mother-child relationships (Balkaya et al., 2018; Cheah et al., 2015; Chen et al., 2015; Chen et al., 2014; Kho et al., 2019; Root & Rasmussen, 2017). Specifically, Chinese mothers often show warmth and affection by concentrating efforts on teaching their children correct principles for exhibiting emotional self-

control whereas European American mothers are more likely to characterize warmth by teaching their children principles for displaying emotional expression (Cheah et al. 2014). Chinese culture is generally considered to be collectivistic, given its connection with Confucian and Taoist values that encourage a group orientation (Hart et al., 2000), while Western societies are more individualistic in orientation, which have been thought to play a role in both parenting practices and views of young children's social behaviors (Hart et al., 1998). Some research suggests that Chinese mothers may differ in their cultural expression of warmth by being there to serve their children's fundamental needs while European American mothers typically see being warm and nurturing as maintaining a direct, open channel of communication with their child (Balkaya et al., 2018; Cheah et al. 2015).

While surrounded by the dominant culture, these mothers may find supportive cultural influences for viewing warmth through this lens. However, when immigrating to an individualistic culture, such as the United States, some mothers may reconsider certain views as particular cultural supports are no longer in place. During this transition to the individualistic culture of the United States, an immigrant mother's level of acculturation to the new society appears to be a defining component in the type of warmth she provides for her young child (Berry, 1997; Calzada et al., 2009; Vu et al., 2019). As the children of a Chinese immigrant mother adjust to the norms of American schools that rely on independent-oriented cultural norms, as compared to the collectivistic-based schools in their home countries, the adjustment can impact both mother and child (Balkaya et al., 2018; Cheah et al., 2015).

In addition to expressions of warmth, mothers who parent children who are more reticent and less likely to be social may both view and parent the child in ways that can encourage their success. Whether the behaviors of these children spring from temperament or other biological factors, the reticent behaviors manifest as withdrawing in social contexts out of fear or anxiousness though still having a desire to engage with other children (Balkaya et al., 2018). These reticent behaviors are evident in both familiar and

unfamiliar contexts where the child frequently engages in looking on, observing, and showing interest in engaging in social contexts but is wary and tends to avoid the interaction (Nelson et al. 2006). For decades, studies within the Western context have investigated ways of promoting shy children's independence due to the concern that shyness may be linked with being less friendly, less happy, or less talented (Zhang & Xu et al., 2019). The concern for these children in Western school settings is that their anxiousness will cause them to pull away from experiences to develop leadership opportunities, peer relationships, and communication skills (Balkaya et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2014). However, researchers have found that Chinese American mothers' cultural approach may be to have concerns about the reticent child being less available or willing to contribute to the good of the group or society to maintain the social order (Nelson et al., 2006). While this approach is culturally distinct, research has revealed that parenting practices within the Chinese cultural context can also successfully enable reticent children to progress with similar outcomes in prosocial behaviors as compared to an uninhibited child's traditional social development (Balkaya et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2014).

Although perspectives and practices differ between Chinese and American cultures, Chinese immigrant mothers' approach of teaching collectivist social values to their reticent Chinese-American children in ways that may differ from the ambient American culture can enhance their children's social behaviors, giving these children the emotional structure to focus on others' feelings, rather than their own, especially when Chinese-American mothers acculturate in ways that support their children's social growth in a Western context. This literature review will first discuss the influence of these practices on the social development of reticent Chinese American children, and second, explore the impact of a Chinese immigrant mother's level of acculturation into American society on her child's ability to develop socially.

Understanding Chinese Expressions of Maternal Warmth and Socialization

The mindset of a child toward their reticence enables their ability or inability to socially progress. Young children obtain theories about themselves and ways of dealing with their emotions primarily in their home environment (Balkaya et al., 2018; Cheah et al., 2015; Chen et al., 2015; Chen et al., 2014; Root & Rasmussen, 2017; Yu et al., 2018; Yu et al., 2019; Zhang & Xu, 2019). Chinese parents typically share the mindset of emphasizing success or failure as a result of the effort invested into a situation whereas many American parents typically encourage success or failure as a result of inborn or unchanging characteristics

(Chen et al., 2015; Zhang & Xu, 2019). Understanding these differences of attitude within the home environment explain why American children are more likely to have a fixed mindset about their reticence as opposed to a different attitude adopted by Chinese children (Zhang & Xu, 2019). Research has indicated that the attitude of a family toward their child's reticence can, in turn, affect the way the child sees themselves and their ability to overcome difficult emotions (Balkaya et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2015; Root & Rasmussen, 2017; Zhang & Xu, 2019). Because children learn emotional regulation from their parents' emotional expressions (Chen et al., 2015), American children are generally taught to deal with anxious behaviors through openly discussing their feelings in the home, which has been shown to help children within the North American context (Balkaya et al., 2018; Cheah et al., 2015). However, Chinese immigrant mothers, coming from a different social and cultural context, often respond by teaching their children to overcome social anxiety by turning their child's focus toward the feelings of others rather than focusing on their own feelings in a given situation (Yu et al., 2018). These culture-specific expressions of maternal warmth provide scaffolding that their children tend to find useful in dealing with their social anxieties (Balkaya et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2015; Yu et al., 2018).

An overarching goal for reticent children shared by both American and Chinese parents is to help them obtain not only the skills necessary for proper social development but also prosocial skills, which can be seen in the way they reach out to peers with empathy and helping behaviors. While American parenting is characterized by teaching social skills by openly sharing emotions, Chinese American parents do not typically teach or encourage this form of empathy building (Main et al., 2017). However, as Chinese immigrant mothers teach their reticent children to turn their thoughts towards others, they are, in fact, expressing and encouraging the importance of developing and displaying empathy in another way (Yu et al., 2018; Yu et al., 2019). This practice of turning a child's thoughts outward may be taught through guilt induction or shaming, which appears to be more likely to be used by mothers with boys than with girls (Nelson et al., 2012). For example, in a study investigating the long-term results of Chinese American immigrant mother's parenting practices, the use of guilt induction, which is common in this cultural context, produces less suppression of issues in their children, and in turn, leads to fewer aggressive behaviors after the first six months (Yu et al., 2018).

In addition to the use of guilt induction to correct unacceptable social behavior, these immigrant mothers typically also encourage their children's development of prosocial behaviors through teaching their children

to be humble and modest in their expressions, which may seem counterintuitive to others from a Western perspective (Balkaya et al., 2018; Cheah et al., 2015; Root & Rasmussen, 2017). Many Chinese mothers guide and instruct their children generally to avoid oversharing since their culture can view it as prideful, given the Confucius values of showing respect towards parents and elders. As a result, immigrant mothers may find the American cultural norms of encouraging children to give individual expression to their feelings different than their emphasis on a group orientation (Cheah et al., 2015). However, though maternal teachings can increase children's prosocial development in their various cultural contexts, the disaffection of a mother toward their child can cause negative trajectories across cultures (Chen et al., 2014; Root & Rasmussen, 2017). For example, American mothers experiencing unhappiness with their parent-child relationship, usually induced by external stresses of life, are less likely to provide maternal warmth (Root & Rasmussen, 2017). The negative perception many American mothers feel toward their socially inhibited child's proper social development may exacerbate the mother's stress (Root & Rasmussen, 2017). While the Chinese culture often viewed Chinese children who showed inhibitions and social restraint as more mature and fitting in with the culture's overarching values in the 1990s, parents' and teachers' concerns about reticent behaviors and the potential negative impacts on social development have since become more prevalent (Hart et al., 2000). Thus, practices that can come to the aid of reticent children are being recognized as important in coming to the aid of their social development across cultural backgrounds moving forward (Chen et al., 2014; Zhang & Xu, 2019).

The Impact of Acculturation of Chinese Immigrant Mothers on Children

Chinese families that move to the United States face the challenges of acculturation, language barriers, and the expectations of American culture for outgoing, social children. As Chinese immigrant mothers adapt to the new society in which they now reside, they are faced with the challenge of assimilating to American culture and navigating the challenges of differing cultural norms. They likely take note of the variance in parenting practices, such as the maternal patterns of expressions of affection more commonly seen in American mothers (Balkaya et al., 2018; Cheah et al., 2015; Chen 2015; Yu et al., 2018; Yu et al., 2019; Zhang & Xu, 2019). However, studies have shown that as Chinese immigrant mothers begin to adopt the new culture of their residence and no longer maintain some specific practices related to their values of origin, these mothers begin to view their own expressions of warmth in the past as less affectionate (Cheah et al., 2015; Chen et al., 2015; Kho et al., 2019). Some suggest that this form of

acculturation, known as assimilation (Berry, 1997; Calzada et al., 2009; Vu et al., 2019), may better allow for reticent young children to receive the warmth they need in an American context, though this may require mothers to leave behind some aspects of their ethnic Chinese identity and traditional practices.

As they acculturate, Chinese immigrant mothers have been found to contribute to their reticent children's formation of peer relationships by helping their child adjust to the new culture in various ways (Calzada et al., 2009; Chen et al., 2015; Kho et al., 2019; Vu et al., 2019; Yu et al., 2018). For example, Chinese mothers with a proficiency in the English language tend to open up more opportunities for their children by providing access to American resources (Balkaya et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2015; Vu et al., 2019). One study in particular showed that Chinese mothers more acculturated to American society were able to provide increased socialization opportunities among their children because of the relationships they had made with American friends or neighbors (Balkaya et al., 2018). The modeling of these mothers' own social interactions with their American peers can also create a visual example for reticent children in communicating with peers and a framework for their transition into school.

While children may benefit from the acculturation practices of their mother to American society in terms of modeling proper social interaction in their new culture, Chinese American children also greatly benefit from the maintenance of some salient aspects of their mother's Chinese cultural identity (Calzada et al., 2009; Vu et al., 2019). For example, young children seem to report the same cultural orientation as their mothers (Kho et al., 2019) and, in many instances, are deemed dependent upon the acculturation of their mothers (Balkaya et al., 2018; Calzada et al., 2009; Chen et al., 2015; Kho et al., 2019; Vu et al., 2019). For this reason, as their mothers acculturate while still maintaining a level of their Chinese identity, these children show fewer externalizing and internalizing behaviors (Calzada et al., 2009). This is especially significant among reticent Chinese American children, who then experience higher levels of adaptive behavior and fewer internalizing problems (Calzada et al. 2009). This sense of cultural identity increases the child's odds of positively developing necessary prosocial behaviors and overcoming their social inhibitions (Balkaya et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2014; Main et al., 2017; Yu et al., 2018). As Chinese immigrant mothers teach their child about their heritage and ethnic identity during the acculturation process, they can use aspects of their Chinese culture to assist their reticent children in developing their social skills within the context of their dual cultural identity.

Because there are significant correlations among Chinese immigrant mothers' adaption to American society and maintenance of their original ethnic identity on their children's adaptive behavior, the most beneficial form of acculturation may be biculturalism, otherwise referred to as integration (Balkaya et al., 2018; Berry, 1997; Calzada et al., 2009; Chen et al., 2015; Vu et al., 2019). Maintenance of an immigrant mother's ethnic identity has been shown to serve as a protection against ailments of typical minority groups such as marginalization (Calzada et al., 2009; Vu et al., 2019). Mothers who have internally resolved their identity as a Chinese woman have been shown to be better equipped to positively participate in American society, which may in turn provide support for their children's social development (Vu et al., 2019). Biculturalism may provide Chinese American mothers the unique opportunity to create the ideal fit for their children's needs by drawing from each culture's values, such as learning English to help their child progress in school while still talking about their Chinese upbringing to help their child understand their family's culture of origin. Other examples of this may include interacting with neighbors and participating in their customs to teach their child proper social interaction while still teaching the child pride in their ethnic heritage in the home. In the case of reticent children, this combination of integrating aspects of each culture the child belongs to may greatly benefit their individual needs (Berry, 1997; Calzada et al., 2009). Because the acculturation of immigrant mothers is related to their children's emerging socialization, Chinese American mothers who maintain many aspects of their Chinese identity while adapting to American society can potentially provide the best environment for their reticent children to develop optimally.

Conclusion

Chinese American reticent children have the unique experience of living within two social contexts of Chinese values and American values (Balkaya et al., 2018; Cheah et al., 2015; Chen et al., 2015; Kho et al., 2019; Main et al., 2017; Vu et al., 2019; Yu et al., 2018; Yu et al., 2019;

Zhang & Xu, 2019). The outcomes of their upbringing may differ depending upon the adaptation mothers make as they adjust to the cultural norms of American society (Balkaya et al., 2018; Berry, 1997; Calzada et al., 2009; Cheah et al., 2015; Chen et al., 2015; Kho et al., 2019; Vu et al., 2019; Yu et al., 2018). By contrast, some researchers suggest that Chinese immigrant mothers who reject American society, meaning they avoid American constructs and embody only Chinese ways, can limit the opportunities of their children to integrate well into school settings and develop healthy peer relationships (Berry, 1997; Calzada et al., 2009; Vu et al., 2019). Likewise, Chinese immigrant mothers who fully assimilate into American culture, meaning they reject their Chinese identity and adopt only American beliefs, may hamper their child's ability to have healthy identity development as they mature (Berry, 1997; Calzada et al., 2009; Vu et al., 2019). Chinese American children specifically dealing with social inhibitions appear to experience the greatest boost to their social development as their mother finds the place for respecting the family's ethnic identity while adopting some American customs, learning the language, and creating relationships with other Americans (Berry, 1997; Calzada et al., 2009; Vu et al., 2019). In summary, this type of acculturation of Chinese immigrant mothers appears to buffer reticent young children against a negative trajectory of development as they overcome their social inhibitions and develop healthy social skills during their early, developing years (Balkaya et al., 2018; Calzada et al., 2009; Cheah et al., 2015; Chen et al., 2015; Chen et al., 2014; Vu et al., 2019; Yu et al., 2018).

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