Ethnic Socialization by Chinese American Parents:

Content and Correlation with Immigration Status

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Introduction

My research mentor and I are second-generation Chinese Americans. Both of our parents were immigrants from Chinese-speaking lands. However, my mentor and I differ greatly in the level of Chinese language proficiency, and of attachment to the Chinese cultural heritage and ethnic community. These differences prompted us to pose the following questions, which will be addressed in the paper: How does ethnic socialization on the part of our and other Chinese American parents explain for the differences in the development of their children's ethnic identity, self-concept and racial attitudes? What are the environmental variables that affect parental ethnic socialization among Chinese American[1] families, and to what extent?

In this paper, I am presenting findings from a research study which examined a) the content of ethnic socialization among Chinese American parents, and b) the frequency of ethnic socialization behaviors as they relate to immigration status. Other sociodemographic variables related to immigration status, e.g., language use and ethnic composition of social networks, will also be examined.

Ethnic Socialization: Concept and Theory

Ethnic or racial socialization has been defined as a process by which parents impart specific messages and practices that relate their ethnicity or race with identity, interpersonal relationships, and social status (Thornton, Chatters, Taylor & Allen, 1990). Other authors have similarly used the term "ethnic socialization" to label the parental transmittal of ethnic and cultural information to the child (Smith, 1996; Hughes & Cross, 1997; Phinney & Chavira, 1995; Stevenson, 1994). According to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, this process

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[1] In my paper, I will use "Chinese American" and "Chinese immigrant" interchangeably due to the study's focus on first-generation Chinese American parents.

is affected by contextual relationships, such as child-parent and family-neighborhood relationships.

Within the family unit, the parental role in the socialization process of children is significant; the

messages that parents impart to their children are laden with values, attitudes and behaviors that

reflect the parents' experiences with and position in relation to the mainstream society.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) conceptualized a socio-ecological system to describe the various

levels of interaction between individual, group, and ideological contexts of the human society.

Parental ethnic socialization occurs at the microlevel of this social ecosystem. It is comprised of

parental perceptions and responses to the attitudes, values and ideologies of the macrosystem

(e.g., stereotypes about minority status and ethnicity), that result from interactions with

macrolevel elements, such as the workplace and community. Another component of influence on

ethnic socialization is the "social location" of the parent, such as socioeconomic and immigration

status. For ethnic minority groups, social location involves: 1) the history of migration and

treatment of an ethnic minority group in the United States, 2) how similar or deviant from the

mainstream culture are the characteristics of the ethnic minority group's culture (e.g., language,

customs and practices) and 3) the ethnic group's status in the mainstream society, such as that

relating to notions of ethnic minority and inferiority (Phinney & Chavira, 1995). Hence, the

content and function of ethnic or racial socialization differ across ethnicity as they relate to the

ethnic groups' experiences in the United States.

In recent years, ethnic socialization among African Americans, Mexican Americans, and

Japanese Americans, has been examined in the literature (Smith, 1996; Hughes & Cross, 1997;

Phinney & Chavira, 1995; Thornton, Chatters, Taylor & Allen, 1990; Knight, Bernal, Garza, Cota

& Ocampo, 1993). Though research on Chinese Americans has increased steadily over the years,

little has been said in regards to the nature and content of ethnic socialization among this ethnic

minority group in the United States. To date, only one study looked at socialization among Chinese Americans; however, the study primarily focused on child outcomes of parental socialization, such as the child's ethnic identity and self-concept, rather than the parental role in ethnic socialization (Ou & McAdoo, 1993). Other literature on Chinese Americans mostly revolve around ethnic identity and the acculturation process (Rosenthal & Feldman, 1990; Rosenthal & Feldman, 1992; Sue, 1989), and child-rearing practices and attitudes (Lin & Fu, 1990; Chiu, 1987).

The parental role in ethnic socialization has been characterized as a "buffer" which filters or elaborates on information emanating from outer levels of the social ecosystem (Thornton, Chatters, Taylor & Allen, 1990; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Parental behaviors that reflect this role serve to protect children from macrolevel or environmental influences deemed developmentally detrimental by the parents. Other researchers have also depicted a mediational model of parental ethnic socialization, where parents control the amount of influence family background structures (e.g., generation of migration, acculturation, ethnic identity, language, and cultural knowledge of parent) have on the child's ethnic identity and ethnically-based behaviors (Knight, Bernal, Garza, Cota & Ocampo, 1993) However, both of these characterizations of the parental role in ethnic socialization were based on studies with African American and Mexican American families. The applicability of such descriptives on the elements of ethnic socialization (as delineated in the literature) to the research on Chinese American families is yet to be examined.

Chinese Immigration to the United States

The Chinese were the first Asian ethnic group to migrate to the United States (Takaki, 1989). The earliest immigrants were male laborers who came to work in the Californian gold mines and on the Transcontinental Railroad during the mid-1800's. Though some of the laborers

returned to their families in China, many of them stayed in the United States, establishing small

ethnic communities ("Chinatowns") in San Francisco and New York City. However, strong anti-

Chinese sentiments led to the signing of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, which prohibited the

entry of all Chinese, with the exception of officials, teachers, students and merchants, to the

United States. During the second World War, the political alliance between the United States and

China led to the repeal of the Act, and the doors of immigration (though small due to restrictive

quotas) were opened once again; however, it was not until the 1965 Immigration Act that the

doors were swung wide open, resulting in the dramatic increase in numbers of the Chinese

immigrants that we see today. The Chinese are the third largest group of immigrants after the

Mexicans and Filipinos (Takaki, 1989). Furthermore, the ratio of American-born to foreign-born

Chinese living in Chinese communities, or Chinatowns, changed significantly after 1965: the

population was transformed from 61 percent American-born to 63 percent foreign-born (Takaki,

1989).

Unlike the immigrants from the W.W.II period, who were mostly professionals and

political refugees, and the earliest group of immigrants, who were mostly men and came from

poor and war-torn regions of China, the post-1965 immigrants represent a much more

heterogeneous group of families and individuals from various socio-economic and educational

backgrounds (Cheung & Dobkin de Rios, 1982). These new immigrants consist of educated and

skilled professionals/entrepreneurs as well as poor and unskilled laborers, resulting in the

formation of a bipolar Chinese American community (Takaki, 1989; Cheung & Dobkin de Rios,

1982). The existence of these intragroup differences among Chinese American families indicates

a rich territory for research, particularly that of ethnic socialization as it relates to

sociodemographic predictors and correlates.

Themes of Ethnic Socialization across Ethnic Groups

The research literature in the field of racial/ethnic socialization provides a variety of themes that characterize the parental ethnic socialization process. Boykin & Toms (1985) identified three main themes in the socialization of African American children: 1) understanding African-American culture (cultural theme); 2) getting along in mainstream society (mainstream theme); and 3) dealing with racism or preparing for bias and prejudice (minority theme). In another study on African American families, the minority theme and cultural theme were also detected in parents' socialization messages (Thornton, Chatters, Taylor & Allen, 1990). Hughes & Cross (1997) likewise described three dimensions of racial socialization that include: 1) teaching about African American history and cultural heritage (cultural theme); 2) preparing children for experiences of prejudice and discrimination (minority theme); and 3) fostering mistrust of whites (minority theme). Demo & Hughes (1990) employed the terms "integrative/assertive" (e.g., pride in African American culture as well as positive interactions with Whites) and "cautious/defensive" (e.g., awareness of prejudice and maintaining a protective distance from Whites) to similarly describe the mainstreaming and minority themes of ethnic socialization among African American families, respectively.

The one study that examined socialization in Chinese American families identified four aspects of socialization: 1) maintenance of Chinese language community; 2) pride in Chinese culture; 3) belief in Chinese culture; and 4) preservation of Chinese customs (Ou & McAdoo, 1993). However, the study failed to delineate other aspects of socialization other than the cultural component, although the measures were constructed to tap into the minority theme as well. The emphasis on cultural rather than minority themes seemed to indicate the parents' positive attitudes towards Chinese culture and heritage. However, a closer look at the research sample revealed

that 77% of the participant families were middle-class, and 23% were upper-class. As the study

suggested, the sample's high socioeconomic status was probably responsible for the parents'

positive view of the immigration experience, as well as their focus on teaching their children the

value of Chinese language and customs (Ou & McAdoo, 1993). Moreover, the sample was

drawn from a suburban community not heavily populated by Chinese immigrant groups. Hence,

positive attitudes might reflect the suburban community's acceptance of a minority culture that is

not as pervasive or "threatening" as those who inhabit urban areas such as New York City and

Los Angeles.

As Ou & McAdoo's (1993) study indicated, ethnic socialization among Chinese

Americans (as well as other groups) of lower socioeconomic status has not been well examined.

In two studies that examined parenting strategies among Chinese American families, the samples

were both middle-class and suburban (Kelley & Tseng, 1992; Lin & Fu, 1990). Phinney &

Chavira's (1995) study on parental ethnic socialization and adolescent coping strategies and

Williams' (1996) study on ethnic socialization of African American children both utilized samples

of mostly middle-class families. Researchers have suggested that minority parents of low

socioeconomic status and who live in low-income ethnic communities may harbor more negative

attitudes about race and their own ethnic/cultural background because of harsher living

conditions; these attitudes may also be reflected in the socialization messages the parents impart

to their children. Hence, an examination of Chinese American families of lower socioeconomic

status, especially in the context of immigration and change, has special significance in

understanding the content and nature of ethnic socialization by Chinese American parents, as the

present study attempts to demonstrate.

Culture-specific Aspects of Ethnic Socialization

Though common themes of ethnic socialization messages that parents impart to their children run across race and ethnicity, differences in style or emphasis on specific components of ethnic socialization exist between ethnic groups. Phinney and Chavira (1995) reported that African-American parents discussed the issue of prejudice more frequently than Japanese and Mexican American parents in their sample. Yet, both Japanese American and African American parents were more likely to stress adaptation to mainstream society than Mexican American parents (Phinney & Chavira, 1995). In addition to differences in style, there are also differences in the development and function of the specific themes in ethnic socialization. For example, Chinese Americans and African Americans may both emphasize mainstreaming when socializing their children; however, the underlying reasons for the emphasis may not be the same for both groups. These distinctions arise from the varying nature of each ethnic group's experience as minorities in mainstream American society, such as the history of the group's migration, whether the discrimination faced by a particular group in a specific social context is more overt or subtle, and the social stereotypes that are attached to ethnic group membership (Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990).

For African Americans, parental ethnic socialization behaviors involve encouraging their children to assimilate into the mainstream culture in order to be successful academically and financially. At the same time, ethnic socialization focuses on recognizing and overcoming barriers that were established as a result of racial discrimination. For example, in addition to the minority and cultural themes, Thornton, Chatters, Taylor & Allen (1990) observed that themes revolving around individual character and achievement oriented goals were evident. It also has been found that African American parents tend to place greater emphasis on the development of self-esteem

than on teaching about race-specific issues such as racial equality (Marshall, 1995). The

categorization of socialization themes by Demo & Hughes (1990) likewise incorporated the

similar theme of self-esteem and individual character in their "individualistic/universalistic"

dichotomy. Researchers suggest that these socialization practices stem from a long history and

current reality of racial prejudice that manifested itself in schools, the media, and other community

settings (Spencer, Kim and Marshall, 1987; Thompson, 1994). Hence, the individualistic or

achievement-oriented theme of socialization may in effect represent a form of coping strategy that

African American parents employ in dealing with race-related issues (Williams, 1996).

Chinese American parents face similar issues when socializing their children about culture

and minority status. However, unlike African Americans, Chinese Americans, especially

immigrants of lower socioeconomic status and educational attainment, face additional challenges

such as the language barrier and other cultural differences (Cheung & Dobkin de Rios, 1982). In

addition to their status as an ethnic minority, the limited or lack of ability to speak the language of

their new country of residence spells more frustration for these Chinese American immigrants as

they attempt to find employment or deal with mundane aspects of everyday living within the

mainstream society. The need to overcome cultural obstacles in addition to racial ones influences

the types of ethnic socialization messages immigrant parents employ. Hence, socialization

messages pertaining to adaptation and mainstreaming may stem from the parents' belief that, in

order to succeed in America, their children must obtain an American education and learn to speak

English well (Wong, 1985).

In addition, Chinese immigrants bring with them a culturally unique set of concepts and

ideals about family life that is deeply rooted in Chinese tradition and philosophy. Confucian

principles, such as *hsiao* (filial piety or respect for authority in the family/social hierarchy) and *li*

(social conformity in relation to maintaining harmony among self and others), have strongly impacted parenting views and strategies among the Chinese (Lin & Fu, 1990; Chao, 1983; Glenn, 1983; Ho, 1981). Other culturally significant aspects include self-discipline, the importance of education, and the belief that "change is possible and is within an individual's own control" (Lin & Fu, 1990, p.429; Chiu, 1987; Wolf, 1970). Rosenthal and Feldman (1990) aptly characterized the Chinese family as "the pivot of Chinese culture," since it is the principal mode of transmitting Chinese cultural knowledge and values to the next generation (p. 497). This transmission of Chinese culture via parent-child interactions also holds true for Chinese immigrant families; however, the parents' exposure over time to the contrasting ideologies of the Western world may also play a role in the extent they rear their children in traditionally Chinese ways. A socialization study which examined immigrant Indian and Pakistani families (groups that share common cultural values with the Chinese such as interdependence and deference for age and authority) indicated that, although they were willing to accept changes in the more practical aspects of life (e.g., language use, observation of social customs), these immigrant parents strongly resisted any changes in the core values of their culture (e.g., respect for elders' decision in matchmaking) (Wakil, Siddique & Wakil, 1981). Though some Chinese American families have been described as "straddling" both the American and Chinese cultures, whether such functional biculturalism as described in the literature for other Asian immigrant groups exists for Chinese American families still needs to be examined (Wong, 1985).

Immigration Status as a Sociodemographic Predictor of Ethnic Socialization

In addition to delineating the components of ethnic socialization among Chinese American families, the present study investigated possible sociodemographic correlates of ethnic socialization. In the present paper, the principle family background variable examined is

immigration status. Research on the role of immigration history (i.e. length of stay in the United States) and its impact on Chinese American parenting behaviors is clearly lacking; to date, only one study on Chinese American socialization practices considered immigration status as a variable (Ou & McAdoo, 1993). Rosenthal and Feldman (1990) have suggested that immigrants may uphold the values of their new culture more strongly than non-immigrants. However, whether intragroup differences exist within the Chinese American immigrant population in terms of immigration history has yet to be examined.

Research findings on ethnic socialization of Mexican American families did indicate that immigration status was significantly related to how parents taught their children about Mexican and American cultures (Knight, Bernal, Garza, Cota & Ocampo, 1993). In families that had more recently immigrated fathers, the children were taught more about Mexican culture, and ethnic pride and discrimination by their mothers. Though no correlation was found between socialization behaviors and mother's generation of migration, a weaker but positive correlation existed for both mother's and father's generation of migration and the family's level of identification with American culture. More specifically, the longer the parents had stayed in the United States since migration, the more likely they promoted mainstream American values in their children. On the other hand, parents who were the more recent immigrants tended to preserve Mexican culture and heritage within the home (Knight, Bernal, Garza, Cota & Ocampo, 1993).

Other sociodemographic variables related to immigration status that were examined in the present study are:

Language Use and Child's Age. In the study which examined the socialization of Chinese American children, it was found that among families with younger boys (i.e., first and second graders) and older girls (i.e., fifth and sixth graders), the longer the parents' length of stay in the

United States, the less Chinese and the more English was spoken at the home. Moreover,

parents' attitudes toward Chinese culture were less positive among families that had immigrated

to the United States for a longer period of time (Ou & McAdoo, 1993). Hence, it was predicted

for the present study that language use would be significantly correlated with immigration status

and influential in the nature of parental ethnic socialization messages.

Ethnic Composition of Social Networks. Many new Chinese immigrants begin their lives

in the United States in ethnically homogenous communities called Chinatowns (Wong, 1985). In

these communities where immigrant families live and work in a virtually "Chinese" environment, it

is possible for these families to "maintain their cultural, economic, social, and psychological

independence from the larger society" (Ou & McAdoo, 1993, p. 247). However, over time, it

was expected that parents would become more exposed to race and minority issues as they moved

their families out of Chinatown, found work in racially heterogeneous establishments, and had

social networks that are no longer exclusively Chinese. In turn, these changes over time would be

reflected in parental ethnic socialization messages, particularly those that involved preparing

children for bias and prejudice and/or teaching children diversity and bicultural values.

In summary, I hypothesized in the present study the delineation of the following

components of ethnic socialization among Chinese American families: a) Maintaining Cultural

Heritage; b) Preparing for Bias; c) Teaching Biculturalism and Diversity; and d) Mainstreaming.

Furthermore, my hypotheses regarding the relationship between immigration status and each

component of ethnic socialization were: 1) The more recently the parents immigrated to the

United States, the more they will socialize their children in traditionally Chinese ways; 2) The

more recently the parents immigrated to the United States, the more they will encourage their

children to adjust to American culture; 3) The more recently the parents immigrated to the United

States, the <u>less</u> they will talk to their child about race and minority issues; and 4) The more

recently the parents immigrated to the United States, the <u>less</u> they will teach their child about

biculturalism and ethnic diversity.

As the research literature indicates, it is theoretically possible for parents to incorporate all

four ethnic socialization themes in their socialization practices with similar levels of emphasis and

frequency (Knight, Bernal, Garza, Cota & Ocampo, 1993; Phinney & Chavira, 1995; Hughes &

Cross, 1997). However, as the current study attempts to illustrate, contextual variables based on

ethnic and cultural differences may explain for the variation in the character and occurrence of

ethnic socialization practices across ethnic and racial groups.

Method

<u>Sample</u>

One hundred and seven Chinese American parents with children between the ages of four

and nine[2] participated in the study. About seventy-two percent of the respondents were mothers.

The participants were primarily first-generation parents (or at least one parent was first

generation) living in the metropolitan New York area. Participants were recruited mainly through

Asian American community organizations, a summer camp in Chinatown, and personal contacts.

The majority of the respondents were married (88.8%). The sample is primarily working

class. Among the mothers, 38.8% had less than a high school education, 41.8% were high school

graduates, and 19.4% had college education or higher. Levels of education were more evenly

distributed among the fathers: 33.3% had less than high school, 37.6% graduated from high

school, and those who had some or graduated from college comprised 29.0%. The majority of

the respondents lived in Chinatown and Brooklyn, 34% and 30% of the sample, respectively.

Other areas of residence reported include Queens (19%), Manhattan (excluding Chinatown, 9%),

Staten Island (3%), the Bronx (2%), and the tri-state area (3%). The largest percentage of

mother's length of stay in the United States was 10-15 years (55%), with 22% less than 10 years

and 23% over 15 years.

<u>Instruments</u>

The two-part parental self-report questionnaire consisted of: 1) <u>Parent and Family</u>

<u>Background Questionnaire</u> and 2) <u>Reported Parental Ethnic Socialization</u>. The entire

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[2] The focus on parents with children in this age group stems from two reasons: 1) parents in general are less likely to socialize children younger than four years since they are not yet mature enough to internalize parental socialization messages, and 2) parents become less prominent as socialization agents in their children's development when the children reach their adolescent years (Hughes & Cross, 1997).

questionnaire was translated into written Chinese (the written language is standard for both

Cantonese and Mandarin dialect speakers), and back-translations were made to ensure accuracy

of the items. The translated items appeared immediately below or next to the original English

language items throughout the questionnaire.

Parent and Family Demographics gathered the respondent's and spouse's descriptive data.

Three family background variables were delineated. Immigration status was measured by

participant's country of birth and length of stay in the United States since migration. Language

use was measured by participant's language proficiency and preferences, primary language spoken

in participant's home and neighborhood, as well as child's language proficiency and preferences,

and child's level of ease in speaking Chinese in different contexts (e.g., at home, at school, at the

grocery store, etc.). Ethnic composition of social networks was measured by a Likert-type scale

(1 = Almost exclusively Asians, Asian-American, or Oriental; 5 = Almost exclusively Anglos,

Blacks, Hispanics, or other non-Asian groups), whose items include ethnic composition of

participant's friends, their children's friends, school and neighborhood, and peer preferences of

both participant and participant's child.

The Reported Parental Ethnic Socialization scale contained twenty-six items which

measured the frequency of specific ethnic socialization behaviors by asking the participants

whether they ever engaged in the behavior with their child ("0" = No) and, if so, how often did

this occur (1 = Never; 5 = Very Often) in the past. In their study on racial socialization among

African American families, Hughes & Cross (1997) developed and implemented the original

protocol, the item content of which was based on focus group interviews with parents from dual-

earner African American families (Hughes & Dumont, 1993). The protocol used in the current

study was adapted for the research of Chinese American families. The adapted protocol included

additional items that sought to examine the possible role that Confucian principles, such as filial piety, parental control, respect for elders and emphasis on education, could play in the socialization process.

Procedure

The participants received the self-report questionnaire along with consent forms from their children through the summer camp or school, or directly from the researchers. The paper-and-pencil questionnaires were completed by the participants at home, and returned to the researchers. The participants were free to inquire the researchers regarding the research project or questionnaire items.

Techniques for analyzing the gathered data include factor analysis of ethnic socialization items, and Pearson correlations of sociodemographic variables and ethnic socialization components. Regression analysis was also used to determine the main effects of immigration status on the factors of parental ethnic socialization.

Results

Components of Ethnic Socialization

A factor analysis of the reported ethnic socialization items yielded the following four components of ethnic socialization: 1) Teaching Biculturalism and Diversity (9 items; Cronbach's alpha = .84); 2) Preparation for Bias (6 items; Cronbach's alpha = .83); 3) Maintaining Cultural Heritage (4 items; Cronbach's alpha = .70); and 4) Mainstreaming (3 items; Cronbach's alpha = .68). (See Table 1.) One item was deleted because of loading into more than one category (Be proud of Chinese heritage), and three items were deleted because of loading at less than .35 (Be friends with other Chinese kids, Maintain harmony and avoid conflicts, and Respect for elders).

Construct variables of ethnic socialization were created by taking the mean frequency of each component.

Means, standard deviations and zero-order correlations between the major study variables are presented in Table 2. A comparison of means yielded the following among the four hypothesized components of ethnic socialization: 1.81 (SD = .92) for Teaching Biculturalism and Diversity; .65 (SD = .83) for Preparation for Bias; 2.07 (SD = 1.01) for Maintaining Chinese Cultural Identity; and 2.22 (SD = 1.22) for Mainstreaming. Though the four hypothesized components of ethnic socialization by Chinese American parents show significant positive correlations with each other, the mean frequency of ethnic socialization behaviors across these components are low, ranging from "1 = Never" to "3 = Occasionally."

Sociodemographic Predictors of Immigration Status

Pearson correlations revealed significant relationships between both parents' length of stay in the United States and parents' age (r = .29, p < .01 for mothers; r = .21, p < .05 for fathers), and parents' levels of educational attainment (r = .61, p< .01 for mothers; r = .52, p < .01 for fathers). However, only father's stay in the United States significantly correlated with child's age (r = .24, p < .05). Significant correlations were also found between mother's and father's length stay in the United States and English language use at home (r = .34, p < .01, and r = .35, p < .01, respectively), but only mother's length of stay indicated a moderate relationship with English language use in the neighborhood (r = .22, p < .05). Though father's immigration history was the only significant correlate of ethnic composition of child friendships (r = .24, p < .05), both mother's and father's immigration history variables moderately correlated with child language variables, i.e., Child Speaks English (r = .22, p < .05 for mothers; r = .21, p < 05 for fathers) and Child's Language Preference (r = .23, p < .05 for mothers; r = .39, p < .01 for fathers).

Immigration Status and Components of Ethnic Socialization

Fathers' length of stay in the United States was significantly and negatively correlated with the following three ethnic socialization components: Maintaining Cultural Heritage (r = -.32, p < .01); Mainstreaming (r = -.34, p < .01); and Preparing for Bias (r = -28, p < .01). Though the mother's length of stay in the United States highly correlated with that of the father's (r = .55, p < .01), there were only two, however less significant, correlations between mother's length of stay in the United States and components of ethnic socialization, i.e., Maintaining Cultural Heritage (r = -.24, p < .05) and Mainstreaming (r = -.25, p < .05).

A regression analysis of parental immigration history on the components of parental ethnic socialization is presented in Table 3. Each ethnic socialization component was assigned as a dependent variable, and mother's and father's lengths of stay in the United States as the independent predictor variables. The predictor variables were entered simultaneously. The regression analysis revealed that parental immigration status accounted for a significant amount of the variance for Preparing for Bias (R^2 = .08, F = 4.11, p < .05), Maintaining Cultural Heritage (R^2 = .11, F = 5.57, p < .05), and Mainstreaming (R^2 = .12, F = 6.21, p < .05). Standardized regression coefficients indicated that the more recently a father had immigrated to the United States, the more parents reported Preparing for Bias (β = -.31, p < .05), Maintaining Cultural Heritage (β = -.27, p < .05), and Mainstreaming (β = -.29, p < .05) behaviors. Parental immigration status did not significantly predict Teaching Biculturalism and Diversity.

Discussion

The findings of this study revealed several themes of ethnic socialization by Chinese American parents, as well as the unique role parental immigration status served in predicting

ethnic socialization behaviors. As previously stated, a similar set of ethnic socialization themes emerged for Chinese Americans as they did for African American and Mexican American families, specifically the cultural, minority, and mainstreaming themes. However, Chinese American parents were less likely to engage in ethnic socialization behaviors, particularly those that tapped into issues of minority status and prejudice, than African American and Mexican American parents as previously indicated in the literature. This finding highlights the contextual and culture-specific nature of parental ethnic socialization as examined across racial and ethnic lines.

Most of the Chinese American parents in the sample either "never" or "rarely" discussed racial and minority issues with their children. This phenomenon suggests a combination of macrolevel or contextual influences, such as mainstream attitudes towards skin color and historical developments based on immigration. The notion that different levels of bias exist based on skin color (e.g., racial bias is more pronounced for African Americans and Native Americans than for Asian groups) has been suggested in the literature (Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990). Moreover, other issues, such as those pertaining to economics and education, may be more salient than race-related ones for these first-generation Chinese American parents.

Nonetheless, the data revealed several significant trends of ethnic socialization and parental immigration status. In summary, my findings were that: 1) the more recent the father immigrated to the United States, the more likely parents would encourage their children to maintain their Chinese cultural heritage; 2) the more recent the father immigrated to the United States, the more likely parents would encourage their children to be part of the American mainstream; 3) the more recent the father immigrated to the United States, the more likely parents would teach their children about racial discrimination and prepare them for bias; and 4) there was no predictive relationship between parents' immigration history and teaching children about

bicultural and diversity values. In addition, correlations between immigration status and other family background variables revealed moderate to strong relationships, as expected. More specifically, the longer the parents' stay in the United States, the older and the more educated the parents were. Moreover, the more time the parents spent in the United States since migration, the more likely English was spoken at home, and the more likely children spoke and preferred to speak English.

The most significant findings were that of the predictive relationship between fathers' length of stay in the United States and components of ethnic socialization. As hypothesized, parents in families with fathers who were recent immigrants to the United States were more likely to engage in behaviors that pertain to maintaining Chinese cultural heritage and encouraging adaptation to the American mainstream in their children. As correlations between immigration status and sociodemographic variables revealed, the more recently immigrated parents tended to speak less English and had children who similarly spoke less English. Hence, these parents would tend to impart more mainstreaming messages to their children (e.g., they must speak perfect English), in order to prepare them for educational and economic success in mainstream American society. On the other hand, recently immigrated parents also encouraged their children to maintain close ties with their ethnic culture, since "the traditions [are] still fresh among [new immigrant families] because of their recent arrival" to the United States (Wong, 1985, p. 251).

Though it was revealed that father's immigration history was a significant predictor of ethnic socialization, and that mother's length of stay in the United States highly correlated with that of the father's, analyses did not indicate any significant relationship between mother's immigration history and ethnic socialization. This finding may appear as counter-intuitive, since it is generally assumed that mothers spend more time with their children, and therefore the mothers'

data should be more reflective of socialization strategies than would the fathers'. A speculation as to why father's immigration history revealed a more significant relationship with ethnic socialization behaviors has to do with a custom that many immigrant Chinese males had practiced throughout the history of Chinese migration to the United States. Chinese men were commonly the first in their prospective families to immigrate to the United States. Instead of finding a mate in their new country of residence, these immigrant Chinese males often returned to their native lands to marry, and then bring back with them their new wives to the United States. This practice was implicated in the study's sample, where the average length of stay for the father (about 15 years) was higher than that for the mother, whose average length of stay in the United States was about 13 years. Hence, the fathers' data in this sample may be more indicative of ethnic socialization strategies, since the fathers had more experience of and exposure to life in the United States than the mothers did.

Another significant finding was that the more recently the father immigrated to the United States, the more parents tended to prepare their children for bias and prejudice. This finding was contradictory to the a priori hypothesis, which was that the longer the parents had been in the United States, the more likely they would prepare their children for bias. The initial rationale was that parents who had been in the United States for longer periods of time were most likely to had encountered incidences of bias and prejudice, and hence become more attuned to these issues than parents who were more recently immigrated. However, the finding in this study did not seem to indicate this. No significant relationships were found between parental immigration status and parents', and parents' choice of, social networks. Only mother's time spent in the United States positively predicted the amount of English language use in the neighborhood, which in turn would indicate the ethnic composition of the neighborhood the family lived in (e.g., The more English, as

opposed to Chinese, is spoken in the neighborhood, more likely the neighborhood consists of

other racial and ethnic groups). Moreover, the longer the father had been in the US, the more

racially diverse the child friendships were. Though both of these correlations appeared to indicate

that parents who had been in the United States for longer periods of time were more exposed to a

racially heterogeneous social context, the findings point to the more recently immigrated fathers

(who less exposed to a racially heterogeneous social context) as those who were more likely to

discuss racism and prejudice with their children.

One speculation for this counter-intuitive finding between parental immigration status and

preparation for bias is that the limited sample size of respondents who were fathers offered less

variability in the responses to ethnic socialization items (only 28% of the respondents were

fathers, whereas 72% were mothers). However, another reason under investigation is that issues

of discrimination and minority status were probably more salient for the more recently immigrated

fathers. For their first time, these fathers were thrust into an environment where they fall at the

bottom of the economic and social hierarchy. As the data indicated, recently immigrated fathers

tended to speak less English. Hence, their frustrations with the language barrier and their social

status as members of a minority group (e.g., their inability to obtain respected and well-paying

jobs) may have translated into more frequent messages that prepare their children for future

encounters with discrimination. Interlocked with messages about bias and discrimination were

likely those that also tapped into the mainstreaming theme (e.g., the next generation must

overcome language and socioeconomic barriers), as the positive and significant correlation

between the minority and mainstreaming dimensions of ethnic socialization seemed to suggest.

Indeed, the intricate relationships between the various components of parental ethnic socialization

among Chinese Americans and its sociodemographic influences this study has presented attest to

the complexity of the subject matter, as well as opening up many possible paths in ethnic

socialization research.

Limitations and Future Research

The low incidence of parental ethnic socialization behaviors in general does not necessarily

suggest that Chinese American parents are less involved with their children's upbringing.

However, the study's focus on a virtually socioeconomically homogeneous sample (i.e., working-

class) may explain for the lack of variance in socialization behaviors. Existing descriptive

literature on Chinese immigrants does indicate that lower SES Chinese American parents work

longer hours; hence, they have less time to spend with their children, unlike their more affluent

counterparts who have the time and resources to do so (Wong, 1985). In this context, it is very

possible that ethnic socialization is compromised as well.

Hughes & Cross (1997) similarly observed that reported ethnic socialization tends to be

"more common among high SES parents of any race" (p. 19). However, as Hughes & Cross

suggested, this tendency is due to existing ethnic socialization assessment protocols that measure

by the frequency of activities, some of which depend on parental time and financial availability

(e.g., taking children to cultural events). This brings into question the type of research protocol

that is currently being used in ethnic socialization research: Do current measures of ethnic

socialization appropriately assess parenting behaviors and strategies? Do they capture the specific

needs and concerns of parents in various socioeconomic subgroups? Though the discussion of

methodology is beyond the scope of this paper, the development of a more valid protocol for

measuring ethnic socialization is an important area for future research.

Some researchers have suggested that in African American families where messages about race and minority status play a minor role in the parental socialization process, parents were most likely those who were unable to accept the negative images of African Americans as perpetuated by mainstream society, or were reluctant to discuss these issues in fear of implanting racist thoughts in their children (Thornton, Chatters, Taylor & Allen, 1990; Ogbu, 1983). It has also been found that children from such families were mostly likely to develop a low self-concept and racial dissonance, since they were ill-equipped to face the harmful influences of racism. Whether the same holds true for the Chinese American parents in the current study's sample is unclear.

This quandary suggests another direction for future research, that is, to examine the relationship between parental attitudes or beliefs about the importance of specific ethnic socialization behaviors and actual ethnic socialization behaviors parents engage in. For example, if parents do not feel that it is important to teach their children about racial issues, then that would probably explain for the low incidence of preparing their children for bias. In summary, an examination of the relationship between parental attitudes and actual behaviors may provide us with more insight as to how cultural and ecological factors differentiate parental ethnic socialization practices within the context of a single ethnic group.

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