

Cultural Models of Shyness and Parenting Among Local and Immigrant Mothers in Hong Kong

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Abstract

Children develop within a complex system of relationships that are affected by their own unique dispositions (e.g. temperament) and by the surrounding environment, including culture. Traditional Chinese culture is influenced by Confucian and Taoist philosophies, which promote self-restraint and discourage self-promotion and individualism (King & Bond, 1985). Until recently, shy behaviors were valued and associated with indices of child adjustment (Chen, Rubin, & Sun, 1992). However, in recent years as China becomes increasingly westernized, there has been an observed shift away from the preference for shyness, with confidence, sociability, and self-assertion becoming highly regarded (Hou, Chen, & Chen, 2005). Researchers also suggest that shyness in the Chinese context may encompass three types: anxious shyness, regulated shyness, and shyness towards strangers (Xu, Farver, Yu, & Zhang, 2009). However, little is known about how mothers conceptualize these three types, and how parenting of shy children might differ between local Hong Kong and Mainland immigrant caregivers.

This three-manuscript mixed-methods dissertation utilizes the developmental niche framework (Super & Harkness, 1986) to understand Chinese cultural models of shyness and parenting. Semi-structured interviews, vignettes, and surveys were collected from 116 mothers ($M_{\text{age}} = 37.91$, $SD = 4.00$) of shy kindergarten children residing in the Kowloon and New Territories districts. The first manuscript explores mothers' developmental goals and socialization strategies for their shy children. The second examines mothers' understanding of the three shy profiles and their prevalence. Finally, the third manuscript investigates parenting and temperamental correlates of anxious and regulated shyness types. These three studies contribute to our understanding of culture-specific forms of shyness and offer possible avenues for parenting interventions with Chinese parents of shy children.