Cultural orientation, parental nurturance, and parent-child conflict among Asian American parents in New York City

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ABSTRACT

Although a growing number of studies in recent years have examined the cultural values and practices as well as family relationships of Asian Americans, few have focused on Asian Americans in the East Coast, the most populous and fastest growing place of Asian Americans in the U.S. Using data from the Study of Asian American Families with a sample of 572 Asian American parents from 11 ethnic subgroups in New York City, this study examined whether parents' cultural orientations (e.g., cultural values and practices on family priority and parental authority) were associated with parental nurturance (e.g., attitudes and behaviors related to warmth, affection, and support toward their children) and conflict with their children. The results showed that parents who endorsed and engaged more toward their own cultural values and practices tended to have less parental nurturance and more conflicts with their children. These associations varied across the ethnic subgroups of Asian American parents. The mediation analyses found that parental nurturance played a significant buffering role in helping parents who adhered strongly to their own cultural values and practices reduce the conflicts with their children. The findings provide implications for culturally sensitive services and interventions, including helping Asian American immigrant parents increase intercultural interactions and parenting skills.

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1. Introduction

Cultural orientation refers to the extent to which individuals endorse and engage in the traditions, norms, values, beliefs, and practices of one or more specific cultures (Lee, Choe, Kim, & Ngo, 2000; Tsai & Chentsova-Dutton, 2002; Ying, 1995; Zhang & Tsai, 2014). In the past decades, extensive research has been conducted to explore the cultural orientations of immigrants when they face critical issues of adjustment between their original and host cultures. In particular, Asian Americans have inherited cultural values and practices that are substantially different from those in the mainstream culture in the U.S. in various domains, including parenting and child discipline (Kim, Ahn, & Lam, 2009; Lau, 2010). As Asian Americans have become one of the fastest growing minority groups in the U.S. since 1990 (Hoeffel, Rastogi, Kim, & Shahid, 2012), an increasing number of studies have examined their immigration and acculturation experiences and how these experiences influence their cultural orientations as well as family relationships and wellbeing, including parenting and parent-child conflict. While most of these studies have been done in the West Coast of the U.S., especially in California, few are in the East Coast regions, including New York City, which has the largest Asian American population (1.1 million, or 13.9% of the total population in 2010 Census data), more than the combination

of the next three cities with the largest number of Asian Americans (i.e., Los Angeles, San Jose, and San Francisco) (Hoeffel et al., 2012).

This study used a sample of 572 Asian American parents in New York City to examine whether parents' cultural orientations were associated with parental nurturance and conflict with their children due to different cultural orientations. Further mediation analyses investigated whether parents' cultural orientations were associated with parental nurturance, and parental nurturance in turn was linked to parent-child conflict. In addition, moderation analyses were conducted to explore whether the associations of cultural orientations with parental nurturance and parent-child conflict varied significantly in some subgroups measured by parents' ethnicity, gender, the number of years in the U.S., and education.

1.1. Cultural orientation in the processes of acculturation and enculturation

Two cultural orientations of immigrants and ethnic minorities have been identified in the literature, including acculturation (i.e., the process of adaptation to the mainstream or host culture) and enculturation (i.e., the process of maintenance or adaptation to their heritage cultures) (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2013; Tao, Zhou, Lau, & Liu, 2013). Early research on acculturation since the beginning of the 20th century, such as Robert Park's three-stage model (i.e., contact, accommodation, and assimilation), postulated that immigrants experienced a progressive and irreversible process of cultural assimilation to the host culture (Padilla

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& Perez, 2003). Empirical evidence and theories developed in the past three decades have suggested that acculturation is a dynamic and multidimensional psychological process with different levels of engagement in the heritage and host cultures of immigrants (Berry, 1993; Bornstein & Bohr, 2011; Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2013; Padilla & Perez, 2003; Tsai & Chentsova-Dutton, 2002). Moreover, while adapting to the host culture, many immigrants also try to preserve their own languages, traditional values and beliefs, and cultural practices, which is a process of enculturation (Kim, 2007; Kim et al., 2009; Park, Kim, Chiang, & Ju, 2010; Tao et al., 2013). In this process, parents who strongly endorse their heritage cultures tend to talk to their children about their homeland countries, speak native languages at home, and maintain social networks with others from the same ethnic groups, which ultimately help them retain their cultural traditions and identities (Lo, 2010).

In contrast to unidimensional models of cultural orientations, which assume acculturation and enculturation to be opposite ends of a single continuum, bi-dimensional models allow them to be relatively independent processes, and thus acculturation to the mainstream culture does not necessarily diminish enculturation to the heritage cultures of immigrants and non-immigrant minorities (Kim, 2007; Kim et al., 2009; Park et al., 2010; Tao et al., 2013; Tsai & Chentsova-Dutton, 2002; Zhang & Tsai, 2014). Therefore, cultural orientations can be used to indicate the degree to which individuals agree with and engage in cultural values and practices of the mainstream culture, their heritage cultures, and other ethnic minority cultures, which may be changing or relatively stable during a specific time period. Some recent studies have used bi-dimensional models to investigate the cultural orientations of Asian Americans (Kim et al., 2009; Park et al., 2010; Tao et al., 2013; Zhang & Tsai, 2014).

To assess the cultural orientations of individuals across and within ethnic groups and capture the dynamic processes of acculturation and enculturation, measures and instruments in multiple domains have been proposed and used in the literature. Two sets of the main domains that have been widely studied include cultural values (e.g., endorsement of traditions, norms, social relations, and family and gender roles) and cultural practices (e.g., language use and proficiency, food preferences, and social affiliations such as friendship) (Chung, 2001; Hong, 2001; Kim et al., 2009; Lee et al., 2000; Lo, 2010; Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2013; Tao et al., 2013; Tsai & Chentsova-Dutton, 2002; Ying & Han, 2008; Zhang & Tsai, 2014). It is important to separate the domain of cultural practices in cultural orientations from the domain of cultural values, because they may not be closely related and studies have shown different relationships between cultural orientations and individuals' adjustment in these domains (Costigan & Dokis, 2006; Tao et al., 2013). In addition, it is important to measure to what extent individuals endorse specific cultural values (e.g., family priority and parental authority), because specific cultural values may not be directly linked to, or reflected by, some general cultural orientations (e.g., the endorsement of family priority may not be highly associated with whether respondents speak only English or only their native languages) (Zhang & Tsai, 2014).

1.2. Cultural orientation, parenting, and parent-child conflict among Asian Americans

Influenced by traditional values and religions (e.g., Confucianism, Buddhism, and Hinduism), many Asian cultures emphasize the importance of family and filial piety, which promote family priority, parental authority, and children's obedience, and thus play a significant role in family structure and parent-child interactions (Larsen, Kim-Goh, & Nguyen, 2008; Lau, Takeuchi, & Alegría, 2006; Zhai & Gao, 2009). In a hierarchical parent-child relationship shaped by these cultural values, children have obligations to fulfill family responsibilities and respect their parents and elders, while parents have the rights and responsibilities to discipline and control their children in order to help them

succeed (Chao & Tseng, 2002; Farver, Xu, Bhadha, Narang, & Lieber, 2007; Fung & Lau, 2010). In doing so, many Asian parents train their children to be hardworking, self-disciplined, and obedient through high expectations, strict discipline, firm control, and continuous monitoring (Choi, Kim, Kim, & Park, 2013; Park et al., 2010). Meanwhile, passive control and harsh discipline (e.g., shaming, criticism, threats of abandonment, and negative social comparison) are also often used to help children foster strong moral compassion and adhere to social norms, especially when they do not meet parents' expectations, misbehave, or bring shame to the family (Farver et al., 2007; Fung & Lau, 2010; Larsen et al., 2008; Takeuchi et al., 2007). Physical discipline, such as spanking and striking, is often not seen as child abuse but rather a form of parental involvement and affection (Choi et al., 2013; Larsen et al., 2008; Lau et al., 2006).

Moreover, immigrant parents and their children, particularly first-generation immigrants and their children who were born in the U.S. or immigrated at young ages, often differ in cultural orientations, because through school, media, and peers, their children absorb the mainstream cultural values and social behaviors at a much higher rate than their immigrant parents (Kim et al., 2009; Lim, Yeh, Liang, Lau, & McCabe, 2008). The gaps in cultural orientations between parents and children due to differential rates of acculturation and enculturation can lead to family dissonance and parent-child conflict (Kim et al., 2009; Park, 2001). In particular, studies have shown that Asian American parents tend to adhere to traditional values and cultural practices more strongly than their children, while their children more readily relinquish Asian traditions and engage in the mainstream cultural values and practices (Kim et al., 2009). As a result, harsh parenting and parent-child conflict may incur because parents feel betrayed and fear the loss of control over their children, whereas their children get frustrated and become rebellious because of their parents' over-control and lack of acceptance of their growing American identities and values (Chung, 2001; Kim et al., 2009; Lim et al., 2008; Takeuchi et al., 2007).

Consistently, empirical studies have shown that Asian American parents who are strongly oriented toward their heritage cultures are less likely to show emotions or express affections to their children, and more likely to have strict rules and limits on children's conduct, be controlling and harsh, and have parent-child conflicts in various areas (e.g., academic performance, career, dating, and marriage) compared to European American parents or Asian American parents who lean more toward the mainstream culture (Farver et al., 2007; Kim et al., 2009; Liu, Lau, Chen, Dinh, & Kim, 2009; Takeuchi et al., 2007; Tao et al., 2013). In contrast, Asian American parents whose cultural orientations are more toward the mainstream culture in the U.S. tend to rely less on harsh discipline, including physical punishment, and show more parental nurturance and other positive parenting behaviors, and thus have better relationships with their children (Chung, 2001; Fung & Lau, 2010; Lin & Fu, 1990; Liu et al., 2009; Ying & Han, 2008).

While most of these studies have focused on how cultural orientations are associated with parenting or parent-child conflict among Asian Americans, the relationship between parenting and parent-child conflict has been understudied, with limited research reporting inconsistent findings. For example, Kim and Cain (2008) show that low parental warmth is related to more parent-child conflicts, while Lim et al. (2008) find no significant relationships between parental warmth and parent-child conflict. Furthermore, few empirical studies have tested the mechanism on whether parents' cultural orientations are indirectly associated with parent-child conflict through parenting. Some limited evidence from Filipino American adolescents in San Diego (Ying & Han, 2008) and Asian American college students in a West Coast University (Park et al., 2010) suggests that parenting plays a significant mediating role in a chain of relationships where parents' cultural orientations are linked to parenting, and parenting, in turn, is associated with parent-child conflict.

Many studies among Asian Americans use relatively homogeneous samples such as college students or respondents of the same ethnic