

Relationship of Young Adult Chinese Americans With Their Parents: Variation by Migratory Status and Cultural Orientation

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To examine whether Chinese and American cultural orientations mediate the association between migratory status and parent relationship, 122 American-born, 121 early-immigrant, and 110 late-immigrant Chinese young adults were measured on cultural orientation and parent relationship. The poorest relationships were found in the early-immigrant group. Cultural orientation mediated the difference in parent relationship between early and late immigrant groups, but not between early-immigrant and American-born groups. Implications of the findings for research and practice are discussed.

...and however much I want my freedom, I agonize over the pain my restlessness causes her (my mother). The clash between our cultures is evident...She expects me to carry the obligations of her culture. She does not understand my individualism—my desire to control my own destiny and to determine who I am.*

To date, the United States has received more immigrants than any other nation in the world (Passel & Edmonston, 1992). Currently, 10% of its population is composed of immigrants, most of them from Latin America and Asia (Edmonston & Passel, 1994; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1993). Migration entails numerous challenges, one of which is the intergenerational and intercultural conflict arising from differences in cultural orientation between immigrant parents and their children (Shizki, 1979): while children of immigrants readily adopt mainstream American values

and behavior, their parents often continue to espouse and practice their traditional culture. This is particularly likely in immigrant families whose cultures, as do Latin American and Asian, vary significantly from mainstream American culture (Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, & Lucca, 1988).

The negative impact of migration on the parent-child relationship in migrant-headed families has been remarked by many scholars (Parrillo, 1991; Thomas, 1995; Ying & Chao, 1996). Ying (1994), found that second-generation Chinese-American adults felt less understood by their mothers than did immigrant Chinese adults. While qualitative descriptive studies are available (Ying & Chao, 1996; Ying, Coombs, & Lee, 1999), few quantitative studies have empirically linked degree of cultural orientation to quality of intergenerational relationship in immigrant families.

Given the size of the immigrant population, significant numbers of Americans are affected by migration-related challenges. Family discord can be a particularly powerful risk factor for psychological

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distress in both immigrant parents and their children. As migration is often motivated by the wish to provide the next generation with a better future, intergenerational cultural discord is likely to result in feelings of dismay, if not betrayal, in immigrant parents (Ying, 1999a). At the same time, their children may feel confused and torn by the conflict between the cultures of home and those of school and the larger society, as well as by the inconsistent values and expectations of the people they value and whose love they most seek, e.g., Chinese parents and American peers (Ying, 1999b). A better understanding of how intergenerational cultural difficulties develop would permit more effective interventions, including preventive efforts, to address them (Ying, 1999a, 1999b). If cultural orientation is shown to mediate the intergenerational relationship, those individuals who are most in need of assistance to promote that relationship could be more readily identified.

Currently, the Chinese-American population consists of two-thirds immigrants, and the overwhelming majority of Chinese Americans born in the United States are their children (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000). In such a population, the intergenerational relationship is likely to be influenced by migratory status and cultural orientation, although no studies empirically demonstrating this have been identified. In addition, the importance of the intergenerational relationship in Chinese culture cannot be overemphasized. Hsu (1985) suggested that while Americans are expected to leave their family of origin to form a new family of their own, Chinese Americans are expected to accord central importance to the original intergenerational relationship, while adding on other relationships (e.g., with spouse and children). Thus, a harmonious intergenerational relationship is of particularly high value in the Chinese-American population.

Study Design and Theoretical Framework

The study reported here was designed to address the gap in quantitative research on cultural orientation and the parent-adult child relationship by investigating whether the quality of the relationship varied across three groups of Chinese Americans who have been in the United States for different lengths of time, and whether the relationship was mediated by cultural orientation, i.e., the degree to which they identified with Chinese and American cultures.

The current study is grounded in ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) that points to the importance of the environmental context in human development and behavior. Young Chinese-American adults are exposed to two culturally distinct, and at times incongruent, environments: the home culture (primarily Chinese) and the school and societal culture (primarily American). Their ability to embrace both has been found to facilitate competent functioning (Ying, Lee, & Tsai, 2000), and the present study investigated the sample's Chinese and American cultural orientations. It also tested whether those orientations mediated the relationship between migratory status and parent relationship.

Three study hypotheses were proposed on the role of mediation. These were based on the following conditions specified by Baron and Kenny (1986): a) variation in the independent variable accounts for variation in the presumed mediator; b) variation in the mediator significantly accounts for variation in the dependent variable; and c) the significant relationship between the independent and dependent variables is significantly reduced when the mediator is included (controlled for) compared to when it is not. In the present study, the independent variable was migratory status, the mediator was cultural orientation, and the dependent variable was parent relationship.

Thus, it was hypothesized that: a) Chinese and American cultural orientations would vary by migratory status; American-born Chinese would be weakest in Chinese orientation and strongest in American orientation, late-immigrant Chinese (those who arrived after the age of 12) would be strongest in Chinese and weakest in American orientation, and early-immigrant Chinese (those who arrived before or at age 12) would occupy the intermediate position. b) Quality of parent relationship would vary by cultural orientation; a stronger Chinese cultural orientation (i.e., sharing the immigrant parents' values) would be associated with a better parent relationship, and a stronger American cultural orientation (i.e., deviating from the immigrant parents' values) would be associated with a poorer parent relationship. c) The relationship between migratory status and parent relationship (with late-comers having the best parent relationship, American-born the worst, and early-comers occupying the intermediate position) would be weakened after controlling for the contribution of Chinese and American cultural orientations; that

is, the variation in quality of parent relationship by migration group would be explained by the mediation of Chinese and American cultural orientations.

To capture the diversity in migratory status in the Chinese-American population, three groups of young adults were examined: American-born Chinese (ABC), who were most likely to be children of immigrants; early immigrant Chinese (EIC), who entered the United States before or at the age of 12; and late immigrant Chinese (LIC), those who entered the United States after the age of 12.

Age 12 was chosen as the cut-off point between early and late immigrants because it is the beginning of the transition from childhood to adolescence, and would thus maximize differential exposure to Chinese and American cultures. Not only are children generally more malleable and receptive to new environments than adolescents, earlier arrival would also mean greater exposure and contact with American culture. Thus, EIC were likely to have had at least a partially American childhood, making for a more effortless American acculturation. In contrast, LIC were likely to have had a mostly Chinese childhood, requiring a more effortful American acculturation.

Since the ABC group had been socialized in the United States, it was hypothesized that the group would be stronger in American cultural orientation and weaker in Chinese cultural orientation than the two immigrant groups. It was hypothesized, in contrast, that LIC would be stronger in Chinese and weaker in American cultural orientation than either ABC or EIC, due the recency of their arrival. It was also hypothesized that EIC would occupy the intermediate position. Consistent with these postulations, recent findings (Tsai, Ying, & Lee, 2000) have shown ABC to use English most often and Chinese least often, LIC to use English least and Chinese most often, and EIC to fall between the two. The same study also found ABC to engage in the most American cultural activities and the fewest Chinese cultural activities, LIC in the most Chinese and the fewest American cultural activities, and EIC, again, to occupy the intermediate position.

Traditionally, cultural orientation has been viewed as a unidimensional process, in which the acquisition of a new culture is accompanied by loss of the culture of origin (Gordon, 1964; Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1963). More recently, scholars have proposed a bidimensional model, in which orientation to the culture of origin and the

host society are not necessarily additive (Cortes, Rogler, & Malgady, 1994; Phinney, 1990). Recent research (Tsai et al., 2000) has found cultural orientation in immigrant Chinese people to be unidimensional, i.e., increasing espousal of American culture was inversely associated with engagement with Chinese culture. However, in American-born Chinese, the two cultural orientations were found to be independent, and thus better fit the bidimensional model. Because of this, both Chinese and American cultural orientations were assessed in the present study.

With regard to parent relationship, it was hypothesized that ABC would report the poorest relationship, secondary to having the weakest Chinese orientation and strongest American orientation (i.e., the greatest variation from their immigrant parents). In contrast, LIC were hypothesized as likely to enjoy the best parent relationship because they had the strongest Chinese orientation and weakest American orientation (i.e., the least variation from their parents). Again, EIC were hypothesized as occupying the intermediate position, being likely to espouse both cultures in moderation.

METHOD

Sample

The sample consisted of 174 male and 179 female Chinese-American college students at a major public university in the western United States. Of the 353 total participants, 122 were ABC, 121 were EIC, and 110 were LIC. Among ABC, 109 (89.3%) were second generation (i.e., both parents were immigrant), while 13 were more than second generation (i.e., at least one parent was ABC).

Measures

Study participants completed three questionnaires. One assessed basic demographic background information, including, age, sex, and father's education and occupation. The participant's socioeconomic status (SES) was calculated from the father's education and occupation, using Hollingshead's (1957) method, in which the possible range of scores is 11-77, with 11 as the highest SES.

Cultural orientation was assessed using the last item on the General Ethnicity Questionnaire, American (GEQA) and Chinese (GEQC) versions (Tsai et al., 2000). The items stated: "Overall, I am Chinese" and "Overall, I am American," and were scored on five-point scale, with a higher number reflecting a stronger cultural orientation. Responses

to these two items were found to be highly correlated with the other 37 items of the GEQA and GEQC that assessed language use, social affiliation, participation in cultural activities, cultural pride, and food preference (Tsai et al., 2000).

Quality of relationship with parents was assessed using the parent subscale of the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA) (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987). The IPPA is a self-report measure that includes 28 parent items assessing level of trust, communication, and alienation in the parent-child relationship. It uses a five-point Likert scale response format, in which 1=almost or never true and 5=almost always or always true. Items 3, 5, 7, 10, and 15 are reverse-coded. The range of possible scores is from -20 to +92, derived from summing 20 positively worded items on communication and trust, and subtracting eight negatively worded items on alienation. A higher final score reflects a better relationship with parents. Armsden and Greenberg (1987) reported high internal reliability (.89) and three-week test-retest reliability (.93) of the parent subscale. In the present sample, internal reliability was .93, and one-month test-retest reliability with a subsample was .96 ($N=52$).

Procedure

Participants were recruited through the psychology subject pool, announcements made at classes and Asian-American student organization meetings, fliers posted throughout campus, and by word of mouth. Those agreeing to participate in the study signed a consent form and completed the paper-pencil demographics questionnaire, the GEQA and GEQC, and the IPPA, either alone or in a group with other participants.

RESULTS

Sample characteristics by migratory status are presented in TABLE 1. The three groups did not vary

by gender distribution; there were roughly equal numbers of men and women in each group. Analysis of variance and chi-square tests showed that the groups varied significantly on age [$F(2,350)=24.01, p=.0001$]. Scheffe post-hoc tests ($p<.05$) showed that LIC were older ($M=21.14, SD=2.14$) than ABC or EIC ($M=19.71, SD=1.48$ and $M=19.93, SD=1.31$, respectively). The groups differed significantly on SES [$F(2,350)=11.42, p=.0001$]. Scheffe post-hoc tests ($p<.05$) showed that ABC enjoyed better SES ($M=23.38, SD=13.74$) than did EIC or LIC ($M=31.23, SD=15.40$, and $M=31.38, SD=15.31$, respectively), with a lower score reflecting a higher SES.

Analysis of variance showed significant intergroup variation on Chinese and American cultural orientation, $F(2, 350)=26.80, p=.0001$ and $F(2, 350)=134.36, p=.0001$, respectively. Scheffe post-hoc tests ($p<.05$) showed that both EIC and LIC ($M=4.25, SD=.79$ and $M=4.60, SD=.68$, respectively) reported a stronger Chinese orientation than did ABC ($M=3.84, SD=.89$), while LIC also surpassed EIC in Chinese orientation. ABC had a stronger American orientation ($M=3.82, SD=.70$) than either EIC and LIC ($M=2.98, SD=1.04$ and $M=1.85, SD=.97$, respectively), while EIC more strongly endorsed being American than did LIC. Finally, analysis of variance showed that the three groups varied on quality of relationship, $F(2, 350)=4.76, p=.009$. Scheffe post-hoc test ($p<.05$) showed that LIC reported a significantly better parent relationship than did EIC, $M=50.92, SD=17.69$ versus $M=43.65, SD=18.99$. ABC did not vary from the other two groups.

Four multiple regressions, as specified by Baron and Kenny (1986), were conducted to test the mediating effect of cultural orientation on the relationship of migratory status and parent relationship. In all cases, two-tailed tests were used.

The first hypothesis—that cultural orientation would vary by migratory status—was confirmed.

Table 1
DEMOGRAPHICS AND STUDY VARIABLES BY MIGRATORY STATUS

VARIABLE	TOTAL (N=353)	ABC (N=122)	EIC (N=121)	LIC (N=110)	SIG. DIFF. ($p<.05$)
Male	49.3%	48.4%	48.3%	53.4%	
Female	50.7%	51.6%	53.7%	46.8%	
Age	20.23 (SD=1.77)	19.71 (SD=1.48)	19.93 (SD=1.31)	21.14 (SD=2.14)	LIC>ABC, EIC
SES*	28.56 (SD=15.25)	23.38 (SD=13.74)	31.23 (SD=15.40)	31.38 (SD=15.31)	ABC>EIC, LIC
Chinese Orientation	4.22 (SD=0.85)	3.84 (SD=0.89)	4.25 (SD=0.79)	4.60 (SD=0.68)	EIC, LIC>ABC; LIC>EIC
American Orientation	2.92 (SD=1.21)	3.82 (SD=0.70)	2.98 (SD=1.04)	1.85 (SD=0.97)	ABC>EIC, LIC; EIC>LIC
Parent Relationship	47.46 (SD=18.31)	48.11 (SD=17.58)	43.65 (SD=18.99)	50.92 (SD=17.69)	LIC>EIC

Note. ABC = American-born Chinese; EIC = early-immigrant Chinese; LIC = late-immigrant Chinese.

*Lower scores reflect higher socioeconomic status.

The deleted comparison group was rotated so that each migration group was compared to the other two. As model 1a of TABLE 2 shows, for Chinese orientation, the adjusted R^2 was .13, $F(2, 350)=26.80$, $p=.0001$. Chinese orientation was lower for ABC than for EIC or LIC ($\beta=-.23$ and $-.42$, respectively, $p=.0001$ in both cases), and lower for EIC than for LIC, $\beta=-.20$, $p=.0009$. In terms of American orientation (see model 1b of TABLE 2), the adjusted R^2 was .43, $F(2, 350)=134.46$, $p=.0001$. American orientation was stronger for ABC than for EIC or LIC ($\beta=.33$, $p=.0001$ and $\beta=.75$, $p=.0001$), and stronger for EIC than for LIC, $\beta=.44$, $p=.0001$.

The second hypothesis—that the quality of parent relationship would vary by Chinese and American cultural orientation—was confirmed. The model adjusted R^2 was .03, $F(2, 350)=6.29$, $p=.002$. As model 2 of TABLE 2 shows, a stronger American orientation was negatively associated with parent relationship, $\beta=-.14$, $p=.01$. Chinese orientation did not contribute significantly to explaining the variance in parent relationship.

The third hypothesis—that inclusion of cultural orientation in the model would diminish the contribution of migratory status to explaining the variance in parent relationship—was tested in several steps. First, the model testing the relationship of migratory status and parent relationship, without controlling for cultural orientation, was conducted. The model was significant, adjusted $R^2=.02$, $F(2, 350)=4.76$, $p=.01$. Exhaustive comparisons were made among the three migrant groups. Contrary to expectation, as model 3a of TABLE 2 shows, ABC had a better parent relationship than EIC, $\beta=.12$, $p=.06$. ABC did not vary from LIC but, as expected, EIC had a worse relationship than LIC ($\beta=-.18$, $p=.003$).

Chinese and American cultural orientations were then added as control variables. The model adjusted R^2 was .05, $F(4, 348)=5.82$, $p=.0002$. As model 3b of TABLE 2 shows, Chinese cultural orientation was positively associated with parent relationship ($\beta=.11$, $p=.06$), while American cultural orientation was negatively associated with parent relationship, $\beta=-.20$, $p=.005$. Again contrary to expectation, ABC reported a better parent relationship than EIC, $\beta=.20$, $p=.002$. LIC did not vary significantly from ABC or EIC. To determine the presence of a mediating effect, models 3a and 3b were compared. There was partial support for cultural orientation as a mediator in the relationship of migratory status and parent relationship, since the significant variation between EIC and LIC that was evident in model 3a disappeared in model 3b, and the adjusted R^2 increased from .02 to .05. However, the difference between ABC and EIC increased from model 3a to model 3b ($\beta=.12$ and $.20$, respectively), suggesting that the difference in parent relationship between these two groups was not mediated by cultural orientation alone.

DISCUSSION

Two of the three conditions for mediation (Baron & Kenny, 1986) were met, and one was partially met. That is, cultural orientation varied by migratory status, parent relationship varied by cultural orientation, and the relationship between migratory status and parent relationship was mediated by cultural orientation in comparisons of EIC and LIC, but not in those of ABC and EIC.

The unexpected finding that ABC enjoyed a better relationship with their parents than did EIC may be due to variation in parents' cultural orien-

Table 2

MULTIVARIATE MODELS TESTING THE MEDIATING EFFECT OF CHINESE AND AMERICAN CULTURAL ORIENTATIONS ON THE RELATIONSHIP OF MIGRATORY STATUS AND PARENT RELATIONSHIP

FACTOR	MODEL 1a CHINESE ORIENTATION	MODEL 1b AMERICAN ORIENTATION	MODEL 2 PARENT RELATIONSHIP	MODEL 3a PARENT RELATIONSHIP	MODEL 3b PARENT RELATIONSHIP
Adjusted R^2	0.13	0.43	0.03	0.02	0.05
F	26.80	134.46	6.29	4.76	5.82
p	0.0001	0.0001	0.002	0.01	0.0002
ABC vs EIC	-0.23***	0.33***	—	0.12*	0.20**
ABC vs LIC	-0.42***	0.75***	—	0.07	-0.12
EIC vs LIC	-0.20***	0.44***	—	-0.18**	0.09
Chinese Orientation	—	—	0.08	—	0.11*
American Orientation	—	—	-0.14**	—	-0.20**

Note. ABC = American-born Chinese; EIC = early-immigrant Chinese; LIC = late-immigrant Chinese.
* $p<.06$; ** $p<.01$; *** $p<.001$.

tations in the two groups. The parents of ABC were likely to have a stronger American cultural orientation than the parents of the EIC: the fact that their child had been born after their migration implied that they had lived in the USA for a longer period and had probably arrived at a younger age. Thus, although ABC themselves had a stronger American orientation than the EIC, the parent-child differential in cultural orientation may have been smaller for them than it was for the EIC. Unfortunately, lacking data on the parents' cultural orientation, this cannot be empirically tested. Nonetheless, if the postulation is correct, second-generation ABC, both of whose parents were immigrants, could be expected to have a poorer parent relationship than those ABC who had at least one American-born parent, since the parent-child cultural gap would be greater in the former than the latter.

Tests revealed that second-generation ABC did, indeed, rate their parenting relationship lower ($M=47.36$, $SD=17.89$) than did those ABC with at least one American-born parent, $M=54.46$, $SD=13.90$. Although the difference was not statistically significant ($t=-1.38$, $df=120$, $p=.17$), possibly due to the small number ($N=13$) of the latter ABC subgroup, it was in the expected direction. Clearly, future studies of the parent-child relationship in Chinese-American families should assess degrees of difference in both parents' and children's cultural orientation.

Across the three migrant groups, EIC were found to be at greatest risk for discord in the intergenerational relationship. Unlike the LIC, who were the most oriented to Chinese and least oriented to American culture (and thus most strongly shared their parents' values), EIC were likely to be more American and less Chinese oriented than their immigrant parents, resulting in greater conflict in the intergenerational relationship. EIC's poorer parent relationship may have been because of their vulnerable developmental age at the time of migration. Upon arrival, the primary concern of immigrant parents is likely to be with surviving and adjusting to life in the United States; this may make them less available to attend to their children's emotional needs, which may be heightened as they, too, struggle with adjusting to the new context. For EIC, this reduction in attention is probably more keenly felt and of greater detriment than for LIC, who are developmentally more mature at arrival and able to function more indepen-

dently. Another contributing factor may be role reversal in the parent-child relationship (Sluzki, 1979). That is, as immigrant children gain greater competence in American society, they tend to assume adult responsibilities prematurely in coping with that society, while the immigrant parents' incompetence in the new environment can reduce them to the role of children. Thus, the parent-child hierarchy, so highly valued in Chinese culture, is severely upset (Ying, 1999b). Although this occurs in many immigrant families, it may be more deleterious to the intergenerational relationship for EIC than for LIC, as the former are less developmentally ready to resume adult roles.

The finding that EIC have the poorest intergenerational relationship suggests that immigrant families with young children may be especially in need of assistance to achieve intergenerational understanding. Specifically, social services targeting newly arriving immigrants with young children ought to incorporate interventions that aim to prevent parent-child discord and misunderstanding. Primary prevention may not be feasible, given that immigrant parents are likely to be more concerned about economic survival than about the quality of the intergenerational relationship, at least initially. It is nonetheless useful to make the family aware of this potential problem early on, paving the way for community-based interventions like that developed by Ying (1999a, 1999b).

In spite of partial support in the findings for the mediating role of cultural orientation in the relationship between migratory status and parent relationship, the amount of variance accounted for was quite small (adjusted R^2 was .05 in the model controlling for cultural orientation). This suggests that other factors influence the intergenerational relationship. These may include the degree of the immigrant parents' involvement in the development of their child, and the compatibility of the parents' and child's personalities. Research is needed in order to explore the potential role of these contributions further.

The study suffered from several limitations. It utilized an overall assessment of Chinese and American cultural orientation, whereas some scholars (Oetting & Beauvais, 1991; Ying, 1995) have suggested that cultural orientation varies by specific domains (e.g., language, activity, social relationship). Further research should identify those domains in which cultural orientation is most salient to the relationship of migratory status and

intergenerational relationship. The study reported here assessed the quality of that relationship on the basis of children's subjective reports, and it is unclear whether these concurred with their parents' views. Obtaining information on parents' assessments in future studies would allow a fuller understanding of the intergenerational relationship. If the consistency of parents' and children's reporting can be determined, this may, in and of itself, serve as a good indicator of intergenerational harmony. In addition, more objective methods might be employed to assess the validity of the subjective responses.

The study used a college student sample from a prestigious Western university rather than a community-based sample. Since 70% of Asian Americans between the ages of 18 and 21 were attending college in 1999 (*U.S. Bureau of Census, 2000*), this sample is not as biased as it may at first appear. However, since the university at which the study was conducted is a highly competitive and sought-after institution of higher education, these Chinese-American students may not be representative of their co-ethnic peers at other universities. Their parents are likely to be pleased about their attendance at this school and this may, in itself, elevate the quality of the intergenerational relationship. Thus, the study should be replicated using a less selective sample. In addition, future research should ensure better comparability in the three groups under study. In this sample, LIC were older than ABC and EIC, probably because their limited competence in English at the time of migration had held them back a grade. Also, the sample ABC were better off economically than the two immigrant groups, perhaps because their parents had more opportunity to establish themselves economically.

These limitations notwithstanding, the study contributes to the current literature by demonstrating variation in the intergenerational relationship among three groups of Chinese-American young adults. It provides empirical evidence for the role of cultural orientation in mediating differences between EIC and LIC in the intergenerational relationship, though not for differences between EIC and ABC. Thus, the current study is one of the first to demonstrate empirically that, in some cases, variation in cultural orientation between Chinese-American immigrants and their children is, indeed, associated with a lower quality of intergenerational relationship.

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