

European American and Mainland Chinese Mothers' Socialization Beliefs Regarding Preschoolers' Social Skills

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SYNOPSIS

Objective. The purpose of this study was to examine the socialization beliefs (goals, attributions, strategies) of European American and Mainland Chinese mothers regarding preschoolers' social skills (sharing, controlling negative emotions, and helping others) within a cultural framework. *Design.* Participants were 103 European American mothers from Washington, DC, and 100 Mainland Chinese mothers from Beijing and Baoding cities, China. Mothers' cognitions regarding the socialization of competent skills were assessed. The reasons that mothers provided for the importance of each skill, their causal attributions for the acquisition of those skills, and the socialization strategies that would be most effective were targeted. *Results.* Findings for the European American mothers were generally consistent with previous research on U.S. mothers' socialization beliefs, whereas the Mainland Chinese mothers' beliefs were related to traditional Chinese ideologies and values in meaningful ways. The Chinese mothers provided more social conventional reasons for the importance of children's skills, made more external causal attributions, and endorsed higher proportions of training and education strategies than the European American mothers. *Conclusions.* The study highlights the significance of cultural ideologies regarding children and the family in the study of maternal beliefs regarding child socialization.

INTRODUCTION

One of the major tasks of socialization is to enculturate children, which includes preparing them for socially accepted situations that are characteristic of the culture in which they are to survive and thrive (Harkness & Super, 1995; LeVine, 1974). Therefore, it is not surprising that parental socialization goals and strategies vary according to the requirements of particular cultures. According to Harkness and Super, parental ethnotheories are the "nexus through which elements of the larger culture are filtered" and the

source of organization of daily life and parental practices (Harkness et al., 2001, p. 9). Studies that have examined the role of culture in the construction of parental thinking about children's development suggest that parental ethnotheories are culturally shared beliefs, values, and practices, constructed within broader cultural belief systems (Goodnow & Collins, 1990).

In looking to uncover processes that underlie child socialization, we turn to cross-cultural comparisons to help delineate the role of cultural ideologies and beliefs in shaping parental ideas regarding desired social behaviors in children. Cross-cultural comparisons also serve to increase awareness of the cultural specificity of North American, middle class approaches that have often been used as the comparative "norm." For example, researchers have consistently found that North American and more individualistic societies value assertive and independent behaviors in children (e.g., Triandis, 2001), whereas within Chinese culture, parents, teachers, and peers value socially unobtrusive (e.g., restrained) and compliant child behaviors that maintain social harmony (e.g., Chen et al., 1998; Chen, Rubin, Li, & Li, 1999; Chen, Rubin, & Sun, 1992).

Most investigators of parental belief systems have focused on parents' ideas about children's physical development, cognitive development, and intellectual expectations or capabilities; the study of parental beliefs concerning children's personal – social development has been less exhaustively examined (Olson, Kashiwagi, & Crystal, 2001). However, social relationships are of such central importance to everyday life that the study of the origins of skills that sustain these relationships cannot be neglected, and is deserving of further attention.

Children's Social Skills

In this investigation, we studied mothers' beliefs regarding the socialization of three social skills in children: (1) sharing with others, (2) regulating the display of negative emotions with peers, and (3) helping others. In North American culture, prosocial, cooperative behaviors including sharing and helping are considered important social skills with implications for the quality of social engagement and interpersonal relationships (e.g., Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998; Radke-Yarrow, Zahn-Waxler, & Chapman, 1983). Prosocial attitudes and behaviors in children may be likely outcomes of socialization because they are often based on children's understanding and internalization of social norms and values (Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989). Moreover, parents' early socialization attempts often pertain primarily to these issues (e.g., Galinski & Kopp, 1993).

In Chinese culture, Confucian ideologies have traditionally espoused the importance of behaviors that promote the harmony and cohesiveness of the

group. Chinese kindergarteners appear to place great emphasis on helping and sharing (Orlick, Zhou, & Partington, 1990). In such settings, play equipment is typically designed to facilitate cooperative interaction, games, songs, and dances. Furthermore, the content of children's books, stories, and drawings encourage sharing and helping behaviors (Orlick et al., 1990).

Mesquita and Frida (1992) asserted that one of the most significant sources of variation in the cultural experience of emotion lies in regulatory processes. Cultures vary in terms of what one is expected to feel, and when, where, and with whom one may express different feelings. Furthermore, parents are often the first agents of socialization of these emotional regulation rules. With regard to control of the display of negative emotions in Chinese culture, training a child not to reveal his or her thoughts and feelings, and instilling solemnity and self-control early in a child's life are important aspects of socialization (Bond & Wang, 1983). However, parental beliefs about the socialization of this social skill in different cultures have not been examined previously.

Therefore, it appears that sharing with others, emotion regulation among peers, and helping others are valued skills in both European American and Mainland Chinese cultures, and a cultural examination of the socialization of these skills warrants investigation. All three social skills appear to be valued across the two cultures, but the Chinese have experiences, lifestyles, orientations, traditions, and value systems that are different from those of European Americans. Consequently, it is probable that the cultural expressions of parenting beliefs regarding the promotion these skills may differ between the two cultures. For example, Confucian principles on family interactions and relationships have influenced societal views on such issues as parental control, child obedience, strict discipline, emphasis on education, filial piety, respect for elders, family obligations, reverence for tradition, maintenance of harmony, and negation of conflict in Chinese culture (Lin & Fu, 1990). Theoretically strong Chinese ideologies guided by Confucian teaching provide an excellent opportunity to study the links between culture and parenting beliefs and provide an interesting contrast to European American parenting beliefs. The main purpose of this study was to examine the maternal belief systems (goals, attributions, strategies) of European American and Mainland Chinese mothers regarding the socialization of social skills in children (sharing with others, emotional control, and helping others).

Proactive Parental Beliefs

According to Rubin and colleagues (e.g., Mills & Rubin, 1990; Rubin, Mills, & Rose-Krasnor, 1989), parents' proactive behavior used to promote

skilled or competent social behavior in children is guided by their proactive beliefs. *Proactive* parenting beliefs are postulated to comprise (1) the goals that parents set for their children's social development (e.g., the reasons why they believe a particular skill is important), (2) the causal attributions that parents make for these skills (i.e., the reasons why parents believe children acquire particular social skills), and (3) the socialization strategies parents believe are most effective to meet these goals (i.e., how parents believe they should go about socializing and promoting these skills in their children). These three maternal beliefs in European American and Mainland Chinese mothers were examined and compared in this study.

Parenting goals. Parenting goals are outcomes that parents hope to achieve as they interact with their children. In this study, maternal goals with regard to the social skills of sharing, emotion regulation, and helping of preschool children were examined. In particular, we were interested in the reasons why parents thought these skills were important. Based on work by Smetana and colleagues (e.g., Nucci & Smetana, 1996; Smetana 1995), mothers' reasoning for the importance of the social skills was categorized as either personal (e.g., important for the benefit of the child), moral (e.g., equal treatment for all, act would have intrinsic consequences for others, relates to the idea that children must be nice or kind to others), or social conventional (e.g., appeals to the expectations of the group, making the group function well). An additional category involving an emphasis on the developmental stage of the child was also examined (e.g., skill is important because the child is developmentally ready to acquire it).

The goals of European American mothers in terms of understanding why certain types of social skills are important for their children to acquire has not been explored previously. Therefore no specific hypothesis regarding reasons for the importance of social skills was made for the European American sample. The major goal of traditional Chinese parental and formal education is the transformation of the child into a socialized adult who learns his or her "place" in the social order, thus functioning successfully within the society (Stimpfl, Zheng, & Meredith, 1997). In addition, failure to bring up a child properly reflects poorly on parents, and brings disgrace to the family and to the ancestors in the system of interlocking responsibility extending over generations (Fung, 1999). Based on Mainland Chinese's emphasis on rules of social order, we expected that Mainland Chinese mothers would respond with a higher proportion of social conventional reasons (e.g., societal and parental expectations) for the importance of the three representative skills than would European American mothers.

Parenting attributions. Parenting behavior may depend on the inferences parents make about the traits and motives of their children, the situational forces operating on their children, or the causes of their children's behavior (Dix, 1993; Weiner, 1995). These attributions have been characterized as reflecting the degree to which parents make internal and external attributions (Dix, 1993; Dix, Ruble, & Zambarano, 1990; Hastings & Rubin, 1999; Miller, 1995). *Internal* attributions reflect the perceptions that a child's behaviors are due to dispositional, intentional, and stable forces in the child. Alternatively, *external* attributions include the perceptions of children's behaviors as due to transitory or environmental causes (e.g., Dix & Lochman, 1990; Weiner, 1985).

Previously, Rubin et al. (1989) found that European Canadian mothers most frequently suggested that social skills fail to develop as a result of internal causes (e.g., child temperament or "poor language skills"). The least commonly attributed reasons were external causes (e.g., "was never taught how"). The same attributional bias toward internal causes was expected in this study. In contrast, one of the most basic assumptions of Confucian ideology about a child's disposition is that it derives from environmental influences. Confucian ideologies espouse the importance of creating the "right" environment for the child's proper upbringing. In addition, it is traditionally believed that a Chinese child's disposition is shaped by the mother, a view still found in present day Chinese families (Chao, 1994). Based on the focus on environmental influences of Confucian ideology, we predicted that Chinese mothers would provide a larger proportion of causal attributions involving external factors such as the home or school environment and parental training and educating than their European American counterparts.

Parenting strategies. Socialization strategies are strategies that parents believe to be most effective in helping their child develop the desired behavior, skill, or quality. Rubin and colleagues (e.g., Mills & Rubin, 1990, 1992; Rubin & Mills, 1992) found that mothers believed that preschoolers learn social skills best through personal experience and they emphasized the importance of observational learning, followed by the adult explanations or inductive techniques, and finally directive teaching. Therefore, we expected that mothers in both cultures would generally take a moderately directive approach to the socialization of these skills thereby suggesting strategies that provide direction such as guidance and modeling that involves discussion, explanation, and inductive techniques.

European American mothers were expected to emphasize modeling strategies based on North American learning literature that espouses the importance of setting parental exemplary behaviors. It is still widely be-

lieved that children learn more effectively through the vicarious observation of others' behaviors than through direct instruction (Bandura & McDonald, 1994). Therefore, we expected that European American mothers would provide a greater proportion of modeling strategies than Mainland Chinese mothers. In contrast, an important principle of Chinese childhood socialization includes the provision of specific instructions regarding proper conduct (Ho, 1986). Therefore, Mainland Chinese mothers were expected to provide greater proportions of directive strategies and strategies that included the use of terms like "training" and "educating." This hypothesis was consistent with traditional Chinese theories of training described by Chao (1994), which is still evident in Chinese families today.

METHODS

Participants

One hundred-three mothers of European descent (at least second generation Americans) were recruited from preschools in the surrounding Washington, DC, area. The mothers' ages ranged from 22 to 47 years ($M = 37.91$, $SD = 4.31$), and their children's ages ranged from 30 to 60 months ($M = 47.58$, $SD = 6.99$). There were 51 boys and 52 girls. There were non-significant differences between mothers from the different preschools on any sociodemographic or study variables. The Chinese sample consisted of 100 mothers of preschool-aged children living in The People's Republic of China. Mothers of 50 boys and 50 girls were recruited from Chinese preschools (three in Beijing and one in Baoding city, both of which are highly populated urban centers) with the assistance of a Chinese collaborator at Beijing Normal University. The Chinese children ranged from 37 to 60 months in age ($M = 48.88$, $SD = 5.68$), and the mothers ranged from 27 to 44 years in age ($M = 32.53$, $SD = 2.94$). There were no significant differences between the mothers from the two Chinese cities on any of the variables.

The children's ages in the two samples were not different, $t(201) = 1.43$, *ns*. All mothers from both samples were highly educated, and had at least college degrees. There was no difference between the educational levels of the European American and Mainland Chinese mothers with regard to whether they had college or graduate/professional degrees, $\chi^2(1, N = 203) = .00$, *ns*. The mothers from the two samples were significantly different in age, with the European American mothers being older than the Mainland Chinese mothers, $t(199) = 10.28$, $p < .001$. In addition, European American mothers (75%) were significantly more likely than the Mainland Chinese mothers (4%) to have more than one child, $\chi^2(1, N = 203) = 108.42$, $p < .001$.

Procedures

Packets of questionnaires including a brief description of the study, the informed consent form, a demographics form, and the maternal proactive beliefs questionnaire were sent home to mothers of preschool children between 3 and 5 years of age at the participating preschools. Participating mothers were instructed to return the completed questionnaires to the school. Sixty-two percent of the solicited European American mothers and 87% of the Chinese mothers participated.

One of the goals of the study was to examine whether findings established for European American families were also found for Mainland Chinese families. Therefore, considerable care was taken to make sure that the vignettes used were comparable and appropriate to the respective cultures being examined. An initial phase of stimulus development ensured that the social skill scenarios were as culturally relevant for the Mainland Chinese mothers as for the European American mothers. The measures were first translated into Mandarin Chinese by a bilingual Mainland Chinese graduate student. Next, a second bilingual Mainland Chinese graduate student back-translated the measures. These students then met and discussed any discrepancies and made necessary wording changes. In addition, the questionnaires were examined by two developmental psychologists in Mainland China to further refine the translations. Finally, six Chinese American mothers of preschoolers (ages 3 to 6) living in the greater Washington, DC, area who were recent (within 5 years) immigrants from Mainland China were administered all the measures and then interviewed about the translated scale. Therefore, the three social skills selected were evaluated as culturally relevant for the Mainland Chinese mothers by the individuals familiar with Mainland Chinese culture who were consulted by the investigators.

Two bilingual graduate students at Beijing Normal University translated the responses from Mandarin to English.

Mothers' Beliefs About Social Skills

All mothers were administered the proactive beliefs questionnaire, which was based on a measure devised by Rubin and colleagues (Rubin & Mills, 1992; Rubin et al., 1989). The questionnaire assessed beliefs about the development of three social skills: (1) sharing toys and possessions, (2) controlling the display of negative emotions during interactions with other children, and (3) helping other children. Mothers were presented vignettes of these social skills (see Appendix), and after each skill asked, (1) how important (or unimportant) they thought those social skills were, ranging

from 1 (*very unimportant*) to 5 (*very important*); (2) why these skills were important (open ended); (3) what the two main factors that contribute to the development of each of these skills (open ended) were; and (4) what strategies parents should or should not use to help preschoolers attain those skills (open ended). The use of open-ended responses for the major constructs of parental beliefs (e.g., reasons of importance, attributions, strategies, and goals) allowed us to capture unique aspects of beliefs in the two cultures.

Reasons for the importance of the skill. Based on work by Smetana (1995), mothers' open-ended responses as to why they thought each social skill was important were coded as follows: (1) *self-focused reasons*: the act brings about positive consequences to the child's internal state (e.g., "The skill is important because it makes the child feel good about himself or herself."); (2) *moral reasons*: issues dealing with compassion, kindness, or justice (e.g., "The skill is important because it shows that the child is kind, thoughtful, considerate"; "It is important to share so that everyone has the same amount."); (3) *social conventional reasons*: issues related to parental or societal expectations (e.g., "It shows that his or her parents have taught him or her well."); (4) *developmental reasons*: issues related to the child's level of functioning (e.g., "Because at this age, the child is capable of understanding sharing.")

Causal attributions. For each open-ended causal attribution (reasons why children might be successful at acquiring these social skills), responses were classified into one of two general categories with regard to the locus of attribution (Rose-Krasnor, 1988). Distinctions were drawn between attributions made to internal factors such as traits or dispositions (e.g., The child has always been shy.), age or age-related factors (e.g., "He may just be not mature enough."), and transient internal states (e.g., "She may have been hungry or tired."), or external factors such as acquired or learned behavior (e.g., "She was probably rewarded for that behavior."), home environment (e.g., "Maybe he came from a deprived background."), experience (e.g., "He probably doesn't have siblings or friends to share with."), and situational factors (e.g., "The rules of the playgroup were probably not set up clearly."). Mothers' responses were coded as "both" if there was mention of an internal and external factor within the same response.

Socialization strategies. Mills and Rubin's (1990) coding scheme was used to categorize mothers' open-ended reported socialization strategies. Four categories were suggested in sufficient frequencies to be analyzed: (1) *mod-*

eling (e.g., demonstrating the desired behavior for the child), (2) *suggestion* (e.g., gently persuading or offering suggestions of child behavior), (3) *directiveness* (e.g., providing step by step instructions for behavior), and (4) *discussion* (e.g., statements about the situation or desired behavior followed by an explanation for why the behavior is desired or the situation is such).

Assessment of Reliability

The first author coded all the data from both samples. A second coder coded a random subsample of 20% of the data (20 European American mothers, and 20 Mainland Chinese) to assess reliability on each of the open-ended coding schemes. Interrater agreement for the beliefs measure was obtained by calculating Cohen's kappa (Bakeman & Gottman, 1987) and was .89, .92, and .91 for the categories of reason for importance of skill, causal attributions, and socialization strategies, respectively.

RESULTS

Covariate analyses were conducted where warranted using two socio-demographic variables: maternal age and number of other children. When a dependent variable was significantly related to either or both of the covariates, the analyses involving that dependent variable were performed again, controlling for the related variables. None of the results differed from the analyses without the covariates; therefore, due to space limitations, all the analyses are reported without the covariate. In addition, sex of child was investigated as a factor in all analyses, but it was found to contribute significantly to group differences in only once instance. Finally, mothers in the two cultures did not have significantly different response rates for any of their open-ended responses (i.e., reasons for the importance of the skills, causal attributions, and socialization strategies).

Reasons for the Importance of Social Skills

Proportion scores for moral, social conventional, and developmental reasons were formed for each of the three social skills. Self-focused reasons were eliminated due to infrequent use by mothers. Due to the open-ended nature of the question, proportion scores were created, which allowed for the control of variability in the number of reasons that mothers suggested for each type of skill. The means and standard deviations of these variables are given in Table 1.

TABLE 1
Descriptive Statistics for Mothers' Reasons for the Importance of the Skills (Proportions)

Variables	European American						Mainland Chinese					
	Boys		Girls		Combined		Boys		Girls		Combined	
	M	SD/n	M	SD/n	M	SD/n	M	SD/n	M	SD/n	M	SD/n
Reasons of importance sharing												
Moral	.60	.44/48	.59	.41/47	.59	.42/95	.52	.49/48	.47	.49/49	.49	.49/99
Social-convention	.12	.28/48	.17	.33/47	.15	.31/95	.46	.48/50	.47	.48/49	.46	.48/99
Developmental	.26	.40/44	.14	.31/47	.20	.36/95	.02	.01/50	.02	.14/50	.04	.17/99
Emotional control												
Moral	.44	.48/44	.33	.44/46	.38	.46/90	.19	.39/50	.35	.48/50	.27	.44/100
Social convention	.07	.21/44	.11	.30/46	.09	.26/90	.55	.47/50	.39	.48/50	.47	.48/100
Developmental	.49	.50/44	.55	.49/60	.52	.49/90	.26	.41/50	.24	.41/50	.25	.40/100
Helping												
Moral	.53	.47/45	.64	.46/48	.59	.29/93	.31	.46/50	.56	.47/50	.43	.48/100
Social convention	.13	.31/45	.09	.28/48	.11	.29/93	.61	.48/50	.35	.43/50	.48	.47/100
Developmental	.26	.26/45	.21	.41/48	.23	.42/93	.02	.14/50	.02	.10/50	.12	.02/100

To determine whether there were differences in the reasons that mothers provided in response to why these social skills were important as a function of culture and the sex of the child, a mixed-model analysis of variance (ANOVA) was computed on the proportion scores, with cultural group and sex of child as the between-subject factors and the reason categories (moral, social convention, developmental) as the within-subjects factors. A separate three-way ANOVA was conducted for each skill.

Sharing. A significant interaction between reason category and cultural group was found, $F(2, 307) = 14.46, p < .001$. Post hoc comparisons (error rate set at .017 [.05/3]) indicated that European American mothers attributed the importance of sharing to the child's developmental stage significantly more often than Mainland Chinese mothers, and Mainland Chinese mothers attributed the importance of sharing to social conventional reasons significantly more often than their European American counterparts, $t(133) = 4.00, p < .001$, and $t(168) = 5.42, p < .001$, respectively.

Controlling negative emotions. There was a significant interaction between cultural group and reason category, $F(2, 368) = 19.88, p < .001$. Post hoc analyses (error rate set at .017 [.05/3]) indicated that European American mothers were significantly more likely to attribute the importance of controlling negative emotions with peers to the child's developmental stage than Mainland Chinese mothers; Mainland Chinese mothers were significantly more likely to attribute the importance of controlling negative emotions to social convention reasons, $t(173) = 4.14, p < .001$, and $t(188) = 6.92, p < .001$, respectively.

Helping. The Cultural Group \times Reason \times Sex of Child three-way interaction was significant, $F(2, 323) = 6.12, p < .01$. To interpret this three-way interaction, the Cultural Group \times Reason Category interaction was first analyzed for mothers of boys and girls separately. Post hoc comparisons (error rate set at .017 [.05/3]) indicated that for mothers of boys, Mainland Chinese mothers were more likely than European American mothers to suggest social conventional reasons, $t(96) = 3.51, p < .001$, whereas European American mothers were more likely to suggest developmental reasons than their Mainland Chinese counterparts, $t(96) = 3.15, p < .01$. For girls, the same pattern of results was found, with Mainland Chinese mothers suggesting more social conventional reasons than European Canadian mothers, $t(93) = 5.71, p < .001$, and European American mothers suggesting more developmental reasons than their Mainland Chinese counterparts, $t(93) = 3.75, p < .001$.

Further analyses of the Sex of Child \times Reason Category interaction separately for the two cultures (error rate set at .017 [.05/3]) indicated no sex differences for European American mothers on any of the reasons. However, Mainland Chinese mothers of preschool girls were more likely than mothers of boys to think that helping was important because of moral reasons, $t(98) = 2.68, p < .01$. In contrast, Mainland Chinese mothers of preschool boys attributed the importance of helping others to social conventional reasons more frequently than mothers of preschool girls, $t(98) = 2.86, p < .01$.

Internal Versus External Causal Attributions

To determine whether there were differences in the causal attributions made by European American and Mainland Chinese mothers for each of the three social skills, mixed-model ANOVAs were computed on the proportion scores of the causal attributions, with cultural group and sex of child as the between-subject factors and the proportion of causal attribution categories (internal and external causes) about the skill as the within-subjects factor. A separate three-way ANOVA was conducted for each skill. The means and standard deviations for each variable are presented in Table 2.

Sharing. The results revealed a significant Causal Attribution \times Cultural Group interaction, $F(1, 182) = 21.81, p < .001$. Post hoc analyses (error rate set at .025 [.05/2]) indicated that European American mothers reported significantly higher proportions of internal causal attributions than Main-

TABLE 2
Descriptive Statistics for Mothers' Internal Versus External Attributions

Variables	European American		Mainland Chinese	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD/n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD/n</i>
Sharing				
Internal	.97	.62/93	.52	.67/93
External	1.03	.62/93	1.47	.67/93
Emotional control				
Internal	1.26	.52/102	.73	.59/98
External	.74	.52/102	1.27	.59/98
Helping				
Internal	1.02	.56/100	.47	.48/94
External	.98	.56/100	1.53	.48/94

Note. Proportions were added across two items assessing causal attributions.

land Chinese mothers, who in turn reported higher proportions of external causal attributions for being good at sharing, $t(184) = 4.64, p < .001$ and $t(184) = 4.64, p < .001$, respectively.

Controlling negative emotions. There was a significant Causal Attribution \times Cultural Group interaction, $F(1, 196) = 44.48, p < .001$. Post hoc analyses (error rate set at .025 [.05/2]) indicated that European American mothers provided a significantly higher proportion of internal causal attributions than Mainland Chinese mothers, who reported higher proportions of external causal attributions for being successful at controlling negative emotions than European American mothers, $t(198) = 6.69, p < .001$ and $t(198) = 6.69, p < .001$, respectively.

Helping. Once again, there was a significant Causal Attribution \times Culture Group interaction as hypothesized, $F(1, 190) = 55.34, p < .001$. Post hoc analyses (error rate set at .025 [.05/2]) indicated that European American mothers reported significantly higher proportions of internal causal attributions than Mainland Chinese mothers who reported higher proportions of external causal attributions for helping others than European American mothers, $t(190) = 7.45, p < .001$ and $t(190) = 7.45, p < .001$, respectively.

Mothers' Beliefs About Proactive Socialization Strategies

For each of the three social skills — sharing, emotional control among peers, and helping others — proportion scores reflecting the endorsement of four general proactive strategies (modeling, suggestions, directive, discussion) were computed. The means and standard deviations for these four strategies are provided in Table 3. A three-way mixed-model ANOVA was conducted on each social skill, with cultural group and sex of child as between-subject factors and socialization strategies (modeling, suggestion, guidance, and discussion) as the within-subjects factors.

Sharing. As hypothesized, a significant interaction was found between socialization strategies and cultural group, $F(3, 367) = 12.15, p < .001$. Post hoc analyses (adjusted error rate of $p < .01$ [.05/4]) indicated that Mainland Chinese mothers were more likely to endorse Directive strategies than European American mothers, $t(140) = 3.39, p < .01$, and European American mothers were more likely to endorse Modeling strategies than Mainland Chinese mothers, $t(140) = 5.16, p < .001$.

Emotional control. The Socialization Strategy \times Cultural Group interaction was significant, $F(3, 131) = 7.19, p < .01$, and post hoc analyses (error

TABLE 3
Descriptive Statistics for Mothers' Proactive Strategies (Proportions)

Variables	European American		Mainland Chinese	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD/n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD/n</i>
Sharing				
Modeling	.54	.46/74	.31	.36/68
Suggestion	.14	.31/74	.06	.20/68
Directive	.15	.32/74	.46	.39/68
Discussion	.11	.27/74	.14	.33/68
Emotional control				
Modeling	.37	.43/72	.18	.36/65
Suggestion	.05	.21/72	.04	.16/65
Directive	.35	.44/72	.60	.43/65
Discussion	.13	.29/72	.15	.32/65
Helping				
Modeling	.67	.40/80	.39	.41/78
Suggestion	.12	.29/80	.12	.30/78
Directive	.13	.28/80	.40	.40/78
Discussion	.07	.24/80	.09	.26/78

rate set at .01; .05/4) indicated that European American mothers were more likely to endorse modeling strategies than Mainland Chinese mothers, whereas Mainland Chinese mothers were more likely to endorse directive strategies when socializing the control of negative emotions among preschoolers, $t(134) = 2.79, p < .01$ and $t(135) = 3.28, p < .01$, respectively.

Helping. Once again, the Socialization Strategies \times Cultural Group interaction was significant, $F(3, 403) = 14.10, p < .001$, and post hoc analyses (error rates = .012, .05/4) indicated that European American mothers were more likely to endorse modeling strategies than Mainland Chinese mothers, and Mainland Chinese mothers were more likely to endorse directive strategies than European American mothers for sharing, $t(156) = 4.45, p < .001$ and $t(156) = 4.91, p < .001$, respectively.

DISCUSSION

To examine cultural differences and similarities in the ways that mothers think about the socialization of desired social skills in their preschoolers, we probed European American and Mainland Chinese mothers about

their goals, attributions, and socialization strategies regarding the social skills of sharing, emotional control, and helping others.

Mainland Chinese mothers endorsed higher proportions of social conventional reasons for the importance of all three skills than European American mothers, supporting earlier findings that Chinese mothers traditionally tend to focus on the transformation of the child into a socialized adult within society (Stimpfl et al., 1997). These findings also support conjectures that high parental expectations about standards of behavior for their children are believed to help ensure that the family reputation is kept unharmed (Fung, 1999). For example, one Mainland Chinese mother stated, "It is important for children to learn to help others whether they are young or old. Parents should begin to help them develop such trait when they are 2 years old, and let them learn to help others." Another Mainland Chinese mother wrote, "It is the prelude before he steps into the society." An alternative explanation for this finding could be that the consequences for not adhering to societal conventions may be greater in Mainland China than in the United States, due to the greater intrusiveness of Chinese governmental restrictions and control. Chinese mothers may have suggested social conventional reasons as a reflection of such impositions.

European American mothers proposed significantly greater proportions of developmental reasons for the importance of all three skills than Mainland Chinese mothers for why it was important that children developed the relevant social skills. The developmental reasons provided by European American mothers appear to reflect their focus on the task as important because it was developmentally feasible and appropriate for their child (e.g., "A preschool-age child should be able to share with other children"). Given that European American mothers are often presented with developmental timetables for children's acquisition of skills, it is unsurprising that European American mothers were also more likely to provide reasons citing concerns about the developmental readiness of the preschool-aged child for these social skills (Goodnow & Collins, 1990).

An unexpected sex of child by reason for the importance of the social skill interaction was also revealed for Mainland Chinese mothers only, in which mothers of preschool girls were more likely than mothers of boys to believe that helping others was important because it meant that one was kind, considerate, and nice, or that it was more obligatory (moral reasons). In contrast, Chinese mothers of boys were more likely to report that helping others was important because of societal or parental expectations (social conventional reasons). Moral rules are viewed as more generalizable and unalterable in contrast to social-conventional rules; the latter are considered more relative to the social context (negotiable) and alterable (i.e., less rigid; e.g., Killen, 1991; Smetana, 1981). It appears that Mainland Chi-

nese mothers were more influenced by gender-role expectations that helping others may be thought of as more a part of the nature of being a girl, but less compulsory or obligatory for a boy (Gretarsson & Gelfand, 1988). This was the only significant effect of sex that was found. In this research, mothers were asked about socialization ideas regarding children in general and not about their specific child, which likely contributed to the lack of gender differences.

In support of previous attribution research, European American mothers were significantly more likely than the Mainland Chinese mothers to provide internal attributional causes (e.g., the child's disposition or age-related factors; "readiness" or maturation) for the successful acquisition of all three social skills. In contrast, Mainland Chinese mothers consistently endorsed an external attributional style consistent with traditional Chinese teachings that emphasize the importance of environmental influences on the developing child (Choi, Nisbett, & Norenzayan, 1999). For example, one Mainland Chinese mother provided the response, "It depends on the way he is educated. Just like the Chinese saying: 'If you live with a lame person you will learn to limp.'" Another mother clearly illustrated her emphasis on external factors with the response, "The future depends on the education received from his parents and teachers, and the influence of the social environment." As expected, mothers in both cultures most often endorsed taking a moderately directive socialization approach (e.g., providing instructions on how to behave, modeling the appropriate behavior, reasoning with the children, discussing the issues of concern, and persuasion).

The data suggested that European American mothers were more supportive of modeling exemplary behaviors and vicarious learning in children than the Mainland Chinese mothers. In fact, two thirds of the strategies suggested by European American mothers referenced the setting of exemplary behaviors (e.g., "A parent should model good behavior and set examples"); only 39% of the responses provided by the Mainland Chinese mothers did so. Therefore, European American mothers are heavily influenced by social-cognitive theories of learning, in which observational learning plays a large part (e.g., Bandura & McDonald, 1994).

Moreover, consistent with ideas on traditional Chinese parenting, Mainland Chinese mothers endorsed significantly greater proportions of directive strategies than their European American counterparts, thus corroborating earlier studies indicating that Chinese parents prefer more instructional childrearing styles and believe in the provision of clear guidelines for children's behavior (Chao, 1994, 1996). Mainland Chinese mothers illustrated their focus on the provision of direction with statements like, "Parents' instruction according to the situation is important." A large proportion of responses provided by the Mainland Chinese mothers

(40%) referred to the use of such types of instructional means; this contrasted with only 13% of strategies provided by the European American mothers.

These findings indicate that the education and training of desired behaviors in children are still endorsed by Mainland Chinese families and seem to be related to the indigenous concepts of *chiao shun* and *guan* described by Chao (1994). The motivation for imposing these standards is not to dominate the child, but rather to assure the familial and societal goals of harmonious relationships with others and the integrity of the family unit (Lau & Cheung, 1987). In addition, the notion of *chiao shun* includes the idea of training (i.e., teaching or educating) children in the appropriate or expected behaviors, and *guan* implies a very involved care and concern for the child. Therefore, parental care, concern, and involvement are synonymous with firm control and governance of the child. In addition, Mainland Chinese mothers cited strategies that included the term "education" in discussing socialization strategies seven, nine, and five times, with regard to the socializing of sharing, controlling negative emotions among peers, and helping others, respectively (e.g., parents should cultivate the behavior by educating the child, education of parents and teachers). In contrast, European American mothers only reported one Education strategy with regard to the socialization of the control of negative emotions.

Chinese child training often includes both direct instruction and careful attention to the structuring of the child's environment to ensure that the child is exposed to only positive models. These positive models include not only the parents, but also teachings, siblings, and peers. In addition, the use of storytelling of the child's own and others' past behaviors is often used to illustrate appropriate and inappropriate behaviors. This might be in contrast with European American parents' use of their own behaviors as models. Also, it is possible that Chinese parents' instructions include providing both direct instructions for behavior, but also the use of models through indirect structuring of the environment and the use of storytelling. Some evidence for this idea can be seen in the Mainland Chinese mothers' reference to both environmental factors and parental instructions when discussing the attributions of behaviors. Future research should examine these aspects of instruction and modeling in more depth to uncover culturally unique expressions of these parenting strategies.

Our findings have several implications for cross-cultural studies of children's social development, particularly with regard to the socialization of socially desired behaviors. The use of open-ended responses to examine variations within and between the two cultures is a strength of this study. However, this study is a preliminary step in the investigation of maternal proactive socialization beliefs regarding preschoolers' prosocial skills

among European American and Mainland Chinese mothers. Much work remains to be done before a thorough understanding of the area is possible. First, the lack of variability in the educational levels of the mothers, as well as the fact that mothers from both samples were urban residents of large cities, limits the generalizability of this study. Future research should address these issues by including more heterogeneous samples. In addition, we controlled for whether mothers had more than one child or not, but we did not have information on the number of children or birth order in each group, which are differences found across countries as a reflection of the one-child policy in China. Moreover, the study of fathers' cognitions regarding child socialization is greatly needed to further our understanding of the processes associated with the socialization of preschoolers' social skills, especially with the increasing responsibility that fathers have in childrearing (e.g., Lamb, 1987). Given the cultural emphasis on paternal authority in child training and the importance of filial piety in the father-child relationship (e.g., Ho, 1986), this may be more the case in Chinese families. These limitations notwithstanding, this study represents a step toward understanding of the socialization beliefs of Mainland Chinese and European American mothers in relation to values and ideologies within their cultural perspectives.

The directive force of cultural models depends on the degree to which they are internalized by the individual (Lightfoot & Valsiner, 1992). In other words, not all parts of a culture and all cultural models are held by people in the same way or to the same degree, and caution should be taken when discussing cultural differences. It is interesting to note that there appeared to be some shared goals and strategies for both cultural groups in this study (e.g., mothers in both cultures suggested a similar set of goals and socialization strategies). This similarity represents, on a more global level, probable commonalities in the tasks that mothers regard as relevant to a young child's social development (Levine, 1988).

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APPENDIX

Social Skill Vignettes¹

Sharing

Jenny is playing with blocks during free play at preschool. Sarah enters the play area and Jenny notices that all the toys are being used, so Sarah has no toys to play with. Jenny offers to share her blocks with Sarah.

Emotional Control

Bobby has some friends over for his fourth birthday party and they are starting to open presents. Bobby receives a gift from Timmy, which is not to his liking. Even though he is very disappointed with the gift, Bobby smiles and thanks Timmy.

Helping Others

Susie is walking in the schoolyard and is carrying a lot of books. Suddenly, she stumbles and drops all the books. Mary sees Susie dropping the books and comes over to help Susie pick up the books.

¹Names of children in the vignettes were matched to the sex of the participant's child and the culture of the participants.

