

# Korean mothers' proactive socialisation beliefs regarding preschoolers' social skills

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The purpose of the present study was to examine the proactive socialisation beliefs (goals, attributions, strategies) of Korean mothers regarding preschoolers' social skills (sharing, controlling negative emotions, and helping others). Participants were 116 mothers in Seoul, Korea. The reasons that mothers provided for the importance of each skill, their causal attributions for the acquisition of those skills, and the socialisation strategies that would be most effective, were targeted. Korean mothers rated controlling negative emotions as less important than sharing and helping others, and were least likely to attribute the importance of social skills to social conventional reasons and provide different ratings and reasons, for the importance of children's skills depending on the sex of their child. Specifically, mothers posit more moral reasons for girls, but more developmental reasons for boys. Also, Korean mothers made more external causal attributions than internal attributions for being good at sharing and helping, whereas emotion regulation was thought to be equally a factor of external and internal reasons. In terms of socialisation strategies, Korean mothers endorsed a higher proportion of modelling than any other strategy for the socialisation of all three social skills, regardless of the sex of the child. In conclusion, Korean mothers' beliefs were related to both traditional and modern Korean ideologies and values in meaningful ways. This study highlights the significance of cultural ideologies regarding children and the family in the study of maternal beliefs regarding child socialisation.

## Introduction

Parents develop a system of beliefs in the socialisation of their children and enact their beliefs via parenting attitudes or behaviours. In this process, it is a common proposition that general cultural attitudes, beliefs, and practices shape particular socialisation values and practices of young children. One of the major tasks of socialisation 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). Thus, parental socialisation goals and strategies vary according to the requirements of particular cultures. 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 exploring the processes that underlie child socialisation, researchers turn to cross-cultural comparisons mainly focused on American and Asian cultures to help delineate the role of cultural ideologies and beliefs in shaping parental ideas regarding desired social behaviours in children. For example, researchers have consistently found that North American and more individualistic societies value assertive and independent behaviours in children (e.g., Triandis, 2001), whereas within Asian culture, parents in general value socially unobtrusive and

compliant child behaviours that maintain social harmony (e.g., Chen, Hastings, Rubin, Chen, Cen, & Stewart, 1998; Chen, Rubin, Li, & Li, 1999; Kim & Choi, 1994).

These cross-cultural studies have mostly compared North Americans to Chinese as a representative sample of Asian culture. In some sense, Chinese and Korean cultures are alike in terms of the prevailing cultural and philosophical backgrounds in these societies. Nevertheless, although the two countries are rooted in the same Confucian tradition, there are many sociocultural differences between the two cultures. Like China, in Korean society where collectivist values used to be the prevalent belief, mothers are primarily concerned with achieving social order and interpersonal harmony in child rearing, emphasising the restraint of personal desires or behavioural control. However, Korean Confucianism posits the family as the fundamental unit of society, and stresses a rigid hierarchical order of human relationships based on age, gender, and inherited social status (Han, 1989).

Recently, these general beliefs along with the male-centred family system have been markedly changing, largely due to Korean women's higher educational attainment, more frequent contact with Western culture, democratic ideology, and the materialistic and competitive nature of industrial society (Kim & Park, 1997). Young people in contemporary Korean society do not think of those traditional values or attitudes as virtues any more, expressing their own opinions more freely against the aged, instead. In fact, young Korean mothers are more

likely to adopt Western individualistic values and place more emphasis on academic achievement and social assertiveness rather than on traditionally valued social behaviours such as sharing, helping, and self-restrained behaviours. Reflecting this change, S. Y. Park and Belsky (1998) found that the more Korean mothers evinced individualistic values, the more positive were their attitudes towards uninhibited child behaviour. Based on the abovementioned sociocultural and political changes, it is probable to assume that there should be distinct differences between the childrearing and socialisation beliefs of Korean and Chinese mothers.

As indicated by Alfred (1999), until recently, Korea was the most rapidly modernising country on earth. He also suggested that Koreans are the most individualistic of Asians, arguing that the Korean self is profoundly collectivist while deeply committed to individual self-assertion. In light of such evidence, we need to consider the cultural diversity or differences within Asian cultures when we compare and interpret the results of cultural comparisons between Western and Asian societies. However, very little research has been attempted to illuminate such within-culture diversity. One of the purposes of this study was to explore the cultural variation in maternal socialisation beliefs within an Asian culture, South Korea.

Most investigators of parental belief systems have focused on parents' ideas about children's 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. Moreover, research within the social domain tends to focus on the negative side of social development such as social withdrawal or aggression, instead of positive behaviour (Miller, 1995). For this reason, prosocial skills such as helping, sharing, and controlling negative emotion were the main focus of the present study.

This study also aimed at exploring the variation of socialisation beliefs as a function of child gender. Child gender has been a peripheral variable in studies of parents' attribution regarding social behaviour and few effects of sex have been founded in Western belief literature (e.g., Coplan, Hastings, Lagace-Seguin, & Moulton, 2002; Miller, 1995). Interestingly, Gretarsson and Gelfand (1988) reported a complex relationship between child sex and maternal attribution; mothers tend to see girls' behaviour as more dispositional whereas boys' characteristics were more often seen as environmentally produced. Despite the prevailing view regarding sex discrimination in child socialisation in Asian countries, empirical evidence related to this issue is not consistent. For example, recent research (S. Y. Park & Belsky, 1998) showed that mothers' traditional values significantly predicted attitudes towards inhibition in Korean preschool children, regardless of child gender. In a similar vein, Chen et al. (1998) found no sex differences in the behavioural inhibition of Chinese toddlers. In contrast, S. Y. Park, Lee, and Park (2000) demonstrated that mothers of girls, in particular, who adopt more Western individualistic values come to hold strong egalitarian attitudes and are likely to encourage assertive behaviour on the part of their daughter; this same relation was not found for their sons. Clearly, these inconsistent results imply possible differential socialisation effects on child development as a function of a

child's gender. Korean parents are expected to have some different socialisation beliefs based on the gender of their child, although inequality based on sex has been decreasing in every aspect of Korean society. In the present investigation, we studied Korean mothers' beliefs regarding the socialisation of three social skills in children as a function of their child's gender: (1) sharing with others, (2) regulating the display of negative emotions with peers, and (3) helping others.

### *Children's social skills: Sharing, controlling negative emotions, and helping others*

In North American culture, prosocial cooperative behaviours, 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 behaviours in children may be likely outcomes of socialisation because they are often based on children's understanding and internalisation of social norms and values (Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989). Moreover, parents' early socialisation attempts often pertain primarily to these issues (e.g., Gralinski & Kopp, 1993). 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 socialisation of these emotional regulation rules.

On the other hand, Confucian ideologies have traditionally espoused the importance of behaviours that promote the harmony and cohesiveness of the group, disapproving the promotion of individualism (Cole, 1999). Chinese and Japanese kindergartners appear to place great emphasis on helping and sharing (Cole, 1999; Orlick, Zhou, & Partington, 1990). Similarly, Korean American teachers stress sensitivity to others and self-control emphasising group awareness and social harmony over individual concerns (Farver, Kim, & Lee-Shin, 2000). With regard to the control of the display of negative emotions, 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 socialisation in Asian culture (Bond & Wang, 1983).

Although there has been remarkable progress in social change in Korea in the past few decades, Korean families have retained traditional values inherited from their Confucian past which bear on their childrearing practices and beliefs. Therefore, Korean mothers in contemporary society are experiencing conflicts in their socialisation practices with regard to maintaining collectivist values versus pursuing individualistic values. Moreover, Koreans view education as the means to social mobility and success, and mothers' parenting goals are focused on academic achievement emphasising competition among peers rather than cooperative social behaviours (Kim & Park, 1997).

Although the social skills of sharing, controlling negative emotions, and helping others are theoretically important social skills in young children, we were interested in whether mothers differentiated between the three skills with regard to how important they thought the skills were. Sharing and helping others might be perceived as more related to moral issues and therefore be considered more compulsory and important than controlling negative emotions (Killen & Turiel, 1998; Neff,

Turiel, & Anshel, 2002; Smetana, Kochanska, & Chuang, 2000). Moreover, as noted previously, the most fundamental feature of the Korean Confucianism is the development of a patrilineal lineage system. Therefore, young boys are taught the characteristics of responsibility, assertiveness, and independence to be a leader of the family, and are expected not to express their own feelings or emotions to others. This Korean lineage is much more rigid than those in China (Deuchler, 1992). On the other hand, women must be passive, obedient, quiet, calm, and speak with restraint (Deuchler, 1992). Moreover, according to the Confucian definition of gender role, the paternal role is disciplinarian, whereas the maternal role is caregiver and nurturing agent. Thus, girls are raised to develop emotional aspects such as warmth and helping others, which may be reflected in mothers' endorsement of social skills being more compulsory for girls than for boys. However, parental beliefs and practices regarding the socialisation of these social skills in different cultures with regard to child sex have rarely been examined previously, and is thus the focus of the present study.

### *Proactive parental beliefs*

According to Rubin and colleagues (e.g., Mills & Rubin, 1990; Rubin, Mills, & Rose-Krasnor, 1989), parents' proactive behaviour used to promote skilled or competent social behaviour 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., *how important* they believe the skills to be, and 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 socialisation *strategies* parents believe are most effective in order to meet these goals (i.e. *how* parents believe they should go about socialising and promoting these skills in their children). These three maternal beliefs in Korean mothers were examined.

*Parenting goals.* Parenting goals are outcomes that parents hope to achieve as they interact with their children. Parenting goals are important because of their influence on parental practices (Bugental & Johnston, 2000). In the present 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 both how important parents believed each of these skills were, as well as 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 categorised as either 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) (Cheah & Rubin, 2003).

Few studies have explored the goals of European American mothers in terms of understanding why certain types of social skills are important for their children to acquire. According to Cheah and Rubin (2003), European American parents

provided reasons focusing on the developmental stage or readiness of the child most frequently for the acquisition of social skills. On the other hand, Mainland Chinese parents provided social conventional reasons significantly more often than European American counterparts, reflecting Mainland Chinese parents' emphasis on rules of social order and expectations. In a study of parenting goals, Hastings and Grusec (1998) found that Canadian women expressed more concern for goals related to child happiness. They also reported that thinking about interacting with a son or daughter did not appear to strongly influence both men's and women's concerns for the parenting goals. Due to the focus on a patrilineal lineage system, young Korean boys and girls may still be taught characteristics of skills to fill different roles, which could be reflected in maternal beliefs regarding the socialisation of these skills. Thus, gender differences were expected with regard to how important Korean mothers believed the skills are for their preschool-age child, as well as the reasons *why* mothers thought these skills were important.

*Parenting attributions.* Parenting behaviour 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 behaviour (Dix, 1993; Weiner, 1995). For instance, it has been postulated that mothers' attributions for children's misbehaviour can determine the harshness of their discipline toward 24- to 42-month-old toddlers (Slep & O'Leary, 1998). These attributions have been characterised 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 behaviours are due to dispositional, intentional, and stable forces in the child. Alternatively, *external* attributions include the perceptions of children's behaviours as being due to transitory or environmental causes (e.g., Dix & Lochman, 1990; Weiner, 1985).

Previously, Rubin and colleagues (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"). Interestingly, Gretarsson and Gelfand (1988) reported that American mothers tended to attribute positive behaviour and characteristics to the child's personality than to external influence and the reverse pattern held for negative behaviours. According to Coplan et al. (2002), mothers attributed children's negative behaviours, such as aggressive and shy behaviour, to more external causes than prosocial behaviour.

In comparison, 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 (Chao, 1994). Cheah and Rubin (2003) found that Chinese mothers provided a larger proportion of causal attributions involving external factors such as the environment and parental training and educating whereas European American mothers reported a significantly higher proportion of internal causal attribution (e.g., temperament, mood). We expected that the Korean mothers in the current study would also be influenced by Confucian ideologies regarding the significance of environmental and parental

influences on child development and cite more external causal attributions. Sex-role stereotypes mothers hold can also influence their causal attributions. For instance, Gretarsson and Gelfand (1988) found that American mothers of 12-year-old children perceived their daughters' behaviours as more innately helpful than their sons' behaviours. In addition, boys' characteristics were more often seen as environmentally produced. As such, child gender could be one factor influencing mother's attribution for social behaviour.

*Parenting strategies.* Socialisation strategies are strategies that parents believe to be most effective in helping their child develop the desired behaviour, 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 emphasised the importance of observational learning, followed by the adult explanations or inductive techniques, and finally directive teaching. Consistent with these results, Cheah and Rubin (2003) found that European American mothers provided a greater proportion of modelling strategies than Mainland Chinese mothers. In contrast, Mainland Chinese mothers, regardless of child sex, reported greater proportions of directive strategies such as training and educating, reflecting traditional Chinese theories of training described by Chao (1994). Given these cultural differences, we hypothesised that Korean mothers' proactive socialisation beliefs would also be dependent on the sex of child. Based on previous findings on Korean fathers (and Korean mothers') increasing access to internet information on parenting that is based on Western parenting information (Kim & Park, 1997), we expected that Korean mothers would also use modelling strategies most frequently to socialise all three skills.

## Methods

### *Participants*

One hundred and sixteen Korean mothers were recruited from preschools in the area surrounding Seoul. The mothers' ages ranged from 27 to 46 years ( $M = 34.04$ ,  $SD = 3.49$ ), and 95% of the mothers were in their 20s and 30s. About 86% of the mother had college and higher education and the average family income was 3,700,000 *won* which represents middle-class socioeconomic status in Korea. The children's ages ranged from 24 to 72 months ( $M = 48.90$ ,  $SD = 13.18$ ), with the age distribution as follows: 24-36 months 23.3%; 37-48 months 26.7%; 49-60 months 36%; and 61-72 months 14%. There were no significant correlations between child age and any outcome variables. There were 56 boys and 60 girls. It should be noted that the generalisability of the present study's results is limited in light of the urban, highly educated Korean sample used in the present study.

### *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 children at the participating preschools. Participating mothers were instructed to return the completed ques-

tionnaires to the school. Eighty-five per cent of the solicited mothers participated.

One of the goals of the study was to examine whether findings established for European American families and Mainland Chinese families were also found for Korean families. Thus, considerable care was taken to make sure that the vignettes used were comparable and appropriate to the respective cultures being examined. The detailed procedures are found in Cheah and Rubin (2003). The measures were first translated into Korean by a bilingual Korean graduate student. Next, a second bilingual Korean 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 the first author who is also fluent in both languages, to further refine the translations. Finally, 10 Korean mothers of preschoolers (ages 3 to 6) living in Seoul were administered all the measures and then interviewed about the translated scale to determine its validity.

### *Mothers' beliefs about social skills*

All mothers were administered the proactive beliefs questionnaire, which was based on a measure devised by Rubin and colleagues (Cheah & Rubin, 2003; Rubin & Mills, 1990; 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 (see Appendix A for complete social skill vignettes). Mothers were presented vignettes of these social skills, and after each skill, asked: (1) how important (or unimportant) they thought those social skills were (ratings of *very unimportant-1* to *very important-5*); (2) why these skills were important (open-ended); (3) what were the two main factors that contribute to the development of each of these skills (open-ended); 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 Korean culture.

*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) *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"); (2) *social conventional reasons*: issues related to parental or societal expectations (e.g., "It shows that his/her parents have taught him/her well"); (3) *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), the response was coded 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., "She has always been shy"), age or age-related factors (e.g., "He may just be not matured enough"),

and transient internal states (e.g., “She may have been hungry or tired”), or *external* factors such as acquired or learned behaviour (e.g., “She was probably rewarded for that behaviour”), 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 were asked to provide two main causal attributions and were given a score for each type of attribution (internal and external).

*Socialisation strategies.* Mills and Rubin’s (1990) coding scheme was used to categorise mothers’ open-ended reported socialisation strategies. Four categories were suggested in sufficient frequencies to be analysed: (1) *high power* (e.g., verbally commanding the child to behave appropriately, or threatening to punish the child); (2) *directiveness* (e.g., providing step-by-step instructions for behaviour); (3) *reward* (e.g., gently persuading or offering suggestions of child behaviour); and (4) *modelling* (e.g., demonstrating the desired behaviour for the child).

### Assessment of reliability

The first author coded all the data. The second author coded a random subsample of 20% of the data to assess reliability on each of the open-ended coding schemes. Inter-rater agreement for the beliefs measure was obtained by calculating percentage agreement and ranged from 80–90% for the categories of reason for importance of skill, causal attributions, and socialisation strategies.

## Results

To begin, a series of correlations were computed between demographic variables (such as age of mother, age of child, mother’s education, and number of children) and all the outcome variables. Nonsignificant correlations emerged except for the variable “number of other children”, which was related to a few outcome variables. As such, only “number of other children” was used as a covariate where appropriate.

### Ratings of importance

To compare the ratings of importance of the three skills (sharing, controlling negative emotions, helping) a mixed-model ANCOVA with sex of child as a between-subject factor and types of skills as a within subjects factor, and number of other children as a covariate was employed. Results revealed that both the main effect of the type of skill and sex of child were significant,  $F(2, 113) = 23.81, p < .001$  and  $F(1, 113) = 3.93, p = .05$ , respectively. However, the interaction between type of skill and sex of child was not statistically significant. Post hoc *t*-tests (adjusted  $p < .02$  [.05/3]) indicated that Korean mothers reported significantly higher ratings of importance for sharing and helping than for controlling negative emotion,  $t(115) = 10.52, p < .001$ ;  $t(115) = 8.04, p < .001$ , respectively. A *t*-test to compare mothers’ ratings of importance for boys and girls indicates that overall social skills are thought to be more important for girls than boys,  $t(114) = 1.99, p < .05$ .

**Table 1**

*Descriptive statistics for mothers’ rating of importance of social skills*

Social skill	Boys ( <i>N</i> = 56)	Girls ( <i>N</i> = 60)	Total ( <i>N</i> = 116)
	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )
Sharing	3.82 (0.83)	4.22 (0.72)	4.03 (0.80)
Emotional control	3.14 (0.75)	3.25 (0.86)	3.20 (0.80)
Helping	3.82 (0.79)	4.00 (0.82)	3.91 (0.81)

### 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. Due to the open-ended nature of the question, proportion scores were created that allowed for the control of variability in the number of reasons that mothers suggested for each type of skill. The *M*s and *SD*s of these variables are presented in Table 2.

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 sex of the child, mixed-model ANCOVAs were computed on the proportion scores, and sex of child as the between-subjects factor and the reason categories (moral, social convention, developmental) as the within-subjects factor and number of other children as a covariate.

*Sharing.* The main effect of the type of reason was statistically significant,  $F(2, 113) = 11.9, p < .001$ . Also, a significant interaction effect between type of reason and the sex of child was found,  $F(2, 113) = 20.1, p < .001$ . Post hoc paired sample *t*-tests (adjusted  $p < .02$  [.05/3]) were used to compare mothers’ reasons for boys and girls to examine the interaction. Sex differences were found only for moral and developmental reasons: When responding to their son’s behaviours, mothers were more likely to attribute the importance of sharing to the child’s developmental stage significantly more often than moral and social conventional reasons,  $t(55) = 2.71, p < .01$  and  $t(55) = 5.39, p < .001$ , respectively. In addition, moral reasons were provided more frequently than social conventional reasons,  $t(55) = 2.66, p < .01$ . In contrast, when responding

**Table 2**

*Descriptive statistics for mothers’ reasons for importance of each skill*

Reasons for importance	Boys ( <i>N</i> = 56)	Girls ( <i>N</i> = 60)	Total ( <i>N</i> = 116)
	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )
Sharing			
Moral	.27 (.36)	.62 (.43)	.45 (.43)
Social convention	.09 (.29)	.05 (.22)	.07 (.25)
Developmental	.53 (.45)	.19 (.34)	.35 (.43)
Emotional control			
Moral	.21 (.38)	.43 (.48)	.33 (.45)
Social convention	.03 (.15)	.08 (.06)	.02 (.11)
Developmental	.68 (.43)	.47 (.49)	.57 (.47)
Helping			
Moral	.36 (.44)	.52 (.47)	.44 (.46)
Social convention	.03 (.15)	.05 (.20)	.04 (.18)
Developmental	.43 (.46)	.25 (.43)	.33 (.45)

to their daughters' behaviours, mothers were more likely to attribute the importance of sharing to moral reasons significantly more often than developmental and social conventional reasons,  $t(59) = 4.86, p < .001$  and  $t(59) = 8.11, p < .001$ , respectively. In addition, moral reasons were provided more frequently than social conventional reasons,  $t(59) = 2.50, p < .02$ .

*Controlling negative emotions.* There was a significant main effect of type of reason,  $F(2, 113) = 15.97, p < .001$ , and a significant interaction effect between type of reason and sex of child,  $F(2, 113) = 6.85, p < .001$ . Post hoc analyses using paired  $t$ -tests to examine the interaction indicated that when responding to their sons' behaviours, mothers were significantly more likely to attribute the importance of controlling negative emotions with peers to the child's developmental stage than moral and social conventional reasons,  $t(55) = 4.56, p < .001$  and  $t(55) = 9.79, p < .001$ , respectively. However, when responding to their daughters, there was no significant difference between moral and developmental reasons,  $t(55) = 0.28, n.s.$ , although both reasons were provided significantly more frequently than social conventional reasons, moral vs. social conventional  $t(59) = 6.78, p < .001$ ; developmental vs. social conventional  $t(59) = 7.13, p < .001$ .

*Helping.* Both the main effect of type of reason,  $F(2, 113) = 8.31, p < .001$ , and the type of reason by sex of child 2-way interaction were significant,  $F(2, 113) = 4.18, p < .05$ . Post hoc comparisons using paired  $t$ -tests indicated that when responding to their preschool son's behaviours, mothers were equally likely to provide developmental and moral reason  $t(55) = 0.56, n.s.$ , and both reasons were significantly greater than social conventional reasons, developmental vs. social conventional  $t(55) = 5.98, p < .001$ ; moral vs. social conventional  $t(55) = 5.17, p < .001$ . With regard to their daughters' behaviours, mothers were more likely to attribute the importance of helping others to moral reasons than to developmental and social conventional reasons,  $t(59) = 2.55, p < .05$  and  $t(59) = 6.56, p < .001$ , respectively. In addition, developmental reasons were provided more frequently than social conventional reasons,  $t(59) = 3.17, p < .001$ .

### Internal versus external causal attributions

To determine whether there were differences in the causal attributions made by mothers of boys and mothers of girls for each of the three social skills, mixed-model ANCOVAs were

computed on the proportion scores of the causal attributions, with sex of child as the between-subjects factor, the proportion of causal attribution categories (internal and external causes) about the skill as the within-subjects factor, and number of other children as a covariate. A separate 2-way ANCOVA was conducted for *each* skill. Proportion scores were formed for the internal and external attribution categories for each of the three social skills. For example, external attribution proportion scores were created via dividing the number of external attribution responses mothers suggested by the total number of attribution responses (internal plus external) mothers suggested for each type of skill. The  $M$ s and  $SD$ s for each variable are presented in Table 3.

*Sharing.* The results revealed a significant main effect of type of attribution,  $F(1, 112) = 34.8, p < .001$ . Korean mothers reported significantly higher proportions of external causal attributions than internal causal attributions for being good at sharing. Neither the main effect of sex of child nor the interaction between sex of child and type of attribution was significant.

*Controlling negative emotions.* There was no significant main effect of type of attributions for being good at controlling negative emotions. In addition, neither the main effect of sex of child nor the interaction between sex of child and type of attribution was significant.

*Helping.* There was significant main effect of type of attributions for being good at helping,  $F(1, 111) = 31.8, p < .001$ . Korean mothers reported significantly higher proportions of external causal attributions than internal causal attributions for helping others. Neither the main effect of sex of child nor the interaction between sex of child and type of attribution was significant.

### Mothers' beliefs about proactive socialisation 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 (high power, directive, reward, modelling) were computed. A 2-way mixed model ANCOVA was conducted on each social skill, with type of strategy (high power, directive, reward, modelling) as the within-subjects factor, sex of child as between-subjects factor, and number of other children as a covariate. The  $M$ s and  $SD$ s for these strategies are provided in Table 4.

**Table 3**  
*Descriptive statistics for mothers' internal versus external attributions*

Social skill	Attribution	Boys ( $N = 55$ )	Girls ( $N = 60$ )	Total ( $N = 115$ )
		$M$ ( $SD$ )	$M$ ( $SD$ )	$M$ ( $SD$ )
Sharing	Internal	0.37 (0.51)	0.53 (0.59)	0.45 (0.56)
	External	1.63 (0.51)	1.48 (0.59)	1.55 (0.56)
Emotional control	Internal	0.87 (0.57)	0.92 (0.53)	0.90 (0.54)
	External	1.13 (0.57)	1.08 (0.53)	1.10 (0.54)
Helping	Internal	0.59 (0.52)	0.42 (0.43)	0.50 (0.48)
	External	1.36 (0.59)	1.51 (0.53)	1.44 (0.56)

*Sharing.* A marginally significant main effect of type of strategy for sharing was found,  $F(3, 112) = 2.52, p < .10$ . Thus, a series of six paired sample *t*-tests (with adjusted  $p < .008 [.05/6]$ ) were carried out to compare high-power strategy vs. directive, high-power vs. reward, high-power vs. modelling, directive vs. reward, directive vs. modelling, and reward vs. modelling. The results indicated that Korean mothers were more likely to endorse modelling strategies for sharing than any other strategies including reward  $t(115) = 4.11, p < .001$ , directive  $t(115) = 4.30, p < .001$ , and high power strategies,  $t(114) = 5.01, p < .001$ . However, neither the main effect of sex of child nor the interaction between sex of child and type of strategy was significant for sharing.

*Emotional control.* There was a significant main effect of type of strategy for emotional control,  $F(3, 113) = 3.76, p < .05$ . A series of six paired sample *t*-tests (with adjusted  $p < .008 [.05/6]$ ) indicated that Korean mothers were more likely to endorse modelling strategies for emotional control than any other strategies including high power,  $t(115) = 3.89, p < .001$ , reward,  $t(115) = 4.22, p < .001$ , and directive strategies,  $t(115) = 4.55, p < .001$ . Once again, neither the main effect of sex of child nor the interaction between sex of child and type of strategy was significant for emotional control.

*Helping.* A significant main effect of socialisation strategies was found for helping,  $F(3, 111) = 23.0, p < .001$ . A series of post hoc analyses revealed that Korean mothers were more likely to endorse modelling strategies for helping than any other strategies such as high power,  $t(115) = 10.92, p < .001$ , directive,  $t(115) = 10.21, p < .001$ , and reward strategies,  $t(115) = 7.09, p < .001$ . Moreover, mothers were more likely to endorse reward strategies for helping than high power,  $t(115) = 3.36, p < .001$ , and directive strategies,  $t(115) = 3.04, p < .01$ . In addition, reward strategies were provided more frequently than directive,  $t(115) = 3.04, p < .01$ , and high power strategies,  $t(115) = 3.36, p < .01$ . Neither the main effect of sex of child nor the interaction between sex of child and type of strategy was significant.

**Table 4**  
*Descriptive statistics for mothers' proactive strategies (proportions)*

Variables	Boys (N = 56)	Girls (N = 60)	Total (N = 116)
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
<b>Sharing</b>			
High power	.07 (.16)	.08 (.16)	.07 (.16)
Directive	.06 (.22)	.09 (.27)	.08 (.24)
Reward	.07 (.16)	.11 (.24)	.09 (.20)
Modelling	.23 (.34)	.28 (.34)	.26 (.34)
<b>Emotional control</b>			
High power	.06 (.17)	.12 (.23)	.09 (.20)
Directive	.10 (.26)	.03 (.16)	.07 (.21)
Reward	.08 (.23)	.08 (.20)	.08 (.21)
Modelling	.26 (.35)	.24 (.33)	.25 (.34)
<b>Helping</b>			
High power	.04 (.13)	.01 (.06)	.01 (.23)
Directive	.06 (.19)	.00 (.00)	.03 (.13)
Reward	.14 (.27)	.08 (.18)	.11 (.23)
Modelling	.42 (.38)	.47 (.41)	.44 (.39)

## Discussion

This study explored Korean mothers' proactive beliefs about the socialisation of social skills in their preschoolers. More specifically, we examined mothers' socialisation goals, attributions, and socialisation strategies regarding the social skills of sharing, emotional control, and helping others. For contemporary Korean mothers' proactive beliefs, conflicts between old and new ideas of childrearing were evident. It is noted that these findings should be interpreted in light of their limited generalisability due to the lack of variability in the educational levels of the mothers, as well as the fact that mothers in this study were urban residents of a large city (Seoul).

As predicted, the results revealed that sharing and helping others were perceived as more important than controlling negative emotions (Killen & Turiel, 1998; Neff et al., 2002; Smetana et al., 2000), perhaps because these behaviours are thought to be more related to moral issues and therefore more compulsory, although we expected that negative emotional control would also be considered an important social skill (Bond & Wang, 1983). In Confucian cultures, people tend to inhibit their own feelings for the interests of others because controlling one's emotion has been considered as an important virtue (Ho, 1986). However, it appears that compared to the social skills of sharing and helping others, the ability to control one's negative emotions among others is considered less important for a preschool-aged child to acquire among Korean mothers. Perhaps the ability to control one's emotions is thought to be acquired later in a child's development (e.g., early school-age). It would be interesting for future research to examine mothers of young children of different ages developmental timetables for different social skills.

With regard to the sex difference that was found for the importance of social skills, Korean parents traditionally emphasise strength and the intellect for their sons in order to be a competent breadwinner, whereas they focus on the emotional and social development of their daughters to become good wives and nurturing mothers (Han, 1999; I. H. Park & Cho, 1995). In the present study, mothers tended to rate girls' social behaviours as more important than those of boys, indicating the continued presence of gender-specific expectations of social behaviour among Korean families. Given Miller's (1995) theory that sex-of-target differences might emerge when the behaviour being judged is regarded as more typical for one sex than the other, this sex difference may reflect Korean mothers' sex-biased perception that social skills are more typical and important for the socialisation of female roles, as compared to male.

In terms of the reasons for the importance of the social skills, there were interesting sex of child by category of reasons interactions for all three skills. With regard to sharing and helping behaviours, mothers were most likely to endorse developmental reasons (e.g., "The child is developmentally ready to acquire it"; "He is old enough to control his negative emotions") for boys, than moral and social conventional reasons; in contrast, mothers were most likely to suggest moral reasons for girls (e.g., "It is important to share because it makes the other child feel that he is included in the group") with regard to sharing and controlling negative emotions. These results contrast earlier findings on European American and Mainland Chinese samples in which there were no significant interactions between type of reasons and sex of child for prosocial skills (Cheah & Rubin, 2003). In fact,

European American mothers were more likely to provide developmental reasons for the importance of social skills for the preschool-aged child regardless of the sex of the child (Cheah & Rubin, 2003). 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 (Goodnow & Collins, 1990). Instead, the Mainland Chinese mothers attributed more social conventional reasons for the importance of all three skills than their European American counterparts (Cheah & Rubin, 2003). Chinese mothers traditionally tend to focus on the transformation of the child into a socialised adult within society and focus on social order (Stimpfl, Zheng, & Meredith, 1997). These findings also support conjectures that high parental expectations about standards of behaviour for their children are believed to help ensure that the family reputation is kept unharmed (Fung, 1999).

Under similar Asian cultural and philosophical background, family reputation is also an important aspect of socialisation in Korea. However, in the present study, Korean mothers were least likely to endorse social conventional reasons for the importance of these social skills for both boys and girls. These results are in sharp contrast with those of Mainland Chinese mothers, mentioned above. The Korean mothers may be more likely to be influenced by Western ideologies regarding child development because of a longer period of modernisation and greater access to Western culture in Korean society. Korean mothers may have suggested developmental reasons, perhaps reflecting the recent political, economic, and social changes in South Korea that may have resulted in more "Westernised" views on child development (Ju & Chung, 2000). In contrast, Mainland Chinese mothers may have kept to traditional values because of the greater intrusiveness of Chinese governmental restrictions and control over family. It is interesting to note that for helping behaviours with regard to boys, mothers cited developmental and moral reasons equally, perhaps indicating that helping others is considered equally obligatory and dependent on developmental readiness for boys (e.g., Killen, 1991; Smetana, 1981). Moreover, for girls, mothers believed that controlling negative emotions was equally important for moral and developmental readiness reasons, perhaps indicating mothers' sex-stereotyped ideas that moral characteristics such as being kind, considerate, and thoughtful are more important for girls than for boys.

On the other hand, the results from the present study support another finding from the Mainland Chinese sample, where 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 the present study, Korean mothers of preschool girls were also most likely to believe that sharing and helping were important because of moral prosocial reasons (i.e., it meant that one was kind, considerate, and nice), or moral principle reasons (i.e., that it was more obligatory reasons based on principles of equality and fairness).

However, while Chinese mothers of boys were more likely to report that helping others was important because of societal or parental expectations (social conventional reasons), Korean mothers of boys were generally more likely to report that social skills were important only if the child was developmentally ready rather than because of social conventional reasons. In the case of helping behaviours specifically, developmental and moral reasons were equally important, and both were

significantly more important than social conventional reasons. Thus, it appears that Korean mothers were more influenced than their Mainland Chinese counterparts by gender-role expectations in that these social skills were thought of as more compulsory for girls, but less compulsory or obligatory for a boy. These findings corroborate mothers' ratings of social skills being more important for girls than boys, as well as supporting previous research showing that South Korean parents still have traditional gender-role attitudes (e.g., Han, 1999) and more traditional gender-role attitudes than their Asian counterparts (Arnold & Kuo, 1984; Sagara & Kang, 1998). One potential limitation of the present study is that mothers were not probed further regarding potential underlying rationale for developmental reasons (e.g., "Why do you think the child should be ready to do this?"). Doing so may have revealed a moral principle or prosocial rationale.

According to Cheah and Rubin (2003), European American mothers were significantly more likely 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, whereas Mainland Chinese mothers consistently endorsed external attributions like parental or environmental influences. As expected, Korean mothers of both boys and girls endorsed an external attributional style (e.g., "Because of education received from his parents", "Has been influenced by family or siblings") for sharing and helping behaviours, consistent with Confucian philosophy that emphasises the importance of environmental influences on the developing child (Choi, Nisbett, & Norenzayan, 1999; Han, 1999). Interestingly, mothers appeared to believe that internal factors (such as child disposition or maturation) may have an equally strong role to play as external factors when controlling one's emotions, particularly for young children.

The current data also suggested that Korean mothers were more likely to endorse modelling strategies rather than any other strategies for socialising all three skills. For helping behaviours, rewarding appropriate behaviours was also believed to be significantly more appropriate than directive or high-powered strategies. These results are similar to those of European American mothers, who were more likely to support modelling exemplary behaviours and vicarious learning in children than the Mainland Chinese mothers (Cheah & Rubin, 2003). These results may reflect an element of the Korean family's traditional idea of training that emphasises *both* modelling and direct teaching in childrearing (Han, 1989). That is, in the traditional Korean family, sons typically learned through observing behaviours and attitudes of adults in general life situations, whereas girls were socialised by direct lessons from their mothers and observation of their mother's behaviours. However, neither the main effect of child sex nor the interaction between child sex and type of strategy was significant for all three social skills. Alternatively, contemporary Korean mothers may be influenced by social-cognitive theories of learning, in which observational learning plays a large part (e.g., Bandura & McDonald, 1994), just like European American mothers. Furthermore, Korean mothers' beliefs were unlike those of Mainland Chinese mothers, who endorsed significantly greater proportions of directive strategies (Cheah & Rubin, 2003), indicating that Chinese parents prefer more instructional childrearing styles and believe in the provision of clear guidelines for children's behaviour (Chao, 1994, 1996). Thus, it appears that traditional Confucian ideas



of training may have encountered greater modification among Korean mothers, with Korean mothers moving away from more directive strategies.

The results of the present study provide evidence for interesting intercultural variations in the socialisation beliefs of the East Asian culture of South Korea. In addition, indirect comparisons with previous research on a Mainland Chinese sample also revealed interesting and important similarities and differences among two Confucian-based cultures. Like their Chinese counterparts, South Korean mothers provided more external attributions for the attainment of these social skills, which indicated the influence of Confucian ideologies on maternal beliefs regarding children's social behaviours. However, in general, Korean mothers of boys were more likely to provide reasons for the importance of sharing and controlling negative emotions that focused on the child's developmental readiness, whereas mothers of girls were more likely to provide moral reasons, indicating that traditional gender-role differentiations are still prevalent among younger generations of Korean mothers.

Although both modelling and direct teaching are traditional ideas of training and socialisation, as mentioned previously, it is interesting to note that Korean mothers endorsed modelling strategies rather than direct teaching for children in this developmental period. This finding is possibly due to both traditional Korean socialisation beliefs and the growing Western influence on contemporary South Korean mothers' childrearing ideas. Moreover, the high proportion of modelling strategies for all social skills may also be partly due to the age of the children in this sample. The average age of the children in this study was 49 months old, and Korean mothers with preschoolers often think that their children are too young to teach or discipline strictly and do not expect their children to possess high abilities in social skills before entering elementary school.

To summarise, contemporary Korean mothers' socialisation beliefs appear to be influenced by Western ideas of child socialisation. However, traditional beliefs still appear to exert some influence, on mothers' attributional beliefs in particular. This may result in conflicts between old and new ideas in South Korea today. Korea's traditional culture, including its religious heritage, was seriously undermined during Japan's colonial rule of Korea (1910–1945) and the Korean War (1950–1953) (Park & Cho, 1995). Moreover, since the 1960s, within a single generation, Korea has transformed from an agrarian to an industrialised urban society, with more South Koreans living in cities than in towns and villages today. Korea's adoption of Western science, technology, and culture comes along with Protestantism and an increase in Protestant churches (Park & Cho, 1995). At the same time, South Korean parents are experiencing sociopolitical changes towards an ideology of "perfect democracy". Although both South Korea and Mainland Chinese societies have been greatly influenced by Confucianistic ideologies on children and the family, in contrast to their South Korean peers most Mainland Chinese mothers have only more recently begun to be exposed to Western culture, along with changes in societal policies. Thus, the significance of examining cultural variation in East Asian Confucian-based cultures with attention to current sociocultural and political changes was supported.

Our findings have several implications for cross-cultural studies of children's social development, particularly with regard to the socialisation of social behaviours. The use of

open-ended responses with regard to reasons, attributions and strategies was a strength of the present study as it allowed for the identification of culturally specific beliefs. However, the present study is a preliminary step in the investigation of maternal proactive socialisation beliefs regarding preschoolers' prosocial skills among Korean families. Much work remains to be done before a thorough understanding of the area is possible. First, as noted previously, the lack of variability in the educational levels of the mothers, as well as the fact that mothers in this study were urban residents of a large city, limits the generalisability of the findings of the present study. Future research should address these limitations by including more heterogeneous samples and examining the potential influence of maternal education and rural–urban differences in child socialisation beliefs.

Second, while we also investigated maternal and child age as potential covariates, we found that number of children was the only variable related to the mothers' belief outcomes variables. Nevertheless, Korean parents have been reported to have special and higher expectations for their first-born children, especially for their first-born sons (Han, 1999). Also, as suggested by Miller (1995), parents who have both a son and a daughter are more likely to have different beliefs than parents who do not. Thus, other aspects of family structure such as birth order or the sex combination of siblings should be considered as possible predictors of maternal beliefs in future studies.

Moreover, the study of fathers' cognitions regarding child socialisation is greatly needed to further our understanding of the processes associated with the socialisation 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 and Korean families. These limitations notwithstanding, the present study represents a significant step towards understanding the socialisation beliefs of South Korea in relation to values and ideologies within a cultural perspective.

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**Appendix A***Social skill vignettes*

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*Sharing*

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

*Emotional control*

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

*Helping others*

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

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Names of children in the vignettes were matched to the sex of the participant's child.

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