

Abstract:

This study explored relationships between Chinese schools and Chinese American parenting, motivated by the literature gap in the social support for Chinese American parenting. Twenty-five Chinese American mothers from three Chinese schools in the state of Alabama were surveyed in face-to-face interviews. During the interviews, these mothers recounted their experiences with their Chinese schools. They shared their views on the social meanings of the Chinese schools. They described how the Chinese schools impacted their parenting strategies, family functions, and child-rearing ideology.

Multiple common themes emerged in the domains of parenting practice and impacts of the Chinese schools on parenting. The Chinese American mothers created a rich cognitive environment. They had low levels of satisfaction with their children's academic attainment, despite their children's high academic achievements. These mothers constantly adjusted their parenting strategies under the influences of two cultures. They universally felt the influences of racial discrimination, although to different extents. The Chinese schools carried multiple social functions for the local Chinese American families. The schools provided to these Chinese American mothers strong social support, brought them various social resources, and helped them to bridge with the large society. The schools had dual roles for language-teaching and passing-down cultural values. Both roles of the school led to positive developmental outcomes for the enrolled children. Throughout their interviews, the participants demonstrated their strong desire to integrate with the broader society, while preserving their heritage culture. The participants felt strong needs for social supports, as they were constrained with limited social networks and scarce social resources. Through language learning, cultural events, and social interactions at the schools, these mothers and their children established a sense of belonging. Their ethnic identity was enhanced.

Literature Gaps:

- **Inadequate studies on Chinese American parenting**
 - Mischaracterization as authoritarian
 - Misalignment between parenting styles and developmental outcomes
 - Mainly focusing on cultural influences on parenting
- **Lacking investigations of communal forces in Chinese American parenting**
 - Chinese schools are described as "loci of community, viability, creativity, and identity"
 - Chinese schools have not been explored as an important force in providing social support to Chinese American parents
 - Their important functions, as an information channel, social control, and networking support, deserve further investigations, especially in the parenting context

Study Purpose: Explore Chinese schools as an important communal force in supporting Chinese American parenting and understand the unique parenting experiences of Chinese Americans

Selected References:

Chao, R., & Tseng, V. (2002). Parenting of Asians. In B. Webbs (Ed.), *Handbook of parenting. Volume 4: social conditions and applied parenting* (pp. 59-95). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Coll, c. G. & Pachter, L. M. (2002). Ethnic and Minority Parenting. In M. Bornstein (Ed.s). *Handbook of parenting. Volume 4. Social Conditions and Applied Parenting* (pp. 36-56) New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Zhou, M. (2009). *Contemporary Chinese America: immigration, ethnicity, and community transformation*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Research Questions:

- **Q1: What relationship was there between the Chinese schools and Chinese American parenting practice in the contexts of culture and social structure?**
- **Q2: How did Chinese American mothers make meaning of the Chinese schools for parenting purposes?**

Methodology:

- **Qualitative face-to-face interviews:** Semi-structured interview, with mostly open-ended questions; Mandarin Chinese used during interviews to better capture the true meanings of the participants.
- **Study subjects:** 25 Chinese American mothers with children enrolled in Chinese schools; including four school principals
- **Customized questionnaire:** consisting of three parts, which were 1) Demographics and Acculturation, 2) Chinese school functions, and 3) parenting practices
 - An additional set of questions for the school principals
- **Study contexts:** Three Chinese schools in Alabama (in a city and a small town)
- **Grounded theory as the guide:** 1) Concurrence of data collection and analysis and 2) Use of purposeful sampling to recruit participants
- **Major data analysis steps:** Transcribing of audio files; Immersion into the transcripts; Only dialogues related to themes and quotes translated into English; Open coding to obtain themes.

Selected Results:

- **Demographics and Acculturation**
 - Uniform demographic characteristics: 1) Intact marriage; 2) High educational level; 3) Professionals in universities or research institutes
 - Mixed acculturation traits: Strong desire to maintain ethnic identity & heritage language, but acculturated holiday preferences
- **Functions of Chinese Schools:**
 - Connecting and bridging as a platform
 - Providing social and parenting resources
 - Creating volunteering opportunities
 - Reinforcing ethnic identity and fostering a sense of belonging
- **Parenting under effects of racial discrimination:**
 - Subtle feeling on the problem
 - Worries and concerns on racial bullying
 - Coping strategies on promoting acceptance of ethnic identity
- **School Principals:**
 - Broad school roles beyond language learning
 - Both high hopes and great challenges
 - Learning Chinese as the goal for students
 - Expectations for more parental involvement

Overview of the contexts, subtexts, and obtained themes

Contexts	Sub-contexts	Themes	
Demographics and Acculturation	Relocation and neighborhood		
	Self-identity and home language usage		
	Holiday preferences		
Chinese School Functions	Functions of Chinese schools on parenting in the bi-cultural context	Platform for communication and networking Promoting positive character development Negative influences Reinforcing ethnic identity	
	Social support provided by Chinese schools	Providing social resources Creating volunteering opportunities Sense of belonging	
	Functions of Chinese schools on parenting under the effects of racial discrimination	Unifying Chinese Americans Voice for the Chinese American community	
	Parenting Practices	Parenting in the bi-cultural context	
		Parenting under effects of racial discrimination	
Parental expectations			
Quality time, mother-child communication, and discipline			
Interviews with School Principals		School roles beyond language learning Both high hopes and great challenges Learning Chinese as the goal for students Expectations for more parental involvement	

Implications:

- More scholarly work on the ecological factors when studying ethnic minority parenting
- Policy implications: 1) Resources can be directed to support Chinese schools' operations and functions; 2) Resources to other ethnic minority centers
- Great needs on parenting education and training.

Cross-Themes:

- 1) **Preserving the Heritage Culture:** Making efforts on speaking Chinese at home; Emphasis on ethnic identity; Strong beliefs in education; Cultural integrity promoted by Chinese schools
- 2) **Willingness to Integrate:** Examples including adopting "American way" of parenting and learning volunteerism
- 3) **Longing for Social Support:** Cherished support from Chinese schools; Requesting parenting education

Study Contributions:

- 1) Extended the current research scope
 - Investigations on the impacts of ethnic communities on parenting
 - Studies on social functions of Chinese schools
 - Highlighted parenting and social needs
- 2) High reliability and validity from qualitative interviews and personal position
 - Rich first-hand information from face-to-face interviews;
 - Personal position supported better understandings and interpretation
- 3) Unique perspectives from the Chinese school principals: Multiple roles carried meaningful interpretations
- 4) Unique socio-cultural context in the Deep South with a low density of Chinese Americans
 - Strong needs for social support