



# Chinese Parents' Perception of Children's Shyness

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## INTRODUCTION

- Cultural ecological theory and the developmental niche framework emphasize the importance of understanding the development of children within their cultural contexts (Garcia Coll, 1990; Super & Harkness, 1986).
- Culture can be conceptualized as the organization of the developmental environment (Super & Harkness, 1986), and it colors our child-rearing beliefs. As one sub-system in this framework, parental ethnotheories reflect the parents' cultural belief systems that influence variability in parenting practices, and ultimately child outcomes (Harkness & Super, 1996).
- In western cultures such as the United States, Canada, and Australia, shy children are often seen as inadequate in social settings and may be rejected by their peers (Rubin et al., 2011; Rubin et al., 2014; Wu et al., 2015).
- Xu and colleagues (2008) have proposed a three-domain model of shyness, which includes anxious shyness, regulated shyness, and shyness towards strangers, and they predict divergent developmental outcomes.
- Studies have suggested that this temperamental trait is interpreted differently in Chinese societies, where parents often view shyness as acceptable, and are more likely to positively interpret shy behavior (Chen et al., 1998; Xu et al., 2008).

## OBJECTIVE

- The current research focused on how parents' perceptions of the different types of shyness are related to children's characteristics.

## SAMPLE AND PROCEDURES

### Participants

N=116 Chinese mothers

73 local-born ( $M_{age} = 38.14, SD = 3.77$ ) and 38 Mainland immigrant ( $M_{age} = 37.73, SD = 4.58$ ); Immigrant mothers arrived to Hong Kong anywhere between 1 to 28 years ( $M_{years} = 8.07, SD = 6.60$ ).

### Measure

- **The Chinese Shyness Scale (CSS)** was used to examine the types of shyness (Xu et al., 2007).
- Parents' self-reports of the **Child Behavioral Questionnaire (CBQ: Short Form)** were used to assess children's characteristics (Putnam & Rothbart, 2006)

### Analyses

- **SPSS version 25 (IBM, Armonk, NY)** was used to conduct a Pearson correlation to examine the association between type of shyness and children's characteristics.

### Pearson Correlations

	Regulate Shy	Anxious Shy
Children's sensitivity	.273**	-
Inhibitory Control	.366**	-
Attention	.357**	-
Fear of evaluation	.249**	.356**
Guilt	-	.271**
Anger	-	.194*
Fear of Attention	-	.265**

\*\* Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed).

## RESULTS

- Chinese parents made some distinctions regarding different forms of shyness. The correlations between regulated shyness and anxious shyness with different sort of temperament domains provide evidence that there are subsets of shy children who can function adaptively.
- Children's **regulated shyness** is positively related to children's sensitivity ( $r=0.273, p<0.005$ ), inhibitory control ( $r=0.366, p<0.005$ ), attention ( $r=0.357, p<0.005$ ) and fear of evaluation ( $r=0.249, p<0.005$ ).
- Children's **Anxious shyness**, in contrast, is associated with personal qualities that are often maladaptive for the child, such as fear of evaluation ( $r=0.356, p<0.005$ ), guilt ( $r=0.271, p<0.005$ ), anger ( $r=0.194, p<0.005$ ) and fear of attention ( $r=0.265, p<0.005$ ).
- Such results indicated the need to examine reactivity (shyness) and regulation (effortful control) together.

## DISCUSSION

- This study demonstrates that unlike traditional western studies, different types of shyness are connected to various children's temperamental characteristics in a Chinese population.
- Parents and school psychologists should consider the different motivations that are associated with children's shyness.
- Additionally, researchers and interventionists can benefit from understanding these nuanced cultural differences in developing effective programs to help shy children from diverse backgrounds.

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