

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Qian Liu for the degree of Master of Science in Human Development and Family Studies. Presented on July 6, 1999. Title: Attributions of Chinese Parents in the U.S. for Their Children's Social Behaviors: Contribution of Age and Gender of Child, Valence of Behaviors, Gender of Parents, and Parents' Adaptation to Life in the U.S.

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The purpose of this study was to examine the general nature of attributions of Chinese parents in the U.S. regarding their preschool children's social behaviors. Eighty-seven parents with preschool children participated. The attributions were examined along three causal dimensions: locus of causality (internal versus external), stability (stable versus unstable), and controllability (controllable versus uncontrollable). The types of child social behaviors studied were positive social behaviors, aggression, and withdrawal. The study looked at the contributions of child age, child gender, parent gender, and parent adaptation to life in the U.S. to parental attributions. It also investigated whether different types of child social behaviors (i.e., positive, aggressive, and withdrawn behaviors) elicited different types of attributions from parents.

Results indicated that older children's social behaviors elicited similar attributions from Chinese parents as younger children's. Chinese parents saw girls' withdrawn behaviors as more internally caused and controllable, but not more stable, than boys' withdrawn behaviors. However, no difference was found between boys' and girls' aggressive or positive social behaviors.

Chinese parents saw their children's positive social behaviors as more internally caused, stable and controllable than their children's negative social (aggressive and withdrawn) behaviors. In addition, Chinese parents saw their children's withdrawn behaviors as more internally caused, but not more stable or controllable, than their children's aggressive behaviors.

Fathers and mothers were not significantly different in their attributions for their children's social behaviors. No parent gender effect was found. Chinese parents who were more adapted to life in the U.S. saw their children's positive social behaviors as more stable and controllable by their children, but not more internal, than Chinese parents less adapted. In addition, these more highly adapted Chinese parents saw their children's aggressive behaviors as more unstable and uncontrollable by their children, but not more external, than Chinese parents less adapted. Furthermore, more highly adapted Chinese parents saw their children's withdrawn behaviors as more externally caused and less controllable, but not more unstable, than Chinese parents less adapted.

Attributions of Chinese Parents in the U.S. for Their Children's Social Behaviors:  
Contribution of Age and Gender of Child, Valence of Behaviors, Gender of Parents, and  
Parents' Adaptation to Life in the U.S.

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Qian Liu, Author

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ATTRIBUTIONS OF CHINESE PARENTS IN THE U.S. FOR THEIR CHILDREN'S  
SOCIAL BEHAVIORS: CONTRIBUTION OF AGE AND GENDER OF CHILD,  
VALENCE OF BEHAVIORS, GENDER OF PARENTS, AND PARENTS'  
ADAPTATION TO LIFE IN THE U.S.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Social relationships are of central importance in everyday life. Therefore, the acquisition of socially competent behaviors is considered critical to child development. The ways in which children acquire social competence and develop less competent social behaviors are significant issues in the study of human development.

Children's social competence has been examined by researchers in many different ways. One way has been to ask parents for their perceptions (Goodnow, Knight, & Cashmore, 1986). Parents' ideas are of interest to a wide range of social scientists, particularly developmental psychologists. However, many others have looked beyond developmental psychology to attribution theory, which examines parents' ideas about the causes of their children's social behaviors within the framework provided by general analyses of patterns of parental attributions (e.g., Dix & Reinhold, 1991; Dix, Ruble, Grusec, & Nixon, 1986).

Substantial research exists which suggests that the quality of children's social development is associated with parental behaviors (e.g., Ainsworth, Bleher, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Baumrind, 1989). Further, research shows that parental behaviors are partly guided by parents' attributions for their children. However, we know very little about how parents think and feel about their children's social development (e.g., Goodnow, 1988), and even less about parental perceptions of problematic as opposed to normative

child social behaviors as a result of the focus of studies on negative outcomes. Much of the research that has been done on parental beliefs concerns children's physical and cognitive development (e.g., Miller, 1988), not social development. Therefore, one major purpose of this study was to look at the way in which parents explain the reasons for their children's social behaviors.

To date, a predominance of research on parents' attributions for children's behaviors and characteristics have focused on White middle-class children (e.g., Melson, Ladd, & Hsu, 1993). Only recently, have cross-cultural studies on children's social development been seen in the research literature. Consequently, the culture and ethnic differences observed in children's social behaviors and play may sometimes be misinterpreted as signs of deficiency rather than variation.

There is no doubt that parents may differ from one another in their causal attributions for their children's problematic as well as adaptive and prosocial behaviors (Rubin & Mills, 1992). Therefore, research focused only on parents from the dominant culture will neglect some important information. Of particular interest in this research study was to investigate how foreign-born Chinese parents in the U.S. make attributions for their children's social behaviors.

In 1990, the Chinese population was the largest of more than twenty Asian groups residing in the United States (Wong, 1995). According to the 1990 U.S. census, in the past decade, the Chinese population in America has increased by 7.1% and has reached 1.6 million people (Bureau of the Census, 1990). The majority of Chinese living in the United States were foreign born, and this has become increasingly true (Wong, 1995). As a result, Chinese children are increasingly represented in school enrollment. In spite of

the rapid growth of this population, very little is known about them, particularly with respect to parents' beliefs about their children's social behaviors.

Previous studies (e.g., Bagley, 1972; Minde & Minde, 1976) have identified prevalent adjustment and social competence problems in immigrant children. For example, Wong (1995) found that Chinese–American children in Chinatown had identity conflicts, and some constantly demonstrated aggressiveness. No research evidence has been found to suggest that social problems were more prevalent among immigrant children than among White native–born children in the United States. However, although such social competence problems are often manifested in immigrant children, there is a serious dearth of research in the area. There has been an even more notable lack of information on foreign-born parents' causal attribution for their children's social behaviors. However, this is quite an important area of study due to the increasingly large ethnically diverse population in the U.S.

Causal attributions, as part of parental beliefs, are the product of a very complex mixture of factors. Previous research has identified child age, child gender, event valence (i.e., whether child behaviors are positive or negative) and parent gender as possible determinants of parental attributions. Besides these determinants, socioecological and personal-social setting factors have also been identified as factors that often times influence parental beliefs (Rubin, Mills, & Rose-Krasnor, 1989). These socioecological and personal-social setting factors for the Chinese are in various degrees different from those in their home country as a result of their migration (Locke, 1992). However, there may or may not be a large difference between present day Chinese and “the first Chinese who arrived in the United States, finding themselves in a new land among new people

with new ways.” (Locke, 1992, p.82). Along with their involvement in the adaptation process, new conditions come into being when changes in people’s cultural, economic, and social lives take place (Gordon, 1964). To date, there have been no data supporting a link between immigrant parents’ adaptation and their attribution for their children’s behavior. Research associated with a related area mentioned previously (i.e., relationships between parental beliefs and socioecological and personal-social setting conditions) leads the present researcher to anticipate that parental adaptation might influence the attributions they make for their children. No research has assessed this aspect of attribution.

The purposes of this study were twofold. First, it focused on describing the general nature of parental attributions among Chinese in the United States regarding their preschool children’s social behaviors. Second, it considered whether or not parents’ adaptation to conditions in the U.S. was associated with and predictive of variability in their attributions for their children’s social behaviors.

It was hypothesized that age and gender of child and event valence (i.e., positive versus negative child behaviors) would affect the attributions from parents. It was also hypothesized that fathers and mothers were different in attribution making due to the different child-rearing practices of fathers and mothers. Further, it was hypothesized that parents who were more highly adapted to life in the U.S. would make different attributions for their children’s social behaviors than parents who were less adapted. The former would make more positive attributions than the latter.

## Chapter 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Parents frequently engage in attempts to understand their children's social behaviors. "Why is my child crying?", "Why did he fight in school today?" and "Why is it so hard for Tony to make friends?" are some of the questions commonly asked by parents. A socially competent child is expected to be sensitive and empathetic to peers, engage in complex play, form friendships with peers, and be able to solve social problems (Howes, Matheson, & Hamilton, 1994). Children who lack social competence usually have a variety of difficulties and are considered to be at risk for maladjustment in later life. For example, socially deviant behaviors such as aggression are likely to be associated positively with peer rejection or isolation. Longitudinal studies have shown that aggression is a reasonably stable attribute and that aggressive children are likely to grow up into "bad-tempered" adults and develop difficult relationships with their spouses and children (Cummings, Iannotti, & Zahn-Waxler, 1989). Parents have to determine why particular child behaviors are happening, identify the needs and limitations in their children that may underlie these behaviors, and choose parenting strategies that they think are appropriate. These are cognitive aspects of parenting. The process through which parents get their perceptions has been the domain of attribution theory.

The topic of parental attributions for their children's social behaviors covers two major areas in the research literature. One is the literature on attribution theory, which has been developed over the last thirty years. The other is the literature on parental beliefs about children, a research area with a much shorter history.

This literature review consists of three parts. The first part reviews general propositions in attribution theory. The focus of this section is on the three causal dimensions of locus of causality (internal versus external), stability (stable versus unstable), and controllability (controllable versus uncontrollable). The second part is a review of literature on parents' attributions for their children's social behaviors. This section reviews studies that examined the determinants of parental attributions such as child age, child gender, event valence (i.e., positive versus negative child behaviors), parent gender, and individual parent experiences. The third and last part is a review of literature on immigrant adaptation, including a definition of adaptation and review of studies on various modes of adaptation.

Based on the review of literature, a model for this study was proposed, covering the five variables mentioned above, including child age, child gender, event valence (i.e., positive versus negative child behaviors), parent gender, and parent adaptation.

### Attribution Theory

The study of "causal explanations given for events by ordinary people" (Kelley & Michela, 1980, p.460), or attribution theory, has come to occupy an important position in social psychology research. Explaining an event constitutes an answer to the question of why that event happened. One way of explaining an event is to state what caused it. If science is the "institutionalized art of inquiry" (Nagel, 1961, p.vii), attribution theory deals with the non-institutionalized or common sense way of answering questions of why. Dealing with the rules the average individual uses in attempting to understand the causes of observed behaviors, the theory concerns itself with what Heider (1958) called



“naive psychology”, or the cause-effect analyses of behavior made by the “man in the street.” As one of the “men in the street”, the parent often makes attributions, especially for his/her child’s behaviors.

### General Model of the Attribution Field

As explained by Kelley and Michela (1980), the essential elements of attribution research include alternative explanations for an event, antecedents of causal attribution (i.e., the factors that lead the person to attribute a particular event to one cause rather than another), and consequences of the person’s making a particular attribution. The link between antecedents and attributions involves assessment of antecedents. There is no interest in consequences of attributions. The link between attributions and consequences concerns only the consequences of attributions. The primary interest of the present study was in factors that lead parents to attribute a particular event or behavior of his/her child to one cause rather than another, rather than the consequences of such an attribution. Using attribution models of social cognition, the present study examined parents’ explanations for why everyday child behaviors occur.

### Three Causal Dimensions

Causes of behaviors can be located along three dimensions of causality. They are locus of causality (internal versus external), stability (stable versus unstable), and controllability (controllable versus uncontrollable) (Russell, 1982; Weiner, 1985).

The reason a classification system or structure of perceived causality is created lies in the simplicity it gives to the organization of causal thinking (Weiner, 1985). It

enables one to see the relationship between various possible causal explanations for any particular event. This is because by finding the underlying properties of causes of an event, one is no longer confronted with previously incomparable qualitative distinctions. Rather, they are replaced by quantitative comparisons. What's more, as empirical data showed (e.g., Meyer & Koelbl, 1982), the structure of causality is not only a convenient classification system imposed by attribution theorists, but also part of the lay psychology of the ordinary person who explains causes of events in terms of the three broad dimensions. In this study, parental attributions for their children's social behaviors would be examined along these three dimensions.

Heider (1958) was the first person to propose the causal internal-external distinction. He wrote, "In common-sense psychology (as in scientific psychology) the result of an action is felt to depend on two sets of conditions, namely, factors within the person and factors within the environment." (p. 82). According to Weiner (1985), causal attributions pertaining to locus of causality vary between internally and externally perceived causes.

The major question an attributer asks is whether a particular behavior can be better explained by some internal ability, personality, or attitude that the person possesses (dispositional attribution) or by some external characteristic of the particular situation in which the person is momentarily located (situational attribution). If a behavior of a child occurs often (high consistency), occurs only in the presence of a particular situation (high distinctiveness), and occurs for many children (high consensus), then the cause of that behavior will be attributed by an adult to characteristics of the situation (McArthur, 1972). On the other hand, if the child's behavior occurs often (high consistency), occurs

in a variety of situations (low distinctiveness), and occurs uniquely for that particular child (low consensus), then an adult will be very much likely to attribute the cause of the behavior to the child's personal characteristics.

The second dimension of causality is labeled stability. The stability dimension defines causes on a stable (invariant) versus unstable (variant) continuum. When children's behaviors are viewed by parents as a result of stable causes, the behaviors are perceived to be permanent and unchangeable. On the other hand, if parents attribute unstable causes as reasons for children's behaviors, they believe that the behaviors are temporary.

Weiner and colleagues in 1971 argued that a second dimension of causality was required in addition to the internal-external dimension, because among the internal causes of behaviors, some fluctuate while others remain relatively constant. For example, for a child in the social context, the causal factor of physical attraction is considered a constant characteristic; whereas mood as a temporary state is considered as more variant, fluctuating from moment to moment. This is also true among external causal factors. For example, social acceptance or rejection may be attributed to parental influence or the chance of having easy-going or not easy-going classmates. Parental influence may be constant, at least during a certain period of time; but the chance of having easy-going or not easy-going classmates may change from term to term, year to year, or as the child moves from one school to another. Because causes within an identical grouping (internal versus external) differ in some respect, an additional causal dimension is required to capture this difference.

By adding the stability dimension, Weiner et al. (1971) proposed a classification system that permits more sophisticated comparisons between causes than merely having one dimension --- locus of causality. Without such a system, one would not be able to contend that such causes as physical attraction and parental influence are alike, although they differ qualitatively. The isolation of the underlying properties of causes permits a quantitative, more exact determination of the similarities and differences of the causes.

The third causal dimension is controllability. This dimension is concerned with whether the person is able to control his/her behaviors. Parents sometimes may attribute a child's social behaviors to causes that are within the child's control. In some other occasions, they may attribute a child's behaviors to causes uncontrollable by the child. This dimension of causality was established with the same reasoning that led to the naming of the stability dimension. Again, consider the example of a child in a social situation. Bad mood, fatigue, and temporary lack of effort may all be possible causes of an aggressive behavior of the child. They are all internal and unstable. However, they are different in that effort is under volitional control because a child can increase or decrease expenditure of effort. But mood and fatigue usually cannot be willed to change.

Besides these three causal dimensions, some other possible dimensions, such as intentionality and globality, have been suggested (e.g., Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978; Weiner, 1979). However, there is disagreement about them among researchers. Studies report the highest reliability and validity among the locus of causality, stability and controllability dimensions of attribution (Russell, 1982; Weiner, 1985). Therefore, in this study, only these three dimensions would be used in the analysis of parents' attributions.

### Parental Attributions about Children

In the general attribution literature, researchers have looked at the extent to which attribution depends on the nature of the person(s) whose behavior is being explained, the nature of the behavior, and the nature of the attributer (e.g., Fincham & Hewstone, 1982). The question of “where parents’ attributions come from” has been addressed in quite a number of studies. Possible determinants of attributions fall into three general categories: (1) those having to do with the child being judged, (2) those having to do with the child behavior being judged, and (3) those having to do with the parent making the judgment.

#### Characteristics of Targets

There are many personal characteristics that may be related to the making of attributions. Two target variables, child age and child gender, have been examined in research on parental attributions.

##### Child Age

One of the personal characteristics of the target that has received attention is developmental difference. Attributions can be studied in relation to characteristics of the child that may show age-related differences. Since a great deal of an individual’s social experience is structured according to age (e.g., schooling), it is not surprising that many attributions are made in terms of age. Also, age attribution implies social comparisons (e.g., with siblings and peers).

Children differ from adults in a number of ways (Dix, Ruble, Grusec, & Nixon, 1986). For example, they are less cognitively capable than adults, less able to regulate their own behavior, and are more often under control of those around them. Therefore, a particular behavior of a child may be considered as less dispositional, or internal, less stable, and less controllable than the same behavior of an adult.

At the same time, changes associated with the child's age become obvious given the developmental nature of social behaviors (e.g., Dix, Ruble, Grusec, & Nixon, 1986; Dix, Ruble, & Zambarano, 1989). For example, it is known that children become less aggressive and more sociable (e.g., Rubin, Watson, & Jambor, 1978) with age. Therefore, as children are growing, an adultlike pattern of inference becomes more and more appropriate as the child's capabilities and motivations approach those of adults. The display of either a socially aggressive or withdrawn behavior in an older child may elicit different parental causal attributions than the same behaviors in a younger child. Attributions provide a vantage point for considering changes in parents' ideas with the changing age of the child. So Dix and colleagues (1986) predicted that, with age, parents would see children's behaviors as increasingly dispositional, stable, and something under the child's control.

This prediction was confirmed by their study and later studies. In Dix and colleagues' studies (Dix, Ruble, Grusec, & Nixon, 1986; Dix, Ruble, & Zambarano, 1989), data were collected on parental attributions for the misdemeanors of older versus younger children. Parents of older children were found more likely than parents of younger children to say that the child possessed the knowledge of how to behave and understand that certain behaviors were wrong, that the wrong doing was controllable, and

that the behavior indicated negative dispositions in the child. The older the child, the more likely the parents were to conclude that the child had control over his/her behaviors. It has also been reported (Earn & Sobol, 1991) that parents judged child behavior problems as increasingly internal and stable.

However, not all studies found the same results. In order to test if parents really think in the same way as developmentalists (i.e., if age-related changes in children affect parents' explanation of social behaviors), Rubin and Mills (1992) conducted a study over a two-year period. The longitudinal data revealed that mothers in the two years consistently attributed both aggression and withdrawal most often to transient emotional states such as mood and fatigue and least often to acquired habits. Mothers usually saw these negative behaviors as due to unstable factors. No change was found over time.

### Child Gender

Another personal characteristic related to parents' attribution making is gender of the child. Research on adult subjects and children above the age of four years shows that gender differences found in achievement motivation and attribution do not favor females (Lochel, 1983). A number of studies (e.g., Dunton, McDevitt, & Hess, 1988) found a similar pattern in parents' attribution for children's performance in math. Parents of boys attributed relative success in math primarily to ability and relative failure to effort. Parents of girls showed a reverse pattern.

Most of the studies on parents' attributions that focused explicitly on child gender as a variable concerned parental attributions for children's performance in math. To date, gender of the child has been a peripheral variable in studies of parents' attributions for

their children's social behaviors (e.g., Gretarsson & Gelfand, 1988). Few effects of child gender have been found.

One possible direction for future research with gender of the child as a variable is to make the variable central rather than peripheral, that is, to concentrate on situations in which parents might reason differently about boys' and girls' behaviors. For example, it is possible that a gender effect may emerge when the child behavior being judged is considered as more typical for one gender than the other.

The present study examined possible variations in parental attributions about their children's positive, aggressive and withdrawn social behaviors as a function of the gender of the child. Given the evidence for greater permissiveness toward aggression in boys than in girls (e.g., Parke & Slaby, 1983), greater emphasis on interpersonal connections and sensitivity in girls than in boys (e.g., Block, 1983), more negative evaluation of problem behaviors in girls than in boys (e.g., Bacon & Ashmore, 1985), and stronger and more negative reactions to both aggression and withdrawal in girls than in boys (e.g., Rubin & Mills, 1992), it was predicted in this study that parents would perceive the causes of both negative (aggression and social withdrawal) and positive social behaviors differently in boys and girls. Possibly, having less positive perceptions of girls' negative behaviors than of boys', they may attribute more negatively for these problem behaviors in girls than in boys. Since girls are expected to be more social than boys (Rubin & Mills, 1992), it is also predicted that parents attribute girls' positive social behaviors to more internal, stable and controllable causes than boys' positive social behaviors.



### Characteristics of the Behavior to Be Explained

Parents usually think positively about their children. They therefore tend to reason differently about positive child social outcomes from negative ones. The study by Gretarsson and Gelfand (1988) provides an example. The mothers in the study gave examples of two prosocial and two antisocial behaviors that they had observed in their children. Then, they made a series of attributional judgments. Mothers tended to attribute positive behaviors to their child's personality rather than to external/situational influences. The reverse pattern held for negative behaviors, which tended to be attributed to influences outside their child and uncontrollable by their child. Positive attributes were rated more consistently as something inborn and expected to be more stable over time than negative ones. Therefore, the mothers were optimists, attributing more internality, stability, and controllability for positive behaviors than for negative ones.

This pattern with regard to the valence of the child's behaviors (i.e., event valence) has been revealed in other studies (e.g., Buzzelli, 1989; Dix, Ruble, Grusec, & Nixon, 1986; Melson, Ladd, & Hsu, 1993) using within-subject approaches, in which the comparison is made between attributions for positive and negative social behaviors within the same child. The research of the valence effect is closely related to ideas dealing with a long developmental span. Parents have been asked whether they see the behavior displayed at one age as likely to last or to change. The results confirmed that desirable behaviors or qualities (such as being friendly, talking nicely, and being generous to others, etc.) are regarded as likely to be stable. Undesirable behaviors or qualities (such as being unable to engage in complex play, being easily upset by mistakes, being rude, and crying easily, etc.) were expected to change. Undesirable behaviors were

more likely to be attributed by parents to situational factors, while prosocial behaviors were more likely to be attributed to dispositions.

Another approach used has been to make between-subject comparisons and to examine whether parental attributions of children who are experiencing social development problems differ from attributions for children who are developing more normally. Studies (e.g., Baden & Howe, 1992; Rubin & Mills, 1992) have found an exception to the generally held positive parental bias (i.e., parents tend to attribute positive child behaviors to personality and stable and controllable causes and negative ones to situational, unstable and uncontrollable influences). Parents of children with problems tend to make more negative attribution than parents in general.

In studying mothers' attributions for their children's desirable and undesirable social behaviors, Gretarsson and Gelfand (1988) also confirmed the above finding. Mothers had less positive perceptions of children whom they found "difficult to manage" than "easier" children. They tended to attribute their disobedient children's negative behaviors as more inborn.

Researchers have turned to the general attribution literature regarding self-serving and positive biases for explanations of the effects of valence in parental attribution making. For either informational or motivational reasons, parents are positively biased in interpreting their children's behaviors, making attributions that reflect well on either their children or themselves (Gretarsson & Gelfan, 1988).

Motivation is one of the major determinants of the attribution process. A person's interests often become relevant to the attribution process because self-esteem and sense

of competence are affected by the attributions one makes. Concerns about these matters may lead the attributer to search for explanations less than completely objective.

A person's positive behavior has the potential for enhancement of self-esteem if he or she is causally responsible for it. Therefore, motivation for self-enhancement should result in self-attribution for positive behaviors. Similarly, since negative behaviors may have negative implications for self-esteem unless it is attributed externally, such attributions should result from motivation for self-protection. Positively biased self-perceptions extend to close companions (Heider, 1958). Parents' perceptions of their children should closely resemble their self-perceptions because their children are genetically similar to them, are reared by them, and are viewed by others as their extensions. Therefore, parents feel they are personally involved in their children's behaviors. Their self-esteem may be enhanced by perceiving positive child behaviors as inborn and stable, but negative ones as externally caused and transitory (Gretarsson & Gelfand, 1988). It is suggested that this way of interpreting child behavior by parents helps them to be consistent, effective, and optimistic caregivers since the attributions affect the parents' feelings about their children, expectations for future child behaviors, and efforts to improve problems (Jaspars, Hewstone, & Fincham, 1983).

The waning of parental optimism that usually happens when parents categorize their children as deviant or troublesome can also be explained by motivation. Like the positive parental bias, this apparent exception to the positive parental bias could also be functional for parents (Gretarsson & Gelfand, 1988). Viewing a difficult child as constitutionally impaired and his/her problem as inborn and stable relieves parents of

responsibility for their child's problem and for improving it. This apparently works for the parents' self-protection and might enhance parents' self-esteem.

Although parents' perceptions of both types of negative child social behaviors, i.e., aggressive and withdrawn behaviors, are in contrast to parents' perceptions of positive child social behaviors, these two types of negative social behaviors are also different in that they may elicit different attributions from parents. It is a culturally acquired belief that social withdrawal is often the manifestation of a trait (Rubin & Mills, 1992). It was found in Rubin and Mills' study that parents attributed a child's withdrawn behaviors more to the child's disposition than aggressive behaviors. They were also more likely to explain aggression than withdrawal on the basis of age or age-related factors (e.g., a stage that the child will grow out of). Therefore, withdrawal was considered more stable than aggression. In addition, a child's aggressive behaviors were more likely to be attributed to factors out of the child's controllability than withdrawn behaviors.

Since the present study examined the Chinese population in the United States, some consideration of the Chinese cultural values may yield interesting findings. In the Chinese culture, the parent-child relationship is defined by specific role requirements that evolved partly from the principles of Confucius (Chao, 1994). The principles specify that the role of children is to show loyalty, obedience, and respect to elders, while the elders must teach, discipline, and govern responsibly. As a result, disobedience and aggression may be more unacceptable in the eyes of Chinese adults than for Western parents. A socially withdrawn child, who is shy, quiet, and sensitive, may be viewed as well behaved and understanding. These culturally shaped values may be reflected in Chinese parents' attributions for these child behaviors. Therefore, considering withdrawal more

acceptable than aggression, they may attribute their children's withdrawn behaviors to more internal, stable and controllable causes than their children's aggressive behaviors.

### Characteristics of Attributers

The characteristics of parents that have been studied are parent gender and some other individual differences among parents.

#### Parent Gender

The question asked with respect to mother-father comparisons is, "Do mothers and fathers hold similar or different beliefs about their children?" This question is based on the assumption that mothers, on the average, have more experience and perhaps more responsibility for their children than fathers do.

A number of studies (e.g., Dix et al., 1986; Mills & Rubin, 1990; Russell & Russell, 1982) have provided information on both mothers' and fathers' attributions. The dominant impression given by them is one of similarity rather than difference. Some reported no mother-father differences at all (e.g., Dix et al., 1986; Mills & Rubin, 1990). A handful of differences did emerge in some of these studies. For example, it has been reported that mothers were more likely to attribute their children's noncompliance to more external causes than fathers (Sobol, Ashbourne, Earn, & Cunningham, 1989). Fathers were more externally oriented than mothers in their attributions of their children's positive social outcomes (Peet & Melson, 1991). In all of the cases, however, significant parent gender effect emerged on only a minority of measures.

Like investigations focused on gender of the child, the parent gender has been only a peripheral variable in research. Therefore, studies have not been specifically constructed to probe for differences that may exist. In the general child-rearing literature, mothers and fathers are different in a number of socialization practices. For example, fathers tend to play more roughly with their children than mothers. Fathers train boys to be assertive and aggressive by actively suppressing cross-sex play and rewarding them for playing with the same-sex items, while mothers permit their sons to play with either masculine or feminine toys (Langlois & Downs, 1980). Mothers attach greater importance to such desirable child social characteristics as “being cooperative and sharing”, “being able to express affection”, “being well-behaved”, and “being well-mannered” than fathers do (Russell & Russell, 1982). It would be interesting to determine whether differences in attribution accompany these differences in practices. Therefore, parent gender was one of the variables considered in examining parental attributions in this study. It is predicted that mothers may make more positive attributions for their children’s positive social behaviors than fathers, attributing these behaviors to more internal, stable and controllable causes. Having more positive perceptions of children’s aggressive behaviors, fathers may make more positive attributions for their children’s aggressive behaviors than mothers. As for attributions for children’s withdrawn behaviors, mothers may be more motivated to make more positive attributions for their children’s withdrawn behaviors for motivational reasons explained previously, if it is true that mothers are primary caregivers while fathers are secondary caregivers.

## Different Experiences of Parents

Previous studies on immigrant parents in the United States have found that parental characteristics, specifically parental attitude toward social change and new experiences as well as parental adaptation, serve as significant predictors of their children's adjustment and performance in school (Aronowitz, 1992). This was so even when the effects of parental education, family socioeconomic status, and children's age, intelligence, and English language competence were held constant.

However, there has been no investigation on how parental attitude toward change and new experiences and parental adaptation may operate to influence the adjustments and behaviors of children. One possible way to speculate about how such parental characteristics might mediate child outcomes is to link them with parental beliefs.

A number of studies have stated that parental beliefs are significantly related to children's behavioral outcomes. For example, parental beliefs influence children's social, emotional, and intellectual development (McGillicuddy-De Lisi, 1982; Schaefer & Edgerton, 1985). A great deal of research has been based on the assumption that parental beliefs play an important role in the development of children's socialization or social competence (Ladd & Golter, 1988; Putallaz, 1987). Therefore, studying the first part of the link, that is, the relationship between parental characteristics and parental beliefs, may yield some useful information for the investigation on how some parental characteristics, such as parental adaptation, operate to influence child outcomes.

In the attribution field, there have been quite a number of studies on the relationship between parental characteristics and the type of attributions that parents make for their children's behaviors. For example, it has been proven that the immediate

mood (e.g., happy and angry moods) (Dix et. al, 1991) and chronic emotional state (e.g., depression) (Dix, 1991) of the parents are important contributors to parental attributions.

As mentioned before, immigrant parents' adaptation to new conditions has not been one of the parental characteristics studied in the attribution field. However, some related questions have been addressed. Dix and colleagues (1991) concluded from their study on mothers' attributions for their children's behaviors that differences in experiences or life circumstances could lead to differences in attributions. McGillicuddy-De Lisi's study (1982) also revealed a close association between parental beliefs and socioeconomic status. There is also growing evidence that socioecological and personal-social setting factors may influence parental beliefs, including parental attributions (Rubin, Mills, & Rose-Krasnor, 1989). For example, being economically disadvantaged, unemployed, poorly housed, or lacking in social support may interfere with the ability of a parent to be sensitive to the needs of a child and to form positive perceptions of a child.

### Immigrant Adaptation

Parents' adaptation to life in the U.S. was one of the independent variables studied in the present research. "Adaptation" is defined as the process in which immigrants modify their attitudinal and behavioral patterns in order to maintain and improve their life conditions compatible with the new environment (Cohen, 1974).

According to Gordon (1964), there are seven different subprocesses of adaptation. These include cultural assimilation, structural assimilation (or social assimilation), marital assimilation, identification assimilation, attitude receptional assimilation, behavioral receptional assimilation, and civic assimilation. The first two conditions are



the most important and are often used as the basis of theoretical framework in studies on immigrant adaptation.

Cultural assimilation refers to the change of cultural patterns to those of the host society. Social assimilation refers to the large-scale entrance into cliques, clubs and institutions of the host society on the primary group level (Gordon, 1964). In the two contrasting models of assimilation --- the Anglo conformity ideology and cultural pluralism--- the levels of participation of the person from a minority group in the majority group are high in both cultural assimilation and social assimilation (McLemore, 1994). That is, he/she shows very high acceptance of the majority group's culture, very high integration in education, occupations, residence, civic matters, and mass recreation of the majority, and very high acceptance of majority-group friends.

Gordon's model was designed to explain actual adaptation processes. Usually, cultural assimilation occurs earlier than social assimilation and proceeds more rapidly. Gordon has argued that while cultural assimilation of racial and ethnic minorities has taken place to a considerable degree in the U.S., their social assimilation has not been so extensive. This has been true for all ethnic minorities, but more so for non-White minorities (Kitano, 1976).

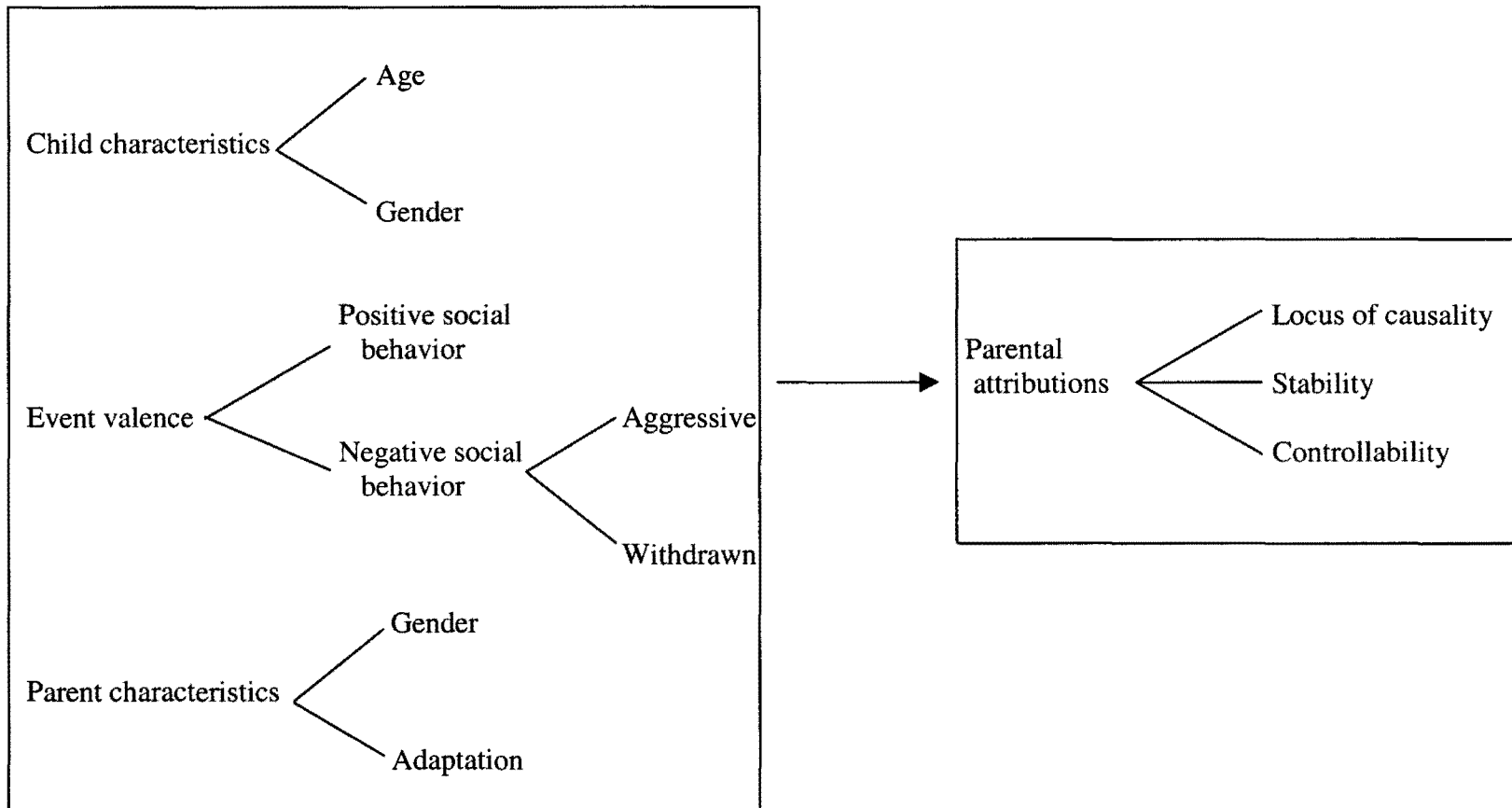
The above mentioned adaptation related concepts would be used in measuring Chinese parents' adaptation in the U.S., one of the independent variables in this study. This variable was included because the experience of foreign-born parents in the U.S. in the adaptation process covers economic, cultural and social conditions of them, and reflects the parents' sociological and personal-social setting conditions.

### Proposed Model

In the model for the present study, all of the above-mentioned variables, including child age, child gender, event valence (i.e., positive, aggressive, and withdrawn child behaviors), parent gender, and parent adaptation, were included as independent variables. The dependent variables were parental attributions made along the three dimensions of locus of causality, stability and controllability for positive, aggressive and withdrawn child behaviors. They are displayed in the figure on page 25.

Based on the above review of literature on the attribution theory, parental attributions for their children's social behaviors, and immigrant adaptation, five hypotheses were proposed:

- (1) Older children's social behaviors (positive, aggressive and withdrawn behaviors) are seen by Chinese parents as more internally caused, stable and controllable than younger children's social behaviors.
- (2) Girls' social behaviors (positive, aggressive and withdrawn behaviors) are seen by Chinese parents as more internally caused, stable and controllable than boys'.
- (3) Chinese parents attribute their children's positive social behaviors to more internal causes and see them as something more stable and controllable than their children's negative social behaviors (aggressive and withdrawn behaviors). They attribute their children's withdrawn behaviors to more internal, stable and controllable causes than their children's aggressive behaviors.
- (4) Fathers and mothers make different attributions for their children's social behaviors. Fathers may attribute their children's positive social behaviors to more external, unstable and uncontrollable causes than mothers. On the other hand, they may



Proposed model

attribute their children's aggressive and withdrawn behaviors to more internal, stable and controllable causes than mothers.

- (5) Chinese parents more highly adapted to life in the U.S. attribute their children's positive social behaviors to more internal, stable, and controllable causes, and their children's negative social behaviors (aggressive and withdrawn behaviors) to more external, unstable, and uncontrollable causes than parents who are less adapted.

### Summary

In spite of the large number of studies on parental attributions, research on attributions of foreign-born parents, particularly Chinese parents, for their children's social behaviors is rather sparse. The present study looked at the contribution of the child's age and gender to their parents' attributions. Furthermore, positive social behaviors and negative behaviors (aggressive and withdrawn behaviors) may elicit different types of attributions from parents. This difference was also explored. It also investigated whether fathers and mothers make different attributions concerning their children. Finally, in investigating the effects of different parental characteristics on parental attributions, this study focused on Chinese parents' adaptation to life in the U.S. as a characteristic to be studied.

## Chapter 3

### METHOD

The method section includes a description of the subject sample, the instruments, the demographic questionnaire, and the procedures used for gathering data. The instruments included two measures --- one for parental attribution and the other for parental adaptation.

#### Sample

Subjects of the study were all Chinese or Chinese-American parents living in the U.S. They were 87 mothers and fathers with children at the age of 3 to 6 years. Forty-four of them were couples. The other 43 were from different families. Thirty-nine of the parents, or 44.8%, were mothers; while 48 of them, or 55.2%, were fathers. The vast majority of parents were married (fathers = 44 or 91.7%, mothers = 37 or 94.8%) (see Table 3.1), with the remainder among divorced, remarried and separated parents.

The demographic characteristics of the mothers and fathers are compared in Table 3.2. The parents ranged in ages from 28 to 47, with a mean of 36.34. Their number of years in the U.S. ranged from 1 to 45, with a mean of 6.32 years. The birthplace of 75 (86.2%) of all the parents was Mainland China. Twelve (13.8%) were born in Taiwan, Hong Kong, the U.S., or other countries or places. Twenty-one (24.1%) were permanent residents or citizens of the U.S.; the other 66 (75.9%) were not. The subjects' educational level on the whole were quite high with 80 (92.0%) of them having Bachelor's or higher degrees. For family income, 18 (23.7%) parents had a yearly family income of \$50,000 or

higher. Twenty-six (34.2%) had family incomes between \$20,000 and \$49,999. Thirty-two (42.1%) had family incomes below \$19,999. Data were missing for this question for 11 subjects.

Each parent was asked to answer questions about their attributions for his/her child's social behaviors. Although some couples chose the same child when answering the questionnaires, the same child was counted twice when the total number of children included in the study was calculated. This was because the father and mother were asked to answer the questionnaires independently and, therefore, their scores for the same child

Table 3.1

Frequency distribution of the marital status of fathers and mothers

Marital status	Frequency (percentage)	
	Fathers	Mothers
Married	44 (91.67%)	37 (94.87%)
Divorced	3 (6.25%)	0 (0%)
Remarried	1 (2.08)	1 (2.56%)
Separated	0 (0%)	1 (2.56%)
Total	48 (100%)	39 (100%)

Table 3.2

Comparison of fathers and mothers on the basis of  
selected demographic characteristics

Characteristics	Fathers	Mothers	Total
<b>Age (in years)</b>			
Mean	37.71	34.67	36.34
SD	4.32	3.39	4.20
<b>Years of residency in the U.S.</b>			
Mean	7.06	5.41	6.32
SD	7.01	4.11	5.92
Percent being a U.S. Permanent Resident or citizen	25.00% (n=12)	23.08% (n=9)	24.1% (n=21)
Percent having Bachelor's degrees or higher	97.91% (n=47)	84.61% (n=33)	92.0% (n=80)
<b>Family income</b>			
\$50,000-Above	23.25% (n=10)	24.24% (n=8)	23.7% (n=18)
\$20,000-\$49,999	34.88% (n=15)	33.33% (n=11)	34.2% (n=26)
\$19,999-Below	41.86% (n=18)	42.42% (n=14)	42.1% (n=32)

differed. Thus, the total number of children included in the present study thus calculated was 87. Thirty-seven were girls and 50 were boys. They ranged in ages from 3.1 to 6, with a mean of 4.29. Mean ages of the boys and girls are shown in Table 3.3.

Forty-eight percent of the parents included in the present study resided in a small northwest city of 50,000 people where the researcher was studying as a graduate student. In order to obtain more subjects for the study, Chinese parents living in some other places in the U.S. were contacted. A snowball method was employed. Twenty-three percent of these parents came from California, 20% from Arizona, and 9% from Washington.

### Measurement

The survey consisted of two instruments: (1) a measure of parental attributions for their children's social behaviors, and (2) a measure of parent adaptation to life in the U.S. Both are described in the following section.

Table 3.3

Frequency distribution of the ages of boys and girls

Age (in years)	Boys (n = 50)	Girls (n = 37)	Total (n = 87)
Mean	4.35	4.22	4.29
SD	.87	.90	.88



### Parental Attribution

An adapted form of the Causal Dimension Scale, originally developed by Russell (1982), was used to measure how parents make causal attributions for their children's social behaviors. The Causal Dimension Scale is a measure designed to assess how the attributer perceives the causes he/she has identified for an event. Based on the work of Weiner (1979) on attribution theory of achievement motivation and emotion, the scale assesses causes along the dimensions of locus of causality, stability, and controllability. These dimensions are three mutually exclusive subscales (See Appendix B).

### Vignette

A majority of the previous studies on parental attributions for children's social behaviors used hypothetical children to translate the general outcome of interest (e.g., negative social behaviors) into a specific exemplar (e.g., Dix, Ruble, Grusec, & Nixon, 1986). For example, in the study by Dix and associates focused on social outcomes, the procedure was to present vignettes that illustrated the behaviors of, not the parents' own child, but a hypothetical child of the same age and gender. Therefore, to reduce the artificiality for which attribution research has been criticized, in the present study, parents were asked about their perceptions of their real children. To help parents focus their thinking, they were asked to imagine their child in specific incidents in which their child had demonstrated negative social behaviors (i.e., one each for socially aggressive and withdrawn behaviors) or a positive social behavior, in answering questions about their attributions.

## Measure

This scale was designed to test the causes an individual perceives about his/her own behaviors, not others' behaviors. However, since the present study looked into parents' attribution for others, namely, for their children, the wordings of the scale was modified so that the focus of the causes shifted from the individual making attributions to the child.

The scale includes nine bipolar items, three items within each subscale. The three items for the locus of causality subscale measure whether the causes of the child's behaviors were perceived by the parent to reflect (a) an aspect of the child versus an aspect of the situation; (b) the location of the cause as inside the child versus outside the child; and (c) something about the child versus something about others. The three items for the stability subscale measure whether the causes of the child's behavior were perceived by parents to be (a) permanent versus temporary; (b) stable versus unstable over time; and (c) changeable versus unchangeable. The three controllability subscale items assess whether or not the child's behavior was perceived to be (a) controllable versus uncontrollable by the child; (b) intended versus unintended by the child; and (c) something for which someone is responsible versus no one is responsible.

The order in which each question was presented was counterbalanced. A total score for each subscale was computed by summing the scores of all three items belonging to a particular subscale. Low scores on these subscales indicated that the cause of the child's behavior was perceived by the parent to be internal, stable, and controllable.

The nine-point scale in the original Causal Dimension Scale of Russell (1982) was reduced to a seven-point scale to encourage ease and accuracy of rating. Total scores

for each of the three subscales ranged from 3 to 21 points. The higher the scores, the less the behavior's cause was perceived to be internal, stable, and controllable. When scores were low for the perceived cause of a positive child social behavior, the parental attributions were viewed as positive attributions. When scores were low for the perceived cause of a negative child behavior, the parental attributions were viewed as negative attributions (Gretarsson & Gelfand, 1988).

In order to validate the Causal Dimension Scale, Russell (1982) did two studies in which undergraduate psychology students rated behavioral descriptions previously identified as representing one of the three causal attribution areas. One hundred and eighty-nine students served as subjects in the first study. From the validity and reliability tests, it appeared that the locus of causality and stability dimensions were assessed reasonably well as demonstrated by the results of a factor analysis and high alpha coefficients. The three items each assessing these two dimensions could, therefore, be combined into subscales. However, the items assessing the controllability dimensions were problematic. This was because the controllability items were of primarily two types: internal-controllable scales and external-controllable scales. They confounded the locus of causality and controllability dimensions. The single item that was found to adequately measure controllability could either refer to the person performing the task or others.

In the second study, to validate the scale, two more controllability items were constructed and added to the single adequate controllability item. Controllability was thus specified as independent of locus of causality. Ninety-nine undergraduate students participated in this study.

Results of the analyses of variance showed that for each item, the largest main effect was found for the dimension the item was designed to assess; while the effect for the other two causal dimensions were generally quite small. The final nine-item measure appeared to adequately assess the three causal dimensions conceptually identified by Weiner (1979). The behavioral descriptions the students matched with the dimensional areas were the same as those designed by the researchers. Subscales were moderately related to each other, with correlations from .19 to .28. The reported alpha coefficients were .87 for the locus of causality subscale, .84 for the stability subscale, and .73 for the controllability subscale. All three subscales were found to be internally consistent.

#### Parent Adaptation

The parents' adaptation to life in the U.S. were assessed using an Immigrant Sociocultural Adaptation Survey developed by Hurh and Kim (1984) with additional items from the Multivariate Model of Immigrant Adaptation by Goldlust and Richmond (1974) (See Appendix A). The Immigrant Sociocultural Adaptation Survey was originally used by Hurh and Kim to examine the adaptation of 615 first-generation Korean adult immigrants in terms of the extent and intensity of their acculturation (cultural assimilation) and social assimilation, and adherence to their Korean socioculture (ethnic attachment). Since the items for ethnic attachment were not the focus of the present study, only the items related to cultural and social assimilation were used. In the present study, the word "Korean" was changed to "Chinese", since the samples in the two studies were from two different ethnic groups.

The degree of cultural assimilation was measured by (a) English proficiency; (b) exposure to American mass media; and (c) attitude toward changing their first names to American names. The degree of social assimilation was measured by the respondents' (a) social network; and (b) participation in American voluntary associations.

The respondents' self-evaluation of their English language proficiency, one of the most important variables affecting cultural adaptation, was used. This was measured by the subjects' responses to the following questions:

(a) Reflecting on your experience in America, how well do you think that you can express yourself in English?

(b) How well can you read American newspaper and magazines?

(c) How well can you write letters in English?

For each question, five response categories were given: (0) "not at all", (1) "almost not at all", (2) "about half", (3) "moderately well", and (4) "fluently", with scores ranging from 0 point to 4 points.

The degree of immigrants' exposure to American-printed mass media was measured by their responses to the following questions:

(a) Do you read any American newspapers?

(b) Do you read any American magazines?

The parents were asked to answer each of the above two questions using a 5-point scale ranging from "not at all" (0 point) to "regularly" (4 points).

The last question concerning the measurement of the parents' degree of cultural assimilation asked about their attitude toward Anglicization of their Chinese first names. It is a conspicuous way of assessing cultural assimilation because it involves modification

of one's symbolic identity (Kang, 1971). This has occurred or has become an issue only because the parents have moved to the U.S. The question concerning the subjects' attitudes toward the change of names was: "How do you feel about Chinese changing their first names to American names?" Answers fell on a 5-point scale ranging from "totally disapprove" to "totally approve".

To assess social assimilation, parents were asked about the amount of White friends they had as their close friends and the number of American voluntary associations they participated in. The parents chose the appropriate amount from among five categories, from "none" to "all".

Besides the cultural and social aspects in Hurh and Kim's (1984) Sociocultural Immigrant Adaptation Survey for Korean immigrants, some items about satisfaction with life in the U.S. were added to the survey. These satisfaction items were obtained from the Multivariate Model of Immigrant Adaptation developed by Goldlust and Richmond (1974). These items were added to the survey for use in the present study because it was felt that social and cultural aspects, the objective side of immigrant adaptation, were not adequate to measure adaptation alone. The subjective side of immigrant adaptation must also be taken into consideration (Goldlust & Richmond, 1974). "Irrespective of the research methodology adopted, a multivariate approach to the analysis of data relating to immigrant adaptation is necessary and entirely compatible with a longitudinal study or a single survey. It simply recognizes that human behavior is the complex outcome of many different determinants. Only a few of these can be adequately observed and measured." (Goldlust & Richmond, 1974). The level of satisfaction of the respondents in the U.S.

was decided upon by how various aspects of the post-migration was being considered by respondents, and was thus a subjective aspect.

The satisfaction level involved relative comparisons with the person's situation before migration. These items covered satisfaction with house, neighborhood and job, and perceived differences in the respondents' present economic and social positions in the U.S. compared with the former country. These were measured on five-point scales and their scores were summed for the general satisfaction score.

A sum of scores of each of the 13 items concerning cultural assimilation, social assimilation, and satisfaction level represented the parents' adaptation scores. The scores for each item ranged from 0 to 4. Total adaptation scores, therefore, ranged from 0 to 52.

Validity and reliability information for this version of the Immigrant Adaptation Survey, which combined Hurh and Kim's (1984) survey and the satisfaction items of the Multivariate Model (Goldlust & Richmond, 1974), is not available. Some research, however, reported that expressed satisfaction with life showed significant correlation with adaptation (Neto, 1995). Satisfied migrants tended to be better adapted than dissatisfied ones. Satisfaction with life was negatively related to all perceived problems of adaptation. This provided some evidence of concurrent validity.

The face validity of the Immigrant Sociocultural Adaptation Survey may be evaluated in terms of whether its cultural and social assimilation items are measuring immigrants' adaptation. Support for this can be found in Gordon's *Assimilation in American Life* (1964), which is the mainspring of the theoretical framework for Hurh and Kim's study (1984). These subprocesses of adaptation are the common experiences of all

ethnic groups in the U.S. (Gordon, 1964), which provides some proof for the external validity of the survey.

### Demographic Questionnaire

In order to obtain background information on the subjects, all parents were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire. These questions were mainly of four types: (a) questions about parents' background, including gender, age, marital status, birthplace, length of residence in the U.S., and U.S. residency status; (b) questions about children in the family (including the research child for whom the parents made attributions), including their respective ages and gender, and the research child's birthplace; (c) the parents' intention to return to China to live in the future and their concern about their children's assimilation into the American culture; and (d) questions about the educational level, occupation, and income level of the parents (See Appendix C).

### Procedures

Subjects in this study were first recruited through the local Chinese associations of church, schools and community as well as the Chinese Students and Scholars Association at the university in the northwest city of 50,000 people, where the research was being conducted. Telephone numbers of families with children were obtained from the directories of these associations. Then telephone calls were made to the parents asking about the ages of their children. Only those with preschoolers were appropriate subjects for this study. These parents were further asked about their willingness to participate in the study. Since these families did not constitute a large enough sample,



some Chinese associations in California, Arizona and Washington were contacted. A snowball method was used.

Surveys were conducted in this study. The initial English-language version of the questionnaire was translated into Chinese. Two bilingual Chinese people who had not seen the English version then translated the Chinese version back into English. The inconsistencies found using this back translation method were resolved.

The vignettes, instruments, and demographic questionnaires were compiled into a booklet. A cover letter was attached to explain the purpose of the study. The order of the scales was counterbalanced to prevent order effects. In closing, appreciation for the subjects' participation was extended.

Upon agreeing to participate, the surveys were sent out to the subjects by mail. Since many people had access to e-mail, surveys were e-mailed to some subjects. Both parents from each family were asked to complete questionnaires concerning their attribution for their children's social behaviors, their adaptation to life in the U.S., and some demographic information. The father and mother of each child were asked to complete the surveys independently and not to discuss their responses with each other until they both completed the survey. Confidentiality of their answers was promised. Only the researcher and her supervisor, whose names were listed in the cover letter, had access to the data. Self-addressed envelopes with returning postage stamps were provided to parents for them to return the completed questionnaires to the researcher of the present study. Thirty-nine percent of the parents chose to e-mail back their completed surveys. A thank-you card and a summary of the results of the study were mailed to the parents after they completed their questionnaires for the research project.

## Chapter 4

### RESULTS

The major purpose of this study was to examine the general nature of attributions of Chinese parents in the U.S. regarding their preschool children's social behaviors. The attributions were examined along three causal dimensions: locus of causality (internal versus external), stability (stable versus unstable), and controllability (controllable versus uncontrollable). The types of child social behaviors studied were positive social behaviors, aggression, and withdrawal. The study looked at the contributions of child age, child gender, parent gender, and parent adaptation to life in the U.S. to parental attributions. It also investigated whether different types of child social behaviors (i.e., positive, aggressive, and withdrawn behaviors) elicited different types of attributions from parents.

In order to achieve the purposes of this study, several statistical analyses were applied to the data. The data were analyzed using multiple regressions, and analysis of variance, when appropriate, to explain the variance in the dependent variables, parental attributions for their children's socially positive, aggressive and withdrawn behaviors made along the three causal dimensions of locus of causality, stability and controllability.

More specifically, the following hypotheses were tested in this study.

Hypothesis I: Child Age Effect: Older children's social behaviors (positive, aggressive and withdrawn behaviors) are seen by Chinese parents as more internally caused, stable and controllable than younger children's social behaviors.

Hypothesis II: Child Gender Effect: Girls' social behaviors (positive, aggressive and withdrawn behaviors) are seen by Chinese parents as more internally caused, stable and controllable than boys'.

Hypothesis III: Event Valence Effect: Chinese parents attribute their children's positive social behaviors to more internal causes and see them as something more stable and controllable than their children's negative social behaviors (aggressive and withdrawn behaviors). They attribute their children's withdrawn behaviors to more internal, stable and controllable causes than their children's aggressive behaviors.

Hypothesis IV: Parent Gender Effect: Fathers and mothers make different attributions for their children's social behaviors. Fathers may attribute their children's positive social behaviors to more external, unstable and uncontrollable causes than mothers. On the other hand, they may attribute their children's aggressive and withdrawn behaviors to more internal, stable and controllable causes than mothers.

Hypothesis V: Parent Adaptation Effect: Chinese parents more highly adapted to life in the U.S. attribute their children's positive social behaviors to more internal, stable, and controllable causes, and their children's negative social behaviors (aggressive and withdrawn behaviors) to more external, unstable, and uncontrollable causes than parents who are less adapted.

To test Hypotheses I, II, IV and V, multiple regressions were used. To test Hypothesis III, an ANOVA was used.

The mothers' and fathers' scores of adaptation to life in the U.S., one of the independent variables, are presented in Table 4.1. The means and standard deviations for the dependent variables in the data analyses are presented in Table 4.2.

Multicollinearity of the independent variables was checked for the regression analyses by computing the variance inflation factors. None of the variance inflation factors was bigger than 1.5. This result indicated minimal multicollinearity.

In order to illuminate the relationships among child age, parent adaptation, and the locus of causality, stability, and controllability dimensions of attributions made for boys and girls, and by fathers and mothers, respectively, Pearson correlation coefficients were computed.

Table 4.3 presents the coefficients between these variables for parental attributions for boys' social behaviors. The results indicated that parent adaptation was significantly and negatively related to stability ( $p < .05$ ) and controllability ( $p < .05$ ) of positive child social behaviors, and significantly and positively related to stability of aggressive child behaviors ( $p < .05$ ), and tended to be significantly and positively related to locus of causality of withdrawn child behaviors ( $p < .10$ ). The locus of causality, stability, and controllability dimensions of positive social behaviors were significantly and positively related to one another ( $p < .01$ ), and significantly and negatively related to

Table 4.1

Fathers' and mothers' scores of adaptation to life in the U.S.

Gender	N	Mean	SD
Fathers	48	33.64	9.25
Mothers	39	30.22	9.81

Table 4.2

Descriptive statistics for dependent variables, parental attributions for children's socially positive, aggressive and withdrawn behaviors along the three causal dimensions of locus of causality, stability and controllability (n = 87)

	Positive behaviors			Aggressive behaviors			Withdrawn behaviors		
	Locus of Causality	Stability	Controllability	Locus of Causality	Stability	Controllability	Locus of Causality	Stability	Controllability
Mean	6.47	6.93	7.78	15.21	15.16	14.11	13.52	14.46	13.66
SD	2.84	2.40	2.08	3.07	2.61	3.03	2.81	4.30	3.71

Table 4.3

Correlation coefficients for child age, parent adaptation, and the locus of causality, stability and controllability dimensions of parental attributions for boys' social behaviors

	1.Child age	2.Parent adaptation	<u>Positive behaviors</u>			<u>Aggressive behaviors</u>			<u>Withdrawn behaviors</u>		
			3.Locus of causality	4.Stability	5.Controlla- bility	6.Locus of causality	7.Stability	8.Controlla- bility	9.Locus of causality	10.Stability	11.Controlla- bility
1	1.00										
2	-.11	1.00									
3	-.07	-.08	1.00								
4	-.14	-.30*	.60**	1.00							
5	-.15	-.32*	.65**	.72**	1.00						
6	.12	.08	-.56**	-.54**	-.56**	1.00					
7	-.02	.33*	-.58**	-.67**	-.69**	.61**	1.00				
8	.18	.15	-.54**	-.40**	-.44**	.51**	.53**	1.00			
9	.06	.25 <sup>+</sup>	-.60**	-.61**	-.66**	.60**	.67**	.45**	1.00		
10	.09	.14	-.59**	-.58**	-.58**	.62**	.65**	.46**	.59**	1.00	
11	.16	.20	-.54**	-.65**	-.54**	.51**	.62**	.43**	.50**	.56**	1.00

\*\* p < .01 \* p < .05 + p < .10

all three dimensions of both aggressive and withdrawn behaviors ( $p < .01$ ). The locus of causality, stability, and controllability dimensions of aggressive behaviors were significantly and positively related to one another ( $p < .01$ ), and significantly and positively related to all three dimensions of withdrawn behaviors ( $p < .01$ ). The locus of causality, stability, and controllability dimensions of withdrawn behaviors were significantly and positively related to one another ( $p < .01$ ). No other significant relationships were found.

Table 4.4 presents the coefficients between these variables for parental attributions for girls' social behaviors. The results indicated that child age was significantly and positively related to stability of positive child social behaviors ( $p < .05$ ) and controllability of aggressive child behaviors ( $p < .05$ ). Parent adaptation was significantly and negatively related to stability ( $p < .01$ ) and controllability ( $p < .01$ ) of positive child social behaviors, significantly and positively related to stability ( $p < .01$ ) and controllability ( $p < .01$ ) of aggressive child behaviors, and significantly and positively related to controllability of withdrawn child behaviors ( $p < .05$ ), and tended to be significantly and negatively related to locus of causality of positive child social behaviors ( $p < .10$ ). The locus of causality, stability, and controllability dimensions of positive social behaviors were significantly and positively related to one another ( $p < .01$ ), and significantly and negatively related to all three dimensions of both aggressive and withdrawn behaviors ( $p < .01$ ). The locus of causality, stability, and controllability dimensions of aggressive behaviors were significantly and positively related to one another ( $p < .01$ ), and significantly and positively related to all three dimensions of

Table 4.4

Correlation coefficients for child age, parent adaptation, and the locus of causality, stability and controllability dimensions of parental attributions for girls' social behaviors

	1.Child age	2.Parent adaptation	<u>Positive behaviors</u>			<u>Aggressive behaviors</u>			<u>Withdrawn behaviors</u>		
			3.Locus of causality	4.Stability	5.Controllability	6.Locus of causality	7.Stability	8.Controllability	9.Locus of causality	10.Stability	11.Controllability
1	1.00										
2	-.14	1.00									
3	.20	-.30 <sup>+</sup>	1.00								
4	.38*	-.43**	.61**	1.00							
5	.19	-.46**	.56**	.69**	1.00						
6	-.18	.10	-.57**	-.45**	-.50**	1.00					
7	-.21	.45**	-.52**	-.55**	-.54**	.46**	1.00				
8	.36*	.42**	-.42**	-.50**	-.49**	.49**	.54**	1.00			
9	-.31	.17	-.50**	-.44**	-.45**	.51**	.43**	.48**	1.00		
10	-.26	.04	-.51**	-.47**	-.44**	.35*	.41*	.37*	.70**	1.00	
11	-.24	.39*	-.38*	-.43**	-.47**	.34*	.49**	.53**	.58**	.46**	1.00

\*\* p < .01 \* p < .05 <sup>+</sup> p < .10



withdrawn behaviors ( $p < .05$ ). The locus of causality, stability, and controllability dimensions of withdrawn behaviors were significantly and positively related to one another ( $p < .01$ ). No other significant relationships were found.

Table 4.5 presents the coefficients between these variables for attributions made by fathers for their children's social behaviors. The results indicated that fathers' adaptation was significantly and negatively related to stability ( $p < .01$ ) and controllability ( $p < .01$ ) of positive child social behaviors, significantly and positively related to stability ( $p < .01$ ) and controllability ( $p < .01$ ) of aggressive child behaviors, and significantly and positively related to controllability of withdrawn child behaviors ( $p < .05$ ), and tended to be significantly and positively related to locus of causality of withdrawn child behaviors ( $p < .10$ ). The locus of causality, stability, and controllability dimensions of positive social behaviors were significantly and positively related to one another ( $p < .01$ ), and significantly and negatively related to all three dimensions of both aggressive and withdrawn behaviors ( $p < .01$ ). The locus of causality, stability, and controllability dimensions of aggressive behaviors were significantly and positively related to one another ( $p < .01$ ), and significantly and positively related to all three dimensions of withdrawn behaviors ( $p < .01$ ). The locus of causality, stability, and controllability dimensions of withdrawn behaviors were significantly and positively related to one another ( $p < .01$ ). No other significant relationships were found.

Table 4.6 presents the coefficients between these variables for attributions made by mothers for their children's social behaviors. The results indicated that mothers' adaptation was significantly and negatively related to stability ( $p < .05$ ) and controllability ( $p < .01$ ) of positive child social behaviors, and significantly and positively related

Table 4.5

Correlation coefficients for child age, parent adaptation, and the locus of causality, stability and controllability dimensions of attributions made by fathers

	1.Child age	2.Parent adaptation	<u>Positive behaviors</u>			<u>Aggressive behaviors</u>			<u>Withdrawn behaviors</u>		
			3.Locus of causality	4.Stability	5.Controlla- bility	6.Locus of causality	7.Stability	8.Controlla- bility	9.Locus of causality	10.Stability	11.Controlla- bility
1	1.00										
2	-.04	1.00									
3	.16	-.13	1.00								
4	.15	-.33**	.59**	1.00							
5	.01	-.38**	.61**	.71**	1.00						
6	-.17	.08	-.56**	-.55**	-.55**	1.00					
7	-.23	.37**	-.63**	-.68**	-.68**	.62**	1.00				
8	-.04	.44**	-.54**	-.64**	-.64**	.58**	.57**	1.00			
9	-.03	.25 <sup>+</sup>	-.52**	-.52**	-.52**	.52**	.53**	.51**	1.00		
10	-.01	.10	-.53**	-.49**	-.49**	.58**	.52**	.50**	.65**	1.00	
11	-.02	.29*	-.42**	-.47**	-.47**	.43**	.45**	.52**	.68**	.68**	1.00

\*\* p < .01 \* p < .05 + p < .10

Table 4.6

Correlation coefficients for child age, parent adaptation, and the locus of causality, stability and controllability dimensions of attributions made by mothers

	1.Child age	2.Parent adaptation	<u>Positive behaviors</u>			<u>Aggressive behaviors</u>			<u>Withdrawn behaviors</u>		
			3.Locus of causality	4.Stability	5.Controlla- bility	6.Locus of causality	7.Stability	8.Controlla- bility	9.Locus of causality	10.Stability	11. Controlla- bility
1	1.00										
2	-.17	1.00									
3	-.09	-.21	1.00								
4	-.05	-.39*	.62**	1.00							
5	.01	-.47**	.68**	.69**	1.00						
6	.19	.10	-.54**	-.43**	-.45**	1.00					
7	.07	.43**	-.60**	-.62**	-.58**	.55**	1.00				
8	.03	.12	-.50**	-.42**	-.42**	.50**	.60**	1.00			
9	-.10	.23	-.49**	-.54**	-.54**	.52**	.54**	.45**	1.00		
10	-.06	.13	-.56**	-.52**	-.43**	.42**	.55**	.41**	.73**	1.00	
11	-.05	.30 <sup>+</sup>	-.41**	-.51**	-.47**	.45**	.56**	.47**	.56**	.45**	1.00

\*\*  $p < .01$  \*  $p < .05$  <sup>+</sup>  $p < .10$

to stability ( $p < .01$ ) of aggressive child behaviors, and tended to be significantly and positively related to controllability of withdrawn child behaviors ( $p < .10$ ). The locus of causality, stability, and controllability dimensions of positive social behaviors were significantly and positively related to one another ( $p < .01$ ), and significantly and negatively related to all three dimensions of both aggressive and withdrawn behaviors ( $p < .01$ ). The locus of causality, stability, and controllability dimensions of aggressive behaviors were significantly and positively related to one another ( $p < .01$ ), and significantly and positively related to all three dimensions of withdrawn behaviors ( $p < .01$ ). The locus of causality, stability, and controllability dimensions of withdrawn behaviors were significantly and positively related to one another ( $p < .01$ ). No other significant relationships were found.

#### Parental Attributions for Children's Positive Social Behaviors

To examine the contributions of child age, child gender, parent gender, and parent adaptation to the attributions that Chinese parents made for their children's positive social behaviors, a series of three regression analyses were undertaken, one for each of the three mutually exclusive causal dimensions. Therefore, the dependent variables in the three regression analyses were locus of causality of positive social behavior, stability of positive social behavior, and controllability of positive social behavior, respectively.

### Locus of Causality of Positive Social Behaviors

Table 4.7 presents the results of the first regression analysis, which included the scores of locus of causality of positive child social behaviors as the dependent variable. The overall regression model was not significant, explaining only 5% of the variance in the locus of causality dimension of Chinese parents' attributions for their children's positive social behaviors. In addition, child age, child gender, parent gender, and parent adaptation made no significant contribution to the locus of causality dimension of Chinese parents' attributions for their children's positive social behaviors. Therefore, Hypotheses I, II, IV and V were not supported.

Table 4.7

Results of regression analysis using child age, child gender, parent gender, and parent adaptation in predicting the locus of causality of Chinese parents' attributions for their children's positive social behaviors

Independent variables	Locus of causality of positive behaviors	
	<u>b</u>	$\beta$
Child age	2.807E-02	.013
Child gender	.398	.107
Parent gender	.375	.102
Parent adaptation	-3.5E-02	-.184
$R^2$	.046	

Note: Child age is measured in years. Child gender is coded 0 if girls and 1 if boys.  
Parent gender is coded 0 if mothers and 1 if fathers.

### Stability of Positive Social Behaviors

Table 4.8 presents the results of the second regression analysis, which included the scores of stability of positive child social behaviors as the dependent variable. The overall regression model was significant ( $p < .05$ ), explaining approximately 13% of the variance in the stability dimension of Chinese parents' attributions for their children's positive social behaviors.

Table 4.8

Results of regression analysis using child age, child gender, parent gender, and parent adaptation in predicting the stability of Chinese parents' attributions for their children's positive social behaviors

Independent variables	Stability of positive behaviors	
	$b$	$\beta$
Child age	4.909E-02	.018
Child gender	.174	.036
Parent gender	.526	.110
Parent adaptation	-9.2E-02***	-.368***
$R^2$	.134*	

Note: Child age is measured in years. Child gender is coded 0 if girls and 1 if boys.  
Parent gender is coded 0 if mothers and 1 if fathers.

\*  $p < .05$

\*\*\*  $p < .001$

In addition, results indicated parent adaptation to significantly contribute to the stability scores of parents' attributions in a negative manner ( $\beta = -.368, p < .001$ ). The higher the stability scores, the more the parents attributed the child behaviors to causes that were unstable rather than stable. This indicated that Chinese parents who were more highly adapted to life in the U.S. were more likely to perceive their preschoolers' positive social behaviors as something stable than Chinese parents who were less adapted. Child age, child gender and parent gender made no significant contribution to the stability dimension of Chinese parents' attributions for their children's positive social behaviors. Therefore, Hypothesis V was partially supported, but Hypotheses I, II and IV were not.

#### Controllability of Positive Social Behaviors

Table 4.9 presents the results of the third regression analysis, which included the scores of controllability of positive child social behaviors as the dependent variable. The overall regression model was significant ( $p < .001$ ), explaining approximately 19% of the variance in the controllability dimension of Chinese parents' attributions for their children's positive social behaviors.

In addition, results indicated parent adaptation to significantly contribute to the controllability dimension of parents' attributions for their children's positive social behaviors in a negative manner ( $\beta = -.445, p < .001$ ). The higher the controllability scores, the more parents attributed the child behaviors to causes that were out of the child's ability to control rather than to causes that were controllable by the child. This indicated that Chinese parents who were more highly adapted to life in the U.S. considered their children to be more able to control their own positive social behaviors

than Chinese parents who were less adapted. Child age, child gender and parent gender made no significant contribution to the controllability dimension of Chinese parents' attributions for their children's positive social behaviors. Therefore, Hypothesis V was partially supported, but Hypotheses I, II and IV were not.

#### Parental Attributions for Children's Aggressive Social Behaviors

To examine how well child age, child gender, parent gender, and parent adaptation predicted the attributions that Chinese parents made for their children's

Table 4.9

Results of regression analysis using child age, child gender, parent gender, and parent adaptation in predicting the controllability of Chinese parents' attributions for their children's positive social behaviors

Independent variables	Controllability of positive behaviors	
	<u>b</u>	$\beta$
Child age	-.134	-.056
Child gender	.390	.093
Parent gender	.593	.143
Parent adaptation	-9.6E-02***	-.445***
$R^2$	.194***	

Note: Child age is measured in years. Child gender is coded 0 if girls and 1 if boys.

Parent gender is coded 0 if mothers and 1 if fathers.

\*\*\*  $p < .001$



aggressive social behaviors, another series of three regression analyses were made, one for each of the three mutually exclusive causal dimensions. Therefore, the dependent variables in these three regression analyses were locus of causality of aggressive behavior, stability of aggressive behavior, and controllability of aggressive behavior, respectively.

### Locus of Causality of Aggressive Behaviors

Table 4.10 presents the results of the first regression analysis, which included the scores of locus of causality of aggressive child behaviors as the dependent variable. The

Table 4.10

Results of regression analysis using child age, child gender, parent gender, and parent adaptation in predicting the locus of causality of Chinese parents' attributions for their children's aggressive social behaviors

Independent variables	Locus of causality of aggressive behaviors	
	$b$	$\beta$
Child age	1.021E-02	.004
Child gender	.511	.122
Parent gender	-6.2E-02	-.015
Parent adaptation	1.941E-02	.090
$R^2$	.025	

Note: Child age is measured in years. Child gender is coded 0 if girls and 1 if boys.  
Parent gender is coded 0 if mothers and 1 if fathers.

overall regression model was not significant, explaining only 3% of the variance in the locus of causality dimension of Chinese parent's attributions for their children's aggressive behaviors. In addition, child age, child gender, parent gender and parent adaptation made no significant contribution to the locus of causality of Chinese parents' attributions for their children's aggressive behaviors. Therefore, Hypotheses I, II, IV and V were not supported.

#### Stability of Aggressive Behaviors

Table 4.11 presents the results of the second regression analysis, which included the scores of stability of aggressive child behaviors as the dependent variable. The overall regression model was significant ( $p < .01$ ), explaining approximately 18% of the variance in the stability dimension of Chinese parents' attributions for their children's aggressive behaviors.

In addition, results indicated parent adaptation to significantly contribute to the stability dimension of Chinese parents' attributions for their children's aggressive behaviors in a positive manner ( $\beta = .404$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This indicated that Chinese parents who were more highly adapted to life in the U.S. attributed their children's aggressive behaviors more to unstable causes than Chinese parents who were less adapted. Child age, child gender and parent gender made no significant contribution to the stability dimension of Chinese parents' attributions for their children's aggressive behaviors. Therefore, Hypothesis V was partially supported, but Hypotheses I, II and IV were not.

### Controllability of Aggressive Behaviors

Table 4.12 presents the results of the third regression analysis, which included the scores of controllability of aggressive child behaviors as the dependent variable. The overall regression model tended toward significance ( $p < .10$ ), explaining approximately 10% of the variance in the controllability dimension of Chinese parents' attributions for their children's aggressive behaviors.

In addition, results indicated parent adaptation to significantly contribute to the controllability dimension of Chinese parents' attributions for their children's aggressive

Table 4.11

Results of regression analysis using child age, child gender, parent gender, and parent adaptation in predicting the stability of Chinese parents' attributions for their children's aggressive social behaviors

Independent variables	Stability of aggressive behaviors	
	$b$	$\beta$
Child age	-.122	-.041
Child gender	.214	.041
Parent gender	.163	.031
Parent adaptation	.109***	.404***
$R^2$	.177**	

Note: Child age is measured in years. Child gender is coded 0 if girls and 1 if boys.  
Parent gender is coded 0 if mothers and 1 if fathers.

\*\*  $p < .01$   
\*\*\*  $p < .001$

behaviors in a positive way ( $\beta = .255, p < .05$ ). This indicated that Chinese parents who were more highly adapted to life in the U.S. were more likely to consider their children's aggressive behaviors as uncontrollable than Chinese parents who were less adapted. Child age, child gender and parent gender made no significant contribution to the controllability dimension of Chinese parents' attributions for their children's aggressive behaviors. Therefore, Hypothesis V was partially supported, but Hypotheses I, II and IV were not.

Table 4.12

Results of regression analysis using child age, child gender, parent gender, and parent adaptation in predicting the controllability of Chinese parents' attributions for their children's aggressive social behaviors

Independent variables	Controllability of aggressive behaviors	
	$b$	$\beta$
Child age	7.093-02	.021
Child gender	.418	.068
Parent gender	.759	.125
Parent adaptation	8.056E-02 *	.255*
$R^2$	.097 <sup>+</sup>	

Note: Child age is measured in years. Child gender is coded 0 if girls and 1 if boys.  
Parent gender is coded 0 if mothers and 1 if fathers.

+  $p < .10$

\*  $p < .05$

### Parental Attributions for Children's Withdrawn Social Behaviors

To examine how well child age, child gender, parent gender, and parent adaptation predicted the attributions that Chinese parents made for their children's withdrawn social behaviors, another series of three regression analyses were made, one for each of the three mutually exclusive causal dimensions. Therefore, the dependent variables in these three regression analyses were locus of causality of withdrawn behavior, stability of withdrawn behavior, and controllability of withdrawn behavior, respectively.

#### Locus of Causality of Withdrawn Behaviors

Table 4.13 presents the results of the first regression analysis, which included the scores of locus of causality of withdrawn child behaviors as its dependent variable. The overall regression model was significant ( $p < .05$ ), explaining approximately 13% of the variance in the locus of causality dimension of Chinese parents' attributions for their children's socially withdrawn behaviors.

In addition, results indicated parent adaptation ( $\beta = .217, p < .05$ ) and child gender ( $\beta = .268, p < .05$ ) to significantly contribute to the locus of causality scores of parents' attributions in a positive way. This indicated that Chinese parents who were more highly adapted to life in the U.S. tended to consider causes of their children's socially withdrawn behaviors as something more in the external environment or situation versus as something in their children's internal ability or personality than Chinese parents who were less adapted. Also, girls' withdrawn behaviors were considered to be more

caused by their internal ability or personality than boys' withdrawn behaviors. Child age and parent gender made no significant contribution to the locus of causality dimension of Chinese parents' attributions for their children's withdrawn social behaviors. Therefore, Hypotheses II and V were both partially supported, but hypotheses I, IV were not.

Table 4.13

Results of regression analysis using child age, child gender, parent gender, and parent adaptation in predicting the locus of causality of Chinese parents' attributions for their children's withdrawn social behaviors

Independent variables	Locus of causality of withdrawn behaviors	
	$b$	$\beta$
Child age	-.202	-.063
Child gender	1.521*	.268*
Parent gender	-.366	-.065
Parent adaptation	6.349-02*	.217*
$R^2$	.132*	

Note: Child age is measured in years. Child gender is coded 0 if girls and 1 if boys.  
Parent gender is coded 0 if mothers and 1 if fathers.

\*  $p < .05$

### Stability of Withdrawn Behaviors

Table 4.14 presents the results of the second regression analysis, which included the scores of stability of withdrawn child behaviors as its dependent variable. The overall regression model was not significant, explaining only approximately 3% of the variance in the stability dimension of Chinese parents' attributions for their children's socially withdrawn behaviors. In addition, child age, child gender, parent gender, and parent adaptation made no significant contribution to the stability dimension of Chinese parents' attributions for their children's withdrawn social behaviors. Therefore, Hypotheses I, II, IV and V were not supported.

Table 4.14

Results of regression analysis using child age, child gender, parent gender, and parent adaptation in predicting the stability of Chinese parents' attributions for their children's withdrawn social behaviors

Independent variables	Stability of withdrawn behaviors	
	$b$	$\beta$
Child age	-7.7E-02	-.029
Child gender	.559	.120
Parent gender	-7.0E-02	-.015
Parent adaptation	2.456-02	.103
$R^2$	.027	

Note: Child age is measured in years. Child gender is coded 0 if girls and 1 if boys.  
Parent gender is coded 0 if mothers and 1 if fathers.

### Controllability of Withdrawn Behaviors

Table 4.15 presents the results of the third regression analysis, which included the scores of controllability of withdrawn child behaviors as the dependent variable. The overall regression model was significant ( $p < .001$ ), explaining approximately 24% of the variance in the controllability dimension of Chinese parents' attributions for their children's withdrawn behaviors.

Table 4.15

Results of regression analysis using child age, child gender, parent gender, and parent adaptation in predicting the controllability of Chinese parents' attributions for their children's withdrawn social behaviors

Independent variables	Controllability of withdrawn behaviors	
	$b$	$\beta$
Child age	3.724E-02	.012
Child gender	2.144***	.391***
Parent gender	-9.0E-02	-.170
Parent adaptation	7.504E-02**	.266**
$R^2$	.238***	

Note: Child age is measured in years. Child gender is coded 0 if girls and 1 if boys.

Parent gender is coded 0 if mothers and 1 if fathers.

\*\*  $p < .01$

\*\*\*  $p < .001$



In addition, results indicated parent adaptation ( $\beta = .266, p < .01$ ) and child gender ( $\beta = .391, p < .001$ ) to significantly contribute to the controllability scores of parents' attributions in a positive way. This indicated that Chinese parents who were better adapted to life in the U.S. tended to see their children's socially withdrawn behaviors as less controllable by their children than Chinese parents who were less adapted. Also, parents thought girls' withdrawn behaviors were more within their control than boys' withdrawn behaviors. Child age and parent gender made no significant contribution to the controllability dimension of Chinese parents' attributions for their children's withdrawn social behaviors. Therefore, Hypotheses II and V were partially supported, but Hypotheses I and IV were not.

#### Event Valence Effects on Parental Attributions

In order to examine how event valence (i.e., positive, aggressive and withdrawn child behaviors) was associated with parental attributions, event valence was coded as a categorical variable: 1 if the event was a positive child behavior, 2 if aggressive child behavior, and 3 if withdrawn child behavior. Application of an analysis of variance on the three dimensions of locus of causality, stability and controllability of parental attributions revealed a significant effect for event valence for all three dimensions ( $p < .001$ ).

Results of the one-way ANOVA post hoc tests for pairwise multiple comparisons of the parental attribution scores for positive, aggressive and withdrawn child behaviors are shown in Table 4.16 (see Table 4.2 for mean scores). For the locus of causality dimension, there existed significant differences between the scores of attributions for positive child behaviors and the scores of attributions for aggressive child behaviors,

between the scores of attributions for positive child behaviors and the scores of attributions for withdrawn child behaviors, and between the scores of attributions for aggressive child behaviors and the scores of attributions for withdrawn child behaviors. This indicated that parents attributed their children's positive social behaviors as more internally caused than the children's aggressive or withdrawn behaviors. They also attributed their children's aggressive behaviors to be significantly more externally caused than withdrawn behaviors.

For the stability dimension, there existed significant differences between the scores of attributions for positive child behaviors and the scores of attributions for both aggressive and withdrawn child behaviors. The difference between the scores of attributions for aggressive and withdrawn child behaviors was not statistically significant. This indicated that parents perceived their children's positive social behaviors as more stable than the children's aggressive or withdrawn behaviors.

For the controllability dimension, there existed significant differences between the scores of attributions for positive child behaviors and the scores of attributions for both aggressive and withdrawn child behaviors. The difference between the scores of attributions for aggressive and withdrawn child behaviors was not statistically significant. Therefore, this indicated that parents perceived their children's positive social behaviors as more controllable than the children's aggressive or withdrawn behaviors.

To summarize, the Chinese parents saw their children's positive social behaviors as something within the children's personality and controllability and stable. The reverse pattern showed in their attributions for the children's aggressive and withdrawn behaviors. In addition, they also attributed their children's aggressive behaviors to be

more externally caused than withdrawn behaviors. Therefore, Hypothesis III was partially supported by this analysis.

Table 4.16

Results of one-way ANOVA post hoc tests for pairwise multiple comparisons of the parental attribution scores for positive, aggressive and withdrawn child behaviors

Dependent variable	(I)Event	(J)Event	Mean difference (I-J)
Locus of causality	Positive	Aggressive	-8.736*
	Positive	Withdrawn	-7.052*
	Aggressive	Withdrawn	1.685*
Stability	Positive	Aggressive	-8.227*
	Positive	Withdrawn	-7.528*
	Aggressive	Withdrawn	.702
Controllability	Positive	Aggressive	-6.326*
	Positive	Withdrawn	-5.883*
	Aggressive	Withdrawn	.451

Note: Event valence is coded 1 if positive child behavior, 2 if aggressive child behavior, and 3 if withdrawn child behavior.

\*  $p < .05$

### Summary

A number of statistical analyses were employed to examine the contributions of selected child and parental characteristics to Chinese parents' attributions for their children's social behaviors along the three causal dimensions of locus of causality, stability and controllability. The child characteristics included child age and gender; while the parent characteristics included parent gender and adaptation to life in the U.S. In addition, children's social behavior referred to whether such behavior was socially positive, aggressive or withdrawn. Results of these analyses provided partial support for Hypotheses II, III and V, but no support for Hypotheses I and IV. More specifically, the following findings associated with the hypotheses were obtained.

Age Effect (Hypothesis I). Older children's social behaviors (positive, aggressive and withdrawn) were not seen by Chinese parents as more internally caused, stable, or controllable than younger children's social behaviors. No child age differences were found.

Child Gender Effect (Hypothesis II). Chinese parents saw girls' withdrawn behaviors as more internally caused and controllable, but not more stable, than boys' withdrawn behaviors. However, no difference was found between boys' and girls' aggressive or positive social behaviors.

Event Valence Effect (Hypothesis III). Chinese parents saw their children's positive social behaviors as more internally caused, stable and controllable than their children's negative social (aggressive and withdrawn) behaviors. In addition, Chinese parents saw their children's withdrawn behaviors as more internally caused, but not more stable or controllable, than their children's aggressive behaviors.

Parent Gender Effect (Hypothesis IV). Fathers and mothers were not significantly different in their attributions for their children's social behaviors. Fathers did not attribute their children's positive social behaviors to more external, unstable and uncontrollable causes, or aggressive and withdrawn behaviors to more internal, stable and controllable causes than mothers. No parent gender effect was found.

Parent Adaptation Effect (Hypothesis V). Chinese parents who were more adapted to life in the U.S. saw their children's positive social behaviors as more stable and controllable by their children, but not more internal, than Chinese parents less adapted. In addition, these more highly adapted Chinese parents saw their children's aggressive behaviors as more unstable and uncontrollable by their children, but not more external, than Chinese parents less adapted. Furthermore, more highly adapted Chinese parents saw their children's withdrawn behaviors as more externally caused and less controllable, but not more unstable, than Chinese parents less adapted.

## Chapter 5

### DISCUSSION

To understand the attributions made by Chinese parents living in the U.S. for their preschool children's social behaviors, the study looked at how selected child characteristics, child behavior characteristics, and parental characteristics contributed to the attributions these parents made. The attributions were examined along three causal dimensions: locus of causality (internal versus external), stability (stable versus unstable), and controllability (controllable versus uncontrollable). The selected child characteristics were child age and gender. The selected child behavior characteristics were positive and negative social behaviors (including aggressive and withdrawn behaviors). The selected parental characteristics were parent gender and parent adaptation to life in the U.S.

#### Effects of Child Characteristics on Parental Attributions

Two of the personal characteristics of children that have been studied the most in parental attribution research are child age and child gender. They were also included in the present study as two independent variables.

#### Child Age

Findings in the present study indicated no significant child age related variations in Chinese parents' attributions for the three types of child behaviors, i.e., socially positive, aggressive and withdrawn behaviors. The explanations Chinese parents offered

for both positive and negative child behaviors did not change between ages 3 and 6 years. The positive behaviors of children of all ages were consistently seen as innately determined, stable over time, and under the child's control. Conversely, all children's aggressive and withdrawn behaviors were consistently seen by Chinese parents as reflective of the external situation, unstable, and out of the child's ability to control.

This finding contradicts earlier studies which reported a variation in parents' responses to children's social behaviors, especially negative behaviors, as a function of children's age (e.g., Dix, Ruble, Grusec, & Nixon, 1986; Dix, Ruble, & Zambarano, 1989). Although some studies have found no age related effects regarding parental attributions for their children's social behaviors (Rubin & Mills, 1992), it seemed reasonable to suggest that parental attributions for an older child's behavior would be different for a younger child's behavior, especially if the difference between the ages of the children is large. The sample of children in this study piled up at the younger end. The insignificant results obtained in the present study regarding child age effects may be due to the small age range of children included in the study. A wider age range would have allowed for a more accurate assessment of age differences between subjects.

### Child Gender

Although attempts were made to make child gender a central variable in order to detect any gender effect by providing the parents with vignettes of socially aggressive and withdrawn incidents, no child gender effect emerged for aggressive child behaviors. Perhaps, this was because all aggressive behaviors on the part of the children were not tolerated and were highly discouraged, whether they were in boys or girls.

No significant difference was found in Chinese parents' attributions for their sons' and daughters' positive social behaviors, either. It has been suggested by previous research that pro-social and competent social behaviors are positively valued in Chinese children of both genders (Ho, 1986). This may help to explain why Chinese parents held similar perceptions on boys' and girls' positive social behaviors.

However, the study did find a significant difference in the attributions of Chinese parents for boys' and girls' withdrawn behaviors. Girls' withdrawn behaviors were seen as less determined by external/situational influences and more controllable than boys' withdrawn behaviors.

This difference may be explained in two ways. The first is that Chinese parents' reactions to boys' and girls' withdrawn behaviors were in congruence with the general literature on parental expectations for boys and girls. That is, parents generally hold more negative and stronger evaluations of withdrawn behaviors in girls than in boys, because it is usually believed that girls should be more social, emotional and sensitive than boys as a result of gender role stereotypes (Rubin & Mills, 1992).

The second possible explanation, however, includes a different explanation. It is rooted in the evaluation of social withdrawal in the Chinese culture, which has a different meaning from that of the Western culture. Quietness, passiveness and non-competitiveness are traditionally viewed as positive child behaviors and expected to be seen more in girls than in boys (Slonim, 1991). Therefore, withdrawal in girls was not considered so negative as it was in boys. Consequently, in consistency with the positive parental bias mentioned previously, the Chinese parents attributed girls' withdrawn behaviors to more internal and controllable causes than boys' withdrawn behaviors.



This trend, however, did not occur in the stability dimension of Chinese parents' attributions for the boys' and girls' withdrawn behaviors. Both boys' and girls' withdrawn behaviors were considered unstable. This non-significance appears understandable, if parents' expectations of their children's assimilation into the American culture are taken into consideration. In the demographic questionnaire, Chinese parents were asked about their opinions of their children's assimilation. An absolute majority of them hoped that their children would be assimilated into the American culture. Probably, in their hope for their children's assimilation into the American culture, they realized that their children needed to be more active and less submissive for assimilation to occur. Therefore, they perceived their children's (boys' and girls') withdrawn behaviors to be transient rather than stable.

#### Event Valence Effects on Parental Attributions

Computation of Pearson correlation coefficients for tests of the relationships among child age, parent adaptation, and the locus of causality, stability and controllability dimensions of attributions made for boys and girls, and by fathers and mothers, respectively, revealed the following results. First, the locus of causality, stability, and controllability dimensions of positive child social behaviors were significantly and negatively related to all three dimensions of both types of negative social behaviors (aggressive and withdrawn behaviors). Second, the three dimensions of aggressive behaviors were significantly and positively related to the three dimensions of withdrawn behaviors. Finally, the three dimensions of positive, aggressive, and withdrawn social behaviors, respectively, were significantly and positively related to one

another. These findings suggested that positive and negative child social behaviors were perceived by parents as opposite to each other and, therefore, elicited negatively related parental attributions. In addition, aggressive and withdrawn child behaviors were more or less both negative child social behaviors and, therefore, elicited positively related parental attributions. Finally, Chinese parents were pretty consistent raters of their children's social behaviors as demonstrated by the significant and positive relationships among the three dimensions of positive, aggressive, and withdrawn behaviors, respectively. Therefore, a high/low score in one dimension of a parent's attribution for his/her child's social behavior would very much likely be accompanied by a high/low score in another dimension.

Besides the relationships among positive, aggressive, and withdrawn child social behaviors, the differences among these three types of behaviors were tested by an ANOVA. The ANOVA showed that significant differences were found in Chinese parents' attributions for their children's positive and negative social behaviors. Chinese parents in the U.S. thought positively about their preschool children. They regarded positive child social behaviors to be caused by the child's internal ability and dispositions rather than by external/situational factors. In addition, they predicted that positive child behaviors would be stable over time and were within the child's ability to control. On the other hand, children's socially aggressive and withdrawn behaviors were considered to be caused by external situation, transient over time, and out of the child's control.

This finding coincides with earlier studies on White American parents' attributions (e.g., Buzzelli, 1989; Gretarsson & Gelfand, 1988). Therefore, like Western parents, Chinese parents in the U.S. were optimists about their children because they held

a positive parental bias about their children's social behaviors. Motivation might be involved in the positive parental attributions since the parents' self-esteem was affected by the attributions they made for their children (Gretarsson & Gelfan, 1988). This may be especially true for Chinese parents for whom the family concept of mutualism is quite important (Slonim, 1991). The actions of one family member can bring shame upon the entire family. Therefore, motivation for self-esteem might be an important determinant of Chinese parents' positive attributions for their children's social behaviors.

However, although parental attributions of both the children's aggressive and withdrawn behaviors were in contrast to the attributions of children's positive social behaviors, the results of the analysis of variance also revealed a significant difference between parents' attributions in the locus of causality dimension of aggressive and withdrawn child behaviors. Socially aggressive child behaviors were attributed to external/situational influences significantly more than socially withdrawn child behaviors. One possible explanation for this finding may be found by a deeper understanding of the Chinese culture. It has been argued that the evaluation of social competence is a complex phenomenon, and may be influenced by cultural values (Gresham, 1986; Rubin, 1990). In the Chinese culture, the Confucian philosophy considers inhibition and self-restraint as indices of accomplishment. A shy and quiet child may be called "well behaved" and "not trouble making". Consequently, it appears that socially withdrawn behaviors were not considered as deviant and socially unacceptable as aggressive behaviors by Chinese parents (Ho, 1986). Therefore, they attributed children's withdrawn behaviors as more internally caused than aggressive behaviors. This pattern further supports the positive bias held by parents of their children.

No significant difference was found between parents' attributions in the stability dimension of aggressive and withdrawn child behaviors. Both types of behaviors were considered equally unstable despite the fact that withdrawn behaviors might be perceived more positive than aggressive behaviors. This again appears understandable, if parents' expectations of their children's assimilation into the American culture are taken into consideration. As the absolute majority of them hoped that their children would be assimilated into the American culture, they perceived their children's withdrawn behaviors to be transient rather than stable.

However, the non-significant difference between parents' attributions in the controllability dimension of aggressive and withdrawn child behaviors is puzzling. This is not consistent with the assumption that withdrawn child behaviors might elicit less negative reactions in parents than aggressive child behaviors. Perhaps, more dramatic vignettes of incidents in which a child displays a socially withdrawn behavior and a socially aggressive behavior, respectively, in the survey on parental attributions may lead to a more significant finding.

#### Effects of Parental Characteristics on Parental Attributions

Two parental characteristics were used in the present study as independent variables. They were parent gender and parent adaptation to life in the U.S.

### Parent Gender

Chinese fathers and mothers were quite similar in their attributions for all the child behaviors studied. They all saw positive child behaviors as innately determined, stable, and controllable. Their attributions for aggressive and withdrawn child behaviors showed the reverse pattern.

This finding was not unusual as some previous research also reported similarity in fathers' and mothers' opinions of their children's social behaviors (e.g., Dix et al., 1986; Mills & Rubin, 1990). This finding also supports the portrayal of Chinese families as close families because the father and mother held similar opinions on their children's social behaviors. The similarity of fathers' and mothers' opinions might be a result of gender roles in Chinese families, where the father is the head of the household, while the mother has a more submissive role (Slonim, 1991). This suggested that future studies should use family scores, i.e., mothers' and fathers' combined or discrepancy scores, rather than separate scores to assess their impact.

### Parent Adaptation

Parental attributions, as a part of parental beliefs, are under the influence of the parents' socioecological and personal-social setting factors (Rubin, Mills, & Rose-Krasnor, 1989). This idea was supported by findings in the present study. Chinese parents who had adapted to life in the U.S. to various degrees were also different in terms of their attributions for their children's social behaviors. Generally, the more highly adapted the parents were, the more positive their attributions were.

Although there was no difference in Chinese parents' perceptions of their children's positive social behaviors as to whether the behaviors were internally or externally caused, more highly adapted parents rated their children's positive social behaviors as more stable and controllable than less adapted parents. They also rated children's aggressive behaviors as more unstable and uncontrollable, and withdrawn behaviors as more externally caused and more uncontrollable than the less adapted parents.

Literature on immigrant adjustment has reported the prevalence of acculturative stress in the process of coping until some satisfactory adaptation to the new situation is achieved (Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987). The set of stress behaviors includes depression, anxiety, and confusion. Although these effects are not inevitable and may appear to be relatively slight and transitory for some people, mental health problems often do arise during the process of adaptation (Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987). Depressed parents tend to have more negative than average perceptions of their children's development (Dix, 1991). It has been shown that there is an association between depression and a feeling of lack of control in outcomes (Weiner, 1986). Depressed people see desired outcomes as improbable and undesired ones as probable.

What's more, the less adapted parents' special socioecological and personal-social setting factors, such as economic disadvantage, language barrier, and lack in social support, may also interfere with the parents' ability to form positive perceptions of their children. Therefore, it is understandable that less adapted Chinese parents made more negative attributions than parents who were more highly adapted.

Three exceptions to this relationship between parent adaptation and parental attributions were found. The first two were related to the locus of causality dimension of parental attributions for both positive and aggressive child social behaviors. Obviously, the parents, regardless of their adaptation conditions, all held the view that their children were born with positive personalities and thus their positive social behaviors were caused by their innate ability and personality, while aggressive behaviors were caused by external/situational factors.

There may be two explanations as to why less adapted parents attributed their children's withdrawn behaviors more to the children's internal causes and personality than more highly adapted parents. First, as stated above, less adapted parents held less positive views of their children's withdrawn behaviors than more highly adapted parents. The second possible explanation is that less adapted Chinese parents' perceptions of their children's social behaviors were more influenced by the Chinese culture. Thus, to them, children's withdrawn behavior was a less unacceptable behavior than an aggressive behavior (Ho, 1986).

The third exception to the above mentioned relationship between parent adaptation and parental attributions was that all parents considered the children's withdrawn behaviors to be unstable over time. As mentioned earlier, the reason might be because a large majority of Chinese parents in this study hoped for their children's assimilation into the American culture. As a consequence, they envisioned for their children a change from inactive, passive and submissive behaviors to more active ones as more assimilation took place.

### Limitations of Study and Suggestions for Future Research

As mentioned previously in this chapter, all children included in the present study were 3 to 6 year-old preschool children. The range of children's ages was too small to detect any variability in the attributions Chinese parents made for children at different age levels. Future research should include children from a larger age range, for example, including children from preschools through adolescent years, in order to test for age effects.

The sample of parents used in this study were also limited relative to their birthplaces and occupations. The majority of them were from Mainland China and were students at U.S. universities due to the sample recruiting strategies used. Only a very small percent of the parents were from other regions. Therefore, the sample was not very representative. Extreme caution needs to be taken in generalizing the results obtained to a larger population. In addition, it would be interesting to compare the attributions of American-born Chinese parents and foreign-born Chinese in a future study.

Another limitation encountered relative to this study's sample was the fact that only half of the parents in this study were couples. The rest of them were from different families. Otherwise, scores of mothers and fathers from each family could have been combined as a unit for analysis. This could have useful applications because the Chinese mothers and fathers in this study held similar perceptions of their children's social behaviors. Future studies might also want to compare parents with similar and different attributions for their children's behaviors.

The method used in the present study for eliciting parental attributions was a closed-choice approach, in which parents were asked to choose from the categories



provided by the researcher. While this approach had the advantage of easy and accurate coding and analysis, it also put a lot of constraints on parents' responses. In rating parents' attributions for their children's withdrawn behaviors, for example, it was found that parents attributed girls' withdrawal more to their internal personality than boys'. But it was not known whether this was because these parents held more negative and stronger perceptions of girls' negative behaviors than boys' or because in the Chinese culture, girls were expected to be more submissive and quiet. An answer to this question could have been obtained if an open-ended approach had been used in eliciting parental attributions where the parents could offer their explanations for why the particular outcome occurred.

Although fathers and mothers in each family were asked to complete their questionnaires independently and not to discuss their answers until they were both finished, like all mailed questionnaire studies, there was no assurance that the subjects did as asked by the researcher. Discussion between couples might have occurred and contributed to the similarity in fathers' and mothers' perceptions of their children's social behaviors. However, in an interview study, such a problem can be avoided.

As the result shows, Chinese parents were optimistic parents because they gave different explanations for positive and negative child behaviors. However, the question of accuracy of the parental attributions was not addressed in the present study. Therefore, it is not known whether the different attributions Chinese parents made for different types of child behaviors were an accurate reflection of real child outcomes or the Chinese parents were biased in explaining their children's social behaviors in a positive way. While the problem of accuracy of attributions has rarely been studied because of the

difficulty in obtaining a criterion to assess accuracy, the problem is not impossible to solve. Empirical research on accuracy of social judgments has used several types of logic in assessing accuracy of judgments. These include a direct comparison between a judgment response and a criterion value measured independently of the subject's judgments, and a comparison between a judgment of one subject with the judgment of a second subject to determine whether the two subjects agree, etc. (Hastie & Rasinski, 1988). Future studies on whether negative child behaviors are really less internal, less stable, and less controllable than positive child behaviors, as seen by parents, would be worthwhile. This is because both positive parental bias and parental accuracy in attributions may be significantly associated with the child's development. However, their relative importance has not been well studied and thus remains unknown up to now.

Lastly, the instrument used in the present study to assess Chinese parents' adaptation to life in the U.S. was not comprehensive enough to reflect the multiple realities of Chinese parents' experiences involved in the adaptation process. Adaptation is a broad concept which includes various modes and resultant conditions such as acculturation, assimilation, and pluralism, etc. (Gordon, 1964). For many people, while certain aspects of the new culture and social relations with members of the host society are added to their traditional culture and social networks, the significant part of their old culture and social networks are not replaced or weakened (Hurh & Kim, 1984). Adaptation and ethnic attachment are not necessarily mutually exclusive (Hurh & Kim, 1984). Therefore, the instrument used in the present study was only one way, measuring only Chinese parents' adaptation but omitting aspects of ethnic attachment. Future research should use a more comprehensive instrument, which measures parents'

adaptation as well as ethnic attachment, and examine if there are any differences in the attributions made by parents who only adapt well to life in the U.S., parents who do not adapt well, and parents who adapt well and still maintain their cultural heritage.

### Implications for Early Childhood Educators

Immigrant children are increasingly being represented in school enrollment in the U.S. Prevalent adjustment and social competence problems have been identified in these children (e.g., Bagley, 1972; Minde & Minde, 1976). As parental perceptions play a very important role in the development of children's social competence (Ladd & Golter, 1988; Putallaz, 1987), the present study was made in an effort to understand how Chinese parents in the U.S. perceive their children's social competence. Since early childhood educators have close and frequent contact with children and their parents, it would be helpful for them to know about the parents' perceptions in order to help to facilitate the children's development of social competence.

It was found in the present study that Chinese parents in the U.S. were optimistic relative to their perceptions of their preschool children's social behaviors were concerned. They tended to regard their children's positive social behaviors as internal, stable and controllable, and negative social behaviors as external, unstable and uncontrollable. These parents' optimistic view about their children could help them to be consistent and effective caregivers because parents who make optimistic attributions will be most likely to persist in helping their children overcome problems. While it is certainly encouraging for teachers to know that their efforts to enhance the children's social competence are accompanied by the parents' optimism, it does not hurt for

teachers to make careful observations of the children's social behaviors and compare their observations with the Chinese parents' attributions. If discrepancy exists, discussion with parents can occur. Presently, it is not known how much parental optimism, if inaccurate, will lead to harmful overexpectation of children. But it seems reasonable to assume that the more accurate and positive parental judgments of child behaviors are, the more helpful parents' child-rearing efforts would be than if the parental judgment is positively biased but not accurate.

A couple of the findings of the present study could be explained on the basis of values of child-rearing practices of the Chinese culture. For example, it was found that socially aggressive child behaviors were more attributed to external/situational causes than socially withdrawn child behaviors. Also, girls' withdrawn behaviors were seen as more internal and more controllable than boys' withdrawn behaviors. One possible explanation for these differences lies in the different evaluations of children's socially withdrawn and aggressive behaviors in the Chinese culture. Compliance, self-constraint, and passiveness are positive child behaviors in traditional Chinese culture. They are more expected in girls than in boys (Slonim, 1991). On the other hand, defiance and aggression are totally unacceptable.

This kind of culture information is important for teachers to understand in their attempts at enhancing Chinese children's social competence. It has been noted that the transition to school is often hard for children from cultural backgrounds that are different from those of the school, because the format for social interaction expected at school may be different from their home situation and unfamiliar to them (Tharp, 1989). Teachers should be sensitive to cultural mismatch that can occur between children's usual style of

social interaction and the style expected in school. Teachers can help to improve children's competence if the learning and activities they plan in school are sensitive to the children's cultural backgrounds, while at the same time gradually introduce children to the unfamiliar cultural format they will continue to encounter in school (Tharp, 1989).

Within Chinese families, mothers and fathers were similar in their attributions for their children's social behaviors. As stated previously, this may be due to the concept of gender roles in Chinese families, in which the father plays a more dominant role while the mother plays a more submissive one (Slonim, 1991). Therefore, when teachers work with these families in developing strategies to enhance the children's social competence, they should interact with both the mother and father in the family as a unit rather than separately to achieve best results.

Chinese parents who were not as adapted to life in the U.S. tended to have less positive perceptions of their children than the Chinese parents who were more highly adapted. This difference may well reflect on their children since parental perceptions affect child outcomes. Therefore, programs that focus on aiding these families in adapting to conditions in the U.S. by enhancing their English language ability, providing social support, as well as finding ways to support their own cultural heritage will be not only helpful to the parents but also beneficial to the children's development of social competence.

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## Appendices

## Appendix A: Questionnaire on adaptation to life in the U.S.

Subject's ID: \_\_\_\_\_

Have you read and agreed to the letter of introduction? If No, do not answer any more questions. If Yes, please fill out the rest of this questionnaire. Thank you.

**For the following questions, please circle the number corresponding to your answer.**

1. Reflecting on your experience in America, how well do you think you can express yourself in English?

0	1	2	3	4
Not at all	Almost not at all	About half	Moderately well	Fluently

2. How well can you read American newspapers and magazines?

0	1	2	3	4
Not at all	Almost not at all	About half	Moderately well	Fluently

3. How well can you write letters in English?

0	1	2	3	4
Not at all	Almost not at all	About half	Moderately well	Fluently

4. Do you read any American newspapers?

0	1	2	3	4
Not at all	Almost not at all	Occasionally	Moderately often	Regularly

5. Do you read any American magazines?

0	1	2	3	4
Not at all	Almost not at all	Occasionally	Moderately often	Regularly

6. How do you feel about Chinese changing their first names to American names?

0	1	2	3	4
Totally disapprove				Totally approve

7. Are you satisfied with your house?

0	1	2	3	4
Not at all				Very satisfied

8. Are you satisfied with your neighborhood?

0	1	2	3	4
Not at all				Very satisfied

9. Are you satisfied with your current job? (Home maker is considered a job here.)

0	1	2	3	4
Not at all				Very satisfied

10. Are you satisfied with your present economic?

0	1	2	3	4
Not at all				Very satisfied

11. Are you satisfied with your present social position?

0	1	2	3	4
Not at all				Very satisfied

12. How many of your close friends are white?

0	1	2	3	4
None	Almost none	About half	Most	All

13. How many of the voluntary associations you participate are American associations?

0	1	2	3	4
None	Almost none	About half	Most	All

Appendix B: Questionnaire on parents' attributions

**In the following part of the questionnaire, “your child” specifically means your child who is participating in the present study. Kindly think about this child when you answer the following questions.**

- A. Please imagine that below is an incident in which you saw your child exhibit aggression to other children now or within the past 2 months.**

***Incident:* Your child intentionally pushed over another child's blocks.**

**The items below concern your impressions about your child's behavior in that incident. For each of the following items circle one number that best shows where you think the cause(s) lie(s).**

- |    |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |  |
|----|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|--|
| 1. | The cause is something that reflects an aspect of your child  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | reflects an aspect of the situation          |
| 2. | The cause is controllable by your child or other people       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | uncontrollable by your child or other people |
| 3. | The cause is something that is permanent                      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Temporary                                    |
| 4. | The cause is something intended by your child or other people | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | unintended by your child or other people     |
| 5. | The cause is something that is inside your child              | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | outside your child                           |
| 6. | The cause is something that is stable over time               | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | variable over time                           |
| 7. | The cause is something about your child                       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | other people                                 |
| 8. | The cause is something that is unchangeable                   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Changeable                                   |
| 9. | The cause is something for which some one is responsible      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | no one is responsible                        |

**B. Please imagine that below is an incident in which you saw your child exhibit social withdrawal to other children now or within the past 2 months.**

***Incident:* For the whole morning, your child played by him/herself in school, did not interact with other children, and seemed of little interest to other children.**

**The items below concern your impressions about your child's behavior in that incident. For each of the following items circle one number that best shows where you think the cause(s) lie(s).**

- |    |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |  |
|----|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|--|
| 1. | The cause is something that reflects an aspect of your child  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | reflects an aspect of the situation          |
| 2. | The cause is controllable by your child or other people       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | uncontrollable by your child or other people |
| 3. | The cause is something that is permanent                      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Temporary                                    |
| 4. | The cause is something intended by your child or other people | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | unintended by your child or other people     |
| 5. | The cause is something that is inside your child              | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | outside your child                           |
| 6. | The cause is something that is stable over time               | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | variable over time                           |
| 7. | The cause is something about your child                       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | other people                                 |
| 8. | The cause is something that is unchangeable                   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Changeable                                   |
| 9. | The cause is something for which some one is responsible      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | no one is responsible                        |



- C. Please imagine that below is an incident in which you saw your child exhibit positive social behaviors to other children now or within the past 2 months.**  
***Incident:* When your child wanted to enter other children's play, he/she was skillful in gaining entry and was easily accepted.**

**The items below concern your impressions about your child's behavior in that incident. For each of the following items circle one number that best shows where you think the cause(s) lie(s).**

- |    |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |  |
|----|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|--|
| 1. | The cause is something that reflects an aspect of your child  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | reflects an aspect of the situation          |
| 2. | The cause is controllable by your child or other people       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | uncontrollable by your child or other people |
| 3. | The cause is something that is permanent                      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Temporary                                    |
| 4. | The cause is something intended by your child or other people | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | unintended by your child or other people     |
| 5. | The cause is something that is inside your child              | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | outside your child                           |
| 6. | The cause is something that is stable over time               | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | variable over time                           |
| 7. | The cause is something about your child                       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | other people                                 |
| 8. | The cause is something that is unchangeable                   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Changeable                                   |
| 9. | The cause is something for which some one is responsible      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | no one is responsible                        |

Appendix C: Demographic questionnaire

**The following questions are related to some basic information about you and your family. Please answer these questions by writing the information in the blank space on the right of each question, or by circling the number that best fits you.**

1. Are you a father or a mother?
  - (1) Father
  - (2) Mother
  
2. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_ years
  
3. What is your spouse's age? \_\_\_\_\_ years
  
4. What is your marital status? (Circle one)
  - (1) Never married
  - (2) Divorced
  - (3) Separated
  - (4) Widowed
  - (5) Married
  - (6) Remarried
  - (7) Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
  
5. Where were you born?
  - (1) Mainland China
  - (2) Taiwan / Hong Kong
  - (3) U.S.
  - (4) Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
  
6. Where were your spouse born?
  - (1) Mainland China
  - (2) Taiwan / Hong Kong
  - (3) U.S.
  - (4) Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
  
7. How long have you been in the U.S.? \_\_\_\_\_ years
  
8. How long has your spouse been in the U.S.? \_\_\_\_\_ years
  
9. Are you a permanent resident or citizen of the U.S.?
  - (1) Yes.
  - (2) No.
  
10. How many children are there in your family? \_\_\_\_\_

11. Please indicate each of above children's gender and age.  
(For example, if there are 3 children in your family, then answer, girl - 9, boy - 6, girl -3.)
12. Please indicate the gender and birthday of the child participating in this study.  
Gender: (1) Boy  
(2) Girl  
Birthday: \_\_\_\_\_
13. Where was the child participating in this study born?  
(1) Mainland China  
(2) Taiwan / Hong Kong  
(3) U.S.  
(4) Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
14. Do you plan to return to China to live in the future?  
(1) Yes.  
(2) No.  
(3) Have not decided yet.
15. Do you hope that your child will be assimilated into the American culture?  
(1) Yes.  
(2) Partly.  
(3) No.
16. What is the highest educational level you have completed?  
(1) Less than high school  
(2) Some high school  
(3) High school graduate  
(4) Partial college (at least one year) or specialized training  
(5) Bachelor's degree  
(6) Graduate degree
17. What is the highest educational level your spouse has completed?  
(1) Less than high school  
(2) Some high school  
(3) High school graduate  
(4) Partial college (at least one year) or specialized training  
(5) Bachelor's degree  
(6) Graduate degree
18. What is your occupation? \_\_\_\_\_
19. What is your spouse's occupation? \_\_\_\_\_

20. Approximately what is your total annual family income?

- (1) Less than \$4,999
- (2) \$5,000 - \$9,999
- (3) \$10,000 - \$19,999
- (4) \$20,000 - \$29,999
- (5) \$30,000 - \$49,999
- (6) More than \$50,000

Thank you very much for your cooperation!