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CHILDCARE PRACTICES IN THREE ASIAN COUNTRIES

Sham`ah Md. Yunus

SUMMARY

Childcare practices such as feeding, toilet training, sleeping arrangement and discipline in three Asian countries (Chinese, Japan, and India) are compared. These countries differ from each other in culture, religion, language and ethnic makeup from Euro-American culture. The differences in childcare practices are broadly related to the differences in family values, traditions, and religions among these countries. Educational implications of sensitivity to cultural differences are also discussed.

RÉSUMÉ

Les pratiques vitales de l'enfant comme l'alimentation, l'entraînement à la toilette, les préparatifs du coucher, et la discipline dans différents pays asiatiques sont comparés. Ces pays diffèrent l'un de l'autre par la culture, la religion, la langue et la composition de groupes ethniques de la culture euro-américaine. Les différences dans les pratiques de structures d'accueil pour les enfants d'âge préscolaire sont généralement rattachées aux différences dans les valeurs attribuées à la famille, aux traditions et aux religions dans ces pays. Les implications éducatives de sensibilité aux différentes cultures sont aussi discutées.

RESUMEN

Las prácticas infantiles de hábitos, tales como los de alimentación, los de higiene y arreglo personal, el orden de los espacios, el dormir y la disciplina, son estudiadas en diversos países asiáticos en un estudio comparativo. Estos países se diferencian entre ellos en su religión, la lengua y el origen étnico de sus culturas. Las diferencias en las prácticas de la crianza infantil, están relacionadas ampliamente con los valores, las tradiciones y las religiones, además de las diferencias inter familiares. Se desarrolla en el estudio un análisis las implicancias educativas de la sensibilidad a las diferencias culturales que debiera poseer el profesional a cargo de los infantes.

KEYWORDS: Childcare practices, Asian countries, Educational implications

INTRODUCTION

The term Asian which has been in common use since the 1960s applies to 43 ethnic groups (Grant, 1997; McGoldrick, Giordano, & Pearce, 1996) which differ in language, religion, and customs. In addition to these “between groups” differences, diversity exists within national groups and among individuals families. The four major groups of Asian are East Asian, such as Chinese,

Japanese, and Korean; Pacific Islander; Southeast Asian, such as Thai and Vietnamese; and South Asian, such as Indian and Pakistani (Jianhua, 1999).

Among these countries, Chinese and Indian cultures are the two oldest. The traditions and values in their cultures are greatly reflected in everyday practice including raising young children. Generally speaking, in many Asian cultures, individuals strive to attain the Confucian goal of harmony in social relationships and in life in general even though the influence of Confucius teaching is very much found in Chinese families (Hsu, 1990). The Confucian principles include filial piety, ancestral unity, primogeniture, and lineage. Children are taught to respect their parents, other siblings, and other adults in positions of authority (e.g., teachers); and individual family members are to be aware of their place in the hierarchy of family membership. A typical punishment for a betrayal of obligation to others in a Chinese family is to lock the child out of the house which is expected to shame the child; the child then “looses face.” In most Asian cultures, mutual interdependence is fostered from an early age, so much so such obligation to parents and family is expected to outweigh personal desires or needs. This is in stark contrast to Western values such as that prevail in American cultures, one of assertiveness and independence.

In China, the *li* is the ideal conduct, ordering all human relationships, resulting in an ideal social structure and harmony. The essence of this idea later on became the basis of discipline and behavior: love in father and filial piety in the son; gentility in the oldest brother and humility and respect in the younger; righteous behavior in the husband and obedience in the wife; human consideration in elders and difference in juniors; benevolence in rulers and loyalty in subjects (Cohen, 2000). These teachings shaped Chinese thought and character.

Asian cultures, in general are highly contextual which depend less on words than on other kind of contextual messages (Zhao, 2002). This deemphasizing of the verbal message starts from the beginning in the way babies are treated. Babies are carried around much of the time and get good at sending message nonverbally. They may depend much on words at an early age. Adults may model or demonstrate particular behavior as the child watches. The nonverbal style of communication teaches them to watch and pick up appropriate behavior from their caregivers. Asian infants and young children are treated quite permissively; that they are in almost constant contact with their mothers, and babies are practically never left alone.

This article provides basic information to the selected Asian countries: China, Japan, and India, to help teachers and educators gain a better understanding of Asian children particularly from immigrant families, and to identify culturally appropriate educational practices to communicate successfully with them.

THE FAMILY

In Asian cultures, the family is emphasized as the most important element in child rearing practices. In traditional Asian families, the family unit, rather than the individual, is highly valued (Dosanjh & Ghuman, 1996). While guiding and protecting the individual, the family serves as the tie between the individual and society as a whole. As the central focus of the individual's life, the value of family engenders primary loyalty, mutual obligation, corporation, interdependence, and reciprocity. Ingrained with a profound sense of responsibility and duty to the family, individual members thus engage in sustained efforts to promote the welfare, harmony, and reputation of their family. Throughout this process, each individual views him or herself as an integral part of the totality of the family and the larger social structure. This naturally leads to social and psychological dependence on others. This family-centered orientation and its attendant values contrast sharply with the more individualistic values of competition, autonomy, independence, and self-reliance of most Western cultures.

The values of family and filial piety include reverence for elders, ancestors, and the past. An individual is viewed as the product of all generations of the family from the beginning of time. Individual behaviors therefore reflect upon one's ancestors as well as the entire "race". While striving to defend the family's honor and enhance its reputation, one must properly observe historical events and maintain family traditions. This orientation toward living with the past differs markedly from the individualistic cultural preoccupation with the present and living for tomorrow.

In China, the individual is seen as the product of all the generations of his or her family. This concept is reinforced by rituals and customs such as ancestor worship, family celebrations, funeral rites, and genealogy records. Because of this continuum, an individual's personal action reflects not only on the self but also their extended family and ancestors. Obligation and shame are the mechanisms that traditionally help to reinforce societal expectations and proper behavior (Zhao, 2002). Family relationships are honored.

In many extended families, children are not solely raised by their parents, but cared for by a wide range of adults such as grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousin, and wet nurses (Lee, 1999). Because of the large number of children in many Asian families, the parents usually delegate child-care functions to older siblings. The joint family system provides an excellent framework to support young mothers in child care. In some cases the grandmother becomes the surrogate mother (Zhao, 2002).

Children are taught at an early age to control their emotions (Newth, & Corbett, 2003). Being more situation-centered, the Asian child is inclined to be socially and physiologically dependent on others. The child's happiness and sorrow tend to be mild since they are shared by all family members.

Child development in Indian and Chinese cultures is thought to begin not with birth but with conception (Parekh, 1999) because it is believed that the basic contours of personality are laid down in the uterus. In contrast to the Western, Freudian emphasis on early childhood as the vital period for psychological development, early childhood is relatively underplayed in the Hindu tradition, in favor of the prenatal period (Kakar, 1989).

The child in Indian tradition is ideologically considered a valuable and welcome human being to whom the adults are expected to afford full protection, affection, and indulgence. What adults do to children is to protect and nurture them; they are not reared and brought up like Western children who are generally autonomous and self-directing (Dosanjh & Ghuman, 1996). Studies by Harkness, (1992); Mishra & Jain (1994), indicated that implications of training the child, teaching him or her to conform to social norms and “channeling his or her impulses,” is a logical next step in historical evolution where the older model was that of discipline and conquering the child’s will. The traditional Indian view of childhood is often encountered in ancient laws and medical practice (Patel, 1999). First, there is an intense parental longing for children, and their upbringing is characterized by affectionate indulgence. This “child-centeredness” however, is very different and overtly hostile to the development of girls (Holdren & Edwards, 1999). Secondly, the Indian tradition subscribes to an ideology that downgrades the role of the environment and nurture in the development of a child, and instead emphasize a deterministic conception of mystical heredity. Childhood years was expressed through such proverb as “Treat a son like a king for the first five years, like a slave for the next ten, and like a friend thereafter.” (Kakar, 1989).

FAMILY VALUES

In some Asian countries such as in China and Japan, parents take pride in being dependent on their children and supported by them (Chieu, 2000, Gonzalex-Mena, 2000). Dependence on others is desirable, for it strengthens the relationships among people. For example, a granddaughter would have her grandmother do things for her because it makes the grandmother happy. In almost all Asian countries, children from as young as two-years old are encouraged to be obedient and to honor the elders (Lee, 1995). The popular notion of what good child is, and was, firmly tied to the notion of being “Do as you are told”. Children are expected to be docile obedient. Their role is to bring honor to their families by exhibiting good behavior, high achievement, and by contributing to the well-being of the family. As one Indian parent noted “We tell them right from the start what we are doing for them and what in turn their responsibility is. I don’t believe in social security. I consider my children as my social security.” (Kakar, 1989, p. 24).

Asian children are dependent emotionally and often socially on their parents throughout the parent’s lives. Maintaining this social homogeneity and

cultural consistency is highly valued by other almost all Asian cultures. We often hear the Japanese saying “The nail that sticks up shall be pounded down” (Takaki, 1999). Searching for the common ground within the social group and seeking consensus are tendencies encouraged particularly by Japanese values and norms.

The Japanese family is the repository and bulwark of all culture values and norms and goals. There is virtually no divorce in Japan (Power, Kobayashi-Winatae & Kelly, 2001). As a result, there are not too many a single-parent households which put a great deal of strain on the time, energy, and financial resources of the single parent. In Japanese families, collaborate in fulfilling their expected parental and social responsibilities. Women are expected to attend to the inner world of the family, in which the education of children is a central concern (Takaki, 1999). The traditional role of a mother is also to provide food and physical support. The father’s role is to discipline the children. (Vedder, Bouwer, & Pels, 1995). In most Asian cultures, the strongest emotional attachment for a woman is sometimes not her husband, but her children (Parker-Jenkin, 1995).

RELIGION

The influence of religion on child-rearing practices has been very strong in most Asian families. The notion of a child’s nature was derived primarily from tradition and religious texts. For instance, the Indian views about child nature have been shaped by the sacred Hindu texts of Ramayana and Mahabharata and the Laws of Manu (Patel, 1999). The Hindu view derived from these sources an ideal creature without desire and aversions and thus nearer to God (Kakar, 1989).

According to Kakar (1989), Indian children learn about religion through daily practices. Children are not excluded from any religious events. They learn about eating rituals by watching how parents prepare food and how it is served. For many Asians, religion is part and parcel of their life and are closely woven into life-cycle rituals (rite of passages). Parents think, it is important for growing children to be full participants in all aspects of their lives, so that they can internalize both the rituals absorb the quintessence of religious piety and spirituality.

PARENTING STYLE

Western researchers report that children from authoritarian, controlling, and restrictive child-rearing practices are related to poor school achievement (Park & Honing, 1999; Levine, 1997). However, this does not appear to be the case with Asian children. Many Asian parents are authoritarian but their children do not necessarily exhibit poor school performances (Lui, 1998). The concept of authoritarianism toward children may have very different meaning depending on

the culture. A Study by Patel (1999) on childrearing practices of Asian Indians and Euro-American parents found that Asian Indians were more controlling compared to Euro-Americans. Euro-American parents tend to encourage independence, to emphasize achievement less, and to be more nurturing than Asian Indians.

Asian mothers are inclined towards a total indulgence of their infant's wishes and demands, whether these are related to feeding, cleaning, sleeping or being keeping company (Roopnariane & Carter, 1992). These mothers are very caring of their infants- even to the point of indulgence (not father; is a male dominated society). Moreover, mothers tend to extend this kind of mothering well beyond the time when the infant is ready for independent functioning in many areas. Very few would contemplate reprimanding a child in any way, let alone by physical punishment. A crying infant will be instantly picked up by a mother or another female relative. Crying is not considered to be an indication that a child is spoiled or self-centered. However, gentle smacking may be used by some parents to discipline their toddlers (Vedder, Bouwer & Pels, 1995). Generally, the tendency of Asian parents is to spoil those babies at the expense of the toddlers, especially when they happen to be boys. Infants are generally over-indulged but young children are reared in an authoritarian atmosphere.

In most Asian cultures, externalized controls are not expected to lead to inner control. Children are always watched not just by their parents, but by the whole community. The responsibility for child rearing is shared by the group, and everyone becomes a substitute parent when the occasion arises. Shared values and morals make the children know why they need to be good; so they are not bring shame on their families (Takaki, 1999, Zhao, 2002).

FATHER'S ROLE

The modern Euro-American practices is seems as a matter of mirth and hilarity amongst even the middle-class Asians. Working Asians mothers do not expect to get much help from their husbands. They seem to get help from baby-sitters or they have to make other ad hoc arrangements with their neighbors. Sometimes, a grandmother or a close relative might come to live with a family during the first few months after a baby is born. Traditionally, Asian fathers do not play any significant role in the upbringing of their babies until they grow up to the school-age (Goodnow, 1998; Gupta, 1997). Sung (1995), in describing Asian nuclear families, notes that, in general, the traditional father is the unquestioned authority in the family.

The father is considered to be the total provider of family material wealth, and in the eyes of community; furthermore, the successes and failure of individual family members are considered to be his responsibility. The father is the enforcer of family rules and is viewed by family members as stern, distant, and less approachable than the mother (Davidson, 1989). But, a recent study of upper middle income Asians reports that some fathers are beginning to

participate in the early infant care practices such as bathing, feeding and changing diapers (Schwartz, 2003) A study by Kelly & Tseng (2000) of childrearing practices by Chinese parents revealed that today in most Chinese families, father and mother share many household chores. Fathers become more involved in child care, reflecting a wakening of the traditional parent role differentiation between fathers and mothers. A survey conducted in Taiwan by Huntsinger et. al.(2000) questioned 525 families on “who calls the tune in the family.” Twelve percent of the respondents interviewed said the husband, 16 % said the wife, and 72% said both. It was also observed in the survey that the power structure in the family was changing, particularly among young couples. There has been a reduction of authoritarianism in parent’s child training attitudes and practices. Chinese parents perceived themselves as more inclined toward authoritativeness but not authoritarianism (Sung, 1995).

CHILD REARING PRACTICE

Child rearing is based on the assumption of a child’s inherent penchant for the good; however, the development of positive character requires proper training during early childhood. Subsequent emphasis is placed on formal education and high standards of academic achievement; the child’s primary means of fulfilling his or her family responsibility and obligation is through education. Whereas the family sacrifices and mobilizes its resources to provide an environment conducive to academic achievement, the child, in turn, is expected to work hard and receive high grades. Effort is often viewed as more essential in contributing to success than innate ability. Within this context, overt rewards, contingent praise, and personal credit are generally not given for positive achievements or behaviors because they are expected.

Although parents may occasionally tell their children that they are proud of them, acknowledgement of accomplishments of children may often manifested in the form of exhortations to do “better,” to strive for even higher level of achievement. Family pride may also be expressed by the mother by preparing a special meal or by the father asking the child to take on a special task that shows the family’s confidence in his or her abilities. These indirect forms of acknowledgment extends to extra familial relationships whereby public discussion of the child’s accomplishments with others outside the family is considered arrogant and inappropriate. In fact, unsolicited recognition and accomplishments are often politely dismissed, may cause silent embarrassment, or are negated by immediate counter discussion of the child’s faults and by making self-deprecating remarks. The virtues of humility and modesty are thus modeled through such behaviors.

In general, Asian parents who adhere to traditional child rearing values and practices are relatively controlling, restrictive, and at the same time, protective of their children. Children are taught to suppress aggressive behavior, overt expression of negative emotions, and personal grievances; they must

inhibit strong feelings and exercise self-control in order to maintain family harmony. There is a typical avoidance of frank discussion or verbal interchange communication between parent and child, particularly in the area of sexuality, which is suppressed in cultures where physical contact between members of the opposite sex is minimal and public display of affection is rare and embarrassing (Sung, 1995). The communication pattern also is one way: parent to child (the parent speaks, the child listens). The father is particularly distant in this respect and generally neither invites confidence nor initiates "talk" with his children. The mother-child relationship is closer and more verbal. Father-mother interaction is often characterized by indirect communications, inferences, and unstated feelings.

The protective and controlling orientation of Asian parents also may be manifested in a basic distrust of outsiders. In an attempt to control outside influences, parents often restrict their child's social interaction by allowing access to only selected role models (e.g. family, close friends); this may include the child's peer group and playmates. Independent peer interaction and autonomous social behavior (including ultimately leaving the family to reside outside the home) typically occur at much later age relative to Euro-Americans norms. Although Asian parents tend to promote family interdependence, they may simultaneously encourage the development of individual independence outside the family. Whereas the primary collectivist value system reinforces deference to the group, it also supports personal control and self-improvement through the accomplishment of internal goals (Lee 1995, Jianhua, 1999). There is an element of independence that is conducive to success and achievement in the larger society, which, in turn, enhances the family welfare and fulfills filial obligations. Thus, while traditional values continue to influence child-rearing practices significantly, many Asian immigrants may adopt bicultural socialization strategies that enable children to function effectively in their respective ethnic subcultures and in the mainstream culture of the society at large (Chieu, 2000).

Different customs result in the differences in child rearing style. Many Asian mothers constantly interact with their babies through bodily contact. Japanese mothers spend a good deal of time lulling and soothing their babies (Stevenson, Azuma, & Hakuta, 1999; Vedder, et.al., 1995). As result, Asian children are quieter, submissive and follow orders, less talkative and less vocally active than Euro-American children. Asian children are brought up in such a way that they do not openly express their opinions on certain issues (Chieu, 2000; Zhao, 2002 ; Akhtar, 1998).

Children initially are perceived as being relatively helpless and not responsible for their actions. Parents are thus very tolerant, permissive, and immediately gratify the infant's early dependency needs. Mother-infant interactions are characterized by an emphasis on close physical contact rather than active vocal stimulation; infants are carried much of the time, even during naps, or kept nearby and picked up immediately if they cry. Chinese and

Japanese babies are customarily wrapped in a shawl or blanket, strapped around the mother's (or grandmother's) back and carried piggyback. Infants are rarely, if ever, left to sleep alone; they typically sleep in the same room or bed with their parents and other siblings until they reach school age.

According to Power, Winata & Kelly (2001) the Japanese, who prize close independence between child and adult, regard infants as having a small component of autonomy, believe they must tempt the infant into a dependent role, rush to soothe a crying infant, respond quietly to the baby's excited babbling, and sleep with the young child at night in order to encourage the mutual bonding necessary for adult life. The parent-child ties are permanent rather than transitory. It is taken for granted that they are immutable, and are not subject to individual acceptance or rejection. Asian babies have more problems of separation anxiety than Euro-American children. Some babies with a strong attachment get very upset when they are away from their mothers (Park et. al, 1999).

Asian parents train their children to be more people-orientated than object orientated through the way they interact with their children (Santrock, 2000; McGoldrick et al, 1996). They focus on the social world rather than the physical world. Asian families teach their children to pay more attention to person cues (Zhao, 2002). The style of interaction motivates the children to learn to judge the moods of people in authority. The interaction styles also include a great deal of touching, especially in the first three years of a child's life. When the babies focus on an object, picking up something on their own, their attention is often redirected to the face of the person holding them. Because babies are held a lot, body contact figures prominently in child-rearing styles. This approach to child rearing tends to move the child's interest away from the world of objects and redirects attention to people.

Children attend most to adult activities wherein they receive a great deal of sensorimotor stimulation. Children are also freer to move because they do not wear restrictive clothing. Sharma (1999) and Gonzales-Mena, (2000) summarized some of the differences between the Indian and the Euro-American's way of bringing up infants; "A child in India is hardly ever alone. Babies are carried around by their mothers and it is common sight to see a girl, even as young as six, with a young brother." Children play with other children much more than they do with the objects. Most Asian children learn by simply being present when adults go about their jobs and household activities (Zhao, 2002). Adults do not create learning situations to teach their children; rather children have the responsibility to learn culturally valued behaviors and practices by observing and being around adults during the course of the day. Children learn to respect their parents because they see them showing respect to their grandparents.

Some parents prefer that the teacher or caregiver remain in control of everything that happens. Parents understand schooling in terms of their own early experiences and are more comfortable with something familiar to them.

Child centeredness appears too chaotic for some parents (Ghuman & Wong, 1999; Gonzales-Mena, 2000).

Cross-cultural study of infant development carried out by Terry Brazelton (1982) shows not only the effects of culture on infants but the effect infants can have on culture: quiet, inactive children are well adapted to their culture's emphasis on conformity. Cross culture studies do strongly suggest that the course of development of infants is affected by their early experiences, which are often the result of cultural patterns which vary from culture to culture (Brazelton, 1982; Gonzalez-Mena, 2000; and Kakar, 1989). These studies also found that Asian children are passive rather than active. They tend to lay down quietly. They also display occasional episode of unhappy vocalization or crying, which appears to be their method of attracting the attention of their mothers. Japanese mothers engage in lulling, carrying, and rocking their infants. They concentrate on soothing and quieting their children through physical rather than verbal means (Kumekawa, 1993).

Japanese mothers have different cultural attitudes or beliefs about their children than other Asian ethnicities. The Japanese belief is that if their infants are active, and it is the mother's job to soothe and calm them (Holdren & Edward, 1999; Azuma et. al., 1999). The children naturally respond differently to these varying types of treatments. Researchers found that a great deal of cultural learning takes place within the first three to four months of life (Harkness, 1992; Goodnow, 1998; Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

Huntsinger, Huntsinger, & Liaw, (2000) compared self-reported parental values and child-rearing practices and teacher reported and observed children's social skills among families of young children who were first-generation Chinese Americans, Euro- Americans, and Taiwanese Chinese. They found that Chinese parents more strongly endorsed traditional Chinese values and exerted more parental control than did Euro- American parents.

In another study by Hyesoo, & Chung (2003) revealed that authoritative parenting styles were predictive of higher academic competence among authoritarian and permissive parenting styles were predictive of lower self-reliance. Chao (1994) studied child-rearing practices of Chinese and Euro-American mothers of preschool children through questionnaires that measured parental control, authoritative-authoritarian parenting style, and the Chinese concept of child training. Chinese mothers scored significantly higher than Euro- American mothers on the training measure. These findings explain how Chinese students often excel in education (Zhao, 2002).

Culture has a direct impact on the skills children learn from routines (Santrock, 2000). Some children learn routines through cooperative exploration. Euro- American culture often places great value on curiosity and an interest in exploring. However, in Asian culture, learning through exploration is not a natural way to learn. This is because Asian cultures believe that curiosity and active exploration are ill-mannered and rude and that children should be taught to be quiet and self-restrained rather than exuberant and spontaneous (Zhao,

2002). Children are also taught to suppress their anger, and failure to do so is met with severe disapproval (Kakar, 1989).

Language is less relied on to express feelings. Often feelings are expressed through action more readily than through words. They may screen their words and actions to avoid showing how they are feeling. Teaching children to put feelings into words may be quite undesirable. Physical punishment is the preferred form of discipline. The severity of the punishment may range from relatively mild, such as tapping the hand when the child touches a forbidden object, to severe, such as hitting with a belt hard enough to leave marks; an act that would be considered as child abuse in the United States.

Asian children have fewer sleep problems than Euro-American children and their mothers have less difficulty in controlling them (Zhao, 2002). There was a difference in parental attitudes toward difficult behavior between the two groups and also several differences in associated social variables (Newth, & Corbett, 2003).

FOOD AND FEEDING

In Asian culture, food is revered and is never considered a plaything, not at the eating table or at activity table. Anyone who has experienced severe food shortages may be horrified at the thought of playing with food. Some people, even without personal starvation experience, have strong feelings about world hunger. They feel that it's wrong to use food as a plaything (Zhao, 2002). The issue of food shortages may be combined with the cleanup issue. Anyone without washers or dryer and plenty of extra clothes may have a different attitude toward letting babies play with food or have sensory experience. A family may have plenty of everything but live in a home not set up for messy meals. In both cases, the priority is on preventing rather than cleaning up messes. Prevention means spoon-feeding the baby.

Mother starts feeding solid food when babies are about three months old and nearly all of the babies are on solid food by the age of six or seven months (Sharma, 1999; Turner, 1995). Some of the mothers are a little anxious and want their children to eat at the right time with the right food. Rice porridge, bald soups-mostly vegetarian, leafy green vegetables, chicken, and fish are blended and fed to the babies.

Children are fed until they acquire the ability to handle a spoon on their own, but parents often resort to the use of both self-feeding and adult feeding. As the child approaches school-age, feeding by the parents is weaned, and it is stopped altogether when the child enters school. Orderliness and tidiness are highly stressed in the Asian daily life (Chieu, 2000; Dosanjh et. al., 1996; Dung, 1984). Valuing neatness may be less of an issue than lack of time. When parents have to rush to feed their babies and clean up after them, they may find it more expedient to continue to spoon-feed until their children can eat neatly and efficiently by themselves, which may be as late as the age of four.

Many Asian parents in India have strong moral and religious reasons to be vegetarian (Kakar, 1989; Parekh, 1999; Sharma, 1999). Others cite health reasons for avoiding meat and others don't regard meat as an important dietary factor. Muslim parents have restrictions about pork and avoid food items that contain lard, such as some type of crackers, and ice cream (Akhtar, 1998; Zaidi, 1994; Parker-Jenkins, 1995).

Breast feeding may be linked with other practices of "closeness" and intimacy. Asian babies are breast fed on a flexible schedule. A study by Turner (1995) found that children who have more rigid feeding schedule are less active in their first years than children fed more flexibly. Asian children are nursed for relatively long period, are fed more at will, are constantly fondled by their mothers, and are still often carried around on the back when mothers go out (Ramer, 1995). Most Asian mothers believe that a child who has been breast-fed is healthier (Zaidi, 1994; Turner, 1995, Faroqui, Perry & Beevers, 1993). However, due to the increasing employment among many Asian mothers, bottle-feeding is becoming a convenient way of coping with diverse commitments.

Freudian theory suggests that feeding practices during the oral stage are related to later personality development (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Restrictive and severe treatment is supposed to lead to distrust of other people, while permissive treatment is supposed to help establish feelings of trust. One study found that oral deprivation, including severe weaning practices (stopping breast feeding abruptly), reduces trust in other people (Rowe, 2000).

TOILET TRAINING

Many Asian children do not take very long to be toilet trained (Brezelton, 1982; Lui, 1998). Toilet training starts when children are around six months and by around one and half year most children are dry (Whiting & Whiting, 1975; Sung, 1995; Lee, 1999). Mothers are more conscious of their responsibilities to toilet-train their infants. When the baby wants to urinate, his whole body participates in preliminary process. The mother holding the baby in her arms learns to be sensitive to the minute details of this process, and to hold her baby away from her self at exactly the critical moment. The process begins by placing the baby on the toilet when the mother becomes sensitive to his or her schedule after selected feedings; she then recognizes how the baby typically signals elimination through facial expressions, behaviors, or noises.

A study by Kelly & Tseng (2000), found that there was a relationship between slow physical or motor development and rigid toilet training. Children who were relatively slow in motor development were weaned earlier, toilet trained earlier, handled more punitively, and were more restricted in play space and experimentation (Davidson, 1989; Manderson, 1994; McNally et al, 1991). They had less bodily contact and time with others and were less frequently breast-fed and for a shorter time (Lynch & Hanson, 2001; Magione, 1995).

Studies of toilet training do not in any consistent way support Freudian theory, but suggest that psychoanalytic theory may be correct in emphasizing the importance of toilet training (Faroqui, et.al., 1993). Rigid toilet training, when combined with a number of other practices that might be called restrictive, also seems to slow down motor development (Rowe, 2000). The rigidity with which toilet training is carried out is related to a number of other childrearing practices, almost all of which may be thought of as being restrictive. It cannot be said definitely that toilet training alone is important in shaping a child's personality but it can be said that toilet training is one of a number of indicators of the type of relationship parents have with their child, and taken together have important and perhaps lasting effects on personality (Brazelton, 1982).

SLEEPING ARRANGEMENT

It is well established custom in many Asian cultures that young infants, and in some cases even toddlers, sleep with their mothers or a mother-substitute (Manderson, 1994; Magione & Lee, 1995). Indeed, very few mothers would contemplate putting new-born baby in a separate cot in her room, let alone in a different room (Davidson, 1989). As presented earlier, babies are indulged to the point of being spoiled. If the baby cries in the middle of the night, the whole family wakes up to comfort and support the young mother (Schwartz, 2003).

In modern middle class families, the new-born baby is either in the couples' bedroom or in their bed. This is primarily to make sure that the baby is safe and is well-protected from mosquitoes and other hazards at night. This custom may explain the lower rate of "cot death" among Asian babies. Faroqui, Perry, & Beevers, (1993); and Hilder, (1994), found evidence which supports this contention: 94% of the Asian babies slept in their parents' room. Nearly all mothers had their babies either in their bedroom or in the same bed. Some slept with their mothers initially for four to five months (Faroqui et. al., 1993). The parents and children feel that they are secure and have close touch and are comfortable. There is some evidence from Asian countries which suggests a relationship between co-sleeping, on the one hand and dependence and communal ethic on the other (Kakar, 1989). The proponent of co-sleeping was that human contact during sleeping helps infants regulate their body temperature and maintain homeostasis. This communal ethic could promote psychiatric well-being by ensuring a degree of mother-infant attachment (Gonzalez-Mena, 2000).

Japanese culture puts high value on relating to others, believes that the need to attend to an infant's need for dependency is by allowing a child to sleep with the mother, and thereby creating a secure base from which later independence, autonomy and exploration can grow (Bempehat & Omori, 2004; Kagitcibasi & Berry, 1989). The word individual is downplayed in some cultures, and the word private is practically non-existent (Gonzalez-Mena, 2000). Many Asian mothers breast feed their baby. This is also one of the reasons why they sleep in the same room, so it is easy for the mother to breast

feed the baby at night. Additionally, sleeping in the same room or sleeping together in the same bed is more convenient and efficient for breastfeeding. In many Asian countries, fresh milk or baby formula are scarce and expensive. Lastly, children are less likely to need transitional objects as psychological substitute for human contact when parents co-sleep and have frequent daytime contacts (Gonzales-Mena, 2000).

CONCLUSION

In spite of the above generalizations, it has to be noted that there are the diverse groups of Asian people not only differ from each other but also subgroups within each group. For example, Singaporean and Chinese come from Chinese ancestry but Singaporean Chinese are very westernized compared to Chinese from mainland China (Chao, 1994) This has definitely influenced their thinking and perspectives towards child rearing practices and parenting skills.

Early child-rearing practices have been linked to adult personality by psychoanalysts and to intellectual development by many child psychologists (Santrock, 2000). For anthropologists and sociologists, the child's early socialization brings up insights into how a society culturally reproduces itself and how it shapes its future (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

In some parts of the world, Asian immigrants tend to introduce diversity in the work place and educational institutions (Grants, 1997). Societies will benefit from being culturally sensitive to the new immigrants. For example, in the United States, Asian-Americans constitute a significant minority and are one of the fastest growing ethnic groups. Yet little are known about their particular educational needs, especially at the early childhood and elementary levels. Teachers and educators and social workers are sometimes baffled by new immigrant parents who have very different practices and belief systems, perceptions of their children's capabilities, goals for childrearing, and world views. Child care professionals have to be sensitive to these challenges.

From cross-cultural communication, Asians have distinct communication norms that are significantly different from Euro- Americans (Huang, 2003). If not thoughtfully dealt with, conflicts may arise between Asian children and families and educational institutions. Polarized school performance, psychosocial maladjustment, and gang activity among Asian are indications of such conflicts. The goal is to help educators improve communication with Asians and, thus, more effectively educate Asian children. It is important not to generalize an understanding of one group to another (Shen & Mo, 2003).

Western education tends to be essentially Socratic, as opposed to passive learning characterized by Eastern education (Chieu, 2000). Thus, the teachers need to be aware that some Asian children may have difficulty expressing themselves and being assertive in the classroom. Furthermore, respect for authority in general, and for teachers in particular, can inhibit children from voicing their views, as well as discussing any problems they may be encounter.

This is exemplified by the proverb “First you learn respect, and then you learn letters” (Cohen, 2000).

As noted earlier involvement of Asian parents in schools may be limited. Not surprisingly, teachers and administrators often feel that Asian parents do not care about their children’s education (Schwartz, 2003). However, evidence suggests that parents are indeed quite concerned about their children’s progress in school (Morrow, 1999). In a study of parental involvement of working class parents of fifth and sixth graders, Asian immigrants and White Caucasian, the refugee immigrant children reported significantly high levels of parent involvement and concern over day- by –day progress (Bempehat, et. al 1999). A recent report of the Boston Public Schools by Morrow (1999) on Southeast Asian parents involvement indicated that Vietnamese parents see schooling as critical for their children’s futures, but are accustomed to assigning the responsibility to teachers.

In providing services to Asian families and children, it is important for school social workers remember that Asians think and organize themselves differently from Westerners (Schwartz, 2003; Shen & Mo, 2003). When conducting assessments, assessment tools need modification to reflect Asian cultures, and educators will have to be sensitive enough to permit interaction that respects the family’s sense of propriety in interpersonal relationships; also avoid approaches that rely heavily on the expression of interpersonal feelings (Lynch & Hanson, 2001).

Teachers can better understand their Asian-American students by understanding how some cultural characteristics of Asians impact their students’ experience in American schools. For example, Asian-American children may be confused by the informality that exists between teachers and students in America, and may feel considerable distress if attention is drawn to themselves in class (Huang, 2003).

Contrary to the stereotype image many Euro-American teachers have, all Asian students are not “whiz kids” (Huang, 2003). In addition to the family pressure for excellence, Asian students have to cope with unrealistic expectations from teachers. Some scholars have tried to attribute the academic attainment of Asian-American “whiz kids” to the influence of Asian cultural values, childrearing practice, parental socialization, and family expectation (Lynch & Hanson, 2003).

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