International Journal of the Whole Child
2018, VOL. 3, NO. 1

Childrearing Experiences in Cross-national Families

Yajuan Xiang[a], Tori Colson[b]

[a]University of Southern Indiana [b]University of Southern Indiana

Dr. Yajuan Xiang is an Assistant Professor of Early Childhood Education at the University of Southern Indiana. She received her Ph.D from the State University of New York at Buffalo. Her research interests include multicultural family and early learning and early dual language and literacy learning.

Dr. Tori Colson is an Assistant Professor of Education at the University of Southern Indiana. Her research interests include teacher preparation, efficacy, and assessment.

Abstract

Cross-national family is an understudied group. In the past, research on this group tended to focus on the challenges confronted by the couples in marital conflicts impacted by the unique stressors within the family including: place of residence, disparate language and cultural differences, societal attitudes, and extended families and friends. A relatively small proportion of the literature focused on multicultural parenting experiences which is recognized as a turning point for increasing conflicts within couples. Through surveys and selected interviews, this qualitative study provides insightful narrative descriptions to further understand how the unique stressors might impact childrearing experiences. Results describe parents' perceptions on their cross-national marriages and multicultural parenting experiences.

Keywords: childrearing; multicultural parenting; cross-national family; international marriage; cultural impact; language; place of residence; societal attitudes; extended family

Introduction

Typically, a cross-national couple is a married pair who has different countries of origin. Consequently, the couple is often ethnically, culturally, and racially different. They may possess different nationalities and citizenships as well as share different fundamental cultural values and norms. Recent demographic data indicate a trend of diversified family structures in the United States (U.S.) (Bikel & Mandarano, 2012). Although data pertaining to cross-national marriages are still not available, in 2015, a total of 1,051,031 persons became legal permanent residents of the U.S. Of these, 265,367 (25.2%) gained their residence as a spouse of an American citizen (Baugh & Witsman, 2017). This number portrays an image of cross-national marriage in the U.S. Since such marriages were often subsumed in discussions of other types of intermarriages including interracial, interethnic, and intercultural (Cottrell, 1990; Lee & Fernandez, 1998; Seto & Cavallaro, 2007), cross-national couples and their families are not adequately represented in the research literature (Adams, 2004; Crippen & Brew, 2013). Distinguishing this

population from general intermarital studies is challenging, but necessary to understand the unique features of such a group.

To date, research studies suggest cross-national couples faced unique stressors due to the nature of their marriages. Seto and Cavallaro's (2007) described primary stressors such as: gaining legal status for foreign spouses, coping with limited linguistic acquisition of foreign spouses, maintaining family ties in both countries, and responding to societal reactions and cultural complexities within couples. Other findings identify further challenges as lacking of social support, adjusting to the new culture, and reframing cultural differences within couples, especially for cross-cultural parenthood (Baltas & Steptoe, 2000; Bustamante, Nelson, Henriksen, & Monakes, 2011; Crippen & Brew, 2007; Kuramoto, Koide, Yoshida, & Ogawa, 2017). This research trend tended to focus on the challenges confronted by couples in potential marital conflicts. Minimal literature studies have explored opportunities in such families and lack an emphasis beyond the dyadic couple system (Bhugun, 2017; Bustamante et al., 2011; Crippen & Brew, 2007; Djurdjevic & Roca Girona, 2016). Generating from a balanced perspective, the current study, therefore, aims to examine the impact of traditionally recognized stressors among cross-national families on their childrearing experiences. To provide clarity for readers, the authors define major terms in Table 1 commonly used in this study. The definitions were developed specifically for the current study; the terms may be used differently in other research literature.

Table 1: *Major Term Definition*

Term	**Definition**
Intercultural couple	a heterosexual married pair who are from two different cultural backgrounds.
Country of origin	the country of residence in which a person was born and raised.
Cross-national/international marriage	a heterosexual marriage between people from two different countries of origin.
Cross-national couple	a heterosexual married pair who are from two different countries of origin.
Cross-national family	a cross-national couple and their biological child/ren in a single household.
Foreign-born spouse	a member of a cross-national couple who currently resides in a country other than one's country of origin.
Native-born spouse	a member of a cross-national couple who currently resides in one's own country of origin

Literature Review

In many cases, cross-national couples have to determine a place to live. Depending on which country the couple decides to reside, at least one spouse must learn how to function in a foreign country. People who live abroad were found to experience a range of negative emotions, such as: social isolation, inadequacy, a feeling of being caught between two cultures, etc. (Adams, 2004; Molina, Estrada, & Burnett, 2004; Sinha, 1998; Wieling, 2003). Therefore, foreign-born spouses were often restricted in the amount of social support received, experienced distress, and may have felt inadequate to fulfil parental roles, as they were challenged to learn and build a new supporting system in a different country (Imamura, 1990). Kuramoto et al. (2017) pointed out that the power of residence hindered foreign-born spouses from obtaining educational resources to teach their heritage culture and language to children and granted the native-born spouse more power within the relationship. They have less need to move to their spouses'

home countries, change habitual ways, and acculturate into the culture of their spouses (Kim & McGoldrick, 1998; Rosenblatt, 2009; Wieling, 2003). Unfortunately, the unequal power distributions within couples may worsen the marital relationship and further complicate childrearing in the long run (Romano, 2008).

Language, as the primary mechanism by which people share meaning, has a significant impact on cross-national couples. Couple relationships and parenting experiences include the language choice within couple communication and with children, one's language proficiency of their spouse's first language, and the language choice in the larger community. With limited language proficiency, foreign-born spouses reported difficulties in socializing, limited career options, adjustment issues related to a new culture, and challenges in raising children (Ali, 2008; Romano, 2008; Turney & Kao, 2009; Yaman, Mesman, van IJzendoorn, & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2010). Specifically, parents had difficulties helping with children's homework, communicating with teachers, engaging in school activities, and communicating with spouse and children (Kuramoto et al., 2017).

Social attitudes towards cross-national couples were often made on the basis of the cultural, racial, age, religion, and social economic status differences within couples. The distance between the countries of origin within the couples, fluency of shared language, historical relationships between the two countries, and perceptions of gender and gender role in one society were all factors impacting the social attitudes towards a cross-national marriage (Bystydzienski, 2011; Kalmijn, 1998; Yang & Lu, 2010). Children's appearance and mixed heritage were often targeted in school (Kuramoto et al., 2017). Even though marriage itself is primarily a personal affair, reactions from community and society could influence how well cross-national couples and their children might be accepted by their respective communities (Breger & Hill, 1998), and could trigger marital conflicts by emphasizing the differences within couples (Bustamante et al., 2011; Bystydzienski, 2011). Moreover, attitudes and reactions from extended families and friends of cross-national couples and their children can be more severe because of the closeness of the relationships (Bystydzienski, 2011; Mcfadden & Moore, 2001; Rosenblatt, 2009).

Cross-national couples often have disparate cultural backgrounds within the dyadic system. When each spouse brings one's own values to the family, the cultural dynamics within the family can become both interesting and challenging. Cultural clashes can lead to emotional difficulties and later conflicts in the marriage. For example, native-born spouses were found experiencing more culture difficulties than their spouses, and the couples reported relatively higher depression symptoms because of the cultural difficulties (Baltas & Steptoe, 2000). Cools (2006) found that childrearing increased conflicts between couples. They displayed divergent childrearing beliefs and practices including relationships among family members (Bystydzienski, 2011), parent-child relationships, roles and responsibilities between fathers and mothers (Romano, 2008), children's identity and belonging (Caballero, Puthussery, & Edwards, 2008), health care and school preference (Kuramoto et al., 2017), parents' interactions with schools, and child discipline methods (Bustamante et al., 2011; Cools, 2006). Disagreements and conflicting childrearing beliefs and practices may complicate children's development.

A major conclusion of previous research on cross-national couples tended to focus on the unique stressors on marital relationships and parenting experiences. More recent research identified benefits of childrearing in cross-national families, such as parental personal growth, improved communication and parenting skills, and multiple perspectives for children (Bhugun, 2017; Kuramoto et al., 2017). Although parenthood was recognized as a flashpoint where clashes of couples' distinct cultural backgrounds were highlighted (Bustamante et al., 2011; Crohn, 1995), understanding how traditionally recognized unique stressors may complicate or benefit the perceptions of parenthood and raising mixed-heritage children are still unclear in the U.S. context. Thus, this study aimed to understand the ways place of residence,

language, social attitudes and extended families, and culture might impact cross-national couples regarding their childrearing experiences.

Methodology

Participants and Data Collection

This study adopted a general qualitative research methodology. Participants in this study are cross-national couples of an American-born citizen with English as his/her first language and a foreign-born national with other languages as the first language residing in the U.S. Participants were initially recruited by the first author through distribution of flyers to professional and personal contacts at institutions and organizations (Colleges/universities, early childhood facilities, public schools, churches, and parent clubs), and through listserves (college student associations, community churches, language institutes, and online minority discussion forum) mainly in an urban area in the Northeastern U.S. Potential participants were asked to contact the first author for detailed information, and then were asked to forward the researcher's contact information to other eligible couples they might know. After screening for eligibility, 82 participants consented. All participants completed a written survey and 10 were selected for an individual interview.

A written survey consisted of 15 demographic questions and 10 short-answer questions. Demographic information included gender, age, ethnicity, country of origin, years living in the U.S., current status in the U.S., primary/first/mother language, English ability, yearly income, occupation, education level, number of children in the household, ages of children, number of clinical referred children in the household, and interest in follow-up interview. The short-answer questions were developed to understand parents' perceptions of cross-national marriage and multicultural parenting, and the impact of the unique stressors to childrearing. A total of 10 individual interviews were conducted. All questions were open-ended in nature and tailored to individual family situations gained from the written survey. All interviews were audio recorded and lasted 1-1.5 hours.

Participants included 82 individuals from cross-national marriages. Detailed demographic data were listed in Table 2 and 3. Interview participants were selected based on four criteria: first, both parents showed interest in being interviewed; second, since Asian-American family combinations comprised the majority of the research sample, families of this type were chosen to develop a cohort group of cross-national family; third, participants represented two gender and status combination) (foreign-born wife with native-born husband and native-born wife with foreign-born husband). Based on the above criteria, five couples were selected (Table 4).

Table 2: *Demographic Information of Numerical Variables of Cross-national Couples*

	N	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Native-born Spouse					
Parent Age	40	40.28	6.83	29	54
Yrs in the U.S.	40	38.98	7.02	27	54
English Proficiency [a]	41	4	-	4	4
Yearly Income [b]	41	67,024.36	42,934.54	0	250,000
Foreign-born Spouse					
Parent Age	41	37.93	5.83	27	50
Yrs in the U.S.	40	11.48	6.62	2	28
English Proficiency [a]	41	3.34	.85	1	4
Yearly Income [b]	41	36,853.93	43,718.03	0	170,000
Total					
Parent Age	81	39.09	6.41	27	54
Yrs in the U.S.	80	25.23	15.41	2	54
English Proficiency [a]	82	3.67	.69	1	4
Yearly Income [b]	82	51,939.14	45,656.50	0	250,000

Note:
[a] 1=1=Basic, 2=Competent, 3=Proficient, 4=Fluent. Sore range 1-4.
[b] USD ($)

Table 3: *Demographic Information of Categorical Variables of Cross-national Couples*

	Native-born Spouse		Foreign-born Spouse		Total	
	Counts	Proportion	Counts	Proportion	Counts	Proportion
Parent Gender						
Male	34	82.9%	8	19.5%	42	51.2%
Female	7	17.1%	33	80.5%	40	48.8%
Race/ethnicity						
Asian	1	2.4%	28	68.3%	29	35.4%
White/Caucasian	38	92.7%	9	22%	47	57.3%
Hispanic/Latino	1	2.4%	4	9.8%	5	6.1%
American Indian	1	2.4%	0	0%	1	1.2%
Multiple	0	0	0	0	0	0
Education						
High School Below	0	0	0	0	0	0
High School	2	4.9%	3	7.3%	5	6.1%
Partial College	2	4.9%	3	7.3%	5	6.1%
Standard University	15	36.5%	15	36.6%	30	36.6%
Graduate Above	22	53.7%	20	48.8%	42	51.2%
Occupation [a]						
Homemaker/students	4	9.8%	18	43.9%	22	26.8%
Unskilled Worker	0	0	0	0	0	0
Semiskilled Worker	1	2.4%	0	0	1	1.2%
Skilled Worker	2	4.9%	0	0	2	2.4%
Clerical Worker	2	4.9%	2	4.9%	4	4.9%
Semiprofessionals	6	14.6%	5	12.2%	11	13.4%
Business owner	11	26.8%	4	9.8%	15	18.3%
Administration	2	4.9%	0	0	2	2.4%
Major professionals	13	31.7%	12	29.3%	25	30.5
Country of Origin [b]						
Asian	0	0	28	68.3%	28	34.1%
European	0	0	8	19.5%	8	9.8%
N. American	41	100%	2	4.9%	43	52.4%
S. American	0	0	3	7.3%	3	3.7%
Primary Language						
English	41	100%	0	0	41	50%
Mandarin/Cantonese	0	0	17	41.5%	17	20.7%
Japanese	0	0	4	9.8%	4	4.9%
Spanish	0	0	3	7.3%	3	3.7%
Others [c]	0	0	16	39.0%	16	19.5%
Multiple	0	0	1	2.4%	1	1.2%

Note:

[a] Homemaker/students=Farm laborers/Menial service workers/homemaker/students, Unskilled workers, Semiskilled Worker= Machine operators and semiskilled workers, Skilled Worker=Smaller business owners, skilled manual workers, craftsmen and tenant farmers, Clerical Worker=Clerical and sales workers, small farm and business owners, Semiprofessionals=technicians, semiprofessionals, small business owners, Business owner=Smaller business owner, farm owner, manager, minor professionals, Administration=Administration, lesser professionals, proprietors of medium-sized businesses, Major professionals=Higher Executives, Proprietors of Large Businesses, and Major Professionals.

[b] Asian= China, Malaysia, South Korea, Vietnam, Japan, Philippine, Indonesia, and Iran, European= Germany, Czech Republic, Italy, Poland, Sweden, Serbia, and Hungary, North American=Mexico, South American= Colombia and Brazil.

[c] Other Languages=Cebuano, Tagalog, Czech, German, Hungarian, Swedish, Portuguese, Indonesia, Farsi, Hokkien, Korean, Vietnamese, Czech, Italian, Polish, and Serbian

Table 4: *Interview Participants Demographic Information*

	Family 1		**Family 2**	
Name	Dan	Wenjing	Bennett	Ran
Age	52	45	40	40
Gender	Male	Female	Male	Female
Status	Native	Foreign	Native	Foreign
County of Origin	U.S.	China	U.S.	China
Primary Language	English	Mandarin	English	Mandarin
English Proficiency	Fluent	Proficient	Fluent	Proficient
Yrs. in U.S.	52	8	40	12
Education	Graduate above	University/ college	Graduate above	University/ college
Occupation	Professor	Homemaker	Engineering Manager	Homemaker
	Family 3		**Family 4**	
Name	Ron	Lingli	Liam	Abby
Age	45	35	47	38
Gender	Male	Female	Male	Female
Status	Native	Foreign	Foreign	Native
County of Origin	U.S.	China	Malaysia	U.S.
Primary Language	English	Mandarin	Hindi/English	English
English Proficiency	Fluent	Competent	Fluent	Fluent
Yrs. in U.S.	45	4	10	34
Education	University/ College	University/ College	High School	Graduate above
Occupation	Nurse	Homemaker	Sales Consultant	Administration
	Family 5			
Name	Weijia	Jane		
Age	35	46		
Gender	Male	Female		
Status	Foreign	Native		
County of Origin	China	U.S.		
Primary Language	Mandarin	English		
English Proficiency	Fluent	Fluent		
Yrs. in U.S.	9	43		
Education	Graduate above	University/ college		
Occupation	Professor	Homemaker		

Data Analysis

The analysis of written surveys and in-person interviews took place concurrently. Each interview was transcribed and read repeatedly. Interview transcriptions were coded first, and then followed with the written survey, as the former data captured a wider spectrum of couple perspectives on cross-national marriage and childrearing. Additional codes were established in response to emergent meanings within the data. Reflective notes, analytic memos, and summaries of interviews were well documented. After initial coding, a focused coding was applied to eliminate, combine, or subdivide the initial coding categories. The third coding process was conducted using the new coding scheme. Thick description approach (Geertz, 1973) was utilized to portray unique participants' background information in order to make their statements and behaviors become meaningful to others (Denzin, 1989). Several diagrams were drawn to visualize intricate links between emerging codes. This mapping process further reduced the data into a set of holistic categories allowing themes to emerge capturing the rich meaning of all data. This research applied cross-data-source triangulation, peer review for alternative interpretations, and member checking (Ely, 1991; Golafshani, 2003).

Findings

Perceptions of Cross-national Marriage and Multicultural Parenting

Cross-national marriage.

Participants held positive views about their marriages and acknowledged differences within couples. The mixture of two different cultures led to different beliefs, values and expectations. The difference in language also brought difficulties on communications. Although occasionally those differences triggered conflicts, cross-national marriage was viewed as "respectful," "interesting," "fun," "rich," "exciting," "rewarding," "stronger," and "great learning experiences." Participants appreciated that the different upbringings introduced them to a broader range of experiences such as language learning, holidays, and travels. Moreover, mixed marriage was believed to strengthen couple relationships, since couples tended to be more aware and tolerant of the differences within them. It also "breaks racism." Liam, a Malaysia-born Indian husband, said:

> It did break a lot of differences, because I got married [with an American], my sister, my brother and my cousins had the chance to do the same thing……But, every time, when somebody, like a Chinese girl marries a white guy, or an American, it breaks that value. But as more people see mixed marriages, they will think differently and change differently……

Families and friends of cross-national couples displayed a range of attitudes from extremely supportive to disapproval towards the marriage. Many couples were well accepted, but some families hesitated and disapproved about such marriages, mainly because doubts about internet credibility for dating, unknown risks, limited understandings of the spouses and their cultures, and concerns of the solidarity of one's group. For example, Jane's parents said that they would "disown" her if she insisted on her marriage and even bribed her with a new car for not doing so. Jane's father's outdated understanding about China, a communist country, built up his attitude towards Jane's marriage.

> They [my parents] thought I lost my mind. That's what they said "have you lost your cotton-picking mind? ……They are going to kill you in China. You can't live in China". They [my parents] don't know anything about China. My daddy asked me if they still wear ponytails in

> China, because that time China was so closed off. They don't know anything about China. But I don't think it's something necessary given to Chinese.

Most participants believed that they have not been viewed differently by others. A small number of couples shared that they were getting second looks from people and had been stereotyped once. For instance, the foreign-born wife was mistaken as a nanny and the couples were assumed to be not related when appearing in public; couples were questioned for threatening the solidarity of the one's cultural heritage; white women's sexuality was also targeted.

Multicultural parenting.

Cross-national couples view mixed heritage as a "distinct advantage in today's globalized and increasingly interconnected world." They believe mixed children were "culturally sensitive," have a "rich cultural and language environment," a "broad perspective in life," "more opportunities to travel," and "better ability to adapt to different environments." Nevertheless, many couples reported a concern that their children might be targeted or even bullied for their mixed traits. In most cases, children from such families were not viewed and treated differently from children of mono-heritage.

The couples wanted children to embrace dual language and cultures, and reinforced such aspiration in daily practices. Parents intentionally created a rich language and cultural environment by speaking two or more languages, introducing holidays, food, music, art, literature and movies from both cultures, as well as providing weekend language classes to children. Parents maintained a close communication with the foreign-side of extended families through travelling and internet to enrich the cultural and language connections.

Enabling children to become dual cultural and bilingual was a challenge. On one hand, couples were concerned that learning two languages hindered children's English learning as some children struggled at school and social events in the American system. On the other hand, as children developed, their drastic growth of English proficiency inhibited the second-language acquisition. Moreover, the mainstream language and cultural power undermined couples' efforts to maintain the other heritage root. Usually, the responsibilities resided with the foreign-born spouse.

Cross-national couples continuously negotiated childrearing issues, such as daily practices, parent-child relationships, agency of children, and perceptions of learning and education. For example, Weijia shared:

> The different upbringings of the parents can pose difficulties in agreeing on what should be the most important goals of life for our children. For instance, as a Chinese parent, I feel it is important for my child to have a more structured schedule after school to do some additional practice at home, but this seems like a mission impossible for my American wife.

In addition, long distance with the foreign-side extended families, often diminished the opportunities for children to develop the other cultural heritage and socialize with relatives, and for parents to receive extra social supports.

Role of Place of Residence.

Many participants have had travelling or long-time living experiences in the foreign-born spouse's home countries. They believed that their marriages and children were better received in the U.S. than other countries. "Less environmental pollution," "bigger yard for outdoor play," "easy access to museum and

theaters," and "school system that nurtures creativity" were identified as benefits to raise mixed-heritage children. However, other parents argued that the American culture and school overemphasized "individualism" and did not promote "respect for elders," "mindfulness," and "grit." Moreover, parents shared that living in the U.S. has changed their perceptions on discipline and expectations on academic performance in order to follow the mainstream culture.

In general, native-born spouses felt their roles as parents came easier as they were raised in this country, understood what it means to be a parent, and knew the system. Thus, native-born spouses felt more obligated to navigate the health system and school issues. Foreign-born spouses were responsible to reinforce dual cultural and language learning. Furthermore, living in the U.S. limited foreign-born spouses in career options. Thus, many foreign-born wives, holding "foreign-born" and "mother" roles in one person, became the primary caregivers of their children. Dan shared:

> She [Wenjing] has a degree but it doesn't have a background that translates it into a new job. She has to get additional training. Hopefully she will find something she wants to do, but she does not have the option of going out and earning money at the rate as I do……it is just an unfortunate situation that she was put in.

Role of Language.

Cross-national couples believed bilingualism is a tool to understand culture, traditions, and customs that each parent represents, and to communicate with extended families on both sides. Further, parents believe bilingualism strengthens children's learning capacity, enhances cultural sensitivity, broadens career and social network opportunities, and grants more perspectives of viewing the world. However, learning a second language required greater efforts and financial means from both parents and children. The couples engaged bilingual media and literature, socialized with friends who shared the second language, travelled to foreign-spouses' countries of origin, devoted extra time on second-language classes, and frequently communicated with foreign extended families.

Within cross-national families, people who spoke two or more languages had additional channels to exchange information while mono-language speakers were limited in communication. This unique communication pattern, on one hand, constrained native-born parents to join the conversation when it was held in the foreign language; on the other hand, this process diminished children's second language acquisition when communication was based on English where all families can be included. In addition, the power of a language was strengthened by the number of its language users in the current conversation. Jane stated when with her Chinese parents' in-laws, she felt being completely excluded from communications, as Chinese was mutually shared by the majority of the people in the house. Many foreign-born parents felt a sense of incapability in their roles such as helping with homework, reading to children, and building social networks with other parents. Rain shared:

> It's about the terms. It's too many, like in math, I am good at math and I know all the contents. But when he (the son) asked me, I don't have the English words to explain to him. All I know is in Chinese. I tried to explain to him [in English], it hardly makes any sense. Because of my English, my ability to socialize is not as strong as people who grown up here. There were occasions that I have to socialize with people, like if my kids get along with other kids, or have play dates, it is better that the parents can get along. But my relationships with those parents are in a polite stage. It's hard to develop a deeper relationship.

Furthermore, English proficiency was found affecting parent-child relationships. Children of mixed heritage tended to question their foreign-born parents for their English abilities and not being "Americanized".

> Dan: So that (Americanism) comes up recently and I am concerned about it because sometimes there is some disrespect perhaps, um, Wenjing, some of it is based on her language ability……They get the opportunity to correct her. So that often does happen when children say "you are not saying that right" or "you are not doing that right." They get to do that with her fairly often.

Role of Extended Families and Friends.

Cross-national couples attributed extended families and friends as a source of support and role model for their marital relationships and childrearing. In some cases, the marriage between couples was promoted by the precedent of mixed marriage in the family history. Extended families and friends spent quality time, and provided parenting advice and financial support to the couples. However, in most of the cases, families of foreign-born spouses were located in other countries. Many couples expressed their desire of having foreign-sided extended families provide childcare, share parenting advice, engage in children's upbringing, and provide the emotional support to the families.

Extended families indirectly influenced parenting practices, as cross-national couples refer to their own growing-up experiences to parent their children. Moreover, extended families strengthened children's multicultural heritage, but also highlighted the different values and beliefs on marriage and childrearing within couples. One parent expressed, "Their [extended families'] values are different from my family's values that we mutually developed and molded with my husband. It mainly was an issue when it comes to parenting our children." Specifically, the tension between extended families and cross-national couples was due to their different understandings on the boundary of childrearing responsibilities and parenting practices between each party, such as whether it is feasible to take an infant outside in cold weather.

Cross-national couples believed friends were a positive source to exchange parenting advice. However, some couples indicated a peer pressure on childrearing. Dan explained, "We have mostly Chinese friends and that does reinforce [the] source of the demanding tendencies and high expectations we place on our children."

Role of Culture.

Many couples have not recognized the cultural differences before marriage. Others believed differences were minor and a tangle of cultural and personal matters. However, most couples believed the cultural root was deep and cannot be changed easily. Jane stated:

> Anyway, my husband is very Chinese, and he will always be Chinese……Just like I will always be an American. It's just our culture. I believe that we are cultural beings from the time we were born. There's a collective program that goes on... If you see him all of the objective stuffs like, you know, he is a U.S. citizen, a republican, he is a professor, he doesn't speak with an accent, he will eat McDonalds, you know all of these external things, but what drives him is his culture. His values and his ideas, all his views, all come from being a culture being which is Chinese.

The couples argued that what one believes was "normal" or "usual" on raising children was often different from their spouses. They did not think "each other's 'normal' was good enough for the

children." Parents often disagreed on children's bath time, food and clothing preference, and indoor or outdoor play choice.

Moreover, cultural difference was reflected through perceptions on learning. Asian parents tended to have higher expectations on children's academic performance. They value hard work, diligence, structure, and endurance. Weijia explained: "It is not all easy and fun when it comes to study something. American culture emphasizes if you enjoy yourself, but oftentimes 'enjoying' something is a short time. Thus, you really need to cultivate the endurance in learning." However, most American parents believed that learning was supposed to be "fun," "creative," and "through experiences."

Cross-national couples had divergent beliefs on children's agency. It led to the different degrees of parental control posed on children. Many Asian parents believed that it is completely reasonable to feed and clean after children, since young children are still developing self-helping skills. However, American parents argued to foster independence and responsibilities at an early age. Moreover, the level of parental control was also reflected through children's school and future career choices, age of involving in romantic relationships, and sibling relationships. For example, American culture views each child in the family as independent and as equal individuals. However, from an Asian perspective, older siblings making compromises to take care of the younger children is a virtue. This different value was found difficult to reconcile within couples.

Discussion

Current findings indicate that divergent cultural backgrounds may not necessarily bring challenges but also opportunities for both the couples and their children. Parenthood was a flashpoint for increased marital conflicts among cross-national couples. But parents displayed balanced perceptions on their mixed marriage and multicultural parenting experiences. Conflicts derived from distinct cultural backgrounds were likely to be "tradeoffs" to opportunities brought by the differences.

In most cases, cross-national couples and their children were well received by the extended families and communities in today's increasingly diversified society. The tensions between the couple and their families were alleviated once the families learned about the foreign-born spouses and their cultures. Foreign-born spouses, especially females, were found disadvantaged in many aspects in the marital relationships and childrearing. Such findings may be due to the fact that female foreign spouses comprised the majority of the sample. Thus, the result generated a stronger voice of their experiences. The disadvantaged situations faced by foreign spouses were relative whereas the native spouses may have to invest greater effort to maintain a healthy marital relationship and childrearing process.

This study provided strong evidence that the role of place of residence, language, and extended families and friends were cultural factors influencing multicultural parenting experiences. Choosing which country to reside will influence couples by the dominant cultures, values and beliefs in their childrearing practices. Living in the U.S. impacted children's educational resources and learning opportunities, parental responsibilities, and parenting practices. The physical distance was a main challenge in engaging foreign-side extended families in childrearing.

Speaking different languages within the household was another unique feature of cross-national families. Before child birth, English was the language used between couples, which was also the dominant language spoken in the larger community. The balance between dominant and minority language was maintained mainly by foreign spouses assimilating to the mainstream culture. However, child birth

prompted foreign spouses to increase the input of their languages and cultures. The dyadic balance developed by couples inclined towards the minority culture. Although the dominant language in the larger community still overpowers the minority language, interestingly, the power battle overturns when there were more people speaking the minority language in the current context.

Extended families and friends were important role models and support sources for cross-national families, but they may complicate couple relationships and childrearing experiences. Childrearing was a point in which the involvement of extended families increased; the cultural power they brought to the family can further aggravate the cultural differences within couples. Under such family dynamics, maintaining a foreign heritage linguistically and culturally for mixed children becomes challenging.

Cross-national couples are not a homogenous group. The combinations of couples' gender and status, and country of origin have great variation. The condition of the current data does not permit fine distinctions to be made across gender and status, and country of origin. It would be beneficial for future studies to develop cohort groups and balance the different gender and status combinations to hear more voices from foreign-born male spouses. In addition, including the insights of mixed-heritage children into the discussion of multicultural parenting would be valuable. Finally, future research may consider conducting cross-country comparisons on this population.

Conclusion

Since only the 1950's, the systematic and clearer defined research regarding cross-national families represents a brief history. With the unique feature of such families, this population deserves increased attention from researchers, practitioners, and educators. The findings of this study distinguished cross-national families from general intermarried families, and examined the impact of traditionally recognized unique stressors on childrearing experiences from a balanced perspective. Finally, this study shed light on the opportunities and challenges cross-national couples and mixed-heritage children experienced in becoming bi-lingual and cultural. As a result, more research would contribute to supporting multilingualism and multiculturalism in public school systems where more and more mixed-heritage children attend.

References

Adams, J. (2004). " This is not where I belong!" The emotional, ongoing, and collective aspects of couples' decision making about where to live. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 459-484.

Ali, M. A. (2008). Loss of parenting self-efficacy among immigrant parents. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood, 9*(2), 148-160. doi:10.2304/ciec.2008.9.2.148

Baltas, Z., & Steptoe, A. (2000). Migration, culture conflict and psychological well-being among Turkish–British married couples. *Ethnicity & Health, 5*(2), 173-180. doi:10.1080/713667445

Baugh, R., & Witsman, K. (2017). US lawful permanent residents: 2015. *Washington, DC: US Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics*, 4.

Bhugun, D. (2017). Parenting advice for intercultural couples: a systemic perspective. *Journal of Family Therapy, 39*(3), 454-477.

Bikel, & Mandarano, L. (2012). When intercultural relations fail—What happens to the children. Retrieved from https://globenewswire.com/news-release/2012/06/12/479231/259017/en/When-Intercultural-Relations-Fail-What-Happens-to-the-Children.html

Breger, R., & Hill, R. (1998). *Cross-cultural marriage: Identity and choice*: Bloomsbury Academic.

Bustamante, R. M., Nelson, J. A., Richard C. Henriksen, J., & Monakes, S. (2011). Intercultural couples: coping with culture-related stressors. *The Family Journal, 19*(2), 154-164. doi:10.1177/1066480711399723

Bystydzienski, J. M. (2011). *Intercultural couples: Crossing boundaries, negotiating difference*: NYU Press.

Caballero, C., Puthussery, S., & Edwards, R. (2008). *Parenting'mixed'children: Negotiating difference and belonging in mixed race, ethnicity and faith families*. Retrieved from https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/parenting-mixed-children-difference-and-belonging-mixed-race-and-faith-families

Cools, C. A. (2006). Relational communication in intercultural couples. *Language and Intercultural Communication, 6*(3-4), 262-274.

Cottrell, A. B. (1990). Cross-national marriages: A review of the literature. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies, 21*(2), 151-169.

Crippen, C., & Brew, L. (2007). Intercultural parenting and the transcultural family: A literature review. *The Family Journal, 15*(2), 107-115. doi:10.1177/1066480706297783

Crippen, C., & Brew, L. (2013). Strategies of cultural adaption in intercultural parenting. *The Family Journal, 21*(3), 263-271. doi:10.1177/1066480713476664

Crohn, J. (1995). *Mixed matches: How to create successful interracial, interethnic, and interfaith relationships*: Fawcett.

Denzin, K. N. (1989). *Interpretive Biography*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.

Djurdjevic, M., & Roca Girona, J. (2016). Mixed couples and critical cosmopolitanism: experiences of cross-border love. *Journal of Intercultural Studies, 37*(4), 390-405.

Ely, M. (1991). *Doing Qualitative Research: Circles within Circles*. New York: RoutledgeFalmer.

Geertz, C. (1973). Thick Descriptions: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (pp. 3-30). New York: Basic Books.

Golafshani, N. (2003). Understanding Reliability and Validity in Qualitiative Research. *The Qualitative Report, 8*(4).

Imamura, E. A. (1990). Strangers in a strange land: Coping with marginality in international marriage. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies, 21*(2), 171-191.

Kalmijn, M. (1998). Intermarriage and homogamy: causes, patterns, trends. *Annual Review of Sociology, 24*(1), 395-421. doi:10.1146/annurev.soc.24.1.395

Kim, B., & McGoldrick, M. (1998). Marriages of Asian women and American military men. *Re-visioning family therapy*, 309-319.

Kuramoto, M., Koide, T., Yoshida, T., & Ogawa, E. (2017). Raising Multicultural Children in Japan: A Mixed Methods Examination of Parent-Child-Society Dynamics. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 1-25.

Lee, S. M., & Fernandez, M. (1998). Trends in Asian American racial/ethnic intermarriage: A comparison of 1980 and 1990 census data. *Sociological Perspectives, 41*(2), 323-342. doi:10.2307/1389480

Mcfadden, J., & Moore, J. L. (2001). Intercultural marriage and intimacy: Beyond the continental divide. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling, 23*(4), 261-268. doi:10.1023/A:1014420107362

Molina, B., Estrada, D., & Burnett, J. A. (2004). Cultural communities: Challenges and opportunities in the creation of "Happily Ever After" stories of intercultural couplehood. *The Family Journal, 12*(2), 139-147. doi:10.1177/1066480703261962

Romano, D. (2008). *Intercultural marriage: Promises and pitfalls*: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.

Rosenblatt, P. C. (2009). A systems theory analysis of intercultural couple relationships. *Intercultural couples: Exploring diversity in intimate relationships*, *320*.

Seto, A., & Cavallaro, M. (2007). Cross-national couples in the mainland United States. *The Family Journal, 15*(3), 258-264. doi:10.1177/1066480707301315

Sinha, R. (1998). *The cultural adjustment of Asian lone mothers living in London*: Ashgate.

Turney, K., & Kao, G. (2009). Barriers to school involvement: Are immigrant parents disadvantaged? *The Journal of Educational Research, 102*(4), 257-271. doi:10.3200/JOER.102.4.257-271

Wieling, E. (2003). Latino/a and white marriages. *Journal of Couple & Relationship Therapy, 2*(2-3), 41-55. doi:10.1300/J398v02n02_04

Yaman, A., Mesman, J., van IJzendoorn, M. H., & Bakermans-Kranenburg, M. J. (2010). Perceived family stress, parenting efficacy, and child externalizing behaviors in second-generation immigrant mothers. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, *45*(4), 505-512. doi:10.1007/s00127-009-0097-2

Yang, W.-S., & Lu, M. C.-W. (2010). *Asian cross-border marriage migration: Demographic patterns and social issues* (Vol. 2): Amsterdam University Press.