Temperamental characteristics may play a significant role in the development of social competence and adjustment. Support for this belief comes from a number of studies in North America and Western Europe (see Kagan, 1989, and Rothbart & Bates, 1998 for comprehensive reviews). Nevertheless, the impact of temperamental factors on development takes place in cultural context. Culture may influence the display of personal traits and the way in which they contribute to adaptive and maladaptive functioning. During development, temperament and culture interact, which may lead to different developmental patterns and outcomes of certain dispositional characteristics, such as sociability and shyness, across cultural contexts. The mechanism for the temperament–culture interaction mainly involves the socialization process, such as culturally directed social interpretations and responses in children’s relationships with adults and peers (Chen, 2000). Social judgments, evaluations, and responses determine, to a large extent, the functional “meanings” of the characteristics and their effect on individual behavior and adjustment status. Children may actively engage in the processes through their participation in endorsing, transforming, and constructing cultural norms and values in social interactions.

In this chapter, we focus on the relations between temperament and peer interactions and relationships in Chinese and North American children. We first describe a conceptual model concerning some basic dimensions of temperament, social functioning, and cultural context. We then discuss major socioemotional characteristics, particularly shyness–inhibition, in Chinese and Western cultures. Our discussion focuses on how shyness–inhibition is interpreted and responded to by others in socialization and social interactions and consequently makes distinct contributions to peer relationships and general social adjustment in Chinese and North American children. We also discuss how the significance of dispositional factors for social relationships...
and adjustment may be affected by macrolevel changes in the society. These discussions are based mostly on the findings of a series of ongoing cross-cultural projects our research team has been conducting in China and Canada for the past 15 years. Finally, some suggestions are offered about future directions in the cross-cultural study of child temperament and peer relationships.

Social Initiative and Self-Control in Cultural Context:
A Conceptual Model

Chen (2000) proposed a preliminary two-dimensional model concerning socioemotional characteristics and cultural context. According to this model, social initiative and self-control, as manifestations of the fundamental temperamental dimensions of reactivity and regulation (Rothbart & Bates, 1998) in social domains, are two distinct systems that may account for individual differences in social functioning and interactional styles. Social initiative represents the tendency to initiate and maintain social interactions, which is often indicated by children's reactions to challenging social situations. For example, whereas some children are confident and display high interest in social activities, others may be more timid, reticent, and inactive in interacting with others (Kagan, 1998; Kochanska & Radke-Yarrow, 1992). High social initiative may be driven by the child's approach motive in social situations. In contrast, internal anxiety or approach-avoidance conflict may impede spontaneous engagement in social participation, leading to a low level of social initiative (Asendorpf, 1990). Self-control, on the other hand, represents the ability to modulate behavioral and emotional reactivity and promote the appropriateness of children's behaviors during social interactions. A variety of psychological processes, including attention, language, memory, communicative skills, and sense of self, are involved in the development of self-control (e.g., Kochanska & Aksan, 1995; Kopp, 1982). In early childhood, self-control is often reflected in compliant and cooperative behaviors, such as initiating, modifying, or restraining certain behaviors in response to adults' requests and demands (Kopp, 1982). Parents help their children exercise control and restraint through the issuance of frequent directions (Kuczynski & Kochanska, 1990). With age, control shifts to the child himself or herself, and adults increasingly assume the role of distal monitors. As a result, children may "internalize" social standards and regulate their behaviors without intervention from adults (Kochanska & Aksan, 1995). The significance of self-control is reflected mainly in its role in regulating individual behaviors to maintain and promote interpersonal harmony and group well-being. Thus, the broad construct of self-control contains the components of other-orientation, social responsibility, and responsiveness to socialization pressure, especially during the school years.

An important aspect of the contextual model is about the linkage between the temperamental dimensions and cultural values. As shown in Figure 6.1, whereas social initiative is relatively more emphasized in Western individualistic societies, self-control may be more valued in the group-oriented societies, such as Chinese society. In Western cultures, because acquiring individual autonomy, competitiveness, and self-expressive skills are important socialization goals (Maccoby & Martin, 1983), social initiative is viewed as a major index of social competence; the lack of active social participation and assertiveness is considered maladaptive (Rubin & Asendorpf, 1993). On the other hand, although self-control is encouraged (Chamberlain & Patterson, 1995; Maccoby & Martin, 1983), the cultural emphasis on individual decision-making and freedom requires socialization agents to help children learn to balance the needs of the self with those of others (Edwards, 1995;
Kobayashi-Winata & Power, 1989; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Consequently, self-control is often considered less important, especially when it is in conflict with the attainment of individual social and psychological goals (Triandis, 1990).

Unlike in Western cultures, social initiative is not so highly appreciated or valued in Chinese and some other group-oriented cultures, which may be because social initiative does not bear much relevance to mutual support and cohesiveness in the group (Chen, 2000). In group-oriented cultures, children are encouraged to restrain personal desires for the benefits and interests of the collective (Yang, 1986). As a result, self-control is emphasized in a more consistent and absolute manner. In Chinese culture, children are taught to consider others in their decisions and actions and to exert self-control from a very early age (e.g., Chen, Rubin et al., 2003; Ho, 1986; Luo, 1996). Lack of self-control is often regarded as a most serious behavioral problem in childhood and adolescence (Chen, Wang et al., 2002; Zhou et al., 2004). Not only are children encouraged to comply with external demands, but also to understand and accept more general social expectations and requirements concerning their conduct. These understandings, in turn, are thought to help children demonstrate committed and internalized self-control (Luo, 1996).

Cultural norms and values concerning socialization goals and expectations may be reflected in parental child-rearing beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors (e.g., Super & Harkness, 1986; Whiting & Edwards, 1988). In traditional Chinese culture, for example, parents are responsible for “governing” (i.e., teaching, disciplining) their children and are held accountable for their children’s failures. In turn, children are required to pledge obedience and reverence to parents as indicated in the Confucian doctrine of “filial piety” (e.g., Ho, 1986). Consistently, it has been reported that, compared with Western parents, Chinese parents are more controlling and protective in child-rearing (Chao, 1994; Kriger & Kroes, 1972; Lin & Fu, 1990). The directive parenting style and high parental involvement may “fit” the cultural values on the socialization of self-control (Chao, 1995; Ho, 1986). Relative to Chinese parents, Western parents are more likely to support the child’s autonomy and exploration (e.g., Liu et al., in press). Further, they are encouraged to be sensitive to their children’s needs and to interact with children in a low-power, “child-centered” manner (Rubin, Stewart, & Chen, 1995). These parenting beliefs and practices may be conducive to the development of social assertiveness and initiative in the self-oriented cultural context.

Different cultural values on social initiative and self-control and the corresponding socialization beliefs and practices are directly related to the meanings of specific socioemotional characteristics, such as aggression-disruption (based on high social initiative and low self-control), shyness–social inhibition (relatively low initiative and high control), and aspects of social competence, such as sociability and prosocial orientation in Chinese and North American children. Parental beliefs and attitudes may serve as a basis for parents’ interpretations of, and responses to, the display of a socioemotional characteristic in children, which in turn constitute important socialization conditions for their development. Moreover, through the socialization process, children may learn the cultural values and eventually use them to direct their own attitudes and behaviors in their interactions with others. In the past decade, our research team has investigated cultural meanings of compliance (Chen, Rubin et al., 2003), shyness (e.g., Chen et al., 1998), and sociable and prosocial behaviors (e.g., Chen et al., 2000) in Chinese and North American children. Based on these studies, we have found that the significance of individual characteristics for peer interactions and relationships may be moderated by cultural context. As a result, adaptive and maladaptive behaviors may be defined similarly or differently across cultures (Benedict, 1934; Bornstein, 1995; Chen, 2000). In the sections that follow, we focus on shyness–inhibition and discuss its meaning and developmental consequences in Chinese and North American cultures.

Shyness-Inhibition and Peer Relationships in Chinese and North American Children

Shyness–inhibition, often manifested in wary, vigilant, and sensitive behaviors, is taken to reflect internal insecurity and anxiety in social-evaluative situations (Asendorpf, 1990; Stevenson-Hinde & Shouldice, 1993). In the Western literature, children who display shy, wary, and inhibited behaviors are believed to be socially incompetent and immature because these behaviors indicate a low level of social initiative and assertiveness (e.g., Asendorpf, 1991; Larson, 1999, Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 1998; Triandis, 1990). Consistently, it has been found that shy–inhibited children are likely to experience difficulties in peer acceptance and social adjustment, especially in the school years when peer interactions become an important part of social lives (e.g., Rubin, Burgess, & Coplan, 2002). When shy children recognize their social difficulties, they tend to develop negative self-perceptions and self-feelings, such as depression (e.g., Boivin, Hymel, & Bukowski, 1995; Rubin, Chen et al., 1995).

Some researchers have argued that the occurrence of shy–inhibited behavior may involve the psychological process of dysregulation (e.g., Asendorpf, 1991; Rubin, Coplan et al., 1995). This is because shy, wary, and sensitive
behavior in social situations is associated with feelings of anxiety and lack of self-confidence (e.g., Rubin et al., 2002). However, to direct and maintain emotional reactions toward the self, rather than others, and to display constrained behaviors, adequate self-control is required. Moreover, regardless of the underlying psychoemotional process, shy-inhibited behavior usually does not threaten the welfare of others and the functioning of the group. Thus, at the behavioral or social level, self-control is an important attribute of shyness-inhibition, as indicated in Figure 6.1. Shy-inhibited children are perceived as well-behaved and understanding, which are indications of internalized self-control in traditional Chinese culture (Chen, 2000; Liang, 1987, Lou, 1996; Yang, 1986). The cultural endorsement may help shy children obtain social support and approval in peer interactions and develop self-confidence in social performance. Given this background, we have been interested in shyness-inhibition and its implications for social interactions and relationships in Chinese and North American children.

According to Hinde (1987, 1995), children's social and psychological functioning may be analyzed at multiple levels according to its social complexity. At the intrapersonal level, children carry with them somewhat stable, personal characteristics, such as temperament, that dispose them to display particular reactions to social stimuli. At the interaction level, children engage in dyadic behaviors with others, involving the process of social initiation and response. Most interactions are embedded in long-term relationships and group networks, which represent a higher level of social experience (Hinde, 1987; Rubin et al., 1998). Social relationships and groups often develop based on shared expectations and norms and serve to regulate individual behaviors and activities. Finally, Hinde (1987) emphasizes that the different levels of individual and social experiences are embedded within an all-reaching “umbrella” of the cultural macrosystem. Following Hinde’s paradigm, we will discuss how cultural context is involved in organizing the developmental setting for shy-inhibited children and directing the role of shy-inhibited behavior in social interactions and relationships and general social and psychological adjustment.

Shyness–Inhibition in Toddlerhood: Cross-Cultural Differences in Prevalence and Parental Attitudes

Cross-cultural differences in shyness-inhibition between Chinese and North American children were reported in several studies (Chan & Eysenck, 1981; Freedman & Freedman, 1969; Kagan, Kearsley, & Zelazo, 1978). In general, Chinese children displayed more shy and wary behaviors in novel situations than their North American counterparts. In a recent cross-cultural study conducted by Chen et al. (1998), for example, a sample of Chinese and Canadian toddlers were observed in a variety of activities, including free play, interacting with a stranger, and other typical episodes of the inhibition paradigm (e.g., a stranger quietly played with a toy truck and robot) in the laboratory situation (e.g., Kagan, 1989). Compared with the Canadian counterparts, Chinese toddlers were clearly more shy and inhibited in the stressful situation. As shown in Figure 6.2, Chinese toddlers stayed closer to the mother and were less likely to explore in free play sessions. Moreover, they displayed more anxious and fearful behaviors in interacting with the stranger, as indicated by their higher scores on the latency to approach the stranger and to touch the toys. The percentages of toddlers who made contact with their mothers in the free play and truck and robot episodes in the Chinese sample (41 percent and 61 percent, respectively) were almost double those in the Canadian sample (21 percent and 37 percent, respectively). There were significantly more children in the Chinese sample (21 percent and 43 percent, respectively) than in the Canadian sample (6 percent and 12 percent, respectively) who did not approach the stranger or touch the robot. Similar cross-cultural differences have been reported in the attachment literature (e.g., Miyake, Chen, & Campos, 1985; Mizuta et al., 1996). In these studies, Asian infants have been found to be more fearful and insecure, and more likely to seek close physical contact with the caregiver and display ambivalent behaviors in the strange situation than Western infants. Shyness–inhibition is a characteristic that may be biologically rooted (Asendorpf, 1991; Kagan, 1989). It is unclear at this time
how the cross-cultural differences in shyness are reflected at the biological or physiological levels. Some initial evidence has indicated that Chinese American and European American children differ in autonomic nervous system characteristics, such as heart rate variability, in challenging situations (Kagan et al., 1978). It remains to be investigated whether there are differences in the frontal brain activities (Fox et al., 1995), which may be particularly relevant to the socialization experience. Chen et al.'s (1998) study revealed that culturally mediated socialization beliefs and practices might play a role in the development of shyness-inhibition. For example, shyness-inhibition was associated positively with maternal disappointment and dissatisfaction, and negatively with mothers' acceptance and perceptions of achievement in the Canadian sample. However, the directions of the relations were opposite in the Chinese sample; child shyness was associated positively with maternal acceptance, approval, and encouragement of achievement, and negatively with maternal negative attitudes.

The different relations between parental attitudes and children's shy-inhibited behavior indicate parental culturally distinct perceptions of shy-inhibited behavior in Chinese and Canadian children. At the same time, the attitudes and reactions of Chinese and Canadian parents toward shy-inhibited behavior in early childhood constitute different social environments that shy-inhibited children may experience in the early years in China and North America, which is likely to affect their interactions and relationships with peers outside of the family and the general "internal working model" concerning the self and others in the future.

Shyness-Inhibition and Peer Interactions in Early Childhood

Peer interactions occur through the process involving the elicitation of social contact and the response of others. Whereas social initiations represent a necessary condition for the establishment of social interactions, responses from the target child may determine whether the social interactions continue. Findings from various research programs have indicated that the ability to establish and maintain positive peer interactions is important for the development of social relationships and adjustment in other areas (Black & Logan, 1995; Dodge et al., 1986; Putallaz & Gottman, 1981).

In studies of Western children (e.g., Dodge et al., 1983; Rubin et al., 2002), shyness-inhibition is often associated with "incompetent" interaction styles. When shy-inhibited children initiate a social interaction, their initiations are often passive, as indicated by hovering, waiting, and nonverbal behaviors (Dodge et al., 1983; Schmidt & Fox, 1998). Moreover, because shy children are viewed as incompetent and deviant by their peers, social initiations made by shy children may be negatively responded to by peers, with overt rejection or intentional ignoring (Rubin et al., 2002).

It is largely unknown how shy-inhibited children are involved in social interactions in different cultural contexts. Because of their internal anxiety and wariness, shy-inhibited children typically participate in fewer interactions than others in social situations. But when shy-inhibited children engage in social interactions, are there cross-cultural differences in their interaction patterns? For example, do shy-inhibited children in China and North America differ in the strategies that they use to make social initiations because of their different experiences during socialization? Do peers respond differently when shy-inhibited children make initiations? When shy-inhibited children do not make active initiations, do peers voluntarily initiate social interactions toward them, and if so, are there differences in peer voluntary initiations in Chinese and North American children? To examine these issues, we recently conducted a study in Chinese and Canadian children to explore the processes in which shy-inhibited children engaged in peer interactions (DeSouza & Chen, 2002).

Participants in the study were four-year-old Chinese and Canadian children (N = 200 and 180, respectively). Children who were the same sex and within six months of each other in age were invited to the laboratory in quartets, and their interactions were observed in two fifteen-minute free play sessions. Shyness-inhibition was coded using the Play Observation Scale (Rubin, 1989). Children's onlooker (watching the activities of others but not entering the activity) and unoccupied (an absence of focus or intent, wandering aimlessly, or staring blankly into space) behaviors were included as indexes of shyness-inhibition. Following the procedure used by other researchers (e.g., Asendorpf, 1990, 1991), 50 (24 boys and 26 girls) and 45 (23 boys and 22 girls) shy children were identified, and 100 (48 boys and 52 girls) and 90 (46 boys and 44 girls) non-shy children were identified in the Chinese and Canadian samples, respectively.

Shy-inhibited Chinese and Canadian children were less likely than their non-shy counterparts to make active initiations. Initiations made by shy-inhibited children were largely nonverbal and passive (e.g., approaching the target and starting to engage in the same play behavior as the target child within a close proximity). Thus, regardless of culture, shy-inhibited children's internal anxiety, vigilance, and wariness may prevent them from initiating social contact in an assertive manner (e.g., Asendorpf, 1991; Rubin et al., 2002).

There were significant cultural differences in the responses that shy children received from peers and the initiations that peers made voluntarily to shy children. As indicated in Figure 6.3, in general, when shy Canadian children...
made social initiations, peers were less likely to make positive responses, such as approval, cooperation, and support (e.g., "I really like your drawing!"), and were more likely to make negative responses, such as overt refusal, disagreement, and intentional ignoring of an initiation (e.g., "No!" or "I won't do it"). However, peers responded in a more positive manner in China. Further analyses indicated that the cross-cultural differences in peer responses emerged mainly when shy children made nonverbal passive initiations (e.g., the child put building blocks into a truck with the target child or played with a toy car in the same manner as the target child) and active low power initiations (the child's tendency to influence the target's behavior in a polite and positive manner, e.g., "Can I play with you?" and offering or sharing toys). However, peers tended to respond negatively in both samples when shy children used high-power strategies in initiations (direct demands, prohibitions, and verbal and nonverbal aggression and disruption, e.g., "Don't throw blocks!" or child grabs toy out of target's hands).

There were also differences between the samples in peer voluntary initiations to shy children. When peers voluntarily made initiations, the initiations were more likely to be coercive (e.g., a direct demand, such as "Gimme that," or verbal teasing) and less likely to be cooperative (e.g., "Can I play with you?") in Canada. This was not the case in China; there were nonsignificant differences in peer voluntary initiations to shy and non-shy children. In addition, when peers made active low-power initiations, shy children in Canada were more likely to respond negatively than non-shy children; there was a nonsignificant difference in the Chinese sample.

Taken together, the results suggest that, although shy children in both Canada and China were generally inactive in making initiations and responses in peer interactions, Canadian shy children appeared to be relatively more defensive and incompetent in responding to peers' voluntary active initiations. This may be because shy children in Canada tend to experience difficulties and frustration in their daily peer interactions (e.g., Rubin et al., 1998). The negative experiences that Canadian inhibited children have may, in turn, impede the formation of positive attitudes toward others and facilitate the development of destructive behavioral styles in social responses. The differences between Chinese and Canadian children were more salient in peer responses to shy children's initiations and peer voluntary initiations to shy children. Whereas peers were generally antagonistic, forceful, or nonresponsive in their interactions with shy—inhibited children in Canada, peers appeared more supportive and cooperative toward them in China.

These results indicate that cultural norms and values may play an important role in peer interactions. As indicated earlier, North American cultures...
endorse self-confidence and assertiveness in social interactions (Larson, 1999; Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002; Triandis, 1990). Shy-inhibited behaviors are often viewed as incompetent and deviant by peers and adults (Rubin & Asendorpf, 1993; Rubin et al., 1998). These cultural values may affect the attitudes and reactions of peers in their interactions with shy children through various means during the socialization processes. Unlike Western cultures, shyness and social wariness are considered acceptable or even desirable in social situations in Chinese culture (e.g., Chen, 2000; Chen, Rubin, & Sun, 1992; Yang, 1986). Thus, anxious and restrained behaviors that shy children display in social situations may be perceived as normal by peers. Consequently, when shy children make cautious social overtures, peers are likely to react in the same manner as to non-shy children or attempt to maintain the interactions by controlling their negative responses. The results of the present study suggest that cultural context may be involved in the microsystem process (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1988), which may help us better understand peer relationships and the general adjustment status of shy-inhibited children in Chinese and North American societies.

Shyness–Inhibition in Middle and Late Childhood: Relations With Peer Relationships and Social and Psychological Adjustment

Peer relationships are an important social context for learning social and cognitive skills and achieving personal and social success (e.g., Hartup, 1992; Piaget, 1932; Rubin et al., 1998). Children who maintain positive relationships in the peer group may have more opportunities than others to obtain instrumental and informational assistance and guidance from peers, which may be helpful for the development of socially appropriate behaviors and the acquisition of social status. Moreover, children who are accepted by peers and engage in positive social interactions may become increasingly skillful and competent, through social learning process, in solving interpersonal problems (Rubin & Krasnor, 1986). Peer relationships may also be a source of social and emotional support for children in coping with adjustment difficulties and thus may help children develop confidence and feelings of security in the exploration of social and nonsocial worlds. It has been argued that, as a basic social need, being associated with, and accepted by, peers may provide a sense of belongingness and self-valuation (Furman & Robbins, 1985; Sullivan, 1953). Consistent with the arguments about the significance of peer relationships for children’s social and psychological adjustment, findings from empirical research programs have indicated that children who have difficulties in peer acceptance may develop problems, such as academic failure, juvenile delinquency, and psychopathological symptoms (e.g., Coie et al., 1992; DeRosier, Kupersmidt, & Patterson 1994; Ollendick et al., 1990).

Given this background, it is not surprising that researchers have been interested in factors that may predict the quality of peer relationships. Among various antecedents and correlates of peer relationship difficulties, shy-inhibited behavior has received substantial attention in the West. It has been found that shyness and social wariness are associated with, and predictive of, low social status in the peer group; shy children are likely to be neglected or rejected by peers in the school (Cillessen et al., 1992; Coie & Kupersmidt, 1983). Moreover, teachers often rate shy children as socially incompetent and immature (Hymel et al., 1990). Finally, in late childhood and adolescence, shy-inhibited children may develop negative self-perceptions of social competence and feelings of loneliness when they come to understand their difficulties with peers (Boivin et al., 1995; Rubin, Chen et al., 1995).

Our research team has systematically examined relations between shyness and peer acceptance and other indexes of social and psychological adjustment in Chinese and Canadian children. We believe that different cultural views on shy, wary, and sensitive behavior may have direct influences on how shy children are accepted by peers, which in turn may affect children’s performance in social, school, and psychological areas.

In the Shanghai Longitudinal Project (e.g., Chen et al., 1992; Chen et al., 1999), for example, we selected a random sample of children, initially at ages eight and ten years, in China and a comparison group in Canada. In a group session, the children were administered a peer assessment measure of social functioning, including shyness-sensitivity and a sociometric nomination measure. Teachers completed a measure for all participants concerning their social competence. We also obtained information about children’s leadership, distinguished studentship, and academic achievement from the school records in the Chinese sample. In addition, we collected data concerning socioemotional adjustment, such as self-perceptions, loneliness and depression. The data were re-collected roughly every two years for fourteen years.

In general, the results indicated that, consistent with the Western literature (e.g., Rubin et al., 2002), shyness was positively associated with peer rejection and negatively associated with teacher-rated social competence in Canadian children. However, shyness was positively associated with peer acceptance, teacher-rated social competence, leadership, distinguished studentship, and academic achievement in Chinese children. The results, based on the original study, are presented in Table 6.1. The concurrent associations were consistent across different age groups in childhood and adolescence, although the
magnitude of the associations tended to become weaker in higher grades. Shy-inhibited children in China appeared to have more difficulties than others in establishing positive peer relationships during the transitional period, such as the first grade in high school (e.g., Chen, Rubin, & Li, 1995b). However, they continued to adjust well when the social environment became stable. The results concerning the relations at different ages in the Chinese sample are presented in Table 6.2.

Longitudinal data from the Chinese sample indicated that shyness in early childhood significantly predicted later sociometric status and social and school competence (Chen et al., 1999). Moreover, shyness positively contributed to the development of psychological well-being, such as self-perceptions of social competence and general self-worth, and negatively contributed to the development of psychological problems, including feelings of loneliness and depression (Chen, Rubin, & Li, 1995a; Chen et al., 1999). It should be noted that these results have been replicated in several other studies conducted with different samples of Chinese children (e.g., Chen, Chang, & He, 2003; Chen, Chen, & Kaspar, 2001; Chen, Dong, & Zhou, 1997).

The findings from our research program clearly indicate that whereas their counterparts experience various difficulties in peer relationships and social adjustment in North America, shy-sensitive children are liked by peers and regarded by adults as socially competent in China. Shy Chinese children feel positively about their social competence and develop few internalizing psychological problems as reported in the Western literature (e.g., Rubin et al., 2002). These findings suggest that the significance of shyness for social adaptation, including peer interactions and relationships, varies across cultures. As indicated earlier, shy and inhibited behaviors are viewed as incompetent and maladaptive, particularly in school-aged children, in most North American and Western European cultures, where social initiative and assertiveness are endorsed (Asendorpf, 1991; Larson, 1999, Rubin et al., 2002). In contrast, shyness-social inhibition is considered an indication of social accomplishment and maturity in traditional Chinese culture; shy-inhibited children are often perceived as well behaved (Liang, 1987). The cultural values provide important standards for individual judgments and evaluations of shy behaviors, serve as a basis for the formation of different attitudes toward shy children among peers, and eventually lead to different relationships that shy children establish with others. Thus, whereas their North American counterparts have extensive difficulties in social and psychological adjustment, shy children in China live in a relatively desirable social environment that may help them attain achievement in various areas, including school performance and socio-emotional well-being. The different social experiences of shy children in China and North America are likely to determine culturally distinct patterns and outcomes of their development.

### Table 6.1. Concurrent Correlations Between Shyness and Adjustment in Chinese and Canadian Children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjustment Variables</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>Canada</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive sociometric nominations</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>-.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative sociometric nominations</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-rated competence</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>-.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distinguished studentship</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic achievement</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N = 612 and 304 in Chinese and Canadian samples, respectively. 

* * p < .01, ** p < .001.

### Table 6.2. Concurrent Correlations Between Shyness and Adjustment in Chinese Children and Adolescents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjustment Variables</th>
<th>8 years N = 300</th>
<th>10 years N = 555</th>
<th>12 years N = 540</th>
<th>14 years N = 526</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive sociometric nominations</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative sociometric nominations</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-rated competence</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distinguished studentship</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic achievement</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* * p < .01, ** p < .001.

### The Impact of Social Change on Individual Functioning and Peer Relationships

Our cross-cultural research has indicated the importance of social and cultural background for understanding individual functioning and peer relationships. However, social and cultural conditions for individual development are not static, but rather constantly change (Crockett & Silbereisen, 2000). According to social ecological theory (e.g., Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Elder, 1998), human lives carry the imprint of their particular social worlds that are subject to historical change. Thus, it is important to understand cultural influences on individual behaviors in a historical context. Chinese society has
changed dramatically since the early 1980s, particularly in the last decade. During this period, China has carried out a full-scale reform toward a market economy that allows for the adoption of many aspects of capitalism. The rapid expansion of the market systems to all different sectors has led to major changes in economic and social structures. As a result, there is increased variation in individual and family income, massive movement of the population, decline in the government control of social welfare and protection, and rapid rise in unemployment rate and competition (e.g., Zhang, 2000). The dramatic changes in social structure and organization and the introduction of individualistic values and ideologies, such as liberty and individual freedom from North America and Western Europe (Cai & Wu, 1999; Huang, 1999), may have a significant effect on children's social functioning and interactions.

In a recent study using a cohort design, we investigated relations between shyness— inhibition and social, school, and psychological adjustment in Chinese children at different times of the societal transition (Chen et al., 2005). We collected data on shyness and adjustment in three cohorts (1990, 1998, and 2002), which represented different phases of the social transition in the Chinese society. China implemented the "internal vitalization" policy in rural areas and the "open-door" policy in some Southern regions in the early 1980s. The rise of the township and village enterprises and foreign investment represented the main features of the economic reform in the 1980s and early 1990s. The full-scale social and economic reform was expanded to cities and other parts of the country in the early 1990s. Since then, the reform has been significantly accelerated, and its influence has rapidly spread to various aspects of the society and individual daily lives.

Multigroup invariance tests through LISREL revealed overall significant cross-cohort differences in the relations between shyness—inhibition and all adjustment variables. Further invariance analyses indicated that there was a significant cross-cohort difference in the relation between shyness and each adjustment variable, with $X^2(df = 2)$ ranging from 9.52 to 25.88, $p < .01$. The results concerning the effects of shyness in predicting specific adjustment variables are presented in Table 6.3. The relations between shyness and the adjustment variables were all different between the 1990 cohort and the 2002 cohort. The relations between shyness and negative sociometric nominations and teacher-rated competence were significantly different between the 1990 cohort and the 1998 cohort. Finally, the relations between shyness and all adjustment variables were different between the 1998 cohort and the 2002 cohort, except for negative sociometric nominations. In general, shyness was positively associated with peer acceptance, leadership, and academic achievement in the 1990 cohort. However, shyness was negatively associated with peer acceptance and school adjustment and positively associated with peer rejection and depression in the 2002 cohort. The patterns of the relations between shyness and peer relationships and adjustment variables were nonsignificant or mixed in the 1998 cohort.

As indicated earlier, shy, wary, and sensitive behavior has been traditionally valued and encouraged in Chinese children (Feng, 1962; Yang, 1986). However, the extensive changes toward the capitalistic system in the economic reform and the introduction of Western ideologies may have led to the decline in the adaptive value of shy— inhibited behavior. In the new, competitive environment, behavioral characteristics that facilitate the achievement of personal goals, such as social assertiveness and initiative, may be appreciated and encouraged. In contrast, shy, anxious, and inhibited behavior that may impede self-expression, active social communication, and exploration, particularly in stressful situations, may no longer be regarded as adaptive and competent. In other words, shy—inhibited behavior may become increasingly unsuitable for the demands of the changing society. As a result, shy children may be at a disadvantage in obtaining social acceptance and approval and maintaining social status. Moreover, like their Western counterparts (e.g., Rubin & Asendorpf, 1993), when they realize their social difficulties, they may develop negative attitudes toward others and themselves. Thus, shyness—inhibition becomes an undesirable behavioral characteristic in social and psychological adjustment.

The influence of the social and historical transition on individual attitudes and behaviors and social relationships may be an ongoing process that occurs gradually and cumulatively through a variety of means (Silbereisen, 2000). Whereas children in the 1990 cohort experienced relatively limited influence with peer acceptance and school adjustment and positively associated with peer rejection and depression in the 2002 cohort. The patterns of the relations between shyness and peer relationships and adjustment variables were nonsignificant or mixed in the 1998 cohort.
of the comprehensive reform and children in the 2002 cohort were socialized in an increased self-oriented cultural context, the 1998 cohort represented an intermediate phase in which children might have mixed socialization experiences in the family and the peer group. An interesting finding was that shyness was positively associated with both peer acceptance and peer rejection in the 1998 cohort. The analysis of the sociometric classification (Coe, Dodge, & Coppotelli, 1982) indicated that, whereas shy children were more popular in the 1990 cohort and more rejected in the 2002 cohort than others, shy children in the 1998 cohort were controversial; they were liked and disliked by peers at the same time. These results indicate mixed attitudes of peers toward shy-inhibited children, which, to some extent, may reflect the cultural conflict between imported Western values on social initiative and individual autonomy and traditional Chinese values on self-control.

In summary, the results of our recent studies suggest that the dramatic transition in Chinese society in the last decade may have led to changes in the values on the basic dimensions of socioemotional functioning, such as social initiative and self-control. These changes have considerable implications for children's social interactions and adjustment. Historical context is an important aspect of socioecological and cultural conditions for human development, which should be considered seriously in the study of individual disposition and social relationships.

Conclusions and Future Directions

Temperament may make substantial contributions to the development of social functioning and peer relationships. However, temperamental influence on individual behaviors and relationships is likely to be constrained by the social and cultural context. For example, group- and self-oriented cultures may place different values on the fundamental dimensions of socioemotional functioning, such as social initiative and self-control. The cultural values may affect parental socialization goals and beliefs, and regulate parental attitudes toward, and reactions to, specific child behaviors (e.g., shy-inhibited behavior) in parent–child interactions. Moreover, the early socialization experience of children in the family may in turn have a pervasive effect on how they behave and how they respond to others' behaviors in peer interactions. Consequently, the linkage between a temperamental trait and the pattern of peer interactions and relationships may vary across cultures. In this chapter, we discussed shyness-inhibition and its relations with peer interactions and relationships in Chinese and North American children from a developmental and contextual perspective. Based on the discussion, it may be reasonable to conclude that social and cultural circumstances play an important role in defining the functional "meanings" of individual socioemotional characteristics in peer relationships.

Our research program represents a first step toward the understanding of cultural involvement in individual socioemotional characteristics and peer relationships. Several major issues remain to be examined. First, we proposed a conceptual model concerning fundamental temperamental dimensions, social functioning, and cultural context. This model has guided our research effort and helped us understand the findings from a broader contextual perspective. However, the model is largely speculative; supporting evidence is needed for the general framework as well as specific components. Our research has focused mostly on shyness-inhibition, and to a lesser extent, on compliance (e.g., Chen, Rubin et al., 2003), sociable and prosocial behaviors (e.g., Chen et al., 2000; Chen et al., 2002), and parenting (e.g., Chen et al., 2001). Many other aspects of socioemotional functioning, such as aggression-disruption and internalizing problems, need to be investigated in Chinese and other cultures.

Second, parenting beliefs and practices have been considered a major "mediator" of cultural influence on individual functioning in our model and research. It has been argued that child temperament and parenting may interact in a transactional manner in their contributions to social and behavioral development (e.g., Collins et al., 2000; Schaffer, 2000). The transactional process needs to be explored in cultural context.

Third, our research has focused mostly on relations between temperament and peer interactions and relationships. It has been demonstrated that children and adolescents' friendships represent a unique aspect of peer experiences and may make contributions to social and psychological adjustment beyond the overall peer acceptance and rejection. It will be interesting to examine whether children's friendships differ across cultures and what role temperament and socialization play in determining the cultural variations.

Finally, our cross-cultural work has been conducted mainly in Chinese and Canadian children. It will be important to examine personal characteristics and peer relationships in other Asian and Western cultures. Moreover, because of practical difficulties, the samples of the Chinese children and adolescents were drawn from urban areas of China. Generalization of the findings to rural areas of the country should be made with caution. In short, cultural influence on peer relationships is a complex issue involving multiple personal and situational factors. Continuous exploration is essential for achieving a better understanding of the issue and the underlying processes in which different factors affect and interact with each other in development.
References


