This study examined social, emotional, and cognitive characteristics of American and Chinese children's narratives. Twenty-four American and 26 Chinese 6-year-old children participated. Each child was interviewed individually twice with a 1-week delay interval. During the two interviews, children were asked to tell 11 stories prompted by pictures and standard verbal leads and to recount 7 emotional memories. Content analyses were performed on children's stories and memories. In line with predictions, findings indicated that compared with American children, Chinese children showed greater orientation toward social engagement, greater concern with moral correctness, greater concern with authority, a less autonomous orientation, more expressions of emotions, and more situational details in both their stories and memories. A few gender differences were found. Findings are discussed in terms of different value systems and early socialization practices in these two cultures.

INTRODUCTION

Diverse psychological and anthropological studies suggest that the societies of the United States and China embody different value systems. American society embraces independence and emphasizes self-expression, personal uniqueness, and self-sufficiency. In contrast, along with many other East Asian cultures, Chinese society places a relative emphasis on interdependence, stressing group solidarity, social hierarchy, and personal humility (e.g., Benedict, 1946; Bond, 1991; Doi, 1973; Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, & Nisbett, 1998; Hsu, 1953/1970; Lee, Cameron, Xu, Fu, & Board, 1997; Nakamura, 1964). Clearly, there are substantial subcultural and individual variations in the degree of independence and interdependence in both China and the United States (Ho, 1986, 1989; Miller & Sperry, 1987; Wang, Leichtman, & White, 1998), just as there are differences among Western cultures (Grossmann & Grossmann, 1990) and among Asian cultures (Azuma, 1996; Hsu, 1985; Nakamura, 1964). Nevertheless, the nature and magnitude of between-culture variation makes it possible to identify normative differences in social orientation between individuals reared in different cultures (Bond, 1991; Fiske et al., 1998). Theorists have proposed that such differences affect the organization of self-relevant information and other aspects of cognition, emotion, and motivation (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, 1998). Observations of child-rearing practices in China and the United States suggest that these differences are inculcated early in life (e.g., Haight, 1999; Miller, Fung, & Mintz, 1996; Miller, Wiley, Fung, & Liang, 1997; Wang, 2000).

In the present study, we were interested in whether Chinese and American children's self-generated story endings and autobiographical memories would evidence different ways of organizing and interpreting the world. To equate the samples insofar as possible, we studied children from upper-middle-class urban families with college-educated parents in both countries. We hypothesized that children's narratives would reflect societal differences in the degree of emphasis on interdependence or autonomy and associated values, norms, and beliefs.

Socialization practices in families and other immediate settings incorporate the values of the larger culture and promote children's acquisition of specific values and beliefs (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Waller, 1938). Thus, past work elucidating differences between Chinese and American children's social environments was a point of departure for our study of the values expressed in children's stories and memories. To frame the study, we first review relevant findings on early socialization and then turn to specific hypotheses and methods.

Social and Moral Aspects of Early Socialization

Parents and other socialization agents foster behavior in children that upholds cultural values and expectations. A primary difference between Chinese and American parental values lies in the arena of personal autonomy. Many American parents regard helping the child to build "a sense of self" as an important goal (Chao, 1995) and encourage independence, assertiveness, and self-expression. American parents offer children choices both in and outside the
home, teach them to stick up for what they want, and make them feel that they can accomplish anything they wish (Fiske et al., 1998; Hsu, 1953/1970). For example, parents may permit infants to drink by themselves from a cup, sit at the dinner table in a high chair (Sunley, 1955), and explore their immediate environments independently (Dyer, E. D., 1979; Triandis, 1989). Further, American mores dictate that parents attend to their children’s unique attributes and idiosyncrasies, which may require differing responses (Quayle, 1996). American parents often try hard to satisfy their children’s individual needs and predilections (Fiske et al., 1998; Hsu, 1953/1970; Kagan, 1984). As Lewin observed (as cited in Bernard, 1973, p. 297), “The natural relation of adult and child is in the United States not considered that of a superior to the subordinate but that of two individuals with the same right in principle . . . “

In contrast, Chinese parents consider helping their children develop a sense of connectedness to be paramount in socialization. Child-rearing practices emphasize obedience, reliability, proper behavior, social obligation, and group achievement (Chao, 1995; Hsu, 1953/1970; Wu, 1996). Children are expected to fulfill adults’ expectations and are encouraged to develop self-restraint and attunement to others. The willingness to yield during conflict is stressed as a way to preserve harmony and parents often severely punish physical aggression (Ho, 1986). Chinese parents exercise extreme disciplinary control over their children’s aggressive behavior and rarely encourage their children to fight back under any circumstances, whereas American parents seem more flexible in this regard (Bond, 1991; Sollenberger, 1968).

Comparative research by Miller and colleagues (Miller et al., 1996; Miller et al., 1997) found that Chinese parents often reminded children of past transgressions and invoked moral standards and social norms, whereas American parents employed stories of young children’s past experiences as a medium of entertainment and affirmation. By operating with an explicitly evaluative, overtly self-critical framework, Chinese parents encouraged children’s obedience to authority, appropriate conduct, and sense of shame. In contrast, American parents used an implicitly evaluative, overtly self-affirming framework intended to protect children’s self-esteem. Similarly, Wang, Leichtman, and Davies (2000) found that American mothers were more likely to use both storytelling and memory sharing to reinstate a sense of self and encourage autonomy, whereas Chinese mothers tended to use such conversational interactions as a didactic instrument to convey social norms and behavioral standards.

Emotional Aspects of Early Socialization

In the American culture, which emphasizes self-expression and individuality, children are often encouraged to engage in emotional conversations with family members to gain an understanding of their own and others’ feelings. Family experts urge parents to talk about feelings with their children because open communication is considered fundamental to mutual trust (Dyer, W. G., 1972). American parents also believe that it is paramount to, as Chao (1995, p. 339) notes, “help children to convey or articulate their own emotions and feelings so that ultimately they can ‘get their needs met.’”

In contrast, emotional socialization in Chinese families encourages attunement to others’ feelings but emphasizes restraint in the expression of one’s own emotions, which is viewed as good manners and key to group harmony (Bond, 1991; Han, Leichtman, & Wang, 1998; Wu, 1996). Parents are not preoccupied with helping children express their own feelings (Chao, 1995), and data suggest that Chinese adults tend to suppress negative feelings more than Americans to maintain group harmony (Bond, 1991, 1996; Kitayama & Markus, 1994; Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

In accordance with the value placed on interdependence and conformity, Chinese children are encouraged to “read” or infer others’ feelings and thoughts without being told. The ability to tell “the face color” of others and act in response is thought to be characteristic of a good child. Accordingly, Domino and Hannah (1987) found that 11- to 13-year-old Chinese children were more concerned with characters’ feelings and expressed more emotional elements in their stories than American peers. This finding suggests that Chinese school-aged children seem to be more empathic with or sensitive to others’ emotional states than their American peers. Borke and Su’s (1972) study of Taiwanese Chinese and American second graders indicates that such cultural differences may vary depending on the emotion expressed. In this study, Chinese children perceived more angry and fewer sad reactions to social interaction situations than Americans. Situation-specific factors, including whether an interaction takes place on paper or in real life, the degree to which authority is involved, and the personal meaning of an interaction, may also determine the degree of cultural differences.

Cognitive Aspects of Early Socialization

Cross-cultural studies have identified marked differences in cognitive characteristics between Americans and Chinese. (See Fiske et al., 1998 for a review of studies in Western and Asian cultures.) Americans...
tend to base their thinking and reasoning on the internal attributes of a person or object, to analyze individual components in isolation and succession, and to decontextualize a behavior from its environment while making dispositional judgments. In contrast, Chinese tend to embed their thinking and reasoning in a situational context, to focus on relations between objects or events, and to perceive the interaction between a person or an object and the environment as the antecedent of a behavior.

For example, Chiu (1972) required school-age children to group two out of three objects together and to state the reason for their choices. Americans employed a predominantly inferential, analytic style of categorization and reasoning; they identified object similarities on the basis of inferred stimuli characteristics (e.g., "these are things to cut") or on manifest objective attributes (e.g., "they both are holding a gun"). Chinese tended instead to use a relational-contextual style of reasoning and to identify similarities on the basis of functional or thematic interdependence between the elements in a grouping (e.g., "the mother takes care of the baby"). In literature on adults, these contrasting orientations appear in studies of self-knowledge (Bond & Cheung, 1983; Trafimow, Triandis, & Goto, 1991), descriptions of other people (Shweder & Bourne, 1985), and causal attribution and reasoning (Miller, 1984; Morris, Nisbett, & Peng, 1995). Studies suggest that a field-dependent style may result from early socialization that emphasizes discipline and conformity to authority, whereas field independence may result from child-rearing that emphasizes individual choice, autonomy, and self-reliance (Berry, 1966; Dawson, 1967; Witkin, Dyk, Faterson, Goodenough, & Karp, 1962).

Purpose of the Present Study

Bruner (1990, p. 33) proposed a narrativized folk psychology and reinstated the conviction that "the central concept of a human psychology is meaning and the processes and transactions involved in the construction of meanings." Since then, many narrative studies have been conducted as a part of the socio-linguistic approach towards a cultural psychology of human development (Miller & Hoogstra, 1992; Nelson, 1996; Shweder et al., 1998). According to Bruner (1990, p. 8), narrative is an instrument for making meaning that dominates much of life in one's culture, and the child's improvement in narrative skill is "not simply a mental achievement, but an achievement of social practice that lends stability to the child's social life." As a rich carrier of cultural messages, narrative has proven a useful tool for studying the social behavior and cognitive characteristics of children in different cultures (e.g., Han et al., 1998; Miller et al., 1996, 1997; Mullen & Yi, 1995; Wang et al., 2000; Zahn-Waxler, Friedman, Cole, Mizuta, & Hiruma, 1996).

The purpose of the present study was to gain more insight into cultural differences in children's cognition and socioemotional understanding by comparing American and Chinese 6-year-olds' story and memory narratives. Such differences are associated with cultural value systems established through divergent socialization practices during the early years of life (Chao, 1995; Ho, 1986; Kagan, 1984; Lin & Fu, 1990; Miller et al., 1996, 1997; Xu, Shen, Wan, Li, Mussen, & Cao, 1991). Domino and Hannah (1987) found that stories told by American and Chinese older children differed on several dimensions, with Chinese stories evidencing greater social orientation, greater concern with authority and moral-ethical rectitude, more affective elements, and fewer instances of physical aggression. In line with their findings, we hoped to document that the social, emotional, and cognitive consequences of early socialization have been well established in children as early as 6 years of age. We expected that through early family socialization practices, different cultural artifacts would penetrate young children's sociocognitive processes and shape the perceptions and constructions of the world they expressed in narratives of both imaginary stories and autobiographical events.

We focused on 6-year-olds because children this age are prepared to make up fictional stories with complete and complex scenes (Sutton-Smith, 1981; Tucker, 1995) and to talk about personal experiences with rich elaboration (Fivush & Hudson, 1990; Han et al., 1998; Nelson, 1996). Thus, their narratives are sufficient to reflect canonical expectations of the culture. Furthermore, Demorest and Alexander (1992) found that adults usually organize their personal experiences and fictional stories with the same scripts, which are both specific to individuals and shared by people from the same culture. In the present study, we wished to observe whether such an integration between story constructions and significant personal memories has already begun to occur as early as age 6.

Through content analysis of children's narratives of both fictional and personal events, we examined the following hypotheses. Each reflects cultural differences presumed to exist in the social values, interpersonal relations, emotional reactions, or cognitive characteristics children absorb through early socialization in the American and Chinese cultures. We expected that (1) Chinese children's narratives would evidence greater social engagement than American children's, reflected in the introduction of a larger...
number of social interactions and positive interpersonal relations. (2) Chinese children’s narratives would show greater concern with moral code and appropriate behavioral conduct than American children’s. (3) Chinese children’s narratives would indicate more prominent concern with authority than American children’s. (4) American children would show a more autonomous orientation than Chinese children, reflected in more frequent expressions of autonomy and self-determination in their narratives. (5) American children’s narratives would evidence more instances of verbal and physical aggression than those of Chinese children. (6) In terms of emotional expressiveness, Chinese children would make more references to the feeling states of story characters and of other people and less of their own than their American peers. (7) Chinese children’s narratives would evidence greater concreteness than Americans’ as reflected in the description of more contextual information and situational details.

METHOD

Participants

Twenty-six Chinese (14 boys and 12 girls, age range = 5.9–6.9, M = 6.3) and 24 White American (12 boys and 12 girls, age range = 5.6–6.11, M = 6.3) children participated. All Chinese children were from only-child families and were recruited from a university-affiliated kindergarten in Beijing. American participants, 13 firstborns and 11 laterborns, were recruited from three kindergartens in the Boston area. All children came from middle- or upper-middle-class families, with almost every mother and father having college education or beyond.

Procedures

In preparation for the task, we created 11 story beginnings (see Appendix A). All referred to emotionally charged situations related to divergent topics such as peer conflict, competition, family relations, authority relations, and routine activities. Eleven colorful, cartoon-like pictures (15.6 inches × 11.4 inches) were then painted by a children’s artist on the basis of the content of these story beginnings. The picture characters were either human beings or animals. When they were human beings, the main character was always of the same sex and ethnicity as the subject child. The list of story beginnings is attached in the Appendix.

Female interviewers collected the data in Boston and Beijing. The interviewers in the two cities were native speakers of American English and Chinese, respectively. Before the procedure began, the interviewers spent several days in participating classrooms allowing children to become acquainted with them. The same interviewer individually interviewed each child twice in a room adjacent to his or her classroom, with a 1-week interval between interviews. At the beginning of each interview, the interviewer chatted with the child for several minutes to establish rapport. On day one, to prepare the children for the story task, the interviewer also asked them to tell warm-up stories about how they spent their last birthdays. The same procedures were then conducted in both interviews.

After chatting with the child, the interviewer said, “You and I are going to play a fun game. We’re going to make up some stories about pictures together. I’m going to show you these very interesting pictures and start the story about each picture. You’ll help me finish the story, OK?” The child was then presented with a picture for approximately 20 seconds, with the interviewer narrating the standard story beginning and pointing to the characters in the picture. Note that according to research on story-completion tasks (Murstein, 1961), the lengths of exposure of picture stimuli ranging from 5 s to 2 min have similar effects on personal involvement and productivity in individual fantasies.

Next the interviewer took the picture out of the child’s sight and asked the child to “tell me what happens next.” (Studies of children’s story-telling by Spinillo & Pinto, 1994, and Wellhousen, 1993, have demonstrated that with the absence of picture prompts, children’s oral stories tend to be more fluent and reflect a more sophisticated story schema.) Standard prompts were used including “It’s a really neat story. Can you tell me some more?” and “Then what happens?” until the child indicated by speech or gesture that the story was finished. After that, the child was asked how the characters in the story felt and why. For example, after the child finished a story about a child lost in a store, the interviewer asked, “How did the little boy / girl feel when he / she got lost in the store?”

Following the story-telling, the interviewer asked the child to tell about a memory in response to one of seven emotional episode questions. The interviewer said to the child, “Now tell me one time when you felt really disgusted (ashamed, scared, angry, guilty, happy, sad).” The English and Chinese emotional terms we adopted in our interviews were based on previous studies on emotion involving both languages (for review, see Russell & Yik, 1996). They were as follows: disgusted—taoyan, ashamed—diulian, guilty—neijiu, happy—gaoxing, sad—nanguo, scared—haipa, angry—shengqi. If the child indicated that he or she did not understand the emotion word, the interviewer would soothe the child and then switch to another story-
telling task. The 11 pictures and 7 memory questions were numbered and arranged in a random sequence before being presented to children during the two interview sessions. For each child, five pictures and three memory questions were presented in the first interview and six pictures and four memory questions in the second. Each interview lasted from 20 to 30 min and was tape-recorded. At the end of the second interview, each child was given a small gift as a way of saying thank you for his or her participation.

Coding

All interviews were conducted in the child’s native language and were first recorded on audiotape and then transcribed verbatim onto paper. Chinese children’s narratives were translated into natural-sounding English by a bilingual Chinese-English speaker with attention to both literal and sense meaning and were checked by a second bilingual speaker. All coding was then conducted on the English transcriptions. A bilingual research assistant coded 20% of the data in the original language, implicit translation would be unavoidable in conducting comparative analyses. These procedures are likely to introduce bias and impair the reliability of the findings. Second, some variables cannot be coded on the basis of different languages (e.g., it is not appropriate to code the number of Chinese characters and the number of English words to compare narrative volume). Third, using the theme rather than the number of words or sentences as the recording unit helped to eliminate the possible interference of linguistic differences between cultures (Lindzey, 1961). Past comparative work with children’s narratives (Han et al., 1998; Mullen & Yi, 1995; Wang et al., 2000) also suggests that using a single coding scheme on a carefully transcribed and translated data set is a reliable method.

Content analysis was used to identify social, emotional, and cognitive characteristics of children’s stories and memories. According to Holsti (1968), content analysis is defined as “any technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying specified characteristics of messages.” An original coding scheme was developed by consulting the body of past work on family socialization practices in America and China. Some of the categories reflected factors that emerged in Domino and Hannah’s (1987) analysis of American and Chinese school-aged children’s stories.

Seven composite variables were constructed and defined as follows. Each composite variable was composed of several component variables. Except for two component variables that were defined by counting the number of story characters or persons introduced, the theme, that is, a single assertion about a given component variable, was employed as the recording unit (Holsti, 1968). Each component variable was coded by counting the number of occurrences of its related themes across all the stories or memories each child told. Because the coding categories were based on the occurrences of various themes (which could be composed of different numbers of utterances), they were not mutually exclusive but overlapped among utterances.

Social engagement. This variable indexes children’s tendency to introduce social interactions and positive interpersonal relations in their narratives. Five components were coded: (1) Number of characters children introduced in their narratives. (2) Instance of group action and cooperation, for example, “They built a sand castle together.” (3) Instance of help provided by others, for example, “Dad hung up the picture in my room for me.” (4) Instance when the protagonist offered help to others, for example, “Doggy helped dad clean up the house.” (5) Positive relationship continued, or new relationship established, for example, “Becky went to another school, but we still keep in touch.”

Moral code. This variable indexes children’s concerns with moral correctness and appropriate behavioral conduct in their narratives. Four components were coded: (1) Didactic statement of social standards and moral rules, for example, “Making mistakes is how you learn.” (2) Reference to the protagonist child’s appropriate behavior, moral character, and good deeds, for example “She is a brave child.” (3) Instance of reparation, including both verbal and behavioral amends made by perpetrators, for example, “Bear gave the toy truck back to the little pig.” (4) Reference to correct future behavior, for example, “Ever since then, I have been obedient.”

Concern with authority. This variable indexes children’s tendency to show their concern with and conformity to authority in their narratives. Four components were coded: (1) Number of authority figures introduced, referring to those who had superior–subordinate interactions with the protagonist child such as demanding, ordering, approving, disapproving, or punishment. (2) Instance of authority approval
or award, for example, "Mommy said to the little girl, 'You're a good child.'" (3) Instance of authority disagreement or punishment, for example, "The naughty little girl got a ten-minute time-out in her room." (4) Conformity or obedience to authority, for example, "Monkey listened to Mom and cleaned up his room right away."

Autonomous orientation. This composite variable indexes children’s tendency to express autonomy and self-determination in their narratives. Four components were coded: (1) Reference to the protagonist child’s personal needs, desires, wishes, and preferences, for example, “Piggy liked to watch TV every morning.” (2) Reference to the protagonist child’s personal dislikes or avoidance, for example, “I don’t like to sleep in the dark.” (3) Instance in which the protagonist child expressed personal evaluations, judgments, and opinions regarding other people, objects, or events, for example, “Monkey said, ‘It’s not fair.’” (4) Instance in which the protagonist child retained control over his or her own actions and resisted group or social pressure, for example, “The little goose ignored what the leader said and flew away by herself.”

Aggression. This variable indexes children’s tendency to portray protagonists engaging in aggressive speech or behavior during conflict situations in their narratives. Two components were coded: (1) Instance of physical aggression of the protagonist child, including physical actions such as pushing, hitting, grabbing, fighting, and killing, for example, “The two bunnies began to fight.” (2) Instance of verbal aggression of the protagonist child, such as threatening, quarreling, and insulting speech, for example, “Monkey said to Cat, ‘Oh, you are so disgusting.’”

Emotional expressiveness. This variable indexes children’s spontaneous expression of emotions in their narratives. Four components were coded: (1) Positive emotions expressed by verbs, for example, “Bear hugged grandpa and said, ‘Happy birthday.’” (2) Negative emotions expressed by verbs, for example, “Pig cried after his truck was grabbed away.” (3) Direct expression of positive feeling states, for example, “He felt very happy being praised by the teacher.” (4) Direct expression of negative feeling states, for example, “The little goose felt really lonely while flying in the sky.” Children’s direct expressions of feeling states were further coded separately by different types of emotions such as happiness, sadness, and anger.

Narrative concreteness. This variable indexes children’s tendency to describe contextual information and situational details in their narratives. It consists of three components: (1) Reference to background information, including descriptions or explanations for placing the event in specific context, for example, “Grandma’s house was very clean and shiny.” (2) Reference to when, how frequently, or for how long a story scene took place, for example, “They flew back to the north when spring came.” (3) Reference to where or in what location a story scene occurred, for example, “Piggy played alone in the yard.”

Other Coding

Narrative volume. The volume of each child’s speech during the interviews was coded for stories and memories separately by counting the total number of words spoken by each child. Narrative volume per story and narrative volume per memory were then calculated.

Emotional understanding. Memories were coded in terms of children’s understanding of the emotion term being asked about. When children indicated by speech or gesture that they did not understand an emotional word, it was coded as “not understanding.”

Responses to the emotional questions. Children’s responses to the questions about how the story characters felt and why they felt as they did, asked by the interviewer at the end of each story-telling task, were also coded.

One trained research assistant coded all of the data and a second independent assistant recoded 20% of the transcripts for reliability. Both coders were blind to the hypotheses of the study and uninformed of the identity of the participants. The average intercoder reliability (r) was .91 on story component variables and .94 on memory component variables. Disagreements were resolved by discussion among the coders.

RESULTS

The overall mean narrative volume per story was 91.98 words, SD = 33.35. Two-way (culture) × 2 (gender) analysis of variance revealed a marginally significant gender effect on the story narrative volume, F(1, 46) = 3.75, p = .06. Inspection of the means indicated that girls on average told longer stories, M = 101.17, SD = 37.65, than boys, M = 83.49, SD = 26.83. There was no culture effect, U.S.: M = 86.99, SD = 40.11, China: M = 96.60, SD = 25.57, or Culture × Gender interaction on the narrative volume per story.

The same analysis was performed on the narrative volume per memory, M = 36.56, SD = 19.54. There were no significant culture, U.S.: M = 33.82, SD = 17.11, China: M = 39.10, SD = 21.56; gender, boys: M = 35.71, SD = 17.40, girls: M = 37.49, SD = 21.96, or Culture × Gender interaction effects on this variable.

Results for children’s understanding of emotion
terms indicated that whereas only 55% of American children understood what the word “ashamed” meant, 96% of Chinese children understood the corresponding Chinese word “diulian,” $\chi^2(1, N = 48) = 12.88, p < .001$. In contrast, 69% of American children understood what the word “guilty” meant, whereas only 15% of Chinese children understood the corresponding Chinese word “neijiu,” $\chi^2(1, N = 49) = 15.67, p < .001$. For the memory in which the child felt disgusted, 82% of Chinese children mentioned other people with whom they felt disgusted in memory events. In contrast, 73% of American children referred to nonhuman beings such as insects, bad dreams, and food, whereas only 18% of Chinese did so, $\chi^2(1, N = 37) = 11.70, p < .001$. We speculate that this result may be due to a cultural difference in the way the word “disgusted” is most often used by young children. Chinese children are equally likely to use this word (tao yan) in reaction to human beings and objects. Although the English word “disgusted” could also be used either way, American children may be more inclined to use it in reaction to objects than people. There was no gender difference in the case of any memory. To avoid systematic bias, memories of shame, guilt, and disgust were excluded from later analyses of memory content variables. We consider these memories further in the discussion.

Because a few children did not tell all stories (total $n = 11$ stories) or memories queried (total $n = 4$ memories when the abovementioned memories of shame, guilt, and disgust were excluded), for content analysis we computed the mean frequency of each component variable per story and per memory. To avoid the influence of different scales, we further transformed the mean frequency of each component variable into standard deviation scores (Z scores) before aggregating them to yield the composite variable scores.

Analyses of children’s stories and memories were conducted separately. (We tested for birth order effects within the American sample across all the variables of interest but found no significant effects except in one case: Laterborn American children showed greater aggression in their stories than did firstborns, $t(22) = -3.47, p = .002$.) Multiple analyses of variance (MANOVA) that considered children’s narrative content (represented by seven composite variable scores) as a function of culture and gender revealed only a main effect of culture for both story, $F(6, 41) = 8.26, p < .001$, and memory, $F(6, 41) = 4.62, p = .001$. Two-way ANOVAs were further performed across all the composite variables in analyzing both story and memory content. To explore narrative content in more depth, the same analyses were also conducted with all component variables. Tables 1 and 2 show the mean frequencies and standard deviations of content analysis variables for story and memory, respectively, and $F$ and $p$ values from two-way ANOVA analyses for main effects of culture and gender. Effect sizes, which can be inferred from the two tables, were large for all significant effects and moderate for marginally significant effects (for example, $r(46) = .26$). Significance test results that are reported in Tables 1 and 2 are not repeated in the text. In each of the following sections, results of story variables are reported first, followed by results of memory variables.

### Social Engagement

For story content, Chinese children scored significantly higher than American children on social engagement. Analyses on each component variable further demonstrated that compared with American children, Chinese children introduced more story characters, talked about more instances of help provided by others, and more frequently ended their stories with continued positive relationships. Neither gender nor Culture × Gender interaction effects were found for the composite variable or any component variables.

Mirroring the social engagement results of story content, a 2 (culture) × 2 (gender) ANOVA on this variable for memory content revealed a main effect of culture whereby Chinese children scored higher than American children on social engagement. Further analyses on the component variables indicated that Chinese children’s memories involved significantly more people, more instances of group action and cooperation, and more instances of help provided by others and were more likely to end with continued positive relationships. A marginally significant gender effect was found for the composite variable of social engagement where girls scored higher than boys.

### Moral Code

Analysis on the composite variable of moral code for story content revealed a significant culture effect. Further, analyses on the component variables indicated that compared with American children, Chinese children made more didactic statements concerning social standards and moral rules and more references to the protagonist’s proper behavior and good moral character, instances of reparation, and correct future behavior. Gender differences were found whereby girls scored higher than boys on the composite variable of moral code and were more concerned with proper behavior. The latter was qualified by a Culture × Gender interaction on the frequency of references to proper behavior, $F(1, 46) = 5.77, p = .02$. Only Chinese
children showed a significant difference between the genders, \( t(24) = 3.26, p = .003 \), with girls, \( M = .49 \), showing greater concern with proper behavior than boys, \( M = .19 \).

For memory content, a main effect of culture was found whereby Chinese children scored higher than American children on the composite variable of moral code. Analyses of the component variables showed that Chinese children's memories contained more didactic statements. There were no significant effects for the other component variables.

**Concern with Authority**

In line with predictions, Chinese children showed greater concern with authority in their stories as indexed by the composite variable scores. Further analyses on the component variables demonstrated that in their stories, Chinese children introduced a greater number of authority figures and mentioned more instances of authority approval or award, authority disagreement or punishment, and conformity to authority than American children. A gender difference was found whereby girls mentioned more instances of adult approval or award in their stories than did boys. There was no interaction effect for any variable.

The same analyses on memory content revealed that Chinese children scored higher than American children on the composite variable of concern with authority. Also, Chinese children's memories involved a greater number of authority figures and more instances of condoning authority.

**Table 1  Mean Frequencies (and Standard Deviations) per Story of Content Analysis Variables by Culture and Gender**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content Variable</th>
<th>America</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>( F(1, 46) )</th>
<th>( p )</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>America</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>( F(1, 46) )</th>
<th>( p )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social engagement (Composite score)</td>
<td>-1.89</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>18.51</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>-1.6</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of characters</td>
<td>2.79 (.48)</td>
<td>3.48 (.34)</td>
<td>34.32</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>3.10 (.50)</td>
<td>3.20 (.57)</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group action and cooperation</td>
<td>.63 (.33)</td>
<td>.76 (.47)</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.71 (.39)</td>
<td>.68 (.43)</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protagonist helped by others</td>
<td>.33 (.24)</td>
<td>.67 (.32)</td>
<td>17.86</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.47 (.31)</td>
<td>.54 (.34)</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>.28</td>
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*Note: F and p values refer to 2 (culture) x 2 (gender) ANOVAs for the main effects of culture and gender. Standard deviations are in parentheses. Boldface highlights significant results.*
of authority disagreement or punishment. No gender or Culture × Gender interaction effects were found.

Autonomous Orientation

A main effect of culture was found for the composite variable whereby American children showed greater autonomous orientation in their stories than Chinese children. Analyses of the component variables revealed marginally significant results in that American children made more references to the protagonist’s personal needs and preferences and dislikes or avoidance. There were no gender or Culture × Gender interaction effects for any variables.

Analyses on memory content showed that American children scored higher than Chinese children on the composite variable of autonomous orientation at a marginal level of significance. Also, a marginally significant culture effect was found whereby American children’s memories involved more instances in which the child retained control over his or her own actions and resisted social pressure. There was a gender effect indicating that boys made more personal evaluations and judgments in their memories than girls. No Culture × Gender interactions were present.

Aggression

For both composite and component variables, no cultural differences were found in children’s tendency to impute aggressive speech or behavior to story protagonists during conflict situations. There were no gen-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2 Mean Frequencies (and Standard Deviations) per Memory of Content Analysis Variables by Culture and Gender</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Content Variable</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social engagement (Composite score)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of characters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group action and cooperation</td>
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<td>Protagonist helped by others</td>
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<td>Protagonist helping others</td>
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<tr>
<td>Autonomous orientation (Composite score)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of authority figures</td>
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<td>Authority approval and award</td>
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<td>Physical aggression</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emotional expressiveness (Composite score)</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Negative feeling by verbs</td>
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<td>Negative feeling states</td>
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<td>Location</td>
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</table>

Note: F and p values refer to 2 (culture) × 2 (gender) ANOVAs for the main effects of culture and gender. Standard deviations are in parentheses. Boldface highlights significant results.
der or Culture × Gender interaction effects for any of the variables. Similarly, there were no significant effects for the composite and component variables of aggression in children's memories.

Emotional Expressiveness

Analysis on the composite variable of emotional expressiveness yielded a significant culture effect whereby Chinese children were more emotionally expressive than American children in their story narratives. Further analyses indicated that Chinese children had more expressions of negative emotions by verbs and made more direct expressions of positive and negative feeling states. Gender differences were found whereby girls scored higher on the composite variable and made more direct expressions of positive feeling states than boys. There were interaction effects for the composite variable and for the direct expression of positive feeling states, F(1, 46) = 4.16, p = .05; F(1, 46) = 7.84, p = .007 respectively. In both cases, Chinese girls, M = 2.68 and .71, scored higher than Chinese boys, M = .15 and .24, respectively, t(24) = 3.05, p = .006; t(24) = 3.07, p = .005 respectively, whereas there was no significant gender difference in the American sample.

Separate analyses on children's direct expressions of specific feeling states revealed some significant results. Chinese children made more references to happy feelings in their stories than American children, F(1, 46) = 10.57, p = .002, and girls made more than boys, F(1, 46) = 7.12, p = .01. There was also a significant interaction effect, F(1, 46) = 7.58, p = .008, because a gender difference was found in the Chinese sample, girls: M = .70, boys: M = .24, t(24) = 3.08, p = .005, but not in the American sample, girls: M = .19, boys: M = .19. There was a main effect of culture for the direct expression of shame whereby Chinese children, M = .05, had higher frequencies than Americans, M = .004, F(1, 46) = 5.80, p = .02. There was a significant interaction effect for expression of sadness, F(1, 46) = 3.81, p = .05. Chinese girls, M = .10, expressed more sad feelings than Chinese boys, M = .02, t(24) = 2.15, p = .04, corrected p = .08, whereas there was no significant gender difference in the American sample, girls: M = .09, boys: M = .11. No effects were found for other individual emotions.

For memory content, Chinese children scored higher than American children on the composite variable of emotional expressiveness. Specifically, Chinese children mentioned emotions of both the self, F(1, 46) = 4.13, p = .05, and others, F(1, 46) = 3.41, p = .07, more frequently than American children in their memories. Chinese children also made more expressions of positive emotions by verbs than American children. There were no effects for the other component variables.

Children's direct expressions of their own and others' specific emotions (e.g., happiness, sadness, anger, and the like) in memories were analyzed separately. There were no significant effects for the frequency of any emotion.

Narrative Concreteness

Chinese children's stories were more concrete than those of American children at a marginal level of significance, as indexed by the composite variable. Analyses on the component variables demonstrated that on average, Chinese children made more references than American children to when, how frequently, or for how long a story scene took place. There were no significant effects for the other two components.

Analyses on the concreteness of memory content revealed no significant effects for either the composite variable or the component variables, although inspection of the means suggested that they were all in the predicted direction, with Chinese children's narratives being more concrete than those of Americans.

Consistency between Story and Memory Content

We further performed correlational analyses to examine the degree of consistency of the social, emotional, and cognitive characteristics between children's story and memory narratives. Simple correlations of each pair of corresponding composite variables of story and memory content were obtained. Significant relationships included social engagement, r(48) = .58, p < .001, concern with authority, r(48) = .29, p = .04, autonomous orientation, r(48) = .43, p = .002, emotional expressiveness, r(48) = .28, p = .04, and narrative concreteness, r(48) = .30, p = .03. The correlation coefficient for moral code and aggression did not reach significance, r(48) = .21, p = .14 and r(48) = .05, p = .72. Figure 1 further illustrates the consistency between children's story and memory content in terms of their social, emotional, and cognitive characteristics.

Responses to the Emotion Questions

Analyses on children's responses to the questions following each story-telling about how the story characters felt and why they felt as they did also yielded interesting findings. Cultural differences emerged in response to 4 of the 11 stories. For the Lost in Store story, 59% of American children answered that the protagonist child felt scared and 31% of them an-
answered sad. In contrast, 50% of Chinese children thought the child felt sad and only 15% answered scared, $\chi^2(1, N = 48) = 6.36, p = .01$. Fifteen percent of Chinese children but none of the Americans responded that the child felt angry because “Mom left him/her there alone.” Figure 2 presents children’s responses to the Lost in Store story by culture.

For the Grandma’s House story, 73% of American children answered that Piggy felt a negative emotion, such as sad, scared, or bad, whereas 46% of Chinese children answered that Piggy felt happy or good, $\chi^2(1, N = 47) = 6.82, p = .009$. However, in both culture groups, a majority of children answered that Grandma felt happy when Piggy came to stay with her (U.S.: 90%; China: 88%).

Similarly, in response to the Doggy and Dad story, the majority of American children (78%) attributed a negative emotion to Doggy, such as sad, scared, lonely, or bad. In contrast, more than half of the Chinese children (54%) said that Doggy felt happy or good staying home with Dad, $\chi^2(1, N = 47) = 8.59, p = .003$.

There was also a cultural difference in children’s responses to emotional questions after the Monkey’s Room story. American children overwhelmingly (95%) answered that Monkey felt a negative emotion toward Mom’s requirement, such as angry, mad, sad, or bad. Although the majority of Chinese children (67%) also ascribed a negative emotion to Monkey, 33% of Chinese children answered that Monkey felt happy, good, or fine, “because Monkey likes to work” or “because after cleaning up, Monkey could play with Bunny outside,” $\chi^2(1, N = 37) = 4.75, p = .03$.

No significant effects were found for the other stories. Across all stories, there was no gender difference in children’s responses concerning the emotional states of the story characters.

Examples of Children’s Stories and Memories

Inspection indicated that compared with Chinese children’s narratives in translation, American children’s narratives tended to contain more adjectives, adverbs, modifiers, and words referencing complex
temporal and causal relations such as when, if, and because. Such results serve as a general indication of different degrees of elaborativeness of children's narratives and are consistent with Han et al.’s (1998) findings, which were also based on comparisons between children’s autobiographical narratives in English and translated Chinese. Because these characteristics of narrative were not of central interest in the present study, we did not use quantitative analyses to evaluate them.

The examples below illustrate typical differences in the style with which American and Chinese children narrated story endings and personal memories and also reflect the content differences discussed in the results section. To provide a qualitative sense of how participants’ interviews looked, we offer two endings to the Lost in Store story told by 6-year-old girls and two memories of anger told by 6-year-old boys. In both cases, the first example came from an American child and the second from a Chinese child (interviewer’s prompts were omitted).

**Story 1 (American girl).** Then she started walking and walking until she found a toy that she really, really likes and then she picked it up and went to the counter. And she paid for it and then she went out, she tried to find her Mom’s car. But she couldn’t, cause there’s too many cars that looked like her Mom’s. Then she went back in the toy store and bought all the toys that she really, really wanted. And then she stayed inside and she played with her toys. And then the little girl, she had a map in her pocket and she took it out and she found her way home. And she walked inside and there was nobody there and she decided to stay anyway. And then her Mommy came home. And then they had dinner and they went to sleep.

**Story 2 (Chinese girl).** Then the little girl found Mom was not there. Then she called Mom everywhere. But she couldn’t find Mom. She sat in a corner and cried. Then an uncle policeman came and asked, “Little girl, what happened with you?” The little girl said, “My Mom and I got lost from each other.” The policeman said, “What’s the telephone number of your house?” She said, “Our number is 2929335876.” Then the uncle policeman made a call. Five minutes later, a taxi came. Mom said, “Where were you just now? Why didn’t you follow mom?” The little girl felt very ashamed, said, “Sorry, Mom. I’ll follow you next time.” They thanked the uncle policeman, and they went home.

**Memory 1 (American boy).** When I didn’t get to get a toy. I like to get lots of Legos and there was an underwater one, and it was a little big. It was a medium one and it had one of the things I’ve been waiting for. But I forget what it was.

**Memory 2 (Chinese boy).** One day, my Mom brought many flower seeds. They were alive. She planted them there. I stepped on them by accident. Then my Mom scolded me and spanked me twice. So I cried. I felt a little angry when she spanked me.

As the above examples illustrate, although both the story endings and memories provided by American and Chinese children were similar in length, their content differences were marked. American children’s narratives revealed a sense of independence and autonomy. They focused on the individual child’s needs, desires, preferences, and actions while making few or no references to other people. In contrast, Chinese children’s narratives revealed a sense of interdependence and social orientation. They focused on social interactions with other people, showed a concern with proper behavior, referred to adult authority figures, described emotional reactions, and provided contextual detailed information.

**DISCUSSION**

In accordance with our hypotheses, there were social, emotional, and cognitive content differences between American and Chinese children’s story and memory narratives. These differences were consistent with differences in social orientation (i.e., independence versus interdependence) in the larger cultures and patterns of family socialization observed in past work (e.g., Chao, 1995; Fiske et al., 1998). Specifically, the
between-culture differences that emerged in the present content analyses of children’s stories and memories accorded with past observations that children’s environments in China and the United States are guided by adults with different overarching belief systems. American children’s narratives reflected the preeminent value placed on developing autonomy, a “sense of self,” and assertiveness in American child-rearing. Moreover, they reflected the cognitive focus on field-independent or relatively less situationally oriented thinking associated with these child-rearing values. In contrast, Chinese children’s narratives were consistent with the value placed on social harmony, attention to others, and moral correctness in that culture. The field dependence associated with strict disciplinary practices reinforcing such overarching beliefs was also evidenced by the concreteness of Chinese children’s narratives.

Reflecting a relatively more interdependent orientation, in both their stories and memories, Chinese children showed a greater orientation toward social engagement than their American counterparts. They introduced more story characters and more other people in their narratives, made more references to group actions and cooperation, and described more instances in which the protagonist was helped by others. Compared with American children, Chinese children also more frequently ended their narratives with continued or newly established positive relationships.

As predicted, children’s narratives showed striking cross-cultural differences in concern with moral code. Chinese children showed a greater preoccupation with moral correctness than American children in both their stories and memories. Specifically, Chinese children made more didactic statements concerning social standards and moral rules, more frequently mentioned the protagonist child’s proper behavior and moral character, described more instances of reparation, and made more references to correct future behavior.

Similarly, cultural differences appeared in children’s narratives with regard to their concern with authority. Compared with American children, Chinese children introduced a greater number of authority figures into their narratives, described more instances of authority approval and award, more frequently mentioned authority disagreement and punishment, and ascribed more compliant behavior to the protagonist child.

American children showed a more autonomous orientation in both their stories and memories than Chinese children. They more frequently mentioned the protagonist’s personal needs and preferences, showed greater concern with the protagonist’s dislikes and avoidance, and introduced more instances in which the protagonist retained control over his or her own actions and resisted social pressure.

Children’s talk about aggression in the story protagonist’s speech and behavior and in their personal memories did not show significant cultural differences. This may be an artifact of our tasks, insofar as children in both cultures may not have wished to focus on aggressive acts in their discussions with adults. Alternatively, despite different levels of tolerance, middle-class families in both cultures frown upon aggression and the results may reflect this common value.

Consistent with our predictions, Chinese children made more references to the feeling states of story characters and other people’s emotions in their memories than American children. They described more emotional actions and provided more direct expressions of feeling states of story characters, including both happiness and shame. These findings are consistent with Domino and Hannah’s (1987) study in which 11- to 13-year-old Chinese children’s stories contained more affective elements than American children’s, although the authors did not describe the specific emotions. The present finding indicates that by age 6, children in the two cultures have shown different degrees of empathy or sensitivity to others’ emotional states in accordance with their respective cultural values and socialization practices.

However, compared with their American peers, Chinese children also made more references to their own feeling states in their memory narratives. This finding is surprising in light of indications that American parents encourage emotional self-expression (Chao, 1995; Dyer, 1972), whereas Chinese parents discourage it, especially when it endangers interpersonal harmony (Bond, 1991; Wu, 1996). On the other hand, Chinese children are taught to be sensitive to others’ feelings, which may lead to more awareness of their own emotions. As noted earlier, the expression of emotions may be influenced by various situation-specific factors such as whether an interaction takes place during pretend play or in real life and whether the emotional expression jeopardizes an important ongoing relationship. In the present experimental tasks, children could express their feelings relatively freely with little repercussions.

In the present study, almost all Chinese but only half of American children understood the meaning of “shame (diulian).” In contrast, the majority of American but few Chinese children understood the meaning of “guilt (neijiu).” This was the case although the terms selected to prompt children are widely used in each language and are the most straightforward expressions to refer to these emotional experiences according
to past cross-culture research (Russell & Yik, 1996). Moreover, Chinese children expressed significantly more shame feelings in their stories than American children. These results are consistent with Shaver, Wu, and Schwartz’s (1992) findings based on mothers’ reports about their toddlers and suggest that cultural differences in children’s understanding of shame and guilt concepts extend beyond the preschool years.

The present research is the first we know of to directly assess Chinese and American children’s own reports regarding these emotional concepts. Although it is likely that children in both cultures have experienced some form of both of these emotions, we believe that our results reflect the relative emphasis each culture places on the importance of such experiences. Differences in children’s ability to label each emotion, resulting from different exposure to such labels, may eventually shape children’s personal experiences of guilt and shame. The findings accord with observations that Chinese caregivers frequently use shame to encourage children to behave appropriately and maintain harmonious relationships, whereas American parents engender children’s guilt feelings to elicit self-discipline and promote a private conscience (Dyer, 1972; Kagan, 1984; Miller et al., 1996, 1997).

Further, children in the two cultural groups tended to attribute different emotions to story protagonists across various situations. These differences may reflect divergent social expectations in China and the United States that researchers have previously observed. Such divergent expectations have been noted in the role of the father (Bernard, 1973; Ho, 1987; Parke, 1996), mother (Kessen, 1975; Sunley, 1955) and grandparents in child-rearing (Kessen, 1975; Stevenson, Chen, & Lee, 1992), cultural meanings of particular contexts such as unfamiliar situations (Lewis, 1989), and attitudes toward parental authority and social hierarchy (Bond, 1991; Han et al., 1998; Wang & Hsueh, 1997). Children acquire emotional situation knowledge by actively engaging in everyday social interactions with their parents and peers. In turn, how American and Chinese children understand the emotional meanings associated with daily life situations is likely to influence their personal emotional experiences and cognitions, including their personal memories (Wang, 2000).

As predicted, Chinese children’s stories overall were more concrete and contained significantly more temporal elements than American children’s, although cultural differences in the narrative concreteness of memory were not significant. In line with adult literature and past developmental studies of reasoning and categorization (Chiu, 1972; Miller, 1984; Shweder & Bourne, 1985), the story findings suggest that Chinese children tend to be more sensitive to environmental factors and situational details than Americans. These differences held up even though children’s narratives canonically contain elements of time, location, and situation, which should tend to minimize between-group differences.

Notably, early differences in children’s sensitivity to contextual information appear to foreshadow later cultural differences in situational versus dispositional tendencies in self-descriptions, other-descriptions, and attributional processes (Fiske et al., 1998; Swerder & Bourne, 1985; Trafimow et al., 1991). For example, social psychologists have noted that American adults are inclined to make dispositional causal attributions, attributing events to the characteristics of actors. In contrast, Chinese adults are inclined to emphasize situationally specific variables in explaining events (Morris et al., 1995). Children’s differential tendency to focus on situational elements in tasks such as those in the present study may be a habit acquired early that later manifests itself in various social-cognitive realms.

Chinese children in the present study all came from only-child families, which is the most common family situation currently in China. In contrast, all American children had siblings. Some scholars have noted differences between Chinese only children and those with siblings, asserting that the copious adult attention paid to only children within the family produces more egotistical and willful offspring (Fan, 1994; Lee, 1992). Indeed, our previous work has indicated that Chinese young adults from only-child families were more “individually oriented” than those with siblings, describing themselves in more self-focused terms and providing earlier and more self-focused childhood memories (Wang et al., 1998). Thus, including a sample of only-child Chinese children would appear to work against our hypotheses, which predicted a generally more interdependent orientation among Chinese than Americans. Nonetheless, even when focusing on this most autonomously oriented and less traditionally reared segment of the Chinese population, we obtained robust cross-cultural variations in American and Chinese children’s stories and memories.

It should be noted that cultural differences identified in the present study do not result from family socialization alone. Instead, socialization takes place at both the micro level of the family, school, and neighborhood contexts and the macro level of the larger cultural-societal milieu, as well as many layers of influence in between (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For example, American preschools tend to encourage individual predictions and autonomy in young children, whereas Chinese preschools tend to emphasize prosocial behav-
ior and appropriate conduct (Tobin, Wu, & Davidson, 1989). We believe that influences from other powerful socialization contexts further reinforce cultural values that parents have instilled in their children.

Several gender differences in children’s story and memory content were in line with expectations. Research shows that in both China and the United States, parents rear girls to be more socially sensitive, affectionate, and caring than boys (Dunn, Bretherton, & Munn, 1987; Fivush, 1993, 1998; Hsu, 1953/1970; Leaper, Anderson, & Sanders, 1998; Lin, 1939). In their narratives, girls in both cultures showed a greater tendency toward social engagement and a greater concern with moral correctness and proper behavior. They more frequently mentioned authority approval and award, made fewer personal evaluations and judgments, and were more emotionally expressive than boys. In the few cases where Culture × Gender interaction effects were found, this was always the result of a significant gender difference within the Chinese but not the American group. Chinese girls were more concerned with proper behavior and were more sensitive to story characters’ feeling states than Chinese boys, which is consonant with the traditional gender role of Chinese women who are expected to be more self-restrained and affectionate than men (Hsu, 1953/1970; Lin, 1939).

In line with a previous study with adults (Demorest & Alexander, 1992), the present study revealed marked consistency between the content of children’s stories and memories across variables. This consistency occurs at both the level of the individual (as indicated in the correlational analyses) and at the level of the culture (Tables 1 and 2). Although the cultural effects for story narratives were stronger than those for memories, the direction of the cultural differences was consistent in every instance. These findings suggest that by age 6 children have already acquired meaningful scripts, or ways of organizing knowledge about themselves and the world around them, that are manifested in both their fictional stories and personal experiences. Importantly, such scripts contain elements that are unique to each individual and elements that are commonly shared by people within a particular culture.

The systematic cultural differences revealed in the social, emotional, and cognitive content of children’s narratives have potentially important implications for understanding human diversity and for educational practices. Through early social interaction, especially within the family context, children acquire knowledge about their own thinking, feeling, and behavior and that of others. As they acquire such knowledge, children begin to apply it to understand and interpret novel life experiences, which in turn reinforces the knowledge. In this way, the knowledge or belief system that children acquire during early socialization, no matter how rudimentary, is continuously refined through daily social interactions within proximal social settings and the larger cultural milieu. This process contributes to both individual diversity and commonalities within each single culture and reflects the way in which, according to Shweder et al. (1998, p. 867) “culture and the psyche ‘make each other up.’”

Findings from the present study indicate that before the onset of formal schooling, children have acquired culturally appropriate values that influence how they make meaning of the world. American and Chinese children’s stories and personal memories reflect different cognitions and socioemotional understanding in line with belief systems specific to the two cultures. Children learn about and internalize normative values and beliefs within their immediate social environments, especially the family. Once established, children’s belief systems guide them in organizing experience and constructing reality. Acquisition of cultural belief systems ensures that children assume culturally desirable qualities and become acceptable members of society, thereby sustaining the continuity of the culture.

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ADDRESSES AND AFFILIATIONS

Corresponding author: Qi Wang, Department of Human Development, Cornell University, Martha Van Rensselaer Hall, Ithaca, NY 14853-4401; e-mail: qw23@cornell.edu. Michelle D. Leichtman is at Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

APPENDIX

List of Story Beginnings

The Favorite Toy. Here is a little boy (girl). His (Her) Dad and Mom have bought him (her) all kinds of toys. Among these toys, he (she) likes this great machine gun (pretty doll) best. Tell me a story about this boy (girl).

Pig and the Bear Siblings. One day, the bear brothers (sisters) are playing together. They see a little pig playing with a really great truck. The younger bear wants this truck very badly, but the little pig doesn’t want to give it to him (her).
So, the younger bear grabs the truck from the little pig. Tell me what happens next.

Monkey and Cat. One day, at school, Monkey and Cat are fighting for a toy truck. They don’t want to share the truck with each other. Tell me what happens next.

A Race. Brown Bunny and White Bunny are best friends. One day, they are running in a race together. Both of them want to win the race very badly. Tell me what happens next.

Art Class. One day, in art class, the teacher praises this little boy (girl) because his (her) painting is the best in the class. Tell me what happens next.

Lost in Store. One day, this little boy (girl) goes to the market with his (her) Mom. There are so many toys in the store! The little boy (girl) can’t take his (her) eyes off them. Then he (she) gets lost and can’t find his (her) Mom. Tell me what happens next.

The Geese. Winter is coming. Wild geese are leaving for the South. Before they leave, the goose leader tells everybody that the journey will be full of dangers. So everyone should fly very close together. A little goose says to himself (herself), “Flying together will be very slow. I’d like to fly all by myself.” So, he (she) leaves the group, starting alone for the South. Tell me what happens next.

Grandpa’s Birthday. One day, it is Grandpa’s birthday. Bear’s Mom and Dad take him (her) to Grandpa’s house. Tell me what happens next.

Grampa’s House. Piggy’s Mom and Dad are going on a trip. They send Piggy to Grandma’s house, and say goodbye to him (her). Tell me what happens next.

Monkey’s Room. One day, Bunny comes to ask his (her) friend Monkey to go out and play. They are just about to leave when Monkey’s Mom stops them. “Monkey, clean up your room first before you go out,” Mom says to Monkey. Tell me what happens next.

Doggy and Dad. Sunday morning, Doggy’s Mom is going to the market with his (her) Dad stay at home. Tell me what happens next.

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