Unpacking the rich tapestry of Chinese culture: the interplay between parental socialization and children's social functioning
Gao, D.

Chapter 5

Chinese Mothers' Profiles of Color-Evasive Socialization and Social Dominance Orientation: Relations to Children's Racial Attitudes

Dan (Joyce) Gao, Mitch van Geel, Junsheng Liu, Judi Mesman

5

Abstract

This study concerns Chinese mothers' color-evasive socialization and social dominance orientation, and how these relate to children's racial attitudes. Data was collected from a sample of 155 Chinese children (71 girls) aged 7-11 years and their mothers, including observations of mothers' color-evasive practices, self-reported social dominance orientation, and children's attitudes towards light-skinned East Asian, tan-skinned East Asian and White groups. Variable- and person-centered analyses suggested three areas of color evasion: racial appearance, cultural background, and grouping, and revealed heterogeneity in associations between color evasion and social dominance orientation. Mothers' acknowledgement of shared culture predicted children's positive attitudes towards their racial ingroup with darker skin tone. This study emphasizes the importance of a nuanced and contextualized understanding of color-evasive socialization.

Color evasion refers to denial of racial differences by emphasizing sameness (Neville et al., 2013). It reflects a contemporary expression of racism in Western societies and reinforces racial prejudice (Pahlke et al., 2012). Despite potential harmful effects of color evasion practices on shaping children's racial attitudes, White majority parents in Western countries predominantly adopt color evasion practices to socialize their children (Vittrup, 2018). Endorsement of color evasion has been found linked to individuals' social dominance orientation (Daughtry et al., 2020; Levin et al., 2012). However, current color evasion theories and empirical evidence are specific to Western countries with multicultural populations. The prevalence and context of color evasion in childrearing has yet to be studied in more racially homogenous societies such as China, a country that is characterized by paradoxical attitudes towards Western whiteness (i.e., criticism of Western *culture* but preference for White *appearance*; Page, 2015; Yu, 2021). In this study, we used observational measures to examine mothers' color-evasive socialization practices and its relation to social dominance orientation in the context of contemporary China. With this study we aim to contribute to a contextualized understanding of color evasion.

Western-Based Color-Evasive Socialization Theory

Parental ethnic-racial socialization refers to the transmission of messages from parents to children about race and ethnicity (Atkin & Yoo, 2021). Color-evasive socialization, a passive type of parental ethnic-racial socialization that provides very few messages regarding racial differences and cultural pluralism, is dominant among White parents in Western societies (Hagerman, 2018; Mesman et al., 2022). For example, research shows that the majority of White American mothers reported using a color-evasive approach to socialize their children (e.g., everyone is the same; Vittrup, 2018). However, theoretical reflections and a growing number of studies show that color-evasive socialization is related to negative racial attitudes in children (Neville et al., 2013; Pahlke et al., 2012), particularly in the U.S. where

racism and inequality are normative realities (Umana-Taylor, 2016). For example, children of White mothers who engaged in color-evasive socialization showed more positive attitudes towards White people and more prejudice towards Black people (Pahlke et al., 2012). Likewise, a recent study with a sample of White Dutch families revealed that maternal color-evasive practices clustered with more negative child attitudes towards Black and Middle-Eastern outgroups (Mesman et al., 2022). Overall, color-evasive socialization can perpetuate the idea that race is a taboo topic and hinder children's ability to understand and appreciate diversity (Aral et al., 2022).

The ideologies underlying color evasion can be related to individuals' social dominance orientation. Social dominance orientation refers to individuals' preference for inequality or hierarchy among social groups (Pratto et al., 2000). White people high in social dominance orientation may use the color evasion strategy to defend the status quo and maintain racial hierarchy (Knowles et al., 2009). Empirical research has shown that individuals who hold more favorable views towards social hierarchies are more likely to adopt color evasion (e.g., Daughtry et al., 2020; Roebroeck & Guimond, 2018). However, other research suggests that the relation between social dominance orientation and color evasion is negative, with lower level of social dominance orientation being associated with greater color evasion (Levin et al., 2012). People holding more egalitarian values are more likely to ignore racial differences, while those who embrace social hierarchy may make the distinction between groups matter and thus social dominance proponents more likely to stress racial differences (Goff, 2013; Milojev et al., 2014). Taken together, color-evasive socialization practices have been found associated with individuals' social dominance orientation, but there is no consensus on how they are related to each other (Daughtry et al., 2020; Levin et al., 2012). The inconsistent findings on the relations between color evasion and social dominance orientation may be attributed to individual differences in patterns of

such associations. To our knowledge, previous research has typically used variable-centered analysis, which assumes that the patterns of associations between color evasion and social dominance orientation in a study sample are consistent across the board (Hofmans et al., 2020).

The current color evasion theories and research findings are based on Western research, which largely used White samples in Western societies. According to the White normativity framework, being White does not need to be defined in Western White majority societies, as it is considered to represent the normal or neutral range of human characteristics and behaviors (Bhandaru, 2013; Morris, 2016). According to Morris (2016), White normativity hides behind color-evasive practices, as being the norm allows White people to ignore race. However, to our knowledge, no research exists about the prevalence and context of color evasion practices in China, where the dominant racial group consists of East Asians. Given the importance of a contextualized understanding of racial socialization in general, and its specific components in particular, this study focuses on Chinese mother's color-evasive socialization and its ideological correlates and relation to children's racial attitudes.

Color-Evasive Socialization in the Chinese Context

Research has shown that Chinese children display both explicit and implicit racial bias towards White people (Qian et al., 2019). Based on Western research about the effects of parental color-evasive socialization on children's racial attitudes (Pahlke et al., 2012), it may be that Chinese parents socialize their children to reject other racial groups. Indeed, parents play a significant role in children's racial attitude development, particularly before adolescence when children have more opportunities to interact with and be influenced by peers (Burkholder et al., 2021). In addition, the middle childhood period before adolescence, is a crucial developmental period to study children's racial attitudes, as meta-analytic evidence shows that racial prejudice peaks approximately 7 years old, with a slight decline

until adolescence (Raabe & Beelmann, 2011). Therefore, studying Chinese parents and their primary school-aged children, can provide contextualized insights into the role of parental socialization during the early stages of racial attitude development.

The predominant racial group in China consists primarily of East Asian people. Following the logic of the White normativity framework that refers to White-dominant societies (Morris, 2016), one would expect *East Asian normativity* in Chinese society. That is, East Asian majority is considered as the norm in Chinese society, while White people deviate from the norm by their differences in physical appearance and cultural background. However, Western whiteness has penetrated China due to globalization and postcolonial mechanisms (Stohry et al. 2021), which makes it hard to ignore its existence and influences. On the one hand, Chinese people's growing nationalism and desire to protect traditional cultural heritage lead to the rise of Western culture boycott trends (Xu, 2012). On the other hand, Western White beauty ideals have assimilated into China. White people's appearance, particularly a light skin tone, are favored by the majority of Chinese people (Yu, 2021). To better understand the paradoxical stance towards Western whiteness in China, in the next section we elaborate on *Western culture criticism* and *White appearance preference*. Of note, Western culture is a broad term that encompasses a wide range of cultural values and practices that have developed in Western societies. In contrast to East Asian culture, in this study we have narrowed the meaning of the term 'Western culture' to specifically refer to the culture that originates from White people in Western countries.

Due to a strong sense of cultural and national pride (Pan, 2019), some Chinese scholars propose that Chinese cultural heritage should be emphasized to counter Western cultural colonization (e.g., Ye, 2010). Indeed, the Chinese government has ordered restrictions on celebration of Western festivals to protect Chinese traditional culture from an invasion of Western culture (Union of Catholic Asian News, 2021). Likewise, some

mainstream Western brands are considered offensive and invasive (Tian & Dong, 2010). The tendency to marginalize Western culture seems to support the concept of East Asian normativity in contemporary China. However, it seems paradoxical to propose that East Asians are the norm, given that a White physical appearance is preferred in Chinese society (Stohry et al., 2021). Due to a global standard of White beauty ideals in the Asian culture, White people's appearance features such as light skin are preferred by Chinese people (Yu, 2021). In contrast, a tanned skin tone in China is associated with outdoor manual labor. Because outdoor jobs indicate a low social class, the traditional preference for light skin over tan skin persists (Xie & Zhang, 2013). Indeed, mass media such as TV commercials and print ads in contemporary China, highly advocate aesthetic standards of White being more attractive and indicative of a higher social status (Qiao & Wang, 2022). The preference and desire for light skin can also be seen in the many advertisements for skin-lightening products and in a growing market for whitening products in China (iResearch, 2022). The importance and benefits of having a light skin tone may motivate Chinese people to prefer Western whiteness.

The Western-based theory on color evasion proposes that majority White people tend to adopt color evasion with the goal of appearing unprejudiced or maintaining their privilege (Neville et al., 2013). In contrast, despite the majority status of Chinese people in China, Chinese people's paradoxical attitudes towards whiteness, i.e., negative about Western culture but positive about White appearance, suggests that the color evasion construct may not simply be a copy of its Western incarnation. In line with the paradox of Western culture criticism but White appearance preference, the Western notion of color evasion may need to be disassembled and reassembled in the context of China. To more closely examine color-evasive socialization practices in China, we propose two separate but related constructs corresponding to the Chinese people's paradoxical attitudes towards Western whiteness:

cultural background evasion and racial appearance evasion. Cultural background evasion is defined by avoiding mentioning culture differences. Racial appearance evasion refers to avoidance of talking about differences in racial appearance.

Furthermore, noticing and mentioning differences regarding cultural background and/or racial appearance, may not equate acknowledging the functional meanings of racial differences (e.g., identifying systemic racial disparities in opportunities). Interviews and observations conducted in Australian elementary schools show that some teachers encouraged children to notice racial differences, but remained silent about the meanings of these differences (Walton et al., 2014). This means that although agents may socialize children to recognize racial differences, they may choose to focus on similarities between groups rather than differences, such as grouping characters together regardless of their racial/ethnic background. This hinders children's understanding of the functional meanings of racial differences in society. Therefore, we introduce a third subtype of color evasion socialization practice: grouping evasion, and define it as avoidance of making grouping statements based on race. Conceptually, avoiding mention of group membership (especially when grouping was in fact done according to race and/or skin tone) is similar to the concept of color evasion (Whitley & Webster, 2019). Exploring Chinese mothers' evasion of cultural background, racial appearance, and grouping statements can help better understand the nuances in potential color-evasive socialization practices.

The Current Study

To unpack Chinese mothers' color-evasive socialization and how it relates to Chinese children's racial attitudes, this study addressed three research questions. First, we examined to what extent Chinese mothers adopt different types of color-evasive socialization practices (RQ1). Second, we tested individual differences in Chinese mothers' profiles of observed

color-evasive practices and the underlying ideology (i.e., social dominance orientation; RQ2). Last, we examined whether the identified profiles predict Chinese children's attitudes (RQ3).

We included three target groups in the measures, namely light-skinned East Asian, tan-skinned East Asian, and White people. This study is a follow-up study to one by Authors (2023), in which Chinese children were found to have a preference hierarchy, where light-skinned East Asians were the most favored, followed by tan-skinned East Asians, and White people were the least favored. This finding suggests that Chinese children in middle childhood display negative racial attitudes and, to some extent, colorism, as tan-skinned East Asians were less preferred than light-skinned East Asians. To gain a better understanding of Chinese children's preference for light skin tone, which appears to be restricted to their own racial group, we included both tan-skinned and light-skinned East Asians as target groups in addition to the White group, in the task that examine mothers' socialization practices.

Considering the unique contextual and cultural factors in China, and the absence of research evidence on Chinese parents' color-evasive practices, it remains unclear to what extent the Western-based color-evasive socialization theory can be applied to Chinese society. In addition, there is no consensus on color-evasion's relation to social dominance orientation based on Western research to date. Therefore, we did not propose specific hypotheses but took an exploratory approach to the analyses.

Methods

Participants

The sample included 155 Chinese children aged between 7 and 11 years old (71 girls and 84 boys; M_{age} = 8.85 years, SD = 1.12) and their mothers. Participating families were recruited from urban regions across China, including Shanghai and Jinan cities as well as cities in Jiangsu Province. Recruitment was carried out through multiple channels, including

organizations, schools, and social media platforms. All children were born in urban areas and from middle-income families. Most children's mothers and fathers had a high level of education (92% mothers and 88% fathers gained bachelor's degree/higher vocational education or higher). The family income was above the average income of urban households in China for 86% of the families. Most children (91%) attended public schools in the absence of children from other racial groups. The study was approved by the Ethics committee of the authors' host institute.

Procedure

Data collection was conducted from April 2021 to January 2022. Because of the strict contact restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic, the home visits shifted from an in-person to a virtual format that researchers implemented tasks through virtual meetings with participating families. Virtual home visiting has been found to be effective and viewed as a promising method for boosting family engagement and participation in research programs (Roben & Costello, 2022). The data collection through online meetings was conducted by well-trained Chinese graduate students. Mothers and children provided informed consent prior to participation. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Participants were assured that they could quit at any time without consequences. During the video-recorded virtual visits, mother and child first performed interaction tasks. Then the mother and child individually performed several computer tasks under the guidance of the researchers in absence of other family members. While the child was completing the computer tasks, the mother was instructed to complete her questionnaires on the phone in a separate room. The virtual visit lasted around one hour for each family. The family received a small gift after the visit.

Measures

Mothers' Color-Evasive Practices

Mothers and children were videotaped while looking through a picture book that was specifically designed for the current study to elicit race-related talk. The method was adapted from the work of Mesman et al. (2022) to fit the East Asian and White racial contexts. The book contains 10 pictures featuring two light-skinned East Asian, two tan-skinned East Asian, and two White children (a boy and a girl each) in various situations without any text. The first introductory picture features all six children standing next to each other. The following six pictures feature each of the six children alone in ambiguous situations (e.g., a mishap such as a broken vase that could reflect intentionally naughty behavior or an accident). The final three pictures show all six children and a male and female adult for each group in an explicitly cultural setting relevant to the three represented groups (i.e., Lunar New Year celebration settings to represent the two East Asian groups, a Halloween party to represent the White group). Mothers were instructed as follows: "Please go through each of the pictures and tell your child what you see. Your child may also want to talk about the pictures, which is fine of course, but we would like you to take the lead and tell a story about the pictures."

All videotaped statements by mothers were first transcribed verbatim, and then coded. The coding system was adapted from the work by Mesman et al. (2022). For all pictures, the presence/absence of statements about the racial appearance of the characters (skin tone and hair/eye color), and the cultural background of the characters (cultural heritage and nationality) were coded. The reason to include skin tone and hair/eye color as racial appearance codes is that such physical features are associated with race and geographical origin to some extent. Although hair/eye color can vary within a single racial group, blond hair and blue eyes are more commonly found in White people, in contrast to East Asians who

are more likely to have black hair and eyes (Chaitanya et al., 2018; Leerunyakul & Suchonwanit, 2020). In addition, a common stereotype among East Asian people is that White people typically have blond hair and blue eyes (Ito & Bisila, 2020). Accordingly, considering the sample of this study (Chinese) and the aim of this task (to elicit mothers' talk about racial difference), in the picture book, White characters were featured with noticeable blond hair and blue eyes, whereas East Asian characters were portrayed with black hair and eyes. In addition, for the first introduction picture (all children are present) and the last three cultural setting pictures (all children and two adults are present), the presence/absence of statements about grouping the characters based on their race and/or skin tone were coded.

Multiple statements about the same category regarding the same character within one picture were only coded once (Mesman et al., 2022). Higher scores reflect lower color evasion. Two coders developed a reliability set of 10 videos with consensus scores and established intercoder reliability. They then trained graduate students who also coded the reliability set. After reaching intercoder reliability for all variables (kappa values >.80), the trained coders proceeded to code the videos for the rest of the sample in which thirty percentages of the videos were double coded (kappa values >.71), and generated consensus scores through discussion in case of discrepancies.

Mothers' Social Dominance Orientation

The degree of preference for social hierarchy between groups was measured with the eight-item Social Dominance Orientation (SDO; Pratto et al., 1994). The items were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). An example item is: 'Some groups are inferior to others.' The items were averaged and higher scores reflected a higher preference for social hierarchy. The internal consistency of the scale was acceptable, Cronbach's $\alpha = .66$.

Children's Preference and Rejection

Children completed a social preference task based on the work by Levy et al. (2005). During the task, children were presented with 12 pictures simultaneously: two boys and two girls of each group (light-skinned East Asian, tan-skinned East Asian, and White people). The pictures were taken from the Internet (https://generated.photos/datasets) and an existing laboratory database (Mesman et al., 2022). The children in the pictures all faced straight and smiled. The skin tone of the light-skinned East Asians in the pictures was noticeably different from that of the tan-skinned East Asians, and was similar to that of the White group. The photos were cropped below the heads and into the same size with a white background. A pilot was conducted for perceived attractiveness and race by Chinese adults aged between 18 and 32 years old ($N = 23$). A 7-point scale to was used to rate attractiveness and a multiple-choice question was used to rate race. Photos receiving extreme scores of attractiveness were dropped, as were photos for which racial categorization was not reliably accurate. The final selected 12 photos were matched on perceived attractiveness (ps > .05), and were displayed in a randomized array that was consistent for each participant. Of note, people from different East Asian countries, such as China, Japan, and Korea, are difficult to distinguish by facial features alone, which is similar for White people from different countries (Srinivas et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2018). In addition, this study focused on race at a larger and more comparative level rather than on specific nationalities. Therefore, photographs used in the measures were described as East Asian or White in this article.

The participating children were asked 5 questions representing preference or rejection: 1) Who would you like to sit next to in class? 2) Who would you not like to sit next to in class? 3) Who would you like to invite for a play date at your house? 4) Who would you not like to invite for a play date at your house? and 5) Who would you want to invite for your birthday party? Children were instructed to choose one or none of the children in the pictures

for the first 4 questions, and to choose any number of children or none for the last question

about the birthday party (meaning that this question only yields a preference score, as asking

who children would not invite would simply be the reverse of the invitation question).

Preference scores for each group reflect the frequency of selecting a child of a specific group

to sit next to, play with, or invite to a birthday (potential score range 0–6). Rejection scores

for each group reflect the frequency of selecting a child of a specific group to not sit next to

or to not play with (potential score range 0–2).

Analyses

Preliminary analyses were conducted to check the distribution of the variables.

Outliers (z-score > |3.29|) were found for maternal color-evasive practices (four outliers for

racial appearance statements, three for cultural background statements, three for grouping

statements) and for child attitudes (eleven for rejection). These outliers were winsorized to

bring them closer to the rest of the score distribution (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2021).

Winsorizing reduces the weight of outliers without eliminating them, which preserves the

information that a case had (Reifman & Keyton, 2010). There were missing data for fourteen

cases, for one case there were missing Picture Book observations because the virtual visit

video was lost. Additionally, one case lacked data on child attitudes because the wrong

material was accidently used, and the SDO questionnaire was not filled out for twelve cases.

Because the missing data did not exceed 10 percent of the total sample, we used pairwise

deletion for cases with missing data (see Smits et al., 2002).

To address RQ1 regarding to what extent Chinese mothers adopt color evasion to

socialize their children, variable-centered descriptive statistics of three subtypes of observed

maternal color-evasive practices (i.e., racial appearance, cultural background, and grouping)

were calculated. Cochran's Q test was conducted to examine whether the *presence* of such

116

statements differed among the three subtypes of color evasion. Of note, we did not consider the *frequency* of the statements when comparing the three subtypes, as each subtype involved a varying number of pages in the picture book. Dunn's test was used to carry out a post-hoc test. In addition, for each type of color evasion, repeated-measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to test differences in responses to the three target groups (i.e., light-skinned East Asian, tan-skinned East Asian, and White people). Regarding RQ2 focusing on individual differences in patterns of color-evasive socialization practices and social dominance orientation, a person-centered approach was used. Compared to variable-centered approaches, which assume population homogeneity (Hofmans et al., 2020), person-centered approaches are more appropriate when the goal is to understand individual differences. Give that this study focuses on individual differences in mothers' profiles of three subtypes of color evasion and social dominance orientation, we used a person-centered approach of K-means clustering to capture the heterogeneity among Chinese mothers. The K-means cluster analysis aims to group similar individuals into clusters by minimizing variation within profiles and maximizing variation between profiles (Henry et al., 2005). The NbClust package in R was used to determine the optimal number of clusters according to 30 popular indices (Charrad et al., 2014). Euclidean distance was employed as the dissimilarity measure. The K-means cluster analysis was conducted on the standardized variables using SPSS's default Lloyd algorithm. The identified Chinese mothers' clusters from RQ2 were the basis to further address RQ3. Specifically, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) without including covariates, and a multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) including covariates, were conducted to examine differences of Chinese mothers' profiles of color-evasive practices and social dominance orientation in children's attitudes.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Table S1 shows the correlations between the main study variables. We examined child gender, child age, family income, maternal education, and child contact frequency with White people in relation to the study variables, to decide which ones should be included as covariates in later analyses. Out of 65 associations tested, only 10 were significant. Child age was positively associated with preference for the tan-skinned East Asian and White groups, and negatively associated with rejection of the tan-skinned East Asian group and maternal grouping evasion about the White group (ps < .05). Higher educated mothers showed lower observed racial appearance evasion (ps < .05). In addition, children who had more frequent contact with White people had mothers who showed lower observed color-evasive practices in terms of racial appearance about White and light-skinned East Asian people, and scored higher on rejection of the tan-skinned East Asian group (ps < .05). We conducted multivariate analyses with and without covariates (children's age and contact frequency with White people, which were significantly related to both the predictor and outcome variables), to better understand the impact of these covariates on our findings.

RQ1: To What Extent Do Chinese Mothers Adopt Color-Evasive Socialization Practices?

Descriptive analyses of the observed mothers' color-evasive practices showed that during book reading 11% of mothers made none of the three subtypes of the statements about the characters. In other words, the majority of Chinese mothers made at least one statement about racial appearance, cultural background or grouping. More specifically, 68% of mothers made at least one statement about the *racial appearance* of the characters, 83% of mothers made at least one statement about the *cultural background* of the characters, and 36% made

at least one statement about the *grouping* of the characters. The results of Cochran's Q test showed that the proportion of mothers who mentioned and did not mention statements across the three subtypes was significantly different, $\chi^2(2) = 87.65$, $p < .001$. A pairwise comparison using Dunn's test indicated that Chinese mothers were more likely to mention cultural background, followed by racial appearance, but less likely to make statements about grouping the characters based on these racial differences (ps $< .01$).

Mothers' statements about racial appearance, cultural background, and grouping of the characters for each target group are presented in Table 1. Overall, 82% made statements about the light-skinned East Asian characters, 81% made statements about the tan-skinned East Asian characters, and 81% made statements about the White characters, revealing no significant target group effect, $F(1.88, 287.45) = 1.35$, $p = 0.26$. However, separately inspecting the three types of statements, the number of the statements about the three groups differed. Specifically, with regard to racial appearance statements, mothers made the most statements about the White group, with the tan-skinned East Asian group being the next most frequently mentioned, followed by the light-skinned East Asian group, $F(1.78, 271.74) = 20.13$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_G = .02$, with all contrasts ps $< .05$. We also found significant differences regarding the cultural background statements, $F(1.87, 286.14) = 15.68$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_G = .01$, with mothers making more such statements about the light- or tan-skinned East Asian group than about the White group (both contrasts ps $< .001$). There was no significant difference between the three target groups in terms of the number of grouping statements mothers made about them, $F(2, 306) = 2.02$, $p = 0.13$.

RQ2: Does Chinese Mothers' Social Dominance Orientation Cluster with their Color-Evasive Socialization Practices?

Correlations showed that Chinese mothers' social dominance orientation was negatively related to grouping evasion (ps < .01), but was not significantly related to racial appearance evasion or cultural background evasion. We further used the K-means cluster analysis to identify clusters of maternal color evasion with social dominance orientation. The NbClust package in R showed that a two-cluster solution was supported by 4 indices, a three-cluster solution was supported by 13 indices, a four-cluster and a ten-cluster solution were both supported by 3 indices. Given these results, and applying the parsimony principle, we report the three-cluster solution (Table 2; Henry et al., 2005). The first cluster ($N = 79$) reflects mothers higher than the mean on all three types of color-evasive practices, and lower than the mean on social dominance orientation. The second cluster ($N = 22$) reflects mothers with the exact opposite pattern (lower than the mean on color evasion, higher than the mean on social dominance orientation). The third cluster ($N = 41$) reflects mothers higher than the mean on grouping evasion but lower than the mean on racial appearance and cultural background evasion, and lower than the mean on social dominance orientation. All variables distinguished significantly among the three clusters present in Table 2.

RQ3: Do Chinese Mothers' Profiles of Color-Evasive Socialization Practices and Social Dominance Orientation Predict Children's Attitudes?

Using the identified profiles from the results of RQ2 as the basis, we tested whether Chinese mothers' profiles of observed color evasion and social dominance orientation predict children's attitudes towards the different target groups. A MANCOVA was conducted with Chinese mothers' profiles (3 clusters) as the between-subjects factor, children's age and contact frequency with White people as the covariates, and children's attitudes (preference

and rejection) towards the three target groups as the dependent variables (2*3 dependent variables). This analysis revealed a significant main effect of child age, $F(6, 119) = 2.60$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2_p = .12$, but no significant effects of either the clusters, $F(12, 240) = 1.00$, $p = .45$, $\eta^2_p = .05$, or of child contact frequency with White people, $F(6, 119) = 1.58$, $p = .16$, $\eta^2_p = .07$. A MANOVA without covariates revealed similar results in that Chinese mothers' profiles color-evasive socialization practices and social dominance orientation did not predict children's attitudes, $F(12, 268) = 0.94$, $p = .51$, $\eta^2_p = .04$.

Further, we conducted multivariate regression analyses to examine the relations between the number of maternal statements and child attitudes towards *specific* target groups, considering the findings from RQ1 revealed that for each subtype (racial appearance, cultural background, grouping), the number of maternal statements varied across the three target groups. We found that the three subtypes of maternal statements about the White group and social dominance orientation had no significant effects on children's attitudes towards the White group. However, for the tan-skinned East Asian group, we found that the number of maternal statements about their appearance positively predicted children's rejection of the group, $b = 0.08$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2_p = .05$, while the number of maternal statements about their cultural background negatively predict children's rejection of the group, $b = -0.06$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2_p = .04$. No significant results were found for the light-skinned East Asian group.

Discussion

This study investigated maternal color-evasive practices and underlying social dominance orientation in Chinese families, and it examined whether individual differences in Chinese mothers' socialization practices and social dominance orientation predicted children's attitudes towards different groups in terms of race and/or skin tone. This study also adapted the Western-based construct of color evasion to the unique cultural context and

121

identified three subtypes, namely racial appearance evasion, cultural background evasion, and grouping evasion. The findings suggested that Chinese mothers did not typically adopt color-evasive practices in conversations with their children. Using a variable-centered approach, maternal color-evasive practices (specifically grouping evasion) were associated with less social dominance orientation. Using a person-centered approach, Chinese mothers' color-evasive practices were found to cluster with less social dominance orientation, with the exception of one profile where less evasion of mentioning racial appearance and cultural background clustered with more grouping evasion and less social dominance orientation. The study also found that the more mothers made statements that focused on tan-skinned East Asian appearance, the stronger the children's rejection of this group. However, when mothers made more statements about the cultural background of this group, children's rejection of tan-skinned East Asian was less strong.

Regarding RQ1, the results indicated that mothers in China displayed little color evasion. This contrasts with studies in White Western populations where most White mothers showed color evasion (Mesman et al., 2022; Vittrup, 2018). Color evasion strategies are commonly used in Western societies, where racial equality social norms are prevalent, to avoid appearing prejudiced (Neville et al., 2013). However, in China, prejudice against other racial groups appears to be relatively acceptable compared to other societies (Cheng, 2019), which may make Chinese individuals less concerned appearing prejudiced. Indeed, on Chinese social media platforms, there have been instances of online hatred towards Black people in China (Liu & Deng, 2020). Additionally, White people in China have reported feeling marginalized (Liu & Dervin, 2022). As a result, the relatively limited social norms regarding racial equality may contribute to Chinese mothers' lower awareness of racism and lower inhibition about discussing racial differences in front of their children. However, it is important to note that Chinese mothers' discussion of racial differences may not necessarily

reflect color-consciousness, which involves an acknowledgement of racism that contributes to power imbalances based on race (Bell, 2016; Vittrup, 2018). The measure used in the current study, which involved picture book reading, did not capture the aspect of acknowledging racism. It seems likely that Chinese mothers' discussion of racial differences does not necessarily indicate their acknowledgment of racism, given the cultural context pertaining to social norms about race. Further research is needed to examine this idea.

Considering the paradoxical Chinese stance towards Western whiteness, characterized by criticism of the White culture but a preference for White appearance, this study further examined differences between racial appearance evasion and cultural background evasion. The results showed that Chinese mothers tended to make more statements about cultural background than racial appearance, supporting our notion that color evasion needs to be deconstructed and reconstructed in the Chinese context. One possible explanation is that despite the minority status of the White group in China, Western culture is pervasive and has been perceived as a potential threat to Chinese culture (Ye, 2010). With growing nationalism and pride in traditional culture, the invasion and perpetuation of Western culture may trigger active rejection among Chinese people rather than silence, such as boycotting Western festivals and brands while at the same time promoting Asian cultural heritage (Tian & Dong, 2010). Therefore, Chinese mothers might make cultural background statements to emphasize such cultural differences. In contrast, due to Western White beauty norms assimilating into Chinese perceptions of beauty, Chinese people may consider White appearance as the norm to some extent, resulting in more racial appearance evasion compared to culture evasion. An alternative explanation could be that individuals may find it more comfortable to talk about cultural background rather than racial appearance. Additional research is recommended to explore the nuances between the evasion of these two subtypes of color evasion in Western samples. However, overall, neither cultural background evasion nor racial appearance evasion

prevails among Chinese mothers, indicating that they tended to openly discuss racial differences rather than promoting the idea that "everyone is the same". Moreover, it is interesting to note that Chinese mothers exhibited a relatively high prevalence of grouping evasion, as opposed to cultural background and racial appearance evasion. This indicated that they tended to avoid grouping characters based on race and/or skin tone in interactions with their children, which seems to suggest a deemphasis on racial differences. The different prevalence rates of racial appearance evasion, cultural background evasion, and grouping evasion underscore the need to conceptualize color evasion in a more nuanced way.

Furthermore, when examining each subtype of color evasion separately, significant differences were found between the three target groups (i.e., light-skinned East Asian, tan-skinned East Asian, and White group) in the number of statements made by Chinese mothers Regarding cultural background, Chinese mothers made more statements about both East Asian groups than the White group. This may be because Chinese mothers intended to emphasize and transmit their traditional culture heritage to their children, while focusing less on Western cultures in order to protect their own culture. We speculated that being more vocal about East Asian culture while being more silent about Western culture is an implicit way of rejecting Western culture, or at least stressing their own culture. Regarding racial appearance statements, Chinese mothers made more statements about the White group, followed by the tan-skinned East Asian group, and the least about the light-skinned East Asian group. One possible explanation is the Chinese preference for White appearance, such as light skin tone, which may lead to mention of White people's appearance more often compared to that of East Asian people. This is similar to the finding that Chinese mothers talked about preferred East Asian culture more often than about Western culture. However, our speculation seems to contradict the finding that Chinese mothers made more statements about the appearance of the tan-skinned East Asian group than the light-skinned East Asian

group. Future studies should investigate the reasons behind Chinese mothers' specific color-evasive practices.

Regarding RQ2, we tested individual differences in Chinese mothers' profiles of observed color-evasive practices and their social dominance orientation, to facilitate understanding of Chinese mothers' color evasion as well as to reconcile previous inconsistent findings on the relations between color evasion and social dominance orientation. Three subpopulations were identified by using a person-centered approach. One group of mothers showed color-evasive practices and low levels of social dominance orientation (cluster 1), while the other group showed the opposite pattern (cluster 2). These results indicate that color evasion in Chinese culture has an egalitarian orientation, consistent with previous research suggesting that color evasion was hierarchy-attenuating (e.g., Guimond et al., 2014). However, some research has suggested that color evasion may be associated with merely superficially egalitarian attitudes, such as openness and support for diversity, but with less willingness to engage in social justice. For example, color evasion has been found to be negatively related to social justice interest, and to denial of historical and continued racism (Mekawi et al., 2020; Yi et al., 2023). This suggests that while Chinese mothers' color evasion may relate to a sense of egalitarianism, it may not reflect interest in systemic issues of inequality and injustice. Future research is needed to examine the relations between Chinese mothers' color evasion and their social justice attitudes or actions. Importantly, our findings suggest that Chinese mothers' mention of racial differences is related to higher levels of social dominance orientation. This again supports our earlier notion that Chinese mothers' acknowledgement of racial differences may differ from color-consciousness, given that the latter is considered a positive force in promoting racial equity and justice with low social dominance orientation.

The study also revealed a third subpopulation (cluster 3) of Chinese mothers who demonstrated color evasion on grouping, but not on racial appearance and cultural background, with low levels of social dominance orientation. The existence of this cluster highlights the heterogeneity among Chinese mothers' social dominance orientation and color evasion, particularly in terms of racial appearance and cultural background evasion. That is, some individuals with low social dominance orientation tend to mention racial appearance and cultural background (cluster 3), while some avoid acknowledging such differences (cluster 1). This finding seems to reconcile inconsistencies found in previous variable-centered research on the relation between color evasion and social dominance orientation, and highlights the importance of considering individual differences in levels of social dominance orientation underlying color-evasive practices.

Additionally, the results suggest that avoiding grouping statements was consistently clustered with low levels of social dominance orientation. This indicates that Chinese mothers' focus on the functional aspects of racial differences (i.e., making grouping statements) may be associated with negative connotations, such as group-based hierarchy, rather than egalitarianism (Ho & Kteily, 2020; Lee et al., 2011). While emphasizing group membership can be related to identifying systemic racial disparities and support for diversity, grouping with hierarchy-enhancing ideologies aligns with the concept of social dominance orientation (Okuyan & Vollhardt, 2022). Overall, our nuanced findings underscore the complexity of color-evasive practices among Chinese mothers and highlights the need for a mixed-methods approach to this field.

Regarding RQ3 focusing on the relations between maternal color evasion and children's racial attitudes, the study found that when mothers made more statements about tan-skinned East Asians' appearance, children showed stronger rejection of this group. However, when mothers made more statements about the cultural background of tan-skinned

East Asians, the rejection of the group was less strong. Therefore, it appears that emphasizing cultural background rather than physical appearance can help promote children's positive attitudes towards certain groups. On the one hand, due to the prevalence of colorism in China, emphasizing tan-skinned East Asians' physical appearance, such as skin tone, might trigger children's negative stereotypes (Adams et al., 2016). These stereotypes could include associating darker skin with low social status (Mandalaywala et al., 2020). On the other hand, talking about cultural background can shift the focus away from superficial characteristics and highlight the rich traditions and heritages of the group. Due to sharing the same East Asian cultural background, children may feel a stronger connection to tan-skinned East Asians, which can help reduce negative stereotypes and prejudices associated with physical appearance.

Our study has some limitations. First, by reviewing all the specific statements made by Chinese mothers during picture booking reading, we found no positive or negative statements about any characters or cultures, regardless of the target group. However, it is important to note that these findings may have been influenced by social desirability bias, as mothers may attempt to avoid displaying prejudice in front of the camera (Bergen & Labonté, 2020). To gain a more nuanced understanding of intergenerational attitudes about racial outgroups, a more implicit approach would be beneficial. Additionally, we did not examine mothers' attitudes towards the three target groups. Prior research has shown that mothers' racial attitudes can be linked to their color-evasive practices and can impact children's racial attitudes (e.g., Wang et al., 2022). To gain a better understanding of how maternal socialization influences children's racial attitudes, future studies could include this information. This could also help to investigate whether mothers' mentions of racial differences are well-intentioned or indicative of negative attitudes. Third, while this study touched upon the ideology underlying Chinese mothers' color-evasive practices, a mixed-

methods approach including both qualitative and quantitate methods could further investigate the beliefs and attitudes that inform Chinese mothers' discussions of racial differences (Vittrup, 2018). Finally, although parents are significant socializing influences on children's interracial attitudes, other socialization agents such as teachers and peers may also play important roles in shaping children's attitudes during the elementary school years (e.g., Burkholder et al., 2021). Therefore, it is crucial to explore how these different socialization agents intersect and influence one another in shaping children's racial attitudes.

In conclusion, this study represents a significant step towards cultivating a critical global theory of color evasion. The different prevalence rates and implications of racial appearance evasion, cultural background evasion, and grouping evasion, underscore the need to conceptualize color evasion in a more nuanced way, particularly in the Chinese context, but potentially in all contexts. By considering the individual differences in ideologies underlying color-evasive practices, this study better resolves seemingly contradictory findings in the literature. This study also provides valuable empirical insights into racial socialization practices of Chinese mothers and their impacts on children's racial attitudes. The acknowledgement of cultural background appears to be a positive driver of Chinese children's attitudes towards their racial ingroup with darker skin tone, suggesting that emphasis on shared cultures could potentially reduce colorism.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Mothers' Statements[a] in Picture Book Reading

Variable	Range[b]	*M(SD)*[b]	Percentage[c]
Total number of racial appearance statements	0-18	4.06(4.08)	68%
Light-skinned East Asian	0-6	1.15(1.34)	55%
Tan-skinned East Asian	0-6	1.31(1.40)	59%
White	0-7	1.60(1.62)	65%
Total number of cultural background statements	0-21	4.68(4.86)	83%
Light-skinned East Asian	0-7	1.66(1.75)	73%
Tan-skinned East Asian	0-7	1.70(1.74)	68%
White	0-6	1.32(1.61)	58%
Total number of grouping statements	0-10	0.88(1.59)	36%
Light-skinned East Asian	0-3	0.30(0.57)	25%
Tan-skinned East Asian	0-4	0.27(0.58)	21%
White	0-3	0.32(0.58)	27%

[a] Note that the *presence/absence* of each category of statements was counted per picture, so that multiple statements within one category in relation to the same picture were only counted once. [b] Statistics obtained before winsorizing (actual observed range). Racial appearance statements variable for each target group could range from 0-12. Cultural background statements for each target group could range from 0-7. Grouping statements for each target group could range from 0-4.

[c] The percentages of mothers who made relevant statements.

Table 2

Results of K-means cluster analysis about three types of color evasion and social dominance orientation

Variable	Cluster 1 (N = 79)	Cluster 2 (N = 22)	Cluster 3 (N = 41)	F-test[a]
Maternal racial appearance statements about				
Light-skinned East Asian	-.55	.20	.94	52.48***
Tan-skinned East Asian	-.56	.43	.88	51.45***
White	-.56	.44	.84	47.46***
Maternal cultural background statements about				
Light-skinned East Asian	-.55	.41	.93	52.84***
Tan-skinned East Asian	-.54	.36	.92	49.68***
White	-.55	.48	.90	54.33***
Maternal grouping statements about				
Light-skinned East Asian	-.39	1.71	-.22	85.04***
Tan-skinned East Asian	-.37	1.97	-.30	149.14***
White	-.38	1.82	-.21	99.40***
Maternal social dominance orientation	-.12	.86	-.27	11.80***

Note. Numbers represent z values for cluster centers. Lower number reflects higher color evasion. [a] Significance of the variable's contribution to the clustering. ***$p < .001$.