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Member Spotlight: Yishan Shen

Assistant Professor, Texas State University; Chair of the SRCD Asian Caucus International Scholars Network Subcommittee.

AUTHOR

Yishan Shen

Assistant Professor

Texas State University

https://twitter.com/shen_yishan

What interested you in becoming a developmental scientist?

I grew up in a Korean ethnic minority family in a poor neighborhood of a small Koreatown in Northeast China. In my elementary and middle school years, I witnessed a lot of violence (e.g., bullying) among my peers, and by the end of middle school, almost half of my classmates dropped out and did not make it to high school. It was always puzzling to me why some children grew up to be more aggressive and delinquent than others and what made some children more academically disengaged and underachieving than others. The developmental psychology courses I took in college were eye-opening to me because they helped me understand, for example, how such differences in developmental outcomes could be explained by parental involvement (or lack thereof). However, none of the courses addressed the unique developmental processes

of ethnic minority children, such as the development of ethnic identity or experiences of bias and prejudice. Therefore, I came to the U.S. to further my education and learn more about the science behind minority child development. In graduate school, I learned how child and adolescent development could be influenced by different layers of contexts and realized how deeper systematic factors, such as social stratification based on race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status, could underlie what might seem to be individual or familial differences (e.g., in parenting). Consequently, I decided to become a developmental scientist who could shed light on our understanding of how to reduce inequality and promote minoritized children and youth's success and well-being.

Do you have a mentor or mentors who have been instrumental to your career and, if so, whom and how?

Dr. Li Wang at Peking University was my first mentor who provided me with the important initial training in conducting cross-cultural developmental research. Additionally, Dr. Su Yeong Kim and Dr. Aprile Benner at the University of Texas at Austin are two other mentors who have been extremely influential to my career. When I applied for graduate school, I did not have the most competitive GPA, and as someone whose first language was not English who also could not afford professional English language editing services, my personal statement was full of grammatical errors. However, Dr. Kim saw the potential in me, trusted me, and admitted me to the prestigious Human Development and Family Sciences program at UT Austin and taught me how to conduct and publish research in immigrant and minority child development with her numerous hours of training and mentoring. Finally, Dr. Benner provided me with continuous financial and emotional support in graduate school and trained me in how to investigate the roles of contextual influences in adolescent development. Without these (and many other) amazing mentors' mentorship and encouragement, my career would not have been possible.

What is a typical day like for you?

My workday typically begins at a little before 9am after I drop off my son to school. After I check my emails, I try to spend at least 30 minutes writing. On the days that I do not teach (I typically teach 2 days a week), the writing time may be extended to 2 hours or the entire morning. Writing has always been very hard and daunting to me and writing in the morning when my mind is the sharpest helps me overcome the constant writer's block. On the days that I do have classes to teach later in the day, I limit my writing time to somewhere between 30 minutes and an hour and spend the rest of my morning preparing for my lectures, although writing is not always possible, because there is always something urgent that comes up. In the

beginning of my career, I used to spend a full day, if not days, preparing for a single 80-minute lecture. However, with experience, I find myself becoming more and more efficient in prepping for teaching. In the afternoon, I am either in the classroom teaching or in my office grading student homework. Friday mornings, I meet with my undergraduate and graduate students either one-on-one or as a group. Friday afternoons are also good times for me to get back to writing because the campus is usually quieter. I wrap up my work a little before 5pm to pick up my son, and I switch to the "mom-mode" in the evening.

What is something you learned in the last month?

I learned in the last month that the COVID-19 pandemic led to a significant learning loss in children in Texas, as reflected in their State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) test results. Students in 3rd-8th grades showed a decrease in academic performance with a larger decline in math than reading. As compared to 2019, there were 4% fewer students who met the grade level proficiency in Reading and 15% fewer who met the grade level proficiency in Math in 2021. The COVID-19 pandemic erased years of improvement in children's reading and math. These findings are truly alarming and concerning, and policymakers, scholars, educators, and parents need to work together to help these children who have experienced learning losses to get back on track academically.

What does the Asian Caucus mean to you?

The Asian Caucus has been an important source of social support for me, both professionally and personally. In various SRCD Asian Caucus meetings, not only do we share our research findings, but we also share our experiences (and frustrations) as scholars of Asian or Asian American children and youth or as Asians or Asian Americans ourselves. Additionally, the leaders and members of the Asian Caucus care deeply about Asian, Asian American, and other minoritized or marginalized children's well-being and share a strong commitment to social justice. Therefore, I feel a strong sense of belonging and feel greatly empowered when I communicate and collaborate with other like-minded Asian Caucus scholars and students.

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