**Tiger Parenting**

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“I vividly remember when I was in seventh grade at Horace Mann School that I had been very excited and happy to have received 3 A+ and 2 A grades on a trimester report card until my mom asked me why I had failed to receive 5 A+ grades. She reminded me how expensive Horace Mann was. My flippant response was that grades and tuition were not correlated because other parents also paid the same tuition and some of their kids received a total of zero A+ grades. She was not amused.” (Huang, P.)

This is not an uncommon sight in most Asian households where parents hold the children responsible for outshining in all assignments as an unsaid price for the love, dedication and monetary investment they receive.

Amy Chua’s (2011) memoir Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother similarly describes at great length how tiger mothers keep a tight leash on their children in an attempt to drive them towards success in not just academics but also acoustical skills. Chua’s daughters are expected to be straight-A students in addition to being proficient in Chinese culture and language.

However, in the process of making both her daughters outshine their peers, Chua denied them the basic constructs of social life such as play dates, sleepovers and extracurricular activities.

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Chua describes tiger mothers as authoritarian Chinese mothers who “believe” that they know what is best for their children and therefore override all of their children’s desires and preferences.” They expect their children to achieve success at all levels at the cost of both their leisure time and social cultivation. In a radically different manner from the softer Western mother who believes in “foster(ing) the idea that learning is fun,” a Chinese mother considers achievements, not the process, to be the marker of “successful parenting.”

Such a contrast receives strong opposition from both Western societies as well as its analysts who regard tiger parenting as mechanistic because of its ignorance of concepts like self-esteem. Hicks, M. noted that the emergence of self-esteem is highly dependent on peer group involvement, which the Chinese parenting philosophy bars the child from by keeping him indoors or, quote an extreme example, “locked in a room to study, except for bathroom breaks, for over a week to prepare for an important exam.”

Chua herself quotes how the parents are not acquainted with their children’s self-esteem, “not concerned about their children’s psyches…assume(ing) strength not fragility.”

Nevertheless, what both Western critics and the author fail to address is the difference between the American and the Asian societies that give rise to such opposing behaviours.

Western society conforms to the principles of the independent self-construals- “the autonomous self,” which is reliant on the ideas of the individual himself rather than those around him and is largely derived from the inner attributes. In contrast to this view, most Asian societies practice interdependent construals- “self in relation to others” where identity is largely defined by roles, relationships, and expectations by the society; not the ideas of the self. Because of the difference between the values cherished in the two groups, each defines child rearing according to its customs and rituals. Both groups often experience ethnocentrism by disregarding the other model such as American parents thought of as “never saying no to their children” or the Asian parents regarded as consorting with “higher levels of psychological control.”

Cultural psychologists like Campos have worked extensively on the reaction of different groups to teasing from both their close ones and strangers. They found out that Asian Americans were less likely to get offended by their family members teasing them; even when bitterly. Furthermore, they even rated teasing by strangers as being less hostile than their European-American counterparts.

Another comparison, quoted by Chua herself, entails how she, unlike Western parents, didn’t mind when her daughter, Lulu, reacted to her coercion by drawing similarities between her mother and Lord Voldemort. This is largely because Asian families intend to use teasing and, rather strongly critical, nicknames as tools to educate their children, from an early start. Chua, herself, remembers how her father, once, called her “garbage” because she was being disrespectful of her mother and later she received a harsh retort from her friends when she told them about her doing the same to Sophie, ” One guest named Marcy got so upset she broke down in tears and had to leave early.” Such an early introduction with self-critique enables the Asian children to attempt to comprehend the reasoning behind remarks, especially from their close ones, instead of being affronted.

Chua believed that this enforcement was crucial for her daughters to attain success. She would show great delight when her techniques worked; particularly once when Lulu could only master her piano piece because of her mother’s constant persistence in employing every tactic, ranging from verbal insults to physical confinement, to make her practice more. She regards how instead of worrying about the child’s self-esteem and letting them off easy, “there’s nothing better for building confidence than learning you can do something you thought you couldn’t.” Nonetheless, some studies do quote how Tiger parenting does not always result in the best child outcomes: either academically or socio-mentally. A study by Kim and colleagues (2013) looked at children of Tiger parents and found that the adolescents were more likely than those with supportive parents to feel themselves at a greater distance from their parents, report greater depressive symptoms, and, in stark contrast to Chua’s expectations, report lower GPAs.

A study by Cheah and her colleagues (2013) looks at interviews with 50 Chinese immigrant mothers who admit to carrying out a union of traditional Chinese and American aspects when dealing with their children. They pursued this integration as an attempt to accommodate the values present in the host culture so that the child can feel independent but stay connected to the family and its beliefs simultaneously.

Western parents try to respect their children’s individuality, encouraging them to pursue their true passions, supporting their choices, and providing positive reinforcement and a nurturing environment. By contrast, Asians believe that the best way to protect their children is by preparing them for the future, letting them see what they’re capable of, and arming them with skills, work habits, and inner confidence that no one can ever take away.

Cultures that believe in interdependent values are highly similar in their practices and parenting techniques. It is because of this methodological equivalence-perception of methods in identical ways across different cultures that many East Asian principles could be applied to south asian parenting strategies. Although Chua has been heavily criticized by the mainstream idea, her ideas would have been lauded in Pakistan where a majority of parents believe in the same principles. This coexistence is a direct result of loosely defined cultural boundaries where physical borders are often not succinct enough to formulate a set of varying ideals. Moreover, most cultures do have tiger parenting present, with varying popularity, but the question of their efficacy and efficiency is what the researchers haven’t yet found a conclusive answer to.

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