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What Drives Asian Descendant Students' Motivation for Learning? Exploring the Key Ingredients to Nurture Achievement.

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Introduction

This motivation project is part of a larger study exploring the relationship between Asian parenting styles and children's academic achievement. In light of the consistent Asian students PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) data results and the media phenomenon created by Amy Chua's Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother in 2011 in U.S., our research team found that high motivation has been a reoccurring theme in children's academic achievement in the perceptions of Asian descendant parents. The purpose of this project was to examine the Asian descendant students' motivations for learning through the parents' experiences and perceptions.

Research Methods

Phenomenological approach was used. The research methods include individual interviews and a focus group. Eighteen parents, including thirteen mothers and five fathers participated in this study. All participants had at least one child within the ages of 3-23 years old. Based on the thematic analysis, four themes emerged.

Participants:

• Individual Interview: 13 mothers

• Focus Group: 10 parents (5 fathers, 5 mothers)

Key Themes

The following four themes nurture development of children's self-motivation.

1. Expectations of parents' setting high and clear goals for their children.
• I always want him to get [a good grade], the basic thing he can. I mean, I'm not expecting too much from him. That is his ability. (Quincy)
• Sometimes, I notice that they will either get a B+ or an A-, but they still don't understand the subject. … [Comparing] to a lot of other kids, it may be easy for them [daughters] to get a relatively high score but [it] doesn't mean that they know it. (Sam)

2. Resources that allow their children to explore their interests, including academic and extracurricular activities. We also found that parents changed their methods of providing the resources based on the child's developmental stage.
• I also give my son extra exercises to do worksheet, because I want him to go to a good university and have a good career. (Quincy)
• Every summer, …I let them sleep a little bit later, but they get up at 8 or 9, and they just read or do worksheets. I prepare worksheets for them. They all have to sit down to do worksheets, social studies, math study and I just lined up Monday through Friday, just like they are going to school.(Hannah)

3. Communication of realistic goals, reasonable negotiation, and clarification with their children. Communication was interpreted as a source of support from the parents to the children. The excerpt below includes the components described above.
• Mommy you don't seem to care that much that I had a bad grade." [The daughter said] I said, "I only worry that you work too hard." So in my mind, even though I expect her to get an A and she expects to get an A also. But I really don't gave her the pressure. As long as she knew where the mistakes are, why she made that mistake, then for me, it is fine. (Glenda)

4. Modeling of knowledge, skills, efficacy, and positive attitudes for their children. The qualities of participants' modeling were consistent and responsive to their children's academic needs.
• If you enter my home, you will see a bulletin board … the key part is the calendar "to-do" list. For example, you will have to plan your day, what are the things you [the child] want to achieve? Of course for a three-year-old, they couldn't write. I would ask them to draw on a piece of paper, like they want to read, they want to draw, they want to play, they want to play the piano…
• He is not really interested in reading or some language arts, but math and science. He always asks my husband: "why you came home so late? Is it about experiment?" My husband will explain to him, he just listens and listens, and he was so attentive, yeah! And really want to find out what my husband research was about. (Quincy)

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Conclusion
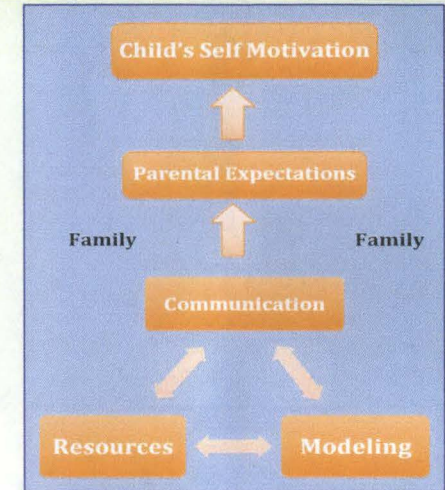
Based on our findings, we developed the diagram above to describe the attributes that foster children's motivation, including parental **Communication, Modeling, and Resources**. They used these ingredients interchangeably with one another and this occurred consistently during the child's life. Additionally, these ingredients supported the parents' **expectations** of the child to ensure that they were explicit and responsive to their children's needs. We concluded that the four ingredients described above impacted children's motivation which foster their academic achievement.

References

• References will be provided upon request