

**UNIVERSIDAD COMPLUTENSE DE MADRID**  
FACULTAD DE FILOLOGÍA  
Departamento de Filología Inglesa I  
(Lengua y Lingüística Inglesa)



**TESIS DOCTORAL**

**Marco y práctica institucional en el estudio de la comunicación  
intercultural: El caso del estilo de crianza "chino" de Amy Chua en los  
Estado Unidos**

**Institutional framework and institutional practice for the study of  
intercultural communication: a case study of Amy Chua's "Chinese"  
parenting style in the United States**

MEMORIA PARA OPTAR AL GRADO DE DOCTOR

PRESENTADA POR

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**Madrid, 2016**

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**ISBN:**

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this work is the result of a process, perhaps best understood by thinking of the concept of iteration: It is rooted in restatements and reformulations of initial notions after they were transformed and refined because of their exposure to other people's thoughts and other areas of knowledge. All of those successive explorations yielded this final manuscript, and it would have never been possible without the support and encouragement of so many people personally and professionally.

It is very difficult to list all of those who shaped, influenced and facilitated this work, but I would like to begin by thanking the Universidad Complutense de Madrid for making countless resources available, I am especially indebted to all those unrestricted hours at the library and the help of all its librarians.

I would like to individually mention and thank the following people who contributed some way or another to making this work possible,

My dissertation advisor, Dra. Juana Isabel Marín Arrese for all those patient and devoted hours committed to my work, guiding, suggesting and encouraging.

Professor István Kesckes, who generously has always been there to answer my questions and made relevant recommendations and comments to early drafts of this work.



My parents and my sister who throughout this long undertaking, and my entire life have shown me their unwavering support and love.

My husband, life partner and soul mate Carlos Andrade, who I owe my greatest debts to and who I dedicate this work to. For the whole of this venture I could always turn to him to read, discuss and think ideas through with me. Thank you for being there throughout all the uncertainties and difficulties.

*For Carlos and our son Mateo*



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## **PART I. Preface**



Recent research in the field of Intercultural Pragmatics contends that it would make sense to extend this discipline's research scope to include broader discursive phenomena and go beyond utterance level analysis when studying intercultural communication (Kecskes 2011; Mey 2001). In light of this recent development, this research proposes to develop a theoretical basis for formulating two constructs: Institutional Framework and Institutional Practice, for the study of intercultural communication.

This work opens with an example of a situation that is thought to be representative of the type of situation for which this framework might be useful, then it goes on to provide a theoretical basis founded on the Theory of Institutional Reality (Searle 2010) and develop the two constructs, and finally, to illustrate the application of how the two constructs can be put to use in intercultural communication, we will analyze a case, namely, Amy Chua's 'Chinese' parenting style in the United States. This case is relevant because it addresses the matter of behaving in a particular way, and stating particular things, that conflict with a larger institutional context, presumably enacting a conflicting institutional practice, divergence which may account for a profound lack of cultural understanding.



## 1. Introduction

Some time ago, while pondering over how to exemplify the phenomena that this work sought to address, an article was published in The New York Times called, “The two languages of academic freedom” written by Professor Stanley Fish (2009). In the article Professor Fish described the following situation during one of his classes and asked his students to reflect on it:

Suppose you were a member of a law firm or a mid-level executive in a corporation and you skipped meetings or came late, blew off assignments or altered them according to your whims, abused your colleagues and were habitually rude to clients. What would happen to you?” There was a unanimous response from his class, “I’d be fired,” they chorused. Then he continued, “Imagine the same scenario and the same set of behaviors, but this time you’re a tenured professor in a North American university. What then?” He answered the second question himself: “You’d be celebrated as a brave nonconformist, a tilter against orthodoxies, a pedagogical visionary and an exemplar of academic freedom.

(Fish 2009)

This example is emblematic of the type of situation this work wishes to address for several reasons. First, it illustrates that meanings can be ascribed to almost anything: in

this case the same set of behaviors have two, almost diametrically, different meanings (by implication: meanings are not fixed, instead they vary and transform). Second, it exemplifies that the understanding or interpretation of meanings does not occur unboundedly; they are anchored, so to speak, to the context where they occur (Recanati 2010). Third, it indicates that we are capable of fully grasping the different meanings assigned to phenomena as they emerge in different settings. Lastly, it is representative of some intricacies of communication in general, and of intercultural communication specifically.

If we've traveled or interacted with people from different places we already have a sense of the fact that meanings are not universal. Quite often we feel that we are fully capable of understanding what is going on in a particular setting, and then upon moving to another unfamiliar setting, we begin to feel completely lost in our ability to comprehend what surrounds us.

The example above was said to be emblematic of the type of situation this study is interested in dealing with because, despite not being a conventional intercultural encounter<sup>1</sup>, it does serve to illustrate situations that concern the field of intercultural communication and pragmatics in general. Since the meanings associated to behaviors, states of affairs and people are so divergent in each setting described by Professor Fish,

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<sup>1</sup> In saying that the example is not a conventional intercultural encounter what is meant is that it is not in line with, for instance, what Samovar, Porter and McDaniel consider intercultural communication when they say, "intercultural communication occurs when a member of one culture produces a message for consumption by a member of another culture. More precisely, intercultural communication involves interaction between people whose cultural perceptions and symbol systems are distinct enough to alter the communication event" (2009:12)



it provides a scenario that can help us speculate over what might happen if an individual didn't have an adequate command or understanding of the complex sets of meanings assigned to objects, behaviors, states of affairs and people within particular settings when involved in intercultural interactions. That is, it allows us to speculate about the possible communicative effects that might result if someone, who not understanding or sharing the meanings, value systems, and day-to-day practices that converge within a particular set of circumstances, interacts with people in specific sets of circumstances who do hold and share those particular meanings, value systems, and enact certain day-to-day practices. To study such phenomena this work proposes to formulate two constructs: namely, institutional framework and institutional practice, as laid out in section 6, and explore possible areas of application in the field of intercultural pragmatics for the study of intercultural communication as will be evidenced by the example in section 7.



## **PART II: Literature Review**



## **2. Foundations of the two constructs: the theory of institutional reality**

This work rests on the assumption that the assignment of meaning is a human phenomenon and that social reality is socially constructed and therefore ontologically subjective, yet that same social reality exists –is epistemically objective– and has binding qualities. Since these notions are central in the work of philosopher John Searle (1995, 2010) we will be grounding the two constructs proposed here in the conceptual apparatus developed in his theory of institutional reality. The following notions in his theory are especially relevant for our study:

- I) Ontological subjectivity and epistemic objectivity
- II) Intentionality and collective intentionality
- III) Language
- IV) Constitutive rule (or X counts as Y in C)
- V) Status functions
- VI) Deontic powers
- VII) Institutions and institutional facts
- VIII) Desire independent reasons for acting

Searle proposes a philosophy of society for deepening our understanding of how social reality is created and maintained and for helping advance “our research in the social sciences” (Searle 2010:5), and since the field of intercultural communication and

pragmatics is a branch within the social sciences then we feel it is relevant to explore the principles this theory contains in an effort to further our field of study. The way the above notions link together and cooperate to ramify into our first construct will be detailed in the following sections.

### **3. Building blocks**

#### *3.1. The role of language*

According to Searle (2007:9), “language is essentially social, but not just in any old way; rather, in a way that makes human society essentially linguistic.” This conception makes the notion of language and its role within the limits of this research fundamental for this work and therefore such role will need to be made explicit to develop the two constructs proposed for the study of intercultural pragmatics and communication. The understanding of language as will be outlined in this section contributes to set the stage and foundations for the entire framework.

The account of language that best serves our purposes is one provided by Searle, which describes language as being both “naturalistic”, that is, as an extension of other human biologically fundamental forms of intentionality and also as “deontic”, in the sense that, “once a society has a common language, it already has a social contract.” (Searle 2007:11)

Including these two features in a description of language for building, defining and understanding institutional frameworks and institutional practice is essential, because

they underpin two features present in social and cultural phenomena relevant to our field of study: namely, our inherent human capacity to ascribe different meanings and functions to phenomena that would otherwise not possess meanings and functions (the naturalistic aspect), and the binding qualities that these creations actually have, as well as our commitment to complying with them (the deontic aspect).

Searle's (2007:11) assertion provided above, where he states, "once a society has a common language, it already has a social contract" is not trivial. On the contrary, it manifests that individual languages like other socially constructed phenomena are institutional: we create them through our faculty for meaning-ascription and then conform and commit to their binding qualities by means of deontology. According to Searle,

...we will not understand an essential feature of language if we do not see that it necessarily involves social commitments, and that the necessity of these social commitments derives from the social character of the communication situation, the conventional character of the devices used, and the intentionality of speaker meaning. It is this feature that enables language to form the foundation of human society in general.

(Searle 2007:28)

### *3.2. Language and collective intentionality*

*It is impossible to imagine anything beyond even a rudimentary technology –such as one based on the manufacture of stone tools– in the absence of an exceptional capacity to conceptualize abstract ideas and communicate them symbolically, the primary human means for which is, of course, language.*

*(Monaghan and Just 2000:35)*

When trying to explain the existence of the two constructs it is important to keep in mind that institutional reality, and therefore institutional frameworks and institutional practice, are all humanly created; that is, they are dependent on us for their existence and sustainment: we enable their existence and in this sense they are ontologically subjective. This ontological subjective feature of institutional reality, however, does not make it less real. Things that are dependent on us for their existence, when commonly accepted and not contingent on individual preference or opinion, can be epistemically objective, that is, they can be objectively known and understood. (Searle 1995).

These two notions accord human reality exceptional properties because not only is it dependent on our existence for its own existence –human institutions would not exist if it weren't for us– but can also be genuinely known, recognizable and fully acknowledged by us. Eventually, and perhaps most consequentially, it imposes on humans desire independent reasons for action.



Enabling institutional frameworks then is contingent on human beings, but what enables humans to create institutional phenomena?<sup>2</sup> According to Searle's account of institutional reality human beings are endowed with intentionality, which in broad terms is the capacity of the mind to represent objects and states of affairs in the world (Searle 1995; 1998; 2010). Intentional states are composed of a) types of states, such as beliefs, fears, wants, preferences, intentions, hopes, needs, and b) their content, which end up in combinations such as *I believe that it is raining, I want to go to the movies, I need to talk to you*. In all of these statements, the first part represents the intentional state (believe, want, need), and the second part represents the content of the intentional state (that it is raining, to go to the movies, to talk to you). Also, a particularly interesting feature of intentional states is that they can, not only be directed at objects and states of affairs in the world that exist, but also at objects and states of affairs that do not exist: "one can believe that ghosts are present in this house even if there are no such things as ghosts" (Searle 1998).

Intentionality however on the individual level, is not enough for creating human institutional phenomena. For intentionality to create human institutions and society, intentional states need to be collectively directed at objects and states of affairs. Collective intentionality is, according to Searle, "the fundamental building block of all

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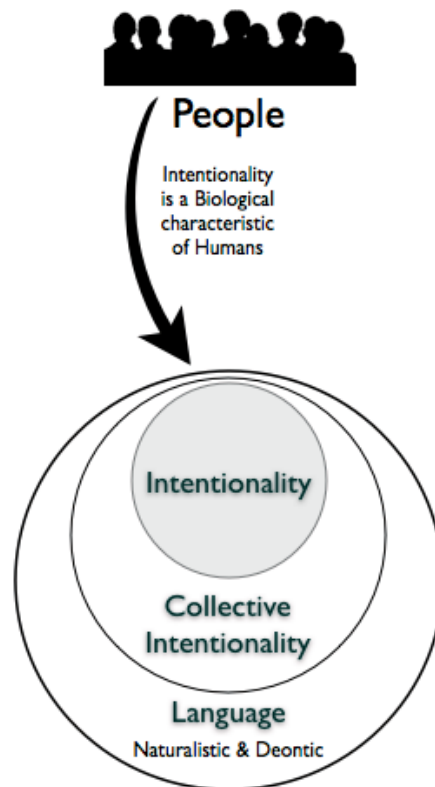
<sup>2</sup> John Searle's philosophy of social ontology and institutional reality is skillfully thorough and he has rigorously developed his theory throughout his career. His entire work developing the theory of social ontology has influenced this work. However, for the purposes of proposing the two constructs we will only make use of the concepts and features we judged most salient for developing the two constructs. For anyone wishing to fully understand social ontology reading Searle's entire oeuvre is a definite must.

human ontology and human society in general: human beings...have the capacity for collective intentionality” (2010:43); “a remarkable fact about human beings [...] is that they have the capacity to cooperate” (2010:8). We are able to collectively hold beliefs, wants, fears, etc. and cooperate in accepting, and recognizing that those beliefs, wants and fears are the case, and also commit to their authenticity, and all of this collaboration not only enables institutional phenomena, but it also sustains it.

The next component that is fundamental in the construction of our two constructs is language. We need to note, before anything else, that natural languages are human constructions themselves and as such, an account needs to be given as to how Searle’s conceptual apparatus might help us understand their constitution. Considering that natural languages extend from biologically fundamental forms of intentionality sets the stage to assume that they derive from our belief or our intention, for instance, that particular sounds, or chains of sounds we utter, or lines we draw, mean something in particular. This thus enables intrinsically meaningless lines and sounds, or combinations of lines and combinations of sounds, to perform functions that they could not perform by their inherent nature; and the deontic aspect of language, mentioned in section 3.1 above, constantly binds us to the meanings and functions that we believe in and have constituted.

In terms of why language is part of human society at all –or to use his own terminology, what conditions its existence satisfies– Searle argues that it serves to satisfy one of those human fundamental forms of intentionality: the desire to communicate other forms of

intentionality. Language allows us to communicate things for which we hold intentional states; with language we are able to communicate what we believe, what we want, what we need, etc. and it is therefore fundamental in the creation and sustainment of institutional phenomena. Figure 1 below aims to summarize the relation just described between intentionality, collective intentionality and language, as foundational components of the two constructs we will propose in section 6 of this work for the study of intercultural communication.



*Figure 1.- Intentionality, collective intentionality and language.*

Having described collective intentionality and language we can now account for the role of the constitutive rule in enabling institutional framework and institutional practice.

### *3.3. The constitutive rule and institutions*

The constitutive rule is a fundamental notion for the construction of institutions and therefore institutional frameworks, since it is the conjunction of units of Xs counting as Y in the same C (context or circumstances) that enable the existence of, or constitute, institutions. According to Searle, “an institution is a system of constitutive rules, and such a system automatically creates the possibility of institutional facts” (2010:10). In addition, the constitutive rule creates the possibility of assigning status functions or meaning to something beyond that something’s intrinsic physical properties, and indeed, it enables the creation of things that don’t “naturally” exist.

In his own account, Searle describes the assignment of status functions as a “capacity to impose function on objects and people where the objects and the people cannot perform the functions solely in virtue of their physical structure” (2010:7). This capacity enables us by virtue of our intrinsic possession of intentional states, our linguistic capacity and our capacity to cooperate, to assign meaning and function to things in order to constitute and create social reality, that is, a reality that only exists on our account.

A significant characteristic of status functions is that they carry deontic powers, and hence their relevance in serving to create institutions along with the constitutive rule. According to Searle (2010) their deontic powers imply that they bear duties, rights and

obligations. Therefore, this notion is especially pertinent for understanding the potential relevance of institutional frameworks because, as will be explained (see section 6.2), institutional frameworks are made up of a conjunction of institutions which will serve as constrainers and enablers of the sets of status functions, meanings and values that can be assigned and enacted within their boundaries. That is, they yield upon participants within the institutional framework desire independent reasons for acting.

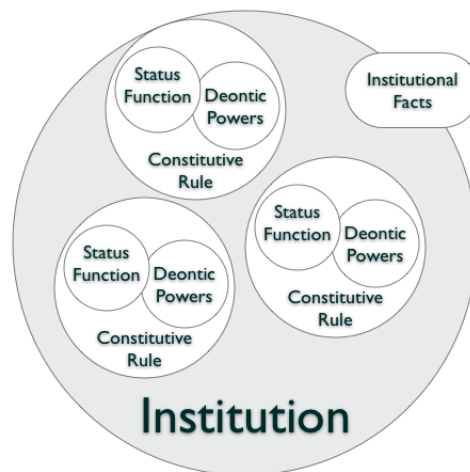
To cite a Searlean example, for instance, the constitutive rule enables us to create something like the game of chess, which does not exist independently from us like the sun, or mountains and rivers, but exists only by virtue of our collective belief that certain figures count as chess pieces (X count as Y). The imposition of status functions and meanings on both the figures and the movements performed by those figures on a board, along with the collective recognition of many other elements, constitutes a chess game.

Looking at this type of phenomena allows us to evidence how the constitutive rule facilitates the creation of institutional phenomena in its systemic way: the game of chess for instance is an institution because it is made up of various Xs counting as Ys in C – the pieces shaped in such and such a way count as pawns, bishops, knights or king, and different moves of the chess pieces on the board count as attacks, opening moves, castling, etc.

As we mentioned earlier in this paper, institutional reality is epistemically objective and indeed, within institutions we are able to produce institutional facts, which are part of

objective reality. However institutional facts are not like brute facts, because they require our participation in their creation in order to exist. Institutional facts derive and can only exist as long as there are institutions: the fact that there can be someone winning a chess game at all is contingent on the existence of chess.

The following figure captures the relation between the notions just described in accounting for institutions as systems of constitutive rules that generate institutional facts.



*Figure 2.- Institutions and their component elements*

Up to this point we have provided a description of how Searle's conceptual apparatus interacts to create institutional phenomena, and this account should serve as the foundation for how we get to the two constructs proposed in this work, since institutional frameworks as proposed in this work are nothing else than systems of institutions taking place under the same set of circumstances, and institutional practice

is a necessary competency for interacting within these frameworks and to communicate with its participants.

### *3.4. Language as an enabler of other institutions*

#### *3.4.1. Language's properties and agency in this study*

We briefly mentioned in Section 3.3 that institutions exist and perform the functions they perform and possess the meanings they possess by virtue of our collective imposition of forms of intentionality, such as belief, on actions, objects and states of affairs that couldn't perform the functions they perform nor possess the meanings they possess if it weren't for our collective, cooperative imposition of forms of intentionality on them and our capacity to represent them in particular ways. According to Searle (2010:87), “[We] can represent states of affairs that [we] believe exist, states of affairs that [we] desire to exist and states of affairs that [we] desire to bring about.”

We also have, thus far, described language as an institution; but as far as the argument goes, just what is the relation between language as an institution and all other institutions that constitute social reality? And why does it matter for the purposes of studying intercultural communication?

According to Searle,

Institutional [phenomena] are without exception constituted by language, but the functioning of language is especially hard to see.

This might seem an odd thing to say because we are conscious of language when we engage in a conversation, receive a telephone call, pay our bills, answer our e-mail, and so on. What I mean is that we are not conscious of the role of language in constituting social reality. We are aware of such things as actual conscious speech acts we perform... but the constitutive role of language...is for the most part, invisible to us.

(2010:90)

When we say that social reality is essentially linguistic, this implies that it is constituted by an array of representations based on our intentional states collectively imposed on actions, objects and states of affairs, as well as commitments on our behalf that they, in fact, function and mean what we have collectively assigned them to mean. Social reality is linguistic in the sense that it exists insofar as our inherent human capacity enables us to create and represent objects, actions and states of affairs as having meaning and functions that they wouldn't ordinarily have if it weren't for us. We are capable of constituting a social reality that exists beyond the natural and physical reality, which exists regardless of us.

In constituting institutions, the constitutive rule, which as we have already mentioned takes the form of "X counts as Y in C", plays a crucial role. Its function is to create something as being the case by believing, desiring and perhaps, but not necessarily, openly declaring that they be the case (Searle 2010). The constitutive rule gives



meaning, or a certain status, or function to something that only acquires a particular meaning, status, or function by our imposition of certain characteristics to it, enabling thus, a particular something (X) to be represented in a particular way (Y) within the boundaries of a particular context (C). Then by means of the intrinsic deontic power of language, after having represented things in particular ways, we commit to these creations and representations. The constitutive rule alone does not create social reality, but it serves, as it were, as a stand-in for a representational capacity we have for enabling any object, action or state of affair to acquire new properties, beyond their intrinsic properties, within particular contexts.

Thus far, the essentials for the constitution of social reality are, as outlined above, language with its naturalistic and deontic features and the constitutive rule, which transforms certain actions, objects and states of affairs taking place in a particular context –after collective acceptance or recognition of the status function assigned– into institutions.

This is fundamental to our argument because we are able to substantiate the entwinement of the linguistic with the institutional, the social, and as we will observe (see section 5), the cultural. One of the main arguments of this work, as mentioned in section 3.1 and in the abstract above, is that to study social communication in general and intercultural interaction specifically we need to, not only focus on language as conventionally studied in linguistics, that is, as its main object of study, but also

incorporate a view of language as an essential creator of social, institutional phenomena and as a binding factor to the phenomena it creates.

#### *3.4.2. Language and other social phenomena: sharing the same ontology*

Now moving on to the second question posed at the beginning of this section: How is all this relevant for our specific purpose of better understanding intercultural communication and furthermore justifying going beyond utterance analysis?

To answer this question we will need to approach the matter of culture and take a glimpse at what culture is. According to anthropologist Clifford Geertz, “man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun” and he takes “culture to be those webs” (1973:5). This definition is relevant to this study because we can start piecing together that culture, being webs of significance spun by man, coincides with what we have been arguing thus far regarding human intervention in the constitution of social reality. Culture, with all its webs of significance and representations accounts for a primary constituent of the social reality that we create and inhabit.

A interesting realization in characterizing language as we have done so is understanding that natural languages and society share the same ontological background: they both exist because we have the representational capacity not only to provide meaning to things that do not have intrinsic meaning or function, but also allocate meaning and function to states of affairs that only exist because we believe they exist and are collectively committed to the belief that they exist. And this, briefly stated, is the

foundation and the ontological configuration of all institutions: natural languages as well as the rest of institutional facts that constitute our social reality.

Given the ontological similarities between language and human society, therefore, it is conceivable that to engage in an understanding of human communication, and most relevantly for the purpose of this research, intercultural communication, we would need to go beyond studying what is said or what is written and include other institutional phenomena. That is, since all social reality, culture included, has the same ontological components of natural languages, why then should we only rely on studying what is said and what is written through natural languages for studying human communication and intercultural communication specifically?

Going beyond what is said and written to study intercultural communication is a way to acknowledge that when we create a particular culture we have represented X things as counting as particular Ys in C contexts, and then collectively recognized and committed to these representations: a process that has in its own way been applied to language, a tool that we extensively and legitimately use for studying and understanding human communication.

Furthermore, we would also be acknowledging the analogy that we are supposing there is between language and culture, indeed, between language and social reality: We come to be a part of and take part in a culture and a society, just as we are speakers of a language. Comparatively then, when we engage within societies or cultures that have represented objects, actions and states of affairs differently to what we have come to

understand by belonging to a different culture –that is when we come from a different institutional reality– then we might encounter inconsistencies when interacting within and attempting adapt to that particular framework.

The reason that going beyond utterances and language ultimately makes sense in understanding the interaction within intercultural communication is that culture and society, being constituted by an array of institutions, with all their conventions of meaning and symbolic representations become a type of language, so to speak, and they come to have degrees of intelligibility: some being completely intelligible to us, others somewhat intelligible and others utterly unintelligible, and then there being levels of gradience in between, just like with actual natural languages.

In linguistics “when speakers of different linguistic entities can understand one another” (Campbell 2004:191) their languages are said to be mutually intelligible: However, “entities which are totally incomprehensible to speakers of other entities clearly are mutually unintelligible” (2004:217). In this sense Kristeva is insightful when she says, “the law governing.... affecting any social practice lies in the fact that it signifies; i.e. that it is articulated like a language” (1973:1249).

#### **4. Social cognition and its influence in the study of intercultural communication within the boundaries of this work**

##### *4.1. Social Cognition*

As we have already mentioned, one of our arguments for proposing the constructs of institutional framework and institutional practice is that they will allow the inclusion of phenomena that goes beyond the utterance level of analysis in the study of intercultural communication and pragmatics. To further make this point, we believe it is necessary to mention contributions made by other fields of research which may be helpful in shedding light on other meaningful events that may be important to consider when thinking about intercultural communication. The field of social cognition, for instance, has developed a range of theories that enable social scientists to better understand the complexities that underlie human interaction with each other, –intercultural or otherwise– and with their surrounding social environment.

Social cognition has been traditionally concerned with the dynamics of how humans understand and interpret different types of information that is presented before them, and how that information is further structured and put together as it surfaces in different contexts, bringing about discrete emergent structures. In broad terms, “social cognition is the study of how people make sense of other people and themselves” (Fiske and Taylor 1991:1) and it “focuses on perceiving, thinking, and remembering as a function of who and where one is” as well as “the perceiver’s own interpretation of the world” and his or her motivation to act in accordance to what the environment indicates. In this

sense, “knowing what to do does not mean you will do it; cognition itself is not enough. Motivations provide the motor for behavior” (1991:5-6). Social cognition then, involves making sense of ourselves and others in some contextual setting and then having some motivation to behave and respond in a certain way to that which we encounter.

Within the boundaries of this study, social cognition’s holistic approach is fundamental; according to Fiske and Taylor, this approach “is characterized by analyzing the pieces in the context of other pieces and focusing on the entire configuration of relationships among them.” (1991:2). This is an important notion for us because, as we will see in section 6.2, the first construct proposed in this study –institutional framework– is not only humanly created and sustained, but also made up of configurations of discrete constitutive elements that conform a network of meanings that we need knowledge and awareness of in order to navigate them. Social cognition also assigns a prominent role to “the social environment as perceived by the individual” (1991:4). This is also a key aspect of this field that can be embraced into this work because it underscores how humans, by virtue of prior beliefs, experiences, etc. influence or shape the understanding of information that takes place before them.

Last but not least, in identifying aspects of social cognition that we find worth assimilating into the ideas put forth in this study, we cannot leave out the *motivation for behavior* aspect. This aspect enables us to account for the reasons a person might say something or do something in a particular context, even when something else might be expected.

These aspects are fundamental to us because in communication in general and intercultural communication in particular it is important to bear in mind how participants themselves are making sense of the interaction holistically: “No one force predicts action, but the dynamic equilibrium among them –the ever changing balance of forces– does predict action” (Fiske and Taylor 1991:5). In this sense, not only is it relevant to understand how participants perceive their fellow participants and themselves within the contextual setting, but also how they perceive conjoining intervening elements within the broader context. Participant perception for social cognition is of utmost importance because it is the participant’s structuring of the available information that will ultimately determine how the interaction is understood, interpreted and what action he or she will take in the communicative process.

The study of intercultural exchanges between people immerse in particular sets of circumstances already implies the study of a social and cultural reality made possible by human subjectivity, which as we have previously stated is at once objectively real. Because of their intrinsic intentional states people have an ensuing role in building and influencing the social environment they inhabit; they also have the capability to form impressions about themselves, others and social situations, and also change their minds about those impressions over time and in given circumstances. The clues to how this happens and the intervening elements lie in understanding some aspects of social cognition, such as schemas, scripts, and social categories which enable our functioning under specific circumstances. These elements of social cognition’s theoretical and

conceptual foundation aggregate fittingly in our study since they are central in a field that is ultimately “concerned with the processing of information about people and social experience” (Fiske and Taylor 1991:18).

#### *4.2. Cognitive elements: Schemas, scripts and social categories*

Humans develop throughout their lifetime a system or structure of understandings, perceptions, beliefs, impressions, assumptions, about the things that they perceive: from people (others and oneself alike) to places and expectations about what to do in certain situations. In social cognition these structures and expectations are referred to as *schemas* and *scripts*. “A schema is conceptualized as a mental structure which contains general expectations and knowledge of the world.” (Augoustinos and Walker 1995:32). According to Fiske and Taylor, “schemas are defined as people’s cognitive structures that represent knowledge about a concept or type of stimulus, including its attributes and the relations among the attributes” (1991:139), furthermore, they are sets of “structured knowledge that we bring into everyday perceptions... schemas emphasize our active construction of reality” (1991:99). Scripts are a very common type of schema that “describe the expected sequence of events in a well-known situation, such as going to a restaurant...scripts help us anticipate what will happen next and to prepare our behavior accordingly” (Taylor et al 2006 [1994]:78-79)

In understanding the way humans interact and mingle with the social world, it is also key to understand the schematic character of our mind’s approach to processing information. We receive a great deal of information on a daily basis, which in turn needs



to be processed in a way that is intelligible to us for making decisions about the world and react to different circumstances that we may encounter. We need to, for instance, make decisions about our behavior in familiar and unfamiliar environments, or decide what to do or say in the face of novel or long-established personal and professional encounters, and in these instances we use categories to help us sort out our social world, and social encounters to make things we encounter cognitively quick to comprehend.

Schemas and scripts are important because people draw on them to interpret the environment. That is, each time we are confronted with a new situation instead of trying to understand it afresh, we draw on our stored knowledge of similar past situations. In this way schemas help us to process new information. They help us recognize what aspects of a situation or stimulus are important...Schemas enable us to remember information better, to organize details, and to process information relevant to the schema very quickly. Schemas can sometimes fill gaps and knowledge as well as help us interpret and evaluate new information.

(Taylor et al 2006 [1994]:78-79)

Schemas play a fundamental role in allowing us to process information; they allow us to encode new information by interpreting it, remember old information, and make inferences where information is lacking (Fiske and Taylor 1991). Furthermore, and quite importantly, schemas are “learned through experience or socialization” (Augoustinos and Walker 1995:32). This is important because our toolkit of responses and sense-

making to social stimuli will be drawn from our lifetime experiences, which enable us to develop different degrees of expertise in understanding and responding to some situations better than others. Schemas equip us with the necessary cognitive apparatus to be competent in understanding, functioning and operating in environments and situations that are familiar to us.

Throughout our lifetime we develop schemas that provide us with tools to help us process information more economically and more rapidly, so that we don't have to interpret all the units of information separately every time we encounter a situation. They facilitate our ability to understand, perceive and take in information, even of the most complex and detailed kind. According to Taylor et al for instance,

When people have a schema for a particular person or situation, it is easier for them to process information relevant to the schema. People who have watched a lot of soccer games, for example, simply see more and take in more information than do people who know relatively little about soccer...an experienced soccer fan may spend a lot of time commenting on a dubious foul because he or she knows that players often fake injuries, that apparent fouls may represent inadvertent stumbles, and that soccer action looks very different from different angles. To a novice, however, the referee's foul call might be sufficient to process what is happening in the game.

(Taylor et al (2006 [1994]:80)

Schemas also help us work out information that is not directly explicit in the data we are receiving from a particular situation; however, because of them we are nonetheless able to infer and fill in the gaps for missing, unstated information. Take police officers as an example: police officers, like many other things, may elicit different schemas to different people because of the observer's learned experience and prior knowledge with this concept and institution. For some groups of people a police officer may trigger schemas that bring to mind ideas linked to corruption, brutality, abusive authority and mistrust; for another group of people, police officers may trigger other schemas and view them as law enforcers and members of an institution that carries values of high integrity and possessing qualities such as respect, decency and intolerance for corruption. So, depending on the schemas that viewing a police officer may elicit, people will likely behave differently upon seeing a police officer on the street. Schemas of the first type, might elicit behaviors that will make the viewer reluctant to engage with police officers when encountering them on the street. Schemas of the second type however, might motivate the viewer to approach a police officer on the street if help is needed.

Indeed expectations and knowledge of how to function and operate in environments and in situations that are familiar to us come from the schemas we've learned throughout our lifetime, while being exposed to and educated under certain social circumstances and conditions. These schemas help us navigate in situations that are familiar, and are most helpful in situations that are conventional, mostly prescribed and almost ritualistic.

We often take it for granted, but prior knowledge and expectations enable us to cope well with ordinary situations and notions we may encounter on a daily basis such as: what to look forward to when going into a fast-food restaurant or a sit-down restaurant or a buffet, or what to wear and how to behave at a fine restaurant vs. a casual restaurant, and distinguish the difference between all of these categories of places to eat to begin with. As Fiske and Taylor put it,

Categories and schemas allow us the comforting sense that we understand our world, and often they are accurate enough, although sometimes they are sadly mistaken... [But] could we do without them? Consider the seemingly objective alternative of operating within situations and with people about whom one has virtually no expectations or prior knowledge? Arriving on a new campus the first day, coming into a familiar culture for the first time, or meeting a stranger whose gender, age and role are mysterious— these are all disorienting encounters that challenge one's ability to function without the normal level of prediction and control provided by schemas.

(1991:97)

### *4.3. Social and cultural schemas, and expectations of how to function in the social world and interculturality*

Schemas and categories however, are not all-inclusive, that is we cannot apply schemas to the entirety of situations and contexts one might presumably encounter universally. As some empirical studies have suggested, “the way we perceive and interpret our surrounding social environment and its social interaction routines is largely determined by the values and norms of our subjective culture” (Forgas and Bond 1985:86). This is crucial because it implies that our schemas and categories not only help us process information about the social world, but have been built and structured by that very social world: by our surroundings and the things we’ve been exposed to throughout our lifetime. According to Forgas and Bond, (1985:86) “culture influences many of our cognitive processes and representations about the social world.”

Our impressions, feelings, expectations, etc. about how to understand, confront and react to different situations we encounter is guided then by the stock of knowledge that we acquire throughout our life experience. According to Nishida, “schemas are generalized collections of knowledge of past experiences that are organized into related knowledge groups and are used to guide our behaviors in familiar situations” (Nishida 1999:402). This is interesting because it implies that people’s life experience and exposure to certain types of specific events, sequence of events, circumstances under which those events take place, actions, behaviors, reactions to actions and behaviors, provide them with schemas that enable them to acquire a background, practical

knowledge and awareness that gives them insight and understanding not only of what is going on in the surroundings where they are most experienced, but also shape their behavior and expectations of how to function within those surroundings.

In a similar light Nishida (1999) and Fiske and Taylor (1991) hold that schemas vary across cultures. “Different cultures supply people with different schemas... and these schemas guide encoding, memory, and inference. Without the right schema it is difficult to make sense of what happen[s], but with the right schema one can [make sense] rapidly” (1991:120). According to Nishida for instance, “the ‘birthday party’ schema that children in the United States obtain through their experiences differs in many ways from the one Japanese children acquire in Japan”. (1999:403). Nishida refers to this type of schema as “cultural schema” and describes the concept as follows:

When a person enters a familiar situation in his or her own culture, a stock of knowledge of appropriate behavior and an appropriate role he or she should play in the situation is retrieved. In other words, every interactant’s social world is usually constituted within a framework of familiar and pre-acquainted knowledge about various situations. This familiar and pre-acquainted knowledge is called cultural schemas.

(1999:402)

As for the place of experience in forming cultural schemas, Nishida allocates it a fundamental role,

...repeated experience constructs neural circuits, and in this process new synapses are created and strengthened in response to the experience. Thus when humans acquire and retain information from the surrounding environment, neural circuits are generated and, as a result of this process, information processing experience is stored in long-term memory ... experience is the impetus for construction of cultural schemas, strengthening some connections and weakening others. As people have more experience with with different instances, they generalize about the commonalities among them. Developing cultural schemas become more tightly organized, so that the information they contain is not only more complex, but also more usable among the members of a culture.

(1999: 404-405)

Without the appropriate stock of experience then, –brought about by exposure to particular cultural environments– it is be difficult to render situations intelligible and to respond in accordance due to a lack of appropriate social and cultural schemas: understanding and making sense of situations require the right schemas to make sense. We see this as very closely related to our concept of institutional practice, which we will put forth in section 6.3.

Here we need to highlight, just as we did in section 4, how these notions of the theory of social cognition and cultural schemas help support and make relevant the constructs we

are proposing in this study. In this case however, the construct that these notion best serve is institutional practice. Why? Because having the right schemas will affect not only how people understand and make sense of a particular situation, but also how they are likely to behave, view others' behaviors and what responses from their toolkit of the responses are they likely to resort to in a given situation within a particular context –in light of the schemas they believe apply to the situation at hand brought about by their prior exposure and lifetime experience to similar situations.

As far as intercultural communication, our main field of interest, is concerned it might be fair to say that it seems ineffective to import, so to speak, schemas from one culture to another culture for which those schemas do not readily apply, because instead of making the situation more comprehensible and clear, they may render the situation at hand less intelligible or even misunderstood.

In this sense, according to Nishida, in the face of novel and unfamiliar situations people normally tend to

make use of their native-culture schemas as much as possible...In some situations however, there may be no native-culture schema that they can employ. In these kinds of situations, they may have to collect data in order to generate new PSI [Primary Social Interaction] schemas...In these situations people tend to experience cognitive uncertainty and anxiety.

(1999:411-412)



In this respect we recourse to Bartlett ([1932]1995) who conducting experiments in remembering and story reproduction showed that using imported elements, or elements that have little background in one culture, will result in failure of assimilation of the situation at hand by people of that culture. In his own words, “any element of imported culture which finds very little background in the culture to which it comes must fail to be assimilated” ([1932]1995:125).

## **5. Defining culture for the study of intercultural communication and pragmatics within the boundaries of this work**

### *5.1. Situating culture as a human-made phenomenon*

Perhaps a suitable starting point to this section might be to ask ourselves, how might it be appropriate to understand the notion culture for the study of intercultural communication and pragmatics? Of course to attempt to provide a definitive and overarching answer to this question is far-reaching and it goes well beyond the current scope and goals of this work. So even though the quest for an answer to that question for is not only relevant but also desirable, we will here focus on a more modest pursuit and rather ask: how might it be appropriate to understand the notion of culture within the boundaries of this study?

To start setting the boundaries of an approach to culture, and frame it in a way that is relevant for the purposes of this study we would have to first set culture and our surrounding social order in general within the realm of the human-made and the socially

constructed. That is, first and foremost culture needs to be understood in conjunction with the existence of human beings along with their inherent intentionality and mental and cognitive structure. In this sense, as we already mentioned in section 3.4.2, we not only concur with Geertz's (1973) definition of culture constituting webs of significance spun by man, but also find it material to our study. This understanding of culture underscores the weight human intervention has in constituting and creating the social world.

Sociologists Berger and Luckmann (1967) also acknowledge the foundational role humans play in the construction of society. In their treatise in the sociology of knowledge they assert that, "society is a human product" (1967:61). In fact, they go to an even greater extent in their detailing of why the social order derives from human attributes in stating, "man's specific humanity and his sociality are inextricably intertwined. *Homo Sapiens* is always, and in the same measure, *homo socius*". (1967:51). They further their argument in the following terms,

Human being must ongoingly externalize itself in activity. This anthropological necessity is grounded in man's biological equipment. The inherent instability of the human organism makes it imperative that man himself provide a stable environment for his conduct... These biological facts serve as a necessary presupposition for the production of social order. In other words, although no existing social order can

be derived from biological data, the necessity for social order as such stems from man's biological equipment.

(1967:52)

According to Berger and Luckman then, humans beings create social order because of a biological need inherent to their nature. This is relevant for the purposes of the argument we have thus far been making because it is consistent with the idea that we are creators of our surrounding social reality by means of our collective intentionality and language, as described in section 3.2 and also sustainers of that reality by means of our social cognition (the way we schematize and use behavioural scripts) to function and operate within it, as described in section 4.

In section 5.2 below we will provide a brief overview of the concept of culture, as it has traditionally been viewed, and then follow after in section 5.3 with providing a definition of culture for the purposes of this work.

### *5.2. Definitions of Culture: A brief overview*

*What is it, then, that separates our species from all others? There are many things about humans that are unique. But perhaps the most extraordinary characteristic is our capacity to conceptualize the world and to communicate those conceptions symbolically. Anthropologists...call this capacity 'culture'.*

*(Monaghan and Just 2000:34)*

The earliest definition of culture in the modern anthropological tradition, at least known to the author of this work, goes back to Edward B. Tylor, an English anthropologist in the Victorian era. In his book *Primitive Culture* first published in 1871 he defined culture as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” and he adds that it “is a subject apt for the study of laws of human thought and action”. (1891 [1871]:1) This definition is rather all-encompassing: it involves the study of almost everything that influences human beings in their interaction with their social environment, and it assumes a fairly homogenous spectrum of knowledge, customs, practices and beliefs within the inhabitants of a particular culture. Furthermore, it accounts for the role of cultural “acquisition”, but leaves out human agency in the creation of its social surrounding as if culture were something external to humans rather than something intrinsic to their very nature.

Somewhat afterward, in the early 20th century, anthropology was met most prominently with the ideas of Franz Boas a German-born, American anthropologist, who according to Pinker (2002:35) is “the Father of Modern Anthropology”, and founded the American Anthropological Association (Stocking 1960). Franz Boas viewed cultures as “eclectic and expansive” (Bashkow 2004:446), amplifying on Tylor’s conception of culture to also include “the history of the people, the influence of the regions through which it passed on its migrations, and the people with whom it came into contact” (Boas 1974 [1887]:64). In this sense, Boasians viewed cultural boundaries as “porous and

permeable” (Bashkow 2004:445), not as discrete unities with categorical, incontrovertible boundaries and traits all linked to a geographical location. Cultures for Boas,

appeared to have different boundaries when looked at from different viewpoints, and it was just this theme that became increasingly central to Boas’s thinking over his career. In George Stocking’s words, the “consistent tendency” in Boas’s thought was toward “growing skepticism” of blanket classifications and toward insistence on the discrimination between “distinct classificatory points of view” (Stocking 1974:13-14). The thrust of Boas’s early fieldwork was to show that culture could not be correlated with environmental determinants, thus effectively decoupling cultural boundaries from geographical ones.

(Bashkow 2004:446)

Boasians in this sense were pioneers of the notion that culture was not akin to geographical location or to fixed characteristics of a people within a geographical area. Instead, according to Monaghan and Just, they saw the matter of culture as comprising “a set of ‘cultural glasses’ that each of us wears, lenses that provide us with a means for perceiving the world around us, for interpreting the meaning of our social lives, and framing action in them.” (Monaghan and Just 2004:38) Boasians then, saw cultural boundaries more liberally than had been considered up until the turn of the 20th century

and contrasted with what in social anthropology is called functionalism or structural functionalism.

Functionalists differed from Boasians, in that they tended to see stability across different observed social structures. For functionalists, or structural functionalists, the organization and structure of social life and patterns of behavior –such as norms, institutions, customs, traditions, social roles– became a primordial object of study. For functionalists these existent and observable social structures in society were in place to perform specific social functions. “Structural functionalists, or functionalists used the idea of social structure to describe patterns of relations between individuals and groups and tended to explain those patterns in terms of their functions” (Monaghan and Just 2004:59-60).

Furthermore, their focus for understanding society and culture was centered more along the thought of internal evolution: rather than observing social and cultural transformation as something dependent on outside influence they regarded any unfolding in terms of “cultural-internal evolutionary processes” (Bashkow 2004:446). For them, culture and society was less permeable of outside influence; and individuals were considered more as passive recipients of social structure –or as agents performing mainly their societal roles– rather than as active agents capable of social transformation. Indeed according to Giddens,

Functionalist thought, from Comte onwards, has looked particularly towards biology as the science providing the closest and most

compatible model for social science. Biology has been taken to provide a guide to conceptualizing the structure and the function of social systems and to analyzing processes of evolution via mechanisms of adaptation ... functionalism [moreover] strongly emphasises the pre-eminence of the social world over its individual parts (i.e. its constituent actors, human subjects).

(1984:1)

In the 1950's and 1960's, however, functionalists theories began to see their decline.

Eventually, because they saw social institutions as self-perpetuating in a state of 'homeostatic equilibrium', a state in which all the parts acted to keep the whole in balance... and viewed social structure as constraining behaviour, the functionalists were criticized for a vision of society that was essentially static and incapable of explaining social change.

(Monaghan and Just 2004:61)

According to Monaghan and Just social and cultural anthropology more recently tend to view culture as including human action and the dynamic interaction of social factors,

Today we are more inclined to emphasize the dynamic properties of social life and the agency of individuals whose actions are both

constrained and enabled by structures but have consequences –both intended and unintended– that can change structure.

(2004:61)

A brief note on broader senses of the word culture is in order since it has been by no means clearcut. Quite the contrary, throughout its history this word has been ascribed many different meanings and associations. For instance Raymond Williams defined three categories in the definitions he found of culture. According to Williams, a first type of definition regards culture as an ideal state, aspiring or outlining human perfection, “in terms of certain absolute or universal values” and comprises the study of “values which can be seen to compose a timeless order, or to have permanent reference to the universal human condition.” (Williams 1998:48) In the second type of definition provided by Williams, culture “is the body of intellectually and imaginative work, in which, in a detailed way human thought and experience are variously recorded” and finally the third definition explains culture as “a description of a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behavior.”

Lastly, a definition which anthropologists have abandoned is the relation of culture to something that individuals possess to greater or lesser extent. To be ‘cultured’ or to possess ‘culture’ in this sense refers to being more ‘refined’, ‘sophisticated’ or ‘worldly’: “In this sense of the term, the fellow who goes to the opera, sips champagne, and reads Proust is more ‘cultured’ than the one who goes to a soccer match, swills beer,



and reads the tabloid dailies. While this sense may continue in everyday uses of the term ‘culture’, it is rejected by anthropologists” (Monaghan and Just 2000:36)

### *5.3. A workable approach to culture*

*Culture, is “a dimension of mind as well as a part of social reality”*

*(Shore 1996: 311)*

Having first articulated the central role of humans in the constitution of the social order, in section 5.1, and giving a brief overview of the definitions of culture, in section 5.2, we will now go on to introduce a definition of culture that we find fitting to accompany the theoretical base of our work. We find the search for a definition of culture for the study of intercultural communication and pragmatics material because if one of our goal is to study “inter-cultural” encounters then determining the definition of “cultural” is consequential. Do we mean to study interaction of people influenced by fixed social structures of society? Or who posses a pair of glasses through which they filter their world? The goal of this section is to try to find a workable approach to what we mean when we say “cultural” in the study of intercultural communication and pragmatics.

Perhaps a good starting point is looking at a definition developed by two cognitive anthropologists, and in it culture is viewed as “regularities in the world of public objects and practices as well as more-or-less shared understandings learned from this public world” (Strauss and Quinn 1997:24). What we take away most significantly from this initial definition is the idea that understandings are “more-or-less shared.” The idea that understandings are gradual and not absolute would be an interesting characteristic in a

definition of culture for our purposes. Especially in an increasingly globalized and translingual world it is more and more possible that people are members of a “culture” to a certain extent, rather than in categorical terms.

Stauss and Quinn’s definition however, does not stop there, they further clarify,

To the extent that ‘culture’ carries the implication that there exists some entity above and beyond human products and learned mental structures, we agree with recent critics of the concept that it is misleading. We could keep the term ‘culture,’ however, if we stopped thinking of culture as independent entities.

(1997:24)

So we see that they are not espousing a definition of culture where culture is seen as an independent entity from humans beings and which is a standalone reality which hangs over humans and where humans are passively taking in that culture and experiencing the world through it as a cluster of meanings with well defined boundaries. Rather they rescue the notion of culture from its critics and from futility and extend their attribution of culture in the following terms:

To the extent people have recurring, common experiences, – experiences mediated by humanly created products and learned practices that lead them to develop a set of similar schemas– it makes sense to say that they share a culture [...] Culture in our formulation

[...] is not thus this free-floating abstract entity; rather, it consists of regular occurrences in the humanly created world, in the schemas people share as a result of these, and in the interactions between these schemas and this world. When we speak of culture, then, we do so only to summarize such regularities [...] This makes ‘culture’ as we use the term, a fuzzy concept, because we are focusing on people’s (more-or-less) shared experiences and the shared experiences and the schemas they acquire on the basis of those experiences.

(Strauss and Quinn 1997:7)

This definition of culture is reasonable and relevant for the purposes of this work is because it goes beyond the idea that culture is a cohesive, monolithic, unvarying entity, and rather proposes culture as something which includes “humanly created products” and people’s experiences with those products as well as their learned practices from all this interaction and the schemas they draw from these experiences and practices. Indeed Strauss and Quinn are suspicious of the more traditional functionalist anthropological conception of culture as “a superorganic, cohesive, bounded, timeless entity” (1997:24).

Another definition that goes more or less along the same lines is one provided by Goodenough (1957),

A society’s culture consists of whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members, and

to do so in any role they accept for any of themselves...Culture is not a material phenomenon; it does not consist of things, people, behavior, or emotions. It is rather an organization of these things. It is the forms of things that people have in mind, their models for perceiving, relating, and otherwise interpreting them’.

(1957:176)

As we have seen so far then, a workable definition of culture for the purposes of this work integrates behavioral aspects, things that we can observe in people’s actions and utterances as they interact with their environment and with other people, as well as the sets of beliefs, understandings, knowledge, and schemas that they possess for going about in the interpretation of their environment and their functioning within it.

Furthermore, despite the fact that Strauss and Quinn’s approach abandons notions of culture as “static cohesive wholes” (1997:24), they also nevertheless believe that culture does account for some level of shared and thematically enduring notions among people. Citing James Clifford they argue, “it does not follow that we should ban cultural descriptions. If we are going to throw out one set of descriptions, they should be replaced by others that still allow us to talk about ‘collectively constituted difference’” (1997:24), and at the same time as a direct complement to those differences, we should like to add: *collectively constituted similarities*, that enable people who share these similarities to come to similar interpretations of events taking

place under particular circumstances, which they recognize as relevant for the interpretation they are assigning to the events they are observing.

Indeed one of the key components in this description of culture and one that we find especially pertinent for the work that we are developing here is its acknowledgment and admission of stability and fluctuation, of variability and uniformity, of sharedness and idiosyncrasy.

We agree with these authors' contention that "the distinction between relatively stable cognitive networks and the ever-changing reactions that are the response of these networks to particular events is an important one". It admits that we have stable "cognitive structures" (Strauss and Quinn 1997:54), which include schemas, understandings and knowledge that we acquire throughout our lifetime, but it also admits less stable meanings and interpretations which we apply to particular events taking place under certain circumstances, or as they put it, which are "evoked when people's schemas meet the world at a given moment" (1997:54).

All in all, the meaning of culture adopted here encapsulates a vision of cultural understanding that brings together two views discussed and disputed within a field of study akin to our own: anthropology.

Most anthropologists today would probably agree with both sides of this debate. Most would probably agree both that 'cultures' are not bounded, coherent, timeless systems of meanings (as we caution our

advanced students), and that human action rests on networks of often highly stable, pervasive, and motivating assumptions that can be widely shared within social groups while variable between them (as we teach undergraduates in Anthropology 101). The problem facing the discipline is not which is right but how to explain the fact that both are right.

(Strauss and Quinn 1997:4)

Their insistence is that we look at culture, not abstractly “as a property of reified social groups, [but] look instead at how cultural understandings are shared and vary among particular people - in our society as well as others” (1997:88).

### *5.3.1. Cultural meaning*

A further feature of culture that is worth highlighting is that it is bound to meaning. Our substantiation of this comes from Hannerz’s assertion that “culture has been taken to be above all a matter of meaning” (1992:3). Indeed meaning as we see it occurring within different settings: intercultural settings, institutional settings, etc. varies to a great extent. Cultural meaning, framed in the context of culture as containing both disarranged, unbounded systems of meanings, as well as steady, ubiquitous and widely shared networks of signification, is a fundamental component that we will make use of to further sustain this work. To explore the matter we deem it useful to contextualize cultural meaning in the following terms,

...in every human society...behavior is organized in the basis of a shared symbolic world. Every culture consists of categories which are used to sort and classify experience. People learn the rules for appropriate behavior. They acquire cognitive maps which enable them to interpret the behavior and events they observe...Objects take on meaning as they are identified, classified and named...Individuals learn to evaluate each experience in a way that is at least partially shared.

(Spradley 1972:4)

What Spradley says above is not strictly constrained to behavior however, the scope of the symbolic world to which she refers to could be broadened to also include general actions, utterances, objects, states of affairs. Cultural meaning implies first and foremost a symbolic sphere that some individuals share, to a greater or lesser extent, with other individuals.

Before going on any further in speaking of cultural meaning, and the way we make use of the concept within the scope of this work, we believe it might be a good idea to make a brief parenthesis and pinpoint what it is we mean by 'meaning'. Meaning is a vast and compelling topic to tackle and one could write an entire thesis on this matter alone, hence we will limit the discussion of this topic strictly based on matters that have a direct weight and significance for the intended goals and scope of this work.

### *5.3.2. Meaning for intercultural pragmatics and communication*

Finally in this section we would like to propose an approach to meaning that we find fitting for the general purpose set out in this work. Strauss and Quinn, have developed an approach to meaning that renders it “the interpretation evoked in a person by an object or event at a given time. (Note: this includes, but is not restricted to, word meanings.)” (1997:6).

We find this definition fitting for our work in the following ways:

- It involves the individual as a central character accountable in the interpretative process for meaning-assignment.
- It allows for meaning to be contingent on the context where an action or event takes place.
- It does not limit what can be interpreted to words or utterances.

Another feature that we find appealing about this definition, and suitable here is that it renders meanings “momentary states” (Strauss and Quinn 1997:6), contingent on people’s mental structures and cultural schemas. However Strauss and Quinn argue that these intrapersonal features commingle with extrapersonal features world structures. According to them,

The relative stability of the world and our schemas has the effect that both in a given person and in a group of people who share a way of life, more or less the same meanings arise over and over. Our



definition also makes meanings psychological (they are cognitive-emotional responses) but highlights the fact that meanings are the product of current events in the public world interacting with mental structures, which are in turn the product of previous such interactions with the public world...In other words, we are saying that what something (a word, an object, an event) means to somebody depends on exactly what they are experiencing at the moment and the interpretative framework they bring to the moment as a result of past experiences.

(1997:6)

One reason this definition is fitting for the purposes of our work is that it comprises the idea that meanings are relatively stable for people who “share a way of life.” In our work we will argue that this stability of meanings is enabled by the existence of institutional frameworks and the sharedness, by people taking part in the webs of institutional meanings going within the framework. To briefly illustrate where this definition might come into use within the boundaries of this work in the study of intercultural pragmatics and communication we will look at the parent-child relationship, for instance. In our work we are likely to find differences in the conceptualizations of this relationship among people who raise their children following the institutions of what we will label below “Chinese parenting” and people who raise their children following the institutions of what we will label below “Western

parenting.” However, one might expect a person who believes in the institutions of “Chinese parenting,” after living enough in a place where people follow the institutions of Western parenting, may come to understand and perhaps even imitate or follow the notions behind the Western parent-child relationship.

The interesting thing about this example is that it illustrates the matter of cultural meaning –which we began section 5.3.1 with– as being dependent on the interpretation that a group of people who hold common meanings of a particular phenomenon –such as an utterance, an object, a behavior, an event or states of affairs–, which come forth elicited by people’s prior understanding of the situation at hand by means of their life-long exposure to similar situations and hence the acquisition of certain social and cultural schemas. Another related aspect to this example, and one that is fundamental in the understanding of cultural meaning, is that one could easily contemplate that a different interpretation of the same phenomenon or event could be brought about in a different person with different life experiences –and different schemas–, or also in the same person if the event or phenomenon were to take place in a distinct contextual setting, provided that schemas, as we’ve already noted in section 4, are very much bound to the setting where an action or event take place.

In this sense, interpretations depend on features that accompany events taking place, not of events in isolation. To explain this Strauss and Quinn resort to “the famous Geertzian (and before him, Ryleian) example” of what is the meaning of an eye wink? And they

proceed to explain in relation to their advocacy of a connectionist model<sup>3</sup> to cultural meaning and interpretation,

If this gesture were the input to a connectionist network, its output (the interpretation of one eye closing) would depend very much on all the features of the situation. If the gesture were accompanied by a sly smile, it might be interpreted as meaning ‘We’re in this conspiracy together’; if it were followed by eye rubbing, it might instead evoke the interpretation ‘There is something in that person’s eye.’ Interpretations also depend on the learner’s history of experiences and can change over time.

(Strauss and Quinn 1997:83)

Cultural meaning then is not a static phenomenon; meanings change inasmuch as groups of people take in new meanings, given exposure to different life experiences or do away with meanings that are no longer valid or consequential for them.

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<sup>3</sup> For a comprehensive account of Strauss and Quinn’s connectionist model see Strauss and Quinn, 1997 chapter 3. This topic though interesting in and of itself goes beyond the scope of our current study and hence cannot be done any justice within the boundaries of these pages.



**PART III. Theoretical Framework, Description of the Case and  
Hypotheses**



## 6. Outlining the constructs

### *6.1. Institutional framework and institutional practice for the study of intercultural communication and pragmatics*

Recent research in the field of intercultural pragmatics argues that the field would benefit from including broader discursive phenomena in its analysis: according to Kecskes (2011:378), “in intercultural communication, it makes more sense to analyze discourse segments rather than utterances.” Since the underlying structure of the institutional framework that we are proposing is made up mostly of instances of “X counts as Y in C”, (as we briefly mentioned in Section 3.3) and we argue that meaning, function and value can be allocated to almost anything, our work then allows for the inclusion of other meaning-permeated elements that contribute to the complex process of intercultural communication.

In the pursuit of going beyond the utterance level of analysis the two constructs proposed here aspire to provide grounds for analyzing the emergence of meaning, as occurring within specific boundaries of systems of institutions -institutional frameworks- and communication as necessitating an understanding of and adherence to a host of institutional phenomena -institutional practice- in order to take place seamlessly and be effective.

So what other meaning-permeated elements that turn up in intercultural communication might this framework contribute to elucidate? Potentially, countless, however, we believe it best serves three purposes:

First, to provide a theoretical structure that can serve as the boundaries of meaning for the study of intercultural pragmatics and interaction, which the conceptual notion of culture seems to not readily address. Culture tends to be a more schematic, rather than specific notion, and can often obscure more than it can reveal. The cultures it aims to represent and signify are in reality far from being monolithic and unvarying entities but due its elusive trait, it can sometimes be taken as a unified, unvarying body. Consequently we hear speak of American culture, Chinese culture, Business culture, etc., as if these were unified blocks rather than social structures that actually contain many different elements that are difficult to deal with as a whole.

Indeed, the notion of culture “does not preclude variability” (Spencer-Oatey 2005:339) and this is something that needs to be constantly present in approaches that aim to deal with intercultural exchange and communication. Proposing the construct of institutional framework serves to redefine and restructure the limits and boundaries of the meanings of things beyond the conceptual notion of culture, which is already so heavily charged with ideological overtones that can often get in the way of objective analysis. (Kristiansen and Geeraerts 2007).

The second purpose these constructs seek to serve is grant access to the study of intercultural pragmatics to things beyond utterances, such as actions and behaviors –as



illustrated in our initial example— or people, for instance. In pragmatics we know that participants and speakers are a fundamental component of the communicative process: “pragmatics defines its field of interest as the users’ use of language...” (Mey 2007:165). In intercultural pragmatics the “user’s use of a language” is of vital importance of course, because as we know misunderstandings can occur if the speaker’s utterances are not unambiguous or unintelligible, for instance.

This is all matter-of-fact and legitimate, but it often seems that there is a lot more weight given to the “use of language” part of it, than to the “speaker” or “user” part of it. The speaker or user in traditional pragmatic theory seems to be there because it is the primary vehicle, so to speak, through which natural language occurs, and hence of course, crucial to the entire communicative process. The focus intended here by developing and proposing the two constructs is that speakers procure a two-way value in the intercultural pragmatic exchange: They are subject to being ascribed different meanings just like an utterance –identities, for instance, are a form of meaning assignment–, and this variation in meaning will inevitably influence the speaker’s own interaction with the environment as well as with other speakers.

Thirdly, to study the conformity to or adherence<sup>4</sup> to institutional frameworks on behalf of participants. Potentially, interactions of participants who do not share, understand or enact the meanings associated to a particular framework that is, lack institutional practice within an institutional framework, is likely to be problematic or cause some

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<sup>4</sup> Adherence here is used in the sense that someone who adheres recognizes, believes and follows the practices of something.

kind of misunderstanding. Trying to explain this kind of situation is one of the main drivers of this work, and we believe that it is relevant to the field of intercultural communication.

In intercultural communication, participants who engage in interaction and who assign different meanings, values and functions to different things most likely manage different and distinct institutional frameworks and possess institutional practice for particular frameworks but not others, and this might potentially lead to misunderstandings (see Figure 5). Finally, institutional practice is quite distinct from pragmatic competence because it aims to go beyond the understanding of a speaker's intended meaning. Competency in navigating institutional frameworks requires understanding not only the meaning of utterances in terms of the speaker's intended meaning, but also the understanding of a wider spectrum of things based on the fact that they mean what they mean because they are embedded and taking place in a particular framework that enables particular sets of meaning while constraining others.

### *6.2. Institutional framework*

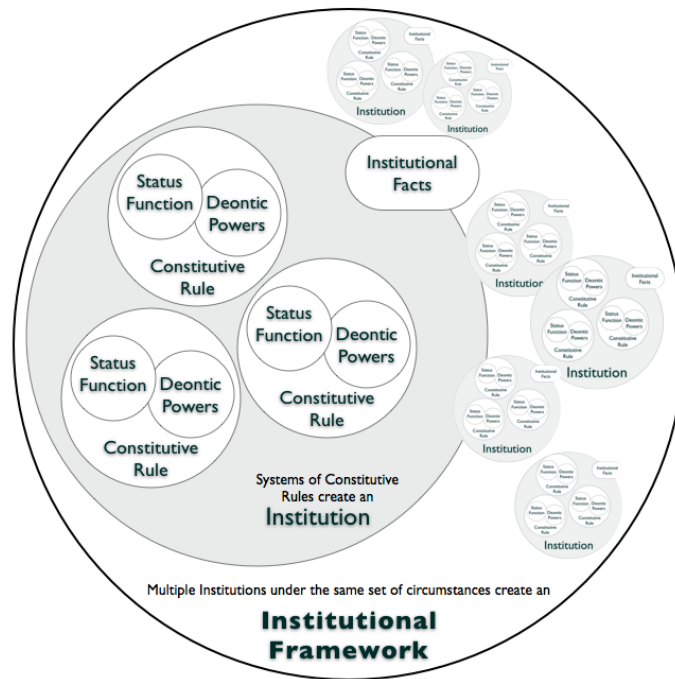
Once we understand the interaction between different elements that bring about institutions, the concept of institutional framework becomes intelligible: an institutional framework gathers multiple institutions taking place under a certain set of circumstances.

Throughout this work it has already been said that there are things in the world that acquire meaning because we humans render them meaningful through our inherent intentional states and our linguistic capacity to ascribe meaning and function to things that would otherwise be meaningless (see Section 3). Bringing to bear the constitutive rule, a main pillar of this research and the backbone structure of institutions and institutional frameworks, helps to elucidate that meanings can, not only be ascribed to almost anything, even thin air (Searle 1979; 2008), but also that meanings are circumscribed to specific settings or contexts.

Institutional framework and institutional practice, as construed here, rest heavily on this notion, and thus entail that the understanding or interpretation of the Y meaning to the X actions, objects and states of affairs that take place within them do not occur unboundedly, but are rather circumscribed –or bound– to the contexts and frameworks where they occur. In addition, the assigned Y meanings are not fixed. An X action, object or state of affair, can be assigned a myriad of meanings (Culler [1981] 2002).

Institutions are the discrete constitutive elements of the institutional framework. Given that some institutions arise within common settings or circumstances, conceivably we can think of them as becoming linked through that conjunction into a network or system and produce a framework of institutions. Succinctly speaking, webs of institutions under a common set of circumstances would then constitute what we here call institutional frameworks, as shown in Figure 3 below.

*Figure 3: Institutional framework*



Once created, socially established and maintained, institutional frameworks define “what has meaning and what actions are possible” (DiMaggio and Powell 1991:8). Searle’s notions of deontic power and desire independent reasons for acting are also relevant here as an emergent property of these systems of institutions, because institutional frameworks end up serving to constrain and enable not only what actions, for instance, can take place within their boundaries, but serve to constrain and enable the meanings attached to each action, object and state of affair. Moreover, institutional frameworks can limit the emergence of new institutions and new meanings within their boundaries.

This view of institutional frameworks, having emerging properties<sup>5</sup> –in this case desire independent reasons for acting, inherited from properties of the institutions themselves– is important to understand the relevance of defining this construct. Emergent properties resulting from webs of institutions that take place under the same set of circumstances are unique and specific to that specific web of institutions and its boundaries. That is, the constraining and enabling properties of stand-alone institutions are likely to differ from the constraining and enabling properties resulting from systems of institutions, and moreover, the combination of different sets of institutions is likely to result in distinct institutional frameworks with distinct boundaries.

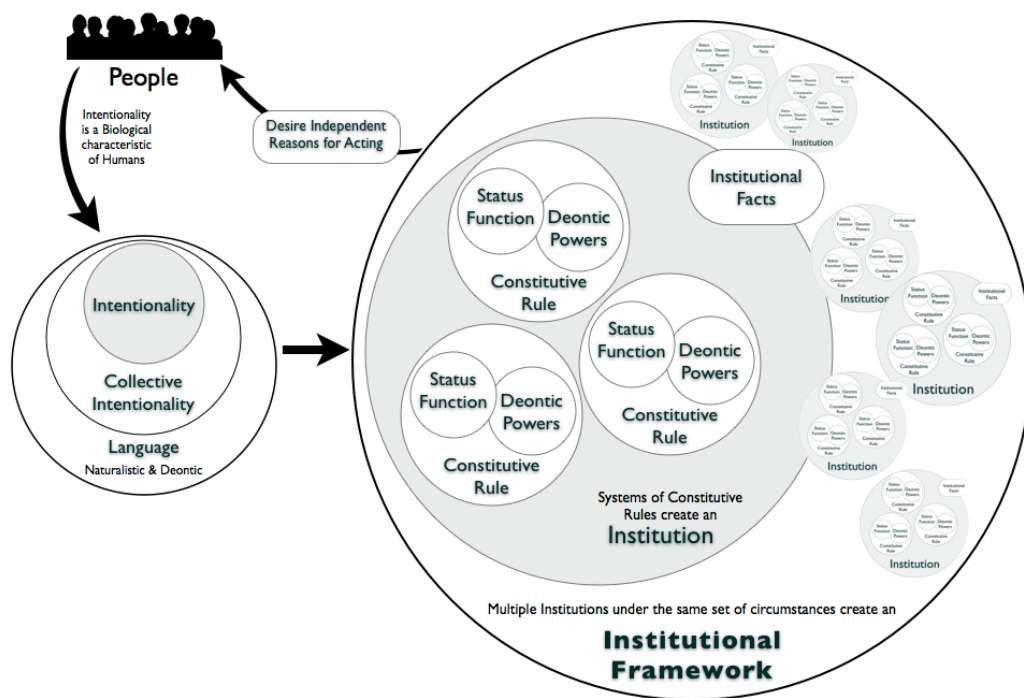
Finally it is worth noting that institutional frameworks, due to their constitution and our active role in enabling and sustaining them, are not unchanging, monolithic structures. Because they are constituted by institutions, they are rather much more like systems, back and forth flows, between the factors that shape them and the factors that they shape.

Figure 4 below shows the interrelations between the elements that create institutions and institutional frameworks, and how the cooperations between these elements in turn impose desire independent reasons for acting on people.

*Figure 4: Institutional framework and its emerging properties of desire independent reasons for acting*

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<sup>5</sup> According to O'Connor and Wong (2009), "emergent entities (properties or substances) 'arise' out of more fundamental entities and yet are 'novel' or 'irreducible' with respect to them. (For example, it is sometimes said that consciousness is an emergent property of the brain.)"



### 6.3. Institutional practice

Succinctly put, institutional practice has to do with the understanding that participants have of what is going on within particular institutional frameworks and also participants' adherence<sup>6</sup> to the frameworks in terms their emerging properties of desire independent reasons for acting. In this sense, institutional practice is a two-tier concept that requires us first to acquire an understanding of the sets of meanings and institutions that occur within institutional frameworks, and then (since institutional phenomena demand compliance by means of desire independent reasons for acting), an adherence and enactment of certain systems of institutions, and not others –all of which occurs by means of an ongoing process of socialization.

<sup>6</sup> Adherence in the sense that participants recognize, believe and follow the practices needed to sustain the framework.

Ultimately this work rests on the belief that apprehending and acknowledging certain systems of institutions, and furthermore putting them into practice by means of enacting them, are key ingredients in enabling participants to interact and communicate with one another with a certain degree of success.

In terms of what we can view as the first tier of institutional practice –understanding or recognition– several things might go unnoticed when we interact. One of those things, for instance, is the fact that we don't have to constantly agree on and negotiate with others what the value and meaning of actions, objects, states of affairs and people are. Fortunately, our encounters are not usually like the one that takes place between Alice and Humpty Dumpty in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*, where Humpty Dumpty disdainfully tells Alice: "when I use a word...it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less" (Carroll [1865/1871] 1981:169), leaving her absolutely bewildered because she, contrary to him, believes that words have limited meanings, and that this works in favor of a more fluent communication and makes understanding possible.

In terms of what we can view as the second tier –adherence and enactment– and continuing with the previous example, we also observe that when Humpty Dumpty says "it means just what I choose it to mean", he is not only understanding his words as having some specific meanings and not others, but he is executing –in other words putting into practice– a right that the institutional framework where he is functioning seems to enable him to have: that is words can actually mean what he chooses. Alice's

bewilderment, on the other hand might be caused by her lack of acknowledgment, by valuing this statement differently and putting a different system of institutions into practice, one which in fact enables her to question that he has this right to choose the meanings of his words.

The example of Alice in Wonderland is used here because it somehow illustrates the matter of what happens when participants with great variance in terms of institutional practice interact. We just said that it was fortunate that our encounters were not usually of the Alice-Humpty Dumpty type described above. But what if like Alice, we were to leave our environment, the one where we are used to making sense of things, and end up in a new setting with a whole new set of meanings assigned to things and interacting with people who all share in those meanings that are so different to our own?

Arguably it would be very difficult for anyone to enter into a new setting and begin to interact with the setting and its participants fluently when one does not fully grasp the meanings attached to things which others seem to take so lucidly for granted. *Alice in Wonderland* might not be one hundred percent illustrative of intercultural phenomena, because the main character usually interacts with individual participants so there is no sense of a large scale social interaction. However, one could easily imagine that the local *wonderlandians* are able to interact more fluently with each other than with Alice because they have an understanding of the Xs counting as Ys in Wonderland that make up the institutions there, and hence can decipher and partake with more rather than less degree of success the meanings, functions and values attached to actions, objects,



people and states of affairs in Wonderland; that is, because they possess institutional practice of the institutional frameworks at work in Wonderland.

In addition, it is worth pointing out that apart from being built on the notions of theory of institutional reality outlined in Sections 2 and 3, there are additional factors that could conceivably be included into the notion of institutional practice, namely prior experience (Kecskes 2008), common ground (Kecskes and Mey 2008; Enfield 2008), and the background (Searle 1995).

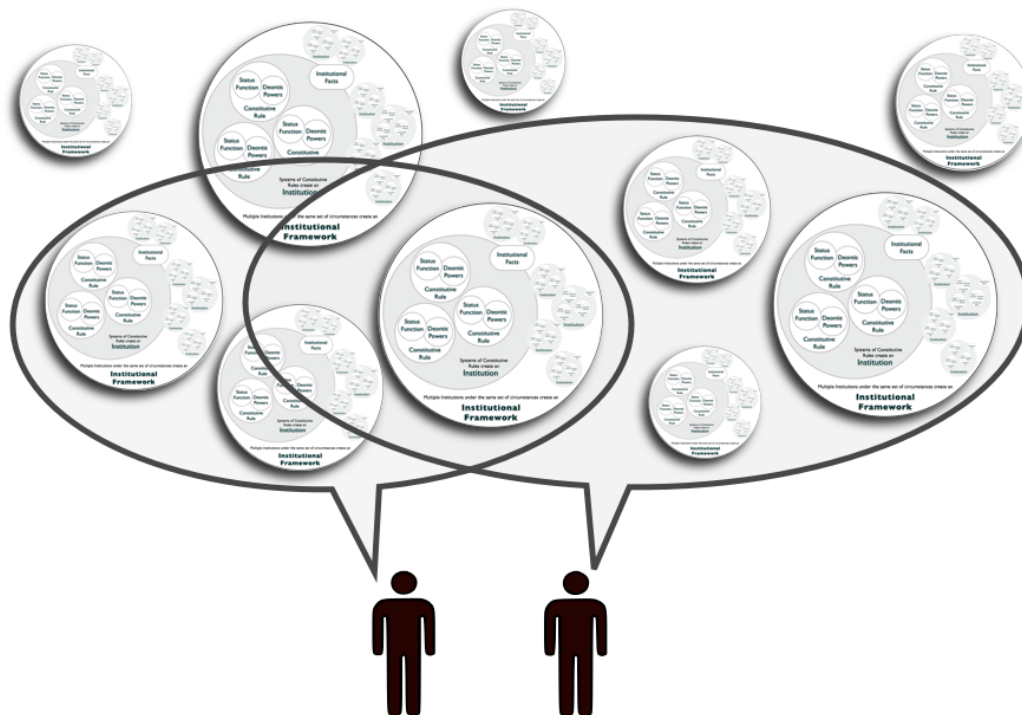


Figure 5: Institutional practice

One final trait of institutional practice is that it is complementary to institutional framework and particularly relevant to the field of intercultural pragmatics and communication. It is in keeping with a primary interest of pragmatics: focusing on

“humans communicatively using language in the context of society” (Mey 2001:175), in the sense that “users are part of a world of usage: they are never alone in their use of language, but use their language as members of a speech community that reflects the conditions of the community at large” (Mey 2001:114). Also, a proficient institutional practice of several institutional frameworks allows a sort of “emergent interactional achievement” (Kecskes and Mey 2008:3) on the part of participants taking place in the intercultural communication exchange. In this sense, proposing the construct of institutional practice has to do with the need to address the understanding and knowledge that participants have of the possible “conditions of action and interaction” (Caffi 2005:84) within different systems of meanings, specifically institutional frameworks, especially when it comes to more gradient interactions, that is when interactions occur between participants who share degrees of institutional frameworks. In this sense, institutional practice also wishes to address “that area of the speakers’ competence that reflects judgments of appropriateness on one’s own and other people’s communicative behavior...with the ‘know-how’ regarding the control and planning of, as well as feedback on, the ongoing interaction” (Caffi 2005:82) within institutional frameworks.

Finally institutional practice, as described here, is linked and derived from the institutional framework because, since the institutional framework allows for some meanings to emerge while reining in others for an X action, object and state of affair, that makes meaning particularly situated, (Gee 2005; Mey, 2001) that is, “grounded in

actual practices and experiences” (Gee 2005:53) of both the participants and the observers who share in the knowledge and practices of the context. In this sense the behavior’s meaning is tied both to the conceptual framework of the interpreter as well as to the institutional framework where the behavior takes place.

## **7. A plausible example for exploring institutional frameworks and institutional practice in intercultural communication: The Case of Amy Chua’s ‘Chinese’ parenting style in the United States**

### *7.1. Background*

In this section we will present the case that we wish to apply our two constructs to and explore its relevance and relation to intercultural communication and pragmatics.

In early 2011 the book *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* came out in the United States causing quite a stir. The initial and subsequent uproar was triggered by several articles coming out, mainly in the press, reviewing the book and explaining that the author was championing a form of parenting which was labelled at the time, “extreme parenting,”<sup>7</sup> (Kolbert 2011) which basically rests on the premise that “tough love is key to raising

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<sup>7</sup> For reference on the matter of “extreme parenting” see debate published in The New York Times on January 31, 2011 titled “Is Extreme Parenting Effective?” Retrieved from: <http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/01/13/is-extreme-parenting-effective?>

successful children”<sup>8</sup>. We believe that the debate is relevant from an intercultural perspective, and for that reason also believe it is a relevant case in point for the application of our two constructs: It depicts both how institutional frameworks are brought about by the dynamic interaction of different institutions –at once brought about by different meanings, values and functions being assigned particular phenomena– and how having common institutional practice within institutional frameworks helps participants in the communicative process.

The book’s author, Amy Chua, is a Yale professor and a first-generation, American-born Chinese-descendant whose parents immigrated to the United States in 1960. In her book she briefly depicts her family history and heritage and describes the hardships her parents endured when they first arrived to the United States of America, a foreign country to them where they could hardly speak the local language. They went to the USA to seek a better life, and in the meantime lived off of their student scholarships and were not able to pay for heating during their first two winters in Boston. Despite the initial hardship, however, Chua’s account portrays a family who prevailed and was able to succeed and get ahead both personally and professionally.

In her book Chua conveys a sense of pride in her family’s heritage and history and in the sacrifice, toil and endeavor of her parents in raising her and her sisters to be successful achievers in their particular undertakings and within their specific

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<sup>8</sup> Debate appearing in the New York Times’ section “Room for Debate” on extreme parenting on January 13, 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/01/13/is-extreme-parenting-effective>

disciplines. She also recalls her awareness of the differences between her sisters and herself in comparison with their classmates in their midwestern school. She and her sisters took Chinese food to school for lunch, instead of sandwiches, they were only allowed to speak Chinese at home, receiving a whack for every English word their parents caught them uttering, they drilled the piano and math at home after school, they were not allowed to go on sleepovers and they were neither rewarded for getting grades lower than As nor for coming in second place.

After having grown up under this parenting style, then marrying and having her own children, Chua and her husband –who is not of Chinese origin– decided to apply the same parental guidelines on their own two daughters that were used on Amy Chua and her sisters while they were growing up: they decided to raise their daughter's, according to Chua's own words, "Chinese style".

Amy Chua is a self-described "Chinese Mother" or "Tiger Mother," and she embraces and subscribes to the parental practices her parents imposed on her. For Chua this type of upbringing, among other things, enables children to develop a strong character, have high expectations for themselves, acquire the work ethics that will help them succeed.

In her book she writes, "A lot of people wonder how Chinese parents raise such stereotypically successful kids. They wonder what these parents do to produce so many math whizzes and music prodigies, what its like inside the family, and whether they could do it too. Well, I can tell them, because I've done it. Here are some things my daughters, Sophia and Louisa [Lulu], were never allowed to do:

- attend a sleepover
- have a playdate
- be in a school play
- complain about not being in a school play
- watch TV or play computer games
- choose their own extracurricular activities
- get any grade less than an A
- not be the No. 1 student in every subject except gym and drama
- play any instrument other than the piano or violin
- not play the piano or violin.

The publication of her book and her advocacy and details of the parenting style she advocates and describes as ‘Chinese’ triggered tremendous uproar in the United States. So much so that Chua had to go on several television shows and The Wall Street Journal featured an article Chua wrote<sup>9</sup> clarifying and explaining what her intentions were with this book, clarifying that her book was not meant as a parenting manual but was a personal memoir, and she described her depiction of herself and her situation as humorous and not to be taken with the degree of “intensity” that people had had to it.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Chua, Amy. The Tiger Mother Responds to Readers. The Wall Street Journal ([wsj.com](http://www.wsj.com)). January 13, 2011. Retrieved from: <http://blogs.wsj.com/ideas-market/2011/01/13/the-tiger-mother-responds-to-readers/>

<sup>10</sup>Chang, Juju; Wild, Anna; Behrendt, Taylor 'Tiger Mom' Didn't 'Expect This Level of Intensity.' *ABC NEWS* ([abcnews.go.com](http://abcnews.go.com)), January. 26, 2011. Retrieved from <http://abcnews.go.com/US/tiger-mom-amy-chua-controversial-book-parenting-guide/story?id=12767305>

One of the reasons Chua had to go on so many television and radio interviews<sup>11 12 13 14</sup>  
<sup>15 16 17</sup> was that she received harsh criticisms from the American public and even death  
threats<sup>18</sup> due to the parenting style, and anecdotal evidence of the parenting style she  
champions so spiritedly in her book, and which she uses to contrast so sharply to how  
Americans raise their own children. Chua, on the US hardcover edition of her book  
writes “This was supposed to be a story of how Chinese parents are better at raising kids  
than Western ones. But instead, it’s about a bitter clash of cultures...” It’s quite likely  
that even as she wrote these lines she didn’t imagine or foresee just how much more the  
cultures would continue clashing after the publication of her book.

## *7.2. Institutional frameworks and practice in our case study*

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<sup>11</sup> The Today Show interview with Meredith Viera on January 11, 2011; retrieved from: [http://shanghaiist.com/2011/01/14/amy\\_tiger\\_mom\\_chua\\_explains\\_herself.php](http://shanghaiist.com/2011/01/14/amy_tiger_mom_chua_explains_herself.php)

<sup>12</sup> The Colbert Show interview with Stephen Colbert on January 25, 2011; retrieved from: <http://thecolbertreport.cc.com/videos/2lr90o/amy-chua>

<sup>13</sup> The Today Show interview with with Ann Curry; retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oPIhIDMFkWY>

<sup>14</sup> Good Morning America on January 26, 2011; retrieved from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GAel\\_qRfKx8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GAel_qRfKx8)

<sup>15</sup> The Charlie Rose Show on March 1, 2011; retrieved from: <http://www.charlierose.com/view/interview/11510>

<sup>16</sup> CNN interview with Erin Burnett on January 4, 2012; retrieved from: <http://amychua.com/media-appearances/>

<sup>17</sup> NPR interview on January 13, 2011; retrieved from: <http://www.npr.org/2011/01/11/132833376/tiger-mothers-raising-children-the-chinese-way>

<sup>18</sup> Zernike, Kate. Retreat of the ‘Tiger Mother.’ *The New York Times*. Published January 14, 2011; retrieved from: <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/16/fashion/16Cultural.html?pagewanted=all>

To illustrate the application of how the two constructs could be put to use in intercultural communication we will briefly analyze a specific section of her book where Chua addresses and reflects on the matter of behaving in a particular way –a particularly different way, we should rather say– when it comes to raising her children within American society and in the context of what is a widely accepted form of parenting in the U.S.A.

In her book Chua writes,

...Chinese parenting is incredibly lonely—at least if you’re trying to do it in the West, where you’re on your own. You have to go up against an entire value system—rooted in the Enlightenment, individual autonomy, child development theory, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—and there’s no one you can talk to honestly, not even people you like and deeply respect.

For example, when Sophia and Lulu were little, what I used to dread most was when other parents invited one of them over for a playdate. Why why why this terrible Western institution? I tried telling the truth once, explaining to another mother that Lulu had no free time because she had to practice violin. But the woman couldn’t absorb this. I had to resort to the kinds of excuses that Westerners find valid: eye appointments, physical therapy, community service. At a certain point, the other mother got a hurt look on her face and began treating me



icily, as if I thought Lulu were too good for her daughter. It really was a clash of worldviews. After fending off one playdate invitation, I couldn't believe it when another one would immediately come along. "How about Saturday?"—Saturday was the day before Lulu's lesson with Miss Tanaka in New York—"or two Fridays from today?" From their point of view, Western mothers just couldn't comprehend how Lulu could be busy every afternoon, for the whole year.

(2011:25)

The relevance of analyzing the above account by applying the institutional approach being laid out in this work could perhaps be best viewed by looking into what one might miss by the application of an analysis solely at the utterance level.

When Chua describes how when interacting with the other mother she tried to tell the truth once about Lulu not being able to attend a playdate because she was busy every afternoon and weekend practicing the violin, while having the other mother insist repeatedly, until Chua resorted to "valid excuses", one might be able to speculate that the actual conversations that took place left few traces of the profound differences and lack of rapport taking place in the encounters. Interestingly, we can already see how deontic powers and desire independent reasons for action are functioning here: Chua is forced to make up "valid excuses" to somehow conform to the demands of the surrounding "Western-American" childrearing framework.

By viewing the situation through an institutional lens, so to speak, one will appreciate instead that there are clear distinctions between the systems of institutions with regard to parenting that exist within the United States and the one Amy Chua adheres to through her advocacy and practice. These distinctions draw sharp contrasts, and may potentially account for a profound lack of understanding between the two parts, regardless of the fact that indeed they do share and adhere to many of the same institutions.

There are countless institutions at work in daily interactions and they are so taken for granted that they are practically imperceptible. In the above encounter, which Amy Chua is describing, there are institutions that are common to both speakers, but there are also institutions that they do not share. Common institutions between the two frameworks, for instance, are making and accepting excuses, friendship, not to mention the Gregorian calendar and the English language they both use to speak to each other. Divergent institutions, most saliently include, the playdate and violin practice as forms of occupation for children for instance.

For Chua playing the violin, or the piano for that matter, seems to have immense value, she believes this is the sort of activity that instills hard work, tenacity and discipline into children, and also provides rewarding experiences and a sense of accomplishment after painstaking effort in mastering a piece of music, or giving a concert in front of an admiring audience. Playdates on the other hand, to Chua at least, seem to be a waste of

time and talent, and a distraction from activities that form a strong and resilient character.

For the other mother in Chua's story, and arguably a large portion of American parents, playdates and sleepovers seem to be valuable because, as we will see when we analyze and discuss the conceptualizations of parenting for the Western parenting approach, they present children with opportunities for building important social skills that will later enable them to cope with the difficult intricacies of a demanding society which values socialability. According to New York Times columnist David Brooks (2011), who wrote an article criticizing Chua's parenting approach,

Practicing a piece of music for four hours requires focused attention, but it is nowhere near as cognitively demanding as a sleepover with 14-year-old girls. Managing status rivalries, negotiating group dynamics, understanding social norms, navigating the distinction between self and group — these and other social tests impose cognitive demands that blow away any intense tutoring session or a class at Yale. Yet mastering these arduous skills is at the very essence of achievement. Most people work in groups. We do this because groups are much more efficient at solving problems than individuals.

(Brooks 2011)

At the beginning of his article Brooks also interestingly writes, “sometime early last week, a large slice of educated America decided that Amy Chua is a menace to society.” This assertion seems to go side by side with Chua’s own assertion presented at the beginning of this section where she says that Chinese parenting is a lonely endeavor “at least if you are doing it in the West.” And what these two statements together may reveal to this analysis is that the debate and outrage which followed the publication of Chua’s book may be caused in part because in fact “a large slice” of American parents mostly adheres to one set of institutions when it comes to parenting and Chua mostly adheres to another, rather different, set of institutions when it comes to parenting.

That is, more than framing these issues in ethnic or national terms as East vs. West or America vs. China, they may as well be framed in terms of thinking: what institutions are at play under a certain set of circumstances and who subscribes and enacts them? Why? Because in a deeper analysis it is likely that we will find that there are other people, from other ethnicities, other backgrounds, and other nationalities who endorse the same belief system that Chua advocates and who put them into practice regularly. Being from a particular country or being of a specific ethnicity doesn’t necessarily determine what systems of institutions we will subscribe to and enact –or practice–. Furthermore, the institutional frameworks that we cope with are in constant dynamic evolution.

Finally, the force, or as Searle would say, the deontic power, that derives from of being immersed within an institutional framework and somehow not upholding the demands

imposed on participants via the enactment of a corresponding institutional practice is perhaps best evidenced in the fact that after the publication of her book, and subsequent controversy, Chua spent many months touring and visiting very prominent morning shows, late night shows and radio shows to explain her intentions with the book. In these interviews the hosts described the “outrage” that the book elicited among American parents and described her ideas as “controversial”. Chua in these interviews defended her parenting style and her decisions as a mother, but she also tried to tone down the message that her parenting style leads to more successful children, she insisted throughout these interviews that her book was a memoir, not to be taken literally or as a recipe for parenting and also that the type of parenting she advocates is one where toughness and strictness is coupled with unconditional love. Moreover, she repeatedly reminded viewers and listeners that she came from an immigrant family who loves the United States and treasure American traditional values.

### *7.3. Relevance of this case for supporting the two constructs*

Child bearing is one of the most natural and universal experiences that human beings can come across throughout their lifetime and yet the process of child-rearing is a phenomenon that entails and carries along with it fundamental humanly constructed values and networks of signification as well. When a child is born, not only is a genetic code passed down (in the case of biological parenting) to the child, but also parents prepare to pass down onto their children particular sets of beliefs, values, and world-views.

Education and child-rearing are fundamental forms of passing on the different ways of understanding the world, and since there are many ways of understanding the world, there will be many ways of understanding and implementing child-rearing and parenting. Usually parenting and child-rearing involve undertakings of both a private and social order: private because they take place within the home, and social because a large portion, if not all, of the beliefs, values and world-views that care-takers and parents teach and pass onto children are socially shared by a wider social group, which go well beyond the boundaries of the home.

The subsequent controversy brought about by the publication of Amy Chua's book *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* is a case in point to carry out our study because it illustrates well what might happen when a person does not fully operate in accordance to the system of values and meanings that we have here called institutional framework and, rather, advocates, believes and enacts practices that are more appropriate for other institutional frameworks.

An institutional framework, it is worthy of calling to mind, is a set of institutions –that is, things that have the meanings, values and functions that come into being by having been collectively and intentionally agreed upon by group of people and which have deontic powers– taking place under a particular set of circumstances.

The institutional frameworks that will be dealt with in this study are 'Chinese' parenting style in the US and 'Western' parenting style in the US. It is worth noting at this point, however, that these two labels are provided by the debate in question, and not by the

researcher. However, the researcher decided to leave the labels as where being presented in the debate for consistency reasons and therefore will be marked by single inverted commas throughout this work.

Arguably, framing the two parenting styles that are juxtaposed in the debate with the terms ‘Chinese’ and ‘Western’ could infuse the debate with culturally charged notions – in the more traditional sense of culture– that sway the debate towards talking about countries and ethnicities engaging in particular practices, however, these are the actual terms that have been used in the debate, so they already are an indication of a persistent tendency to frame issues in “cultural” or “ethnic” terms. One of the desired outcomes of this work would be to evidence the need to open up new ways of packaging webs of meaning together and going beyond the traditional “cultural” understanding of things. Another outlook on the matter at hand might frame the issue in terms of child-rearing, not by citizens of particular countries or members of particular ethnicities, but by people who believe and enact parenting following particular patterns regardless of nationality, country of birth, or ethnicity.

It could be the case that different forms of understanding and enacting parenting might be assembled together and packaged into different cultural and ethnic forms. That is, culture might be a useful category for understanding different forms of parenting styles: parents from a particular culture or ethnicity might be prone to do and teach certain things to their children and not others, for instance. However, how could we account for those circumstances, where it seems the systems of signification and value are not

strictly connected to people in terms of their ethnicity, nationality, and culture, but in terms of a shared understanding, affinity, recognition, and advocacy through acknowledgement and practice of precisely those systems of meaning and values?

The model and constructs put forth in this work we hope will allow an alternative outlook of those instances since the institutional framework is assembled around the notion of concurring institutions, and institutions and their associated values and functions are built by means of collective and intentional agreement of people, not necessarily bound together by a similar ethnicity, but by a bond that produces the collaborative upholding of the institutional facts that structure the institutional framework.

By using the case at hand as a platform to look into these issues one of the resulting outcomes we hope to evidence is that the practices of what Amy Chua refers to in her book as “Chinese parenting” and “Western parenting” are misleading labels. Amy Chua herself acknowledges this in her book when she writes:

I'm using the term "Chinese mother" loosely. I know some Korean, Indian, Jamaican, Irish and Ghanaian parents who qualify too. Conversely, I know some mothers of Chinese heritage, almost always born in the West, who are not Chinese mothers, by choice or otherwise. I'm also using the term "Western parents" loosely. Western parents come in all varieties.



All the same, even when Western parents think they're being strict, they usually don't come close to being Chinese mothers. For example, my Western friends who consider themselves strict make their children practice their instruments 30 minutes every day. An hour at most. For a Chinese mother, the first hour is the easy part. It's hours two and three that get tough.

(Chua, 2011:1)

Hence the practices described as 'Chinese' and 'Western' might not actually be exclusive to people who "belong" to those particular cultural or ethnical categories, but instead could potentially be enacted by people who are not, by the traditional definition of culture, part of those ethnicities: parents born and raised in the West could potentially engage in so-called 'Chinese' parenting practices and vice-versa. Going beyond linguistic, cultural and ethnic categories and attempting to understand intercultural exchanges as something that is not necessarily linked to the correspondence between people who belong to different social groups that have a common national or cultural tradition and language might be useful to explain some of the phenomena that is going on in the debate, and that's where we hope the constructs of institutional framework and institutional practice might become useful.

Finally, an underlying goal of this study is evidencing, by means of the case, that an analysis of other components in the interactive process are key to understanding aspects of communication in general, and intercultural communication specifically. In the case,

not just what people say is of utmost relevance, but also other discursive elements, or that “other stuff” that Gee refers to (2005:26). People in this sense, enact certain practices and adhere to or recognize certain meanings, not just by saying, but also by doing specific things, or behaving in particular ways which make a statement as to the institutions they advocate, embrace and perpetuate through their actions.

## **8. Statement of the problem, hypotheses and research objectives**

### *8.1. Statement of the problem*

The study of the case we have just presented in section 7, will aim at providing evidence that by not adhering or conforming to essential principles, or shared collective meanings, and enacting divergent or incompatible practices of an institutional framework, possible misunderstandings and antagonisms could take place in the communicative process. The case of Amy Chua’s enacting, and writing a prominent book endorsing the practices of a parenting style so divergent from a widely accepted form of parenting style in the USA, illustrates an underlying problem of pragmatic intercultural communication. By asserting and upholding ‘Chinese’ parenting practices which is at odds with a larger, more widely accepted pool of beliefs and principles regarding parenting practices in the US, namely ‘Western’ parenting, Amy Chua antagonizes what David Brooks (2011) called “a large slice of educated America.”

As we will see in the results section, the two parenting styles present within the debate are to a greater or lesser degree, recognizable by participants taking part in it, but they are conceptualized differently, they are assigned different meanings, that is. With this in mind, it is plausible to hypothesize that these participants make sense of the actions, objects, and states of affairs taking place from the perspective of the concurring sets of meanings in the institutional framework where they draw their own beliefs from. This as a result may produce challenges in communication and understanding if and when the sets meanings and beliefs of one group are divergent and perhaps even irreconcilable or antagonistic with the sets of meanings and beliefs of another group.

In terms of intercultural communication, the underlying problem in this debate is threefold: The first element of the matter at hand is that there exist two different visions of what parenting is, or ought to be, namely there are two different conceptualizations of parenting: the ‘Chinese’ and the ‘Western’. The second element of the issue is that the people participating in the debate, recognize these conceptualizations not only by acknowledging their existence but also, to a certain extent, by allocating value judgements to each, assuming and implying, if not directly stating, that one approach to parenting is better, more valid, or “superior” than the other. The third element of the problem can be framed by seeing that one of the institutional frameworks at work is more widely recognized and in this sense may be part of a prevailing way of thinking in the USA, and there is a direct infringement of conventional parenting institutions within that framework on the part of one of the players in the debate, in this case, Amy Chua.

## *8.2. Hypotheses*

In view of the above, we propose the following three hypotheses for the purpose of this work:

**Hypothesis 1:** We will find differences in conceptualizations of childrearing, and schooling and education, and the meanings ascribed to them, when comparing ‘Chinese’ parenting and ‘Western’ parenting beliefs.

By reviewing the differences in conceptualizations for ‘childrearing’ and ‘schooling and education’ and the meanings ascribed to them in the ‘Western’ and ‘Chinese’ traditions, we will not only verify the existence of these two institutions but also validate that each tradition assigns different meanings to them and regards them differently. Also, with the co-occurrence and emergence of particular meanings for each we can begin to evidence the existence of the notion of institutional frameworks. Hypothesis 1 is based on the premise that institutions are the type of phenomenon that would not exist if it were not for a group of people giving them meaning, and furthermore they have binding qualities. They need groups of people to create and sustain their existence through collective endowment of significance, value and relevance to them and once created they need to be recognized, sustained, adhered to and enacted, which we will in turn attempt at validating with hypothesis 2 and 3.

**Hypothesis 2:** We will find that participants taking part in the parenting debate will recognize and value at least one of the two parenting styles by deliberately mentioning some of the conceptualizations outlined in hypothesis 1, which are representative of ‘Chinese’ parenting and ‘Western’ parenting styles in the USA.

Hypothesis 2 will help us evidence the existence of the institutional frameworks at play within the debate itself, that is not just conceptually, but within people’s observations. By observing participant recognition and value of elements and conceptualizations of the two parenting styles described in hypothesis 1 we will be able to validate that the constitutive elements which make up each institution, as well as the institutions themselves, also exist in practice, that is, within the debate itself. Because of the nature of institutions, by recognizing and assigning a particular value to at least one of the institutions at play, participants are contributing to substantiate its existence. Recognition and value in this hypothesis will also be used to help us explore which of the two parenting styles is more prevalent in the context of the USA.

**Hypothesis 3:** We will find that the conceptualization of parenting that Amy Chua mostly recognizes, values and enacts, as put forward in her book, conforms more suitably with the ‘Chinese’ conceptualization of parenting and diverges from the ‘Western’ conceptualization of parenting.

Hypothesis 3 aims to provide evidence that the ensuing debate after the publication of Amy Chua's book can be attributed, at least in part, to Chua's advocacy, adherence and enactment of a conflicting parenting institutional practice within a larger, more widely accepted, parenting institutional framework. With this hypothesis we expect to provide evidence that Amy Chua not only mostly recognizes and positively values, but also adheres to and enacts, the 'Chinese' conceptualization of parenting rather than the 'Western' conceptualization of parenting. This finding would enable us to infer that Amy Chua is effectively enacting a distinct and contrasting parenting institutional practice, one whose "institutions" are more associated to the 'Chinese' parenting model than to the 'Western' parenting model. Institutional practice, as we saw when we outlined the two constructs in section 6.3, is not only determined by the understanding of the significance, value and relevance associated to the meanings of a particular institutional frameworks, but also determined by the adherence and the enactment of the systems of meaning and institutions within that particular framework, as well as to the binding qualities that they have.<sup>19</sup>

Enactment in this hypothesis, as we will specify in section 9.3 below, will be verified by discursively looking at the *activities* building task –as described by Gee (2005)– that Amy Chua both puts into practice herself or endorses.

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<sup>19</sup> As we mentioned in section 6.3, institutions, besides being humanly constructed and sustained, also have binding qualities.

### 8.3. Research objectives

To verify hypothesis 1 of our work, the first task that will be carried out is an identification of the two institutional frameworks involved in the debate. Our starting point for this will be the structuring of the two parenting institutional frameworks in the debate, namely ‘Chinese’ parenting style and ‘Western’ parenting style, by way of analyzing the conceptualizations that surround each one around two core institutions common to the issue of parenting: 1) Childrearing and 2) Learning, Schooling and Education. The justification for the selection of these two institutions will be described in section 9.3, and their description and analysis will be presented in section 11, where we will explore and examine existing literature discussing parenting beliefs and practices regarding these two parenting institutions.

We believe that we will find different functions, values and meanings attached to the beliefs that revolve around childrearing on the one hand, and learning, schooling and education on the other, for the two parenting styles in question, namely ‘Chinese’ and ‘Western’. This bifurcation of meanings and functions assigned to the ‘Western’ and ‘Chinese’ conceptualizations of childrearing and learning and schooling and education gives way for understanding that they are indeed constituted by distinct and often divergent constitutive elements and hence conforming two distinct institutional frameworks.

To verify hypothesis 2, the second task of this work, will be to select the first 50 relevant comments found in the Wall Street Journal article by Amy Chua titled *Why*

*Chinese Mothers are Superior* published on January 8, 2011 (Appendix A) and the first 50 relevant comments found in The New York Times article by David Brooks titled *Why Amy Chua is a Wimp* published on January 17, 2011 (Appendix B) to discursively analyze them and determine which framework the participants taking part in the debate recognize and value.

Finally, to verify hypothesis 3, the third task of this work will be to discursively analyze elements of Amy Chua's parenting practices and beliefs, as laid out in her book, *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*. A juxtaposition of her practices and beliefs to the more widely accepted in the USA 'Western' institutional framework and to the 'Chinese' institutional framework, as will both be identified in this work in section 10, will be carried out as part of the concluding remarks for this work.

In our concluding remarks, we will therefore also attempt to assess the correspondence between, on the one hand, Chua's parenting beliefs and practices, and on the other, the 'Western' parenting institution. This will be done to determine if the resulting clash between Chua and a large portion of American parents after the publication of her book is plausibly the product of an incompatibility between the constitutive elements of two opposing institutional frameworks and also of Chua's recognition, advocacy and enactment of practices that are viewed as antagonistic to a prevailing institutional parenting framework in the United States.



## **PART IV. Methods Section**



## **9. Methodology**

### *9.1. Case study research*

The type of research that we will be conducting is a case study. The main justification for using the case study in this work is that it provides a basis for the assessment of the constructs laid out in section 7 of the theoretical framework of this work. According to Yin, case studies “are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes” (1984:21). Since one of the main tasks of this work is to evaluate the relevance and significance of the two proposed theoretical constructs for the study of intercultural communication, and not to extrapolate the findings to a general population, we believe the case study methodology is a suitable way to structure the overall research design.

In putting the constructs under scrutiny we will undertake an empirical investigation that takes place in a particular context, under a particular set of circumstances and with a particular set of interactants, attempting to deal, as Yin (1984:23) would put it, with “the entangled situation between phenomenon and context” present in the particular contemporary event we will be analyzing. In this sense, case study research is also relevant because according to Yin (1984:23), “a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used.”

## 9.2. Corpus definition and temporal delimitation

The sources of data we will use for this work, namely the corpus, will be constituted by the three main records specified below.

To verify hypothesis 3, we will use Amy Chua's book *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, where Chua first expounds her parenting style and practices. After she published her book, various articles came out presenting and describing the book to the public, most notably an article published in the Wall Street Journal (henceforth WSJ) titled *Why Chinese Mothers Are Superior*, written by Amy Chua herself. This article, as well as her book, elicited a good deal of controversy, qualifying to her parenting practices as "abusive" and "counterproductive"<sup>20</sup>. Many comments were posted on the WSJ website, and many other articles were published with regard to the matter in multiple media outlets.<sup>21 22</sup>

With the above in mind, to verify hypothesis 2, two sources will be used: Related comments made on the WSJ article, as well as comments made on another article published in the New York Times (henceforth NYT) titled *Amy Chua Is a Wimp*, written

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<sup>20</sup> Williams, Donna Marie. A Black Mother's Response to Amy Chua: We're Tiger Moms, Too. *The Huffington Post*, ([huffingtonpost.com](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/donna-marie-williams/black-tiger-mother-responds_b_814457.html)) January 27, 2011. Retrieved from: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/donna-marie-williams/black-tiger-mother-responds\\_b\\_814457.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/donna-marie-williams/black-tiger-mother-responds_b_814457.html)

<sup>21</sup> Kolbert, Elizabeth. America's Top Parent: What's behind the "Tiger Mother" craze? *The New Yorker*, January 31, 2011 issue. Retrieved from: <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/01/31/americas-top-parent>

<sup>22</sup> Murphy Paul, Annie. Tiger Moms: Is Tough Parenting Really the Answer? *Time Magazine* ([time.com](http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2043477,00.html)) January 20, 2011. Retrieved from: <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2043477,00.html>

by journalist and political and cultural commentator David Brooks. In his article Brooks offers an alternative vision of Amy Chua's parenting style, one perhaps more akin to aspects of what we here label the 'Western' parenting style, and offers criticism to her parenting approach.

In terms of the composition of the corpus for hypothesis 2, a selection of the first 50 relevant comments from subjects commenting on the articles will be extracted from each article, amounting to 100 relevant commenters and comments selected chronologically for the purposes of verifying our hypothesis. To select the relevant comments from the subjects commenting on the articles we examined a total of 250 comments and singled out those relevant based on whether the participants addressed topics related to the main issue related to this work, that is if they addressed parenting issues related specifically to aspects of childrearing and learning, schooling and education. No other bias was used in the selection of the comments that we used for the corpus of hypothesis 2. In terms of describing the commenters, people commenting on the NYT article specified being located mostly in the United States, specifically 48 commenters said to be located in the US. The commenters from the WSJ article, on the other hand, unfortunately were not required to specify their location, so this datum is missing from WSJ commenters. In terms of origin, that is whether the commenters could be identified as being from a 'Western' background or 'Chinese' background, we looked into how the commenters identified themselves, and we found that all in all, 17 people could be identified as having a 'Western' origin, and whereas only 6 people

could be identified as having a ‘Chinese’ origin (mostly found in the WSJ article). With the above in mind, we do detect a tendency of there being mostly commenters located in the USA and having a slight tendency of being of ‘Western’ origin.

Last but not least, to verify the hypothesis 1 will use books and scholarly articles, on the topic of parenting ‘Chinese’ style and ‘Western’ style –focusing on practices of so-called Chinese or Asian parents and Western parents–. We will examine these sources, which despite not being directly derived from the debate, as are the sources we have selected to verify hypotheses 2 and 3, we believe will provide conceptual basis for building and extracting features and themes –indeed conceptualizations– related to the two main institutions we have decided to analyze for the purpose of this work, namely childrearing and learning, schooling and education for both the ‘Chinese’ and the ‘Western’ parenting styles.

With regard to the validity of the aforementioned records for the case study research, according to Yin (1984:79), such “documentary information is relevant to every case study topic” and includes within the suitable varieties of documentation things such as “news clippings and other articles appearing in the mass media.” (1984:79)

Also since most of the sources for this study are online sources, we deem it appropriate to account for the validity of this medium as well. The use of the Internet to collect data for this study rests on the premise that computer mediated communication (CMC) provides a space where “rich and complex social experience” is viable. (Hine 2000:16) Indeed Hine argues to the effect that meaningful social and cultural relations can exist

and be reflected in cyberspace, “between the poster of one newsgroup message and the author of a response, a space opened, and that space was a cultural context” (2000:17).

In terms of the temporal boundaries of our data, both the WSJ and the NYT articles appeared in the news in January 2011 –January 8, 2011 and January 17, 2011 respectively– immediately after the release of Amy Chua’s book. In terms of the comments selected from each of the two article, the WSJ comments range from January 8th to January 25th 2011, and the comments from the NYT article are all from January 18th 2011. These comments are the ones made closest to the publication date of the two articles, and the dates where most activity was registered.

### *9.3. Procedure*

The structure of our research is prescribed by an adherence to the three hypotheses mentioned in section 8.2 and verifying the hypotheses we have proposed will lead the course of our ensuing work. We have already described the corpus we will be using in section 9.2 and in this section we will describe how the corpus data was organized for verifying our hypotheses.

For hypothesis 1, which consists of delineating the constitutive elements and grouping them into themes, considering the principles, tenets, belief systems and behaviors characteristic of each of the two parenting institutional frameworks, we read a selection of books and scholarly articles on the topic of ‘Chinese’ and ‘Western’ parenting in order to assess the constitutive elements and conceptualizations behind these two

parenting styles. In approaching our readings, we first found common elements arise surrounding both parenting frameworks. Based on these commonalities we decided to group the first type parenting concerns into general matters regarding “childrearing” and the second type into concerns with respect to “learning, schooling and education.” The persistence of these two general matters of interest in both of the parenting discourses we examined prompted us to formulate them as the two parenting institutions upon which we would structure our two institutional frameworks. As a result of our analysis, we will present a table that summarizes our findings for hypothesis 1 at the end of section 10 of this work.

For verifying hypothesis 2 and 3, which consist of observing participant recognition, and value in the case of hypothesis 2 and recognition, value and enactment in the case of hypothesis 3 of the ‘Chinese’ and ‘Western’ conceptualizations of parenting (and to the parenting institutional frameworks to which they correspond outlined in section 10), we will make use of Gee’s (2005) discourse analysis methodology, and we will apply it to the pertinent corpus just described in section 9.2. According to Gee,

We continually and actively build and rebuild our worlds not just through language but through language used in tandem with actions, interactions, non-linguistic symbol systems, objects, tools, technologies, and distinctive ways of thinking, valuing, thinking, feeling and believing. Sometimes what we build is quite similar to



what we have built before; sometimes it is not. But language-in-action is always and everywhere an active building process.

(2005:10)

With the above in mind we will be using the following specific discursive elements, or “building tasks,” as specified in Gee’s methodology to verify how participant discourse in our corpus builds and sustains distinct ways of being, thinking, valuing, feeling and believing with regard to the parenting institutional frameworks we have laid out in this work:

1. **Significance:** We will apply this building task to make sense of participants’ values and beliefs with regard to the matter of parenting. According to Gee this building task helps us look at the different elements of the corpus and ask, “How is this piece of language being used to make certain things significant and not and in what ways?” (Gee 2005:11). What people find significant gives us insight into what meaning or value and what role or function a particular object, person, idea, state of affairs has and plays under particular circumstances.

2. **Identities:** We will apply this building task to make sense of participants’ attributes or roles as assigned to themselves or others with regard to the matter of parenting. According to Gee this building task helps us look at the different elements of the corpus and ask, “What identity or identities is this piece of language being used to enact?” (Gee 2005:12). The way people identify themselves and others reveals a certain embodiment

of and compliance to, or assignment thereof, the meanings and values of a broader institutional framework.

3. **Relationships:** We will apply this building task to make sense of the parent-child relationship as described by participants within the corpus. According to Gee this building task helps us look at the different elements of the corpus and ask, “What sort of relationship or relationships is this piece of language seeking to enact with others (present or not)?” (Gee 2005:12). The relationships people establish with each other and the way those relationships are framed reveals an embodiment of, or assignment thereof, the meanings and values of a broader institutional framework.

4. **Activities:** We will apply this building task in our analysis of hypothesis 3, mainly to make sense of Amy Chua’s enactment of her parenting practice seen through her efforts, and undertakings with respect to the matter of parenting within the corpus of her book. According to Gee this building task helps us look at the different elements of the corpus and ask, what activity or activities is this piece of language being used to enact? (Gee 2005:11). How people frame their actions and the actions of others gives insight into what their customs, habits, conventions, they enact as well as their conformity and adherence to the meanings and values of a broader institutional framework.

Specifically we will be using the first three building tasks –significance, identities and relationships– for the verification of hypothesis 2 and 3, and the fourth building task – activities– specifically for the verification of hypothesis 3. The first three building tasks will help us authenticate *recognition and value* of the conceptualizations, while the

fourth building task will help us authenticate *enactment* of the conceptualizations by Amy Chua.

Applying Gee's methodology for hypothesis 2 and 3 also implied breaking up the texts in lines and stanzas as he describes in his work (Gee 2005). In this sense we concur with Gee when he states that our choice in the division of texts was based on our own interpretation and criteria as researchers. According to Gee,

The way in which analysts break up a text in terms of these units represents our hypothesis about how meaning is shaped in the text ... We make structural decisions based partly on our emerging ideas about the overall themes and meaning of the text. We then use the structures (e.g. lines and stanzas) that are emerging in our analysis, to look more deeply into the text and make new guesses about themes and meaning ... In the end, a line and stanza representation of a text ... simultaneously serves two functions. First, it represents what we believe are the patterns in terms of which the speaker has shaped meanings "online" as she spoke. Second, it represents a picture of our analysis, that is, of the meanings we are attributing to the text. As analysts, we must tie back to this representation all the situated meanings and Discourse models we are attributing to the text and its context.

(2005:136)

Finally we also bring Gee to mind with regard to the uniqueness of each analysis and in the non-existence of what he calls a “lock step method to be followed in doing discourse analysis” (2005:137). In our case for instance, some building blocks included and described in his methodology were not incorporated into this work because we deemed them immaterial for the verification of our hypotheses. According to Gee (2005:137), “actual discourse analyses will rarely, if ever, fully realize the ideal model sketched.”

It is worth mentioning at this time that since the comments used for the verification of hypothesis 2 and 3 of our work will be analyzed using Gee’s methodology, the summary table which we aim at generating after analyzing the corresponding literature for hypothesis 1 will be shaped in accordance to the building blocks just described.

With regard to recognition and value of the institutions, which are the component we will be looking out for to verify hypothesis 2 and recognition, value and enactment, which are the components we will be looking out for to verify hypothesis 3: We here define recognition and value as relating to the beliefs and meanings (significance) participants in the debate manifest as assigning to the parenting phenomena they speak about –most relevantly any of the constitutive elements derived from our description of the institutions in hypothesis 1–. Participant recognition and value of parenting phenomena is also relevant for understanding views regarding the other building tasks we will be looking into, namely identity and relationships.

With regard to adherence and enactment of the institutions, which is the component we will be looking out to verify hypothesis 3, we define enactment of the institutions as

aspects related to activities carried out or endorsed by Chua in her book of any of the constitutive elements derived from our description of the institutions in hypothesis 1.



## **PART V: Results and Discussion**





## **10. Analysis of results for hypothesis 1.**

### *10.1. Verification of Hypothesis 1: 'Chinese' parenting and 'Western' parenting.'* *Review of conceptualizations of childrearing, and learning, schooling and education in both parenting styles*

Within these two institutions, namely 1) childrearing and 2) learning, schooling and education we found specific attributes and differences when we closed in on each of the parenting discourses. From this we extracted more specific features particular to each, which describe their distinct characteristics, or what we believe are constitutive elements for each parenting discourse. We labeled them as follows:

In the realm of the 'Western' childrearing institution:

- a) child-centered and child vulnerability
- b) concerns with self-esteem

In the realm of the 'Western' learning, schooling and education institution:

- c) emphasis on ability and fixed intelligence
- d) expectations and satisfaction

In the realm of the 'Chinese' childrearing institution

- a) filial piety

In the realm of the ‘Chinese’ learning, schooling and education institution

- b) emphasis on effort and self-improvement
- c) training and parental involvement

The detailed description of the above constitutive elements found for each institution will be detailed in the sections that follow. Here we look at existing literature specializing in discussing elements and characteristics of ‘Chinese’ and ‘Western’ parenting styles. We did this to examine what meanings and values are behind the institutions we have set out to understand for each parenting style, namely 1) childrearing, and 2) learning, schooling and education.

*10.2. Childrearing, and Learning, Schooling and Education: Two institutions we will focus on within the ‘Chinese’ and ‘Western’ parenting styles.*

We will now turn to examining the two institutions that we will focus on for the purposes of our study: 1) childrearing, and 2) learning, schooling and education. These two institutions are key in constituting the two institutional frameworks we view as being present in the debate, namely ‘Western parenting’ and ‘Chinese parenting’. In this section we will review literature which describe and convey features of these two parenting styles and determine whether they vary significantly in the systems of meanings they attribute to these two institutions and if so, this section will serve to explore that variation.

Before proceeding any further in the main task just outlined for this section we will briefly mention why Childrearing and Learning, Schooling and Education constitute institutions in the first place. We mentioned in section 3.3 two fundamental elements that enable the creation and existence of institutions, the first of those elements is the constitutive rule (X counts as Y in C). In the case of both Childrearing and Learning, Schooling and Education we will see that these notions not only carry different meanings and values –always depending on whether they originate and are set within the ‘Western’ frame of things or the ‘Chinese’ frame of things– but also would not exist in the form that they do were it not for a conjunction of people agreeing and understanding that, under specific circumstances, they embody the meanings they embody. The second element mentioned in section 3.3 that makes something an institution is the fact that it carries deontic powers; indeed both childrearing and learning, schooling and education bear deontic powers, that is, duties, rights, and obligations which need to be respected and observed by people who adhere to them.

*10.2.1. Constitutive elements of ‘Western’ childrearing: child-centeredness & vulnerability and concerns with self-esteem*

Historically, notions about childrearing in the USA have been in constant transformation, and under continual back and forth and reshaping (Hulbert 2004). The current widely accepted views however, according to historian Peter Stearns (2003) began to take shape at the outset of the 20th century.

According to Stearns at the turn of the century,

Many American parents, and those who advised them, began to change their ideas about children's nature, attributing to it a greater sense of vulnerability and frailty. This new view then influenced the handling of matters within the family, such as discipline and chores. It also affected the ways parents tried to mediate between children and other experiences that affected them, such as schooling and recreation. Some of our most striking practices, from grade inflation to worries about children's boredom result from the intersection of beliefs in vulnerability and the influence of wider social institutions.

(Stearns 2003:ix)

This vulnerability takes shape in a variety of parenting notions, which we will briefly outline below, and in coalescence shape into what we believe has come to be a conventional childrearing frame of mind in the USA today.

#### *10.2.1.1. Child-centered parenting and the vulnerable child*

According to Hsu,

In no other country on earth is there so much attention paid to infancy or so much privilege accorded during childhood as in the United States [...] Americans are very verbal about their children's rights. There are not only state and federal legislation to protect the young

ones, but there are also many voluntary juvenile protective associations to look after their welfare.

(1981:79)

One of the current notions regarding childrearing in the USA revolves around, and is particularly concerned with, the matter of children's vulnerability, and this hints into a broader held, more encompassing child-centered view of the parent-child relationship. Indeed, not by coincidence was the 20th century, according to Stearns (2001), labelled "the century of the child."

The late 19th century and early 20th century brought along fundamental changes in the views previously held about children's role in the family economy; according to economist Steven Horowitz at one point, "children's role in the family changed from being net economic producers to net consumers of resources" (2007:2), and parents without the need of having more children in exchange for their economic benefits, "could with fewer kids, and less need of their income, afford to invest in their education and training" (2007:2). The market and economic changes brought on during the transition between these two centuries also led to a transformation in the perception of children and childhood, morphing from the idea of economically useful to the what sociologist Viviana Zelizer referred to as "the economically worthless but emotionally priceless child" (1985:96).

These changes are not only with regards to children's role in the family economy, but also in their worth as individuals within the family and society at large. According to Hess and Hess,

Particularly in the second half of the twentieth century, the norms regarding parent-child and family relationships have been reinforced by widely disseminated theories of child development and recommended approaches to child-rearing.

(2001:315)

Such norms were a consequence of the influence of findings and widespread adoption of theories in the field of Western psychology and child development. These theories, most prominently put forward by theorists such as Sigmund Freud and Erik Erikson, proposed that parent-child relationships and the environment in which children were brought up could determine children's possibilities for thriving, and also in their development of adult mental health and a sense of self-worth. Freud on his part "stressed the powerful effects of parental relationships on human development and mental health" and asserted that "the indicators of a healthy personality are the ability to love and to work" (McCartt Hess and Hess 2001:319). Erikson on his part, proposed several phases of healthy development for individuals in which parents were instrumental in nurturing and enabling during the first years of life. According to McCartt Hess and Hess, their developmental tasks "have defined children's 'healthy'

and desirable developmental outcomes for generations of parents, teachers, and helping professionals” (2001:319)

Notably, the present-day cornerstone of the parent-child relationship in the US is the belief that what’s crucial is “what parents should do for their children” (Hsu 1981:80) and not the other way around. According to Hanson (1998), the lifestyle of the American family emphasizes the child above everything else, and asserts that children have “a great deal of say in events and in the practices of the family” (1998:105). Also, parents seem to be less interested in disciplining and regulating their children’s behavior and more with pleasing, being affectively nurturing, friendly and congenial and seeming approachable to their children. Regarding this matter journalist Elizabeth Kolbert in an article titled “Spoiled Rotten” published The New Yorker magazine cites psychologists Jean Twenge and W. Keith Campbell noting that “parents want their kids’ approval, a reversal of the past ideal of children striving for their parents’ approval” (Kolbert 2012). Writer and journalist Judith Warner describes to what extent this child-centeredness has been taken in contemporary USA in her book *Perfect Madness: Motherhood in the age of anxiety* (2006), and notes how its implementation has shaped societal ideas about parenthood and the role of parents, particularly mothers, and foisted upon them often unwelcome and distressful behaviors, attitudes and emotions toward their childrearing practices and responsibilities.

This reversal may be causing ‘Western’ parents to live their lives absorbed by their children’s needs and wants, in a way causing them to live subordinate to their children’s

material and emotional demands and requirements. This, in turn, may be consequential to the way children relate to the greater environment. Indeed, according to Hsu, the American child “expects his environment to be sensitive to him” (1981:88) and not the other way around.

The child-centered and vulnerability view seems not uncommon in the American way of thinking. Ochs and Izquierdo, for instance, note in their comparative ethnographic field research study, which juxtaposes the notion of responsibility in childhood between Matsigenka, Samoan and middle-class Los Angeles families, that “two interrelated expressions of responsibility stand out: (1) displays of children helping family members and (2) displays of family members helping children” (Ochs and Izquierdo 2009:400). Notably their study showed “many middle-class L.A. parents devoted time and energy assisting children in simple chores in a manner not observed in Matsigenka and Samoan families” (Ochs and Izquierdo 2009:392). According to the authors, these “cross-cultural differences in children helping parents and parents helping children may boil down to socialization practices *that place a different value* on children’s practical competence”. [*emphasis ours*] (Ochs and Izquierdo 2009:407). It is precisely these different values that make all the difference when it comes to understanding and behaving within institutional frameworks.

Interestingly Ochs and Izquierdo point out, when referring to the contrasts found between children helping or being helped at home, and the development of children’s sense of responsibility, dutifulness and discipline within their immediate community at



an early age that, American 20th century experts in childrearing such as Dr. Spock, “did not view children as capable of housework. but, rather advised that children help with chores to build self-esteem” (Ochs and Izquierdo 2009:401). The theme of self-esteem within the ‘Western’ childrearing framework in the USA is one that derives from the notion of vulnerability and one that we will explore in more detail in the next section.

#### *10.2.1.2. Concerns with self-esteem*

Concerns with self-esteem within the ‘Western’ childrearing style in the US also arose in the 20th century, and they “intertwined with larger notions of children’s vulnerability and the need for adult protection and support” (Stearns 2003:106). According to Stearns the trend in parental involvement with children’s self-esteem took root with the co-occurrence of three factors in post-war USA: 1) a rapid shift from factory and agricultural functions in the economy towards service-sector functions, which meant that now workers needed to add to their skills “the ability to get along with others”, and experts on the matter insisted that self-esteem was “a crucial variable in the social equation”. (Stearns 2003:108); 2) the uncertainties parents began to face regarding the quality of the family life they were providing to their children, which emerged in the middle of the 20th century. During this time divorces were on the rise and women began to join the workforce more definitively, so “whether wittingly or not expert formulations about self-esteem directly played on uncertainties about the quality of family life, even in middle-class households” (Stearns 2003:109); and finally 3) the shift from a more strict, stern parenting style to a more understanding, softer, lenient view of parenting

was put forward most prominently by Benjamin Spock in his book *Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* first published in 1946. In this new post-war view children “needed help and latitude in living up to standards, less chance to feel guilty about failure and more opportunity to express the self in the process” (Stearns 2003:109). In this sense Dr. Spock recommends parents to,

love and enjoy your children for what they are, for what they look like, for what they do, and forget about the qualities that they don't have...The children who are appreciated for what they are, even if they are homely, or clumsy, or slow, will grow up with confidence in themselves and be happy. They will have a spirit that will make the best of all the capacities that they do have, and of all the opportunities that come their way.

(Spock 2012 [1946]:631)

The importance of fostering and developing self-esteem in children, given their natural vulnerability, was further expressed by American psychologist Stanley Coopersmith. According to Coopersmith there was evidence that,

In children domination, rejection and severe punishment result in lowered self-esteem. Under such conditions [children] have fewer experiences of love and success and tend to become generally more

submissive and withdrawn (though occasionally veering to the opposite extreme of aggression and domination)

(Coopersmith 1967:45)

Interestingly a recent empirical ethnographic research study (Miller et al 2002) found that there were significant differences between the way American mothers viewed, framed and practiced the matter of self-esteem towards their children when compared to Taiwanese mothers. In fact, the researchers found that the concept and term for self-esteem, as it exists in America, did not exist in Taiwanese. According to the authors “there is no term in Mandarin Chinese or Taiwanese that translates directly as self-esteem” (2002:228), in fact one of the researchers, who grew up in Taiwan, indicated that “she first encountered the term ‘self-esteem’ in a college course in social psychology” (2002:228).

Furthermore, one of the most interesting findings of this research was the fact that when interviewed, American mothers spontaneously brought up self-esteem as an important aspect to promote and nurture in their children. According to the authors all of the American mothers interviewed in their study “said that self esteem was important to children’s development and that [they] actively try to build, cultivate, or protect their children’s self-esteem.” (Miller et al 2002:230). In fact, the authors assert that most American mothers appeared to have a pretty well clear-cut theory of childrearing and self-esteem. According to these mothers’ view,

self-esteem is either in-born or emerges in the early years of life, and it provides an essential foundation for a wide array of psychological strengths. Children who have high self-esteem are able to learn and grow with ease; they are not afraid to achieve or compete; they interact well with others and form healthy relationships.

(2002:231)

Self-esteem, however, needs to be stimulated and strengthened by parents, they believe that parents have a fundamental role in building children's self esteem. According to the authors, American mothers interviewed thought,

that self-esteem can be easily eroded, undermined, or crippled, and that parents play an important role in protecting and building children's self-esteem. In response to the question 'What role do parents play in helping children to develop self-esteem?' Mrs. Thomas concisely made several of the points that the other mothers made:

'I think it goes back to the whole praise and trying to be encouraging of those individual differences and preferences as much as possible and just making sure that they – again they always know that they are loved, that their actions might not always be the greatest but that they are always loved and that they can try to do anything they want to do, that there are no limits.'

(2002:231)

The study also gives insights into these mothers' beliefs regarding what parents should not do, to avoid the risk of crippling their children's self-esteem. According to Miller et al, "they believed that a variety of practices –such as shaming children, disciplining too harshly, or making invidious comparisons– should be avoided because they damage self-esteem" (2002:231)

*10.2.2. Constitutive elements of 'Western' learning, schooling and education: ability & fixed intelligence and expectations and satisfaction.*

In this section we will outline two constitutive elements which we found to be central and relevant to understanding the 'Western' notion of learning, schooling and education in the United States and which makes apparent fundamental distinctions from Asian structures and beliefs, as we will see in section 10.2.4

*10.2.2.1. Western' emphasis on ability and fixed intelligence*

One key element we found in our review of 'Western' conceptions with regard to learning, schooling and education is the widespread belief that academic success and high levels of achievement are facilitated, if not determined, by children's innate ability rather than continued effort<sup>23</sup>. Studies have shown that American children and their parents tend to ascribe greater emphasis on lack of ability than they do on lack of effort when it comes to providing explanations for children's low performance in academics

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<sup>23</sup> In section 11.1.4 below we will see that, contrastingly, Asians tend to place higher emphasis on effort as a factor determining academic success.

(Holloway et al 1986). And as we will see later in this section, it seems to be a driver in the structuring and organization of the American school system.

Notions of ability and effort are akin to the “entity theory of intelligence” and the “incremental theory of intelligence” described by Dweck and Leggett (1988:259). According to these authors people who hold theories related to entity intelligence view intelligence as something fixed, whereas people who hold theories related to incremental intelligence perceive intelligence as something progressive and increasable. Moreover, theories held regarding intelligence, influence learning practices, policies and outcomes. In this sense, according to an experiment conducted by Dweck and Leggett (1988), people who hold an entity theory about intelligence and believe they have low ability for a particular task will show low levels of persistence, avoid challenge for that particular task and feel helpless in the face of that particular challenge. Contrastingly, people who hold an incremental view of intelligence may or may not believe they have low ability for a particular task; this belief however, does not deter them from persevering in the task and face challenges that they believe will enable them to further learn and master the task at hand.

The entity view of intelligence as well as the learning strategies and practices that accompany it, are both according to Jose and Bellamy (2012:1000), characteristic of widely accepted US ‘Western’ views on the matter of learning. According to these authors ‘Western’ culture views intelligence as fixed, carrying with it the following consequences,

The entity theory has been found to be predictive of learned helplessness which encompasses behaviors including increased negative affect, decreased persistence and denigration of ability following failure. Failure is interpreted by someone who holds an entity view as a sign of lack of intelligence. As a consequence, he or she becomes focused on achieving successful outcomes (e.g., passing a test) rather than learning.

(2012:1000)

These issues are discussed by Stevenson and Stigler (1992) in their book *The Learning Gap: Why our schools are failing and what we can learn from Japanese and Chinese education*. According to these authors, there exists an “American belief that innate differences in intellectual ability limit what can be expected from large numbers of the country’s citizens”. (1992:94)

Widespread societal views are important to pinpoint and understand because beliefs about “effort, ability and achievement [...] have far-reaching consequences for learning and for the organization of education” (1992:95). An emphasis on ability, as opposed to effort, as a primary driver of academic success can serve to model educational policies, as well as teaching and parenting practices which can ultimately be very influential in bringing about certain outcomes in children’s academic achievement. According to Stevenson and Stigler,

In American society, learning tends to be regarded as an all-or-none process. A student who is 'bright' is expected to 'get it,' whereas 'duller' students are assumed to lack the requisite ability for ever learning certain material. Under an 'ability' model, motivation to try hard depends to a great extent on the individual child's assessment of whether he has the ability to succeed [...] Under the ability model [...] errors may be interpreted as an indication of failure, and may imply that the potential to learn is lacking.

(1992:102)

Furthermore,

In American classrooms, teachers go to great lengths to prevent failure. Rather than have children risk failing a task that may be difficult, teachers tend to give easier tasks to students they judge to be of lower ability.

(1992:103)

Schools and teachers are not alone in this regard, parental beliefs are also consistent in placing greater emphasis on ability: In a study conducted by Stevenson and Stigler (1992), where they examined beliefs mothers held regarding the factors they thought played a role influencing children's performance, American mothers placed significantly higher points to and greater importance on ability as a determining factor of success and



achievement, in sharp contrast with Chinese and Japanese mothers. This is important because “parents provide a context for the development of children's academic motivation” (Ames and Archer 1987:413).

As a matter of fact, a study conducted by Jose and Bellamy evidences a link between parental views about the nature of intelligence and child persistence and learned helplessness (LH) on behalf of children. Their study specifically found that “parent support of the incremental views led to greater child persistence (and lower LH) through mediators such of parent persistence and parent encouragement for Asian parents but not for Western parents” (Jose and Bellamy 2012:1016). Their findings suggest that for Asians, the combination of views about intelligence and parenting practices and beliefs about motivating their children to work hard in academics results in their children’s greater persistence and lower perceived helplessness. According to these authors “Asian parents believe in, model, and behave according to a different motivational schema [for their children] than do Western parents.”

As these findings suggest, these beliefs transfer to children as well. According to an empirical study conducted by Stipek and Gralinsky (1996), children who hold a fixed or entity view about intelligence believe that “intelligence facilitates or limits success in all academic subjects” (1996:403). These children were also more likely to pursue what Dweck and Leggett (1988) call “performance goals”, that is, goals “in which individuals are concerned with gaining favorable judgements” (such as passing a test), rather than

mastery or “learning goals,” “in which individuals are concerned with increasing their competence” (1988:256).

Moreover in the U.S, adults in general perceive there to be an inverted relationship between effort and ability thus, “individuals who try hard are seen as compensating for lack of ability.” (Holloway 1988:328). Beliefs such as these, held by the larger society including, educators, policy-makers, children and parents alike, greatly influence the way the educational system is organized and is consequential for the overall progress that a student can make within the system or the limitations that students are confronted by. According to Stevenson and Stigler,

The seemingly logical and humane consequence of an emphasis on innate differences is that children with different abilities should be educated differently if their full potential is to be realized. Great care is given to assigning children to different groups within a classroom or to different academic tracks, each with its own textbook and curriculum. A tendency to categorize children has pervaded the American educational system for a long time [...] Once categorized as slow learners, a vicious cycle begins: they are placed in slower tracks; teachers hold lower expectations for their possible accomplishments, and thus expose them to lower levels of material than they do the more able students; the students come to believe that they indeed are

incapable of higher levels of achievement; and many end up dropping out of school.

(1992:106;109)

Furthermore, parents and teachers not only seem to believe that ability and intelligence is fixed and innate, but also self-motivation and the desire to learn. As Chao (1996) points out in her study of the influence of parenting practices in children's school success, many of the European American mothers she interviewed seemed to believe that "learning is either an innate process or a self-motivated process within children." (1996:416)

This situation has direct consequences for students not only in the short run, persuading the "lower ability learners" to believe that they are less likely to succeed academically, but also later in life,

Expectations for 'low ability' children are reduced, and they finish their education with inadequate skills and insufficient knowledge for finding jobs and adapting successfully to contemporary society.

(Stevenson and Stigler 1992:95)

As it happens, the belief that innate ability influences children's achievement and performance directly influences expectations that parents and teachers have for children.

Tagged for life expectations for “higher ability children” are raised, while expectations for “lower ability children” are set low. As Stevenson and Stigler point out,

The pervasive emphasis on innate ability lowers expectations about what can be accomplished through hard work. Whether children are considered to be bright or dull, the belief that ability is largely fixed leads parents and teachers to be reluctant to demand higher levels of performance from their children and leads to a satisfaction with the status quo.

(1992:112)

These beliefs about ability and innate intelligence may have repercussions in actions and postures held by some American parents, which instead of motivating their children to strive for academic excellence, downplay the importance of performing successfully in academics, perhaps in an attempt to avoid feelings of inadequacy and failure. These beliefs may also motivate parents to invest little time helping, tutoring and instructing their children.

Finally, a related issue to the subject of ability and fixed intelligence is the matter of existent lifestyle priorities and perceived usefulness of connecting what happens at school with what children then do at home, or outside school in general. According to Stevenson and Stigler (1992:68) “a notable characteristic of the lives of American children is a striking discontinuity between home and school.” It seems that American

parents place a greater priority when outside school to sports, and team and social activities and “a meager amount of time” of after school time to “academic oriented activities, such as doing homework, using workbooks, and reading for pleasure.” (1992:68)

*10.2.2.2. Western’ expectations and satisfaction with learning, schooling and education*

According to Stevenson and Stigler,

Parents’ satisfaction with their children’s academic achievement and their schools depends only partially on the children’s actual achievement. The same level of performance may leave some parents satisfied and others dissatisfied, depending on the standards and expectations they hold for their children.

(1992:113)

The above reference is relevant within the context of this work, not only because of the matter we are currently addressing, but also because it reminds us that we are capable of giving different meanings and interpretations to the same actions, phenomena and states of affairs; indeed, meanings accorded to expectations and satisfaction are no exception.

This section however, is not about how meanings can be ascribed to a host of phenomena, but rather about conventional, widely accepted ‘Western’ views in the US,

especially parents', regarding expectations and satisfactions towards their children's learning, schooling and education.

Perhaps very much linked to the two 'Western' beliefs about children that were described in sections 10.2.1.1 and 10.2.1.2, namely children's vulnerability and the promotion of self-esteem in children, as well as the idea that intelligence is fixed, is the finding some studies show where Americans tend to have lower expectations and higher levels of satisfaction with regard to children's education, especially when compared to Asian parents. In this respect, Stevenson and Stigler point out the following,

The belief that innate ability limits academic achievement prevents many American parents from expecting excellence. If standards are too high, and more is expected of children than they are considered capable of, children's self-esteem could be damaged. To prevent this risk, Americans tend to adjust standards downward to a level considered to be appropriate for the child's level of ability.

(1992:114)

In addition, American parents seem to hold a further assumption with regard to their children's schooling and education. According to Hsu, "they feel compelled to reduce even the rudiments of a child's education to a matter of fun" (1981:83), and they further view playing and leisure as a significant way to attain learning. In a study conducted by Chao, she found that 32% of European American mothers she interviewed concurred

with the idea not only that learning should be fun, but also “interesting, exciting and stimulating” and that children’s “creativity should be promoted” (Chao 1996:416).

With regard to creativity, Gross-Loh notes a divergence between the ‘Chinese’ approach to drilling and practice and the American perspective. She notes,

American parents and even some teachers believe drill practice (sometimes referred to as “drill or kill”) and rote memorization can impede creativity and take the fun out of learning.

(2014:175)

And Gross-Loh, further points out that,

Lessons about perseverance and deliberate practice are important for any child, and [the Western] bias toward believing that learning should always be fun and engaging isn’t always in our children’s best interests.

(2014:176)

Regarding ‘Western’ parental expectations with schooling and education, Chao (1996) also found in her study that European American mothers tend to regard academic achievement as a lesser order goal and instead grant the development of social skills greater significance. According to Chao, some of the European America mothers that she interviewed,

Voiced the opinion that stressing academic success is not good for children and should not be the goal of education. Often mothers felt that that stressing academics would rob children of their self-motivation [...They] felt that, rather than stressing academics, their children's social development should be of foremost concern.

(1996:415)

Beliefs and behaviors such as these are far from universal, and they have the added effect of influencing outcomes. Indeed, in this sense, some empirical studies have shown that Asian parents hold higher standards and expectations for their children with regard to academics than do their American counterparts (Stevenson and Stigler 1992; Yao 1985), and that holding higher expectations in turn influences performance outcomes on behalf of children (Feldman and Theiss 1982). With regard to this, Yao points out that, "the more parents and students expected from school, the higher achievement the students attained" (1985:199).

Looking into more fine-grained findings regarding the differences between Asian and American expectations, Yao finds that when asked about their grade expectation all Asian parents interviewed in her study "reported that they expected their children to make an average grade of A." Compared to the Anglo-American sample interviewed in her study, according to her findings, "only two thirds of American parents expected straight As from their children, while the remaining one-third were willing to accept Bs." (Yao 1985:203) It is worth pointing out that her study was conducted among Asian-



American and Anglo-American high achievers, which would imply, interestingly, that American high achievers have lower expectations than Asian high achievers. Moreover, Yao reports that “all the Anglo parents were pleased with their children’s performance in school while half of the Asian parents felt that their children did not perform well all the time.” (1985:203)

Viewing a broader sample, with more general characteristics, however, did not necessarily alter results. An empirical study conducted among Asian and American mothers by Stevenson and Stigler (1992) found that American mothers held a more positive view of their children’s overall education and their performance than did their Asian counterparts. According to the authors, however, their positive judgment was not a result of more objectively positive results in terms of grades and achievement, but on lower standards and expectations held by Americans for their children. In this sense the authors assert, “American parents...hold lower standards, and as a result, American children have less reason to study hard” (1992:123). Furthermore, another thing the authors noted in their study was the variation between the “subjective labels mothers from different societies placed on the scales” (1992:119) According to the authors, it was revealing to observe that, “a level of performance described as ‘average’ by Chinese and Japanese mothers was considered ‘above average’ by American mothers” (1992:119).

A related matter we came across with regard to expectations Americans hold, already briefly mentioned above, was the issue of stressing social development, and it being a

“foremost concern” as Chao puts it (1996:415). Indeed author Susan Cain in her book *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World that Can't Stop Talking* (2012), describes what she believes was a fundamental cultural shift that took place in 20th century America. According to Cain, the United States shifted from a culture of “character” to a culture of “personality”, where what seems to matter is how gregarious, and socially successful people are. In her book she writes:

We live with a value system that I call the Extrovert Ideal -- the omnipresent belief that the ideal self is gregarious, alpha, and comfortable in the spotlight. The archetypal extrovert prefers action to contemplation, risk-taking to heed-taking, certainty to doubt. He favors quick decisions, even at the risk of being wrong. She works well in teams and socializes in groups. We like to think that we value individuality, but all too often we admire one type of individual -- the kind who's comfortable "putting himself out there.”

(Cain 2012:4)

Cain’s description of the *Extrovert Ideal*, as she puts it, is relevant because it helps in understanding just how omnipresent and pervasive the standard of being sociable and instilling sociability is within the ‘Western’ framework. She interestingly notes that research has found that American high school students value positively and mostly seek out friends who are “‘cheerful’, ‘enthusiastic’ and ‘sociable,’” (2012:187) and contrasts this with values which ‘Chinese’ high school students tell researchers they prefer in

friends: “‘humble’, ‘altruistic’, ‘honest’, and ‘hard-working.’” Cain cites cross-cultural psychologist Micheal Harris Bond in stating, “The contrast is striking, the Americans emphasize sociability and prize those attributes that make for easy, cheerful association. The Chinese emphasize deeper attributes, focusing on more virtues and achievement” (2012:187).

### *10.2.3. Filial piety as a driver of Chinese childrearing beliefs*

In his book *Cultural Foundations of Learning: East and West*, author Jin Li offers us a glimpse of what underlies what Confucian philosophy calls filial piety, and we might start by understanding it in terms of a fundamental appreciation of our closest social relations. According to Li (2012),

Counter to popular belief, the power of Confucius does not focus on a political system, not even political careers of his pupils, but the fundamental question that each human has to face: How do I live my life? What kind of person do I want to be? These questions assume personal choices, but they are not framed from the perspective of the individual as biological entity or as a rights-bearing individual as may be the case in the West. These questions concern the very fact that all humans survive, develop, and flourish in social relationships.

(2012:37)

So we see that Confucian philosophy focuses not on the individual, but on the individual in relation to other individuals, as participant and member of human relationships. According to Li, Confucius and later Confucians outlined specific *cardinal relationships*, along with virtues and moral principles tied to each one, and the parent-child relationship is one of them.

For parent-child relationships, the parent shall show unconditional love –that is total commitment to children’s welfare– whereas children express what is known as filial piety. Unconditional love and filial piety are mutually constitutive. Moral obligation lies in this mutuality. Therefore, parental total commitment and children’s filial piety are not mere emotions (often determined by momentary spurts of feelings), but rather are anchored in corresponding moral obligations to nurture each other’s well-being. So understood and practiced, these obligations shall endure for life.

(2012:38)

According to Confucian philosophy, filial piety is not understood as a task or duty, but as a genuine feeling towards one’s parents:

Confucius emphasizes the genuine human feeling towards parents as the real difference, not the performance of duties as a formality. The appropriate conduct here is to show filial piety willingly,

ungrudgingly, and gladly. Thus, to Confucius, filial piety is the very beginning of all human morality. The assumption is that if one cannot even feel filial love and respect toward one's parents who gave birth and, often at great sacrifice, nurtured oneself, how can one show love and care to unrelated people?

(2012:38)

Another author, Hsu also notes that the parent-child relationship in Chinese culture is based on the nation's "ancient cultural heritage in which Confucian filial piety [is] the highest ideal" (Hsu 1981:80). In her book *Filial Piety: Practice and Discourse in Contemporary East Asia* (2004), Charlotte Ikels provides an account of the Chinese character *xiao*, which is used to write the concept of filial piety, which serves as an appropriate footing for further understanding the concept of filial piety for the purposes of our research,

The character *xiao* is composed from two other characters: the top half of the character *lao* (old) and the character *zi* (son). When combined to constitute *xiao*, the element derived from *lao* rests on top of *zi*, that is the "elder" is on top of the "son." This ideograph communicates multiple messages of which the officially preferred one is that the old are supported by the young(er generation). However it could also be read as meaning that the young are burdened by the old or even that the young are oppressed by the old ... Or, more benignly, hearkening

back to the fact that Chinese was originally written from top to bottom, simply that filial piety is the continuation of the family line, that is, the father produces the son. Indeed in the classics and in popular thought, support, subordination (or obedience) and continuing the family line have all been touted as the essence of filial piety.

(Ikels 2004:3)

In terms of the more broader conception of the concept of filial piety, and to get further insight into its tenor within the Chinese parenting belief system we observe that Confucian filial piety sets clear principles of interaction and hierarchy.

According to Hwang (1999),

Confucius advised that social interaction should begin with an assessment of the role relationship between oneself and others along two social dimensions: intimacy/distance and superiority/inferiority. Behavior that favors people with whom one has a close relationship can be termed benevolence (*ren*); respecting those for whom respect is required by the relationship is called righteousness (*yi*); and acting according to previously established rites or social norms is called propriety (*li*).

(1999: 166)

Confucian analects reflect this idea expressed above of there being righteousness and propriety in respecting elders. According to a translation by Edward Slingerland, Confucius once said, “filial piety and respect for elders constitute the root of Goodness” (Slingerland 2003:1).

With these notions, we can already get a sense that the character of the Chinese parent-child relationship is set in hierarchic terms, and it is the offspring’s duty to respect their parents and elders. Indeed, according to Chao and Tseng (2002), two central themes found in Asian parenting are “family as center”, coinciding with the notion of favoring the intimate, or those closest; and “control and strictness”, in accord with notions of hierarchy and respect that we have just mentioned.

According to Hwang (1999), this may be due to the ontological conception of the universe and humanity by Confucians, where they,

Did not conceive a transcendent creator as did the Christians. Instead they recognized a simple fact on the basis of Chinese cosmology: individuals’ lives are the continuation of their parents’ physical lives. Confucian advocacy of filial piety is premised upon this indisputable fact.

(1999:169)

Furthermore, going back to the concept of *ren* (benevolence) mentioned above, Confucian tradition accords parents with the duty of cultivating *ren* in their children;

*Ren* has been translated as benevolence, compassion, magnanimity, goodness, love, human heartedness, charity, perfect virtue, and man-to-manness. As a concept, or human virtue *ren* is strongly linked to human responsibility, loyalty, uprightness and righteousness [...] From the perspective of life within families parents [...] are responsible for fostering the development of *ren* in their children.

(Lieber et al 2004)

With this in mind, it is no wonder that Asian parents in general and Chinese parents specifically are traditionally viewed as being thoroughly involved in every aspect of their children's ethical tutelage and instruction: for Chinese parents, inculcating filial piety in their offspring is a parental responsibility and moral imperative. According to Chao (1994),

Confucian tradition accords certain relationships with special significance ... with father and son being the most important. Because these relationships are structured hierarchically the subordinate member is required to display loyalty and respect to the senior member, who is required to responsibly and justly, teach, and discipline.

(1994: 1113)



Besides respect towards parents and elders, Confucian values related with filial piety exhort offspring the incontrovertible duty of obedience and gratitude towards those closest to them by kinship and then those who are their senior. According to Hsu (1981),

The son not only has to follow the Confucian dictum that ‘parents are always right,’ but at all times and in all circumstances he must try to satisfy their wishes and look after their safety. If the parents are indisposed, the son should spare no trouble in obtaining a cure for them. Formerly, if a parent was sentenced to prison, the son might arrange to take that parent’s place. If the parents were displeased with their daughter-in-law, the good son did not hesitate to think about divorce. In the service of the elders, no effort was too extraordinary or too great.

(1981:81)

Behaviors such as these are expected in Confucian tradition and they carry within themselves great significance since their practice is viewed as a measure of proper integration and maturity to the family and greater community. According to Ikels,

To experience the urge to be disobedient or ungrateful, amounts to a violation of the self. The individual who has been trained well accepts the willingness to practice filial behavior as a key indicator of a mature, well-adjusted adult.

(2004:5)

Interestingly, filial piety is not a private matter, but a family and community affair, whose main realization begins in the home and whose non-compliance brings to parents and children dishonor and shame. Parents and children are both required to carry out the responsibilities and duties set within the belief system of filial piety, otherwise neither is regarded a worthy, respectable member of the community. According to Ikels,

In the eyes of fellow community members a filial person is a reliable, trustworthy and honorable person...[and] just as filial behavior could bring honor to a community, unfilial behavior could bring dishonor and shared punishment... [Moreover] the costs to parents of children's failure in the performance of filial piety are substantial.

(2004:5-6)

*10.2.3.1. Concerns with filial piety among Chinese immigrant parents in the US: Children's obedience and respect toward elders.*

Asian immigrant parents to the United States struggle to not lose ground of traditional values, even as they are surrounded by a foreign and unfamiliar culture, quite distinct from their own. Western culture and its extensive influence slowly seems to be making many traditional Chinese beliefs and conventions more vulnerable among Chinese immigrants to the US, transforming and affecting not just the way children of Chinese parents see themselves and their parents, but also, sometimes raising questions and

concerns among parents themselves as to the best childrearing practices to carry out.

Lieber et al (2004) voice this environment,

Rapid culture change is taking place in many Confucian societies around the world. Particularly in those experiencing expanding capitalistic economies, populations are exposed to and are adopting more modern ways of life [...] Along with changes in traditional Asian cultures, immigrants to the United States face unique child-rearing challenges. Parenting with intent to foster the development of traditional Asian values can be complex within a broader society whose features are unsupportive of and perhaps inconsistent with these values. Particularly with respect to the influence of the U.S. education system on developing children, and the importance of education to Asian people, immigrant parents must strive to understand the relevant cultural practices and apply strategies that support the development of the traditional values they wish their children to possess.

(2004: 327)

According to Chao and Tseng (2002), “beliefs about childhood have direct implications for childrearing, specifically in shaping how parents regard and treat children to foster or protect them from their own basic nature and how they should help children develop and grow”. (2002:60). One strongly held belief system among Asian cultures in general

and Chinese in particular as we have aforementioned, is filial piety, and it forcefully shapes views and practices of parents, not only living in Asia, but also of those who have immigrated to non-Asian countries such as the United States.

Filial piety thus, as we have described it above, “sets a foundation for many sociocultural beliefs and behaviors in Asian societies” (Lieber et al 2004: 325) and there is research (Chao and Tseng 2002; Lieber et al 2004) that evidences that parental expectations and undertakings on behalf of Asian communities, both inside and outside Asia are –even today– in line with the achievement and conservation of the tradition of filial piety when raising their children.

Indeed, in an empirical study conducted by Lieber et al among Chinese first-generation immigrant parents in the United States, two general findings emerged consistently in terms of broad parental concerns related with raising children in America, both closely linked to filial issues. The two main categories of concerns had to do with 1) parental expectations towards their children, and 2) the preservation of their cultural heritage. According to Lieber et al, Chinese immigrants to the USA voiced concerns about their children’s adoption of what they call “the American style”,

They expressed ambivalence about the influence of the U.S. education system and culture, and frustrations about the many occasions in which they struggled with conflict between this influence and Chinese ways of thinking. Such concerns are clear in parents’ reports:

‘[Here] is too different from her family education and Chinese traditions. They don’t teach her how to respect parents and elderly. They only teach American styles, which often contradict our Chinese ways of thinking (mother, 515).’

(2004:334)

The mother’s statement cited above illustrates some concerns Chinese immigrant parents deal with, and the struggle they go through to preserve some aspects of filial piety across generations when raising their children in a society, such as the USA, that does not grant positive value or sustain Confucian precepts of filial piety. The matter of instructing and passing on values that the broader society does not encourage, sustain, and even belittles, poses a challenge for Chinese parents and a threat to their traditional values for future generations.

But just what kinds of family values and traditions are Chinese immigrant parents trying to preserve and instill in their children? What are the differences they find between their beliefs and codes of behavior and the ones they find their children learning in American society?

Delving a bit into the details related to filial piety behind the broader issues that came up with parents in the study just mentioned above, we can also mention more specific concern voiced by parents: for instance, the perception that their children were “self-centered, individualistic, and self-promoting” (2004:335) all of which contradict and

run counter to Asian values, which are based on a perspective of others, especially those closest and most elderly (Hwang 1999) as being worthy of unconditional esteem, honor, respect and devotion, emphasizing “family responsibility and obligation—before oneself” (Lieber et al 2004:335). We briefly mentioned this aspect of Asian parenting in section 10.2.3, and indeed, according to Hwang (1999), the Confucian ethical system,

is based not only on the principle of respecting the superior, but also on favoring the intimate. Because family members are conceived of as a whole body, members of a family residing under the same roof have an obligation to share resources with one another.

(1999:170)

Self-centeredness, individualistic and self-promoting values and behavior are seen as detached from and inconsistent with traditional Asian principles of filial piety. On this matter one father was reported as saying the following,

...self-centered like my daughter. In everything she thinks about herself... Unlike us, the way we treat others; to us family value is very important. You have to take care of your family, to take care of others; if you lose out a bit, and others benefit from it, it doesn't matter.

(father, 106)

(Lieber et al 2004:335)

Another mother was reported as stating “He’s less obedient; very rigid and self-centered. The children here are too self-centered and it’s hard for them to tolerate others (mother, 514)” (Lieber et al 2004:338). Parents in Lieber’s study reported feeling that they needed to continuously make compromises between their own values and beliefs regarding their children’s respect and concern for others, other than themselves, and self-centeredness and individualism which they felt were values that the larger American society promoted. According to Lieber et al,

Parents attributed the pressure to make this compromise to the influence of U.S. culture. They felt that U.S. children were more independent, individualistic and self-centered and thus, more resistant to parental guidance.

(2004:338)

Obedience and respect for elders and authority were other key issues related to filial piety that explicitly came up among parents in Lieber et al’s study; in fact, more than 70% of parents spontaneously commented on these matters.

We briefly mentioned in section 10.2.3 above that the parent-child relationship in the Chinese tradition is set in hierarchic terms, but to understand how Confucianism conceptualizes the hierarchical relationship between parents and children and how respecting those in superior ranks is an unconditional precept within Confucianism we will resort once again to Hwang (1999),

The Confucian idea of filial piety is constructed on the simple fact that one's body exists solely because of one's parents. In fact, Confucians conceptualized family members as one body. [Furthermore], Confucians conceptualized the family by analogy to the human body. Each role in the family represents a distinct part of the human body, and together they constitute an inseparable entity. The Confucian configuration of ethical arrangements within family also corresponds to the body structure. The up-and-down relationship between head and feet refers to the superior and inferior positions of father and son ... Relationships between senior and junior maintain rank order.

(1999: 170)

The use of the human body as a metaphor for the family not only indicates a hierarchic relation between members as we see here, but also ratifies the tight connection among those closest, as well as the primacy accorded to them. The familial bond is a tight one and its conceptualization in terms of a body enables the understanding of the family as a entwined organism and as well as the tight knit relationships and reciprocity among its members.

According to Chao and Tseng (2002),

Family members fulfill different roles within an overall family system of reciprocity, defined by caring and mutual obligation. Parents and



other elders hold considerable authority and responsibility, and are to be treated with great respect by their children.

(2002: 67)

Hwang (1999) in his article on filial piety and loyalty in Confucianism further conveys the importance of respect towards elders by citing the following proposition,

Benevolence is the characteristic attribute of personhood. The first priority of its expression is showing affection to those closely related to us. Righteousness means appropriateness; respecting the superior is its most important rule. Loving others according to who they are and respecting superiors according to their ranks gives rise to the forms and distinctions of propriety (*li*) in social life.

(1999:166)

Confucianism then, establishes clear rules for practices and behaviors on behalf of those it considers in lower-ranking positions (in this case children) in terms of respect toward those in higher-ranking positions (in this case parents) and sets these behaviors in terms of social norms of correctness.

In this sense, for instance,

Parents should provide advice and guidance even after the child becomes an adult and moves out of the household. [And] children, in

turn are expected to consult with parents and other family members on important decisions.

(Chao and Tseng 2002:67)

Empirically, as evidenced in the study conducted by Lieber et al, Chinese immigrant parents raising their children in the U.S felt frustration and ambivalence about their children's resistance and unwillingness to obey and be respectful towards parents and their elders. In the study "children were reported to resist, ignore, or make excuses in response to demands and insist on equilateral discussion prior to their decision for compliance" (Lieber et al 2004:337). One mother was reported contrasting her own experiences as a child with obedience to her children's current conduct living in the USA,

When we were young, whatever our parents said, unconditionally, under any conditions we would listen. But now you have to give them a reason, some explanations why they have to do it. Often there needs to be some discussion and sometimes they still choose not to listen to us. (Mother, 517)

(2004:337)

Parents in the study also seemed aware that the distance between American and Chinese values regarding parent-child hierarchy, respect and obedience might be a crucial factor which determined the difference in viewpoint between their children and themselves

regarding these matters. They phrased contradictions between American and Chinese values in the following terms,

From the viewpoint of Chinese, this is something everyone knows: parents can never be equal to a child. From his view, he thinks they are equal. This is one point where we are entirely different. He feels he is obedient in terms of U.S. obedience, but in terms of being filial, he doesn't have this kind of concept. (father, 715)

Children here [in the United States] are very independent. It has to do with society and education. (father, 514)

They have learned some of this American style. In America you see the old and the young are treated as equals... (father, 612)

(2004:338)

An even more revealing finding, still related to the matter of obedience and respect towards elders and coping within a larger contradicting belief system, was the dilemma that Chinese immigrant parents faced “of teaching children to respect elders and authority (e.g. teachers) even though these elders and authorities did not work to guide the children in ways consistent with parents’ expectations and goals” (2004:340). In this regard one mother was reported as saying,

Maybe I'm a little bit better, definitely especially on respecting teachers, the authority, the elderly, and the pastors. I think my sons are not as good, but they're not really out of line [...] Sometimes there are teachers, especially in America, who set bad examples for the students. So I told them even though they're the teachers, they're not always right, which is true. Also, there are teachers who mislead children... (mother, 803)

(2004:340)

This finding provides further evidence of where concerns among Chinese immigrant parents regarding the preservation of their primordial beliefs and values may stem from. These parents in the U.S. seem to encounter an unfavorable and often contradictory climate for the preservation and instillment of conventional Chinese values related to filial piety in their children. Conceivably, since the greater society does not abide by or share the beliefs underlying the principles of filial piety, these parents are left in a quandary over how to best transfer, uphold and sustain these family values.

One last thing worth noting about respect, understood in terms of filial piety, is that it goes beyond the observation, in behavioral terms, of hierarchic relationships between elders and the younger generation. Respect, similarly to what we mentioned about the application of authority on the part of parents in section 10.2.3, implies a dutiful and conscientious fulfillment of one's role in moral and emotional terms within the social environment one inhabits. Respect also bears an element of affection and care: indeed,

according to Sung, “in the teachings of filial piety, respect for one’s parents and all elderly persons is the most stressed point. Respect in this context means that [children and adult children treat parents] with deference, courtesy, esteem, and earnest and sincere consideration” (Sung 1995:245).

In this sense Chao and Tseng observe that respect, understood in the Chinese tradition, “involves an emotional component of fostering harmonious and loving relationships.” (2002:68)

*10.2.4. Constitutive elements of ‘Chinese’ learning, schooling and education: Effort & self-improvement and training & parental involvement*

*10.2.4.1. ‘Chinese’ emphasis on effort and self-improvement*

In contrast with ‘Western’ beliefs regarding the role that innate ability has on achievement, or lack thereof, as we outlined in section 10.2.2.1, is the ‘Chinese’ view that lack of achievement is attributable not to the absence of ability on the part of the individual, but “to insufficient effort...or to personal or environmental obstacles” (Stevenson and Stigler 1992:98); and this apparently has its roots in Confucian philosophy as well,

In Asia, the emphasis on effort and the relative disregard for innate abilities are derived from Confucian philosophy. Confucius was interested above all in the moral perfectibility of mankind. He rejected

categorization of human beings as good or bad, and stressed the potential for improving moral conduct through the creation of favorable environmental conditions...Human beings were considered to be malleable, and like clay, subject to molding by the events of everyday life.

(1992:97)

According to Jose and Bellamy,

Confucian doctrine places great importance on the role that effort has on achievement, and the internalization of these ideas has been linked to increased academic achievement in Asian children and adolescents.

(2012:1001)

Indeed Chinese children seemed to be instilled with ideas related with human malleability and potential for change that enable them to believe that hard, diligent and steady work will lead them to the realization of greater potential (Chen and Uttal 1988), regardless of innate abilities.

These ideas about effort go hand in hand with Chinese ideas about self-improvement and the positive role this has on the greater social environment: when individuals strive and attain self-improvement it leads to greater societal well-being. In this sense, “Chinese philosophy has emphasized that societal improvement must begin with self-

improvement” (Chen and Uttal 1988:353). Furthermore, not only is effort the emphasis of Chinese tradition towards achievement and self-improvement, also, the way ability is conceptualized within the ‘Western’ and ‘Chinese’ frame of beliefs is different. According to Chen and Uttal,

In China, ability is considered to be an accumulation of skills and knowledge [...] This does not mean that innate ability is considered unimportant, but rather that ability is not an ultimate or complete explanation for any achievement [...] According to the Chinese perspective, innate ability may determine the rate at which one acquires knowledge, but the ultimate level of achievement is attained through effort.

(1988:354)

These beliefs help to foster in children a sense that academic performance and achievement is within their reach and influence, and that it is up to them to change inadequate academic results based on how much they are willing to work to make progress.

Furthermore, the extolment of these beliefs at home through parental persistence of these values allows ‘Chinese’ children, even those growing up in Western societies, to preserve behaviors that will enable them to commit to working hard to get ahead. For instance, in the empirical study conducted by Lieber et al, one Chinese immigrant

parent to the U.S. was reported to say, “working hard, I feel this is a must, a basic thing to do. If you want to be able to gain a footing in this society, working hard is a must. There should be no question about it (father, 117).” (2004:336)

Similarly to what was discussed in section 10.2.2.2 in terms of parental expectations regarding school performance and grades, empirical studies show that parental satisfaction with children’s academic performance is also higher among parents of Western tradition than among parents of Chinese tradition. According to Chen and Uttal,

At all grades, Chinese mothers were much less satisfied with their children’s performance, than were American mothers. The difference was even larger for comparisons of fathers.

(1988:355)

Moreover, in the same study these authors found that satisfaction of Chinese parents had little to do with their children’s own satisfaction with and enjoyment in school, evidencing not only a separation between Chinese parents’ own opinions and to that of their children, but also a difference in criteria for evaluating what they feel is important about school. This is an interesting contrast with the findings the study reports regarding American parents’ satisfaction with school. In the authors’ own words,

The satisfaction of Chinese mothers had little relation to their perception of how much their children liked school. However, the



satisfaction of American mothers was related to their perceptions of their children's satisfaction with school.

(1988:355)

This is interesting considering the differences that have been already pointed out in sections 10.2.1 and 10.2.3 between 'Western' and 'Chinese' childrearing beliefs. The findings of Chen and Uttal's study are consistent with the idea that when it comes to children, 'Westerners' hold a more child-centric perspective and children are perceived as being more vulnerable.

Another study reporting on Chinese parents' concerns with education and the importance of children's commitment to effort and self improvement found that not only are these matters crucial for these parents, but also "a necessary requisite to being successful" (Chao 1995:343). Furthermore, according to Chao,

Chinese children are expected to do well in school in order to fulfill their role and obligations to the family... [The parents] explained that Chinese culture has traditionally emphasized that achieving academic excellence is the primary way for a child to honor his or her family and do well for the family.

(1995:343)

These findings were also consistent with notions that have already been outlined in this study, namely, in section 10.2.3, where we discussed the matter of filial piety as a driver of Chinese parenting beliefs.

Finally, at the crux of the idea that learning through effort is something important to the self as well as to the greater social environment one inhabits (or in the case of ‘Western’ beliefs, the idea that innate ability is key to success, as discussed in section 10.2.2.1) lies the question of what it is that learning and knowledge constitute for ‘Chinese’ and ‘Western’ traditions. Li (2003) argues that ‘Westerners’ view learning and knowledge as something that is “out there”, (2003:264) to be acquired by the individual who is endowed with some internal, innate characteristics that ultimately enable him or her to acquire that knowledge. According to Li,

These internal learner abilities include cognitive skill, intelligence, and abilities on the one hand, and thinking, communicating, and active engagement on the other. Motivational factors such as interest, curiosity, willingness, and commitment are also part of the internal make-up of a person that serves to facilitate the learning process.

(2003:264)

In contrast, ‘Chinese’ conceptions about knowledge regard it as something that is more intimately connected to themselves in a way that is morally, emotionally, spiritually and socially, important, and regard it as essential and fundamentally linked to their personal

lives. According to Li, this conception is “consistent with the age-old Confucian understanding of learning.” (2003:265)

Knowledge, accordingly includes not only the externally existing body but also social and moral knowing. Knowing the world is not the ultimate purpose. Even though Chinese also endorse utilitarian benefits as part of their motivation for learning, their purposes do not end there. Individuals also seek learning to cultivate themselves as a whole in the moral domain toward ‘self perfection.’ Chinese beliefs about learning, therefore, seem to display a ‘person orientation.’ As a result, knowledge is not something that Chinese lives can do without but something they must have. They need knowledge and the seeking of it require that Chinese cultivate the desire to learn, engage in lifelong learning, remain humble and adopt the action plan of diligence, endurance of hardship, perseverance, and concentration.

(2003:265)

The view that knowledge is essential for self-improvement and requires active and committed engagement in order to attain it seems to be bound to the idea that intelligence is malleable and adaptive, rather than fixed. Indeed some authors agree (Dweck 1999; Stevenson and Stigler 1992 and Li 2003) that Asians view intelligence as being adaptive. Li, based on the results found in her research asserts, “Chinese may

indeed view intelligence not as an inherent quality of a person but something that one can increase through learning” (2003:265).

Lastly, Gross-Loh (2014), accounts for the Chinese belief in effort as a means to fulfill one’s passions, coupled with parental guidance, a theme we will be looking into in the following section:

Passion isn’t something you stumble upon. The parent puts opportunities these opportunities in the child’s path, and believes such passion must go hand in hand with intensively and deliberately honing basic skills... [Chinese] thinking is that you can’t do much with your interests if you don’t have skills.

(2014:175)

*10.2.4.2. The ‘Chinese’ notion of training and ‘Chinese’ parental involvement in their children’s education*

According to Stevenson and Stigler (1992), Chinese and American childrearing beliefs about socialization and schooling differ radically, and “these contrasting beliefs lead to different practices” (1992:73):

Chinese [...] parents make an important distinction between early and later childhood, and they engage in different socialization practices with children at these different ages. Until their children are about six

years old, Asian parents impose few demands or controls on them. They believe that this is a period when children should learn how to relate to others, and there is little pressure to learn academic skills. About the time children enter first grade, child-rearing practices shift markedly, and parents and children begin to work diligently on what is defined as the primary task of later childhood: getting a good education.

American parents, in contrast, do not noticeably alter their child-rearing practices according to a child's age. Parents often begin to work on academic skills early in the child's life and expect kindergarten teachers to help them. The goals of socialization do not change greatly when their children enter first grade, but the agent responsible does change. Just when Asian parents are getting more involved in their children's academic life, American parents are beginning to abdicate many of their responsibilities to their children's teachers.

(1992:73)

The role 'Chinese' parents play in their children's education and the nature of their involvement in their children's schooling can begin to be understood by looking into the Chinese concept of *Chiao Shun*, (Chao 1996) or child training. It's important to explore beliefs and concerns parents have about learning because they tap into how

parents view child development and the influence they have in nurturing it and promoting it.

The Chinese notion of training, or *Chiao Shun*, contains elements regarded as important for children's development, not only for themselves, but also as functional and valuable members of their families and of broader society. Furthermore, the concept also connotes parental responsibility in bringing this development about by paying close attention to their children's performance in school. Indeed, according to Wu and Tseng, "in the family, Chinese parents pay special attention to training children to adhere to socially desirable and culturally approved behavior. One way to measure the success of parental intervention is the ability of children to perform well in school." (Wu and Tseng 1985:11) Indeed, the exertion of training and control on behalf of parents is not only "motivated by their intense concern for their children to be successful, particularly in school" (Chao 1994:1117) but also because it is a sign of parental success since, "not guiding their children in learning is a parental moral failure in Chinese culture. (Li 2012:271)

Some studies have suggested (Chao 1996; Chao and Tseng, 2002; Chen and Uttal 1988; Yao 1985) that parental involvement, as well as care among Asian parents in their children's education and academics is greater than that of 'Western' parents'. This matter might be explained by glimpsing into the contents of "training" in 'Chinese' tradition. According to Chao (1994),

One distinctive feature of this concept of training for the Chinese involves the role of responsibility that parents have to be highly involved, caring and concerned. Specifically, Chinese mothers in comparison to European-American mothers endorsed a high level of maternal involvement for promoting success in the child.

(1994:1117)

So not only is it important to send children to the best schools and warrant them the best possible education, but parents have a moral obligation, driven by principles of Confucian filial piety, to see that their children succeed. Indeed, the mother-child relationship is yet again determined by principles of Confucian filial piety, very much in alignment with those we mentioned in section 10.2.3,

The mother's relationship with the child is defined by specific role requirements that have evolved from the principles of Confucius. These Confucian principles require that children must show loyalty and respect to their elders, and also the elders must responsibly teach, discipline and 'govern.' Each party must fulfill these role requirements in order to maintain social harmony, particularly in the family, that is also stressed in Confucian tradition.

(1994:1117)

In this sense a reciprocal relationship is formed where a style of training and tutoring is also present. According to Li (2012), tutoring is a way of passing down “learning values” where the “tutoring style also resembles the Confucian way of talking: the mother’s guidance is assumed by herself and her child.” (Li 2012:271) We observe then that the mother and the child both understand the hierarchical position of the parent and the reciprocal role of parent and child in the educational process. According to Li (2012),

[The mother] attributes good learning to application of good virtues and poor learning to lack thereof. Positive and negative affects also pivot around the learning virtues. Attributing learning to virtues clarifies for the child what is inherently in the child: capacity to be virtuous, and therefore inherent, inexhaustible ability to learn well. But the realization of such morally endowed potential requires continuous effort on the part of the child. For this reason, mothers are compelled to instruct more rather than leave learning to be a matter of children’s choice, driven by interest and fun. Also for this reason, maternal focus is always on the child’s continuous betterment in learning rather than on securing pride and self-greatness in the child, regardless of good or poor outcomes.

(2012:271)



Furthermore, from the Chinese perspective, parents' teaching, disciplining, and governing their children from the earliest years, particularly with regard to their academic work, serves to prepare them to be self-motivating and also as a guidance towards self-improvement. And this undertaking is all promoted and nurtured by close maternal involvement. One study reported for instance, that Chinese mothers of first graders spent "substantially more time than their American counterparts on working directly with their children on homework" (Chen and Uttal 1988: 356). Another study found that "Asian American parents are more involved in helping their children with their homework including tutoring them, checking over their work, assigning additional work, and structuring and monitoring their time." (Chao 1996:404)

The responsibility and accountability that the concept to *Chiao Shun* or "training" signifies for Chinese parents instructs them to act in particular ways and have particular behaviors, among which the most prominent seems to be actively implicated in their children's academic success. Studies on the matter consistently show that Chinese parents seem to be "willing to commit all their resources to insure the best education available for their children" (Yao 1985:202), and the investment in it implies familial involvement not only in terms of monetary investment, but also time-wise, and effort-wise for its members. According to Chao (1996) for Chinese parents,

Their children's school performance was a central and necessary objective of child rearing. Academic achievement reflected successful parenting. If children were not doing well this indicated a problem that

parents were not doing their job. As one Chinese mother stated, 'Academics is a family thing,' and this was conveyed in a number of ways. Mothers also have a very significant role in ensuring their children's academic success.

(1996:420)

In terms of training and parental involvement it is worth noting that 'Chinese' parents' expectations and direction are not neutral. Quite the contrary, they seem to restrict children's participation in certain activities. According to Yao (1985), "parent's expectations of education, teachers and children, and their relationships with their children directly or indirectly often affect the type of extracurricular activities a child engages in after school" (1985:200). "Asian students were more likely to participate in honorary or subject-matter clubs than in vocational educational clubs, church activities or athletics" (1985:200).

In this regard, we turn to author Yong Zhao. Zhao (2014) writes critically of China's education system and describes its cultural legacy as one where it would seem that "all [of] life's pursuits are worth less than [the] scholarly quest." (2014:122) In this sense, the Chinese education seems to focus primarily on academic pursuits and a mastery for preparing for exams and attaining high scores. According to Diane Ravitch, "The examination system," that Zhao describes in his book as having succeeded in China "was designed to reward obedience, conformity, compliance, respect for order, and

homogeneous thinking... It was an efficient means of authoritarian social control.” (Ravitch, 2014). In this Zhao writes.

Education in China is, in essence, a process through which those willing to comply are homogenized, and those unwilling or unable to comply –but quite possibly talented or interested in other, non scholarly pursuits– are eliminated.

(2014:124)

Before summarizing our findings for hypothesis 1 in section 10.3 below, a final word on the concept of training and coupled with the idea of authoritarian parenting, and how they are concepts which vary greatly from its conceptual understanding in the West. According to Gross-Loh (2014)

The Chinese words *guan* and *chiao shun* are best understood within their cultural context, not through a Western lens... The ideas of *Chiao shun* (training) and *guan* (to love, govern or care for) emphasize that it is a parent’s responsibility to make sure the child does not fall short of standards. In China a parent’s main responsibility to her child is to monitor his learning, because learning itself *is* how you develop the “whole child.” It’s through learning that you foster perseverance, self-regulation, and constant self-improvement, traits considered important in all spheres of life. [To Westerners] the price of

*guan* might seem too high. Intrusive parents aren't viewed positively: we worry they inhibit their children's growing independence or that their child isn't being allowed to live life for himself. But authoritarian parenting in the West is negatively associated with Puritan child-rearing influences, stern or harsh domination, and "breaking a child's will," notions that have no innate roots in Chinese or Asian culture. In China, authoritarian parenting springs from a completely different view of children, one that's rooted in Confucianism and is centered in harmony and care, teaching and inculcating. Seen through the eyes of *guan*, parental authoritarianism (or parental control) can be a sign of parental love, simply expressed differently... In a cultural system where social hierarchy is thought to promote harmonious relationships rather than domination, a Chinese child can feel his parents' deep care for him expressed through their attentiveness to his education.

(2014:171-172)

*10.3. Summary table of 'Chinese' and 'Western' parenting conceptualizations for hypothesis 1*

In a final effort in the portrayal and description of the two institutional frameworks at play, we have created the following table, summarizing the above findings and encompassing the themes, conceptualizations and constitutive elements related to each framework, as well as the building blocks which these conceptualizations mostly serve

(see Tables 1a and 1b). This summary chart will be used as a base for analysing the corpus for hypotheses 2 and 3.

		Western Framework			
Institutions	Childrearing	<p><b>Significance: (Westerners value or believe)</b></p> <p><u>Values related to child-centeredness and vulnerability.</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Children are entitled to formal rights provided by institutions as well as informal rights in the home</li> <li>- Childhood is important and cherished</li> <li>- Children are entitled to parental consideration</li> <li>- Children have a right to their individuality</li> <li>- Children need parents to help them develop mental health, self-worth and healthy personalities to function socially and emotionally.</li> <li>- Children are entitled to their own views and opinions</li> <li>- Children deserve tolerance to make mistakes</li> <li>- Children have valid emotional and material demands that parents should cater to</li> <li>- Children need not display responsibility, dutifulness or discipline.</li> <li>- Childhood is important</li> </ul>	<p><b>Identity:</b></p> <p><u>Parental attributes/roles:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Protective, nurturing, dutiful, understanding, tolerant, easygoing, accepting, encouraging, broad-minded, accomodating, permissive, undemanding</li> </ul> <p><u>Children's attributes/roles:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Entitled, individualistic, independent, uninhibited, remiss, self-indulgent, privileged</li> </ul>	<p><b>Relationships:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Non-hierarchical: Parents on a par with children</li> <li>- Parents do everything for children but children are not expected to do the same for parents.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Activities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Parents protect their children legally and emotionally</li> <li>- Parents act nurturingly to help their children develop socially and emotionally</li> <li>- Parents and children make decisions in concert</li> <li>- Parents look for their children's approval</li> <li>- Children are given room to explore</li> <li>- Children don't need to be helpful around the house</li> <li>- Children don't need to be respectful or dutiful</li> </ul>
	Learning, Schooling and Education	<p><b>Significance: (Westerners value or believe)</b></p> <p><u>Values related to child self-esteem.</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- It's important that parents protect and support their children</li> <li>- It's important to treat children softly, caringly, understandingly, leniently</li> <li>- Children are entitled to self-expression</li> <li>- It's important that parents be understanding and sensitive regarding children's failures</li> <li>- It's important that parents demonstrate their acceptance of and love towards children.</li> <li>- It's important that parents nurture children's self-confidence</li> <li>- It's important that parents encourage the development of children's individuality and their capacities as individuals.</li> <li>- It's important that parents avoid being domineering and controlling, or fail to show due affection, or punish children</li> <li>- It's important that parents build children's self-esteem.</li> <li>- It's important that parents avoid shaming, disciplining too harshly, or making comparisons</li> </ul>	<p><b>Identity:</b></p> <p><u>Parental attributes/roles</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Protective, supportive, caring, understanding, lenient, sensitive, obliging, broad-minded, loving, accepting, nurturing, encouraging, sympathetic, responsive, affectionate, tolerant, forbearing, devoted, enlightened, kind</li> </ul> <p><u>Children's attributes/roles:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Vulnerable, emotional, susceptible, malleable, impressionable</li> </ul>		<p><b>Activities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Parents develop children's self-esteem</li> <li>- Children are given freedom to explore</li> <li>- Children receive praise and are rewarded for attempts</li> <li>- Parents are nurturing and encourage their children</li> <li>- Parents refrain from controlling, shaming, punishing and disciplining their children</li> </ul>
	Childrearing	<p><b>Significance: (Westerners value or believe)</b></p> <p><u>Values related to ability and fixed intelligence</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Intelligence and ability are fixed and innate</li> <li>- Academic achievement and success depends on innate intelligence and ability</li> <li>- Expectations regarding academic achievement are to be based on a child's innate intelligence and ability</li> <li>- Intelligence facilitates or limits academic success</li> <li>- Trying hard at academics indicates lack of ability and intelligence</li> <li>- The difficulty of academic material given to a child is contingent on his or her level of intelligence</li> <li>- The capacity to learn is both innate and self-motivated</li> <li>- School academics and home activities are distinctly separate</li> <li>- Valuable extracurricular activities: sports-related, team-related, social-related</li> </ul>	<p><b>Identity:</b></p> <p><u>Parental attributes/roles:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Understanding and tolerant regarding children's academic ability and achievement, nurturing and stimulating with regards to their children's academic performance</li> </ul> <p><u>Children's attributes/roles:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Clever/dull, intelligent/unintelligent, athletic, sociable, gregarious, self-motivated, resourceful</li> </ul>		<p><b>Activities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Prevent failure</li> <li>- Request children to fulfill undemanding tasks</li> <li>- Downward adjustment of academic standards</li> <li>- Pursuit of performance goals: related with gaining favorable judgments</li> <li>- Preference for and participation in social extracurricular or also those that are sports and team-related</li> </ul>
	Learning, Schooling and Education	<p><b>Significance: (Westerners value or believe)</b></p> <p><u>Values related to expectations and satisfaction</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Education should be fun</li> <li>- Play and leisure are legitimate ways to learn</li> <li>- Learning should be interesting and stimulating</li> <li>- Creativity and originality are valuable and should be encouraged</li> <li>- Emphasis on developing social skills</li> <li>- De-emphasis on academic achievement vs. social skills</li> <li>- School grades are not indicative of success</li> <li>- Alternative ways of learning, besides academic, are also valid</li> </ul>	<p><b>Identity:</b></p> <p><u>Parental attributes/roles:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Undemanding and tolerant regarding academic results; stimulating with regard to children's creativity and social development; broad-minded with regards to valid, non-traditional methods for learning</li> </ul> <p><u>Children's attributes/roles:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Creative, outgoing, sociable, gregarious, self-motivated, resourceful, self-determining, independent, individualistic, uninhibited, frisky</li> </ul>		<p><b>Activities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Engaging in play and leisure as a means for learning</li> <li>- Parents allow children to engage in alternative ways of learning beyond the classroom and academic experience.</li> <li>- Promotion of individuality and originality</li> <li>- Less time spent on academic work than development of social skills</li> <li>- Time spent activities related with the development of social skills</li> </ul>

Table 1a.- Conceptualizations and themes of the 'Western' institutional framework

Chinese Framework

	<b>Significance: (Chinese value or believe)</b>	<b>Identity:</b>	<b>Relationships:</b>	<b>Activities:</b>		
<b>Filial piety</b>	<p><b>Values related to filial piety:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Children's lives is a continuation of their parent's lives</li> <li>- Parents, elders and teachers are worthy of devotion and respect</li> <li>- Parents must instill responsibility, dutifulness, loyalty and righteousness in children</li> <li>- Parents are expected to be involved in their children's ethical tutelage and general instruction</li> <li>- Children owe obedience and gratitude towards their elders, parents and teachers</li> <li>- Family responsibility and obligation come before oneself</li> <li>- Family relationships should be harmonious by maintaining reciprocal love and respect</li> <li>- Filial behavior merits worth; unfilial behavior merits dishonor</li> <li>- Parental control and involvement in children's overall development</li> <li>- Parents are expected to exercise parental authority over their children</li> </ul>	<p><b>Parental attributes/roles:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Higher-ranking, authoritative, dutiful, determined, sober, benevolent, familial, accountable, involved, disciplinarian, didactic, pedagogic, selfless</li> </ul> <p><b>Children's attributes/roles:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Subordinate, dutiful, loyal, righteous, obedient, docile, grateful, familial, selfless, respectful</li> </ul>	<p><b>Relationships:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hierarchical: Top/Bottom, Superiority/Inferiority, Parent/Child hierarchy.</li> <li>- Relationship based on reciprocal responsibility and dutifulness: children are expected to show dutifulness, respect and loyalty towards parents and parents are expected to teach and discipline.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Activities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Parents exercise influence and authority over children</li> <li>- Parents develop in their children a sense of respect, loyalty, righteousness and dutifulness</li> <li>- Parents are involved in their children's general education</li> <li>- Children behave and show obedience, respect and gratitude towards their elders</li> <li>- Parents instruct and discipline their children</li> </ul>	<b>Childrearing</b>	
<b>Emphasis on effort and self-improvement</b>	<p><b>Values related to effort and self-improvement:</b></p> <p>Effort and discipline are necessary to procure achievement and success</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Environmental and personal obstacles are surmountable with effort</li> <li>- Human beings are malleable</li> <li>- Hard and steady work leads to the realization of one's greatest potential</li> <li>- Procuring academic achievement and success is at everybody's reach.</li> <li>- Academic and moral progress depends on effort</li> <li>- Learning is part of one's moral obligation</li> <li>- Learning is the path towards self-improvement and self-realization</li> </ul>	<p><b>Parental attributes/roles:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Persevering, involved, tenacious, influential, diligent, conscientious, controlling, demanding, supportive, controlling</li> </ul> <p><b>Children's attributes/roles:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Persevering, tenacious, malleable, hard-working, studious, bookish</li> </ul>			<p><b>Activities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Work hard and unwaveringly to procure success (supportive of children's development)</li> <li>- Parents exercise influence and guidance on their children</li> <li>- Involved in learning</li> <li>- Involved in improving knowledge, status and character by means of effort</li> <li>- Parents have high expectations for their children</li> </ul>	<b>Institutions</b>
<b>Training and parental involvement</b>	<p><b>Significance: (Chinese value or believe)</b></p> <p><b>Values related to training and parental involvement:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Parents are responsible and liable for their children's academic and moral development</li> <li>- Children's academic and moral development is consequential for society at large</li> <li>- Parental/maternal involvement in children's schooling contributes to academic success</li> </ul>	<p><b>Parental attributes/roles:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Accountable, involved, influential, controlling, restrictive</li> </ul> <p><b>Children's attributes/roles:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Answerable to parents, obligated, reliant, constrained</li> </ul>			<p><b>Activities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Parents teach and instruct children</li> <li>- Children obey, respect and honor parents</li> <li>- Assessment of parental capability based children's academic performance</li> <li>- Parents work with children on schoolwork</li> <li>- Parents tutor their children</li> <li>- Parents structure children's time</li> <li>- Parents influence children's choice of extracurricular activities</li> <li>- Children likely to participate in scholastic activities</li> </ul>	

Table 1b.- Conceptualizations and themes of the 'Chinese' institutional framework

## **11. Quantitative and qualitative analysis of results for hypotheses 2 and 3.**

### *11.1. Verification of Hypothesis 2: Evidencing conceptualizations and themes related to 'Chinese' and 'Western' parenting in participant comments.*

We will proceed to the verification of the second hypothesis by analyzing comments in our corpus taken from The Wall Street Journal (WSJ) (Appendix A) and The New York Times (NYT) (Appendix B) articles. In doing this, evidence is expected to be provided for the existence within the debate, of the conceptualizations related to the 'Chinese' and 'Western' parenting models outlined in the previous section, via their recognition and value among commenters of the NYT and WSJ articles. We will first make use of a quantitative analysis to describe the percentage of comments in relation to themes linked to each conceptualization of parenting. To make the quantitative analysis feasible we created themes into which all the of the discourse that came up in the comments were categorized. The second phase of our analysis will consist of a qualitative analysis where we will zoom in on and discuss the most relevant themes mentioned via the comments and explore their content more in-depth. To make our analysis more visual to the reader, the phrases that relate closely to the themes being discussed in each section will be underlined.

In quantitative terms, at first we glance, we observe that commenters from the New York Times and Wall Street Journal debates reveal in their remarks a greater recognition and value of themes related to the 'Western' conceptualization of parenting than to the 'Chinese' conceptualization of parenting. According to our analysis 54 comments

mention one or more aspect related to the ‘Western’ conceptualization of parenting compared to only 11 comments which mention at least one aspect related to the ‘Chinese’ conceptualization of parenting. Interestingly, 25 comments evidence recognition of both conceptualizations by mentioning at least one theme for each (see figure 6)

### Recognition and Value of Institutional Frameworks

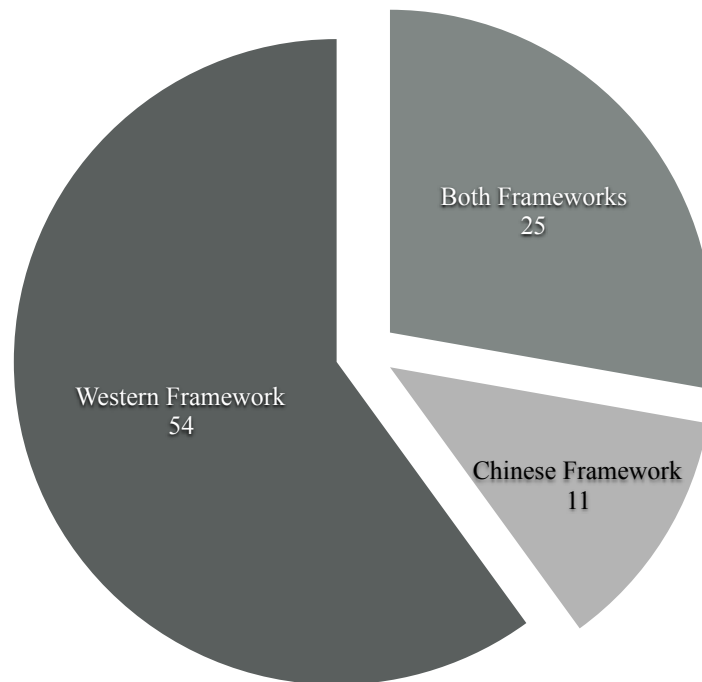
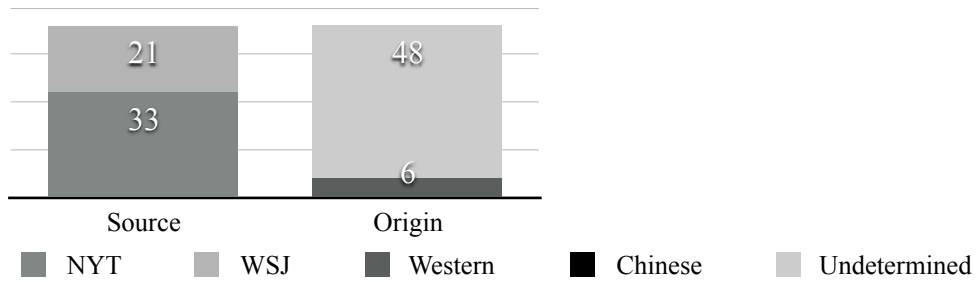


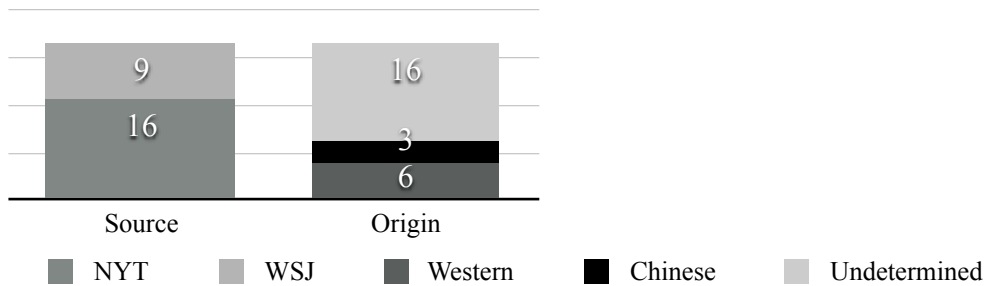
Figure 6.- Recognition of the ‘Western’ and ‘Chinese’ conceptualizations of parenting among commenter



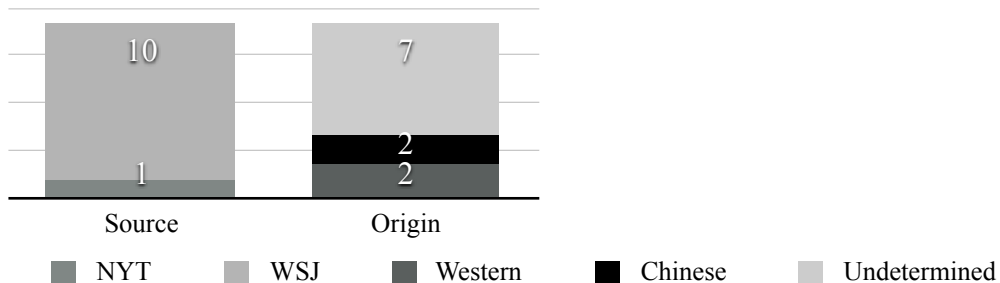
### Detailed Results - Western Framework



### Detailed Results - Both Frameworks



### Detailed Results - Chinese Framework



With regard to the recognition and value of specific themes for both parenting conceptualizations, it is worth mentioning at this point, before delving into the qualitative in-depth analysis that ensues, that the nature of the recognition and value for the ‘Western’ conceptualization tends to be more positive. We will see below that people making comments in both articles are mostly more prone to support or concur with the

views of the ‘Western’ conceptualization. While there are also people who show support for aspects of the ‘Chinese’ framework, or show disapproval or concern for certain aspects of the ‘Western’ conceptualization, the upholders of the ‘Western’ sphere generally outweigh the opposers, as we will see below.

Now as we turn to the qualitative analysis we will first list the notions or themes that received the most amount of mentions (as shown in Table 2) for the each conceptualization of parenting and then go on to analyze specific comments that correspond to each. In relation to the most mentioned notions with regard to the ‘Western’ framework, we find the following:

- (1) Emphasis on developing social and emotional skills (32 mentions)
- (2) Child protection and vulnerability: Developing self-esteem is important (20 mentions)
- (3) De-emphasis on academics as a path to success (20 mentions)
- (4) Creativity is important and should be encouraged (20 mentions)
- (5) Avoidance of dominance and control: Children are entitled to freedom and developing their individuality and independence (19 mentions)
- (6) Parents as undemanding, tolerant, lenient and permissive (18 mentions)
- (7) Non-hierarchical and non-reciprocal parent-child relationship (18 mentions)

With regards to themes related to the 'Chinese' conceptualization of parenting we observed that the following notions received the most significant amount of mentions:

- (1) Family involvement and responsibility in children's instruction and moral development / Suitability of parental control, influence and use of authority (22 mentions)
- (2) Effort and practice are critical in the attainment of goals (16 mentions)
- (3) Hierarchical and reciprocal parent-child relationship (11 mentions)

## Themes mentioned by commenters per Conceptualization of Parenting

WESTERN FRAMEWORK				CHINESE FRAMEWORK				
Themes	Frequency of Recognition			Total	Frequency of Recognition			Themes
	NY T	WSJ	Total		WS J	NY T	Total	
Emphasis on developing social and emotional skills and abilities	25	7	32	22	13	9	Family involvement and responsibility in children's instruction and moral development / Suitability of parental control, influence and use of authority	
Child protection and vulnerability: Developing self esteem is important	12	8	20	16	10	6	Effort and practice are critical in the attainment of goals	
De-emphasis on academics as a path to success	12	8	20	11	10	1	Hierarchical and reciprocal parent-child relationship	
Creativity is important and should be encouraged	12	8	20	5	0	5	Achievement and success are at everybody's reach	
Avoidance of dominance and control: Children are entitled to freedom and developing their individuality and independence	13	6	19	1	1	0	Focus on academics and inclination for classical music learning	
Parents as undemanding, tolerant, lenient and permissive	10	8	18	1	1	0	Achievement and success are at everybody's reach	
Non-hierarchical and non-reciprocal parent-child relationship	14	4	18	1	1	0	Attribute: Selflessness	
Leisure and sports are important	3	7	10	1	1	0	Learning is a moral obligation	
Learning should be fun and stimulating	6	1	7	1	1	0	Attributes: perseverance and tenacity	
Emphasis on innate intelligence, ability and talent	3	3	6					
Soft, protective, emotionally available, supportive parenting	6	0	6					
Extroversion is a valuable and desirable trait	4	2	6					
Attributes: narcissistic, self-centered, individualistic	3	1	4					
Attributes: disrespectful, privileged, entitled	0	1	1					

Table 2.- Themes mentioned by commenters related to the Western and Chinese conceptualizations of parenting

*11.1.1. Qualitative analysis of 'Western' themes found in comments*

*11.1.1.1. Emphasis on developing social and emotional skills*

As can be observed in Table 2 above, a total of 32 comments made reference to the 'Western' theme of *emphasis on developing social and emotional skills* as something valuable and important within the 'Western' conceptualization of parenting. For instance, one commenter issued the following statement in relation to the importance of developing social skills:

I did not read her book, but my initial impression was that she's not imparting upon her daughters some of the most important skills: the social ones.

(record 68, NYT)

The commenter clearly emphasizes that social skills are the most important skills to impart upon children, assigning value to the matter at hand. The above comment is not isolated, we encountered similar opinions in other records. For instance the comment shown below is critical of "the Chinese method" of upbringing for presumably restraining precisely attributes closely related to social skills:

"The 'Chinese' method resembles the old European method of severity and drills. Problem with this method is that it stifles what really matters: creativity, communication, strategic thinking, and leadership"

(record 92, WSJ)

As can be observed, at least two of the elements mentioned, namely, communication and leadership, are directly linked to the social realm. The fact that the commenter views stifling communication and leadership as a “problem” would suggest that this person values these traits, and conceivably, views fostering them in children as something worthwhile.

A similar comparative statement between ‘Chinese’ and ‘Western’ upbringing came from another commenter, as shown below, but in this case also adding a brief description of supposed traits of ‘Chinese’ children. According to the commenter, ‘Chinese’ children are awkward when it comes to social skills, and ‘Western’ children are to some extent at a loss when interacting with their ‘Chinese’ counterparts or when immersed in an environment where social skills are not encouraged:

For five years my kids went to a San Francisco public school that was 85% Chinese. The Chinese students were nearly all brilliant in class. But on the yard? Their social skills were terribly behind the non-Chinese kids. Inarticulate, socially clumsy kids for the most part. We transferred from that school not because the academics were too demanding but because my kids found the social scene at the school terribly debilitating.

(record 8, NYT)

In the above record we see evidence of the significance given to social skills by this commenter, both in the description of the ‘Chinese’ children as “inarticulate” and “socially clumsy” and also in the commenter’s decision to withdraw their children from the school because the “social scene at the school was terribly debilitating”.

An analogous comment was also found remarking on alleged behavior that people with ‘Chinese’ background and upbringing engage in socially:

Based on my experience with my Chinese educated co-workers, they sit stone-faced at company dinners and speak only when spoken to, blurting out terse answers that leave everyone else feeling awkward and uncomfortable. Privately they will acknowledge their difficulty with relationships, both personal and professional.

(record 58, NYT)

In the above record we observe that possessing a set of social skills and behaviors that enable people to navigate and interact within social encounters favorably according to ‘Western’ standards of extroversion and gregariousness is valuable to the commenter. In describing the behavior of “Chinese educated co-workers” with phrases such as: “They sit stone-faced,” “speak only when spoken to,” “blurting out terse answers,” the commenter is expressing disapproval and lack of empathy with regard to these behaviors. According to the commenter the behaviors described “leave everyone else,” presumably ‘Western’ counterparts, “feeling awkward and uncomfortable,” a phrase that

indicates at least some level of tension in the Chinese-Western social interaction. In addition, the commenter closes by expressing that ‘Chinese’ co-workers will privately “acknowledge their difficulty with relationships, both personal and professional.” This is an interesting assertion because it underlines two things: Firstly, that ‘Chinese’ themselves are aware of their struggle adapting to ‘Western’ standards of relationships and social exchange, and secondly, by framing the matter as “difficulty with relationships,” the commenter is judging this lack of mastery of ‘Western’ societal standards by Chinese a sort of social disability.

Other records not only provided evidence of the value some commenters accord to the importance of developing social skills per se, but also for specific utilitarian reasons. One such comment was framed in relation to its relevance for attaining success in general:

Success in later life is often a result of emotional and social skills.

(record 55, NYT)

Another record was framed the relevance of the social realm in relation to its value and benefit in the professional sphere:

My 14 year old daughter aced her Honors Physics and Trig classes by putting in countless hours of time. But I don't think that was as hard as what she had to do to put the plans in place for her High School Formal. The group planning and dynamics she had to deal with when



she took a leadership role with her group was much more difficult than just studying for an exam, and the skills she learned will probably better serve her when she reaches the working world.

(record 5, NYT)

In the above record we observe that the commenter does not give the same level of significance to excelling in physics and trigonometry –and the effort that “acing” these two classes entailed for his or her daughter– as the import accorded to his or her daughter in organizing and putting together a high school social event.

With statements such as the ones highlighted above, (“I don't think that was as hard,” “the group planning and dynamics she had to deal with when she took a leadership role with her group was much more difficult than just studying for an exam,” “the skills she learned will probably better serve her when she reaches the working world”) the commenter evidences assigning more value on possessing and developing social skills than on those used in succeeding in the academic sphere. The commenter seems to view the social activity as being more demanding, complex and rewarding than the academic one.

Other records were also found to highlight the benefits of developing social and emotional skills for children’s future. For instance one comment predicted difficulty in the future of the Chua girls for their lack of emotional and social skills:

She's [Chua] actually holding her children back from developing social and emotional intelligence, and it will make things difficult for them later on.

(record 10, NYT)

The implication of the above comment is that developing social skills is relevant not only for their own sake, but because they are useful and necessary for people's future, either professionally or personally. This is evidenced in the final phrase "it will make difficult for them later on."

Another comment pointed to the relevance that developing these skills has for assimilating into society:

Social confidence developed through experiences outside academia is not only good for the brain, but essential for integration into our society.

(record 12, NYT)

Apropos the statement just cited, another commenter assessed the importance of developing and attaining social skills compared to academic achievement, and not only granted the latter greater import, but described it as a better indicator of success:

I would even venture to say that in our culture, "people skills" might even be a better indicator of success than grades and test scores.

(record 56, NYT)

Finally, as some of the comments already indicate, not only is developing social skills such as being team-oriented, communicative or resourceful, valuable in indicating future personal and professional success, but it also seems to be a determining factor in someone's work-life. The record below is an example of this:

I think the Chinese parenting approach has its value in that it is great at producing child prodigies in music and math. The problem of course is those are restricted fields. The drawback is that few Chinese kids turn out very well equipped for success in the modern world...

I'm speaking from the experience of living and working in China for 11 years. My Chinese staff all have very high IQ's, possibly higher than the Westerners in the office, and they can all calculate the most complex math problems in their heads while I'm still fumbling with my calculator. But few of them have the skills to lead a team or solve a real problem in today's business world. At the end of the day I'd hire an American from a second rate university over a Chinese with top grades from the top university in China. Why? They know about team work and can think outside the box.

(record 74, WSJ)

The commenter above is another case in point that evidences the recognition and value found to be given to the 'Western' notion of the importance and relevance of developing social skills.

As can be observed from the sample of records presented above, which reflect the ‘Western’ theme of the importance of developing social and emotional skills, commenters submitted unprompted remarks which evidence the value generally held in relation to the attainment of these skills. Procuring “social confidence,” “people skills,” “social and emotional intelligence,” ease in relating with others, eloquence, and social adroitness are seen as consequential in molding well integrated individuals, able to cope with the demands of both the personal and professional life.

These comments are interesting in that they attest to the ‘Western’ ideal of sociability, extroversion, gregariousness and outgoingness not only as important traits in themselves, but as a means for attaining personal and professional success. Personal likability and professional success in the ‘Western’ realm seem to be linked to having a charismatic personality (Cain 2012) and these comments are evidence of this ‘Western’ value.

*11.1.1.2. Child protection and vulnerability: Developing self esteem is important*

The next theme we will explore for the ‘Western’ conceptualization of parenting was that which was formulated as *child protection and vulnerability: Developing self esteem is important*; a total of 20 references were made in comments with regard to this topic. Perhaps to get a sense the general character of the comments made in relation to the theme of child protection and vulnerability it might be revealing to look at the first comment found in this regard:

I hope the social services people get after her [Chua] and force her to lighten up on the girls. That will make the girls' lives at home tolerable.

(record 1, NYT)

In stating the above, the commenter is identifying with the ‘Western’ belief that children are vulnerable, specifically in her reference to the social services and her use of the phrase *I hope the social services people get after her and force her to lighten up on the girls*. As we put forth in section 10.2.1.1 when describing the ‘Western’ child-centered approach and its appeal and belief in child protection, "in no other country on earth is there so much attention paid to infancy or so much privilege accorded during childhood as in the United States [and] Americans are very verbal about their children’s rights”. And a palpable evidence of the prevalence of this belief is the existence and use of “not only state and federal legislation to protect the young ones, but [also] many voluntary juvenile protective associations to look after their welfare". (Hsu 1981, 56).

Further evidence that the existence in the belief of child vulnerability is present in some of the comments is found both in the way commenters describe Amy Chua’s daughters, as well as in how Chua’s actions towards them are depicted in comments. For instance one commenter asks, when referring to the Chua sisters:

How will these overburdened children know how to rest, or find peace?

(record 3, NYT)

The use of the adjective *overburdened* to describe Amy Chua's daughters reflects and conveys the commenter's views of Amy Chua's children as being somehow victimized by their mother's actions. Furthermore, the fact that the children are assumed to need to *know how to rest* and *find peace* bestows upon them the benefits of these privileges.

The following comment depicts Chua's actions as *browbeating*:

Browbeating kids in the manner described in the book is not the answer, at least not a good one.

(record 20, NYT)

We plainly observe that the above comment is far from neutrally describing Chua's actions towards her daughters, on the contrary, by using the word *browbeating* Chua's parental practices are condemned and valued as abusive and intimidating and further described as not being a good answer.

Another comment is yet more stern and more explicitly disapproving of Chua's parenting approach:

You seem to completely fail to grasp the significance and the severity of the emotional child abuse she has openly admitted to systematically committing on both of her daughters. Just because she used heavy handed emotional abuse as opposed to claiming to have gone after them with a hot iron or beaten them with an electrical cord doesn't

make her abuse any the less real or damaging to her daughters ... Ms. Chua is a classic abuser and her husband a classic enabler of that abuse. The fact that they are apparently a "nice" middle class couple and both eminently respectable law professors at Yale doesn't make their abuse any less real or devastating to their children. It simply prevents other "nice" middle class families from call their behavior what it really is -- a text book case of child abuse. Ms. Chua's statements that she is raising her children exactly the same way she was raised is also no justification. Abused children typically go on to abuse their own children in the same way their "loving" parents abused them. Finally, and perhaps ultimately, Ms. Chua justifies her abusive and coercive behavior by claiming the ends justify the means. Her daughters are a success -- in her terms — and the emotional and psychological wreckage that will be the consequences of her behavior, well that is just not her problem.

(record 21, NYT)

The above commenter expresses concern for what is referred to as *the emotional child abuse* that Chua is *systematically committing on both her daughters*. By framing Chua's actions as *abusive* and claiming them to be *damaging* the commenter is placing him or herself in agreement with the idea that parents should be protective of their children and as well as nurturing.

The commenter insists on this point by firmly depicting Chua and her husband's behavior toward their children as *a text book case of child abuse*. According to the commenter, Chua's behavior is *abusive and coercive* and she is putting her daughters through an *emotional and psychological wreckage*.

Still another comment places emphasis on Chua's actions as a counter-example of what should be done to instill healthy personalities with a high sense of self-esteem in children.

I can't help but think that a mother who rejects her child's birthday card as not good enough and threatens to burn her kid's stuffed toys if the child does not do something perfectly will produce an adult with a clawing sense that she can never be good enough. I agree that much modern American parenting is too soft but doubt it is helpful to simply swing to the other extreme. We will not know whether this is effective or simply brings its own set of pathologies until the daughters grow up and write their own book...

(record 29, NYT)

The above commenter questions the effectiveness of Chua's parenting practices with regard to producing children with high self-esteem. Doing things like rejecting *her child's birthday card as not good enough* or threatening to *burn her kid's stuffed toys if the child does not do something perfectly* might give way to raising a child that as an



adult will have a *clawing sense that she can never be good enough*. The above record also acknowledges that American parenting is *too soft*, however according to the commenter, Chua's method sway to the other extreme. The vulnerability of children is again evidenced in the commenter's statement that Chua's methods might bring forth their *own set of pathologies* on children.

Two more comments found remark on Chua's article published in the WSJ. The first one is portrayed as one where value is given to children's protection and vulnerability because it finds fault in Chua's use of the word *garbage* to her daughters. According to the commenter:

It was hard enough just to get past "garbage".

(record 38, WSJ)

In the above record the commenter criticizes Chua's parental actions by stating that it was *hard enough just to get past 'garbage'* which is a word Chua uses in her WSJ article and book to refer to what her father once called her once and she in turn called one of her daughters for what she considered bad or objectionable behavior. The idea that it was *hard to get past* reading the use of the word *garbage* may evidence on the part of the commenter the underlying 'Western' belief that parents are there to protect their children emotionally and help them develop their self-esteem and not to verbally abuse or put them down by calling them names.

The second comment directly criticizing Chua's views as portrayed in her article in the WSJ states the following:

It's hard to tell if she was trying to be funny; if so, she is not a talented humorist. If not, she sounds like a dreadful mother.

(record 48, WSJ)

The commenter seems to be depicting Chua's article as a joke, mainly because he or she might be disagreeing with or misunderstanding the article's content. However the commenter plainly views it as *not funny* and states *Chua is not a talented humorist*. The commenter not only discredits Chua's article but also characterizes her as *a dreadful mother*. From this short statement it is possible to assume that the commenter is more in line with a 'Western' system of parenting beliefs where the child is regarded as central and vulnerable, and condemning Chua as a dreadful mother for not putting into practice more subtle and nurturing forms of parenting.

Another comment, sways away from a focus on Chua's actions and their influence on her children and rather centers on other sources of possible emotional harm for children. According to the following commenter exposing children to navigating the social challenges of the school cafeteria may also be unfavorable:

There is nothing so good about the school cafeteria that cannot be learned more efficiently and with less damage later. I am not at all sure that the hyper socialization that teens and pre-teens typically get is

really in their self interest. Emotions are too raw and too inexperienced for the social immersion where we dunk our children.

(record 69, NYT)

The above commenter shows concern for children's emotional well-being. We see evidence of this when the commenter says: *emotions are too raw and too inexperienced for the social immersion where we dunk our children.* With this statement the commenter gives credence to the 'Western' notion that children are vulnerable and that it is important that parents protect their children, also the commenter admits that parents are the ones ultimately carrying out this exposure. We see evidence of this in the use of the word *dunk* when the commenter refers to the social exposure that parents allow children to take part in.

Finally, two last comments were found where there was an open acknowledgment of the acquiescence there exists within the 'Western' parenting approach on the importance of self-esteem. The first one phrased the matter in the following terms:

I agree that there is a middle way: I think that this article was a humorous slap in the face to help us move closer towards it--instead of being trapped in the self-esteem paradigm.

(record 77, WSJ)

In the above record the commenter gives credence to the ‘Western’ notion that attributes value to self-esteem by stating that Chua's article might *help us move closer towards it; it being a middle way* that removes ‘Western’ parents away from what the commenter calls *being trapped in the self-esteem paradigm*.

The second comment in this respect phrases the matter by stating that:

American parents need to hear serious arguments in favor of replacing the cult of self esteem with one of accomplishment. This silly article, however, is nothing but a showcase for the author's vanity.

(record 98, WSJ)

Interestingly, in finding these two comments and observing that they both use phrases such as *cult of self-esteem* and *trapped in the self-esteem paradigm*, within the realm of American parenting, they are evidencing the worth and value that self-esteem has for the ‘Western’ approach to parenting and also conveying a sense of how pervasive this belief might be.

#### *11.1.1.3. De-emphasis on academics as a path to success*

The next theme we will look into for the ‘Western’ conceptualization of parenting was that which was formulated as *de-emphasis on academics as a path to success*; a total of 20 comments were classified as making reference to this topic. With regard to this theme some records, such as the one below, evoked the importance of *balance* and

stressed the worthiness of helping children develop and benefit from exposure to other things besides academics. In the following record we observe the following:

Being a mother of six, I understand the demands of helping your children succeed in life, which includes more than being at the top of your class. It is called balance and the ability to be a member of the human race and revel in the grandest adventure of all - life with all its uncertainties!

(record 7, NYT)

The above record conveys the belief that success is *more than being at the top of your class* and it comes from exploring life's *uncertainties*. A similar assertion comes from someone who says to have been raised by parents using similar methods to those as Chua, and also refers to the importance of balance when it comes to exposing children to academics and what he or she calls discovering things through *real-world problems*:

I was raised similarly through Korean parents, with the same emphasis on music and education. While I'm grateful for where my upbringing has brought me, I agree with the [...] importance of other cognitively difficult activities. I prefer the freedom and independence to discover myself through real-world problems and failures over tyrannical practices in the pursuit of perfection. I hope Asian parents raising

children in the U.S. start to adopt a more balanced approached to parenting. Balance is a very Chinese notion indeed.

(record 12, NYT)

Also, some commenters made reference to what they labelled the ‘Chinese’ *method* or *model* when alluding to a focus on academics, and contrasted it with allowing children to explore and engage in more artistic or other non-academic activities.

The last thing we need is a Chinese model for our children. Our daughter spent her school-day afternoons in the canyons, dancing, painting and playing. She is every bit as successful as the children whose parents woke them up at 3am to study or burned their stuffed animals, made it to the Ivy League and has actually worked for a living as well.

(record 18, NYT)

As we observe in the above record the commenter expresses the opinion that spending school day afternoons *in the canyons, dancing, painting and playing* instead of waking up early to study, did not prevent his or her daughter from succeeding, making it to the Ivy League and working for a living. With this comment we observe that the commenter gives credence to the belief that success and focusing on academics are not correlational.

Another commenter contrasting the focus on academics of the ‘Chinese’ approach says the following:

The 'Chinese' method resembles the old European method of severity and drills... How can you develop necessary communication, leadership or strategic thinking skills when all you do is play an instrument for hours?... I really don't care if one can exquisitely execute a Chopin piece on the piano or took calculus in the 8th grade because your parents made you do math instead of playing outside. If you don't have the skills listed above you will be at a severe disadvantage in life despite acing your SATs.

(record 92, WSJ)

According to the above comment, focus should not be placed on academics and immersing oneself in the effort of learning a musical instrument if it comes at the expense of developing other skills such as strategic thinking, communication and leadership –mostly social skills by nature. Similarly to what we saw when we analyzed the theme of developing social skills in section 11.1.1.1 the comment above underscores the importance and relevance of developing skills in the social and creative spheres because they are seen to give people an upper hand later in life. We see evidence of this when the commenter says: If you don't have the skills listed above [namely, creativity, communication, strategic thinking, and leadership] you will be at a severe disadvantage in life despite acing your SATs.”

Another argument downplaying a focus on academics, seemed to frame the matter as a mechanistic or mindless endeavor, that doesn't necessarily lead to the development of intellect or reasoning skills, which help solve problems:

In my experience students trained in this way just don't do well at all when they finally reach a meaningful intellectual challenge. I've seen it year in and year out. A student accustomed to excelling through mastery of formulaic structures just crumbles in the face of a serious intellectual challenge.

(record 24, NYT)

When the commenter uses the phrases *students trained in this way* or *a student accustomed to excelling through mastery of formulaic structures* one could assume that the commenter is making reference to what some commenters have labelled 'Chinese rote learning', and we found reference to this way of portraying the 'Chinese' learning approach as mechanistic in several records.

We also found commenters granting authenticity and validity to the main point that Brooks makes in his article, namely that children should be exposed to social encounters because these encounters are cognitive enhancers; children learn to understand complex phenomena through them. According to Brooks, by not allowing, or restricting her children from socializing and only emphasizing study and learning to



play a musical instrument, Chua is actually protecting them from that complexity, and being a *wimp*. For instance the following comment makes relates to this point:

Do you want your kid to play the piece of music perfectly or know enough to recognize when they're getting scammed by a con artist? The first is easy and safe to teach: Demands perfection for a narrow little problem. The second is difficult to teach. Who wants to put their child in this position? To allow this type of learning the child needs to experience it. Kids that are over scheduled don't have time to learn the important things Brooks mentions. Protecting kids from every danger by over-scheduling them is no different than locking them up in front of video games. And a lot of well meaning parents do this. Allowing kids to get themselves into a little trouble and encouraging them to get themselves out of it is a great thing.

(record 30, NYT)

By asking, *Do you want your kid to play the piece of music perfectly or know enough to recognize when they're getting scammed by a con artist?* and stating the question in this contrasting or oppositional way the commenter sets these two aspects on opposing spectrums and categories, and the commenter gives a partial response: *the first is easy and safe to teach. Demand perfection for a narrow little problem. The second is difficult to teach. Who wants to put their child in this position? To allow this type of learning the child needs to experience it.* We observe that the commenter seems to view *learning to*

*play a piece of music perfectly* as a *narrow little problem* since he is putting them sequentially together, compared to teaching children to *recognize when they're getting scammed by a con artist* as *difficult to teach*. This is evidence that the commenter seems to be placing a more positive value on the latter than on the former. The value may be attributed to the notion that recognizing a con artist's scam requires more social interactional experiences or *experiencing it* in the outside world than does playing a piece of music perfectly, which is a more solitary and instructional undertaking. The commenter does not seem to agree with *protecting children by over scheduling them*, something Chua does to her children, and in contrast places worth on allowing children *to get themselves into a little trouble and encouraging them to get themselves out of it*.

Another commenter also sees value and problem-solving potential in social activities and in spontaneous or intuitive activities and dismisses the 'Chinese' approach as inadequate by stating the following:

I would add one more thing that is equally as important to developing brain power in ways not addressed by rote and sheer effort—play. To relax and let the possibilities, especially those that come from others for nothing more than the fun of it finishes the circle of social interplay, it gives pleasurable motivation, even when effort is involved. It also is the source of many non-linear solutions to problems that would never have occurred to anybody if they went at it like running at a brick wall...There is a reason why Chinese higher

education is amongst some of the worst in the world, even if the competition to receive that education is also amongst the highest of the world. That’s why the best Chinese students come here... Perhaps with some friends and a little time to play her daughters would be more than performing monkeys and go on to composing something musically new, and breathtaking and have a quartet to perform it with.”

(record 19, NYT)

By stating that *play is important to developing brain power* and opposing it to *rote and sheer effort* the commenter is also contrasting methods of the ‘Chinese’ approach to learning and the ‘Western’ approach, which deems social interaction, creativity and leisure as crucial. A telling phrase with regard to this is the final one where the commenter states: *Perhaps with some friends and a little time to play her daughters would be more than performing monkeys and go on to composing something musically new, and breathtaking and have a quartet to perform it with*. This statement implies the importance that the commenter gives both to social interaction –by the use of the group phrases and words *some friends* and *quartet*– and to creativity –by the use of the phrases *go on to composing something musically new* and *performing monkey*, referring to the Chua daughters as to imply that they are just mechanically repeating musical notes instead of creating something novel.

Other commenters, acknowledged the ‘Western’ emphasis on developing social skills and de-emphasis on academics, but portrayed this as a *problem*, rather than something beneficial:

The problem is that the schools (and parents) today produce too many "people persons" with weak academics who cannot work in advanced technical fields. In the meantime, it's highly likely that Chua will push her daughters to develop people skills because, if for nothing else, it is required for the admission to the best universities.

(record 65, NYT)

Interestingly, while the above comment observes that a sole emphasis on developing social skills may produce people with weak academics, it still reflects the importance and necessity of social skills for American life because it is an ultimate academic requirement. This is evidenced in the final phrase: *it's highly likely that Chua will push her daughters to develop people skills because, if for nothing else, it is required for the admission to the best universities.*

Another commenter, while being critical of David Brook’s article, does acknowledge the existence within the United States of a mindset that underscores the importance of social learning and downplays the importance of academics:

This piece frankly strikes me as an insight into what is wrong with education today in the US. Here's an intelligent, accomplished man

comparing structured intellectual activity and training to socializing, and proclaiming socializing the winner. My question is this: If you don't know anything, what good is your socializing?... Not that Mr. Brook's fundamental point isn't correct. The best predictor for primate brain size is the size of the species' social group. The larger the group, the larger the brain. Obviously, the demands of knowing the thoughts and actions of other similarly equipped creatures as yourself in competitive situations are staggering. But that's not the point...

(record 13, NYT)

We observe in the record above that the commenter questions the validity of a belief system that would give preeminence to socializing when juxtaposing its relevance with *structured intellectual activity*. The main question he poses is *if you don't know anything, what good is your socializing?*, as if to imply that any claims regarding the positive outcomes of socialization must go hand in hand with the acquisition of knowledge. However the commenter does grant the social sphere significance, especially with respect to the cognitive demands it places on human beings, claiming that *the best predictor for primate brain size is the size of the species' social group* and also stating that *the demands of knowing the thoughts and actions of other similarly equipped creatures as yourself in competitive situations are staggering* and with this statement the commenter is ultimately agreeing with Brooks that understanding social dynamics is cognitively important and demanding.

Finally, the last comment in this series relates to the above in that it is also critical of David Brooks's point and but in this case the commenter overtly disapproves of the educational approach of what he calls "American parenting":

You're kidding, right? Sleepovers as training for managing group dynamics? Groups are successful when their members are smart, well read, motivated to complete the task, and up to speed on the problem. None these skills are taught or enhanced by sleepovers, video games, or watching TV. They are enhanced by reading, completing homework, understanding statistics (and other math), problem solving, and understanding what it takes to actually be successful. Bravo to Amy Chua for telling the uncomfortable truth about modern American parenting. The current work ethic and lack of educational success of most American children certainly corroborates her point of view.

(record 63, NYT)

We observe in the above record that the commenter not only disagrees with David Brooks's premise that sleepovers constitute a challenging situation for learning social dynamics, but congratulates Amy Chua on her approach. The criticism is evidence in his question: *You're kidding, right? Sleepovers as training for managing group dynamics?* The commenter believes that group success happens when members are *smart, well read, motivated to complete the task, and up to speed on the problem*, not by members' engagement in activities such as *sleepovers, video games, or watching TV*. According to

the commenter, the skills that are needed for successful groups are enhanced by *reading, completing homework, understanding statistics (and other math), problem solving, and understanding what it takes to actually be successful*. These activities mentioned by the commenter are not of the social type, but rather of the academic type. The type that requires study, effort and practice to master. Furthermore, the criticism does not stop at Brooks's article but the commenter goes on to dismiss what he calls *modern American parenting*. At the end of his comment he congratulates and nods approvingly at Amy Chua's perspective on parenting by stating that, *the current work ethic and lack of educational success of most American children certainly corroborates her [Chua's] point of view*.

#### *11.1.1.4. Creativity is important and should be encouraged*

The next theme we will analyze, tied in number of mentions with the two above, regarding the 'Western' conceptualization of parenting was that which was formulated as *creativity is important and should be encouraged*; a total of 20 comments were classified as making reference to this topic and we will look at a selection of them below. It is noteworthy to mention that, creativity as a valuable trait is regarded as co-relational to another theme: we believe that the importance of creativity seems to be related to the theme we will analyze in section 11.1.1.5 below where we will discuss the another 'Western' theme where importance is assigned to nurturing individuality and individual thought. In this section we will find comments touching the matter of

creativity in itself, as well as comments that contrasted ‘Chinese’ culture in relation to this theme for its lack of encouragement of creativity.

One commenter noted the importance of what was referred to as “creative play”:

...I think that creative play is also very important to a young child. Creative play would be activities such as making a paper airplane out of a sheet of paper, drawing a picture on a blank piece of paper, writing a story, making things out of clay, etc. These types of activities use a child's imagination. And all play is not creative play. I think that many of our battery-operated toys may be entertaining, at least for a short period of time, but they do not really require much imagination. A child's imagination is also the natural cure for boredom.

(record 9, NYT)

Interestingly, we observe that play is contrasted with *creative play*, remarking on the significance of integrating and incorporating creativity in children’s most basic everyday activity. According to the commenter, for children, learning should not just be fun, but also aimed at stimulating originality and triggering the imagination. Imagination, is an important faculty worth stimulating because it is *the natural cure for boredom*. With these statements the commenter evidences his or her own view that enabling, or giving children vast opportunities for developing creativity is important.



Another comment that gave credence to the importance of creativity did so recounting his or her experience in China:

Ten years ago I spent a year teaching at a Primary School in Yunnan Province, China. It was considered a most progressive school, with a forward thinking Principal and some well prepared teachers. But I struggled that whole year to teach either the students or their teachers how to think critically...how to problem solve, to think of alternative ways to find solutions to difficult questions I posed.

(record 59, NYT)

The commenter is evidencing a critical standpoint of the ‘Chinese’ approach to education by stating that during the time spent in China *I struggled that whole year to teach either the students or their teachers how to think critically... how to problem solve, to think of alternative ways to find solutions to difficult questions I posed*. Phrases such as *how to think critically, how to problem-solve, think in alternative ways*, indicate the commenter’s value of critical thought, ingenuity and resourcefulness, all traits linked to creativity, as well as his conviction that these things need to be learned and known. The idea that the commenter *struggled that whole year to teach* these things evidences his own persuasion with regard to these matters.

We found another commenter stating the following:

What's really sad is that these incredible and hard earned talents will then be wasted in creating human-robots, with no chance of ever creating anything of value with them.

(record 35, WSJ)

The above record came up in response to Chua's article published in the WSJ where she outlines her practices and routines with her daughters. By stating, *What's really sad is that these incredible and hard earned talents*, we assume that the commenter would be pitying the fact that the regimented instruction imparted by Chua on her daughters, regardless of the outcomes they achieve in playing their instruments, takes away from them the possibility of *ever creating anything of value*. In this sense the control and systematization and mechanistic qualities of Chua's methods subtracts from inspiring creativity. Furthermore, the phrase *human robots* gives way to conveying the Chua daughters as automated beings lacking creative capacity.

Another three comments were also found making critical judgments both of 'Chinese' culture in general, as well as the education imparted on the Chua daughters when it came to creativity; the first one states the following:

The only native Chinese Nobel price winner is the peace prize. While the Nobel peace prize is great, not a single intellectual Nobel Prize or the Field Medal has been won by a native Chinese in a land of 1.3

billion people... Chua's daughters will grow up to be highly efficient technocrats, but Einstein, Mozart, Gauss, etc, etc, they will certainly not be. While we must improve our education in all grades level, we must not blindly copy the extremist Chinese method of robbing their children of all innate creativity.

(record 66, NYT)

The commenter remarks on the notion that, 'Chinese' upbringing such as the one Chua is imparting on her daughters produces *technocrats*. The commenter implies that this is not a recipe for instilling creativity and ingenuity. We find evidence of this in phrases such as *not a single intellectual Nobel Prize or the Field Medal has been won by a native Chinese in a land of 1.3 billion people* and *Chua's daughters will grow up to be highly efficient technocrats, but Einstein, Mozart, Gauss, etc, etc, they will certainly not be*. The commenter also acknowledges that the American education system must be improved "*in all grades*" but that copying the "*extremist Chinese method*" would be a misstep, since according to the commenter it constitutes *robbing children of all innate creativity*. By making these statements the commenter evidences his or her value of instilling creativity in children.

The other record making negative references to how Chua raises her daughters and evidencing support for the instillment of creativity is the following:

Whatever talent, curiosity and interests her daughters might have brought to their own lives on their own initiative– that just gets thrown out with the trash.

(record 21, NYT)

In stating the above the commenter is expressing his or her belief that it is important to allow children their own individual space to explore, as well as room for being creative. It conveys that Chua with her actions is somehow stifling her daughters' creativity, *initiative* and individuality.

Finally, the third record where references are made to the methods seen as applied to the Chua daughters, specifically *rote learning*, also evidences preference for the instillment of creativity:

...all that rote learning and drilling isn't conducive to developing creative thinking abilities

(record 74, WSJ)

In another tone, and in contrast with the views expressed in most comments above, the following record does not show an absolute rejection of what is referred to as *rote learning and drilling*, methods associated to the 'Chinese' approach, however it is interesting to observe that the commenter mitigates it by stating that it's problematic *IF* it is *the only method used*:

I agree rote learning and drilling have its drawbacks in parenting, IF that is the only method used. Note that Ms. Chua in telling LuLu to make her another birthday card was challenging LuLu to be more creative (which she probably knows LuLu is capable of).

(record 83, WSJ)

The commenter implies that the effects of applying *rote learning and drills* are mitigated by instilling creativity in children, an idea that although not expressed in absolute incompatible or opposing terms with Chua's methods, still evidences the assignment of positive worth to the instillment of creativity.

Another record in this section also refers to the view that we have seen some comments to have with regard to a scarcity among the 'Chinese' for creativity and original thought:

I find most Chinese to lack creativity and the ability to produce original thought. Indeed, we're seeing graduate programs in China producing complete fiction in so-called "research publications". The work is irreproducible. China is well known for ignoring patents and copyrights. Given their inability to produce anything of originality in modern times, I'm not surprised.

(record 85, WSJ)

The commenter gives credence to the ‘Western’ notion that creativity is important by issuing an assertion such as *I find most Chinese to lack creativity and the ability to produce original thought*. the commenter casts this trait as a setback and is critical of ‘Chinese’ for having what he calls an *inability to produce anything of originality*. These statements attest to the commenter’s value of innovation and originality.

Finally, we close this series with a record that attests to the belief that creativity can be stifled if parents are too forceful with their children, or impose their perspectives on children without allowing them some leeway, in this sense the commenter states the following:

There may very well be something to the notion that forcing the child to do what the parents want above all may be bad for creativity.

(record 87, WSJ)

With the above statement the commenter evidences a plausible belief in the worth of instilling creativity in children.

*11.1.1.5. Avoidance of dominance and control: Children are entitled to freedom and developing their individuality and independence.*

The next highest theme mentioned for the ‘Western’ conceptualization of parenting was that formulated as *avoidance of dominance and control: children are entitled to freedom*

*and developing their individuality and independence.* As can be observed in Table 2 above, a total of 19 comments made reference to this subject matter. To set the tone for the comments issued in relation to this theme we will begin by looking at the following comment:

I want to know how to raise a child who has the confidence to try something they are not familiar with or 'good at', all the while being willing to fail while they learn it.

(record 6, NYT)

We observe that the above record assumes the worthiness of freedom and individuality, and this is evidenced in the phrase, *I want to know how to raise a child who has the confidence to try something they are not familiar with or 'good at.'* With it, the commenter expresses the wish of instilling boldness and ingenuity in a growing child. The commenter advocates a form of childrearing that enables children to *try something they are not familiar with* and *being willing to fail while they learn it.* These phrases embody the desire for expressions of singularity in children and reveal the belief that a willingness to fail while making original attempts and venturing into uncharted territories might be a channel for success, resilience-building and fortitude, provided that the experience is all used as an instrument for learning.

Another record objects to parents getting in the way of children's *life* and assigns value to children's use of individual resources for learning and exploring:

Trying to be in total control of a child's life indicates a lack of confidence in the child's own abilities to explore, learn, and excel beyond the parents, and is indeed a clear sign of over-protection

(record 16, NYT)

In stating the above the commenter seems to be putting into practice a belief system in which children are seen as completely and innately endowed with certain individual capabilities that enable them to navigate that which they need to learn. Parents' exertion of control, according to this view, indicates lack confidence and overprotection.

In a similar vein, the following two comments view children as entitled to their own freedom, self-expression, individuality and independence, and in them learning is viewed as a natural occurrence which can be hindered by too much parental –or adult, for that matter– interference:

Children learn when they see a leaf falling from a tree. Every step toward one thing is a step away from something else... When you condition the mind in certain ways, and tell the cognitive brain of an alert child, "this is what is important!", those who can, or who don't have the energy or personality to resist, naturally move in that direction.

(record 17, NYT)



The above comment uses the phrase *condition the mind* to object with interfering with the mental processing that is presumably taking place within *the cognitive brain of an alert child* in the interpretation and formation of concepts about the world. According to the above record, restraint should be used by parents over themselves when tempted to direct children as to *what is important*. According to this view, those children who do not have *the energy or personality to resist*, or a natural disposition for independence, will follow that adult lead, presumably hindering children's autonomy and potential. In this sense the commenter is also conveying credence and relevance to the notion of innate ability.

The following record also touches on the matter of autonomy:

The issue here is parental control, whether soft or hard, that discourages the young from autonomy, and defines autonomy as wicked.

(record 25, NYT)

In asserting that, *parental control whether soft or hard...discourages the young from autonomy* the commenter gives credence to the belief that children benefit from exercising their own individuality and to self-expression. The implication is that parents should not hinder their children's independence or stifle children's desire for autonomy by viewing at an unsuitable behavior.

As we saw in section 11.1.1.1, when analyzing the theme of developing social and emotional skills, some comments mentioning the theme of parental avoidance of control, also linked the benefits of developing autonomy and self-confidence with success:

It's a more nuanced approach when you encourage children to work up to their potential, but then trust them to do it without hovering over them ... I think "success" in the new world will belong to those who have the confidence to develop their own ideas and run with them. Applying too much force is spirit-killing and prevents children from developing the multitude of coping and reasoning skills they need to navigate a much more complex world than the one we came up in.

(record 32, NYT)

By stating the above, the commenter gives credence and value to the 'Western' idea that parents should restrain from controlling, or applying *too much force* on their children. This parental behavior, according to the commenter is *spirit-killing and prevents children* from developing their own coping devices to *navigate the much more complex* world they will need to face. Furthermore, the commenter reports that children should be allowed freedom to explore and encouraged *to work up to their potential* without their parents' *hovering over them*. In the commenter's view, *success, will belong to those who have the confidence to develop their own ideas and run with them.*

Other comments were oriented at implying that children's decision matters most when it comes to engaging in certain activities. As a case in point we observe that the record below gives preeminence to children's choices or natural aptitudes for learning to play a musical instrument in stating the following:

I think a kid learning an instrument is always a good thing. If your kid is passionate and very good at it, that's awesome.

(record 78, WSJ)

By stating the above, the commenter assigns children a prominent role and place in the decision to play a musical instrument. The conditional *if* is used and elicits the implication that the choice revolves around children's aptitude and interest in it. The commenter, in phrasing the matter in the above manner, supplies parents no role in facilitating playing the instrument, or as relevant actors in the matter. The agency is solely placed on the child.

Another commenter contrasted the 'Western' notion which regards freedom and individuality as a positive idea and contrasts it to a more Asian approach to parenting. A mother who considers herself a 'Western' parent recounts the story of meeting a Korean mother who made her realize that children needed to be propelled to do things, like practicing their musical instrument at home, and the commenter compares this view with the 'Western' perspective of letting children be:

I know how fortunate I was, when my older child was starting piano lessons at about age 5, to encounter a mom of a 4-year-old studying with the same piano teacher –this mom was herself a musician, and, incidentally, from Korea– and in a chatting sort of way I commented that my daughter loved her lessons, loved the teacher, "but didn't always want to practice." The Korean cellist-mom looked at me in amazement and said, "Of course they don't want to practice! They're just children! You have to make them!" ... I know that from then on, I began to think of it [making them practice] as akin to my parental attitude towards brushing teeth (non-negotiable) or, later on, doing homework ... I'm glad that mom and I talked –I can't count the number of times other parents said to me, later on and wistfully, contrasting their child with mine, "Gee, I wish my little so-and-so would practice, but she just doesn't want to." That seemed to be the accepted, expected Western attitude: sure, give your kids an instrument, arrange for lessons, but practicing–that had to be on them, as if to say, if following their bliss leads them to practice the instrument, so much the better, and if not, then not!

(record 100, WSJ)

We observe in the record above that the commenter is giving credence to a divergence in terms of beliefs concerning parental involvement and interference with children vs.

entrusting children with freedom of action. According to the Korean mother, children need to be forced into practicing the piano because they are children and they will not want to do it on their own.

According to the commenter, the 'Western' attitude is more laissez-faire and accords children a wider scope of action and flexibility. This is clearly evidenced in the last section of her comment when she says that the expected 'Western' attitude seemed to be something like: *sure, give your kids an instrument, arrange for lessons, but practicing-- that had to be on them, as if to say, if following their bliss leads them to practice the instrument, so much the better, and if not, then not!*

Finally, our last comment in the analysis related to the theme of parental control is one where a direct condemnation is made on 'Chinese' mothering in general:

Why is the pursuit of dramatical studies less meaningful than music or math? Why does success have to come from a prescribed list of fields that seems to have been set in stone the day the first Chinese mother stepped foot on this country? Drawing from my own observations I feel that Chinese Mothering breeds a very nasty mentality; every interaction is seen as though it's a zero-sum game with dominance as the only goal.

(record 34, WSJ)

The commenter's underlying criticism seems to be directed at questioning the validity of Chua's, or 'Chinese' mothers' in general, prescriptive actions of claiming that drama lessons are less important than music or math, for instance, or believing that meaningful success is restricted to the achievement of a prescribed list of fields of knowledge. The commenter's remarks seem to oppose the notion that parenting entails being restrictive, controlling and influential on children and imply that parents should interfere less with their children. The commenter's final statement asserts that, *Chinese Mothering breeds a very nasty mentality where every interaction is seen as a zero-sum game with dominance as the only goal*. In this sense, 'Chinese' parenting is identified as controlling and the commenter seems to be more in line with the 'Western' value of avoiding parental dominance and control towards children.

*11.1.1.6. Parents as undemanding, tolerant, lenient and permissive*

We found descriptions that made reference to notions of 'Western' parents as being *undemanding, tolerant, lenient and permissive* in a total of 18 comments. To set the tone for the comments found in relation to this theme, it is interesting to observe the following record, making reference to something the commenter calls a general *culture of laziness and entitlement*:

I really hope that Chua's book brings American parenting into focus, and fully acknowledges it as a factor in American education... While I believe strongly that children have a right to a childhood, they also

have a right to high expectations from their families, and the greater community...I have one hundred forty students (and yes, that is far too many). Eight parents showed up on parent conference night. Out of the eight, five were the parents of students at the top of their classes...Because our political leadership lacks the intestinal fortitude to add parents and students to the educational equation, and instead lay the entire load on the teacher, the excellence we desire will not appear. The first step in solving a problem is acknowledging the extent of the problem. Ours is a culture of laziness and entitlement.

(record 15, NYT)

According to the commenter, in America there exists an overall cultural frame of mind when it comes to being undemanding and lax with children. The commenter is critical of both parents and the larger community because emphasis and accountability is seemingly solely put on teachers when it comes to education. The commenter characterizes parents as not being involved in their children's instruction and implies that they don't have *high expectations* of their children. According to this record, parents show signs of being in general uninterested and disconnected from their children's formal education. We see evidence of this in the following statement: *I have one hundred forty students (and yes, that is far too many). Eight parents showed up on parent conference night. Out of the eight, five were the parents of students at the top of their classes.*

In a similar vein, we find the following record to be evidence of the notion that it is not just parents who encompass the values for leniency and lack of demand towards children, but also society at large:

I'm also a retired high school teacher, and observed first-hand the shocking lack of rigor that has become acceptable in academic subjects. Parents care more about their child's comfort and ease, than thinking about what will be good for them long-term. Most of my upper middle class students in an 'excellent' school, even the ones getting all A's in other classes, could hardly write their way out of a sentence. It wasn't just the grammar and spelling they lacked, it was the inability to express their ideas...Because of my own experiences growing up, and later, teaching, I have a clear idea of the downside of today's overly-coddling style of parenting; weak, ineffectual, self-indulgent adults who don't know how to do things well, or subject their own efforts to a reasonable, healthy degree of self-criticism.

(record 26, NYT)

The fact that the commenter describes that her students *in an 'excellent' school, even the ones getting all A's in other classes* as hardly being able to *write their way out of a sentence* is evidence of a more extensive undemanding culture.



Furthermore, the commenter views *over-coddling* parenting practices as a detriment to children in the long run. According to the commenter the consequence of this is the potential of raising children who grow up to be *weak, ineffectual self-indulgent adults who don't know how to do things well, or subject their own efforts to a reasonable, healthy degree of self-criticism.*

In another record, we find some criticism toward Chua and her practices as a mother; however, at the same time the commenter notes that American parenting lacks discipline:

Just because she [Chua] pushed her extreme of discipline too far, doesn't mean her point concerning American parenting's lack of discipline is any less valid.

(record 13, NYT)

In stating the above, the commenter gives credence to the idea that 'Western' parents might fall short when it comes to instilling their children with self-restraint or treating them firmly.

An analogous record was found also making reference to American parents exercising lack of discipline with their children, this time making specific references to behaviors parents and children engage in to embody this characterization:

Yes, American parents are too indulgent. Yes, many Chinese parents probably are far too strict. American parents are actually afraid of their kids, afraid that they will withdraw affection and hate them forever (not just for a season). American parents put up with their kids talking back to them in vulgar, rude ways and try to laugh it off.

(record 20, NYT)

The extent of American parent's tolerance and permissiveness is evidenced in the commenter's use of phrases such as *American parents are too indulgent*, *American parents are actually afraid of their kids*, *afraid that they will withdraw affection and hate them forever*, and the final phrase, *American parents put up with their kids talking back to them in vulgar, rude ways and try to laugh it off*. These phrases not only portray American parents as lacking control over their children's behavior, but also too lenient and tolerant of disrespectful behaviors on behalf of the children.

Another commenter also noted the perception exposed in the above record that American parents seem to tiptoe or avoid confronting, or dealing with their children:

I do agree with her in that most parents don't want to be a bad guy. My dad was very tough and used the shame guilt. I did feel shame when I embarrassed my parents or acted up. Kids today could use a little more of that.

(record 78, WSJ)

We see evidence of the recognition that parents avoid confronting their children in the phrase *I do agree with her in that most parents don't want to be a bad guy*. The commenter gives credence to this parental behavior, but doesn't necessarily correspond with it, by stating *Kids today could use a little more of that*, "that" standing for *being very tough* and using *shame guilt* on children to get them to behave.

Finally, the last two comments in this section also give credence to the theme of 'Western' parents being undemanding, tolerant, lenient and permissive:

I agree whole heartedly that American parents have forgotten to be adults. The first duty is to prepare the child for adulthood, not protect them from adulthood.

(record 67, NYT)

The above record, for instance, shows the commenter's perception of parents behavior as inadequate with regard to their children. By stating that, *American parents have forgotten to be adults* we get the sense that the commenter is implying that parents do not sufficiently instruct, or instill in their children the necessary values that they will need as they grow up. We see further evidence of this sentiment when the commenter notes that a parent's first duty is *to prepare the child for adulthood, not protect them from adulthood*.

The closing comment in this section also refers to *American parenting as too soft*, but nonetheless reminds us that Chua's parenting style swings *in the other extreme*, hence cautioning on whether it might be helpful for parents to follow her practices:

I agree that much modern American parenting is too soft, but doubt it is helpful to simply swing to the other extreme.

(record 29, NYT)

This last comment in this series reminds us that although some commenters show criticism towards, or value negatively, 'Western' parenting practices, they still stand in opposition to Chua's parenting approach, and consider it detrimental to *swing in the other extreme* as this comment openly recognizes.

*11.1.1.7. Non-hierarchical and non-reciprocal parent-child relationship*

The final highest theme mentioned for the 'Western' conceptualization of parenting was that which was formulated as *non-hierarchical and non-reciprocal parent-child relationship*; a total of 18 comments were classified as making reference to this topic. This theme was interesting in that it was related to and touched upon other themes mentioned, such as the need for parents to restrain from control, or the centrality of children, or the undemanding nature of 'Western' parents toward their children. We will see this interconnection in most of the records presented below.

The following comment, for instance, encourages a gentle, subtle manner to inducing or influencing children. According to the commenter:

You actually have more control if you ease up on the reins...A mother leads by example and gentle nudges.

(record 2, NYT)

The non-hierarchical nature of the parent-child relationship is evidenced in the fact that the parent needs to *nudge* a child, this term connoting approaching parental matters by making use of indirect methods, such as *examples* to achieve a certain behavior or to involve the child in certain activities. In this scenario, the parent would need to embody and model desired behaviors for their children, instead of imposing or demanding them on the children. This belief is not only evidence of the non accordance of a higher status in terms of hierarchy to parents, but also of the centrality accorded to children.

Another comment that evidenced the non-reciprocal nature of the ‘Western’ parent-child relationship was the following:

An education is a gift you give to your children, but if their childhood must be surgically removed to accommodate it, then something is out of whack.

(record 3, NYT)

Interestingly, by describing education as a *gift*, a term which suggests a voluntary transfer of something to one person without expecting compensation for it, the commenter is characterizing the act of providing education for their children as something parents accord to children willingly without expecting anything in return. The fact that the commenter also states *but if children's childhood needs to be surgically removed to accommodate it then something is out of whack*, further stresses the centrality and preeminence accorded to childhood and children in the parent-child relationship and the non-reciprocity of this family tie as well: parents are expected to give, education in this case, but children are not necessarily expected to respond in kind.

In the following comment we again come across evidence of the non reciprocity of the relationship between parents and children acquiesced to in the 'Western' approach to parenting:

Children know if their parents love them and are motivated by doing what they feel is best for them and children will be capable of forgiving missteps.

(record 60, NYT)

In the above record what is highlighted is what parents do for their children, and not the other way around. Also parental love seems to be contingent on parents doing what is best for children and most material to this notion, it is children who are central in judging this love as well as forgiving their parents missteps. In fact, from looking at this

comment, specifically in the phrase *children will be capable of forgiving missteps*, if there was any hierarchy to be found in the ‘Western’ parent-child relationship, one might be tempted to have to accord the child a higher rank than the parent.

Another record evidencing the non-hierarchical parent-child ‘Western’ relationship is the following:

More often than not, nowadays it seems many parents are their children's "friends" and many often live vicariously through their children.

(record 4, NYT)

By describing parents as their children’s *“friends”* the commenter portrays parents and their children as counterparts in the relationship they share, and not as there being a hierarchy between the two. The use of the quotation marks to signal the word *“friends”* is interesting because it might be an indication of an uncertainty on the part of the commenter that such a relationship is actually possible between parents and their children.

Another record is found to remark on the possible repercussions of parental concessions but the commenter does so first cautioning the implication of making use of “harsh measures” in raising children:

Slave driving one's kids through harsh measures could very well make for some very unhappy children and, later, adults. Constantly giving

in, acting as though nothing is more important in the world than little junior, results in kids who feel there are no boundaries. Raising kids is hard work. Those who survive it and help to produce balanced, moral, alert and caring offspring deserve congratulations.

(record 20, NYT)

We observe that the commenter gives credence to both the vulnerability of children, by stating that *slave driving one's kids through harsh measures could very well make for some very unhappy children and, later, adults*, as well as to the non-hierarchical nature of the parent-child relationship by remarking that parents constantly give in, presumably to their children's demands and act, *as though nothing is more important in the world than little junior*. The use of the fact that parents act as if there is *nothing* more important than their children implies that not even parents regard themselves as more important or higher-ranking than their children.

Finally our last record in this section also recognizes and values the non-hierarchical and non-reciprocal parent-child relationship by stating the following:

Indeed, a key to successful parenting is true ownership by the child concerned of whatever endeavors. Trying to supplant that ownership with parental authority, even with the best intentions, is more likely counter-productive...

(record 16, NYT)



By remarking that *a key to successful parenting is true ownership by the child concerned of whatever endeavors* the commenter is assigning the child paramount capacity and downplaying the role of parental guidance in the child's accomplishments. Parents, according to this view, are accorded only a tangential import and significance: parental success is contingent on the child owning his or her endeavors. The commenter builds on the belief that parents should refrain from influencing their children due to its detrimental effects by stating that, *trying to supplant that ownership with parental authority, even with the best intentions, is more likely counter-productive...*

#### *11.1.2. Qualitative analysis of 'Chinese' themes found in the comments*

##### *11.1.2.1. Family involvement and responsibility in children's instruction and moral development / Suitability of parental control, influence and use of authority*

The theme mentioned most frequently for the 'Chinese' conceptualization of parenting was the one formulated as *family involvement and responsibility in children's instruction and moral development / Suitability of parental control, influence and use of authority*; a total of 22 comments were found as fitting to be classified in this theme. Several comments weighing in on this came from people who identified themselves of Chinese origin, or having Asian backgrounds. One such comment was the following:

As a first generation American born Chinese, I found this article full of humor and satire as it fully hits the nail on the head regarding mine

and my brother's upbringing as well as my cousins ... My mother's mother was even harder on her than she was on me, since life was extremely difficult in Hong Kong during her childhood, and she wanted my mother to have the opportunities that she could not have by coming to the US.

(record 37, WSJ)

As we can see, the commenter identifies herself as coming from an Asian background, and asserts understanding the humor and satire contained in Chua's article as published in the WSJ. The commenter explains the similarities between Amy Chua's practices her own upbringing, underscoring that Chinese upbringing places value on pushing children to be better and on providing them with better opportunities than immigrating parents had for themselves in their places of origin. We see evidence of this when she says *My mother's mother was even harder on her than she was on me, since life was extremely difficult in Hong Kong during her childhood, and she wanted my mother to have the opportunities that she could not have by coming to the US.*

This view is in line with the Chinese notion that places a child's instruction and moral development on parents and also conveys belief that parents need to be *hard* on children and exercise control and authority over them to secure opportunities for them in the future.

Another commenter based his statements on what has been observed in his wife's Asian family:

My wife is asian, and my opinion is that asian families are much more tight-knit than American families. They expect nothing from the government like most american families do and try all they can to make their children self-sufficient.

(record 39, WSJ)

With phrases such as *Asian families are much more tight-knit than American families* and *try all they can to make their children self-sufficient* one could assume that the commenter conveys a sense of fellowship which could imply an effort on the part of parents to be involved in their children's affairs as well as the inculcation of a reciprocal relationship. The second phrase highlighted gives credence to the 'Chinese' value that views parents as responsible and involved in their children's overall development.

Another commenter also identifying himself as of Chinese origin states the following:

Chinese parents vary in their strictness as well ... My parents honestly weren't so strict compared to my friends' parents...

(record 84, WSJ)

It is interesting to note that the above record signals degrees, or a spectrum of strictness when it comes to 'Chinese' parenting. The assertion seems to assume that 'Chinese'

parenting is characterized by authority, the only issue being how much authority parents actually exercise. In this sense, regardless of the amount of authority that one ‘Chinese’ parent exercises with regard to another, the commenter seems to be characterizing parents as all possessing that attribute. By reflecting this assumption the commenter gives credence to the ‘Chinese’ notion that identifies Chinese parents as strict and rigorous.

Not all comments making reference to this theme are as innocuous as the above, or welcoming of parental involvement, influence and use of authority as we saw in the first two we presented above. One commenter, also making reference to his or her ‘Chinese’ origin, frames the matter in the following way:

I am from such a Chinese family being raised by a very strict father.  
However I still don't find this article funny. In fact, I HATE my father for all that he has done to me. I hated going home during the holidays knowing he will be there. And I avoid contacting him. I hated going home during the holidays knowing he will be there. And I avoid contacting him. Since it's customary for grandparents to help raise grandchildren, I will absolutely REFUSE my kids to spend any extended time with them as I do not want their parenting style to have any influence on my children.

(record 40, WSJ)

We observe in the above record that the commenter asserts being from Chinese origin and *being raised by a very strict father*. By using this phrase the commenter identifies his or her Chinese upbringing as including a strict and authoritative parent. The commenter is very emphatic about his or her feelings toward the parental figure, stating *In fact, I HATE my father for all that he has done to me*. The commenter further notes that he or she avoids *contacting him* and *hated going home for the holidays*. These phrases, and the capitalization of the word *HATE* connote feelings of rejection, animosity and resentment toward the type of upbringing the commenter received. Furthermore the commenter asserts, *Since it's customary for grandparents to help raise grandchildren, I will absolutely REFUSE my kids to spend any extend time with them as I do not want their parenting style to have any influence on my children*. With this statement, the commenter gives credence to the 'Chinese' tradition where not only parents but also other family members are involved in children's upbringing. However, as we note in the above statement, and especially in the use of the phrase *absolutely REFUSE*. The commenter vehemently rejects this tradition as applicable to his or her own life since he or she is so averse to this type of upbringing and its practices.

Another commenter also recounts an experience of parental involvement within 'Chinese' parenting. In this case the story is neither a first hand account of 'Chinese' upbringing nor as personal as the record above. In this case a girl is retelling the experience of her encounter with a Chinese mother who asked her about her resolving math problems in the summer:

... the Chinese mom of one of this girl's friends asked her what she was doing with math problems over the summer to which she replied, "Nothing." (to the shock of the Chinese mom who was tutoring her daughter daily with math exercises).

(record 47, WSJ)

We note in the above record again evidence that ‘Chinese’ parents are closely involved in children’s instruction, and the belief in the need to exercise different forms of influence on their children. In this case the mother “tutors” her daughter by drilling math exercises over the summer, however this help is no less a way the mother finds to have an effect over her daughter’s activities and interests, and is a form of exercising control over possible academic outcomes. The record gives credence to the ‘Chinese’ notion that parents should be involved and influential in their children's tutelage: in this case the mother personally teaches and instructs her daughter.

Another record is seen to be responding to another person’s comment issued in the WSJ article which portrayed Chua as a *dreadful mother* in the following terms:

A dreadful mother that secures a prosperous future for her offspring.

As opposed to a mother that allows them to play on Facebook and Youtube all day long, thus certainly ensuring a life long tenure of work at Walmart or at some fast food joint.

(record 50, WSJ)

In the above comment, we observe that the commenter gives credence to the idea that being a demanding parent, as well being involved in children's schooling and education might contribute to academic success in school, the key evidence is the use of the term *secure* as something Amy Chua does by being involved in their upbringing and education. The commenter contrasts Chua's involvement in procuring *a prosperous future* for her children with a hypothetical mother that *allows them [her children] to play on Facebook and Youtube all day long, thus certainly ensuring a life long tenure of work at Walmart or at some fast food joint.*

Finally, the last record in this section likens the commenter's own Irish upbringing and mother to the 'Chinese' mother that Amy Chua describes and represents:

My mother was an Irish immigrant to the U.S. in the early 1960s. She was determined that her two American-born children were not going to waste any advantage offered to them by this great country, particularly higher educational opportunities. In my culture, it was assumed that children came out of the womb strong enough to have high goals set for them, to meet these goals and to be corrected when they failed to meet them. My mother shares many characteristics with the Chinese mothers. There comes a time when each child has to decide whether to be ordinary in life or to be something more. Your parents help you see that you can be extraordinary.

(record 90, WSJ)

In the above record, a few phrases stand out as effectively corresponding to some of the ‘Chinese’ values we have been describing. For instance, by stating that her mother *was determined that her two American-born children were not going to waste any advantage offered to them by this great country, particularly higher educational opportunities*, the commenter conveys the mother as being heedful and resolute to helping and being involved in her children’s taking advantage of the new opportunities they were exposed to. The phrase *to have high goals set for them*, especially the verbal form used, conveys that decision making for setting goals was not something up to the children, but set externally as a requirement to meet children’s assumed strength. This phrase indicates that it is the parents’ responsibility to make decisions that effectively contribute to a child’s development. Lastly, the commenter states *your parents help you see that you can be extraordinary*, a phrase that again signals to the importance of parental guidance and direction in raising children in a way that will help them realize the maximum potential.

*11.1.2.2. Effort and practice are critical in the attainment of goals*

As can be observed in Table 2 in section 11.1. above, a total of 16 comments were classified as making reference to the ‘Chinese’ theme formulated as *effort and practice are critical in the attainment of goals* as something valuable. The comments made with respect to this theme could mostly be grouped into two categories: 1) those that



recognize effort as an Asian value and behavior, and 2) those who endorse effort, and in doing so also express a certain degree of criticism toward ‘Western’ parenting practices.

Interestingly we will begin our discussion with a record where we observe a combination of both categories. In this sense, it is exemplary of comments found in general:

I am a Chinese mom who also believes in pushing my children, for them to be competitive in the future. I do agree with her [Chua] that American parents tend to coddle their children. Since my son was in Kindergarten, I have seen parents battle school administration to have less homework, less testing, less competition, less challenges and more playtime, more individual focus... what has that attitude achieve? Bunch of kids who cannot compete with the rest of world but are so self-assured of their non-accomplishments that they are entitled to the best without working for it.

(record 27, NYT)

The ‘Chinese’ mom issues a statement where she acknowledges believing *in pushing [her] children for them to be competitive in the future.* This phrase signals the mother’s conviction that force and demands must be placed on children for them to be successful, or as she puts it *to be competitive in the future.* By signaling herself as a Chinese mother she somehow grants the belief an Asian quality. Furthermore, she reinforces her view by

criticizing American parenting practices and asserting that their actions produce children *who cannot compete with the rest of world but are so self-assured of their non-accomplishments that they are entitled to the best without working for it.*

The perception of ‘Chinese’ parents, specifically mothers, demanding effort from their children is reflected in the following phrase:

There is no such thing as "the child really can't do it" for a Chinese mother. It is do it or die trying.

(record 46, WSJ)

The above record reveals the belief that for ‘Chinese’ mothers effort on the part of their children is essential. The main conveyor of this belief is the phrase: *do it or die trying*. The emphasis underlying this phrase is precisely the action of striving, attempting, making an effort, toiling, endeavoring, at something. It’s quite forceful, especially combined with the preceding phrase that asserts that for a ‘Chinese’ mother *there is no such thing as ‘the child can’t do it.’* It evidences the notion that goals are indeed attainable, but sustained effort is the crucial course of action toward it.

Another commenter, who identified herself as a Chinese mother, had this to say regarding the insistence of the ‘Chinese’ parenting approach on effort as a path to success and the pursuit of excellence:

I do think Chinese parents are good at teaching kids the importance of discipline and work ethics. They make sure kids understand there is no short-cut to any success. Hard-work and discipline are the only way to achieve their dreams/goals.

(record 86, WSJ)

The above record shows the commenter giving credence and value to believe that, ‘Chinese’ parents are conveyors of values such as *hard work*, instilling their children with *work ethics* and *making sure kids understand there is no short-cut to any success*. The fact that she mentions that success has no short cuts underlies her belief in effort as a path toward it. She underscores this value by also stating that *hard-work and discipline are the only way to achieve their dreams/goals*.

Now onto the second type of comment. In this specific case we find that the commenter values effort, and is also critical of ‘Western’ parenting practices for not concerning itself enough with effort and the pursuit of excellence:

I see no flaw in demanding excellence. The failure of most children to achieve in this country is due to a lack of effort. It is a pity more parents haven't behaved as Ms. Chua.

(record 43, WSJ)

By stating that, *the failure of most children to achieve in this country is due to a lack of effort* the commenter is placing himself in line with the belief that success and effort are co-relational.

That is, that lack of effort produces lack of achievement and success depends on endeavoring towards it. The commenter further laments that parents, presumably American parents –because of his signaling *this country* as the context of for statements– don't *behave as Ms. Chua*. In this sense, the commenter sees *no flaw in demanding excellence*.

Another comment also gives credit to Amy Chua, and makes reference to the American parental tendency to overindulge and disregard the need for effort:

I admire Ms. Chua's determination to not go along with the crowd on things that she did not think were worthwhile. I found the card episode to be one I admired her the most for. She was entitled to her feelings and she was right to return a thoughtless gift to her own child and demand some thought go into it if it is rightly to be called a gift. Our children are extremely privileged beings and if we are to lavish them with gifts –which Ms. Chua did with her kids— they can learn how to be generous back and give a gift with some meaning— and her kids did! They put some effort out and felt really, really good about it. I would say that was a teachable moment. Her kids were not wimps, she

toughened them up and as a result they could totally handle that situation, and I'm sure they can also handle a boss rejecting their work.

(record 61, NYT)

In the above record we observe that the commenter supports the the Chinese notion that effort should be demanded from children in order for them to produce their best. This is evidenced when the commenter says regarding to Chua's parenting practices as described in her book, *I found the card episode to be one I admired her the most for. She was entitled to her feelings and she was right to return a thoughtless gift to her own child and demand some thought go into it if it is rightly to be called a gift.* After Chua returned the card to her daughter the commenter notes that, *they [Chua's children] put some effort out and felt really, really good about it.*

The commenter describes this episode as *a teachable moment* and indicates that as a result of this action Chua moved toward toughening her girls up, making them stronger to handle, for instance, *a boss rejecting their work.* This implies that Chua by demanding effort is preparing her daughters for the challenges they will face in the future. Finally, the commenter remarks that, *our children are extremely privileged beings* and notes that this privilege should be counterbalanced by placing high expectations on them. The fact that she is remarking on this might imply that demands and high expectations on children are not necessarily the norm among 'Western' parents.

The last record we will discuss in this section begins her comment by urging the acknowledgement of effort:

It's well past time to acknowledge that learning is hard work, and that feelings of self-worth are not just one's due, but come from mastering academics, a sport, music or one's craft (theater, music, art), etc. ... If American mothers are too lax, then Chinese mothers are too severe. There has to be a middle ground that enables physical, intellectual, emotional, and social growth.

(record 73, WSJ)

In stating the above the commenter gives credence to the notion of effort and practice as being critical for the attainment of goals. We see evidence of this when she notes that *learning is hard work*. She implies what we have seen other commenters also touching upon: the existence of a sort of 'Western' entitlement that believes that *feelings of self-worth are...one's due*. The commenter indicates that self-esteem is heightened by achieving or mastering something difficult not by entitlement. Finally, the commenter completes her thoughts by stating that *American mothers are too lax* and *Chinese mothers are too severe*. According to the commenter an ideal approach would be a middle ground between the two *that enables physical, intellectual, emotional, and social growth*.

### *11.1.2.3. Hierarchical and reciprocal parent-child relationship*

The third highest theme mentioned for the ‘Chinese’ conceptualization of parenting was that which was formulated as *hierarchical and reciprocal parent-child relationship*; a total of 11 comments were classified as making reference to this topic. Just as the relationship theme presented in section 11.1.1.7, when analyzing ‘Western’ the themes that came up, this theme was also interesting in that it co-related to and came up in comments where other themes were mentioned, such as the significance of parental control and exerting influence over their children, as well as parental involvement in helping their children practice effort for pursuing their goals. The following comments are a sample of this co-relation between these themes.

The record below testifies to the relevance ‘Chinese’ upbringing accords to parental involvement in securing children with opportunities to help build their future. By observing the comment, however, one can also surmise that this involvement implies a hierarchical relationship between ‘Chinese’ parents and their children:

My mother's mother was even harder on her than she was on me, since life was extremely difficult in Hong Kong during her childhood, and she wanted my mother to have the opportunities that she could not have by coming to the US.

(record 37, WSJ)

The nature of the hierarchical relationship first appears in the use of the adjective *hard* to describe the firmness of the demands or requirements that one mother places on her daughter in order to procure effort and an upper hand in life. The mother, by placing demands on the daughter, gives us a sense of the hierarchical in order. The commenter does not describe the mother as requesting her daughters's opinion or giving her a say in the matter, thus portraying a top-down relationship between parent and child. It's the mother who *wants* the child to take advantage of the opportunities and the child is left to enact those wishes. In terms of the reciprocity of the 'Chinese' parental relationship the following record is an interesting case in point:

My wife is asian, and my opinion is that asian families are much more tight-knit than American families.

(record 39, WSJ)

The commenter provides evidence of a certain degree of reciprocity by using the word *tight-knit* to describe *asian families*, thus giving a sense of the existence of corresponding dutifulness, respect and loyalty between family members of Asian origin. The commenter further contrasts this with *American families*, and by doing so conveys these 'Western' family relationships as being more one-sided, where parents might be the ones doing most of the giving and children most of the receiving, as we already saw in section 11.1.1.7 above.



In response to a person commenting on the WSJ who refers to Amy Chua as a *dreadful mother*, one commenter has the following to say:

A dreadful mother that secures a prosperous future for her offspring.  
As opposed to a mother that allows them to play on Facebook and  
Youtube all day long, thus certainly ensuring a life long tenure of work  
at Walmart or at some fast food joint.

(record, 50, WSJ)

By stating the above, the commenter reflects on the idea that being a demanding parent and being involved in children's affairs might *secure a prosperous future for her offspring*. The commenter contrasts Chua's involvement with a mother that presumably *allows them*, that is her children, *to play on Facebook and Youtube all day long, thus certainly ensuring a life long tenure of work at Walmart or at some fast food joint*. This contrast evidences the dichotomy between the 'Chinese' hierarchical parent-child relationship and the 'Western' non-hierarchical parent child relationship, where in the former parents are not only licensed but also expected to demand their children's best effort and push them to procure success, and the latter, where parents are seen to be lax and less demanding and involved in contributing to their children's attainment of goals.

Further evidence is found to support the existence of what we have formulated as the 'Chinese' hierarchical and reciprocal parent- child relationship in the following record.

I wondered often how the parents of the Asian kids helped their children succeed so well and we would exchange parenting tips. [...]  
Some of the parents force the kids to practice, some practice with-out prompts. Education is stressed and expectations are high, children rise to the level expected and with my friends, when the child is not succeeding, extra help is heaped on, I mean heaped! Sleep-overs and T.V. are a waste of time and I admire Ms. Chua's determination to not go along with the crowd on things that she did not think were worthwhile. I found the card episode to be one I admired her the most for. She was entitled to her feelings and she was right to return a thoughtless gift to her own child and demand some thought go into it if it is rightly to be called a gift. Our children are extremely privileged beings and if we are to lavish them with gifts—which Ms. Chua did with her kids—they can learn how to be generous back and give a gift with some meaning--and her kids did!

(record 61, NYT)

We encountered the above record when we discussed the importance that effort has within the ‘Chinese’ framework of parenting in section 11.1.2.2, and we find it relevant here again. We see the commenter touching on elements concerning the hierarchical the nature of the ‘Chinese’ parent-child relationship, by submitting phrases such as *parents force the children, education is stressed, expectations are high, she [Chua] was entitled*

*to her feelings and she was right to return a thoughtless gift and demand some thought go into it.*

The commenter also embraces a type of parenting style where children are expected to do things in return and be thoughtful towards their parents, just as parents are dutiful with their children as we see evidence of this in the phrase, *when the child is not succeeding, extra help is heaped on, I mean heaped!*

In this sense the commenter is reflecting on the significance and value of the ‘Chinese’ reciprocity between parents and children, where parents and children share responsibilities and duties towards one another. This is particularly evidenced in the commenter's statement: *they [children] can learn how to be generous back and give a gift with some meaning.*

We also encountered a couple of records that reflect on the hierarchical nature of the parental role and assuming its validity. For instance in record 87 we find the following statement:

There may very well be something to the notion that a child must be forced to do some things, and that the force needed may be harsh.

(record 87, WSJ)

By stating the above, the commenter gives credence to the ‘Chinese’ hierarchical approach. We seen evidence of this when we read *there may very well be something to,*

an idiomatic expression that indicates a degree of credibility toward what comes after it, in this case, the notion *that a child must be forced to do some things, and that the force needed may be harsh*. Presumably parents are the ones exerting said force on their children and influencing them, and hence on the top of the parent-child relationship hierarchy.

Finally, our last record in this section refers directly to ‘Chinese’ convictions when it comes to the relationship between parents and children.

According to the commenter:

Chinese parents believe that their kids owe them everything. The reason for this is a little unclear, but it's probably a combination of Confucian filial piety and the fact that the parents have sacrificed and done so much for their children.

(record 88, WSJ)

The commenter gives credence to the ‘Chinese’ notion where it is assumed that parents are *worthy* of everything on the part of their children, or as plainly stated above, *that their kids owe them everything*. From how the commenter formulates the matter, this tenet and assumption derives from reasoning that since parents have made sacrifices for their children, then parents are entitled to their children’s sacrifices as well. The above comment portrays the relationship in hierarchical and reciprocal terms: parents expect

everything from their children but not arbitrarily, it is based on a sense of mutual responsibility and dutifulness.

*11.2. Verification of Hypothesis 3: Evidencing Amy Chua's recognition, value and enactment of parenting as conforming more with the 'Chinese' conceptualization of parenting than with the 'Western' conceptualization of parenting*

We will now proceed to the verification of the third hypothesis proposed in this work by analyzing Amy Chua's book *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*. To accomplish this task, we selected and discursively analyzed more than 50 sections of Amy Chua's book which were specifically on-topic, that is they dealt with issues regarding childrearing and learning, schooling and education. In doing this we expect to provide evidence for verifying hypothesis 3, which postulates that the conceptualization of parenting that Chua mostly recognizes, values and enacts conforms more suitably with the 'Chinese' conceptualization of parenting and diverges from the 'Western' conceptualization of parenting.

To do this we will first quantitatively analyze the available data to make a statistically descriptive analysis to detail the percentage of themes that came up in the comments in relation to each conceptualization, as was put forth in section 10 where we verified hypothesis 1. Furthermore, to make our quantitative analysis for hypothesis 3 feasible, we created categories of themes into which all of the discourse that came up in the comments were grouped, in the same way we did for our analysis of hypothesis 2.

The second phase of our verification of hypothesis 3 will consist of a qualitative analysis where we will zoom in on and discuss the most relevant themes mentioned by Chua in her book and explore their content more in-depth. To make our analysis more visual to the reader, the phrases that closely relate to the themes being discussed in each section will be underlined.

We will also focus in on understanding both the nature of Amy Chua's recognition and value, as well as her enactment of the 'Chinese' and 'Western' conceptualizations, since this will help us discern which of the two conceptualizations of parenting she conforms more suitably with.

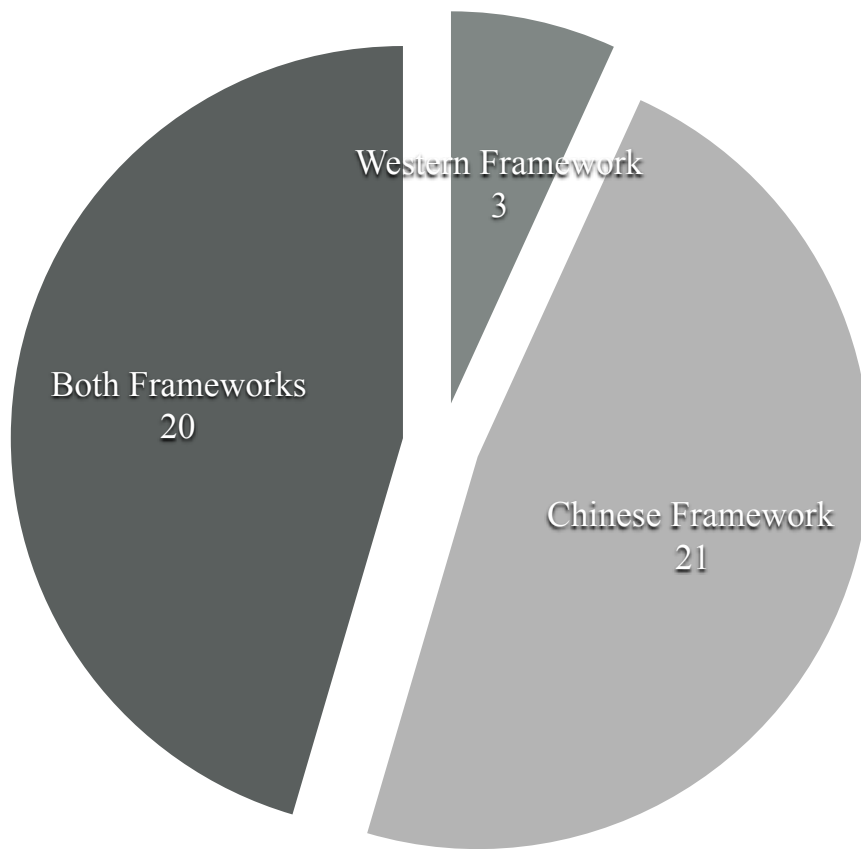
#### *11.2.1. Quantitative analysis of 'Western' themes found in Amy Chua's book*

In quantitative terms, as can be observed in figure 7 below, we first notice that Chua recognizes both conceptualizations of parenting – just as the records we analyzed in hypothesis 2 (see section 11.1). The main difference in the case of hypothesis 3 was the frequency with which she recognized and valued each conceptualization: Our analysis evidences that Chua's remarks, in contrast to the NYT and WSJ commenters, show a greater recognition and value of themes related to the 'Chinese' conceptualization of parenting than to the 'Western' conceptualization of parenting.

According to results, 21 of the sections of Chua's book selected for analysis recognize and value one or more aspect related only to the 'Chinese' conceptualization of

parenting compared to only 3 of her comments recognizing and valuing at least one aspect related only to the ‘Western’ conceptualization of parenting. Interestingly, however, 20 of the sections selected for analysis recognize and value at least one theme related to both conceptualization of parenting. (see figure 7)

### Themes Recognized and Valued per Framework



*Figure 7.- Theme recognition among commenters with relation to the ‘Western’ and ‘Chinese’ conceptualizations of parenting*

An interesting finding in analyzing Chua's comments related to the conceptualizations of parenting that she mentions was the nature of her recognition, and the value that she assigned to the themes that came up. While she does mention 'Western' parenting themes in her book, and acknowledges their existence, she mostly does so to contrast them as less desirable or posit them negatively in relation to the 'Chinese' parenting model. Contrastingly, when she mentions themes related with the 'Chinese' parenting conceptualization, she does so to reflect on and display what she believes are its virtues and merits. We will see this more in detail in section 11.2.3 below where we delve into qualitatively analyzing this aspect of her comments.

With regard to the recognition and value of specific themes mentioned by Chua in her book, related to the 'Western' conceptualization of parenting, we observed that the following two notions received the most amount of references: (see Table 3)

- 1) Avoidance of dominance and control/Children are entitled to freedom and developing their individuality and independence. (14 mentions)
- 2) Child protection and vulnerability (9 mentions)

With regard to themes related to the 'Chinese' conceptualization of parenting we observed that the following notions were mentioned most frequently: (see Table 3)

- 1) Hierarchical and reciprocal parent/child relationship... (24 mentions)
- 2) Parental control, discipline restriction... (18 mentions)
- 3) Parental and family involvement... (13 mentions)



4) Effort, practice and hard work... (12 mentions)

### Themes mentioned by Amy Chua per Conceptualization of Parenting

WESTERN FRAMEWORK		CHINESE FRAMEWORK	
Themes	Frequency of Recognition	Frequency of Recognition	Themes
	Total	Total	
Avoidance of dominance & control / Children are entitled to freedom, to making their own choices and developing their individuality and independence	14	24	Hierarchical and reciprocal parent-child relationship
Child protection / vulnerability	9	18	Suitability of parental control, discipline, influence and authority over their children
Undemanding/tolerant/lenient/permissive parenting	6	13	Family involvement and responsibility in children's instruction and moral development
Innate ability and intelligence / importance of talent	2	12	Effort and practice are critical in the attainment of goals
Non-hierarchical / non-reciprocal parent-child relationship	2	6	Positive attributes: obedience, respect, gratitude
Learning should be fun and stimulating / play is a valid means for learning	2	3	Child traits: academically driven, studious, docile, persevering, respectful, malleable
Developing social and emotional skills is valuable.	2	3	Parents, teachers and elders are worthy of respect
Developing self-esteem is important.	2	2	Perserverence and tenacity are valuable traits.
Creativity is important and should be encouraged.	1	2	Indifferent to self-esteem
		2	Priority is given to academic activities
		1	Learning is a moral obligation.
		1	Parents assume strength on the part of the child

Table 3.- Themes mentioned by Amy Chua related to the 'Western' and 'Chinese' conceptualizations of parenting

11.2.2. *Qualitative analysis of ‘Western’ themes found in Amy Chua’s book*

11.2.2.1. *Avoidance of dominance and control / Children are entitled to freedom and developing their individuality and independence.*

As can be observed in Table 3 above, a total of 14 references were made in Amy Chua’s comments to the ‘Western’ theme that was formulated as *Avoidance of dominance and control/Children are entitled to freedom and developing their individuality and independence*. Despite recognizing this theme, we observe that Chua mostly values it negatively. For instance in one section she makes the following remark:

It turns out that sleepovers aren’t fun at all for many kids—they can be a kind of punishment parents unknowingly inflict on their children through permissiveness. After pumping Sophia for information, I learned that A, B, and C had excluded D; B had gossiped viciously about E when she was in the other room; and F at age twelve had talked all night about her sexual exploits. Sophia didn’t need to be exposed to the worst of Western society, and I wasn’t going to let platitudes like “Children need to explore” or “They need to make their own mistakes” lead me astray.

(record 26; Chua 2011:68)

In the above record, we notice Amy Chua speaking critically of sleepovers, she refers to them as *a kind of punishment parents unknowingly inflict on their children through permissiveness*. In stating this general phrase she reveals her belief that ‘Western’ parents are *permissive* and by being permissive, American parents are hence avoiding the exertion of control over their children, and this is something Chua disagrees with: We see evidence of this specifically when she states that *she wasn’t going to let platitudes like ‘Children need to explore’ or ‘They need to make their own mistakes’ lead me astray*. In referring to these things people say as *platitudes* she seems to be regarding them as banal and perhaps lacking in reflection as well. Contrary to allowing her children make *their own mistakes* or *explore*, Chua prefers to put to use her own criteria and have control over them and to be involved and restrict her children’s choice of activities. Her use of the phrase *lead me astray*, indicates that she was not going to be steered away from the path she believed to be the correct one, which didn’t include allowing her children to do whatever they wanted or whatever American society told them was the correct thing to do, especially if they ran counter to her beliefs as a Chinese mother.

Another record also shows Chua critically valuing the ‘Western’ theme of parental avoidance of dominance and control towards their children and wanting to give them freedom. For instance, she states the following:

To be honest, I sometimes wonder if the question “Who are you really doing this for?” should be asked of Western parents too. Sometimes I wake up in the morning dreading what I have to do and thinking how easy it would be to say, “Sure Lulu, we can skip a day of violin practice.” Unlike my Western friends, I can never say, “As much as it kills me, I just have to let my kids make their choices and follow their hearts. It’s the hardest thing in the world, but I’m doing my best to hold back.” Then they get to have a glass of wine and go to a yoga class, whereas I have to stay home and scream and have my kids hate me.

(record 35; Chua, 2011:148)

In the above record, Chua seems to find fault in the behavior and attitudes of her ‘Western’ parental counterparts with respect to childrearing in a manner that grants children freedom. She questions whether entitling children with the freedom to *make their own choices and follow their hearts* is a way for ‘Western’ mothers themselves to have freedom of their own. We find evidence of this when she states, *To be honest, I sometimes wonder if the question ‘Who are you really doing this for?’ should be asked of Western parents too.* Chua complements the phrase in reporting, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, what ‘Western’ mothers say about how hard it is to let their children do what they want: *As much as it kills me, I just have to let my kids make their choices and*

*follow their hearts. It's the hardest thing in the world, but I'm doing my best to hold back.* She contrasts this belief and attitude with her own approach: she confesses to dread getting up in the morning and confronting her daughters to do the things she thinks are best for them in the long run, like practicing the violin.

Chua closes her point by stating: *Then they get to have a glass of wine and go to a yoga class, whereas I have to stay home and scream and have my kids hate me.*

This final phrase reveals that Chua believes that 'Western' mothers, by not getting involved in their children's affairs let themselves off the hook and have it a lot easier than she does.

We see yet more evidence of Chua's critical assessment of 'Western' parenting beliefs with regard to granting children freedom and avoiding control in finding the following remark:

By contrast, Chinese parenting is incredibly lonely—at least if you're trying to do it in the West, where you're on your own. You have to go up against an entire value system—rooted in the Enlightenment, individual autonomy, child development theory, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—and there's no one you can talk to honestly, not even people you like and deeply respect.

(record 38; Chua 2011:160)

In the above record Chua gives credence to the existence of ‘Western’ themes with respect to the entitlement of children to certain rights: for instance, to the notion that grants worth to individuality. In referring to being up against *an entire value system* that revolves around the *Enlightenment and individual autonomy* Chua is referring to precisely a belief system that grants the individual, self-determination and freedom a great amount of worth and virtue. She sets herself again in opposition to these beliefs when she says that, *Chinese parenting is incredibly lonely—at least if you’re trying to do it in the West, where you’re on your own* and also in revealing that, *there’s no one you can talk to honestly, not even people you like and deeply respect*. Chua’s parenting loneliness and lack of interlocutors when speaking of ‘Chinese’ parenting might have to do with the fact that the people who surround her possibly hold attitudes and behaviors that are more akin to the ‘Western’ approach to parenting, one with which Chua confesses not to concur with. In stating that, *You have to go up against an entire value system*, she corroborates the antagonism she perceives there is between her own ‘Chinese’ value system and the ‘Western’ one.

Another instance where we find Chua to be contrasting her own beliefs and attitudes towards the ‘Western’ theme of allowing children freedom and restraining from controlling them is the following:

It occurred to me that this must be how Western parents think and why they so often let their kids give up difficult musical

instruments. Why torture yourself and your child? What's the point? If your child doesn't like something—hates it—what good is it forcing her to do it? I knew as a Chinese mother I could never give in to that way of thinking.

(record 44; Chua 2011:208)

In the above record we again observe Chua setting herself in opposition to 'Western' notions that value parental acceptance towards their children's decisions, their choices and their preferences. In this case specifically, she refers to allowing children unilaterally deciding on quitting a musical instrument. She reports on what it she believes is the thought process that 'Western' parents go through, which results in them avoiding to control and govern their children. In this sense Chua states, *It occurred to me that this must be how Western parents think and why they so often let their kids give up difficult musical instruments. Why torture yourself and your child? What's the point? If your child doesn't like something—hates it—what good is it forcing her to do it?* The key phrase that indicates Chua's critical view towards Western parental latitude here is the final one: *What good is it forcing her to do it?* –especially when we observe Chua immediately acknowledging that, as a Chinese mother, she *could never give in to that way of thinking.*

Finally, the last record we have included in this series is interesting: It comes up toward the end of the book after Chua has given in to her daughter's reluctance

and decision to continue playing the violin. In reporting a conversation she had with someone who asked her about her daughter's quitting her violin practice, Chua states the following:

"It was her decision," I heard myself saying. "It was too much of a time commitment. You know how thirteen-year-olds are." What a Western parent I've become, I thought to myself. What a failure.

(record 46; Chua 2011:214)

Chua believes that she is a *failure* because she has not been an effective Chinese mother in prevailing in her determination and resolve that her daughter be a prominent violin player. She also deems herself a failure as a Chinese mother because she hears herself speaking like a 'Western' mother when she explains that it was her daughter's decision to quit the violin. In her view, she is a *failure* and has *become a western parent* in enabling her daughter to be entitled to making her own decision to quit the violin and resigning herself as a mother, at least outwardly, to accept this a valid excuse for allowing her daughter quit the violin.

#### *11.2.2.2. Child protection and vulnerability*

The second highest theme that came up in Amy Chua's comments with regard to the 'Western' conceptualization of parenting was that which was formulated as *Child*



*protection and vulnerability*; a total of 9 references were made with regard to this theme.

In the same way that the references made when alluding to the theme on parental avoidance of dominance and control that we just discussed in section 11.2.2.1, we found that Chua's remarks with regard to the 'Western' theme of child protection and vulnerability were mostly unfavorable and critical assessments. For instance the following record shows Chua contrasting her upbringing and actions towards her daughters and how they run counter to the 'Western' value system. According to Chua:

Chinese parents can get away with things that Western parents can't. Once when I was young—maybe more than once—when I was extremely disrespectful to my mother, my father angrily called me “garbage” in our native Hokkien dialect. It worked really well. I felt terrible and deeply ashamed of what I had done. But it didn't damage my self-esteem or anything like that. I knew exactly how highly he thought of me. I didn't actually think I was worthless or feel like a piece of garbage.

As an adult, I once did the same thing to Sophia, calling her garbage in English when she acted extremely disrespectfully toward me. When I mentioned that I had done this at a dinner party, I was immediately ostracized. One guest named Marcy got so upset she broke down in tears and had to leave early. My

friend Susan, the host, tried to rehabilitate me with the remaining guests.

“Oh dear, it’s just a misunderstanding. Amy was speaking metaphorically—right, Amy? You didn’t actually call Sophia ‘garbage.’”

“Um, yes, I did. But it’s all in the context,” I tried to explain.

“It’s a Chinese immigrant thing.” “But you’re not a Chinese immigrant,” somebody pointed out.

“Good point,” I conceded. “No wonder it didn’t work.”

I was just trying to be conciliatory. In fact, it had worked great with Sophia.

(record 17; Chua 2011:50)

In the above record we observe Chua retelling the story of the reaction she received at a party (in the USA) when she mentioned that she had called her daughter “garbage”. According to Chua upon mentioning this she *was immediately ostracized* and recalls, *one guest named Marcy got so upset she broke down in tears and had to leave early*. Chua in recounting this story contrasts the two belief systems: On the one hand people at the party, presumably mostly ‘Western’ guests, become upset and try to *rehabilitate* her

*with the other guests* and on the other hand Chua believes that calling a daughter *garbage works really well*, she says so referring to the effect it had both on her as a child, and then on her own daughter. Chua believes that calling her daughter garbage wouldn't hurt her *self-esteem* at all; the other party guests, in contrast, seem to take issue with the matter perhaps precisely because they believe that children are vulnerable to this sort of thing and should be protected by their own parents, instead of insulted and denigrated by them.

Similarly, we find Chua further contrasting the two parenting positions with regard to the matter of child protection and vulnerability in another record. For instance we find Chua stating the following:

The fact is that Chinese parents can do things that would seem unimaginable—even legally actionable—to Westerners. Chinese mothers can say to their daughters, “Hey fatty—lose some weight.” By contrast, Western parents have to tiptoe around the issue, talking in terms of “health” and never ever mentioning the f-word, and their kids still end up in therapy for eating disorders and negative self-image. (I also once heard a Western father toast his adult daughter by calling her “beautiful and incredibly competent.” She later told me that made her feel like garbage.) Chinese parents can order their kids to get straight As. Western parents can only ask their kids

to try their best. Chinese parents can say, “You’re lazy. All your classmates are getting ahead of you.” By contrast, Western parents have to struggle with their own conflicted feelings about achievement, and try to persuade themselves that they’re not disappointed about how their kids turned out.

(record 18; Chua 2011:51)

We observe in the above record that Chua is contrasting ‘Western’ attitudes and behaviors to ‘Chinese’ attitudes and behaviors. When she states, *Chinese mothers can say to their daughters, ‘Hey fatty—lose some weight.’ By contrast, Western parents have to tiptoe around the issue, talking in terms of ‘health’ and never ever mentioning the f-word,*” Chua is portraying ‘Western’ mothers as enacting behaviors that reveal the belief that their children are vulnerable to what they say to them and also portraying ‘Western’ parents as acting in ways that are protective of their children's self-esteem. Chua adds, apropos the ‘Western’ stance that despite this effort on the part of ‘Western’ parents, their children *still end up in therapy for eating disorders and negative self-image.* With this statement Chua is indicating her opposition to this overprotective stance and also her belief that this effort of framing children as vulnerable and feeble is futile.

In addition, in stating that, *Chinese parents can order their kids to get straight As. Western parents can only ask their kids to try their best. Chinese parents can*

*say, 'You're lazy. All your classmates are getting ahead of you.' By contrast, Western parents have to struggle with their own conflicted feelings about achievement, and try to persuade themselves that they're not disappointed about how their kids turned out, Chua reaffirms the existence of contrasts and divergent standpoints of the two parenting approaches with regard to the theme of child protection and vulnerability. 'Western' parents, according to this portrayal, focus on tactics that nudge and attempt to reassure, whereas 'Chinese' parents are rendered as more commanding and less sympathetic of their children's feelings.*

Finally in yet another contrasting statement on the matter of child protection and vulnerability, we find Amy Chua saying the following:

I've thought long and hard about how Chinese parents can get away with what they do. I think there are three big differences between the Chinese and Western parental mind-sets.

First, I've noticed that Western parents are extremely anxious about their children's self-esteem. They worry about how their children will feel if they fail at something, and they constantly try to reassure their children about how good they are notwithstanding a mediocre performance on a test or at a recital. In other words, Western parents are concerned about their children's psyches. Chinese parents aren't. They assume

strength, not fragility, and as a result they behave very differently.

For example, if a child comes home with an A-minus on a test, a Western parent will most likely praise the child. The Chinese mother will gasp in horror and ask what went wrong. If the child comes home with a B on the test, some Western parents will still praise the child. Other Western parents will sit their child down and express disapproval, but they will be careful not to make their child feel inadequate or insecure, and they will not call their child “stupid,” “worthless,” or “a disgrace.”

Privately, the Western parents may worry that their child does not test well or have aptitude in the subject or that there is something wrong with the curriculum and possibly the whole school. If the child's grades do not improve, they may eventually schedule a meeting with the school principal to challenge the way the subject is being taught or to call into question the teacher's credentials.

If a Chinese child gets a B—which would never happen—there would first be a screaming, hair-tearing explosion. The devastated Chinese mother would then get dozens, maybe hundreds of practice tests and work through them with her

child for as long as it takes to get the grade up to an A. Chinese parents demand perfect grades because they believe that their child can get them. If their child doesn't get them, the Chinese parent assumes it's because the child didn't work hard enough. That's why the solution to substandard performance is always to excoriate, punish, and shame the child. The Chinese parent believes that their child will be strong enough to take the shaming and to improve from it. (And when Chinese kids do excel, there is plenty of ego-inflating parental praise lavished in the privacy of the home.)

(record 19; Chua 2011:51)

In the above description, issued by Chua in her book, portraying the differences that she finds between the 'Chinese' and 'Western' parenting mind-set, we corroborate that which we have been exposing with the previous records analyzed: According to Chua, attitudes and behaviors of 'Western' parents cater to a belief in children's vulnerability, their regard for the importance of self-esteem and their general need to protect their children. We see evidence of this in reflected in the anxiety that Chua reports 'Western' parents feel with regard to their children's self-esteem and feelings, in the phrase: *Western parents are extremely anxious about their children's self-esteem. They worry about how their children will feel if they fail at something.* We see yet more evidence of

‘Western’ parental protective attitudes in a phrase like *and they constantly try to reassure their children about how good they are notwithstanding a mediocre performance on a test or at a recital*. This statement is particularly interesting because it discloses Chua’s attitudes with regard to the ‘Western’ mind-set. In stating that ‘Western’ parents will be reassuring even if the performance is *mediocre*, Chua is suggesting that the ‘Western’ approach is perhaps too forbearing, lenient and soft.

We see even more evidence of her oppositional stance to the ‘Western’ perspective when she says, *Western parents are concerned about their children’s psyches. Chinese parents aren’t. They assume strength, not fragility, and as a result they behave very differently*. This contrast is interesting in that she clearly pinpoints the differences in the convictions of each approach and Chua portrays the ‘Chinese’ in a more positive light in stating for instance that ‘Chinese’ parents *assume strength*.

In the last section of the above record we see Chua again identifying the merits of the ‘Chinese’ conceptualization of parenting by explaining that ‘Chinese’ parents’ persistence on excellence has to do with their belief that their children are capable of excellence, and that their reason for using harsh measures on their children is justified in the fact that their children are *strong enough to take the shaming and to improve from it*. Then after the final result of child proficiency,



*there is plenty of ego-inflating parental praise lavished in the privacy of the home.*

Finally, in the last record selected to discuss in this section we find Chua reflecting on her decision as a mother and reaffirming her belief in the virtues of those decisions; she states:

“...Because come to think of it, I think those were great choices we made too, even though all those people worried that you and Sophia would be permanently damaged psychologically. And you know, the more I think about it, the madder I’m getting. All these Western parents with the same party line about what’s good for children and what’s not—I’m not sure they’re making choices at all.

(record 50; Chua 2011:227)

In the above record, we find Chua again exposing the positive value she believes ‘Western’ parents hold with regard to being sensible and heedful towards child vulnerability evidenced in the phrase *all those people worried that you and Sophia would be permanently damaged psychologically*. Furthermore, Chua reveals her critical stance regarding the ‘Western’ parenting approach for its lack of reflective character concerning its own convictions and practices. We see evidence of this in the final assertion: *All these Western parents with the same*

*party line about what's good for children and what's not—I'm not sure they're making choices at all.* In stating this, Chua portrays the implementation of the 'Western' approach by 'Western' parents as lacking an evaluative and self-critical character and implementing practices and beliefs uncritically because they are part of the widespread norm. Finally, despite the concern and attention to child vulnerability that she encountered in the 'Western' environment where she raised her daughters, she reasserts herself as a mother and the choices she had to make and also restates the merits of the 'Chinese' parenting methods and beliefs she employed with her daughters. We see evidence of this in her use of the phrase *I think those were great choices we made too.*

### *11.2.3. Qualitative analysis of 'Chinese' themes found in Amy Chua's book*

#### *11.2.3.1. Hierarchical and reciprocal parent-child relationship*

As can be observed in Table 3 above, a total of 24 comments made reference to the 'Chinese' theme of *hierarchical and reciprocal parent-child relationship*. This theme encompasses the nature of the 'Chinese' parent child relationship as being based on a top-bottom "chain of command," so to speak, between parents and their children, where parents are the ones unquestionably on top, meaning that parents issue demands and expectations on their children and children are required to carry out these expectations and obey these demands. Since this hierarchical relationship stands on the Confucian concept of filial piety it implies more than a mere hierarchy however: It assumes a

cooperative relation. Parents are demanding and have high expectations because they believe they have a moral obligation and responsibility for their children's existence and their education in terms of behavior, academic achievement and their overall development. Children, in turn, are expected to obey and honor their parents because they are believed to be strong enough and capable enough and also because, as we saw in section 10.2.3. of this work, within Confucian philosophy, they are considered to be a continuation of their parents life, and hence they owe their parents everything.

Now, in terms of the records we found while analyzing Amy Chua's book which make reference to the 'Chinese' theme on the hierarchical and reciprocal parent-child relationship, perhaps it is interesting to begin by looking into the very opening section of her book to get a sense of her perspective when it comes to parental hierarchy:

A lot of people wonder how Chinese parents raise such stereotypically successful kids. They wonder what these parents do to produce so many math whizzes and music prodigies, what it's like inside the family, and whether they could do it too. Well, I can tell them, because I've done it. Here are some things my daughters, Sophia and Louisa, were never allowed to do:

- attend a sleepover
- have a playdate
- be in a school play

- complain about not being in a school play
- watch TV or play computer games
- choose their own extracurricular activities
- get any grade less than an A
- not be the #1 student in every subject except gym and drama
- play any instrument other than the piano or violin
- not play the piano or violin.

(record 1, Chua 2011:1)

In the above record Chua lists the activities she forbade her daughters from ever doing. We know there was forbidding involved because she says her daughters *were never allowed to do* them, and we know it was she that did the forbidding because she previously says that she was able to raise *stereo-typically successful kids* by doing these things. By stating the above Chua is enacting the identity, or at least describing herself as having enacted the identity, of a mother who is in command of her daughters' activities. She plays a part in influencing her daughters' activities inside and outside the school and also enacting a hierarchical relationship in which she is on a higher position in relation to her children, thus the capability to control and restrain them. We know she deems this positively because she frames the matter as valuable to produce *successful* children.

In another comment Chua again is seen to uphold the 'Chinese' theme of hierarchical and reciprocal parent/child relationship in stating the following:

As I watched American parents slathering praise on their kids for the lowest of tasks—drawing a squiggle or waving a stick—I came to see that Chinese parents have two things over their Western counterparts: (1) higher dreams for their children, and (2) higher regard for their children in the sense of knowing how much they can take.

(record 4; Chua 2011:8)

We observe her bias for the ‘Chinese’ parenting approach in her critical stance of American parents’ behavior toward their children. Chua assesses ‘Western’ parental praise toward their children *for performing the lowest of tasks—drawing a squiggle or waving a stick*— as unfounded and or even unreasonable. The implication is that children should be praised when performing at a high level and not for any menial execution. We observe evidence of her critical assessment in her concluding statement that, ‘Chinese’ parents have *higher dreams for their children* and also *higher regard for their children in the sense of knowing how much they can take*.

In another record we also find Chua implementing strategies associated with the ‘Chinese’ hierarchical relationship between parents and children. In the following case, we see her specifically addressing the matter of respect:

The wind chill was twenty degrees, and my own face hurt from just a few seconds' exposure to the icy air. But I was determined to raise an obedient Chinese child—in the West, obedience is associated with dogs and the caste system, but in Chinese culture, it is considered among the highest of virtues—if it killed me.

(record 5; Chua 2011:12)

The above fragment is from an episode that Chua recounts of when her daughter, Lulu, was about three years old. When Lulu refused to play “a single note with a single finger, evenly, three times” (2011:12) on the piano, instead of smashing several keys at a time with her open hand, Chua withdrew her from the piano and Lulu started “yelling, crying and kicking furiously.” According to Chua, after 15 minutes had passed Lulu was still behaving in the same way and so Chua decided to open the back porch door and let Lulu stand outside in the cold. The context of the fragment above, as well as the fragment itself, evidences in fact, Chua's determination *to raise an obedient Chinese child*, because according to her, *in Chinese culture, it is considered among the highest of virtues*.

Again, with regard to respect, we find the following fragment in Chua's book:

Finally, I tried to demand as much respect from the girls as my parents did of me. This is where I was least successful. Growing up, I was

terrified of my parents' disapproval. Not so with Sophia and especially Lulu. America seems to convey something to kids that Chinese culture doesn't. In Chinese culture, it just wouldn't occur to children to question, disobey, or talk back to their parents. In American culture, kids in books, TV shows, and movies constantly score points with their snappy backtalk and independent streaks. Typically, it's the parents who need to be taught a life lesson—by their children.

(record 9; Chua 2011:23)

By stating *I tried to demand as much respect from the girls as my parents did of me*, Chua shows how closely she leans in favor of the 'Chinese' parenting approach. This is a statement that evidences her attempt to implement with her daughters, the same 'Chinese' upbringing that her parents implemented with her, specifically in terms of respect. Her statement reveals a sense of disappointment with this attempt: According to Chua, demanding respect from her daughters was where she *was least successful* and she blames this failure on the surrounding 'Western' parenting conventions and general approach to parenting. In this sense Chua discredits 'Western' practices where kids are depicted as constantly scoring *points with their snappy backtalk and independent streaks* and where the portrayal is usually of parents needing *to be taught a life lesson—by their children*.

The above record evidences the antagonism that Chua seems to encounter with the surrounding 'Western' attitudes and conventions when it comes to parenting. Her

parenting ethics go hand in hand with the notion she also expresses in the above record:  
*In Chinese culture, it just wouldn't occur to children to question, disobey, or talk back to their parents.*

There are more contrasts with regard to the hierarchical relationship between parents and children. In another record Chua reflects on the differences between how 'Western' and 'Chinese' parents tackle the matter of their children's school underperformance. According to Chua:

Chinese parents can order their kids to get straight As. Western parents can only ask their kids to try their best. Chinese parents can say, "You're lazy. All your classmates are getting ahead of you." By contrast, Western parents have to struggle with their own conflicted feelings about achievement, and try to persuade themselves that they're not disappointed about how their kids turned out.

(record 18; Chua 2011: 51)

In observing the above record we immediately notice the use of the verbs *order* and *ask*. Chua describes 'Chinese' parents as being able to *order* their children to *get straight As*, a sign of a top-bottom, commanding position that parents have with respect to their children, whereas according to Chua, 'Western' parents can only *ask* their children to *try their best*.



We see in the 'Chinese' description issued above, evidence of parents' use of an approach that is more stern and less considerate of their children's feelings and the preservation of self-esteem, as well as self-assured that their children can in fact, achieve straight As. In contrast, in the final sentence, we observe Chua portraying 'Western' parents as being less self-assured of their parenting techniques as well as their children's abilities.

With regard to the above point, we find that Chua reaffirms this perspective in the following record:

... I've noticed that Western parents are extremely anxious about their children's self-esteem. They worry about how their children will feel if they fail at something, and they constantly try to reassure their children about how good they are notwithstanding a mediocre performance on a test or at a recital. In other words, Western parents are concerned about their children's psyches. Chinese parents aren't. They assume strength, not fragility, and as a result they behave very differently... Chinese parents demand perfect grades because they believe that their child can get them. If their child doesn't get them, the Chinese parent assumes it's because the child didn't work hard enough. That's why the solution to substandard performance is always to excoriate, punish, and shame the child. The Chinese parent believes

that their child will be strong enough to take the shaming and to improve from it.

(record 19; Chua 2011:51)

Once again we observe Chua issuing critical judgements with regard to the ‘Western’ parenting approach, as well as the non-hierarchical relationship ‘Westerners’ have in place. We see evidence of this criticism in the initial segment of the record above where she states that, ‘Western’ parents are more concerned about their children’s self-esteem and feelings towards failure, and according to her ‘Western’ parents, *constantly try to reassure their children about how good they are notwithstanding a mediocre performance on a test or at a recital*. By stating this, especially by using the word *mediocre*, she positions herself in opposition to this perspective and goes on to describe what ‘Chinese’ parents do instead. According to Chua, ‘Chinese’ parents *assume strength*, and *demand perfect grades* because they are guided by a different belief: *that their child can get them*, and if their children don’t get them, the assumption is that it is because *the child didn’t work hard enough*. That is, they do not doubt their children’s capabilities, as Chua suggests ‘Western’ parents do, and in this sense they adopt a different solution altogether. According to Chua, ‘Chinese’ parents *excoriate, punish, and shame the child* because their stance is one where they assume that their children *will be strong enough to take the shaming and to improve from it* instead of assuming weakness and vulnerability.

In another record, we find Chua providing evidence of the ‘Chinese’ belief that children owe parents everything, which as she herself notes, *is an element of Confucian filial piety*. According to Chua,

Chinese parents believe that their kids owe them everything. The reason for this is a little unclear, but it’s probably a combination of Confucian filial piety and the fact that the parents have sacrificed and done so much for their children... Anyway, the understanding is that Chinese children must spend their lives repaying their parents by obeying them and making them proud. By contrast, I don’t think most Westerners have the same view of children being permanently indebted to their parents. Jed actually has the opposite view. “Children don’t choose their parents,” he once said to me. “They don’t even choose to be born. It’s parents who foist life on their kids, so it’s the parents’ responsibility to provide for them. Kids don’t owe their parents anything. Their duty will be to their own kids.” This strikes me as a terrible deal for the Western parent.

(record 20; Chua 2011: 53)

As we observe in the above record, Chua again sets out to contrast the ‘Western’ and the ‘Chinese’ hierarchical parent-child relationship, and clearly leans in favor of the ‘Chinese’ approach. According to Chua, a precept of Confucian philosophy is the notion that ‘Chinese’ children owe their parents everything, and that *the understanding is that*

*Chinese children must spend their lives repaying their parents by obeying them and making them proud.* Chua issues these statements without casting any evident doubt on them, hence the assumption that she has a bias for this perspective, instead of the ‘Western’ one. To portray the ‘Western’ approach with regard to this belief she contrasts her husband’s perspective to her own. Chua characterizes her husband’s beliefs in opposition to her own by stating, *Jed actually has the opposite view. ‘Children don’t choose their parents,’ ... ‘They don’t even choose to be born. It’s parents who foist life on their kids, so it’s the parents’ responsibility to provide for them. Kids don’t owe their parents anything. Their duty will be to their own kids.* According to Chua, this reasoning strikes her as a *terrible deal for the Western parent.*

Finally, in connection to the matter of whether parents owe their children, or children owe their parents, we find Chua stating the following, and corroborating her ‘Chinese’ stance:

For Chinese people, when it comes to parents, nothing is negotiable. Your parents are your parents, you owe everything to them (even if you don’t), and you have to do everything for them (even if it destroys your life).

(record 30; Chua 2011: 98)

In the above comment, Chua reflects the belief, related to the hierarchical and reciprocal nature of the ‘Chinese’ parent-child relationship that family responsibility and

obligation come before oneself. By stating that children owe their parents everything, even if they don't, and they have to do everything for them, even if it destroys their life, Chua is avowing very strongly for the belief that 'Chinese' children are first and foremost selfless beings in the context of the parent-child relationship and that their role is to be dutiful and subservient to their parents needs, to the extreme, in fact: *even if it destroys your life*.

On a closely related matter, we also find Chua stating the following:

Here's a question I often get: "But Amy, let me ask you this. Who are you doing all this pushing for—your daughters"—and here always the cocked head, the knowing tone—"or yourself?" I find this a very Western question to ask (because in Chinese thinking, the child is the extension of the self).

(record 34; Chua 2011: 148)

In the above comment, Chua again portrays the 'Chinese' parent-child relationship with regard to the role and character children play in it, as quite distinctive, especially in comparison to the 'Western' approach to parenting. In the 'Western' approach, children are seen as individuals with independent needs and interests. Chua however emphasizes that, *in Chinese thinking, the child is the extension of the self*, in this sense then, children are determined by, and influenced by their parents, they are bound together in

an inseparable affiliation. Their individual needs are not regarded because they are an *extension* of their parents' selves, not necessarily independent individuals.

*11.2.3.2. Suitability of parental control, discipline, influence and authority over their children*

The second highest theme that came up in Amy Chua's comments with regard to the 'Chinese' conceptualization of parenting, very much linked to the theme that we just discussed in section 11.2.3.1, was that which was formulated as *suitability of parental control, discipline, influence and authority over their children*, a total of 18 references came up with regard to this theme and one such instance is the following:

...Chinese parents believe that they know what is best for their children and therefore override all of their children's own desires and preferences.

(record 21; Chua 2011:53)

The above record is significant because it not only is an open admission that the theme we are discussing in this section is in fact exercised within the 'Chinese' approach, but it gives us insight into what the rationale behind its implementation is. According to Chua, *Chinese parents believe that they know what is best for their children* and so that is why they see themselves as having a legitimate right and obligation to *override all of their children's own desires and preferences*.

Apropos the matter of overriding children's preferences, Chua recounts a fragment of a conversation she had with her mother-in-law where they touched upon this matter:

"I think it's too idealistic to expect children to do the right things on their own," I said. "Also, if you force them to do what you want, you don't have to be mad at them."

"But they'll be mad at you," Florence pointed out.

(record 31; Chua 2011:104)

In the above record we observe Chua telling her mother-in-law that in forcing her daughters to do what she wanted, in other words, in being demanding and exercising her authority and influence over them, she wouldn't *have to be mad at them*.

She also expresses her assumptions with regard to children's execution of parental expectations: *it's too idealistic to expect children to do the right things on their own*. This is Chua's reasoning, and it goes hand in hand with the 'Chinese' theme of parental control.

Furthermore, with the above exchange, we see Chua, not only in agreement with the 'Chinese' approach, but also again, in opposition to the 'Western' approach: She sets

herself in disagreement with her mother-in-law's perspective, who just like her husband Jed are cast throughout her book as instances of 'Western' or American parenting.<sup>24</sup>

In another record, Chua states the following with regard to the practice of parental control in her own household:

One nice by-product of my extreme parenting was that Sophia and Lulu were very close: comrades-in-arms against their overbearing, fanatic mother. "She's insane," I'd hear them whispering to each other, giggling. But I didn't care. I wasn't fragile, like some Western parents. As I often said to the girls, "My goal as a parent is to prepare you for the future—not to make you like me."

(record 16; Chua 2011:48)

Interestingly, we see Chua referring to her own parenting practices as *extreme*, and we see her alluding to herself as *overbearing* and *fanatic*. With regard to this self-description, she doesn't show signs of being apologetic about this persona. She doesn't seem to shy away from her role as a mother who is domineering and exercises full authority over her children. Quite the opposite, she reaffirms it proudly in stating that

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<sup>24</sup> "Jed was raised on a very different model... As parents, Sy and Florence were determined to give their children the space and freedom they had been deprived of as children. They believed in individual choice and valued independence, creativity, and questioning authority. There was a world of difference between my parents and Jed's. Jed's parents gave him a choice about whether he wanted to take violin lessons (which he declined and now regrets) and thought of him as a human being with views." (Chua 2011:53)



she *wasn't fragile*, implying that this type of mothering requires strength of character, and immediately contrasting it with how some 'Western' parents are: presumably fragile. In this sense, she again situates herself in opposition to the 'Western' approach and confirms that her *goal as a parent is to prepare [her daughters] for the future –not to make [them] like [her]*.

In the next record, we observe Chua extolling some of the virtues that the violin symbolized for her, and befittingly, one of those virtues is control. In this regard she says:

Families often have symbols... In our household, the violin had become a symbol.

For me, it symbolized excellence, refinement, and depth—the opposite of shopping malls, mega-sized Cokes, teenage clothes, and crass consumerism. Unlike listening to an iPod, playing the violin is difficult and requires concentration, precision, and interpretation. Even physically, everything about the violin—the burnished wood, the carved scroll, the horsehair, the delicate bridge, the sounding point—is subtle, exquisite, and precarious.

To me, the violin symbolized respect for hierarchy, standards, and expertise. For those who know better and can teach. For those who play better and can inspire. And for parents.

... Most of all, the violin symbolized control. Over generational decline. Over birth order. Over one's destiny. Over one's children. Why should the grandchildren of immigrants only be able to play the guitar or drums? Why should second children so predictably be less rule-abiding, less successful at school, and "more social" than eldest siblings? In short, the violin symbolized the success of the Chinese parenting model.

(record 43; Chua 2011:207)

In stating that the violin symbolized control and in praising the violin for such a trait, Chua places herself again in a position where she endorses the theme of parental control, in the record above, she states it plainly: she places high regard on the *respect for hierarchy*, for *parents*, for *control* all things very much associated with the 'Chinese' conceptualization of parenting, and she ultimately applauds the virtues of the Chinese parenting style in aspiring for the *success of the Chinese parenting model*.

Perhaps this fierce belief and preference upholding 'Chinese' values is what makes Chua so reluctant to accept when her youngest daughter Lulu doesn't abide by them. In

one segment of her book Chua is forced to accept some of the counter effects of the ‘Chinese’ upbringing, which she holds in such high regard:

So—about my father. I guess it’s time to come clean with something. I’d always told Jed, myself, and everyone else that the ultimate proof of the superiority of Chinese parenting is how the children end up feeling about their parents. Despite their parents’ brutal demands, verbal abuse, and disregard for their children’s desires, Chinese kids end up adoring and respecting their parents and wanting to care for them in their old age. From the beginning, Jed had always asked, “What about your dad, Amy?” I’d never had a good answer.

My father was the black sheep in his family. His mother disfavored him and treated him unfairly. In his household, comparisons among the children were common, and my father—the fourth of six—was always on the short end of the stick. He wasn’t interested in business like the rest of his family. He loved science and fast cars; at age eight, he built a radio from scratch. Compared to his siblings, my father was the family outlaw, risk-taking and rebellious. To put it mildly, his mother didn’t respect his choices, value his individualism, or worry about his self-esteem—all those Western clichés. The result

was that my father hated his family—found it suffocating and undermining—and as soon as he had a chance he moved as far away as he could, never once looking back.

What my father’s story illustrates is something I suppose I never wanted to think about. When Chinese parenting succeeds, there’s nothing like it. But it doesn’t always succeed. For my own father it hadn’t. He barely spoke to his mother and never thought about her except in anger. By the end of her life, my father’s family was almost dead to him.

I couldn’t lose Lulu. Nothing was more important. So I did the most Western thing imaginable: I gave her the choice. I told her that she could quit the violin if she wanted and do what she liked instead, which at the time was to play tennis.

(record 45; Chua 2011:211)

In the above record, we observe Chua casting certain doubt on the effects of ‘Chinese’ parenting practices by telling the story of her father’s experience growing up in a ‘Chinese’ household where his mother was harsh, strict, controlling, humiliating, disrespectful of his interests and authoritative. Chua at the beginning of the record states that ‘Chinese’ parenting often works despite *parents’ brutal demands, verbal abuse, and disregard for their children’s desires*, and says that proof of this is that, *Chinese kids end*

*up adoring and respecting their parents and wanting to care for them in their old age,* regardless of how their parents treated them as children. This line of reasoning shows Chua justifying and going along with the ‘Chinese’ parenting approach. However, towards the end of the record, when she explains how much her father ended up hating his mother and his family for stifling and constraining him, she draws back and recasts her own actions and her own family priorities: We see Chua stating the following: *I couldn't lose Lulu. Nothing was more important. So I did the most Western thing imaginable: I gave her the choice.* In stating this however, she frames her decision as a *Western thing to do*, that is, she concedes that she needed to act differently for the sake of not losing her daughter, but her own convictions about preferring the ‘Chinese’ upbringing seem to be still intact.

Finally, in the last record included in this section, we observe Chua reflecting on the matter of choice:

“Not when you were little,” Lulu said. “Mommy never gave us a choice when we were little. Unless it was, ‘Do you want to practice six hours or five?’”

“Choice ... I wonder if that’s what it all comes down to,” I mused. “Westerners believe in choice; the Chinese don’t. I used to make fun of Florence for giving Daddy a choice about violin lessons. Of course he chose not to. But now, Lulu, I wonder what would have happened if I hadn’t forced you to

audition for Juilliard or practice so many hours a day. Who knows? Maybe you'd still like violin. Or what if I'd let you choose your own instrument? Or no instrument? After all, Daddy turned out fine."

(record 49; Chua 2011:226)

This segment is from the final chapter in Chua's book, after she has told the entire story of her struggles with Lulu and Lulu's rebelliousness towards the 'Chinese' upbringing. In this record we observe Chua seemingly less up in arms with her daughters, that is, less concerned with controlling and more open to giving them more choice. It is interesting to see Lulu stating that Chua *never* gave them *a choice when they were little*. This shows that throughout her daughters' early years, Chua strictly upheld the 'Chinese' approach of being a controlling, restrictive, authoritative mother figure. But as a mother of two teenagers living and being raised in the United States, she seems to be more reflexive and perhaps accepting, that even when children are allowed a choice, as in the case of her husband Jed, maybe they will turn out fine anyway, or maybe as she muses, perhaps Lulu would *still like the violin*.

#### *11.2.3.3. Family involvement and responsibility in children's instruction and moral development*

The third highest theme that came up in Amy Chua's comments with regard to the 'Chinese' conceptualization of parenting was that which was formulated as *family*

*involvement and responsibility in children's instruction and moral development*, a total of 13 references came up with regard to this theme. Similarly to the other 'Chinese' themes that have come up in her book and which we have analyzed so far, we see Chua mostly endorsing and putting this theme into practice as well, such as in the following record:

With me at her side, Sophia practiced at least ninety minutes every day, including weekends. On lesson days, we practiced twice as long. I made Sophia memorize everything, even if it wasn't required, and I never paid her a penny. That's how we blasted through those Suzuki books. Other parents aimed for one book a year. We started off with the "Twinkle, Twinkle" variations (Book One); three months later Sophia was playing Schumann (Book Two); six months after that, she was playing a sonatina by Clementi (Book Three). And I still felt we were going too slow.

(record 11; Chua 2011:27)

In the above record we observe Chua describing how she sat with her daughter Sophia to practice and "drill" the piano with her. She includes herself when referring to practicing, as in the following phrases: *with me by her side, we practiced twice as long, we blasted those suzuki books, we started off with the "Twinkle, Twinkle" variations, and I still felt we were going too slow.* With these

types of statements she indicates her personal involvement in terms of spending her own time and effort helping Sophia drill and practice the piano. She also says *I made Sophia memorize everything*, which not only is a phrase that indicates her close monitoring of her daughter's progress but also conveys her sense of exercising command and control over her daughter's practice sessions.

In another record, we see Chua again recounting a story of her own involvement in her daughters' achievement, in this case, related to her youngest daughter Lulu,

Here's a story in favor of coercion, Chinese-style. Lulu was about seven, still playing two instruments, and working on a piano piece called "The Little White Donkey" by the French composer Jacques Ibert. The piece is really cute—you can just imagine a little donkey ambling along a country road with its master—but it's also incredibly difficult for young players because the two hands have to keep schizophrenically different rhythms.

Lulu couldn't do it. We worked on it nonstop for a week, drilling each of her hands separately, over and over. But whenever we tried putting the hands together, one always morphed into the other, and everything fell apart. Finally, the



day before her lesson, Lulu announced in exasperation that she was giving up and stomped off.

“Get back to the piano now,” I ordered.

“You can’t make me.”

“Oh yes, I can.”

Back at the piano, Lulu made me pay. She punched, thrashed, and kicked. She grabbed the music score and tore it to shreds. I taped the score back together and encased it in a plastic shield so that it could never be destroyed again. Then I hauled Lulu’s doll-house to the car and told her I’d donate it to the Salvation Army piece by piece if she didn’t have “The Little White Donkey” perfect by the next day. When Lulu said, “I thought you were going to the Salvation Army, why are you still here?” I threatened her with no lunch, no dinner, no Christmas or Hanukkah presents, no birthday parties for two, three, four years. When she still kept playing it wrong, I told her she was purposely working herself into a frenzy because she was secretly afraid she couldn’t do it. I told her to stop being lazy, cowardly, self-indulgent, and pathetic.

Jed took me aside. He told me to stop insulting Lulu—which I wasn't even doing, I was just motivating her—and that he didn't think threatening Lulu was helpful. Also, he said, maybe Lulu really just couldn't do the technique—perhaps she didn't have the coordination yet—had I considered that possibility?

“You just don't believe in her,” I accused.

“That's ridiculous,” Jed said scornfully. “Of course I do.”

“Sophia could play the piece when she was this age.”

“But Lulu and Sophia are different people,” Jed pointed out.

“Oh no, not this,” I said, rolling my eyes. “Everyone is special in their special own way,” I mimicked sarcastically. “Even losers are special in their own special way. Well don't worry, you don't have to lift a finger. I'm willing to put in as long as it takes, and I'm happy to be the one hated. And you can be the one they adore because you make them pancakes and take them to Yankees games.”

I rolled up my sleeves and went back to Lulu. I used every weapon and tactic I could think of. We worked right through dinner into the night, and I wouldn't let Lulu get up, not for water, not even to go to the bathroom. The house became a war

zone, and I lost my voice yelling, but still there seemed to be only negative progress, and even I began to have doubts.

Then, out of the blue, Lulu did it. Her hands suddenly came together—her right and left hands each doing their own imperturbable thing—just like that.

Lulu realized it the same time I did. I held my breath. She tried it tentatively again. Then she played it more confidently and faster, and still the rhythm held. A moment later, she was beaming. “Mommy, look—it’s easy!” After that, she wanted to play the piece over and over and wouldn’t leave the piano. That night, she came to sleep in my bed, and we snuggled and hugged, cracking each other up. When she performed “The Little White Donkey” at a recital a few weeks later, parents came up to me and said, “What a perfect piece for Lulu—it’s so spunky and so her.” [...] Even Jed gave me credit for that one. Western parents worry a lot about their children’s self-esteem. But as a parent, one of the worst things you can do for your child’s self-esteem is to let them give up. On the flip side, there’s nothing better for building confidence than learning you can do something you thought you couldn’t.

(record 24; Chua 2011:60)

In the above record, we observe evidence of Chua's credence and belief in the worth of the theme of parental involvement in several phrases which indicate her participation in helping Lulu through her difficulty learning *The Little White Donkey*. When she says things like, *we worked on it nonstop for a week*, or *we tried putting the hands together*, or when she *orders* her daughter to *get back to the piano now*, or when she threatens Lulu with *no lunch, no dinner, no Christmas or Hanukkah presents, no birthday parties for two, three, four years*, Chua is executing and upholding the belief, not only in the significance of being personally involved in her daughter's practice and spending time with her daughter to practice, but also showing her willingness to push and coerce her daughter to favor the positive outcomes that she believes that Lulu is capable of delivering.

Chua shows more evidence of this throughout the record, for instance in a statement like: *I'm willing to put in as long as it takes, and I'm happy to be the one hated*, told to Jed when she was arguing with him, or also when she says, *I rolled up my sleeves and went back to Lulu. I used every weapon and tactic I could think of*. She uses war-related, or combat-related images, and with them indicates her relentlessness in her endeavor, and she characterizes this as a very 'Chinese' thing to do at the very beginning of the record when she says that this type of behavior is *coercion, Chinese style*, and the fact that she characterizes the

story as one *in favor* of this type of coercion only accentuates the point that she is biased towards it.

Chua justifies these actions and behaviors because she says, at the end, they constitute a favorable lesson to children in letting them know that they are capable of accomplishing the goals they have set out for themselves, but this is always contingent upon putting in the required effort to attain those goals. She closes by stating: *as a parent, one of the worst things you can do for your child's self-esteem is to let them give up*, and reflects, that the positive side of all these struggles lies the notion that, *there's nothing better for building confidence than learning you can do something you thought you couldn't*.

In another record we see Chua contrasting the 'Western' and the 'Chinese' approach with regard to parental involvement:

There are all these new books out there portraying Asian mothers as scheming, callous, overdriven people indifferent to their kids' true interests. For their part, many Chinese secretly believe that they care more about their children and are willing to sacrifice much more for them than Westerners, who seem perfectly content to let their children turn out badly. I think it's a misunderstanding on both sides. All decent parents want to do what's best for their children. The Chinese just have a totally different idea of how to do that.

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, the Chinese 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.

(record 25; Chua 2011:62)

We observe that Chua acknowledges a belief that according to her, many 'Chinese' mothers share, and that is a secret belief that, *they care more about their children and are willing to sacrifice much more for them than Westerners, who seem perfectly content to let their children turn out badly.* This belief, as described by Chua, seems to contain the notion that 'Chinese' parents are more involved in their children's education and instruction, and that may be why the underlying understanding is that 'Chinese' sacrifice more: more in terms of their own time, and effort. Also, the elements contained in the comparison Chua issues between the 'Western' approach and the 'Chinese' is telling. Chua highlights that a crucial difference between 'Western' parents and 'Chinese' parents lies in the matter of respecting *their children's individuality* or *encouraging them to pursue their true passions*, or *supporting their choices*,

perhaps since in the ‘Western’ approach so much agency is left up to the child, the implication might be that ‘Western’ parents are uninvolved, especially when compared to ‘Chinese’ parents where more agency is explicitly stated: they *protect*, their children, they *prepare their children*, and they *arm* them with *skills, work habits, and inner confidence that no one can ever take away*.

In another comparative record where we found Chua juxtaposing aspects of the ‘Chinese’ and ‘Western’ approach we observe her mother-in-law regarding childhood as *something fleeting to be enjoyed*, whereas Chua acknowledges to view it, quite antagonistically, *as a training period, a time to build character and invest for the future*.

Florence saw childhood as something fleeting to be enjoyed. I saw childhood as a training period, a time to build character and invest for the future. Florence always wanted just one full day to spend with each girl—she begged me for that. But I never had a full day for them to spare. The girls barely had time as it was to do their homework, speak Chinese with their tutor, and practice their instruments.

(record 29; Chua 2011:97)

This recognition of childhood in terms of *a training period*, again places Chua in an unequivocal position of agreement and acquiescence not only of the

‘Chinese’ approach, but once again with respect to the theme of parental involvement: She confirms *I never had a full day for them to spare*, indicating her close monitoring and control of her children’s activities, and furthermore her lack of flexibility with regard to her imposed academic regime.

In yet another record we see Chua conjecturing as to what would happen if a Chinese child came home with a B-grade on a test:

If a Chinese child gets a B—which would never happen—there would first be a screaming, hair-tearing explosion. The devastated Chinese mother would then get dozens, maybe hundreds of practice tests and work through them with her child for as long as it takes to get the grade up to an A.

(record 19; Chua 2011:51)

By putting forth an example where a ‘Chinese’ mother is not only *devastated* by a B grade on a test, but also sets out to get *dozens, maybe hundreds of practice tests and work through them with her child*, Chua is giving credence to the idea that parents and family who raise their children according to the ‘Chinese’ approach, do in fact involve themselves personally in helping their children get ahead with their education. Chua further indicates that the mother would sit with her child *for as long as it takes to get the grade up to an A*, indicating not only a



degree of self-sacrifice, but also reflecting the belief that parents think children do have the capacity and ability to achieve the highest levels of achievement.

*11.2.3.4. Effort and practice are critical in the attainment of goals*

Finally, the fourth highest theme that came up in Amy Chua's comments with regard to the 'Chinese' conceptualization of parenting was that which was formulated as *Effort and practice are critical in the attainment of goals*, a total of 12 references came up with regard to this theme in Chua's comments. It is worth noting, that this theme entails not just the idea that effort and practice are critical in reaching one's aspirations, but also that achievement is at everybody's reach. Effort, in the 'Chinese' parenting tradition, is emphasized more than talent or innate ability. Also similarly to the other 'Chinese' themes that come up in her book and which we have analyzed so far, we see Chua mostly endorsing and putting this theme into practice, as can be observed in the following record:

What Chinese parents understand is that nothing is fun until you're good at it. To get good at anything you have to work, and children on their own never want to work, which is why it is crucial to override their preferences. This often requires fortitude on the part of the parents because the child will resist; things are always hardest at the beginning, which is where Western parents tend to give up. But if done properly, the

Chinese strategy produces a virtuous circle. Tenacious practice, practice, practice is crucial for excellence; rote repetition is underrated in America. Once a child starts to excel at something—whether it’s math, piano, pitching, or ballet—he or she gets praise, admiration, and satisfaction. This builds confidence and makes the once not-fun activity fun. This in turn makes it easier for the parent to get the child to work even more.

(record 12; Chua 2011:29)

The above record is significant in exemplifying the theme we are currently analyzing, because in it Chua seems to be expressing a critical tenet underlying it quite succinctly: *What Chinese parents understand is that nothing is fun until you’re good at it. To get good at anything you have to work...* According to Chua, this is the recipe for what she calls the *Chinese virtuous circle*, and she continues elaborating on the idea: *Tenacious practice, practice, practice is crucial for excellence; rote repetition is underrated in America. Once a child starts to excel at something—whether it’s math, piano, pitching, or ballet—he or she gets praise, admiration, and satisfaction. This builds confidence and makes the once not-fun activity fun. This in turn makes it easier for the parent to get the child to work even more.* With her confident description, we understand that Chua favors and advocates making use of this strategy.

We also find another record where she retells the story of her parents putting into place the theme of effort, practice and hard work as being critical in the attainment of goals:

We were required to speak Chinese at home—the punishment was one whack of the chopsticks for every English word accidentally uttered. We drilled math and piano every afternoon and were never allowed to sleep over at our friends' houses. Every evening when my father came home from work, I took off his shoes and socks and brought him his slippers. Our report cards had to be perfect; while our friends were rewarded for Bs, for us getting an A-minus was unthinkable. In eighth grade, I won second place in a history contest and brought my family to the awards ceremony. Somebody else had won the Kiwanis prize for best all-around student. Afterward, my father said to me: “Never, never disgrace me like that again.”

(record 6: Chua 2011:16)

Chua recounts that as a child she and her sisters were required to *drill math and piano every afternoon and were never allowed to sleep over at our friends' houses*. She also explains that as children, their *report cards had to be perfect*; and also that for them getting an A-minus was *unthinkable*. With statements like these, Chua portrays her childhood home as one where the ‘Chinese’ requirement for effort and hard work for

attaining goals was very much in place and we also see how much weight her parents placed on good grades and how much they focused on their daughter's academic accomplishment. The notion that Chua's father had only the highest expectations in her capability of getting the highest grades is also expressed in her recounting the final story in the record, when her father felt *disgraced* by Chua for not coming in first place in the school history contest.

In the following record, we find Chua not only advocating the notion that effort and practice is necessary for the attainment of goals, but also having, as she herself describes, a fixation with *difficulty and accomplishment*:

Maybe the reason I can't appreciate gamelan music, which I heard when we visited Indonesia in 1992, is that I fetishize difficulty and accomplishment. I don't know how many hundreds of times I've yelled at Lulu, "Everything valuable and worthwhile is difficult! Do you know what I went through to get this job at Yale?" Gamelan music is mesmerizing because it is so simple, unstructured, and repetitious. By contrast, Debussy's brilliant compositions reflect complexity, ambition, ingenuity, design, conscious harmonic exploration—and yes, gamelan influences, at least in some of his works.

(record 14; Chua 2011:41)

With a statement such as *I fetishize difficulty and accomplishment. I don't know how many hundreds of times I've yelled at Lulu, "Everything valuable and worthwhile is difficult! Do you know what I went through to get this job at Yale?* Chua corroborates her belief in the 'Chinese' notion that hard and steady work are crucial and that it leads to the realization of one's greatest potential. Also she reflects the ethical notion that what's worthy and valuable is difficult and supports the notion that there's a moral obligation to learning something difficult because otherwise learning it won't be valuable.

In another record we see Chua retelling the following account:

...Once, Sophia came in second on a multiplication speed test, which her fifth-grade teacher administered every Friday. She lost to a Korean boy named Yoon- seok. Over the next week, I made Sophia do twenty practice tests (of 100 problems each) every night, with me clocking her with a stopwatch. After that, she came in first every time.

Practicing more than everyone else is also why Asian kids dominate the top music conservatories. That's how Lulu kept impressing Mr. Shugart every Saturday with how fast she improved. "You catch on so quickly," he'd frequently say. "You're going to be a great violinist.

(record 27; Chua 2011:70)

By stating *I made Sophia do twenty practice tests (of 100 problems each) every night, with me clocking her with a stopwatch. After that, she came in first every time.* We see Chua providing evidence of a theme we already discussed in section 11.2.3.3, of Chinese parents' involvement in their children's academic work and general tutelage, and also giving credence to the theme of effort and practice as something determinant in procuring achievement. She reinforces this belief by stating, *Practicing more than everyone else is also why Asian kids dominate the top music conservatories. That's how Lulu kept impressing Mr. Shugart every Saturday with how fast she improved.* Hence, improvement and accomplishment both come after engaged practice and vigorous effort.

In yet another record we see Chua subscribing and evidencing her belief in the *Chinese virtuous circle*, where effort and hard work are the key ingredients in procuring success:

The Chinese model turns on achieving success. That's how the virtuous circle of confidence, hard work, and more success is generated. I knew that I had to make sure Lulu achieved that success—at the same level as Sophia—before it was too late.

(record 33; Chua 2011:146)

According to Chua, she had to *make sure Lulu achieved success* so that Lulu could be motivated, presumably to continue playing the violin, however that success depended on Lulu's engagement and practice. Chua gives credence to

the ‘Chinese’ notion that hard and steady work lead to the realization of one's greatest potential by stating that the virtuous Chinese circle is generated with *confidence, hard work, and more success*.

Finally, in the final record in this section, we see Chua once again reflecting her belief that it is the execution of effort and hard work what leads to success and not just a love for something:

“Bill Clinton recently told some Yale students that you can only be really great at something if you love it. So it’s good that you love tennis.”

But just because you love something, I added to myself, doesn’t mean you’ll ever be great. Not if you don’t work. Most people stink at the things they love.

(record 47; Chua 2011: 214)

In stating that *if you don’t work* you will never be great at something, Chua is reflecting the ‘Chinese’ belief that it is through commitment to effort and toiling hard that one realizes one's greatest potential; Chua believes that progress in something depends on effort. This belief is also shown in her statement that *just because you love something... doesn’t mean you’ll ever be great*. Greatness, according to Chua, is contingent on effort.

#### *11.2.4. The nature of Amy Chua's recognition and value of Western and Chinese themes*

In terms of the nature of Chua's recognition and value of 'Western' and 'Chinese' themes, as we already got a sense of while analyzing her comments in the sections above, we found that even when Chua does refer to and mention both 'Western' themes and 'Chinese' themes, the statements she makes mostly lean towards favoring the 'Chinese' conceptualization of parenting and diverge and show opposition toward the 'Western' conceptualization of parenting.

When referring to 'Western' themes, parents and their parenting practices she usually does so critically. For instance, we observe Chua cast 'Western' parents as irreflexive, when she qualifies their justifications for allowing their children to attend sleepovers as *platitudes* (record 26; Chua 2011:68). She also questions parents motivations for entitling their children with freedom: she asks, *I often sometimes wonder if the question "Who are you really doing this for" should be asked of Western parents.* (record 35; Chua 2011:148) According to Chua, by giving their children freedom and independence 'Western' parents in turn obtain a dosage of freedom of their own and have time, by her account, *to have a glass of wine and go to yoga class.* The implication being that 'Western' parents grant their children freedom, independence and avoid controlling them so that parents themselves can have a break from their parenting responsibilities. In this sense, we observe Chua casting strong judgements the 'Western' model of parenting.



Chua also mentions ‘Western’ themes to contrast it to what she believes represent the virtues, efficacies and strengths of the ‘Chinese’ parenting model. We observe her stating that as a ‘Chinese’ mother she *could never give in to that way of thinking* (record 44; Chua 2011:208), the way of thinking being allowing her children to give up doing something that she as a mother believes is good for them, and avoid regulating decisions that children might make on their own which they might regret in the long run, such as quitting the violin. In this sense, Chua reflects that ‘Chinese’ parents assume fortitude, whereas *Western parents are extremely anxious about their children’s self-esteem* (record 19; Chua 2011:51) and *worry about how their children will feel if they fail at something... they are concerned about their children’s psyches.* (record 19; Chua 2011:51).

She casts this ‘Western’ concern as a weakness and shortcoming, rather than as a merit and contrasts it to the ‘Chinese’ perspective. According to Chua, ‘Chinese’ parents aren’t worried about their children’s psyches because *they assume strength, not fragility* on the part of their children. She praises ‘Chinese’ parental behavior in *demanding perfect grades* from their children *because they know they can get them* (record 19; Chua 2011:51) and she justifies ‘Chinese’ parental excoriation, punishment and shaming of their children as a means to help them improve and excel in whatever task they endeavor.

So we have already begun to portray her bias towards the ‘Chinese’ conceptualization of parenting with the brief samples above. However, the favorable nature of Chua’s

recognition and value towards the ‘Chinese’ conceptualization does not only show up when she mentions it in opposition to the ‘Western’ conceptualization of parenting, but also in the statements she issues where no direct connection or contrast is necessarily made to the ‘Western’ approach. She praises beliefs and attitudes ‘Chinese’ parents hold regarding obedience, for instance stating that *in Chinese culture, it is considered among the highest of virtues* (record 5; Chua 2011:12). She regards children’s commitment and duties towards their parents as a known situation, stating for instance that it is understood that *Chinese children must spend their lives repaying their parents by obeying them and making them proud* (record 20; Chua 2011:53) and also going as far as to state that in the ‘Chinese’ realm, *when it comes to parents, nothing is negotiable... not even if it destroys your life* (record 30; Chua 2011:98). We also observe her open defence and endorsement of respect for authority, even if that authority is being unreasonable.

According to Chua, unjustified actions on the part of Lulu’s teacher Mrs. Kazinczy could not warrant any disrespect from Lulu because she was *an authority figure*, in her words, *one of first things Chinese people learn is that you must respect authority. No matter what, you don’t talk back to your parents, teachers, elders.* (record 36; Chua 2011:92)

Chua also spends time in her book explaining the reasons why ‘Chinese’ parents do what they do and the beliefs behind these actions. For example in one record she justifies ‘Chinese’ parental exercise of control over their children by stating that the

reason these parents *override all their children's own desires and preferences* is because they *believe they know what is best for their children* (record 21; Chua 2011:53). In a similar vein, she also justifies her parental hands-on involvement in her daughters' education and instruction and the strong demands she puts on them by stating that this comes from the view within the 'Chinese' belief system, *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* (record 25; Chua 2011:62).

She also refers to what she calls "the Chinese virtuous circle" and with regard to it she states the following: *If done properly, the Chinese strategy produces a virtuous circle. Tenacious practice, practice, practice is crucial for excellence: rote repetition is underrated in America. Once a child starts to excel at something –whether it's math, piano, pitching, or ballet– he or she gets praise, admiration, and satisfaction. This builds confidence and makes the once not-fun activity fun. This in turn makes the child work even more.* (record 12; Chua 2011:29) We observe her admiration and her pride in the 'Chinese' parenting belief system, and we see her portraying the 'Chinese' parenting practices and model as practically feeding virtuously onto itself; according to Chua, *the Chinese model turns on achieving success. That's how the virtuous circle of confidence, hard work, and more success is generated* (record 33; Chua 2011: 146).

*11.2.5. Enactment of specific 'Chinese' and 'Western' themes by Amy Chua*

A final element we need to explore for our third hypothesis is the matter of Amy Chua's enactment of parenting conceptualizations. This item will help us evidence the institutional parenting practices she both fulfills and endorses. In terms of Amy Chua's enactment of parenting practices we found evidence, upon analyzing her book, that Chua mostly enacts herself, or endorses the enactment of the 'Chinese' conceptualization of parenting. In figure 8 below, we list the most frequent themes that came up in her own account and description the parenting practices she carries out, as well as the description of parenting practices that she subscribes to and endorses. Following figure 8, we will present and analyze some of the quotes we found in her book evidencing this matter.

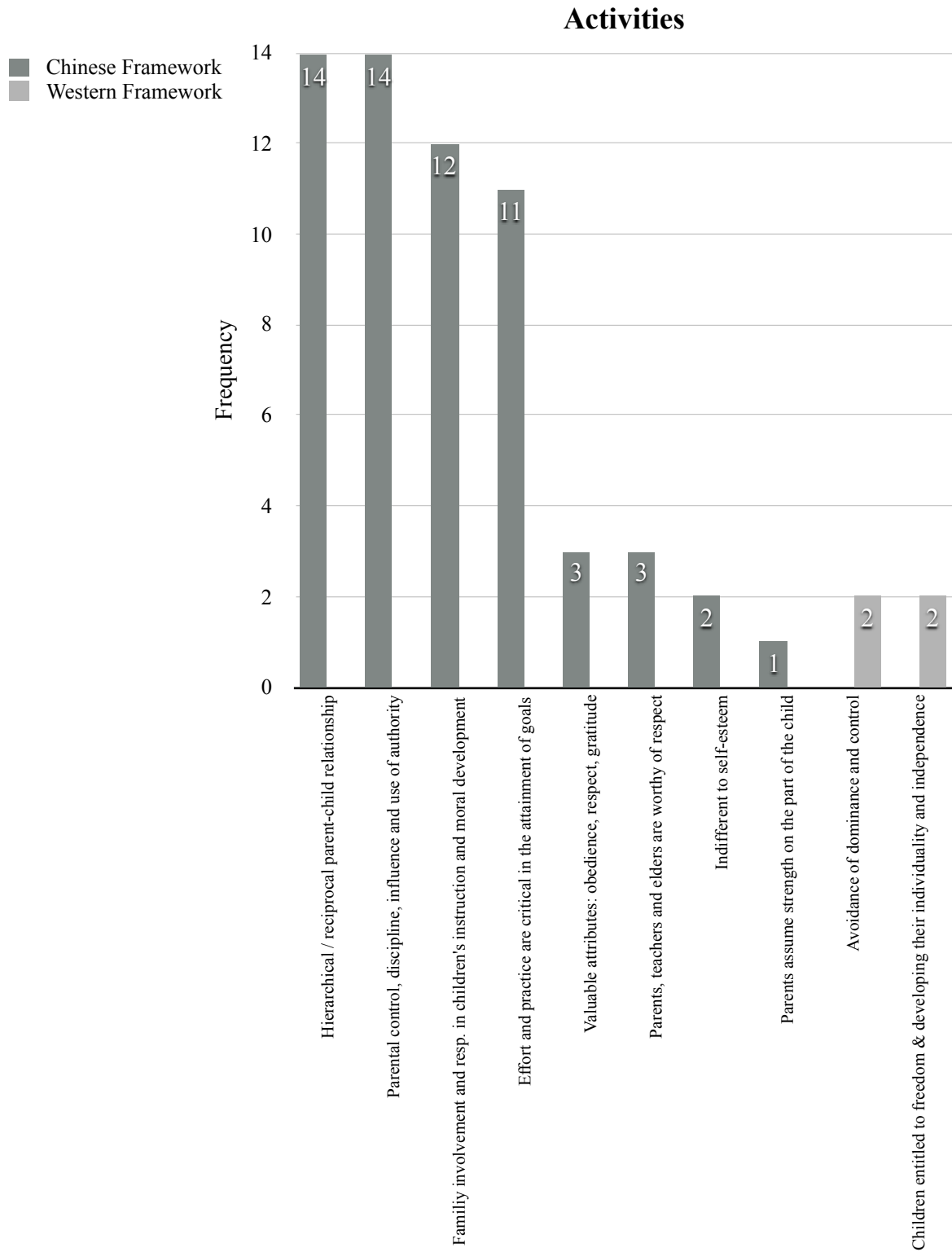


Figure 8.- Themes enacted by Chua related to the 'Western' and 'Chinese' conceptualizations of parenting

### *11.2.5.1. Hierarchical and reciprocal parent-child relationship*

At the beginning of her book Chua describes a list of activities she forbids her daughters to do. The fragment is the following:

A lot of people wonder how Chinese parents raise such stereotypically successful kids. They wonder what these parents do to produce so many math whizzes and music prodigies, what it's like inside the family, and whether they could do it too. Well, I can tell them, because I've done it. Here are some things my daughters, Sophia and Louisa, were never allowed to do

- attend a sleepover
- have a playdate
- be in a school play
- complain about not being in a school play
- watch TV or play computer games
- choose their own extracurricular activities
- get any grade less than an A
- not be the #1 student in every subject except gym and drama
- play any instrument other than the piano or violin
- not play the piano or violin.

(record 1; Chua 2011: 1)

In case of the above record, we observe Amy Chua explicitly enacting a parenting role where she exerts a top-bottom hierarchy, conventional and proper to the ‘Chinese’ conceptualization of parenting. As a mother, we observe that she executes her ‘Chinese’ authority to forbid certain things to her daughters.

Every evening when my father came home from work, I took off his shoes and socks and brought him his slippers.

(record 6, Chua 2011:16)

In the case of the record above, we observe by her retelling of it, a scene involving Chua as a little girl and her father: the story retell of her action of taking off her father’s shoes and socks, and bringing him his slippers after he came home from work, and in this context they are both enacting roles in a relationship where there is a top-bottom order. She behaves deferentially towards her father’s needs or expectations, embodying what might represent a conventional conduct of a ‘Chinese’ child who is being raised in a manner that is respectful and honorable towards her elders, and he embodies the image of a ‘Chinese’ patriarch who expects this behavior in turn. The behavior might even betray a hint of submission on the part of the child, by ‘Western’ standards anyway, and it evidences elements of the ‘Chinese’ hierarchical parent-child relationship.

Chinese parents can get away with things that Western parents can’t.

Once when I was young —maybe more than once— when I was extremely disrespectful to my mother, my father angrily called me “garbage” in our native Hokkien dialect. It worked really well. I felt

terrible and deeply ashamed of what I had done. But it didn't damage my self-esteem or anything like that. I knew exactly how highly he thought of me. I didn't actually think I was worthless or feel like a piece of garbage ... As an adult, I once did the same thing to Sophia, calling her garbage in English when she acted extremely disrespectfully toward me.

(record 17; Chua 2011: 50)

In the above record we observe Chua subscribing to actions that we saw in previous sections as considered reproachable by 'Western' parental standards. She knows, or at least suspects, that given conventions or beliefs within the realm of 'Western' parenting, that 'Western' parents could not act with their children the way Chinese parents act with their children. She, in fact says so: *Chinese parents get get away with things that Western parents can't*. We observe a similar line of reasoning used in the following record,

The fact is that Chinese parents can do things that would seem unimaginable—even legally actionable—to Westerners. Chinese mothers can say to their daughters, "Hey fatty—lose some weight."... Chinese parents can order their kids to get straight As ... Chinese parents can say, "You're lazy. All your classmates are getting ahead of you."

(record 18; Chua 2011:51)



In the two records presented above Amy Chua is evidencing her endorsement and enactment of the conceptualization of ‘Chinese’ parental hierarchy over their children. According to Chua’s examples ‘Chinese’ parents can say, and get away with, certain things to their children, which according to her *would seem unimaginable to Westerners*.

In the next examples, again we see Chua explaining, justifying, or herself enacting actions that denote the belief or conviction in a hierarchical parent-child relationship.

Chinese parents believe that they know what is best for their children and therefore override all of their children’s own desires and preferences.

(record 21; Chua 2011:53)

My parents didn’t give me any choices, and never asked for my opinion on anything.

(record 22; Chua 2011:53)

“Get back to the piano now,” I ordered. “You can’t make me.” “Oh yes, I can.”

(record 24; Chua 2011:60)

“Not when you were little,” Lulu said. “Mommy never gave us a choice when we were little. Unless it was, ‘Do you want to practice six hours or five?’”

(record 49; Chua 2011:226)

The use of verbs or verbal phrases that denote specific actions, such as: Chinese parents *can and do override* their children's desires; Amy Chua's parents *didn't give her choices or asked for her opinion*; Amy Chua *can and does order and make her daughter get back to the piano* indicate not only a present belief, but also performance of those beliefs and convictions.

The above four quotes also serve to provide evidence the hierarchical parent-child relationship that Amy Chua enacts and endorses. Chua asserts that 'Chinese' parents don't ask their children for their opinion, or value their preferences and inclinations when it comes to making decisions. According to Chua 'Chinese' parents think they know what is best for their children and that is why they *override* their children's preferences, implying that 'Chinese' parents might feel that they need to guide and control, compensating for children's own misguided impulses.

Finally, these next two quotations extracted from her book, also show Chua enacting a Chinese conceptualization with regard to a hierarchical relationship between parents and their children. The two statements occur when Amy Chua's mother-in-law falls ill to cancer and Chua proposes taking her in because she is her husband's mother and Chua admits unquestionably that 'Chinese' children owe their parents everything and that is just the Chinese way.

I proposed what seemed the obvious solution: Florence would come live with us in New Haven. My mother's elderly parents lived with us in Indiana when I was little. My father's mother lived with my uncle

in Chicago until she died at the age of eighty-seven ... I've always assumed that I would take in my parents if the need arose. This is the Chinese way.”

(record 28; Chua 2011:96)

Your parents are your parents, you owe everything to them (even if you don't), and you have to do everything for them (even if it destroys your life).

(record 30; Chua 2011:98)

These two segments illustrate the response that Chua considers to be a correct one, in the case of parental illness, hers or her husband's. She assumes that the proper thing to do would be to *take in* her parents and *do everything* for them, even if that meant destroying her life.

*11.2.5.2. Parental control, discipline, influence, and use of authority / Parents should be demanding and strong-willed with their children.*

With respect to the 'Chinese' theme regarding the exertion of parental control and discipline, the following are several records we found in passages of her book which evidence Chua's enactment of this matter:

But I was determined to raise an obedient Chinese child—in the West, obedience is associated with dogs and the caste system, but in Chinese culture, it is considered among the highest of virtues—if it killed me.

(record 5; Chua 2011:12)

In the above record, we observe Chua expressing her determination *to raise an obedient Chinese child*. This statement is an indication of her partiality for and adherence to ‘Chinese’ parenting practices where instilling deference and obedience in children is fostered and preferred.

I wasn’t fragile, like some Western parents. As I often said to the girls, “My goal as a parent is to prepare you for the future—not to make you like me.”

(record 16; Chua 2011:48)

The above statement also indicates Chua’s determination in furthering the instilling of ‘Chinese’ values in her daughters. She states that *her goal as parent is to prepare* her children for the future, and this goal, we assume, serves as a guide and boundary for her actions as a parent. In stating this in a matter that is hands on and in saying she *wasn’t fragile*, she is both undertaking a parenting role where her duty is to influence and be demanding and also denoting her strength and determination to carry it out.

Florence always wanted just one full day to spend with each girl—she begged me for that. But I never had a full day for them to spare. The girls barely had time as it was to do their homework, speak Chinese with their tutor, and practice their instruments.

(record 29; Chua 2011:97)

Once again, we see evidence of Chua's enactment of a controlling and restrictive parenting value in stating that she *never had a full day for them to spare*. She places herself at the center of decision-making when it comes to her daughter's activities and shows just how demanding and restrictive she was with her daughter's routine in admitting that *the girls barely had time as it was to do their homework, speak Chinese with their tutor, and practice their instruments*, leaving no time left to spare to spend with their grandmother Florence.

I broke in, "Do you know how sad and ashamed my parents would be if they saw this, Lulu—you publicly disobeying me? With that look on your face?

(record 42; Chua 2011:204)

In the above statement we observe Chua shaming and criticizing her daughter Lulu for "publicly disobeying" her. This action indicates Chua's bias the 'Chinese' conceptualization of parenting and her enactment of practices related to it. In the 'Chinese' framework children are expected to respect and show deference for their

parents and elders at all times, and without exception, and challenging those values is met with opprobrium.

*11.2.5.3. Family involvement and responsibility in children's instruction and moral development*

Regarding the theme related to parental or family involvement and responsibility in children's general development, we found a few examples that stand out when it comes to evidencing Chua's enactment and endorsement of the enactment of this specific matter in her parental practices:

With me at her side, Sophia practiced at least ninety minutes every day, including weekends. On lesson days, we practiced twice as long. I made Sophia memorize everything, even if it wasn't required, and I never paid her a penny. That's how we blasted through those Suzuki books.

(record 11; Chua 2011:27)

And it's true that Chinese mothers get in the trenches, putting in long grueling hours personally tutoring, training, interrogating, and spying on their kids.

(record 20; Chua 2011:53)

But as a parent, one of the worst things you can do for your child's self-esteem is to let them give up.

(record 24; Chua 2011:60)

“I think it's too idealistic to expect children to do the right things on their own,” I said. “Also, if you force them [children] to do what you want, you don't have to be mad at them.”

(record 31; Chua 2011:104)

In the above sections extracted from her book, we observe Chua both enacting and endorsing a parenting practice where parental involvement in children's instruction is of utmost importance. We observe Chua personally involving herself in her children's instruction and development by describing that she worked with her daughter by her side, making her *memorize everything*. She constantly says, *we* when she refers to the activities they engaged in when practicing the Suzuki method. Also she sympathizes and accords approval to the notion that ‘Chinese’ mothers *get in the trenches* with their children, asserting that it is *true* that Chinese mothers *personally tutor, train, interrogate and spy* on their children. In general, she endorses the ‘Chinese’ notion that it is a parent's responsibility to guide their children to do what is right.

*11.2.5.4. Effort and practice are critical in the attainment of goals*

Regarding the theme related to the belief that effort, practice and hard work are critical in the attainment of goals, we found a few statements where Chua is observed enacting, or manifesting her enactment of this notion in her parental practices. The following are some examples:

We drilled math and piano every afternoon.

(record 6; Chua 2011:16)

To get good at anything you have to work, and children on their own never want to work, which is why it is crucial to override their preferences. This often requires fortitude on the part of the parents because the child will resist; things are always hardest at the beginning, which is where Western parents tend to give up. But if done properly, the Chinese strategy produces a virtuous circle. Tenacious practice, practice, practice is crucial for excellence.

(record 12; Chua 2011:29)

If a Chinese child gets a B—which would never happen—there would first be a screaming, hair-tearing explosion. The devastated Chinese mother would then get dozens, maybe hundreds of practice tests and work through them with her child for as long as it takes to get the



grade up to an A. Chinese parents demand perfect grades because they believe that their child can get them. If their child doesn't get them, the Chinese parent assumes it's because the child didn't work hard enough.

(record 19; Chua 2011:51)

...Over the next week, I made Sophia do twenty practice tests (of 100 problems each) every night, with me clocking her with a stopwatch. After that, she came in first every time...Practicing more than everyone else is also why Asian kids dominate the top music conservatories. That's how Lulu kept impressing Mr. Shugart every Saturday with how fast she improved. "You catch on so quickly," he'd frequently say. "You're going to be a great violinist.

(record 27; Chua 2011:70)

The Chinese model turns on achieving success. That's how the virtuous circle of confidence, hard work, and more success is generated. I knew that I had to make sure Lulu achieved that success—at the same level as Sophia—before it was too late.

(record 33; Chua 2011:146)

In the above passages, we observe Chua either carrying out herself or endorsing actions and practices, which underline the idea that effort, repetition and preparation are key elements in the procurement of goals. She lays out actions she carried out personally, such as drilling with her children, and also presents hypothetical situations and indicates what a ‘Chinese’ parent would do to help their children excel, and she is clear in her offering a blueprint for success: Handing out practice tests, practicing tenaciously for long hours, demanding perfection, all these are things ‘Chinese’ parents do because they believe success and accomplishment ensue as result of this effort.

Finally, towards the end of her book we observe Chua enacting some ‘Western’ themes, especially with relation to children making their own choices and parents refraining from being domineering. Specifically she states the following:

It occurred to me that this must be how Western parents think and why they so often let their kids give up difficult musical instruments. Why torture yourself and your child? What’s the point? If your child doesn’t like something—hates it—what good is it forcing her to do it? I knew as a Chinese mother I could never give in to that way of thinking ... I rejoined my family at the GUM café. The waiters and other guests averted their eyes. “Lulu,” I said. “You win. It’s over. We’re giving up the violin.”

(record 44; Chua 2011:208)

Interestingly, in the above record, even though we observe Chua giving in to Lulu's wishes to quit the violin, we see her casting herself as an enabler of this decision as well. She tells Lulu *we're giving up the violin*, making herself a fundamental part of the decision-making act.

"It was her decision," I heard myself saying. "It was too much of a time commitment. You know how thirteen-year-olds are." What a Western parent I've become, I thought to myself. What a failure.

(record 46; Chua 2011:214)

Again, in the record shown above, we observe Chua enacting a dual role: one in exterior form where she justifies and seems to be respecting and honoring Lulu's decision to quit the violin, and another internal voice, which seems more true to her 'Chinese' parenting ethics, where she admits to feeling like a failure, presumably because she has not been able to help Lulu succeed as a violinist as she had set out to do.

An interesting finding in considering these statements is that despite Chua enacting 'Western' themes towards the end of her book, specifically ones related to avoidance of dominance and control and allowing children freedom and independence, due to her younger daughter's defiance, Chua still does so reluctantly, always staying true in her beliefs and her convictions with regard to her in the 'Chinese' parenting ethics.



## **PART VI. Conclusion**



## **12. Concluding remarks**

### *12.1. Final considerations*

This work has aimed to build and apply two theoretical constructs for studying interactions relevant for the study of intercultural communication and pragmatics, namely institutional framework and institutional practice. These two constructs were conceptualized in section 6 of this work, and then in section 7, a case was described as relevant for their application and validation: The case was Amy Chua's 'Chinese' parenting style as implemented in the USA.

Subsequently, we gathered a corpus of books and articles that focused on the matter of parenting, and which specifically centered their discussions on what throughout this work has been labelled 'Chinese' parenting and 'Western' parenting. We did this in order to study the conceptualizations of each parenting approach and these conceptualizations served to build themes that were classified as either pertaining to the 'Chinese' approach to parenting or to the 'Western' approach to parenting. These conceptualizations were assembled together under two umbrella institutions: 1)'childrearing' and 2)'learning, schooling and education.' These two institutions originated from the observation that aspects related to childrearing and to learning, schooling and education acquired and entailed distinct sets of meanings depending on whether they were being mentioned from the 'Chinese' or the 'Western' perspective, and they also each carry particular deontic powers. That is, they served to constrain or enable particular forms of behaviors and views. These two institutions served and

encompassed the basis for describing the constitutive elements of the ‘Chinese’ and ‘Western’ institutional frameworks. (See section 10), this was done to validate hypothesis 1.

To validate hypothesis 2, the two frameworks we described, that is the ‘Chinese’ and ‘Western’, were then contrasted discursively with comments made on the two articles from the Wall Street Journal and The New York Times and, which we referred to in section 9.2.

We also contrasted sections of Amy Chua’s book *Tiger Hymn of the Tiger Mother* to substantiate hypothesis 3, where we postulated that her recognition, value and enactment of parenting practices conformed more suitably with the ‘Chinese’ form of parenting than to the ‘Western’ form of parenting.

Finally, throughout this concluding section of our work we will aim, firstly, to go over the theoretical constructs we have proposed, as well as the relevance of their application to the case we selected; secondly, we will synthesize our findings and results for each of the hypotheses proposed in section 8.2; thirdly, we will discuss the contributions this work makes to the field of intercultural communication and pragmatics and propose areas for future research. These three aspects will guide our final section and will be examined in detail below.



## *12.2. Attainment of objectives proposed*

This work aspires to provide additional tools to the field of intercultural communication and pragmatics for studying the emergence of meaning. In the pursuit of going beyond the utterance level of analysis, the construct of institutional framework, as described in this work, is applicable to studying and understanding how meaning can be ascribed to different phenomena, not just words, and how certain meanings prevail within distinct boundaries. The construct of institutional practice, is relevant for studying and understanding that prevalent meanings within systems of institutions are sustained by people actively reproducing and taking part in those meanings, not only through what they say, but also through what they do.

At the outset of this work, and as proposed in hypothesis 1, we postulated that we would find differences between the conceptualizations of the ‘Chinese’ and ‘Western’ parenting styles when it came to *childrearing*, as well as to *learning, schooling and education*. Indeed as evidenced in section 10 of this work distinct differences were found for these two constituents of the ‘Chinese’ and ‘Western’ institutional frameworks, in terms of how values, identities, activities and relationships were conceptualized for each. An example of a specific, and perhaps a foundational difference we found, is the notion that children are entitled to freedom of choice and have a right to their individuality in the ‘Western’ sphere, in contrast to the notion that children are a continuation of their parents’ lives and are subject to parental control and parental involvement in their development when it came to the ‘Chinese’ sphere. By

observing these two opposing meanings ascribed to the view of children within each framework we begin to understand an underlying and fundamental source for distinct interpretations and manifestations of parenting behaviors within each. The visible ascription of distinct meanings to a myriad of phenomena related to parenting supports the existence of the two discrete institutional frameworks proposed in hypothesis 1.

Further evidence of the existence of the two institutional frameworks was provided in section 11 of this work upon analyzing the comments taken from “The Wall Street Journal” article titled *Why Chinese Mothers are Superior*, written by Amy Chua (Appendix A) and “The New York Times” article titled *Amy Chua is a Wimp*, written by David Brooks (Appendix B) for the verification of hypothesis 2. Findings suggest that commenters mentioned, as well as recognized and valued, elements and themes from both frameworks, giving their existence actual plausibility outside a plainly theoretical realm. The results for commenter recognition and value was an interesting finding in itself: 54 of the total comments recognized and valued aspects related to the ‘Western’ institutional framework, 25 comments recognized and valued aspects of both, while only 11 of overall comments recognized and valued aspects related to just the ‘Chinese’ institutional framework. We call to mind that in these numerical terms recognition and value does not necessarily entail acquiescence to the framework, however, the fact that the themes and conceptualizations of the ‘Western’ framework are referred to and commented on more often than the ‘Chinese’ themes and conceptualizations might well be an indication that commenters have them more in mind, and that the ‘Western’

framework of meanings is more widespread and ubiquitous. Our qualitative analysis however, did reveal that the nature of the recognition and value of the commenters in both articles, in general, were more inclined to make for favorable remarks with regard to the ‘Western’ themes that they were referring to, or to take them for granted. Contrastingly, we also found that the commenters tended to make more critical remarks or call into question the validity and effectiveness of ‘Chinese’ parenting practices. Finally, we observed that ‘Chinese’ themes had a higher frequency of occurrence among commenters of the article written by Chua in “The Wall Street Journal”, perhaps because reaction was directly elicited regarding the ‘Chinese’ parenting style she advocates in this article. Interestingly, we observed that ‘Western’ themes had a higher frequency of occurrence among commenters of the article written by David Brooks in “The New York Times”, perhaps because he is proposing principles and standards that are akin to the ‘Western’ parenting approach, especially with regard to the matter of socialization.

Finally, the third hypothesis was aimed at understanding whether Amy Chua’s recognition, value and parenting practices were more akin to the ‘Chinese’ framework or the ‘Western’ framework. Our findings suggest that, as expected, Amy Chua recognizes, values and enacts parenting practices that conform more suitably with the conceptualizations of ‘Chinese’ parenting than the ‘Western’ parenting system of meanings and the nature of her recognition is also more favorable to the ‘Chinese’ parenting ethics. Enactment was verified by examining Amy Chua’s discourse with

regard to actions, or activities she described as carrying out or endorsing other people carrying out.

Results suggest that when it came to enacting parenting practices, Amy Chua carried out or endorsed the implementation of actions that adhered to the ‘Chinese’ parenting institutional framework rather than the ‘Western’ parenting institutional framework. Specifically, she mostly recognized, valued and enacted or endorsed the enactment of practices related to the following ‘Chinese’ notions: Firstly, the parent-child relationship is hierarchical and reciprocal (24 mentions regarding recognition and value; 14 mentions regarding enactment); in second place, parents control, influence and exercise their authority with children (18 mentions regarding recognition and value; 14 mentions regarding enactment); in third place, family responsibility in children’s instruction and moral development (13 mentions regarding recognition and value; 12 mentions regarding enactment); and finally in fourth place, effort and practice as critical in the attainment of goals (12 mentions regarding recognition and value; 11 mentions regarding enactment).

In addition to the above findings, an interesting result yielded by this research was the discovery that Amy Chua not only discussed recognized and valued themes and conceptualizations related to the ‘Chinese’ framework, but also did so in relation to themes and conceptualizations of the ‘Western’ framework. An analysis of her discourse suggests that she recognized and valued aspects related solely to the ‘Chinese’ institutional framework in 21 of the sections selected for analysis, while only

recognizing aspects related solely to the ‘Western’ framework in 3 of the sections analyzed. She recognized and valued aspects related to both frameworks in 20 of the sections analyzed. This finding, as does the recognition and value of themes related to the two frameworks in the verification of hypothesis 2, also corroborates the existence of the two institutional frameworks not only in theory but also in actual real-life situations.

Finally, as already mentioned in section 11 of this work, a relevant aspect of Chua’s recognition and value of themes and conceptualizations related to each institutional framework was the nature of her recognition and value. While she does discuss and recognize ‘Western’ parenting themes in her book, and acknowledges their existence, she mostly does so to describe them as less desirable or more negative in comparison to the ‘Chinese’ parenting model. Contrastingly, when she mentions themes related with the ‘Chinese’ parenting conceptualization, she does so to describe them as preferable and display what she believes are its virtues.

### *12.3 Contribution of this work to the field and future research*

This work is a response to the need encountered in the field of intercultural pragmatics of extending this discipline’s research scope to include broader discursive phenomena and of going beyond the utterance level of analysis when studying intercultural communication (Kecskes 2011; Mey 2001). For that reason we have aimed at building and applying two theoretical constructs –institutional framework and institutional practice– for studying interactions we deem relevant to our field of research.

The original contribution of this research to knowledge in general and our field of research in particular has been the development of the two constructs mentioned above by using the ideas of philosopher John Searle as a scaffolding for our model. The application of his work in institutional reality has been relevant here because it has served to underscore the importance of individuals as enablers and sustainers of social reality. Institutional reality exists because humans render things meaningful through our intrinsic linguistic capacity and then after creating that institutional reality we sustain it by implicit or explicit legitimation of those meanings through our understanding, recognition, adherence and enactment of the principles they entail. One key element of the model proposed is that it allows the assignment of meaning to any phenomenon, indeed, even thin air (Searle 1979; 2008), facilitating the study of a host of other meaning-permeated elements and not just what people say.

A second contribution to the field has been the actual application of our two constructs to the case of Amy Chua's 'Chinese' parenting style in the United States, which has served to give credence to the existence of two distinct institutional frameworks in real life intercultural interactions. We have found that there are two distinct parenting styles, each with their distinct conceptualizations of themes regarding parenting that could plausibly be construed as the 'Chinese' and 'Western' institutional frameworks, where in fact different elements or aspects of parenting, namely actions, values, relationships and identities have distinct meanings in each framework. Furthermore, we found that the 'Chinese' parenting values put forth and enacted by Chua in her book in the context of

the United States might have triggered the harsh and dissonant debate over her parenting practices, given that it contrasts sharply and antagonizes with the description of the 'Western' conceptualization of parenting that seems to be more prevalent in the U.S.A

Finally like any research, this work has not been unacquainted with limitations imposed by the specific research design which was possible to implement given the finite resources under which it was conducted. However, this limitation gives rise to future opportunities for research to continue exploring and validating the constructs and the design we have put forth here for the study of intercultural communication and pragmatics. The work begun here is but an initial approach of a much broader, full-blown account that would benefit from further developing. Much more needs to be explored in terms of how this model can be applied to intercultural interactions, one way to do so could be by developing a survey delineating aspects found here to be pertinent to the 'Chinese' and the 'Western' parenting institutional frameworks and applying it to respondents, perhaps selected as being from 'Chinese' and 'Western' origin to further evaluate the validity of the findings of this study, as well as the two constructs here developed. Furthermore, we believe that the two constructs could be applied to other institutional phenomena for the study of intercultural communication and pragmatics, hence they also need to be tested in other intercultural situations, beyond the realm of 'Chinese' and 'Western' parenting styles which has been the sole focus of this work.





## Epilogue

One final word that is worth annotating, which we believe is necessary to round up our work and its contribution, is one regarding the relevance of the constructs of institutional framework and institutional practice as a possible alternative to the concept of culture when studying phenomena related to intercultural communication and pragmatics, which we noted in sections 6 and 7 of this work. One of the reasons for proposing the constructs was the observation that the term “culture,” or ascribing certain “typical” behaviors or beliefs to certain ethnical groups, could often be problematic because “cultural” groups or “ethnical” groups are far from monolithic or homogeneous, and also because in our globalized world, ideas and beliefs are spread more and more dynamically, and they gradually become internalized, adopted, and enacted independently from a person’s ethnicity or cultural background. We find a practical indication for the need to broaden our conceptual basis for dealing with “intercultural exchange” in an account given by Christine Gross-Loh upon visiting China after the publication of Amy Chua’s memoir, *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*. During her visit she met with Madame Wang, the head of the international program at Northeast Yucai School –a highly regarded H-12 public school in Shenyang China– and other education experts, and she reports the following:

Chua’s story of raising her two daughters to excellence in America through strict, exacting child-rearing methods she dubbed “Chinese parenting” had provoked heated discussion and controversy. While

few American readers initially questioned that her book reflected what parenting was like in China, it turned out that dubbing her methods “Chinese parenting” was what made her book controversial to Chinese readers. “The Tiger Mother method is backwards and out of date,” Wang insisted in fluent and capable English. “Today parents are more concerned about how to educate children to find their own ideas, to find their own path. I have my own life, and my daughter has her life. We are trying to raise children in a more Western way. I cannot say one thing is really correct.”

I was surprised. Wang had a more nuanced, if flexible, view of education and childrearing than I’d expected to encounter. But I soon learned many Chinese parents like her –urban and well educated and with one child to lavish their attentions on– are juggling traditional ideals about learning with the influx of progressive ideas from the West that have become popular in recent years, ideas that have an appealing cachet of cosmopolitan modernity. “Parents can’t impose their beliefs on their children. What is good parents isn’t necessarily what is right for children,” Wang continued, as she gazed affectionately at her daughter. The others at the table nodded their heads in agreement. “The Tiger Mother method is outdated, old fashioned –no one here aspires to do that anymore...”

The above testimony provides us with some evidence that the constructs proposed here are relevant in the sense that are intended as a tool to package or arrange webs of meaning and signification differently than by using a traditional *cultural* perspective, that is, not as pertaining to groups of people ascribed by their ethnicity or cultural heritage, but rather attributable to people because of the beliefs they adhere to and enact, which as we just saw, is not necessarily coupled with country of origin or descent. Gross-Loh, was in China, speaking with Chinese parents, and they seemed to hold different parenting beliefs to those of Chua dubbing them *outdated* and inclining themselves to the adoption of more *Western* parenting ways.

The model and constructs put forth in this work we hope will enable an alternative outlook for grouping instances of meaning, as built by means of collective and intentional agreement of people, and the enactment of those beliefs by people, bound together in some respects, not by a similar ethnicity, but by a bond that produces the collaborative upholding of the institutions that they believe in, regardless of ethnicity or cultural background. Furthermore, the people who share in the meanings and uphold one institution don't necessarily share the meanings and uphold other institutions. This approach to understanding and communication entails constant attention to the dynamic, ever-changing webs of significance people subscribe to and enact.



## Appendixes

### Appendix A

#### Why Chinese Mothers Are Superior<sup>25</sup>

By Amy Chua

A lot of people wonder how Chinese parents raise such stereotypically successful kids. They wonder what these parents do to produce so many math whizzes and music prodigies, what it's like inside the family, and whether they could do it too. Well, I can tell them, because I've done it. Here are some things my daughters, Sophia and Louisa, were never allowed to do:

- attend a sleepover
- have a playdate
- be in a school play
- complain about not being in a school play
- watch TV or play computer games
- choose their own extracurricular activities
- get any grade less than an A
- not be the No. 1 student in every subject except gym and drama
- play any instrument other than the piano or violin
- not play the piano or violin.

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<sup>25</sup> Article which appeared in the Wall Street Journal on January 8, 2011

I'm using the term "Chinese mother" loosely. I know some Korean, Indian, Jamaican, Irish and Ghanaian parents who qualify too. Conversely, I know some mothers of Chinese heritage, almost always born in the West, who are not Chinese mothers, by choice or otherwise. I'm also using the term "Western parents" loosely. Western parents come in all varieties.

All the same, even when Western parents think they're being strict, they usually don't come close to being Chinese mothers. For example, my Western friends who consider themselves strict make their children practice their instruments 30 minutes every day. An hour at most. For a Chinese mother, the first hour is the easy part. It's hours two and three that get tough.

Despite our squeamishness about cultural stereotypes, there are tons of studies out there showing marked and quantifiable differences between Chinese and Westerners when it comes to parenting. In one study of 50 Western American mothers and 48 Chinese immigrant mothers, almost 70% of the Western mothers said either that "stressing academic success is not good for children" or that "parents need to foster the idea that learning is fun." By contrast, roughly 0% of the Chinese mothers felt the same way. Instead, the vast majority of the Chinese mothers said that they believe their children can be "the best" students, that "academic achievement reflects successful parenting," and that if children did not excel at school then there was "a problem" and parents "were not doing their job." Other studies indicate that compared to Western parents, Chinese parents spend approximately 10 times as long every day drilling academic activities with their children. By contrast, Western kids are more likely to participate in sports teams.

What Chinese parents understand is that nothing is fun until you're good at it. To get good at anything you have to work, and children on their own never want to work, which is why it is crucial to override their preferences. This often requires fortitude on the part of the parents because the child will resist; things are always hardest at the

beginning, which is where Western parents tend to give up. But if done properly, the Chinese strategy produces a virtuous circle. Tenacious practice, practice, practice is crucial for excellence; rote repetition is underrated in America. Once a child starts to excel at something—whether it's math, piano, pitching or ballet—he or she gets praise, admiration and satisfaction. This builds confidence and makes the once not-fun activity fun. This in turn makes it easier for the parent to get the child to work even more.

Chinese parents can get away with things that Western parents can't. Once when I was young—maybe more than once—when I was extremely disrespectful to my mother, my father angrily called me "garbage" in our native Hokkien dialect. It worked really well. I felt terrible and deeply ashamed of what I had done. But it didn't damage my self-esteem or anything like that. I knew exactly how highly he thought of me. I didn't actually think I was worthless or feel like a piece of garbage.

As an adult, I once did the same thing to Sophia, calling her garbage in English when she acted extremely disrespectfully toward me. When I mentioned that I had done this at a dinner party, I was immediately ostracized. One guest named Marcy got so upset she broke down in tears and had to leave early. My friend Susan, the host, tried to rehabilitate me with the remaining guests.

The fact is that Chinese parents can do things that would seem unimaginable—even legally actionable—to Westerners. Chinese mothers can say to their daughters, "Hey fatty—lose some weight." By contrast, Western parents have to tiptoe around the issue, talking in terms of "health" and never ever mentioning the f-word, and their kids still end up in therapy for eating disorders and negative self-image. (I also once heard a Western father toast his adult daughter by calling her "beautiful and incredibly competent." She later told me that made her feel like garbage.)

Chinese parents can order their kids to get straight As. Western parents can only ask their kids to try their best. Chinese parents can say, "You're lazy. All your classmates are getting ahead of you." By contrast, Western parents have to struggle with their own

conflicted feelings about achievement, and try to persuade themselves that they're not disappointed about how their kids turned out.

I've thought long and hard about how Chinese parents can get away with what they do. I think there are three big differences between the Chinese and Western parental mind-sets.

First, I've noticed that Western parents are extremely anxious about their children's self-esteem. They worry about how their children will feel if they fail at something, and they constantly try to reassure their children about how good they are notwithstanding a mediocre performance on a test or at a recital. In other words, Western parents are concerned about their children's psyches. Chinese parents aren't. They assume strength, not fragility, and as a result they behave very differently.

For example, if a child comes home with an A-minus on a test, a Western parent will most likely praise the child. The Chinese mother will gasp in horror and ask what went wrong. If the child comes home with a B on the test, some Western parents will still praise the child. Other Western parents will sit their child down and express disapproval, but they will be careful not to make their child feel inadequate or insecure, and they will not call their child "stupid," "worthless" or "a disgrace." Privately, the Western parents may worry that their child does not test well or have aptitude in the subject or that there is something wrong with the curriculum and possibly the whole school. If the child's grades do not improve, they may eventually schedule a meeting with the school principal to challenge the way the subject is being taught or to call into question the teacher's credentials.

If a Chinese child gets a B—which would never happen—there would first be a screaming, hair-tearing explosion. The devastated Chinese mother would then get dozens, maybe hundreds of practice tests and work through them with her child for as long as it takes to get the grade up to an A.



Chinese parents demand perfect grades because they believe that their child can get them. If their child doesn't get them, the Chinese parent assumes it's because the child didn't work hard enough. That's why the solution to substandard performance is always to excoriate, punish and shame the child. The Chinese parent believes that their child will be strong enough to take the shaming and to improve from it. (And when Chinese kids do excel, there is plenty of ego-inflating parental praise lavished in the privacy of the home.)

Second, Chinese parents believe that their kids owe them everything. The reason for this is a little unclear, but it's probably a combination of Confucian filial piety and the fact that the parents have sacrificed and done so much for their children. (And it's true that Chinese mothers get in the trenches, putting in long grueling hours personally tutoring, training, interrogating and spying on their kids.) Anyway, the understanding is that Chinese children must spend their lives repaying their parents by obeying them and making them proud.

By contrast, I don't think most Westerners have the same view of children being permanently indebted to their parents. My husband, Jed, actually has the opposite view. "Children don't choose their parents," he once said to me. "They don't even choose to be born. It's parents who foist life on their kids, so it's the parents' responsibility to provide for them. Kids don't owe their parents anything. Their duty will be to their own kids." This strikes me as a terrible deal for the Western parent.

Third, Chinese parents believe that they know what is best for their children and therefore override all of their children's own desires and preferences. That's why Chinese daughters can't have boyfriends in high school and why Chinese kids can't go to sleepaway camp. It's also why no Chinese kid would ever dare say to their mother, "I got a part in the school play! I'm Villager Number Six. I'll have to stay after school for rehearsal every day from 3:00 to 7:00, and I'll also need a ride on weekends." God help any Chinese kid who tried that one.

Don't get me wrong: It's not that Chinese parents don't care about their children. Just the opposite. They would give up anything for their children. It's just an entirely different parenting model.

Here's a story in favor of coercion, Chinese-style. Lulu was about 7, still playing two instruments, and working on a piano piece called "The Little White Donkey" by the French composer Jacques Ibert. The piece is really cute—you can just imagine a little donkey ambling along a country road with its master—but it's also incredibly difficult for young players because the two hands have to keep schizophrenically different rhythms.

Lulu couldn't do it. We worked on it nonstop for a week, drilling each of her hands separately, over and over. But whenever we tried putting the hands together, one always morphed into the other, and everything fell apart. Finally, the day before her lesson, Lulu announced in exasperation that she was giving up and stomped off.

"Get back to the piano now," I ordered.

"You can't make me."

"Oh yes, I can."

Back at the piano, Lulu made me pay. She punched, thrashed and kicked. She grabbed the music score and tore it to shreds. I taped the score back together and encased it in a plastic shield so that it could never be destroyed again. Then I hauled Lulu's dollhouse to the car and told her I'd donate it to the Salvation Army piece by piece if she didn't have "The Little White Donkey" perfect by the next day. When Lulu said, "I thought you were going to the Salvation Army, why are you still here?" I threatened her with no lunch, no dinner, no Christmas or Hanukkah presents, no birthday parties for two, three, four years. When she still kept playing it wrong, I told her she was purposely working herself into a frenzy because she was secretly afraid she couldn't do it. I told her to stop being lazy, cowardly, self-indulgent and pathetic.

Jed took me aside. He told me to stop insulting Lulu—which I wasn't even doing, I was just motivating her—and that he didn't think threatening Lulu was helpful. Also, he said, maybe Lulu really just couldn't do the technique—perhaps she didn't have the coordination yet—had I considered that possibility?

"You just don't believe in her," I accused.

"That's ridiculous," Jed said scornfully. "Of course I do."

"Sophia could play the piece when she was this age."

"But Lulu and Sophia are different people," Jed pointed out.

"Oh no, not this," I said, rolling my eyes. "Everyone is special in their special own way," I mimicked sarcastically. "Even losers are special in their own special way. Well don't worry, you don't have to lift a finger. I'm willing to put in as long as it takes, and I'm happy to be the one hated. And you can be the one they adore because you make them pancakes and take them to Yankees games."

I rolled up my sleeves and went back to Lulu. I used every weapon and tactic I could think of. We worked right through dinner into the night, and I wouldn't let Lulu get up, not for water, not even to go to the bathroom. The house became a war zone, and I lost my voice yelling, but still there seemed to be only negative progress, and even I began to have doubts.

Then, out of the blue, Lulu did it. Her hands suddenly came together—her right and left hands each doing their own imperturbable thing—just like that.

Lulu realized it the same time I did. I held my breath. She tried it tentatively again. Then she played it more confidently and faster, and still the rhythm held. A moment later, she was beaming.

"Mommy, look—it's easy!" After that, she wanted to play the piece over and over and wouldn't leave the piano. That night, she came to sleep in my bed, and we snuggled and hugged, cracking each other up. When she performed "The Little White Donkey" at a recital a few weeks later, parents came up to me and said, "What a perfect piece for Lulu—it's so spunky and so her."

Even Jed gave me credit for that one. Western parents worry a lot about their children's self-esteem. But as a parent, one of the worst things you can do for your child's self-esteem is to let them give up. On the flip side, there's nothing better for building confidence than learning you can do something you thought you couldn't.

There are all these new books out there portraying Asian mothers as scheming, callous, overdriven people indifferent to their kids' true interests. For their part, many Chinese secretly believe that they care more about their children and are willing to sacrifice much more for them than Westerners, who seem perfectly content to let their children turn out badly. I think it's a misunderstanding on both sides. All decent parents want to do what's best for their children. The Chinese just have a totally different idea of how to do that.

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, the Chinese 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.

—Amy Chua is a professor at Yale Law School and author of "Day of Empire" and "World on Fire: How Exporting Free Market Democracy Breeds Ethnic Hatred and Global Instability."

## Appendix B

### Amy Chua Is a Wimp<sup>26</sup>

By DAVID BROOKS

Sometime early last week, a large slice of educated America decided that Amy Chua is a menace to society. Chua, as you probably know, is the Yale professor who has written a bracing critique of what she considers the weak, cuddling American parenting style.

Chua didn't let her own girls go out on play dates or sleepovers. She didn't let them watch TV or play video games or take part in garbage activities like crafts. Once, one of her daughters came in second to a Korean kid in a math competition, so Chua made the girl do 2,000 math problems a night until she regained her supremacy. Once, her daughters gave her birthday cards of insufficient quality. Chua rejected them and demanded new cards. Once, she threatened to burn all of one of her daughter's stuffed animals unless she played a piece of music perfectly.

As a result, Chua's daughters get straight As and have won a series of musical competitions.

In her book, *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, Chua delivers a broadside against American parenting even as she mocks herself for her own extreme 'Chinese' style. She

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<sup>26</sup>Article with appeared in The New York Times on January 17, 2011

says American parents lack authority and produce entitled children who aren't forced to live up to their abilities.

The furious denunciations began flooding my in-box a week ago. Chua plays into America's fear of national decline. Here's a Chinese parent working really hard (and, by the way, there are a billion more of her) and her kids are going to crush ours. Furthermore (and this Chua doesn't appreciate), she is not really rebelling against American-style parenting; she is the logical extension of the prevailing elite practices. She does everything over-pressuring upper-middle-class parents are doing. She's just hard core.

Her critics echoed the familiar themes. Her kids can't possibly be happy or truly creative. They'll grow up skilled and compliant but without the audacity to be great. She's destroying their love for music. There's a reason Asian-American women between the ages of 15 and 24 have such high suicide rates.

I have the opposite problem with Chua. I believe she's coddling her children. She's protecting them from the most intellectually demanding activities because she doesn't understand what's cognitively difficult and what isn't.

Practicing a piece of music for four hours requires focused attention, but it is nowhere near as cognitively demanding as a sleepover with 14-year-old girls. Managing status rivalries, negotiating group dynamics, understanding social norms, navigating the

distinction between self and group — these and other social tests impose cognitive demands that blow away any intense tutoring session or a class at Yale.

Yet mastering these arduous skills is at the very essence of achievement. Most people work in groups. We do this because groups are much more efficient at solving problems than individuals (swimmers are often motivated to have their best times as part of relay teams, not in individual events). Moreover, the performance of a group does not correlate well with the average I.Q. of the group or even with the I.Q.'s of the smartest members.

Researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Carnegie Mellon have found that groups have a high collective intelligence when members of a group are good at reading each others' emotions — when they take turns speaking, when the inputs from each member are managed fluidly, when they detect each others' inclinations and strengths.

Participating in a well-functioning group is really hard. It requires the ability to trust people outside your kinship circle, read intonations and moods, understand how the psychological pieces each person brings to the room can and cannot fit together.

This skill set is not taught formally, but it is imparted through arduous experiences. These are exactly the kinds of difficult experiences Chua shelters her children from by making them rush home to hit the homework table.

Chua would do better to see the classroom as a cognitive break from the truly arduous tests of childhood. Where do they learn how to manage people? Where do they learn to construct and manipulate metaphors? Where do they learn to perceive details of a scene the way a hunter reads a landscape? Where do they learn how to detect their own shortcomings? Where do they learn how to put themselves in others' minds and anticipate others' reactions?

These and a million other skills are imparted by the informal maturity process and are not developed if formal learning monopolizes a child's time.

So I'm not against the way Chua pushes her daughters. And I loved her book as a courageous and thought-provoking read. It's also more supple than her critics let on. I just wish she wasn't so soft and indulgent. I wish she recognized that in some important ways the school cafeteria is more intellectually demanding than the library. And I hope her daughters grow up to write their own books, and maybe learn the skills to better anticipate how theirs will be received.



## **Appendix C**

Contents of this appendix attached in digital format on CD 1 of this work

## **Appendix D**

Contents of this appendix attached in digital format on CD 1 of this work



## **English Summary**

*Thesis Title:* Outlining and proposing the constructs of Institutional Framework and Institutional Practice for the study of Intercultural Communication: A case study of Amy Chua's 'Chinese' parenting style in the United States.

*Introduction, background and justification for proposing the two constructs:*

This work aspires to provide additional tools to the field of intercultural communication and pragmatics by proposing two constructs: Institutional Framework and Institutional Practice. These two constructs rest on the ideas developed by John Searle in his theory of institutional reality (1995, 2010) which centers on the assumption that the assignment of meaning is an inherently human phenomenon. Therefore, social reality is socially constructed and ontologically subjective.

According to Searle, a key attribute that capacitates humans to create social reality is language, implying that social reality is essentially linguistic: Constituted by representations based on human intentional states, collectively imposed on actions, objects and states of affairs. Social reality is linguistic in that it exists insofar as our linguistic human capacity enables us to create and represent things as having meaning and functions that they wouldn't ordinarily have if it weren't for us.

How is this relevant to better understand intercultural communication and pragmatics, and justifying going beyond utterance analysis in this field? To answer this we will need to approach the matter of culture and explore what culture is within the scope of this

work. According to anthropologist Clifford Geertz, “man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun” and he takes “culture to be those webs” (1973:5). This definition is relevant here because we can start piecing together that culture, being webs of significance spun by man, corresponds with the notion of human intervention in the constitution of social reality. Culture, with all its webs of significance and representations accounts for a primary constituent of the social reality that we create and inhabit. So, going beyond analyzing utterances makes sense in understanding the interaction in intercultural communication because culture and society, being constituted by an array of conventions of meaning and symbolic representations become a type of language, so to speak, and they come to have degrees of intelligibility. In linguistics “when speakers of different linguistic entities can understand one another” (Campbell 2004:191) their languages are said to be mutually intelligible: However, “entities which are totally incomprehensible to speakers of other entities clearly are mutually unintelligible” (2004:217). In this sense Kristeva is insightful when she says, “the law governing.... affecting any social practice lies in the fact that it signifies; i.e. that it is articulated like a language” (1973:1249).

*The case of Amy Chua's 'Chinese' parenting style in the United States*

The controversy brought about by the publication of Amy Chua's book *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* (2011) is a case in point to carry out our study because it illustrates what might happen when a person does not fully operate in accordance to the system of values and meanings that we have here called institutional framework and, rather,

advocates, believes and enacts practices that are more appropriate for other institutional frameworks.

The case of Amy Chua writing a prominent book endorsing the practices of a parenting style so divergent from a widely accepted form of parenting style in the USA, and the reactions the publication of her book elicited, illustrates an underlying problem of pragmatic intercultural communication. By asserting and upholding 'Chinese' beliefs and practices which are in general at odds with more widely accepted pool of beliefs and principles in the US, Chua antagonizes what David Brooks (2011) called "a large slice of educated America."

*Research Objectives:*

First, we will identify of the two institutional frameworks that we observe as being present in the debate. To do this we will explore existing literature examining parenting beliefs and practices regarding the 'Chinese' and the 'Western' parenting approaches as described in this work. We will categorize and analyze the conceptualizations that emerge around two core sets of beliefs, which we view as common to the issue of parenting, namely, 1) Childrearing and 2) Learning, schooling and education.

We believe we will find different functions, values and meanings attached to beliefs that revolve around 1) childrearing and 2) learning, schooling and education, for the 'Chinese' and 'Western' two parenting styles. This bifurcation of meanings gives way

for understanding these parenting approaches as made up of distinct and often divergent constitutive elements and conforming two institutional frameworks.

Second, we will select the first 50 relevant comments found in the Wall Street Journal article by Chua titled: Why Chinese Mothers are Superior, and the first 50 relevant comments found in The New York Times article by David Brooks titled: Why Amy Chua is a Wimp, to discursively analyze them and determine which framework the participants taking part in the debate recognize and value.

The third and final objective will be to discursively analyze elements of Chua's parenting beliefs, values and practices, as laid out in her book, *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*. This analysis will help determine whether they correspond more closely to the 'Western' or the 'Chinese' conceptualization of parenting.

#### *Results and concluding remarks*

This work has aimed to build and apply two theoretical constructs for studying interactions relevant for the study of intercultural communication and pragmatics, namely institutional framework and institutional practice.

We postulated that we would find differences between the conceptualizations of the 'Chinese' and 'Western' parenting styles when it came to 1) childrearing, and 2) learning, schooling and education. Indeed, distinct differences were found in terms of how values, identities, activities and relationships were conceptualized for each. A specific and significant example of a foundational difference we found, is the notion

that children are seen as being entitled to freedom of choice and have a right to their individuality in the 'Western' sphere, in contrast to the notion that children are a continuation of their parents' lives and are subject to parental control and parental involvement in their development when it came to the 'Chinese' sphere. By observing these two opposing meanings ascribed to the view of children we begin to understand an underlying and fundamental source for distinct interpretations and manifestations of parenting and childrearing beliefs and behaviors in each framework.

Further evidence of the existence of the two institutional frameworks was found upon analyzing the comments taken from two articles. Findings suggest that commenters recognized and valued, elements and themes from both frameworks, giving their existence actual plausibility outside a plainly theoretical realm. The results for commenter recognition and value was as follows: 54 of the total comments recognized and valued aspects related to the 'Western' institutional framework, 25 comments recognized and valued aspects of both, while only 11 of all comments recognized and valued aspects related to just the 'Chinese' institutional framework. Our qualitative analysis further revealed that the nature of the recognition and value of the commenters in both articles was, in general, more favorable towards to the 'Western' themes, or more likely to take them for granted. Contrastingly, we found that commenters tended to make more critical remarks or question the validity and effectiveness of 'Chinese' parenting practices and beliefs.

Finally, we aimed at understanding whether Chua's recognition, value and parenting practices were more akin to the 'Chinese' framework or the 'Western' framework. Our findings suggest that Chua enacts parenting practices that conform more suitably with the conceptualizations of 'Chinese' parenting than the 'Western', and the nature of her recognition is also more favorable to the 'Chinese' parenting ethics. Results suggest that when it came to enacting parenting practices, Chua carried out or endorsed the implementation of actions that adhered to the 'Chinese' parenting framework rather than the 'Western' parenting framework.

In terms of the contribution of this research to intercultural communication and pragmatics in particular, as has been previously noted, we aimed at developing the two constructs by using the ideas of philosopher John Searle as a scaffolding for our model to attempt to study broader discursive phenomena, and go beyond the utterance level of analysis. The second contribution has been the application of our two constructs to the case of Chua's 'Chinese' parenting style in the United States, which has served to give credence to the existence of two distinct institutional frameworks to be applied in intercultural interactions.

Like any research, this work has not been unacquainted with limitations imposed by the specific research design which was possible given the finite resources under which it was conducted. However, this limitation gives rise to future opportunities for research. The work begun here is but an initial approach and more needs to be explored in terms of how this model can be applied to intercultural interactions. One way to do so could



be by developing a survey delineating aspects found here to be pertinent to the two parenting frameworks and applying them to respondents, perhaps selected using criteria such as the respondent's "origin" to further evaluate the two constructs and the validity of the findings of this study. Furthermore, we believe that the constructs could be applied to other institutional phenomena for the study of intercultural communication and pragmatics, hence they also need to be tested in other intercultural situations, beyond the realm of 'Chinese' and 'Western' parenting styles which has been the sole focus of this work.



## **Resumen en Castellano**

*Titulo de la tesis:* Propuesta y descripción de los constructos “Marco Institucional” y “Practica Institucional” como elementos a ser considerados en el estudio de la comunicación intercultural: Trabajo de investigación aplicado al caso de Amy Chua y su estilo parental 'Chino' en los Estados Unidos.

*Introducción, antecedentes y justificación a la propuesta de ambos constructos:*

Este trabajo aspira a proporcionar herramientas adicionales en el ámbito de la comunicación y la pragmática intercultural mediante la propuesta de dos constructos: “Marco Institucional” y “Práctica Institucional”. Estos dos constructos se apoyan sobre las ideas desarrolladas por el filósofo John Searle en su teoría de la realidad institucional (1995, 2010) que se basa en el supuesto de que la asignación de significado es un fenómeno intrínsecamente humano. Por lo tanto, la realidad social es una construcción social: es ontológicamente subjetiva.

Según Searle, un atributo clave que capacita a los seres humanos para crear la realidad social es el lenguaje, lo que implica que la realidad social es esencialmente lingüística: Constituida por representaciones basadas en estados intencionales intrínsecamente humanos, impuestas de manera colectiva sobre acciones, objetos y situaciones. La realidad social es lingüística en el sentido de que existe en tanto que nuestra capacidad humana lingüística nos permite crear y representar entidades de cosas como teniendo significado y funciones que no tendrían si no fuera por nosotros.

¿De qué manera es esto relevante ayudar a para comprender mejor la comunicación y la pragmática intercultural? Pretendemos justificar que nuestro campo de estudio comprenda análisis que vayan más allá de aquello se dice o se pronuncia (beyond utterances). Para responder a esta necesidad, tendremos que, en primer lugar, abordar la cuestión de qué es la cultura y explorar lo que significa cultura dentro del alcance de este trabajo. Según el antropólogo Clifford Geertz, "el hombre es un animal suspendido en redes de significación que él mismo ha tejido" y él asume que "la cultura es esas redes" (1973: 5). Esta definición es relevante en el ámbito de esta investigación porque con ella podemos empezar a juntar piezas, y comprender que la cultura –siendo redes de significación hiladas por el hombre– corresponde con la noción, mencionada anteriormente, de la intervención humana en la constitución de la realidad social. Cultura, con todas sus redes de significación y simbología, viene a ser un componente fundamental de la realidad social que creamos y habitamos. Así, un análisis que va más allá de lo pronunciado (utterances) cobra sentido al intentar comprender aspectos de la interacción en la comunicación intercultural. La cultura y la sociedad, al estar constituidas por un conjunto de convenciones de significado y representaciones simbólicas vienen a ser un tipo de lenguaje, por así decirlo, y llegan a tener grados de inteligibilidad. En lingüística "cuando los hablantes de diferentes entidades lingüísticas pueden entenderse unos a otros" (Campbell 2004:191) se dice que sus lenguas son mutuamente inteligibles: Sin embargo, "las entidades que son totalmente incomprensible para los hablantes de otras entidades claramente son mutuamente ininteligibles" (2004: 217). En este sentido Kristeva muestra perspicacia cuando dice,

"la ley que rige .... que afecta a cualquier práctica social reside en el hecho de que significa; es decir, que se articula como un lenguaje "(1973: 1249).

*Breve descripción del caso de Amy Chua y su estilo parental 'Chino' en los Estados Unidos.*

La polémica provocada por la publicación del libro de Amy Chua “Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother” (2011) sirve de ejemplo para llevar a cabo nuestro estudio porque ilustra lo que puede ocurrir cuando una persona no opera de manera plena y en conformidad con el sistema de valores y los significados que en nuestra investigación hemos llamado “marco institucional” y, más bien, defienden, creen y promulgan prácticas que se ajustan más a otros marcos institucionales.

El caso de Amy Chua respaldando las prácticas de un estilo parental que diverge ampliamente de las prácticas de estilo parental aceptadas en los EE.UU a través de la publicación de su libro y las reacciones suscitadas por la publicación de su libro, ilustra un problema de fondo de la pragmática y comunicación intercultural. Al otorgar validez y defender las creencias y las prácticas de la crianza “China”, que por lo general, son contrarias a un conjunto de creencias y principios más ampliamente aceptados en los EE.UU., Chua antagoniza a quienes el periodista y analista del New York Times, David Brooks (2011) llama " una gran parte de la América educada. "

### *Objetivos de la investigación.*

En primer lugar, identificaremos los dos marcos institucionales que observamos como presentes en el debate. Para ello exploraremos la literatura existente que examina creencias y prácticas de padres con respecto al estilo parental 'Chino' y el estilo parental 'Occidental,' tal y como son descritos en esta investigación. Clasificaremos y analizaremos las conceptualizaciones que surgen en torno a dos conjuntos básicos de creencias, que observamos que son comunes en la cuestión parental, específicamente 1) Crianza de los hijos y 2) El aprendizaje, la enseñanza y la educación.

Creemos que encontraremos distintas funciones, valores y significados vinculados a las creencias asociadas a 1) la crianza de los hijos y 2) el aprendizaje, la enseñanza y la educación, por parte de cada uno de los estilos parentales analizados en esta investigación, es decir, el estilo parental 'Chino' y el 'Occidental.' Esta bifurcación de significados da paso a la comprensión de cada uno de estos enfoques o estilos parentales, como compuestos por elementos constitutivos distintos, y a menudo divergentes, que dan paso a la conformación de dos marcos institucionales independientes.

En segundo objetivo será seleccionar los primeros 50 comentarios pertinentes para nuestro estudio que se publicaron en la sección de comentarios del artículo escrito por Amy Chua en el Wall Street Journal titulado “¿Por qué las madres chinas son superiores”<sup>27</sup>. También seleccionaremos los primeros 50 comentarios pertinentes a

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<sup>27</sup> “Why Chinese Mothers are Superior

nuestra investigación que se publicaron en el artículo de El New York Times escrito por David Brooks titulado: “¿Por qué Amy Chua es débil”; analizaremos éstos comentarios discursivamente y determinaremos cual marco institucional reconocen y valoran los participantes que tomaron parte en el debate.

El tercer y último objetivo será analizar discursivamente el conjunto de creencias, valores y prácticas de Chua sobre la crianza, tal como ella las presenta en su libro, “Battle Hymn of The Tiger Mother”. Este análisis ayudará a determinar si sus creencias, valores y prácticas se corresponden de manera más cercana a la conceptualización del estilo paternal ‘Occidental’ o a el 'Chino' .

#### *Resultados y Consideraciones Finales*

Este trabajo de investigación ha tenido como objetivo el diseño y la aplicación de dos constructos teóricos para estudiar interacciones relevantes en el ámbito de la comunicación y pragmática intercultural, esos constructos son, “Marco Institucional” y “Práctica Institucional.”

Hemos postulado que encontraríamos diferencias entre las conceptualizaciones del estilo paternal 'Chino' y el 'Occidental' en cuanto a 1) la crianza de los hijos y 2) el aprendizaje, la enseñanza y la educación. En efecto, se encontraron diferencias claras en términos de cómo se conceptualizan los valores, las identidades, actividades y la relaciones para cada uno. Un ejemplo concreto y significativo de una diferencia fundamental que encontramos, es la noción de que los niños son considerados con

derechos, en especial existe la creencia de que tienen derecho a la libertad de elección y a su individualidad. Esta característica la encontramos en el marco de creencias del estilo paternal ‘Occidental’, y se puede contrastar con la noción ‘China’ que se basa en la creencia que los niños son una continuación de las vidas de sus padres y están sujetos al control de los padres, y los padres tienen deber y derecho sobre todos los aspectos de la educación y el desarrollo de sus hijos. Mediante la observación de estos dos significados opuestos adscritos a la conceptualización de los niños, comenzamos a comprender que dentro de cada uno de los marcos institucionales, es decir el ‘Chino’ y el ‘Occidental’ existe una fuente subyacente y fundamental que da pie a interpretaciones y manifestaciones distintas en cuanto a las creencias sobre la crianza y comportamientos paternos.

Más evidencia de la existencia de los dos marcos institucionales la encontramos al analizar los comentarios extraídos de los dos artículos. Los resultados sugieren que los comentaristas reconocieron y valoraron elementos y temas de ambos marcos institucionales, otorgándole plausibilidad y existencia real fuera del ámbito plenamente teórico. Los resultados en cuanto al reconocimiento y valor otorgado a aspectos de ambos marcos institucionales por parte de los comentaristas son los siguientes: 54 del total de comentarios reconocieron y valoraron aspectos relacionados con el marco institucional ‘Occidental’, 25 comentarios reconocieron y valoraron aspectos de ambos marcos institucionales, mientras que sólo 11 comentarios reconocieron y valoraron aspectos relacionados sólo con el marco institucional ‘Chino’. Nuestro análisis



cualitativo reveló, además, que la naturaleza del reconocimiento y la valoración de los comentaristas en ambos artículos era, en general, más favorable hacia los temas ‘Occidentales’, o se daban por sentado con mayor facilidad. En contraste, se encontró que los comentaristas tendían a hacer observaciones más críticas o cuestionar la validez y eficacia de las prácticas y creencias del estilo ‘Chino’.

Por último, otro objetivo de esta investigación fue comprender si el reconocimiento, la valoración y las prácticas maternas de Chua eran más afines al marco ‘Chino’ o el marco ‘Occidental’. Nuestros hallazgos sugieren que Chua promulga las prácticas de crianza que se ajustan de manera más adecuada con las conceptualizaciones del estilo paternal y crianza ‘China’ que la con ‘Occidental’, asimismo observamos que la naturaleza de su reconocimiento también es más favorable hacia la ética paternal ‘China’. Los resultados sugieren que cuando se trataba de la promulgación de las prácticas de crianza, Chua llevaban a cabo o respaldaba la ejecución de acciones que se adherían al marco parental y de crianza ‘China’ en lugar del marco parental y de crianza ‘Occidental’.

En cuanto a la contribución de esta investigación al ámbito de la pragmática y la comunicación intercultural, como ya hemos dicho anteriormente, nos trazamos como objetivo la construcción y desarrollo de dos constructos utilizando las ideas del filósofo John Searle como base y andamiaje para la construcción de nuestro modelo, con la idea de estudiar los fenómenos discursivos de manera más amplia, e ir más allá del análisis de lo que se expresa o dice (utterance). La segunda contribución ha sido la aplicación de

los dos constructos al caso del estilo maternal y de crianza 'China' de Amy Chua en los Estados Unidos. Este análisis ha servido para dar credibilidad a la existencia de dos marcos institucionales distintos que se pueden aplicar en las interacciones interculturales.

Al igual que cualquier investigación, este trabajo se ha topado con las restricciones propias que le han sido impuestas por el diseño de investigación específico que fue posible realizar dadas las limitaciones de recursos en las que se llevó a cabo. Sin embargo, estas limitaciones dan lugar a futuras oportunidades para la investigación. El trabajo iniciado aquí no es más que una primera aproximación al tema propuesto y aún queda mucho por explorar en términos de cómo este modelo se puede aplicar a las interacciones interculturales.

Una forma de hacerlo podría ser mediante el desarrollo de una encuesta que incluya los aspectos delineados y encontrados en esta investigación relacionadas con los dos marcos institucionales de crianza y aplicarlos a encuestados, seleccionados quizás, utilizando criterios tales como "origen" de los encuestados ahondar en el tema y evaluar en mayor profundidad a los dos constructos, así como la validez de los resultados encontrados en esta investigación. Además, creemos que los constructos son sujetos a ser aplicados a otros fenómenos institucionales para el estudio de la comunicación y la pragmática intercultural, por lo tanto, sería deseable que se apliquen y prueben en otras situaciones interculturales, más allá del ámbito de los estilos paternos y de crianza 'Chino' y 'Occidental' que fue el centro de este trabajo.

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