



Chua, Amy. (2011). Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother. New York: Penguin Books.

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Amy Chua's "Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother" is a divisive autobiographical memoir concerning the rearing of one's own children and the clashings of ideals and reality, as well as the development of the inadvertent recognition of the flaws existing within not only liberal Western parenting styles but also the entrenched and exceedingly strict Eastern parenting style that is exemplified best within the figure of "a Chinese mother" (p. 21). With the creation of this book an important display and discussion of Western and Eastern parenting styles is formulated, but not before Chua herself embodies a metamorphosis that ends powerfully with a greater emphasis on reevaluating a long-held belief system. Furthermore, Chua delves into not only the clashing of Western and Eastern culture but also how immigration can serve as a tool for transforming the culture one transmits to their own children. From newly landed to first and second-generation immigrant families, Chua is able to convey a meaningful message that is interlaced with points that are sometimes comedic and other times intense. Chua herself organizes the book into small and succinct chapters, but more importantly into three main acts, letting each part serve as a bookmark in Chua's life in respect to her aforementioned metamorphosis: the first act being before her metamorphosis, the second act leading up to her metamorphosis, and finally, the third act dealing with the aftermath of this change within.

Amy Chua's book begins with an important distinction, Western parents are at times weak-willed, indulgent, lax, and naive. Although not often stating such as explicitly so, Chua nevertheless shows contempt and ridicule towards Western parents, preferring to idolize the strict and intense parenting style that she herself grew up under. In this style, Amy Chua acknowledges how she may come off as an "overbearing, fanatic mother" (p. 56) but Chua simply does not care. In her own words "[she] [is] not fragile, like some Western parents" and thus, this further reinforces Chua's rigidity by highlighting how willing she is to do anything to assure the future of her children, regardless of whether this would result in her children disliking her or not (p. 56). Before delving further into this distinction created by Chua, one must note that Chua is not overgeneralizing parenting styles either. Contrary to the assumption brought forth by labelling parenting styles as Western and Eastern, Chua briefly explains that she is using the label 'Western parents' quite loosely (p. 12). When referring to Western parents Chua acknowledges that Western parenting styles are found in various styles and diversities (p. 12). And therefore, when using the term Western parenting, Chua is choosing to exclusively focus on a certain type of parenting style that runs as the antithesis to her own. Furthermore, Chinese parenting is not invulnerable to criticism either, within reason Chua willingly admits that Chinese parenting does not "address the concept of happiness" (p. 102). However, Chua offers a clever refutation to this supposed deficiency to the parenting style she employs, in fact, contrary to popular belief, Chua asserts that Western parenting does not necessarily do any better with the concept of happiness when compared to its Chinese counterpart. If Western parenting was so assured of bringing happiness unto the children being raised then there would be a severe lacking of unhappy western children.

This is absurd and simply not the case, and therefore the conclusion towards Western parenting simply does not follow. “[H]ere’s one thing I’m sure of,” Amy Chua exclaims, “Western children are definitely no happier than Chinese ones” (p. 103).

Another important theme aside from the clash of Western and Eastern ideologies, that runs somewhat shrouded and underlying inside Chua’s book, is the theme of immigration and generational change. Being born in America from newly landed first-generation immigrant parents, Chua takes pride in considering herself as Chinese. However, interestingly, within the book itself, generational change can be specifically seen with how her children, Sophia and Louisa, find themselves as not being distinctly attached and assimilated to this Chinese culture and identity that Chua so highly takes pride within. Furthermore, taking cues from a cultural maxim, Chua is firm in her belief to push her children further mentally, physically, and emotionally than ever before, all in order to delay and circumvent the inevitable generational decline that Chua believes is most definitely on the horizon. Consequently, throughout the entirety of the book, Chua focuses on the incorporation of classical music into the life of both her children: piano to Sophia, and violin to Louisa, cementing this as a much-needed method in order to bypass the aforementioned generational decline. And yet, ironically this very method is the one that in turn leads to Chua’s metamorphosing away from the rigid belief system of Chinese parenting; and ultimately, this is what leads her to become more open and accepting of alternative parenting styles.

To better understand why Amy Chua goes through a period of change, one must first understand how her daughters, Sophia and Louisa, who is commonly referred to as Lulu, serve as instigators to the change seen within their mother. This change can be best visualized with Chua’s gradual acceptance of alternative parenting styles and specifically, this metamorphosis is under-

taken when Lulu, in a fit of rebellion, exclaims to her mother about how she detests “[Amy] controlling her life” (p. 219). Furthermore, Sophia and Lulu serve as foils to one another. Sophia serves as an example of the perfection of the Chinese parenting style employed by Chua, while Lulu, on the other hand, serves as a stark reminder of how this parenting style is capable of failure as well. In Amy Chua’s own words: “[t]he Chinese parenting approach is weakest when it comes to failure; it just doesn’t tolerate that possibility” (p. 145). Hence, when confronted with Lulu’s opposition as well as her own failure to have her daughter conform to her demands, Chua is faced with an ultimatum: either she can continue down the path she is currently walking down, or ease up on her daughter. Consequently, what results is the blooming cognizance in Chua that the Chinese parenting style is not as infallible as it truly seems, and neither is the Western parenting style as flawed as she originally made it out to be.

Now transformed from an individual that once perceived all other alternatives as “romanticized model[s] of childrearing doomed to failure” (p. 108) to someone that was able to understand how the Chinese model could resemble success but also oppression (p. 207). “Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother” serves as an important piece that reflects Chua’s intent in highlighting the evolution in oneself as well as the forthcoming generation. Chua herself admits to how her book was supposed to reaffirm the correctness of Chinese parenting over its Western equivalent (p. 11). But instead, it became an entity of its own, a book “about a bitter clash of cultures, [and] a fleeting taste of glory” (p. 11). Ultimately, the intent of this book is to not only highlight the differences between two distinct parenting styles, but also the important lessons it can teach both parent and child, especially in regard to aspects of oneself and others that can change as well as

those that are immutable.

As a final matter of note, this book, academically speaking, should be recommended towards all manners of audiences. Specifically, this book can be exceedingly helpful to sociologists and anthropologists, who are attempting to further strive towards and answer the differences in culture and objectives within the processes of child-rearing. Furthermore, as this book is written simply, and without convoluted and esoteric terminology, this book can easily be recommended to audiences that are somewhat base in comparison to those who are particularly complex and sophisticated.