



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

Reviewed by: Ruth Vantor, MacEwan University

In Amy Chua's satirical memoir "Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother", she shares her experiences of using an authoritarian style of parenting on her two daughters, Sophia and Louisa. Influenced by her first-generation immigrant parents, who raised her and her siblings in a "diligent, disciplined, confidence-expanding Chinese way" (Chapter 2), she aims to replicate their parenting style with her own children in fear that they will become assimilated into the Western culture. However, her memoir gives readers a chance to debate about how to raise kids and the amount of control a parent should have over their children. She calls herself a "tiger mother," which is a term for a mother with a disciplinarian and demanding way of raising children. In Chua's account, she expresses her emotions towards Sophia and Louisa while they amaze her and disappoint her at the same time.

Chua fears for her children's generation and refuses to accept the generational decline in her family. The theme of the denial of generational decline is one of her reasons for the way she raises her children, mainly because they are Chinese-Jewish children living in America. She states that "America changes people" (Chapter 4) and rejects the idea of her children slowly deviating from their Chinese heritage. Because of this, she pushes her children to be high-achieving students and young musical prodigies like most Chinese children. She claims that enforcing hard work on children is a virtuous circle because it leads to success and, in turn, satisfaction. However, readers are skeptical about the techniques she uses on her daughters to

become skilled in their instruments and become ‘model children.’ Chua’s stern and authoritarian rules for her daughters became so severe that it led Sophia to leave teeth marks on the piano and Louisa to yell at her in public. She would resort to threats, blackmail, bribery, and even spanking to enforce better grades and success. Her methods stir great controversy between readers, which makes her book so compelling and thought-provoking.

As years went on, Chua expressed her struggles with maintaining a solid practice schedule and the negative effect it had on her relationship with her daughters. Although Sophia and Louisa became accomplished musicians due to Chua’s presence and assistance in every music lesson and practice, they saw her as an assertive ruler and feared disappointing and embarrassing her. One would argue that Sophia and Louisa’s fear of upsetting their mother would pressure them into spending more hours practicing their instruments and studying to get high grades. On the other hand, one would argue that Chua makes them miss out on being a kid and enjoying their childhood.

In her quest for raising prodigies, she addresses the many cultural differences between the Chinese and Western methods of raising children. Chua states that “Jed’s parents gave him a choice about whether he wanted to take violin lessons and thought of him as a human being with views” (Chapter 10), which shows that the Western practice encourages children to make choices for themselves. Although Western parents hold a certain amount of control over their children’s lives, they value individuality over success and allow them to express their opinions openly. This method contrasts her goal of raising an accomplished and right-minded child. Chua then continues to say, “My parents didn’t give me any choices, and never asked for my opinion on anything” (Chapter 10). Her parents adhere to socially sensible and culturally accepted behaviour. Chinese mothers are more demanding than Western mothers, which

sequentially raises high-achieving and academically successful kids. The push for studying, practicing, and achieving increases mixed feelings between those who believe that children should not be pressured into impressing their parents. Chua's beliefs are continually contradicted by Jed's mother, Florence. Florence suggested that Chua gives them an opportunity for individual choice, independence, creativity, and the questioning of authority. Nevertheless, Chua's parenting style always prevailed because Sophia and Louisa became well-known and prosperous for piano and violin, common instruments for Asian children to play. One example of a positive effect of Chua's tiger parenting is Sophia's achievement to perform at the Carnegie Hall, which is a rare accomplishment, especially for someone her age.

Over time, Chua realized that the Chinese way does not work for both of her children. Tiger parenting is not as advantageous as she thought it was as it can yield mixed outcomes, which is evident in her children. Sophia bitterly obeys her mother's regulations, but Chua always expresses her extreme difficulty with Louisa. Although Louisa had attained great accomplishments, she did not feel gratitude for her parents. Chua experienced gratitude for her own parents after her successes, so she expected Louisa to feel the same. Instead, she started rebelling against everything that Chua stood for like talking back. Her rebellion caused Chua to rethink her approach to parenting. Her new mentality is shown when she starts giving her children more freedom, specifically letting Louisa play tennis. Readers are then able to understand that children with freedom are still able to become successful. Chua confesses that "it's the parents who need to be taught a life lesson - by their children" (Chapter 5). She acknowledges that she needs to be less strict and more open-minded. In addition, Chua admits that her father is proof that Chinese parenting does not always work. He ended up hating his family and moved abroad, which is what Chua fears and hopes would never happen. In her

post-book interview where she is asked about her children's happiness, she says, "If I could push a magic button and choose either happiness or success for my children, I'd choose happiness in a second" (Afterword). Readers are able to believe that she has re-evaluated her beliefs in Chinese culture and the way she should raise her children. She seems to understand that giving children freedom is not a negative aspect of parenting. However, she continues to say that "It's not as simple as that" (Afterword), meaning happiness is not easily attainable. It is not easy to make your children content. Before, Chua was content that they were accomplished, but her children were not happy. There should be sacrifices to make everyone pleased.

Chua's "Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother" is an amusing and engaging memoir of the battles between cultures and how to raise children. Though she aimed to argue how Chinese parenting is superior and more fulfilling, she was able to find a new respect for freedom and discover a different perspective on parenting. She intends that tiger parenting has great results as well as tough consequences. The audience that Chua targets could be a general audience as it educates people about the different perspectives that cultures have on child-rearing and shows the positive and negative effects of tiger parenting. Children of first-generation immigrant parents would be able to understand the reasons for Chua's parenting style and be able to tell how Sophia and Louisa feel towards their mother. Asian parents, as well as other immigrant parents, would empathize with Chua and her parents on the importance of continuing family traditions, becoming successful, and feeling gratitude towards parents. Experts in parenthood, education, and child-rearing would find this book useful, as well as sociologists, psychologists, and social workers. It shows first-hand the common way that Chinese mothers raise their children and the motives behind their actions. I found "Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother" to

be amusing as I got to see parenting from the perspective of a strong-willed mother. As a daughter of first-generation immigrant parents, I am able to understand their reasons for raising me the way they are. I would definitely recommend it to someone in search of an entertaining, educational, and eye-opening book.