



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

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Amy Chua's memoir, "Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother", entails the risks and rewards of tiger parenting done by a stereotyped *Chinese mother*. Chua uses a seamless narrative technique to integrate her own experience of parenting her two daughters, Sophia and Louisa (Lulu), as well as her daughters' perspectives on their upbringing. The tiger is a "living symbol of strength and power, generally [inspiring] fear and respect" — this definition is the root of tiger parenting, an extreme form of authoritarian parenting Chua used to raise her daughters as a Chinese mother. When referring to *Chinese mothers*, Chua explains how she uses the term as one not literal, but as any parent who practices tiger parenting; *Western parents* are any parents who practice less disciplined versions of parenting (this can range from authoritative, unengaged, or permissive parenting styles). Chua, in her memoir, emphasizes the following realizations she made as a Chinese mother raising second generation Americans: (1) there is stereotypical immigrant pressure in a western society; (2) there is a differentiation between a child's nurture versus nature; and (3) there are inter-generational cultural differences. Chua also raises an underlying, controversial question: can a parenting style truly be considered "damaging" if a brilliant child is produced?

Society has stereotyped Asian children for decades; Chua points out that these successful

children come from strict rules and determination. She had felt the label of a “bad parent” many times, from her children, outsiders, or even at times from her own family. This makes one question whether they are doing right; through the ups and downs of parenting, Chua had questioned herself and her parenting but was unwavering in her belief of tiger parenting and stayed true to being a Chinese mother. In her memoir, she made a point to express that she refused to let peer pressure get to her, as she had regretted it the few times she did (p. 68). The fundamental difference between Chinese and Western parents is that “Western parents can only ask their kids to try their best” (p. 51), whereas Chinese parents order perfection. Due to these stereotypes and societal pressures “Chinese parents can get away with things that Western parents can’t” (p. 50). Children of immigrants are more accustomed to the hardships and relentlessness of their parents as they are expected to fit into the mould of a perfect child for all the sacrifices their parents had made for them— a practice Chua had used in her parenting as well. Chua recounts a dinner party she once attended where a guest had “broke down in tears and had to leave early” (p. 50) due to Chua’s retelling of her parenting style. Baffled at the reaction, Chua felt the judgement the attendees had but her children were after all thriving in academia and on the path to becoming musical prodigies — what mattered most to a Chinese mother. This was opposed to the importance Western parents put on a child’s emotional well-being, Chinese mothers are known to belittle the emotions of their children, for the greater good of their success. The label of fantastic parenting is then pinned when a child succeeds exceptionally, Chua recounts many instances of this when Sophia or Lulu exceeds in a recital; where does the judgement go then, one may wonder. The parenting style seems much more accepting, and even praised, when the child’s success is displayed.

Nature versus nurture has been an ongoing topic in various disciplines; sociology, psychology, and anthropology experts have made great strides in the research behind genetic factors (nature) and environmental factors (nurture) affecting child development. Chua pushes boundaries with her youngest, Lulu, on her stance that nurture precedes nature. Chua's oldest, Sophia was an engaging student and obedient daughter ... exactly what a Chinese mother expects. Lulu, however, was her own free-spirited individual not meant to fit the mould which tiger parenting entailed. Chua felt defeat when Lulu was in her early teenage years, she dishearteningly told her readers: "I'd made a career out of spurning the kind of Western parents who can't control their kids, [now] I had the most disrespectful, rude, violent, out-of-control kid of all" (p. 206). Chua admits that "the Chinese virtuous circle didn't work with Lulu" (p. 167) as it had with Sophia but despite this and the rebuttal, grueling preparation, the usual fights, threats, yelling and screaming, Lulu still mastered the art of violin. Chua can attest to this as her own personal experience of nurture preceding nature with this example of 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, [oppositingly in American culture], typically it's the parents who need to be taught a life lesson – by their children" (p. 24). Chua astounded by this dynamic, recognizes its reality through her relationship with Lulu. Due to cultural assimilation, which happens often with children of immigrants being stuck between their parent's culture and the new cultural aspects of their own country, alongside intergenerational cultural differences, a clash of cultures occurs. A common pattern among immigrant rooted families which Chua links to intergenerational performance is

that second generation children grow up comfortable due to the struggle and hard work of their immigrant grandparents and first-generation parents, they will also believe they have individual rights guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution and therefore be much more likely to disobey their parents (p. 22). Chua's defeat when Lulu decided to pursue her own interests, interests a Chinese mother would not typically approve of, taught her the relentless acceptance parents must at times give their children — slightly straying away from her rugged tiger parenting style.

It is considered that an authoritarian parenting style can result in “damaged” children, as there is low child autonomy and high control. Chinese mothers, however, believe that this style of parenting is what leads to success — signing children up for extra curriculums the parent believes is best, just as Chua enrolled Sophia and Lulu into piano and violin, respectively, had led them to their widely successful musical talents. “Westerners believe in choice; the Chinese don't” (p. 227). Lulu resented the hours of practice and strict rules. Chua discusses how the violin had become a symbol in their home: for her it “symbolized excellence, refinement, and depth — respect for hierarchy, standards, and expertise; most of all, the violin symbolized control — in short, the violin symbolized the success of the Chinese parenting model”; “for Lulu, it embodied oppression” (pp. 207-208). Both Lulu brilliant in her academics, and beyond excelling in her piano, and Sophia, the expected product of tiger parenting, show the positive outcome of an authoritarian type of parenting, labelled “damaging” by many. Questioning the negativity and criticism around tiger parenting. Chua did show her audience the slight parental leniency she had to incorporate into her parenting because of Lulu. Lulu had regained (somewhat) autonomy with her decision to play tennis and quit the violin.

Chua brilliantly encompassed parenting hardships, cultural elements, intergenerational clash, while questioning the environmental versus biological developmental factors. She narrated the truth behind the stereotyped successful Chinese child, the stern nurture which is embedded in the nature. Chua, to avoid some controversial terminology, could have used *tiger mother* instead of *Chinese mother*, as she did begin by explaining how the terms are used loosely and not literally. However, this decision to use the terminology of Chinese and Western parents helped in differentiating the two types of parents in a continuous narrative and bring light to the cultural elements behind her own tiger parenting experience. Chua may have intended this book for parents, ones who agree with her tiger parenting style and ones who may oppose; to share the view and perspectives of a Chinese mother, the struggles and content. The academic audience that would pertain to this book would include sociology and psychology experts in the fields of child development and parenting. As a first-generation Canadian, I would recommend this book to immigrant parents as well as other first-generation children as a relatable and informative narrative.