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# Understanding Chinese Cultural Child-Rearing Attitudes and Practices

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# Understanding Chinese Cultural Child-Rearing Attitudes and Practices

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# Outline

- Post-partum Beliefs for Moms
- Post-partum Practices for Moms
- Different Parenting Styles
- Chinese Parenting Beliefs and Practices
- Chinese Parenting in American Cultural Context



# Post-partum Beliefs

- “Sitting month” is a folklore ritual observed by many postpartum women in China.
- Chinese people are most concerned about balancing yin and yang, in all things. If the yin and yang in your body are balanced, you won't get sick. If they're out of balance, it's easy to get sick.



# 月子病 (yuèzibìng)

- 月子病 (yuèzibìng), a loose Traditional Chinese Medicine term referring to all illnesses contracted during the month after childbirth that never completely heal.
- *Yuezibing* results from the invasion of the Six Evils (六邪 liùxié): wind (风 fēng), cold (寒 hán), dampness (湿 shī), dryness (燥 zào), fire (火 huǒ), and heat (暑 shǔ).



# Post-partum Practices for Moms

- Dietary precautions
- Behavioral precautions
- Infant feeding



# Dietary Practice

- Eating more food
- Eating "hot" food (protein rich)
- Avoiding "cold" food including ice water
- Avoiding fruit and vegetables

These rules are aimed at restoring balance to the new mother's body after childbirth.



# Physical Restrictions

- Post-partum women are discouraged from exerting themselves
- No bathing or washing hair
- No brushing teeth
  - Staying inside the home
  - Avoiding housework
  - Resting in bed
  - Abstaining from sexual activity





# Behavioral Precautions

- Placing a hot water bottle on the belly to reduce lochial discharge and hasten uterine retraction.
- Avoiding reading or watching television to prevent poor eye-sight later in life.
- Avoiding running, jumping, or cutting nails.



# Infant Feeding

- Breastfeeding is best
- Supplementing newborns with water
- Giving honeysuckle for skin rash



# Parenting Styles

- The **permissive** parent attempts to behave in a nonpunitive, acceptant, and affirmative manner towards the child's impulses, desires, and actions.
- The **authoritative** parent attempts to direct the child's activities but in a rational, issue-oriented manner.
- The **authoritarian** parent attempts to shape, control, and evaluate the behavior and attitudes of the child in accordance with a set standard of conduct, usually an absolute standard, theologically motivated and formulated by a higher authority.



# Child Qualities & Authoritative Parenting

- Lively and happy disposition
- Self-confident about ability to master tasks
- Well-developed emotion regulation
- Developed social skills
- Less rigid about gender-typed traits (e.g. sensitivity in boys and independence in girls)



# Child Qualities & Authoritarian Parenting

- Anxious, withdrawn, and unhappy disposition
- Poor reactions to frustration (girls are particularly likely to give up and boys become especially hostile)
- Do well in school (studies may show authoritative parenting is comparable)
- Not likely to engage in antisocial activities (e.g. drug and alcohol abuse, vandalism, gangs)



# Child Qualities & Permissive Parenting

- Poor emotion regulation (under regulated)
- Rebellious and defiant when desires are challenged
- Low persistence to challenging tasks
- Antisocial behaviors



# Chinese Parenting

- Traditional Chinese parenting has been labeled as “authoritarian” by some researchers (Baumrind, 1966).
- Authoritarian is a style of child-rearing that emphasizes high standards and a tendency to control kids through shaming, the withdrawal of love, or other punishments.



# Authoritarian Parenting & Academic Performance

- Authoritarian parenting is linked with lower levels of self-control, more emotional problems, and lower academic performance for Western kids raised in North America.
- However, studies of Hong Kong Chinese (Leung et al., 1998) and of Chinese immigrants to North America (Chao, 2001) have linked authoritarian parenting with higher school achievement.





# Chinese Parenting & Chiaooshun

- Chinese cultural notion of training, *chiaooshun*, which is rooted in the teachings of Confucius (Chao, 1994, 2001), is respect for the social order, including relationships between individuals as well as relationships between an individual and society (Bond & Hwang, 1986).



# Chiaoshun & Strict Discipline

- ***Chiaoshun*** in Chinese culture encourages parents to teach their children the quality of respect in all of their relationships.
- As a result, Chinese parenting practices that appear harsh and strict to others are often simply a culturally-based attempt to train children to act in a socially acceptable manner (Chan et al., 2009).



# Authoritarian Parenting & Love

- “Authoritarian” usually implies that parents are rather cold and distant.
- However, strict Chinese parents enjoy a sense of closeness with their kids.
- Unlike children in Western authoritarian families--children who feel alienated by their parents--Chinese-American kids feel connected (Chao, 1994; Chao, 2001).



2001).

# Strict Discipline & Parental Trust

- When adopting harsh language and strict discipline, Chinese parents assume the children will understand the connotation behind the harsh language. Rather than ruthless punishment, the harsh language and discipline indicates parental trust and high expectations of children's performances (Chan, Bowes, & Wyver, 2009; Chao, 1994, 2001; Chen & Luster, 2002; Cheung & McBride-Chang, 2008).



# Chinese Parenting & Emphasis on Effort

- Traditional Chinese parents--like many other Asian parents--are more likely to emphasize effort over innate talent.
- Notion of “As long as you work hard, put your efforts, you can get everything done.”



# Misconceptions about Chinese Parenting

- American society is unfamiliar with Chinese parenting. When the media isolates Chinese parenting beliefs (i.e., *chiaoshun*) from practices (i.e., strictness) and focus only on the practices, the American public comes to understand Chinese parenting as unwavering and harsh.



# Acculturation and Parenting

- Typical American parenting (Baumrind's three parenting styles)
- Chinese parenting (driven by Confucius's notion of training)
- American perceptions of Chinese parenting (the "tiger mom")



# Immigrant Parenting Challenges

- Immigrant Chinese parents also face challenges
  - acculturative stress
  - low socio-economic status
  - cultural gaps with their more acculturated children





# Differences in Reactions across Generations

- First-generation Chinese children perform better with their “authoritarian” Chinese parents than most second-generation Chinese children.
- First-generation Chinese children seem to have more positive school outcomes and better interpersonal skills than second-generation Chinese children, even after controlling for parenting style (Chao, 1994, 2001; Shek, 1999, 2001; Su & Hynie, 2011).



# Why So?

- The negative reactions of second-generation Chinese children may be due to the fact that second-generation children have been immersed in American culture since birth, whereas first-generation children are more apt to hold certain cultural beliefs that will help them interpret the harshness and strictness in a more positive way.



# Reaction to SES

- Studies have identified that lower income immigrant families have faced more challenges than higher-income families (Shek, 1999, 2001).



# Reaction to Acculturation Stress

- Chinese children whose mothers experience higher acculturation stress tend to have a relatively lower score on school outcomes than Chinese children whose mothers experience relatively low acculturation stress (Cheah et al., 2009; Fung & Lau, 2010).



# Reaction to Family Stress

- Parenting hassles and family stress can also add to the negative experience of cross-cultural parenting of both parents and children (Su & Hynie, 2011; Tan et al., 2012; Xu et al., 2005).



# Chinese Parenting in American Context

- In the American cultural context, the general public and the media tend to make sense of Chinese parenting by directly comparing it with the American standard of parenting.
- Americans interpret harsh and strict Chinese parents as “tiger moms.”
- Without the understanding of the cultural notion of training, the parenting style of the “tiger moms” appears controversial in the eye of the American public.



# Conclusion

- However, when looking at Chinese parenting with the understanding of appropriate cultural values and beliefs, one can find the rationale behind the so-called “tiger mom” is actually to prepare the children to thrive in the environment of social order and respect that characterizes Chinese society.



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