

## A Comparative Study of Cultural Values in Chinese and American Parenting Reflected in *The Joy Luck Club*

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### Abstract

Education plays a pivotal role in a country's progress and rejuvenation. As the most basic and vital stage in education, parenting exerts an invaluable role in supporting the progress of children. Under the influence of production mode, geographical environment, national policy and other factors, education in different countries takes on a unique and distinguishable character in correspondence with its cultural and geographical contexts. China and America are two prominent countries on the world map which represent, in many ways, divergent national culture models. Taking Strodbeck and Kluckhohn's theory of cultural values combined with Hofstede's national culture model as the theoretical framework, and the novel *The Joy Luck Club* as data, the study investigates differences in Chinese and American parenting in terms of cultural values from the perspectives of humankind and nature, time orientation, activity orientation and social relationships. Comparing the two styles of parenting, the study argues that Chinese parenting is distinguishable from American parenting in many aspects, including parenting idea, parenting content and parenting method. Adopting a monitoring role, the Chinese parents foreground criticism in parenting, whereas American parents tend to prefer encouragement as the cornerstone of their parenting style, demonstrating a democratic approach and magnanimity towards their children.

**Keywords:** parenting, theory of cultural values, Hofstede's cultural model, *The Joy Luck Club*

### 1. Introduction

Education is just like a kaleidoscope through which one can view a social and cultural phenomenon. If education is a window through which countries can learn to know one another, then parenting is the mode whereby a country's education can be known. People from different cultural backgrounds hold different parenting values. These are differences which show the uniqueness of different nationalities, enrich human civilization and make the educational community more colorful.

Parenting is a lens for interpreting Chinese and American cultural values, since a comparison between Chinese parenting and American parenting can contribute to mutual learning and complementarity, thus making it possible for parenting to better evolve in line with the developments of time and society. In China, the word "parenting" did not appear until New Culture Movement. In 1925, the renowned expert on education Chen Heqin published a monograph titled *Family Education* and laid the theoretical foundations for parenting research in China, although he did not extend a definition of "parenting" per se. Decades Later, several perspectives on the concept of "parenting" had appeared by the 1980s. Zhao Zhongxin put forward the concept of "narrow parenting" and "broad parenting" in his *Household Pedagogy* (1988), highlighting that the narrow sense of parenting refers to education that parents implement for children, from their birth to the time before schooling, while broad parenting refers to the education parents implement during the children's life directly or indirectly. A similar pluralism in definitions of "parenting" can be found in international literature. Nancy Darling and Lawrence Steinberg (1993) argued that parenting referred to collections of a series of attitude, emotion and atmosphere and parents' daily behavior demonstrated in this atmosphere which together exerted an influence on

children. According to Davies (2000), “parenting refers to the aspects of raising a child aside from the biological relationship”. France (2003) contends that parenting can be thought of as synthesis related to upbringing, stable attitude and belief.

This paper compares Chinese parenting and American parenting from the perspective of cultural values, and explores how cultural values affect parenting styles in China and in America.

Two key questions are addressed in the present study:

- 1) What are the differences between Chinese parenting and American parenting?
- 2) How do cultural values and national culture model influence Chinese parenting and American parenting?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Parenting Studies at Home and Abroad

In his book titled *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* in 17th century, the British philosopher Locke (1693) elaborated on how to solve problems evident in parenting from the perspective of virtue, wisdom and etiquette. He emphasized that parents needed to educate children with equal attitude, respect children’s ideas and choices, and that they should give importance to role models. Mid-18th century, the French thinker Rousseau published *Emile, A Monograph of Family Education* which stressed that the method of education should be identified in correspondence with the nature of children and according to their age characteristics. In the 21st century, the progression in ideas was reflected in *Spencer’s Happy Education* published by eminent educator Spencer (2001) who argued that education was supposed to be a happy experience, and that when children were not in a happy mood, their intelligence and potential were likely to be greatly reduced, with yelling and criticism of the children failing to yield good results. The ideas of the thinkers and educators discussed above reflect systematic theories on parenting. Moving on, American parenting research literature can be largely divided into the following two categories. The first category is targeted at story readers, and the second category comprises suggestions parenting guides ranging from *American Family: Quality Education* written by Thomas Lickona, and *Right and Wrong* written by Michael Riera and Joseph Di Prisco to Patricia H. Sprinkle’s *Being Little Master: Educating Children to Develop Diligent and Responsible Virtue in Household*.

Research about parenting in China can also be categorized into two types. The first kind offers theoretical depth to an extent, such as the earliest *Admonitions for the Yan Clan* written by Yan Zhitui which can be traced back to WeiJin Northern and Southern Dynasties. It concludes by offering some general rules of parenting. This book suggests that the essence of administering country depends on harmonizing the relationships among family members, providing guidelines on how family members should cultivate and educate children respectively. These two monographs represent ancient Chinese parenting research transforming from descriptive method to didactic one. The second category subsumes popular writings for common people, such as *Nver Jing, Nver XiaoYu, NvJie*. The first vernacular parenting monograph by patriotic general Zhu Qinglan which was titled *Family Education* (1916) appeared in the *Republic of China*, expounding upon important problems such as parenting ideas, principles, and methods. Edited by Feng Lin (2001), the book *Chinese Parents Criticizing* highlighted errors made by Chinese parents in educating their children, such as a propensity for paternalism, absolutism and violence.

### 2.2 Comparative Studies on Chinese Parenting and American Parenting

In international literature, comparative studies of Chinese and American parenting differences inquire into many topics such as parenting ideas, content, methods and purposes, but the focus of the studies tends to be on Asian Americans and Chinese Americans. On the other hand, domestic studies of Chinese and American parenting can be roughly divided into two groups. The first category of research compares Chinese parenting and American parenting and highlights the implications of these comparisons for Chinese parenting. This category of research pertains largely to parenting goals, parenting contents, parenting methods and parents’ roles. For instance, in this category, research by Li (2011) analyzes the influence of Chinese and American cultural divergences on mother-daughter conflicts, elaborating on the effect of cultural conflicts on immigrants’ psychology. In another study within the first category of comparative research on Chinese and American parenting, Wang (2012) analyzes the roots of parenting differences by considering three aspects in particular, collectivist values and individualistic values, ethical values and hierarchical values. She concludes that parents should allow children autonomy and implement democratic education. The second category of comparative research on Chinese and American parenting explores reasons for differences between the two approaches. In this context, a study by Zhou and Ma (2012) adopts humane holistic historical opinions to explore the in-depth reasons for differences in Chinese and American parenting from the perspective of family status, marriage ideas and parenting ideas. In

other research, Xia and Shu (2013) analyzes the causes of Chinese and American parenting differences from the perspective of historical and cultural backgrounds, social conditions and thinking modes. Although many studies have been carried out on Chinese and American parenting differences, most of this research employs the lens of pedagogy and psychology, and a few of the studies use Strodbeck and Kluckhohn's cultural values theory in tandem with Hofstede's national culture mode as a theoretical framework to explore the phenomenon. This paper integrates these two cultural theories to compare and analyze Chinese and American parenting from the perspective of cultural values.

### 3. Theoretical Framework and Data

#### 3.1 Culture

The term "culture" links back to the French word "culture", which is derived from Latin 'culture' signifying growing and cultivation. Culture has been defined in various ways by different people. For instance, earlier conceptualizations such as the one by Linton (1945) view culture as "a configuration of learned behaviors and results of behavior whose component elements are shared and transmitted by the members of a particular society". In more recent definitions, culture is described as shared knowledge and schemes created by a set of people for perceiving, interpreting, expressing, and responding to the social realities around them (Lederach, 1995) or as the cumulation of "what a society does and thinks" (Sapir, 2002). Culture, once formed, has certain stability but also experiences transformation (Hu, 1999). Cultural value is a core construct for conducting comparative research on Chinese culture and Western culture. In his work *The Cultural Dialogue: An Introduction to Intercultural Communication*, Michael Prosser (1978) describes cultural value as a type of model made by individuals or groups. Considered to be integral to culture, cultural value includes outlook on life, idea of time, outlook on life, world view and idea of money. Values constrain, drive and guide people's action. They are diversified and unique habitus rooted in practice and the national culture of a country. Kluckhohn (1961) contends that value refers to a group holding overt or covert ideas which are desirable or not. This opinion influences the way people make choices.

#### 3.2 Strodbeck and Kluckhohn's Cultural Value Dimensions

According to American anthropologists Kluckhohn and Strodbeck (1961), value orientation refers to the complicated but specific patterned principles which guide human behavior and thought. Although they use the phrase "value orientations" to describe these five questions: (1) human nature (2) humankind and nature (3) sense of time (4) activity and (5) social relationships, they are in fact talking about what we called cultural patterns. These patterns guide the members of a culture as to what is important and offer them guidance for living their lives (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2007, pp. 207–208). Kluckhohn (1960) identified five perspectives related closely to human life and summed up five cultural orientations. Kluckhohn and Strodbeck's cultural value dimensions are based on the core concept of "value" and provide new insights and new directions for comparative studies of Chinese and Western cultures. As one of the most influential and convincing cultural theories, Strodbeck and Kluckhohn's cultural value dimensions help us to develop a better and deeper understanding of cultural divergences amongst different countries. Selecting four of the five orientations discussed above, this paper deploys humankind and nature, sense of time activity and social relationships to analyze parenting differences.

#### 3.3 Hofstede's National Culture Model

Administering 11600 questionnaires to internal workers, senior executives and doctors in 20 different languages from 1967 to 1973, Hofstede Geert, head of cultural institute, used the data from these surveys to author the book *Culture's Consequences* (1980). Based on the results of the survey, Hofstede argued that rather than reflecting the individual characteristics of people, culture pertained to people's common psychological processes within the same environment. These differences can be further mapped along the four dimensions of power distance, uncertainty avoidance index, individualism versus collectivism and masculinity versus femininity. Based on his study in the East Asia, the Canadian psychologist Michael Harris Bond added a fifth dimension, namely long-term orientation and short-term orientation to those identified. This new dimension was revealed in the responses of students (from 23 countries) to the Chinese Values Survey. Bond termed this dimension as "Confucian work dynamism" as the items of both poles of the dimension reflected the teachings of Confucius, and the dynamism could be attributed to the positive pole groups future oriented items and the negative pole groups past and present oriented items (Hofstede, 2001).

As one of the most important cross-cultural communication theories to have emerged in literature, Hofstede's National Culture Model plays an indispensable role in helping to interpret cultural contrasts. He divides seemingly abstract culture into several concrete aspects which are responsive to evaluation. Since its introduction,

a vast body of research has substantiated the wide applicability of Hofstede's cultural theory in most cultural cases. We integrate Strodbeck and Kluckhohn's cultural value dimensions with Hofstede's national culture model, excluding human nature orientation as our analysis will pertain to Chinese and American cultural values in parenting rather than human nature orientation.

### 3.4 *The Joy Luck Club*

As a second-generation immigrant Chinese American writer, Amy Tan is famous for her masterpiece work *The Joy luck club* which is a classic novel exploring the differences in parenting between Chinese and American cultures. The fiction narrates the story of four immigrant families, focusing on four pairs of mothers and daughters. In the novel, the mothers have migrated to America to make a living for a variety of reasons, whereas the daughters who are brought up and educated in America. In this novel, the conflicts between the mothers and daughters resonated significantly with the audience due to vast divergences in parenting styles within the cultural contexts of China and America. The novel describes the whole process of conflict among these four pairs, spanning misunderstandings, conflicts and mutual understandings. Asian Americans who enter the United States in their childhood and are raised and educated in America are likely to espouse values which are very different from Asian Americans who enter the United States as adults after being raised in an Asian country (Bryan, Donald, Atkinson, & Peggu, 1999). The four Chinese mothers in Tan's novel hold quite different views of the world compared with American peers. These world views are based on their particular-life experiences in China, thereby showing great differences in parenting approaches when compared with American parenting. Having had to give up on their own dreams due to social problems in China, the mothers experience hopes in the new setting of America and seek to impose their past dreams on their children. However, growing up in America, these four children are unable to understand their mothers' desires as they are influenced more by American morality and ethics.

## 4. On Cultural Value Differences Reflected in Chinese and American Parenting

Cultural values are the deep belief systems of culture and play a guiding role in daily activities. They provide a good benchmark for understanding various culture phenomena. Cultural values are invisible that affect various aspects of human life, including the approach to parenting. Parenting is an indispensable component of culture, which is influenced by traditional culture in addition to inheriting and disseminating culture on the other hand. The following section will analyze parenting differences between Chinese and American cultures from the perspective of cultural values as reflected in the novel *The Joy Luck Club*.

### 4.1 *Humankind and Nature*

The differences amongst conceptions of the relationship between humanity and nature produce distinct frames of reference for human desires, attitudes, and behaviors. At one end of the scale devised by the Kluckhohns and Strodbeck is the view that human beings are subject to nature. Cultures that hold fast to this orientation believe that the most powerful forces of life are beyond their control (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2015). These the attitudes of two culture towards the relationship between human and environment can differ a lot. In general, Chinese people believe that humans are in an integrated relationship with the surroundings. People originate from nature and will eventually return to it. Therefore, it is held that man and nature should live in harmony which is a prevalent belief in the Chinese mainstream society. On the other hand, the Americans believe that people are separate from the environment, and have their own independence. Thus, there is no inevitable inner link between the humans and the environment. They believe nature can be changed and conquered for human purposes. Different attitudes towards the relationship between man and environment determine these the value orientations of members of these two distinct cultures, and further affect their divergent approaches to parenting.

#### 4.1.1 The Unity Between Human and Nature and the Distinctiveness of Human and Nature

"Tian" refers to the objective world or nature which is at a distance from the human beings. "Ren" refers to human society. The unity between humans and nature implies human reverence for and obedience to the laws of nature. The distinctiveness of humans and nature means that the humans and the objective world belong to two different fields. Different understandings as represented in the belief of the Chinese in the unity between human and nature the belief of the Americans in the distinctiveness of humans and nature set apart these two countries. The Western civilization includes America which revolves around the leitmotifs of sailing and hunting. However, the American approach to nature manifests a desire to conquer and control the ocean and the beasts and to achieve victory and superiority over nature. In contrast, the Chinese civilization has a close nexus to nature, especially land (Liu, 2002, p. 119), which was the main survival resource for the ancient Chinese people, along with farming as the means of subsistence. Therefore, their reverence for the laws of nature developed into a deep emotional attachment to land. Chinese culture has "Gui, He, Shang, Zhong" spirits which unify many

contradictory things organically to form a harmonious entity and to achieve peace of mind based on “harmony” (Li, 2002). However, for Americans, nature can be changed, conquered, even destroyed and rebuilt.

Influenced by the distinctiveness of the world view about human and nature, Americans contend that people are subjective and can transform nature and things around them. Natural conditions were bad in the early years on the new world, and early settlers were often at war with the native American, so they experienced low life expectancy. In addition, due to the poor medical conditions, the maternal mortality rate was very high. Many children grew up without parents and grandparents. Furthermore, the people who were engaged in nomadic herding had to move from place to place in order to fend for themselves by foraging, so there developed a lesser regard for blood relationships amongst the Americans as compared to the Chinese setting where such kinship was greatly valued.

In the novel, the experiences of the four mothers who are brought up in China and are influenced by Chinese traditional parenting ideas explain why they impose their ideas on daughters who were born and raised in America. They show great interest in everything related to their daughters. However, the four daughters influenced by American values only want their own space and they do not want to live under their mothers’ surveillance or to heed what their parents have to say. From their point of view, parents and children are two different life entities, and mothers are not allowed to interfere in their lives. Given that America is an immigrant country, and its social structure is characterized by volatility and instability, the nuclear family consisting of parents and children is typical in America. However, in China, “big family” in which children, parents and grandparents live together are very common. In America, individuals are independent, and parents accept that children are born to leave their parents. Therefore, they are unlikely to interfere with children’s business, which is regarded as an invasion of privacy. The American world view encompasses subject-object dichotomy.

The child’s adjustment to the family depends on his/her concurrence with parental views concerning appropriate goals and behavior and sufficient self-control on the child’s part to enact those views (Ruth, 2005). As discussed above, American family values are relatively weak, and family members are more likely to pursue realization of self-value. In the face of conflicts between individual interest and family interest, Americans tend to foreground individual interest and to accord secondary consideration to family interest. In contrast, family interest is always put ahead of the individual interest by Chinese family members. In the novel, Lindo Jong’s practice of showing off her daughter’s international chess championship win everywhere leads to misunderstanding on the part of her daughter Waverly, and even feelings of disgust. The daughter believes that if her mother wants to show off, she should play chess herself instead of using her as a trophy to show off everywhere and every time. After the conflict, Waverly returns home, but her mother shows a lack of concern for her daughter, even to the point that she does not care whether Waverly has dinner, observing that if her child does not care for her then she should not expect anything from the family in return (Tan, 1989, p. 60). From her mother’s point of view, Waverly’s honor is a matter of joy for her family rather than an individual accomplishment.

#### 4.1.2 Identity and Diversity

Identity means two or more things have the same nature and can coexist. In order to maintain feudal rule, Ancient Chinese rulers implemented various policies to unify people in their ideas and ideologies. This feature of Chinese culture has far-reaching impact on people’s life. For instance, docile and well-behaved students are favored by teachers and parents under the current Chinese educational system. The four girls who grew up in America cannot bear their Chinese mothers’ style of parenting which also shows why they treat their mothers plans with scorn.

The opposite side of identity is diversity. American’s mainstream culture has its origins in Europe. Influenced by Protestantism and the Renaissance, American’s mainstream culture also advocates freedom and equality, so Americans accord great priority to diversity. In the eyes of American parents, every child is unique and has a distinct personality although sometimes they may be rebellious. They believe that children should be educated according to their aptitude. They know deeply that there is a thin line between obedience and rebellion. Although a rebellious character might hurt other people at times, it represents a primitive impulse, rebellious spirit as well as germination of self-consciousness during children period of growth. American parents have a clear understanding about this.

Chinese parents tend to be adventurous, usually preferring to avoid potential risk due to singular social psychology. Therefore, they agree more with the way most people choose to educate children. For Chinese parents, a perfect life signifies that their children should excel in academics and find good employment after graduation. Many parents believe that children are likely to become failures, if they are not admitted by a university. Such an outlook is reflective of high-uncertainty-avoidance psychology. Compared to Chinese parents,

American parents are more democratic, and they create a more relaxed, free environment at home, with American children moving out to live on their own by a certain age. In order to have her own space, June in *The Joy Luck Club* would rather be driven out by the landlord than go back to live with her parents because living with her parents would subject all her actions to her mother's scrutiny and constraints, which is the last thing she wants to experience. In order to "drive" children to make progress in accordance with the established route, Chinese parents sometimes ignore or even dampen their children's creativity unintentionally.

Chinese identity culture and American diversity culture features make parents' focus on education in quite divergent ways. The mothers in *The Joy Luck Club* want their daughters to behave the way higher class should do while the daughters just want to follow their hearts and keep their diverse personalities. To some degree, conflicts between mother and daughter in *The Joy Luck Club* are essentially conflicts between identity culture and diversity culture.

#### 4.2 Time Orientation and Activity Orientation

As a species, our fixation with time and the power we accord it are rather obvious. Cultures vary widely in their perspective towards time. Where they differ is in the respective values placed on the past, present, and future and on how each stage influences interaction (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2007, p. 212). According to Kluckhohn's and Strodtbeck's value orientations, time orientation can be divided into three types, namely past-oriented, present-oriented and future-oriented. In general, China is a typically past-oriented country while America is a future-oriented one. Activity orientation is the way a culture views the relation between human and activity. As for activity orientation, three common approaches to activity, as detailed by the Kluckhohns and Strodtbeck are classified as being, being-in-becoming and doing (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2007, p. 213).

##### 4.2.1 Past Orientation and Future Orientation

People in past-oriented culture believe and attach great importance to things which have occurred in the past. They believe that past experiences provide lessons for making decisions and determining facts. People in future-oriented culture focus more on things that will happen in the future, and they expect unpredictable future much more in comparison with the past or the present, for they believe whatever they are doing is not quite as good as what they could be doing. America is a typically future-oriented country. Americans are optimistic and willing to be challenged by new things, which is reflected in the common proverb "If at first you don't succeed, try and try again". Future is controllable in the eyes of Americans, which is exemplified in the saying of the President Lyndon Johnson (1964) "Yesterday is not ours to recover, but tomorrow is ours to win or to lose."

Uncertainty Avoidance refers to the uncertainty and the degree of obscure situation menace that society feels. This psychology comes from excessive dependence and emphasis on the past and tradition. People's sense of security is low in high-uncertainty-avoidance society. They have a strong sense of anxiety when faced with unstable situation, and are often reluctant to accept uncertain things in life. People's sense of anxiety is strong in high-uncertainty-avoidance countries. Chinese people are usually not willing to accept new ideas and try to avoid potential danger or threat to life. Compared with Americans' curiosity when facing new things, Chinese people usually feel threatened and refuse to adapt due to sudden changes. People in low uncertainty avoidance society accept changes with relaxed and active attitudes because they have a strong sense of security all the time. Since the moment their ancestors stepped into the new world, Americans learnt not to be afraid of change and uncertainty. On the other hand, China is a typical high uncertainty avoidance country. People in the country tend to avoid uncertainty in life, preferring a stable life to change. For instance, people resist getting a divorce with all their will. Americans usually think that couples should let each other go if love does not exist anymore. When discovering that their daughters' marriages are in danger, the first thing the mothers in *The Joy Luck Club* do is to persuade their daughters to save the marriage although the mothers themselves have married for the second time.

China has a long history, and Chinese people show great respect for tradition and their ancestors. Ancient ideas continue to have a profound effect on people today. America has a shorter history than China, and the immigrants on the people on the Mayflower represented a group with an unconventional outlook that distinguished them from others. They were radical, adventurous, even ridiculous in the eyes of people around them, so they come to the "hope land" in order to make a living there. In China, tradition is considered to be the best teacher, and the old are deemed to be wise (Davis, 2001, p. 189). China has a tradition of respecting the old and the Chinese people believe that old age brings wisdom and authority, so people ask for advice from the elders when making important decisions. However, in America, the old are considered to be useless, as they are thought to hinder social progress. The grandmothers of the daughters in *The Joy Luck Club* had great influence on their mothers, and the power their grandmothers gave their mother was great spirit and fortune which encouraged and inspired them to survive and fight in life. They transferred the power to their daughters through parenting. However, the

four daughters do not understand the tacit mutual understanding between their mothers and grandmothers. The mothers always tirelessly tell their daughters about the miserable experience they had in China in order to let their daughters learn from mistakes and cherish their present life.

#### 4.2.2 Being Orientation and Doing Orientation

Human activity orientation refers to whether individuals in a particular culture tend to keep moving. China is a being-oriented country while America is a doing-oriented one. When people arrived in the North America Continent, it was not the “Eden” waiting for them but unfamiliar environment and endlessly hard work. They emphasized individual efforts which could prove them to be “the Chosen” ones attended by success and wealth. This led to a respect for individual independence and individualism along with the spirit of mutual aid (Men, 2001). They stress release, indulgence of existing desires and working for the moment. Americans have a strong sense of time. In America, People are encouraged to take time to create wealth ceaselessly and to solve problems in time. China is a typical country in which people are satisfied with the status quo and believe that to be content is to be happy. Due to low productivity in agricultural society, people have no defense against natural disasters, so being well provisioned with food and clothing was a very high level of satisfaction for people at that time (Chen, 2001). Chinese people seem to get accustomed to the slow pace and resist change deep in their hearts.

In *The Joy Luck Club*, Anmei Hsu’s mother is raped by the wealthy businessman Wu Qing and has his baby. She has no choice but to marry Wu Qing for the sake of the baby. However, her family is not only indifferent to her but also banishes her from home. In the eyes of the family, Anmei Hsu’s mother has no sense of shame for she has remarried a rich businessman shortly after her husband’s death. No matter how Anmei Hsu’s mother begs for her family’s forgiveness, she is not forgiven, not even she cut her finger to save her dying mother in line with the superstition that a mother’s serious malady can be cured by drinking daughter’s blood. The Chinese people’s being-orientation value determines people’s unchanging attitudes toward life, which reflected in parenting often annoys the daughters in *The Joy Luck Club*. Waverly makes up her mind not to play international chess again since she hates her mother’s showing off her gift for chess everywhere. She believes that her mother will beg her to play chess again, but her mother Lindo Jong maintains an indifference in the Cold War, and it is finally Waverly who gives up and decides to play chess again, only to find everything is not comfortable as before. In Chinese traditional families, parents and elders are in dominant positions, and they present “parents’ role” when educating children. Parents do not admit their mistakes before children even if it is they who have blamed them wrongly or made wrong decisions. For them, parents are parents, and admitting mistakes can damage their authority. Therefore, there is always an insurmountable gap between Chinese parents and children. In China, the original family has an enormous influence on offspring. As an old saying goes: “poverty can be wiped out while original family cannot”. A person’s family background is vital, and no matter how hard a person struggles for his life, he will be labeled with a poor family tags, and these tags will have an impact him throughout his whole life leading him to miss many opportunities.

#### 4.3 Social Relationships

Florence Kluckhohn and Fred Strodtbeck believe that human activity can be divided into two types according to the attitudes toward social relationships, namely, individualism and collectivism. Individualism versus collectivism has been established “as one of the basic pattern variables that determine human action” (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2007, p. 198).

##### 4.3.1 Collectivism and Individualism

Collectivism and individualism are the first important value dimension that Hofstede worked out. He believes that in individualistic culture, the consciousness of “I” prevails, which means that people are emotionally independent. In contrast, “we” consciousness prevails in collectivism: personal benefit is secondary and trivial while family face and collective interest are put in the first place (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2015). Hofstede (2001) defined China as a typical collectivistic country with a low individualism index of 97 and the United States as the most individualistic country with an extremely high individualism index of 200. Western values contend that individual is not only the subject of values but the subject of value realizations. Westerners isolate humans from society and nature unconsciously and gradually develop into individualistic value during the process of exploring nature.

The essence of Chinese traditional humanistic spirit does not lie in respecting the development of individual value and personal freedom but in helping individuals meld into groups by emphasizing the duty that humans have for religion and country, thereby leading to collectivism or “Renxue” of religion. Chinese culture focuses on group and society stresses organization, so a sense of belonging and identity is fostered with a tendency to share honor and disgrace, joys and sorrows together. In this sense of “duty”, the most fundamental and universal

obligation is upholding the honor of ancestors, namely, the awareness of the need to win honor for his own family (Liu, 2002, p. 154). The ethical ideas reflected in education pertaining to family relationship are important. The Chinese family structure generally comprises three to four generations. A family is a small group in which individual interest is secondary while family interest is first. Family face should be taken into account everywhere and every time. Parenting involves Chinese people's face. Therefore, it is not difficult to understand Lindo Jong's practice of showing off her daughter's international chess championship win everywhere. She thinks her daughter has won the honor for the family while her daughter Waverly insists that playing chess is her own business not related to her mother's right to brag, so she refuses to play chess in order to express her dissatisfaction. Lindo Jong believes that her daughter does not care about their family at all. Another daughter, June fails to finish her college education which makes her mother Suyuan Woo lose face in front of the other three mothers. But in the eyes of June, whether finishing school study or not, it's her own business and has nothing to do with others. Conflicts between mother and daughter are in essence the conflict between individualism and collectivism.

#### 4.3.2 Righteousness and Benefit

Ancient China is a typical agricultural society, and people's lives depend more on agricultural production. Due to agricultural production mode, human relations matter. People regard righteousness as the value orientation of life, which helps them to form friendly and harmonious interpersonal relationships. To some extent, righteousness is neglected, and benefit is stressed in Western countries. For some westerners, righteousness is only the means to achieve individual interest. This idea affirms the legitimacy of pursuing individual interest, arouses people's enthusiasm for pursuing wealth and promotes development via western capitalism and formation of modern civilization. Parenting is influenced by such opinions, so egoism, hedonism, money worship tends to prevail in America. Parents contend that obtaining wealth is a sign of children's success. The divergent concepts of "righteousness and benefit" in Chinese and American cultures influence parenting ideas differently in the following aspects.

##### *Altruism and Egoism*

Egoism came from Latin "ego". The basic characteristic of egoism is self-centeredness, and it focuses on individual benefit as a principle of thought, behavior and standard of morality evaluation. Egoism is the upgraded and open version of individualism. Steven M. Sanders (1995) described egoism as a doctrine which argues that individuals should pursue their interest completely and should not sacrifice their own benefit.

Altruism is the opposite of Egoism, which argues that people should put the interests of others before theirs. Confucianism contends that individual benefit and happiness are given by others, thus advancing the idea of "humanity". Altruism regards selflessness as the supreme principle of interpersonal relationships and contends that people should be more considerate of other people and make sacrifices when interest conflicts occur. In China, the approach of putting others' interests and collective's interests in the first place tends to prevail. In Lindo Jong's eyes, Waverly is selfish because she never considers mother's feeling. Lindo Jong sacrificed her whole life only to fulfill a promise she made to her mother, but Waverly thinks nothing of the dedication. In her opinion, a promise does not matter and can be broken because of a headache, traffic jam or a wonderful film. In *The Joy Luck Club*, the four mothers are all born and brought up in China, where they are taught to bear pains. In China, most parents always blame their children when conflicts with children occur. June is very sad because she is not only taken advantage of by Waverly but also humiliated and criticized by her own mother in front of other people. However, that is not the case. If June knew more about Chinese culture, she would understand her mother's behavior and know that her mother did not intend to humiliate her but to save another people's face. In essence, this is the conflict between altruism and egoism.

##### *Pragmatism and Hedonism*

Hedonism, in ethics is a general term for all theories of conduct in which the criterion is pleasure of one kind or another. The word is derived from the Greek hedonal ("pleasure"), Practically all hedonists recognize the existence of pleasures derived from fame and reputation, from friendship and sympathy and from knowledge and art. Hedonism contend worldly enjoyments (sensory, material pleasure) are life purposes. People who hold such values believe that enjoyment is the most important human pursuit. Hedonism is one of the main features of American values. Americans pursue personal pleasures. Influenced by such a value, the four daughters in *The Joy Luck Club* pour scorn on mothers' genius cultivation plan. They just want to be happy and enjoy their childhood like other American children. They admire other American children who are not forced to do things they dislike. They do not understand why their mothers are so strict with them. They even doubt their mothers' love for them.



Pragmatism is opposite of hedonism. It means thinking of or dealing with problems in a practical way, rather than by using theory or abstract principles. Pragmatic people are acknowledged in Chinese society, since pragmatic concept is led by actual circumstances. Mothers in *The Joy Luck Club* do not allow daughters to do illusory things because they believe that these things are far-fetched. Chinese people keep their promises in most cases. As a typical Chinese, Lindo Jong dedicates her whole life only to keep her promises to her mother while her daughter Waverly often cancels appointment because of wanting to go to movies or some trivial things. In other words, conflicts between mothers and daughters are also conflicts between pragmatism and hedonism. The mothers in *The Joy Luck Club* cannot pass their pragmatic ideas onto daughters, so conflicts occur.

#### 4.3.3 Hierarchy Concept and Equality Awareness

The Chinese and American family concepts are influenced by different geographical environments, production modes and economic systems. The Chinese family concept is strong while the American family concept is weak. Therefore, it is normal that children depend on parents, even with regard to some important things such as attending school, marriage and employment and to expect parental interference. The children do not dare to defy their parents' will under such an unequal relationship. On the contrary, in American culture, everyone is born equal and has the right to do anything they want. America is an immigrant country where social atmosphere is open and free, and people seem to accept new things and ideas more easily than Chinese people.

##### *Authority and Equality*

Chinese culture is a "family-oriented" culture (Xu, 2004). Influenced by traditional "family culture", family face is closely related with each family member. China is a high-power distance country. Power distance refers to the degree of people's acceptance of unequal distribution of power in organization. Power distance as a characteristic of a culture defines the extent to which the less powerful person in society accepts inequality in power and considers it as normal (Hofstede, 2001, p. 139). Chinese people show great respect to authority and the old. In the context of America, although Americans are aware of the existence of social stratification, they contend that inequalities of identity should be eliminated. Afzaal et al. (2019) argued that many areas had become the focus of the study that is related to power, domination, social inequalities, gender, race, and the study of text and talk. In Chinese families, parents and children by default experience unequal power distribution to some extent. In China, the old enjoy more priorities in society. American values emphasize man's natural rights. In their opinion, parents and children are different life entities, and even parents cannot deprive children of their right and force them to do things they do not like.

The mothers in *The Joy Luck Club* usually exhort children to go home after school. It is unreasonable in the eyes of the girls, because in their opinions even making mistakes is their own birthright. They even defend their right by letting mothers down deliberately as in the case of June, who was born in the United States. She disdains her mother's genius cultivation plan: "I am not your slave, this isn't China, you can't make me" (Tan, 1999, p. 135). Before her rebellious daughter, Suyuan Woo feels her authority being challenged, so she shouts at June angrily: "There are two kinds of daughters, obedient or freewheeling, and this house only allow obedient kind to live in" (Tan, 1999, p. 136). Again, the mother-daughter conflicts occur due to cultural value differences. Another mother Lindo Jong in order to keep her word to her mother, choose to almost "sacrifice all her life only to fulfill the promise she made" (Tan, 1999, p. 40). Nevertheless, Waverly often breaks promises to her mother for trivial things. Lindo Jong thinks that Waverly is ashamed to be her daughter while Waverly believes that her mother has a fatal influence on her. Her mother does not know the power she had over her. One word from mother, one look was enough to make her feel that she could never please her. Lindo Jong's commanding and criticizing education way inflicts severe hurt on Waverly. Whether hair style, the Christmas gift to her finance, none of these things can ever meet her mother's satisfaction. As a family member, she does not feel that she has the basic right to make choices. Another daughter Rose who always believed that her hard-working husband is more important than herself and that her love was menial compared to husband's ignores her own needs and happiness. The conflict edges them towards divorce. Fortunately, persuaded by her mother Anmei Hsu, Rose realizes that she and her husband are equal individuals in marriage, and marriage without an independent personality is likely to break down. She saves their marriage after a long talk with her husband. It is her mother who reminds her that marriage is based on equality.

## 5. Conclusion

The study concludes with the findings that Chinese parenting differs from American parenting in many aspects. Firstly, in the context of parenting ideas, Chinese parents seem to attach greater importance to children's accumulation of knowledge from textbooks while American parents emphasize children's independence and socialization ability. Secondly, in terms of parenting content, Chinese parents tend to focus on children's test

scores, university choices and career destinations, while American parents are inclined to emphasize children's survival skills and the ability to adapt themselves to society. Thirdly, with reference to parenting method, Chinese parents show a preference for criticism, while American parents prefer to apply democratic encouragement with their children. Lastly, Chinese parents expect children to be persons of importance and to support them in turn when they become old, while American parents hope that their children will become independent individuals with the capacity to integrate into society successfully. In *The Joy Luck Club*, mothers and daughters who are influenced by different cultural backgrounds regard their own respective cultural values as the pivot for their life. While mothers always want to control their daughters, the daughters only desire to be independent. They do not have aspirations to transform into societal elites as is the ambition of their mothers. Rather, they just want to make their own choices based on their own willingness to pursue their chosen paths.

Within the Chinese parent-child relationship, the love of the parents for their children is a constant that may sometimes give way to an unintended and unconscious inflicting of hurt. On the other hand, the American parent-child relationship is characterized by a bond in which the love American parents have for their children may nevertheless translate into a kind of distancing from the latter. In both China and America, great importance is attached to children's education. Whereas Chinese parents tend to constrain their children and pursue life goals for their children in line with their own aspirations, American parents are less likely than Chinese parent peers to unwittingly infantilize their children and to constrain their independence. The study concludes that education within different culture backgrounds is marked with cultural stigma, and that as people's ideas change with time, values too must transform. With the implementation of the socialist market economy, core values in Chinese education have begun to transform in a subtle way. For example, the value orientation of collectivism has begun to weaken while that of individualism has begun to be more widely accepted. Money worship, utilitarianism and hedonism have not only have penetrated into Chinese values but have also gained greater popularity and traction in society.

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