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The Influences of Parental Expectations on Children's Academic Achievements: A Comparative Analysis of the United States and China

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

THE INFLUENCES OF PARENTAL EXPECTATIONS ON CHILDREN'S
ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENTS:
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE UNITED STATES AND CHINA

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

PROGRAM IN CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL POLICY STUDIES

BY

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ABSTRACT

Parenting is very important to children, and it directly or indirectly influences children's outcomes in schools. Parents express passions and strong desires to help their children to succeed regardless of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status, and they are highly interested in their children's education in school.

This paper is concerned with parental expectations for school-aged children in the United States and China under the influences of historical, cultural and social context. I will comprehensively compare relevant literature parts in both America and China, determining the distinctions in terms of various parenting patterns. Research about parental expectations in the two countries will help me to better understand the differences of parental involvement in education and understand some problems and phenomena in current society. The methodology is based on theoretical/conceptual literature, and it is not an empirical study.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Parenting is a process of promoting and supporting a child's comprehensive development including physical, emotional, intellectual and social from infancy to adulthood ("parenting," n. d.). It is also regarded as a set of parental beliefs, attitudes and expectations. According to Bookcock (1972) and Vollmer (1986), parents' expectations have major effects on children's academic performances. Traditionally, there are some attempts at defining parental expectations from school's perspective. Specifically, parents' expectations can be understood as a variety of parental behaviors that directly or indirectly influence children's academic performances.

When studying the parents' expectations of children's academic achievements in the United States and China, it is necessary to determine whether there are differences in such expectations and what causes these differences. For instance, the historical and cultural factors in the United States and China are quite different and they affect parents' attitudes and expectations toward children's education (Chen, 2001).

This thesis is divided into several sections, beginning with the purpose of the study. In this paper, the primary research question is to determine how parents' expectations are conceptualized in the US and China in relation to children's academic achievements under the historical, cultural, social backgrounds.

Purpose of the Study

It is my intent with this thesis to learn more about parents' expectations in children's educational achievements in the United States and China. The agreement of parents and children's expectations on education is also significant, primarily as a result of understanding relationships between parents and children. Furthermore, I want to learn more about what factors affect parents' expectations in both countries and their effects in current society.

The purpose of the study is to examine the influences of parenting expectations on children's academic achievements with a theoretical framework from the past literature. This theoretical framework helps to indicate the differences of the historical and cultural factors that play a significant role in children's academic achievements in the United States and China. From this position, the contexts of the parental expectations on economic, cultural, and social will be compared between the two countries.

Methodology

This is a conceptual and theoretical project and is not an empirical. It consists of historical, cultural and sociological examinations of parenting patterns in American and Chinese literature on the children's school outcomes. The research attempts to connect integrated, existing theories from a careful, systemic analysis of a variety of data such as journal articles, history documents and other written materials. The data to be analyzed comes from the literature of parental expectations as to purposes and goals of students' academic achievements in the U.S. and China. The methodology involves engagement in the creative process combined with thorough understanding of the theoretical/conceptual contexts of the work and its implications.

Research Question

The following research questions will be used to determine how the different conceptualizations of parental expectations in the United States and China affects students' achievements in schools:

1. How are parental expectations conceptualized in the U.S. in relation to children's schooling under historical, cultural and social context?
2. How are parental expectations conceptualized in China in relation to children's schooling in historical cultural and social context?
3. What are the outcomes/findings from the parental expectations in the US and China under these contexts?

CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF RESEARCH LITERATURE

Introduction

My theoretical approach was to bring together literature from different scholars under the historical, economic, cultural and sociological contexts, which address the relationship between parental expectations and children's academic achievements. This literature review will begin with the definition of parental expectations.

Defining Parental Expectation & Academic Achievement

The term "parental expectations" has already appeared in much literature. According to Boocock (1972), parents' expectations affect child's academic performances. In order to further clarify the definition, Seginer (1983) pointed that it typically referred to parents' desires or wishes regarding their children's future attainments in schooling. In other words, children's future achievements are defined as reflected in course grades, college attendances or highest level of schooling attained (Goldenberg, 2001).

The term "academic achievement" is conceptualized as academic competence and is defined as an individual's complete performance in schooling (Dweck & Elliott, 1983). It also refers to belief in one's abilities and is mediated by self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). For example, academic, business, or athletic abilities with higher beliefs of self-efficacy produce better outcomes than those with lower-efficacy. Thus, students in the United

States and China who had the belief of self-efficacy to train themselves, to improve cognitive skill, and to acquire the necessary support from parents, teachers, and friends performed well in schools. Many scholars studied the correlation between parental expectations and the student achievements, and parental expectations have been suggested to have effects on their children's achievements. This common sense notion has been proved by prior research and has been "confirmed in numerous studies over multiple decades"(Carpenter, 2008, p.165).

Historical Context

In this section, historical perspective of parental expectations will be placed into a larger social and cultural context. As one historian notes, "understanding the historical background and the socioeconomic setting of family changes helps turn down the heat on discussion of many family issues" (Coontz, 1997, p.7).

United States

I begin with parents' expectations about children's achievements and parents' beliefs in regard to children's school achievements in the United States, drawing on diverse approaches by different scholars to the parental expectations throughout American history. In general, many historians have agreed that parental expectations have changed. Mintz (2006) in his book *Huck's Raft* gave a comprehensive description of American childhood. Coontz (1997), worked on long-term changes in family history and has also collected information on children, examines two centuries of American family life. Both scholars devoted to increase people's awareness of conditions related to various family types and parental behaviors, which help people to know whether history offers any values to today's families. They also provided a meaning for exploring the role

of American traditional family in contributing to procreation, child-rearing, and parent-child relations. To study the changes of parental expectations, it is necessary to understand the historical context of different time periods. One reason for this is that parental expectations are closely connected with the broader political and social contexts of the nation. As Mintz (2006) demonstrated, the young in the past had to struggle with high rates of family instability compared with the children in today's society. He also explained that families performed many functions in the economic, political and religious and other aspects in society. In the past, a child's social worth was often determined in terms of their economic values of the family (Li, 2003). Children were important to families, but not in the same way as today. Mintz (2006) and Morgan (1944) mentioned that the Puritan family was a typical example. During the seventeenth century, parental expectation was oriented around serving God and they treated education as "God's ordinary way for conveyance of his grace"(Mintz, 2006, p.21). Morgan (1944) says that the Puritan parents had the duties to provide religious trainings for their children with writing and reading, and they were also expected to provide skills that to make their children as useful as adults in the future.

In the early modern period, schooling was so expensive that most families were not willing to pay large amounts of money for their sons and daughters. In England and its colonies, parents began to send their sons to schools to learn popular literacy as a matter of course, which it was an important change in that society. However, their daughters could not accept this kind of treatment (Main, 1991). "Traditional female roles did not require such skills, and powerful prejudices worked to inhibit the public exercise

of trained intelligence by women” (Main, 1991, p.580). Even though women had opportunities to learn and teach, their literacy levels were still limited.

In the postwar period, Fass (2011) and Grossberg (2012) argued that the changes of family are huge, saying that the childhood is being recreated. Fass (2011) and Mintz (2006) indicated that many children didn't think that their primary goals were to serve their families, their countries or God. They had freedom to live based on their inclinations and interests. However, this freedom period for children ended by the 1980s and 1990s and their parents offered less freedom of physical movements and less room to explore alternatives to them (Fass, 2011). The reason for this was due to parental anxieties about children's futures, and “this anxiety has become the governing temper of American child rearing today”(Fass, 201, p.14). Grossberg (2012) also said that conceptions of childhood had been transformed due to many social and political developments, since the end of the World War II. Because of these anxieties, parents expected their children to become more competitive and began to send them to into the colleges and universities in the 1950s. The growing dependence on schooling and the fear of failing in the society also meant that parents had to circumscribe their children's behaviors in new ways.

Mintz (2006) also agree with their points and argues that the growing of parents' anxiety is excessive. He pointed out that parents who got most educated also had the most anxious about today's competitive culture, and that they are obsessed with investing in their children's successes. He also said that parents prepared extracurricular activities and test tutoring for them too. Compared with the 1950s, parents hoped their children to be normal and successful, but not as today (Mintz, 2006). The reason is that parents view their kids as extensions of their own ego (Mintz, 2006). Similarly, Doherty (2000) brings

some concerns. He expressed that some parents don't want to become authoritarian and demanding type of parents to push their children but hope to discover their gifts, so they become too indulgent of their spur-of-the-moment desires. Sometimes, the situation unexpectedly turns to permissiveness. However, Georgiou (1999) still insist that American parents tend to have more flexible expectations and put less pressure on their children to achieve academic success, which is opposite with Mintz (2006)'s discourse.

China

Chinese people also went through a long period of patriarchy that is the similar to American history. According to Hsiung (2005), "these individual accounts refer to a mode of passing knowledge and skills from the older men to the younger generation. The general pattern of cultural transmission and social relations featured parents in an increasingly personal, engaging and physically intimate fashion" (p.112). Fathers and other male family members took responsibilities for personal transmitting and supervising. The needs of boys to make a living, and this occurred during the early age of childhood, usually before the boys reached seven or nine. For elite families, this meant starting their children to a literary education.

Girls also have lower status in society and cannot get as much attention as boys in Chinese traditional society. However, in disagreement with most Neo Confucian writings, Hsiung (2005) unveiled some important findings with respect to treatments and education of girls. Firstly, girls were not treated differently from boys in terms of material life such as food and clothing from parents under normal circumstances. In fact, this "discriminatory" treatment of young girls unexpectedly contributed to the development of "a daughter loving" culture (p.203). "Late imperial Chinese parents tended to be warmer

and more lenient in their treatment and training of young girls” (p.199). This challenges a stereotypical assumption that in patriarchal society in traditional China, parents favored sons and therefore invested more both materially and emotionally in them. Also, the parents’ lack of high expectations for daughters allowed girls to enjoy childhood and free from the harsh punishments more than boys. In agreement with Hsiung, Bai (2008) also found some unexpected effects brought to children under the influences of Confucian. There are some materials which provided that children in Ming-Ching China liked to painting, reading non-Confucians books and playing and acting as their nature. Although the Confucian doctrines appeared to be defied in some extent, it still had profound influences to the whole society of China until the emergence of education reforms.

Chinese parents seem to have the same worries as the American parents who are criticized by Mintz (2006), and this anxiety does not seem to let up from Sui Dynasty onwards. The Confucian philosophy placed scholars in a position of prominence and prestige in history. According to an old proverb, “scholars are respected above all”. In addition, examinations were the only criterion for selection of intellectuals for the government services (Chen, 1988), and it remains the primary path to the success in contemporary China. In history, hundreds of students needed ten years to prepare examinations which were only held every three years in the capital and lasted one to two weeks. To be qualified to take this examination, students must have passed similar examinations at the local and provincial levels. The opportunity for the students and their families to take these examinations was probably the most important event in the lives. Therefore, scholarly attainment was highly respected with many years’ of hard work (Chen, 2001). Education in China has always been an extremely important meaning of

personal advancement, and it was considered as an important route to upward mobility. Because of this educational conception, many parents in contemporary China expressed that their most glorious dreams are that their children would be able to test into colleges. Kipnis (2011) in his book *Governing Educational Desire* pointed out that most Chinese parents regard going to colleges as the only way to prove their children are better than others. Moreover, they are taught that study and high educational achievement are important forms of self-improvement. They have strong desires to develop children's "talent" because they in general they emphasized excellence in academic achievements as a crucial goal in their children's advancements and developments (Salili, Chiu, & Hong, 2001). Chan (2005) also found that Chinese parents are willing to contribute everything to support their children academic achievements.

Cultural Context

Although many researchers have studied the relationship between parental expectations and students' achievements in different ways, in this paper, I examine how parental expectations may influence the level of academic achievements of children under the two cultures. Culture pervasively influences human thoughts and behaviors from generation to generation. Although students' academic roles and behaviors are culturally influenced, students and educators may not totally appreciate such effects.

United States

Lareau (2003) in her book also expressed that each individual is responsible for his or her life outcome and this belief is accepted by the vast majority of Americans no matter if they are rich and poor. Georgiou (1999) agreed and said American culture

usually is regarded as independence and individualism in terms of childrearing and education. The achievement in western culture tends to be conceptualized as individual and self-defining in schools or in work places (Elliot & Dweck, 2005). With respect to child rearing, Chua (2011) in her book *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* said that American parents provide positive reinforcements and a nurturing environment to children, respect their individuality, support and encourage their passions. The degrees of autonomy of culture in western countries are quite different than with other countries. As the National Science Board Commission on Precollege Education In Mathematics, Science and Technology (1991) has states, “American students and its education system are much less culturally homogeneous than those of other countries” (Chen, 2001, p.306).

On the other hand, Crowley (2009) demonstrated that parenting styles are helpful to understand children’s complex behaviors and attitudes associated with academic outcomes. Brown and Iyengar (2008) stated that parenting styles are often adapted by previous generations and are passed down by culture. Scholars divided it into three categories: permissive, authoritative, and authoritarian since 1960s (Baumrind 1971; Darling& Steinberg, 1993; Kawamura, Frost &Harmatz, 2002).

They defined the authoritative parenting style as “certain democratic practices”, and it means that parents offer more supports and care to children’s preferences and encourage them to express their own opinions, and most parents are easygoing. Based on Gwen Dewar’s theory (2011-2013), American parenting can be called the authoritative parenting style because it cares for kids and is responsive to their emotional needs. Kim (2009) also measured the outcomes of the two categories. She pointed out that authoritative parents have more positive outcomes than authoritarian parenting style in

regards to academic achievement and attainment, academic pressure, and parent-child relationship. This is common in the western countries such as the United States and Australia.

China

As an ancient civilization, the attitudes toward Chinese education were strongly influenced by Confucian philosophy in history. “The Confucian doctrines cultivate yourself, regulate your family, govern well your state, and then order well the kingdom” (Chen, 1988, p.354). Li and Dewar (2011) stated that under the influence of Confucian culture, learning is regarded as a moral endeavor, ability is considered to be an accumulation of skills and knowledge, and education became part of the Confusion tradition. For example, Confucius believed that the general population should and could be educated. As Confucius wrote, “In teaching there should be no distinction of classes” (Legge, 1966, p. 235). This means that the self-improvement is relevant to educational achievement. The Chinese parents believe that the best way to support their children is preparing them for the learning; therefore, children suffered the early control, strict learning, and harsh punishments under the influences of Neo Confucian from the Late Imperial Period (Hsiung, 2005). Children in this period were encouraged to begin their academic developments early, and this presented most adults’ views about how children should act and behave (Hsiung, 2005).

It is generally agreed that Chinese culture is more collective and less individualistic than the United States (Triandis, 1989). First, Chinese people are often described as obedient and malleable due to the traditional cultural value (Chen, 2011). Second, they do care what other people think and how they evaluate them. Third, the

group identification is an important value relevant to educational achievement. Parents and other family members assume their primary responsibilities are teaching and disciplining children, and a child's achievement therefore is considered to reflect the efforts of the entire family or community. However, this kind of sensitivity toward social evaluation has negative effects. For instance, it causes children feel more pressure on their studies because their parents may feel shame if their children don't enter a good college or get better scores in schools. In turn, and the children will feel ashamed of themselves, develop low self-confidence may have other physiological illness.

Additionally, Chinese families are more likely to emphasize the value of respect for parental authority than western cultures. Family patterns in China are outlined by a path toward social harmony which are generated by parental expectations throughout childhood and good relationships with peers in adolescence (Steinberg, et, al. 1994). In contrast, family patterns in the United States take steps with the final goal of accomplishing the child's individuality and independence.

Compared with the American parenting style, Chinese parenting is described as authoritarian, which is less responsiveness and leads to higher depression and lower self-esteem. Chinese parenting is relatively regarded as authoritarian compared to American parenting, and they may have lots of psychological controls with little nurturing to their children. Chinese parents rarely encourage their children kids to express their own opinions, especially when they disagreed with their parents (Dewar, 2011). "Tiger mother" is a very typical phenomenon in Chinese parenting style and is especially lodged in certain culture stereotypes about an Asian parenting style. The nature outcome of this is that they make kids who felt more academic pressure, alienated from their parents and

experienced higher depression.

Additionally, many researchers agreed that the traditional approach to Chinese parenting isn't just about strict rules. Moral development is one of the most important characteristics in Confucian philosophy. Therefore, parents view controlling and monitoring children's activities as an act of love and which will benefit them in the future. One example of the traditional Chinese parents to express their expectations is through "Chiao shun" (training children in an appropriate expected behaviors) and "guan" (to love and to govern). Wu and Tseng (1985) stress that children's learning is a major responsibility of parents, and Chao (1994) said that Chinese parents pay more attention to training children and set higher academic standards in a family. On the other hand, the images of the ideal child under the philosophy were discouraged to have physical activities and outdoor play.

However, it is not appropriate to stereotype these parents. For instance, authoritative parents also live in China, and in other places, these positive elements in authoritative style may be absent in some western countries.

Scholars broadly expressed some concerns about the variety of cultural aspects in the two countries. Markus and Kityama (2003) noted the American cultural orientation toward independence. Furthermore, according to Jullien (2004), the basic difference between Western and Chinese thought is that Chinese constructs a model that "is projected onto the situation, which implies that the situation is momentarily 'frozen'. The other relies on a disposition that is known to be constantly evolving" (p.189). Similarly, Hayhoe (1984) expressed the view that she thought Chinese educational reformers were hampered by the limited framework in which they could operate. They were trying to

maintain the traditional pattern although infusing it with new and alien ideas.

Societal Context

Most of people in society have various identities, such as male, female, race, upper or middle class and so on, and some of them are regarded as privileged groups and others belong to oppressed groups. These identities are important for individuals to shape their behaviors, attitudes and experiences. The consideration of these identities is often called as intersectionality. According to Ballantine and Spade (2012) “school class can be treated as an agency of socialization” (p.36). Therefore, there are other factors affect students’ academic achievements such as social structure, gender and ethnicity. Much of the sociological work on expectations was rooted in the status-attainment literature and focused on the effects of social class on expectations (Alexander, 2009). The value of parents’ and children’s educational goals is conceptualized to be the result of the family socialization process and is transmitted across generations (Kerckhoff, 1989; Smith, 1982). In the following, I will examine the effects of the social economic context and gender heritage to parental expectations.

United States

In the book *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life*, Lareau (2003) argued that these aspects such as gender, class, race, and personal life experiences lead to different parental expectations and lead to the two types of child rearing: concerted cultivation in middle class parents and natural growth in working class parents. Explicitly, Lareau (2003) demonstrated that middle -class parents who are engaged in the process of concerted cultivation tend to adopt a cultural logic of child rearing that stresses the concerted cultivation of children. Working class and poor parents tend to undertake

the accomplishment of natural growth, and middle class parents require their children to make independent decisions (Lareau, 2003). Under the effects of concerted cultivation, middle –class parents try to cultivate their children’s developments and foster their cognitive and social skills in a way that complies with professional standards. They patiently talk to their children and instruct them in what to expect and how to overcome difficulties. Consequently, they realize that if their children are going to get ahead, they must be capable of make decisions independently (Lareau, 2003). This is why they expend so many efforts in encouraging self-direction. On the contrary, Working class parents’ jobs involve following what others tell them to do. They are then expected to conform to demands. Once they get home, however, they intend to be the boss. It is now their children who are required to be obedient (Lareau, 2003). However, this does not encourage decision-making abilities that might later facilitate social mobility.

Although most American people disagree about the importance of social class in daily life, they agree that the society is best understood as a collection of individuals. They believe that people who demonstrate hard work, efforts, and talents are likely to achieve upward mobility. In this view, children should have equal opportunities, and it rejects the notions that parents’ social location systematically shapes children’ life experiences and outcomes (Lareau, 2003). However, some social scientists acknowledge that there are systemic forms of inequality, for example, differences in parents’ educational levels, occupational prestige and incomes, as well as in their child-rearing experiences.

As mentioned before, gender is also a sociological aspect which affects parental expectations. In reviewing the historical perspectives of women’s educational

experiences in the United States, it appears that expectations for girls in schools have been different than for boys. Historically, girls were restricted from have the same opportunities in education as boys and were raised to assume specific roles in society such as nursing or teaching (Madigan, 2009). Nowadays, the positions and options for girls have increased dramatically because of a series of legal documents.

China

According to Lareau (2003) 's theory, most middle -class Chinese parents behave as the Americans' working class parenting style. They hope their children will be obedient and follow their parents' values. Because of the ways of child rearing, Chinese kids in middle-class families have to face more pressure in schools compared to their western peers. Most of parents (3/4 of Chinese parents) expect their children to earn postgraduate degrees (2009). Hannum, Kong and Zhang (2009) pointed out that parental educational expectations represent a motivation toward higher educational outcomes in the long run. Parental expectations are based on an assessment of the child's academic capabilities as well as the available resources for supporting a given level of achievement. In terms of younger generations, the scholars expressed that parental expectations are a key mechanism by which parental socioeconomic status is transmitted to them. For instance, middle class children are performing better, because these parents build a good social network or use monetary influences in order to let their children have access to schools. Therefore, unlike the western-orientated and commonly modern sense of a child, the concept of "child" in Chinese society could also be understood and represented as a social status (Wang, Pomerantz, &Chen, 2007).

Another outcome of the cultural values and social structures is the preference of

parents to have a son. Cultural traditions seemed to be the fundamental to this problem, since culture became an easy way to legitimize and justify inequality (Johan, 1990, p. 293). This conceptualization of parental expectations based on a child's gender role continues to shape parental incentives for educating children today, especially in rural area of China. First, the patrilineal family structure dominates rural areas and reinforces a traditional norm that parents should rely on their sons for offspring. Second, sociologists and anthropologists find that a woman needs to have sons in order to secure her position in the family, even in the modern times. Third, because of the poor economic conditions, families heavily rely on sons. Accordingly, Hannum and Park (2007) analyzed that the expectations of parents and their economic conditions influence the amount and quality of investments in schooling and the returns. As a result, parental satisfaction is determined by children's future outcomes and returns to the household, and they bet it all on colleges for their children because they think the investment is worthwhile. Therefore, most parents devote more to their sons than daughters in education and expect to have a larger return from them no matter if the cost of education is higher or the access to school is less. Therefore, boys in rural areas take huge burdens because they take lots of responsibility for paying back their parents. On the other hand, due to the effect of parental preferences to better educate sons, marriages are the desired outcomes for girls more than careers or going to colleges. Nowadays, there are some changes to girls' education, such that parents are willing to invest more to their education despite the returns. However, the purpose to secure a good marriage does not change.

CHAPTER THREE

OUTCOMES

There are some outcomes produced by the parental expectations of the two countries with the influences of the different contexts which has been discussed so far in this paper. In the following part, some examples will be provided to explain how the different parental expectations perform in relation to schooling.

Beliefs of Education

In a cross-cultural comparison of parental expectations, individuals learn respectively in terms of their beliefs that have been generated from history. I will explore the culturally based beliefs that parents have about their own roles in schools.

United States

Western intellectual tradition reflects Socratic beliefs and methods. According to Hess and Azuma (1991), most American students study for themselves. They are socialized to rely on their own curiosity, intrinsic motivation, mental independence, task efficiency, and creativity. In the last decade, “there has been a renewed national focus on the role that families play in their children’s educational development” (Mapp, 2003, p.36). Mapp (2003) also stressed that many parents in the United States view intense academic trainings as inappropriate and detrimental for their children. Instead they wanted their children to feel a sense of joy in learning and believe that school is special. Based on significant prior research, there is a strong link between educational benefits to

children and various forms of family involvement. Some examples include encouragement to succeed academically, help with homework, and participations in volunteers and governance activities. Li (2001) expressed that most Americans often view learning as a process of acquiring the abilities, interests and engagements. Knowledge is gained to understand the world and accomplish one's goals.

In contrast to the Chinese parents, many American parents did not want to stress academic achievements with their children. For instance, in a past study, the European American parents specifically stated that academic achievements were not important for their children's overall developments, and this should not be a central trust or concern for parenting (Hess and Holloway, 1984). Some European American parents did not want to stress academics because they believed that this would ruin children's appreciation for learning. They wanted their children to feel that learning is fun and excited instead of something you work at. Moreover, European American parents also did not stress academic skills. In fact, they felt that social skills were more important, especially when the child is younger. They also felt that academic skills would not necessarily promote learning in general or the learning process. Even, they believed that stressing academics could have a negative impact on their children's self-esteem and could be more problematic rather than complementary or necessary. Additionally, children's school performances should not be the focus of their parenting. The parents' primary responsibilities are to foster or build their children's self-esteem. The belief that learning is fostered when children are allowed to experience their environments, and this belief may cause many parents to take less directive roles in their children's schoolwork and

learning. As Hess and Holloway (1984) explained, this belief involves “proving the raw material of experience so the child’s own active learning process can take over” (p.194). Children are provided with a creative environment to explore various experiences. This facilitative approach involves the idea that learning is more of a natural, innate process that is within child.

China

Chinese intellectual tradition is largely influenced by Confucian beliefs, which are also very prevalent in general in Chinese culture. Chinese students are taught that a deficiency can be overcome with diligence from their childhood by parents and schools, and this belief is considered to be a major contributing factor to success. For most Chinese students, their purposes of learning are mainly to perfect themselves socially and to satisfy their parents. As one Chinese said, “education is a family thing,” and this was conveyed in a number of ways.

On the other hand, for most Chinese parents, their children’s school performances are among their major responsibilities. One of measurements of the success of parental involvement is children’s good performance in schools. Further, parents hope that their children will achieve maximum success in society as they expected. Chinese parents strongly recognize that learning and schooling definitely involve hard work and efforts and are necessary for their children’s overall future successes, especially in attaining careers and social mobility. On the other hand, parents feel that they need to provide direct teaching or tutoring by checking over their children’s homework, having them redo homework, assigning to extra supplementary work, and having their children attend study

groups or after-school academic programs. Generally, Chinese parents place much stress on their children's self-esteem. In addition, Chinese parents emphasize mastery of specific academic skills and high performances, and direct parental involvement may be regarded as relevant and perhaps necessary to ensure that these objectives are met. Although many studies point that parents' high expectations can explain Chinese children's successes, they have also revealed the importance of parental involvement and investment in schooling.

In general, the emphasis on the importance of a well-rounded learning is that the process of learning is more important than the outcome. Chinese parents want well performing children, whereas American parents want well-rounded children, emphasizing both social skills and self-esteem of children.

Expectations of Degrees

United States

In a decade and a half old study, the ideal educational attainment level of children for European American and Latino parents was graduating from colleges (Okagaki, 1998). In other words, European American and Latino parents don't like to put too much pressure on their children, and it is enough if their kids can get some college education. For European American parents, the lower requirements were high school graduation, and the minimum requirements were some colleges for Latino parents (Okagaki, 2001).

China

Most Chinese parents have higher educational expectations for their children. They expected their children to graduate from colleges, and the minimum educational

attainments they set for their children are college graduations. Compared to other parents mentioned above, Chinese parents expect their children to stay in schools longer and have highest expectations on school performances. For instance, Chinese parents were less satisfied with grades of B and C. (Okagaki, 2001). Carpenter (2008) also found that Chinese students are more likely to obtain higher grade point average in colleges although their parents had low levels of education and socioeconomic status. In another study, it was found that both Chinese parents and students pay more attention to science education than their American peers. Generally speaking, Chinese parents put greater emphasis, set higher standards, and encourage and help their children to get further study and higher degrees.

Performances in Schools

Another significant outcome that results from the different expectations between American parents and Chinese parents, which have been discussed thus far, is student performance in schools.

United States

American students spend more time in non-school related activities, such as working household chores or having a volunteer job. American parents believe success in schools depend on many aspects rather than only academic performances, and they are more likely to encourage kids to participate in activities unrelated to academic achievements.

China

Conversely, Chinese students make more efforts toward their school coursework,

and they spend more time on academic activities to improve their academic abilities, such as music or language lessons, private tutoring, and after-school study groups (Kao, 1995).

CHAPTER FOUR

DISCUSSIONS

Although there are significant differences between Chinese and American writings about parental expectations for education, it is also possible to draw comparisons between the two countries. In China, the concept of achievement includes a socially oriented component that is absent in American conception of achievement motivation, and education is a metaphor for governing and a tool of governing. The first suggestion of the study is that we can tell parents that it is important for their children to do well in schools because good performances in schools will help their children to get better jobs as adults or be more successful in life. However, parents have different ideas about what it means to do well in schools. If parents' expectations are to be translated into meaningful improvements in children's school achievements, then educators need to be very clear about what aspects needed to be improved.

Additionally, it is found that the differences of parental expectations between the two countries significantly reflected by culture and socioeconomic factors from the study. The cultural differences impact these findings such as enjoy schooling, excellent performances, aspirations, try hard learn, strong parental encouragements, and obeying parents. Most American students enjoy studying and have aspirations and motivations, but they care less about excellent learn in schooling. Oppositely, Chinese students more

prefer to have higher academic achievements. In fact, the Chinese students always feel shame when they make mistakes in a class or cannot answer questions in terms of the concept of “enjoy learning”. It indicates that they are not willing to show their academic abilities to others. For example, most Chinese students do not raise their hands to give an answer to a question in the classroom even if they know the answers. It is suggested that Chinese parents increase more awareness to cultivate their interests and self-esteem in learning, because parental involvement plays a significant role for student learning when they are out of school. In other words, Chinese parents may try to learn the authoritative style to their children.

However, it cannot be said that the authoritarian parenting style has no benefits. Although it is no doubt that American parenting style stand out in other parts of the world. Thus, it is suggested that American parents learn something from their counterparts in the world, such as Chinese parents. There are some studies showed that American students obtained benefits with the authoritarian style (Dewar, 2010-2013). Therefore, It may be suggested that the combination of the two parenting styles may yield more advantages for both American and Chinese students. However, there are other complicated and dynamic factors also affect children’ high academic achievements. For example, there might be other parenting styles that lead Chinese students to have great academic performances rather than the authoritative parenting style.

Conclusion

Parental expectation is an important factor that has a direct relationship with students’ school performances. The important determinant for children’s educational

achievements is parental influence, because it provides economic resources to achieve higher goals, serves as a role model, encourages specific targets, and recognizes and praises appropriate behaviors. In other words, if parents exert influences to create opportunities, support children's learning and involve themselves in learning activities, then children will actively participate in these learning activities (Epstein, 1988).

The study shows that parental expectations are generally associated with students' academic performances and play a critical role in children's academic success. The degree of parental expectations is perceived by students of different cultural/ethnic groups and has a direct impact on children's academic performances from historical periods. The theoretical literature helps to explore the parental expectations in the production of student achievements. When I consider several definitions of parental expectations, it is obvious that the parental involvement mainly relates to modeling behaviors of parents that have proved to affect children's school outcomes and well being by showing these types of behaviors.

Because of the emphasis on education in culture, it is reasonable to believe that Chinese students are likely to perceive a higher level of parental educational expectation than Americans. A study showed that even American born Chinese parents still keep some traditional cultural value and authoritarian parenting style to raise their children, and it is obvious that the influences of culture is a major effect (Chen, 2001). In addition, Chinese beliefs revealed a virtue orientation, human malleability and self-improvement, which lead to a typical character in educational endeavors. Therefore, Chinese children believe that improving their academic performances is the only way to be successful.

It is acknowledged that China is rapidly changing, and it adjusts to an increasing global society of the influences of the West. As Chinese society continues to evolve, students will learn and appropriate some advantages from the western countries. In so doing, Chinese students will not lose their identity; instead, they will develop their own versions of the meanings and practices that emerge from their exchanges with other cultures. The reason for this is that the “educational attainment is a form of social desire that is manipulated by political elites for various purposes and both transformed and reproduced by new forms of media” (Kipnis, 2011, p.97). As new educational terrain continues, it is important to look back because it is helpful for people to learn the family issues from these historians and social scientists, and it is also beneficial for understanding complex behaviors and attitudes that are associated with children’s academic outcomes.

Limitations

There are many limitations in this study. First, the study uses theoretical approaches of comparisons of parental expectations and their influences to children’s academic achievements in the United States and China. I only focus on the comparisons of the broad levels/contexts between the U. S. and China, and I do not deeply explore the similarities and differences with any typical studies.

The second limitation is that the causes of parental expectations are only captured by social and gender in societal factors, and there is lacking of ethnicity literature which is related to parental expectations. Third, the studies I found are older and the results may not reflect current situations. Lastly my study is not an empirical research design so it

will be a challenge to completely reliably make the comparison.

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Currently Xiaoyu lives in Chicago, Illinois and she will get back to China after graduation.

