



Faculty of **Education**
The University of Hong Kong



Comparative
Education
Research Centre

Revisiting Tiger Parenting:

From Cultural Essentialism to Multiple Frames of Reference

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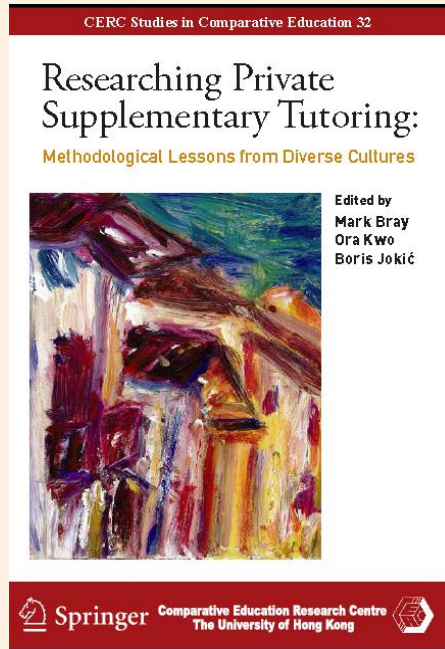
June 8, 2022

Since 1999,
a series of books by CERC
members were published on
shadow education

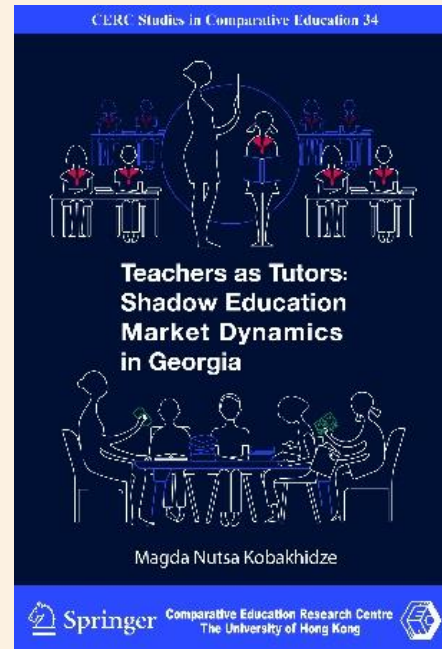


Comparative Education
Research Centre (CERC)

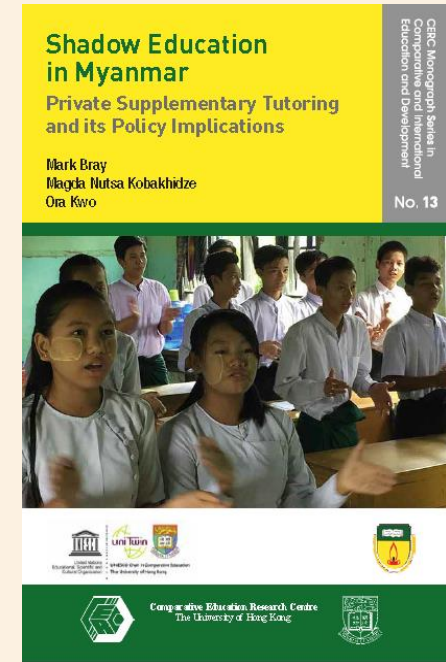
Shadow Education



2015
Methodological
lessons



2018
Shadow Education
in Georgia



2020
Shadow Education
in Myanmar/Burma

Agenda

- **01 Topic Overview**
Previous literature & gaps
- **02 Methodology**
The context, methods, procedures and participants
- **03 Findings**
Major themes and topics
- **04 Conclusions**
Major conclusions and directions



01

Topic Overview

Amy Chua's 2011 book "Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother"

Spurred discussions on Chinese/Asian parenting

- Received media and public attention
- Colloquially used to refer intensive parenting
- Etymology of the term and symbolism
 - Protective mother, strong community leader (Ortiz, 2009)
 - Symbol of willpower, courage confidence and personal strength



TV drama series
Tiger Mom
(China)



TV drama series
Sky Castle
(South Korea)



Criticism



Culture Clash

- Promoted a cultural clash framework similar to Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations* and Benjamin Barber's *Jihad vs. McWorld* (Rhee, 2013)
- Resonated with “decline of the West” narratives (Ho, 2017)

Ethnicisation

- Facilitated negative stereotyping of Chinese parenting as “aggressive” ethnocentric narratives (Chao, 1994)
- “Ethnicisation of educational achievement” (Butler et al, 2017)
- Reduced parenting to ethnic categories (Ho, 2017)
- Considered East Asia as “negative reference societies” (Takayama, 2018)

Alternative Explanations

- Social class (Carey, 2015; Ho, 2017; Zhang, 2020)
- Strategies for social reproduction i.e. middle class advantage (Bourdieu, 1998; Tan, 2017; Sriprakash et al., 2015)
- Changes in global conditions (Doepke & Zilibotti, 2019)
- Individual level factors: “narcissistic pleasure from success and investment” (Katz, 2018)



Definition

- A loose concept constructed by Amy Chua
- Lack of broadly accepted definition. Assumption readers know it
- Authoritarian, controlling, harsh parent with strong discipline
- Often associated with Confucian heritage cultures

A mind-set or approach to parenting that displays most of the following characteristics:

- Carefully plans children's' lives
 - Invests extensive resources in educational activities
 - Has high expectations
 - Often ignores child agency
- We include both academic tutoring and extracurricular activities

Study focus: **Factors influencing tiger parenting in Hong Kong**

Social & Cultural

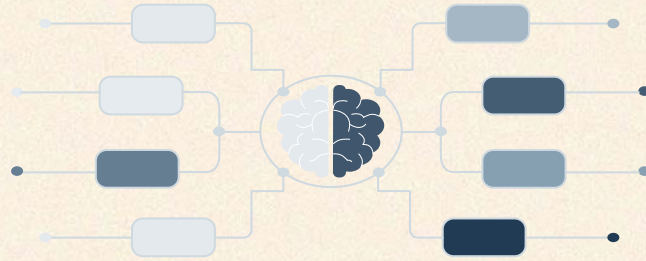
Whether parents regarded themselves as tiger parents

Economic

Reasons for choosing or not tiger parenting

Educational

Demand for private tutoring and extracurricular activities



02

Methodology

Hong Kong, May-July 2021

Research

Qualitative interview study. Maximum variation sampling. Zoom (69), Phone (10), WeChat (1)

Procedures

Cantonese (40), English (29), Mandarin (2), Japanese (9)
Average time: 39 minutes

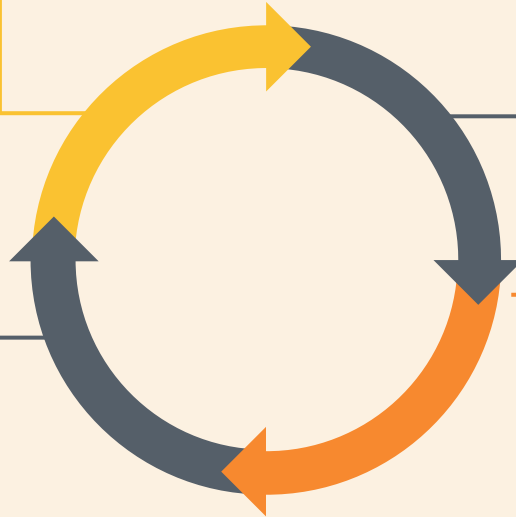
Participants

80 parents from local and international secondary schools

Data analysis

Audio-recorded, transcribed, translated, coded in Nvivo 12
Live blogging and analytical memoing

A background survey as an identifier of parents social class



Social Class Categories of Parents

Class Categories	Number	Percentage
Upper Middle Class	8	10 %
Middle Class	24	30 %
Low Middle Class	25	31.25 %
Working Class	23	28.75 %

- Family Income
- Level of Education
- Occupation

Hong Kong Census
and Statistics
Department Report

Social Class in
the 21st Century
(Savage et. al,
2015)

Other Characteristics



Ethnicity

- Local Chinese (45.6%)
- Mainland Chinese (16.3%)
- Chinese from elsewhere (5.6%)
- Anglophone (14.4%)
- East Asian (9.4%)
- South Asian (5.6%)
- European (3.1%)



Gender

Female
86.4%

Male
13.6 %



Schools

- International schools (30 parents)
- Local schools (50 parents)
 - Government
 - Aided
 - DSS



03

Findings

What is tiger parenting?

Negative Connotation

- A parent who fills children's time with activities,
- schedules children's time back to back, dominates their lives,
- gives no free time,
- too involved, directive, and prescriptive
- has a clear goal for their academic achievement,
- loses the balance and compromises their well-being

Positive Reflections

“tiger parenting is an expression of love”

“tiger parents set strict timetable for children, because they want to finish homework earlier to have free time for play and rest”

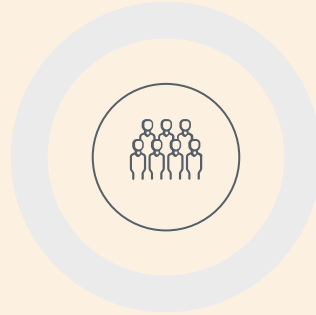


Variations & Beliefs



Parents who are willing
to negotiate

**Moderate version of tiger
parenting**



Degree of “tigerness”

“I am not tiger
enough”, “depends on
how tiger one is”



Meritocracy
Success story
Linear transition from good
education to good life

Belief

Tiger parenting as a belief



- A belief that one needs to control academic and social lives of children and not leave their success to chance
- A belief in tiger parenting as the right strategy
- A confidence about how life will unfold
- “Input-output model” of education

“I am! Yeah, I am! And I I don't even really know how that term is interpreted by different people. But to me, I'm trying to do my best. I'm trying to get my kids to do their best. Sometimes at the expense of their well-being to some extent.”

“Doing seems more assured than not doing, you know.”

A self-proclaimed tiger mother, Asian American

Is tiger parenting Asian or global phenomenon?

Parents

Mostly culturalist explanations

Chinese

Common in HK, mostly Chinese practice

Predominantly Asian

Chinese, Koreans, Japanese, Indians, Taiwanese and Singaporeans and other Asians are more likely to be tiger parents

Global

Increasingly global in big cities
High competition to get to universities
Common among immigrant families

Social Class

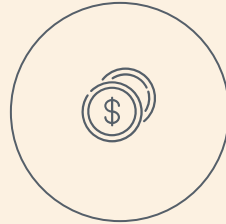
Monthly household expenditure on private tutoring and extracurricular activities combined

Upper Middle Class

HK\$13,800
(US\$1,762)

Middle Class

HK\$8,492
(US\$1,084)



Lower Middle Class

HK\$5,369
(US\$685)

Working Class

HK\$3,504
(US\$447)

Classed Patterns?

Academic tutoring versus extracurricular activities

- The lower-middle class and working class parents focused more on academic performance (society, competition, pressure from school)
- Upper middle class parents and middle class parents tended to adopt a more all-rounded approaches, rather than merely in academic terms (mostly international schools)
- Social class differences emerge in relation to resources and the capacity of parents to achieve tiger parenting goals
- See also new studies on Lareau's (2011) "concerned cultivation" such as Sjödin & Roman (2018) in Sweden, Mikus et al., (2021) in Germany and Ishizuka (2019) in USA.

Other Factors (system, societal and individual)

School-related Factors

Teachers encourage tiger parenting



"I think it's because of the schools. Schools put pressure on teachers who in turn put pressure on parents, [and] finally parents put pressure on students."



Increased competition

Admission to schools and universities

Peer Pressure

Social media



Generational Factors

Some replicated their own tiger parents, while other adopted an opposite path

Changing Times

More tiger parents now than before



"If we do not follow others or catch up to their pace, we might be left behind in the race"



Responsibility

Considered as "insurance" against uncertainties and risks in life

Changing Dynamics & Culture



- Tiger parenting is not static
- Global experiences of living, working, and raising children abroad
- Asian parents adopting more balanced approach to parenting and “happy childhood” philosophy (Li & Xie, 2017; Chan & Yeung, 2019)

“I used to be one [tiger mother]. I am more laid back now. When my kids were in primary school, I wished to explore their talents as soon as possible and I want to make sure that they could head to their goals as early as they can”.

“I was once a tiger mom. Yet I have fewer expectations for them as they grow older... You had many expectations of the children when they were small.... Now they are in secondary school and have developed their own ideas. I will conceal what I want them to do and simply encourage them.... sometimes it may lead to fights. What parents want isn't what children want so I have changed my attitudes a lot too. Sometimes I think parents nowadays have no choice.”



04

Conclusions

Conclusions



**Moving from
culturalist
explanations**

East versus West
binary

**Cross-cultural
practice**

Not exclusively
Chinese/Asian



**Function of an
economic capital**

Tiger parenting
requires family
wealth



Cross-class

Parents from
diverse
backgrounds
engage in tiger
parenting



Impact on Globalization

**Neo-liberal endorsement
of competition**

(Ho, 2017)



Children as “projects”

(Furedi, 2008)

**Common in industrialised
societies across the globe**

(Doepke & Zilibotti, 2019)



**Parents as portfolio
managers**

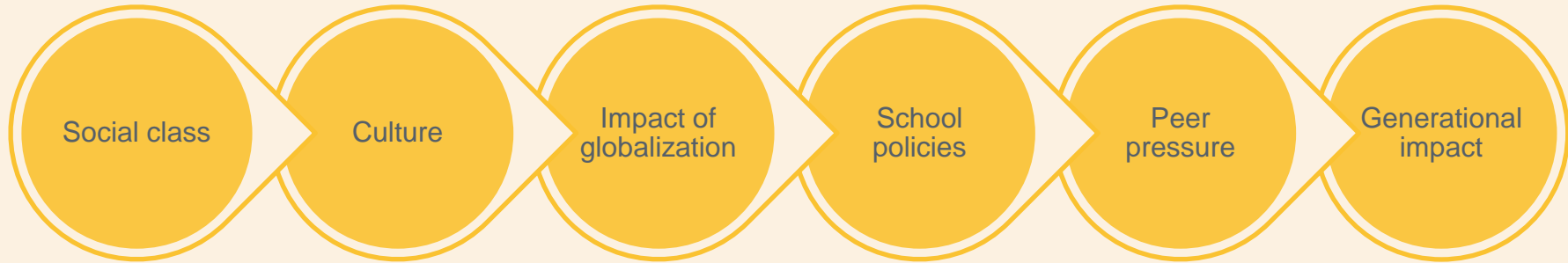
(DeWiele and Edgerton, 2016)

Role of social media Meyer
& Milestone, 2016



Responsibilisation
(Vincent and Maxwell,
2016)

From Cultural Essentialism to Multiple Frames of Reference





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