

# Cross-Cultural Education Journal



Discussions of Interest to Immigrants

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## Faith Lutheran Church

### For Whom do the Parents Work?

*“Welcome one  
another as  
Christ welcomed  
you, for the  
Glory of God.”*

Romans 15:7

CONFUCIUS TAUGHT  
THAT SUCCESS IN  
ACADEMIC LIFE IS  
THE MEASURE OF AN  
INDIVIDUAL AND  
REFLECTS THE  
HONORING OF  
MORAL OBLIGATIONS  
BETWEEN STUDENT  
AND TEACHER.

#### Introduction

Many immigrants, especially Asians, drive their children to excel in school. The children learn effective study habits that give them a good start toward higher education. However excessive pressures on children can impose a price paid by both the parents and the children. In this essay we examine positives and negatives of pushing children to excel academically and discuss effects on parents, children and society.

#### Historical Perspective on Asian Education

The cornerstone of much of Asian culture comes from the teachings of Confucius, the sixth-century BC philosopher. He taught that success in academic life is the measure of an individual and reflects the honoring of moral obligations between student and teacher.

Many Chinese believe that their children should pursue as much education as possible and obtain the highest degree in their field of endeavor. This is based on cultural values that have been passed on for thousands of years. Chinese people are deeply rooted in the belief that only by achieving the highest degree can they gain enough nobility, respect and dignity to enter affluent mainstream society. Thus, they force their children to study hard regardless of

the children's interests, abilities and energy.

#### Asian Approaches to Educating Children and Effects

As important as schooling is, oftentimes, in addition to regular studies in the classroom, parents arrange after-school classes and activities for their children. These might include Chinese language, mathematics, drawing, dancing, swimming and other athletic pursuits. The children can almost be thought of as ducks, being force-fed to fatten them up for market. Although there are certain benefits from additional learning and activities outside of formal education, children sometimes need to have periods during which they are not under pressure. They need time to relax, to play, to think for themselves; they need to re-group or recover. Otherwise they become like a battery that has been exhausted of electricity.

The method by which many Asian children are educated emphasizes rules and regulations. Children are told what they are not allowed to do and what they must ask permission for before doing. Parents believe that when children obey them, the education is successful. But this approach can also stifle creativity. The children learn to conform rather than to develop fresh approaches to solving problems. The children become like animals locked in cages.

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Once they finally get out, they are paralyzed with the level of conformity to which they have been conditioned. Asian culture is somewhat compelled by the ethic that with true effort one can succeed; if one is not achieving, one hasn't tried hard enough. Not getting straight A's in school is considered by some as not being "authentically Asian." This

attitude can be harmful to a student who is not brilliant, but may otherwise have the potential to be a productive member of society. In the worst case, the distressed student can be driven to mental problems perhaps even culminating in suicide due to low self-esteem.

Some Asian education methods have been based largely on rote memorization. This system may be effective in standardizing a high level of education for most students, but it does not encourage creativity or individuality.

### Effects on Parents

Many Asian parents believe that no matter how hard life is they should sacrifice for their children. They think no matter how difficult it is for them as parents, the struggle is worth it. They call it "the duty from heaven." They believe this to be an expression of love for their children. However some parents feel resentful because they are required "to be a horse and cow for their children."

During the Tang Dynasty in China (618 – 907 AD), a poet, Luo Yin, wrote "The Bee." In this poem one finds the line: "For whom does a bee work hard? For whom does the bee make honey?" In another poem is the line: "You save a lot by day, and suffer a lot, but when you have enough, you are dead."

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Chinese people often say one should "grow up in honey," meaning the parents should indulge the children. But coddling children can limit their development of independence. By sheltering the children, the parents may not be helping to prepare them to handle the stresses of

life. By being overly coddled, children may not de-

velop the spiritual strength they will need as adults. Chinese students may have great academic achievements, but they are less likely than Americans to travel the world by themselves or with a friend or two.

In addition to pushing their children to become educated, some Asian parents indulge them with material rewards. Also, they do not correct their children when they are wrong. From a Christian point of view, parents can take some direction regarding correction from various Bible readings. For Example, Leviticus 19:17-18 says "...Rebuke your neighbor frankly so that you will not share in his guilt... Love your neighbor as yourself." While this verse speaks of one's neighbor, it can also apply to one's child. In Revelation 3:19 the Lord says, "Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline." Both of these readings instruct that we show our love for others when we challenge their misbehavior so they can improve themselves. Thus, it is right for parents to correct their children to help guide them toward acceptable behavior.

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Chinese parents may work hard and sacrifice for their children to be successful, but they pay a big price. They might buy expensive clothes and other things for their children while not meeting their own needs. The parents spend so much of their time "making honey" for their children that they do not enjoy their own lives. When they busy themselves "making honey," do they really receive the sweetness of life?

### An Example of the Effects on Society

During the 1980s, it appeared that Japanese manufacturing competition would overwhelm the world. Japanese methods of statistical quality control allowed them to produce superior products. Several books were written about successful Japanese business practices. Even American companies sent executives to Japan to learn how to improve their own manufacturing processes. Actually, the Japanese had learned many of their quality control methods from an American, W. Edwards Deming, who, not finding favor for his ideas in America, offered his services to industrial leaders in Japan. When Doctor Deming died in 1993 at the age of 93, he was still active in industry. Perhaps his venerated age helped the Japanese to accept his teachings with such great success.

In 1989 the Japanese stock market crashed; since then their economy has been languishing and only recently has shown signs of recovering. Although the Japanese were successful in developing cheaper and better ways to manufacture high quality products, their industries have been hampered partly by regimentation and a lack of creativity in employees. Japan has had less entrepreneurship than one finds in the United States. Now many of the techniques used by Japanese industry to gain an edge are not as effective because competitors throughout the world have adopted them.

### **American Approaches to Educating Children**

Many immigrants from Europe in years past also sacrificed to provide education for their children. Sacrificing for one's offspring is not a trait unique to Asians.

Today good grades and high academic achievement are important to many Americans of European descent and others born here. Some may even be compelled as much as Asian immigrants, but the drive for success is usually not as strong for most of them. Americans tend to allow their children more freedom to pursue their own interests, rather than forcing them to accept a program of learning that parents insist upon. The danger in this is that some children may actually need more direction than they get. Americans generally put a high value on their children receiving what they might call a "well-rounded" education, meaning they want them to be adaptable to any situation.

Many American parents are somewhat envious of the dedication exhibited by Asian children in pursuing an education. Because Asians spend much of their childhood building a baseline for education, they have an advantage when they reach college because they already have good study habits. Through lax habits, many American students do not really learn how to study until they get into college. Then they have to work very hard to catch up.

While good grades and high academic achievement are important, they are not necessarily essential for success in business, the arts and many other professions. Bill Gates, the richest man in the world, was a college drop-out. He decided that it was more important to seize a unique opportunity in time to

become a leader in the software industry than to finish a college degree. He was right.

On the other hand, some Americans believe that their only obligation is to raise their children to the age of 18; then they can send them out into the world. Few 18-year-old people are ready to take on such responsibility. Parents have the obligation to help their children prepare themselves to live in the world as productive adults. In most cases, this requires providing support beyond the age of 18, at least until the child has finished a substantial portion of his or her higher education.

### **Conclusions**

Many immigrants have instilled enviable drives and study habits in their children. However, the children may suffer if they cannot meet the demands imposed upon them to study and achieve.

And the parents may suffer for giving up too much to provide for their children. Parents might consider whether they are driving their children too hard and giving up too much for themselves. In addition, they might determine if they are trying to live vicariously through their children's achievements and selfishly using the children to fulfill their own unfinished dreams. In the end, children who are well-adjusted psychologically as well as intellectually well-educated usually become the highest achievers.

Pursuant to our spiritual goals the following Christian principle can be helpful in moderating our excesses. In John 6:27, Jesus tells us, "Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval." Here, Jesus reminds us to keep His message in mind. In other words, to maintain a balance, we are well-advised to seek knowledge of Jesus as we seek worldly knowledge and goals.

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*Faithful people,  
raising up people of Faith*

If you wish opportunities to further explore what has been discussed here or additional topics of interest to immigrants and others, you might like to contact Rainbow Zeng at the address above.

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### About Faith Lutheran Church:

Faith Lutheran Church is a caring people, who support one another's spiritual growth and who reach out to the community with Christ's love.

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