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**Rethinking Parenting of East Asian Immigrant Families in the United States  
with Asian Feminist Perspectives**

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**Rethinking Parenting of East Asian Immigrant Families in the United States**  
**with Asian Feminist Perspectives**

by

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**Rethinking Parenting of East Asian Immigrant Families in the United States  
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In the Western perspective of parenting, East Asian parenting had been understood as either tiger mothering or traditional Confucian mothering. However, those parenting styles were considered a harsh authoritarian style. Based on Asian feminist perspectives, which seek to rethink ‘Asia’ and ‘Asian women’ in different ways, the author attempts to reconceptualize East Asian parenting as the signifier of diversity. East Asian parenting is the process of inviting East Asian immigrant children into the imaginary space of ‘Asia’. Moreover, East Asian women are the producers of their knowledge instead of reproducers of inherent knowledge, or tradition. With this new understanding of East Asian parenting, the author proposes to educators who work with East Asian immigrant families to make space for East Asian immigrant families in the school context, or even broader, in Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP).

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## Chapter One: Introduction

The starting point for thinking about East Asian parenting as the main topic of this master's report was in a course last semester. I was listening to the presentation regarding the stereotypes of Asian and Asian Americans in the United States, and 'tiger mother' was one of the examples. A tiger mother indicates very harsh parenting style of Asian parents for high academic grades. The media paid attention to Amy Chua's 'harsh' dimensions of parenting toward her children to achieve high grades. Chua labeled her parenting style 'tiger mothering' and explained that her parenting practice was based on Asian cultural values. At that moment, I thought the meaning of the tiger mother was, for some reasons, positive. In my view, a tiger is a strong and powerful animal. It is even a somewhat holy animal in Asia. However, I was embarrassed when I realized that the term did not have a positive meaning. Moreover, I was embarrassed again because I recognized that the tiger mother was almost the only narrative to describe Asian parents. However, it was not identical to my understanding of East Asian parenting. East Asian parenting cannot be simply defined; it is complex and subtle within East Asian family relationships.

These complex emotions regarding East Asian parenting belong to not only me but also my friends who are Asian American (second generation immigrants), children of Asian immigrant families (1.5 generation immigrants), and Asian. I still remember we picked the following quote from Kyung-Sook Shin's *Please Look After Mom* (2011) at the same time:

From when you were young, Mom always addressed you as "You, girl." Usually, she said that to you and your sister when she wanted to differentiate between her

daughters and sons, but your mom also called you “You, girl” when she demanded that you correct your habits, disapproving of your way of eating fruit, your walk, your clothes, and your style of speech. But sometimes she would become worried and look closely into your face. She studied you with a concerned expression when she needed your help to pull flat the corners of starched blanket covers, or when she had you put kindling in the old-fashioned kitchen furnace to cook rice. One cold winter day, you and your mom were at the well, cleaning the skate that would be used for the ancestral rites at New Years, when she said, “You have to work hard in school so that you can move into a better world.” Did you understand her words then? When Mom scolded you freely, you more frequently called her Mom. The word “Mom” is familiar and it hides a plea: *Please look after me. Please stop yelling at me and stroke my head; please be on my side, whether I’m right or wrong.* You never stopped calling her Mom. (p. 18)

Although this quote is from a novel, the reason why this comes to *us* as non-fiction rather than fiction, or, a related story rather than a remote story, is that it perhaps reflects the complex feelings and ideas of East Asian parenting.

Thus, this report aims to understand how East Asian parenting in the United States (i.e., tiger mothering and traditional mothering) is understood as a ‘different’ parenting style from Western parenting under the politics of sameness/difference. I attempt to rethink East Asian parenting with an Asian feminist lens (Chen, 2007; Lee, 2008; Lyon, 2000) in order to rethink East Asian parenting in other ways. With a new understanding of East Asian parenting, I propose to make a space for East Asian immigrant families in

the early childhood context. I believe this report adds to the conversation on East Asian parenting by using Asian feminist lens.

In Chapter Two, I address how previous research delineates East Asian parenting (specifically the ‘authoritarian’ parenting style of Baumrind’s (1971) parenting typology) and how Asian scholars criticized this understanding as ethnocentric by Western scholars. In addition, I find that Confucian values are the baseline of East Asian parenting and how the Confucian notion of gender (roles) constructs the traditional mother in East Asian immigrant families. In Chapter Three, I use Asian feminist perspectives, which seek to rethink ‘Asia’ and ‘Asian women’ in different ways. The Asian feminist lens provides other ways to reconceptualize East Asian parenting as the signifier of diversity. In conclusion, I propose to educators who work with East Asian immigrant families to make space for East Asian immigrant families in the school context, or even broader, in Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP).

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

### 1. East Asian Parenting

What is East Asian parenting? In this paper, I define East Asian parenting as the parenting style (i.e., tiger mother and Confucian traditional mother) of East Asian immigrant families, encompassing the first generation to the second generation (Zhou, 1997) in the United States. Although the term East Asian parenting is used to describe the parenting style in East Asian countries, the term mostly indicates the parenting style of East Asian immigrant families in the United States in order to differentiate their parenting style from Western parenting (Chao et al., 2006).

East Asian immigrant families consist of immigrant parents from foreign countries whose children are born in the United States or foreign countries (Zhou, 1997). The children are often labeled the second generation or 1.5 generation based on their birth country. However, in this paper, East Asian immigrant families encompass these two generations. Thus, East Asian parenting indicates the child-rearing styles of East Asian immigrants from South Korea, mainland China and Japan in the U.S. context.

In order to understand the pervasive labels of East Asian parenting, which are tiger mother and traditional mother, I attempt to organize how previous studies defined East Asian parenting. In the first section, I mainly address the tiger mother, or ‘authoritarian parenting,’ and how the Western understanding of parenting is hidden in the term. In addition, in the second section, I mainly address the traditional mother and how the Confucian concepts of gender roles constructed East Asian women as the mothers in East Asian immigrant families.

## 1.1 Shaping the East Asian mother as the Tiger mother

The media paid tremendous attention to Amy Chua's book, *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* (2011), which illustrates how East Asian American parents push their children to succeed. The media specifically paid attention to the harsh dimensions of Amy Chua's tiger parenting style. For example, she did not allow her children to have playdates, participate in extracurricular activities at school, or be second in any subject except gym and drama. Chua emphasized her children had to play the violin or piano perfectly; thus, she monitored and supervised her daughters' practice. Chua explained that her parenting style is a cultural practice based on traditional Chinese values. In the book, a tiger mother is described as a strong, stringent, and harsh mother who pushes her children to be the best and perfect. However, many East Asian and East Asian American scholars (Choi et al., 2013; Juang et al., 2013; S. S. Kim, 2013) are concerned that Amy Chua's parenting generalizes all East Asian parenting styles or has become the master narrative of East Asian parenting (Poon, 2011). Because East Asian parenting places different cultural values and beliefs compared to Western parenting, East Asian parenting could be misunderstood (Juang et al., 2013). As Amy Chua consistently compared her parenting style to Western parenting, tiger mothering (or East Asian parenting) has emphasized the difference from Western parenting.

Based on previous empirical studies, Juang and her colleagues (2013) found that characteristics of East Asian parenting were often described as follows: a "higher level of psychological control and strictness; show less outward affection and verbal expression of love; more strongly emphasize filial piety; obedience, and deference to parents and

elders; and place less emphasis on autonomy” (p. 2). Although many scholars (Juang et al., 2013; S. S. Kim, 2013) use the tiger mother to generalize East Asian parenting, it shows that East Asian parenting is very different from Western parenting. Chua (2011) assumed this difference stems from “a combination of Confucian filial piety and the fact that the parents have sacrificed and done so much for their children” (p. 53). Various articles and opinions regarding comparisons between Western and East Asian parenting styles ultimately ask what the real East Asian parenting is. As Amy Chua said, is it justification for pushing children to be perfect based on Confucian values? Then, what are the cultural beliefs or baseline of East Asian parenting? If the baseline of the parenting style is Confucian values, what are they? Again, then, what is East Asian parenting?

### 1.2 Authoritative and Authoritarian parenting

Many Asian-heritage scholars (Kim & Wong, 2002; Koh et al., 2009; Wu et al., 2002) have problematized that the Western parenting typology has defined East Asian parenting. It is because the Western parenting typology labels East Asian parenting as an authoritarian style of parenting. The most pervasive parenting typology to explain East Asian parenting is Baumrind’s (1971) parenting typology. In a study, Baumrind (1971) categorized parenting styles into four types, which are authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and rejecting-neglecting. The authoritarian parenting style is considered a negative form of child-rearing because authoritarian parents are “demanding and directive, but not responsive” (Baumrind, 1991, p. 64). They push their children to obey their directions without any clear accounts and to regulate them in an orderly environment where the parents can easily monitor them. These parents harshly supervise their

children's activities. In sum, authoritarian parents control their children under a certain set of standards, demand obedience to authorities and order, and discourage democratic communication between parents and children. The opposite of authoritarian parenting is authoritative and the authoritative parenting style is considered the ideal because authoritative parents are "both demanding and responsive" (Baumrind, 1991, p. 64) with clear standards that children can understand. These parents are supportive, cooperative, responsible, and warm. This difference in parenting styles drew attention in the education field because parenting style is considered one of the critical factors of children's school achievement and performance (Dornbusch et al., 1987; Steinberg et al., 1992). Authoritative parenting turned out to be the ideal parenting style because the warm relationship between parents and children increasingly enhances children's school performance and helps them achieve success in class. In contrast, authoritarian parenting became problematic because the harsh and strict hierarchical relationship between parents and children damages the children's performance and success. Thus, parents were recommended to avoid negative parenting, the authoritarian parenting (Baumrind, 1971).

However, due to the harsh characteristics of East Asian parenting, according to Western scholars' perspective (Abubakar et al., 2015; Kim & Wong, 2002; Koh et al., 2009; Wu et al., 2002), East Asian parenting was understood as a problematic parenting practice that needs to be corrected (Choi et al., 2013). Despite the various dimensions of East Asian parenting (Kim & Wong, 2002), based on this parenting typology, East Asian parenting was commonly understood as authoritarian while Western parenting was authoritative (Chao, 1994; Choi et al., 2013; Chuang & Tamis-LeMonda, 2009; Cote et

al., 2015; Kim & Wong, 2002; Koh et al., 2009; Park et al., 2010; Wu et al., 2002). For example, an interview with Chinese immigrant mothers (Cheah & Leung & Park, 2013) showed the contrasts between tiger parenting and Western parenting in the following categories: harsh discipline vs. regulatory reasoning, social comparison and criticism vs. encouragement and praise, interdependence vs. independence, and academic performance vs. overall development. However, these characteristics of tiger parenting are in line with empirical studies that discussed the poor mental health of East Asian immigrant families (Abubakar et al., 2015). Some empirical studies point out that authoritarian parenting is closely associated with maladjustment, low self-esteem, and poor academic scores so that it damages children's mental health (Herz & Gullone, 1999; Lamborn, 1991). Under this parenting typology, the child-rearing style of East Asian immigrant parents was often considered a problematic harsh style due to the regulated and demanding aspects of parenting style (Chao, 1994; Choi et al., 2013; Sue & Okazaki, 1990).

Surprisingly, there was an inconsistency between the previous studies about East Asian parenting style and the high academic scores of Asian and Asian American students because the parents' authoritarian style is understood to be a negative factor for the children's performance at school (Sue & Okazaki, 1990). Some researchers (Gibbs et al., 2016; Schneider & Lee, 1990; Sue & Okazaki, 1990) attempted to figure out this discrepancy through other than the parenting factor. Schneider and Lee (1990) mentioned the high expectations of teachers, peers, and parents lead students to excel in school. On one hand, Sue and Okazaki (1990) criticized that the "folk theory of education ('If I study hard, I can succeed, *and* education is the best way to succeed')" (p. 919) in the Asian

community pushed Asian and Asian American children to achieve high scores in school. Recently, Gibbs and his colleagues (2016) researched Vietnamese and Chinese preschool children who achieved high scores in math regardless of their social economic status. The authors concluded that ethnicity is the primary factor in the high scores, even though it reproduces the model minority stereotype (S. Lee, 2015). Although those researchers attributed the incompatibility of the high scores of East Asian immigrant students and their parents' authoritarian parenting style to out-of-family contexts, such as the expectation of peers and teachers, social inequality, and ethnicity, many Asian-heritage scholars reexamined the inconsistency within the family context, parenting. Throughout the reexamination, they concluded inconsistency was created due to the misunderstanding of the harsh authoritarian parenting (Chao, 1994). For example, Chao (1994) criticized the concepts of authoritarian and authoritative parenting style as Western researchers' ethnocentric perspective and urged scholars to rethink the concept of authoritarian and authoritative parenting in East Asian culture. Since parenting is embodied in cultural values, beliefs, and norms (Kim et al., 2014) and transmits them to the next generation (Whiting & Whiting, 1975), parenting is a cultural practice (Lui & Rollock, 2013). With this notion, thinking of East Asian parenting as authoritarian based on the Western perspective is ethnocentric (Chao, 1994).

### 1.3 Constructing East Asian parenting by drawing a line between Western parenting and East Asian parenting

Many studies (Chao, 1994; Choi et al., 2013; Park et al., 2010; S. S. Kim, 2013) have criticized the concepts of authoritarian and authoritative parenting because critics

viewed these concepts as constructed through Western scholars' ethnocentric perspectives. For example, in the Western context, 'warmth' is often understood as responsiveness, firm control, and admitting the children's and parents' sides of an issue (Kim & Wong, 2002). However, this warmth does not always mean responsiveness in Asian culture. Chao (1994) described parental 'warmth in the Asian cultural context as parents' sacrifice for their children and parents' caring and governance. Chao (1994) challenged the Westernized notion of ideal parenting through a skeptical lens on the universal meaning of warmth. In other words, the concept of warmth is constructed under the cultural belief, value, and norm. Moreover, Chao (1994) posited the following framework to understand East Asian parenting based on Asian (specifically Chinese) culture: *Chiao Shun* (appropriate training in English) and *Guan* (concern in English). Chao (1994) defined *Chiao Shun* as "the idea of training children in the appropriate or expected behaviors – a central part of training focuses on the ability of children to perform well in school" (p. 1112). She also delineated *Guan* as loving and governing. Within this framework, parents' responsibilities are not only training children but also creating the best environment in which for children to train. Thus, forcing children to obey without clear communication, which is considered negative parenting (authoritarian parenting practice), is not "demanding and directive, [but] not responsive" (Baumrind, 1991, p. 64); rather, it is a deeper level of caring and warmth by providing the best environment. In the same notion, Cote and her colleagues (2015) addressed *Jung-sung* in Korean families, which is the "Korean notion of total parental devotion to children" (p. 6). Choi and her colleagues (2013) explained *Ga-jung-kyo-yuk*, or home education in English, which is "the process of socializing children to a

set of core norms, beliefs, and values through parenting” (p. 20) at home. Korean mothers place their children as the first priority in their lives (*Jung-sung*) more than their personal lives and consider teaching *Hyo* and *Gyeum-son* to their children as successful parenting (Cote et al., 2012). As the two frameworks show, the idea of ‘warmth’ in East Asian immigrant families is different from the Western understanding of warmth. Thus, the parental belief, parenting methods, and child-rearing goals are cultural practices that are “sticky and difficult to change in any basic fashion, although they can often be modified” (Hofstede & Bond, 1988). Therefore, categorizing parenting styles into authoritarian/authoritative styles and connecting them to positive/negative concepts are misleading. In other words, considering East Asian parenting as a negative concept is problematic because “parenting goals, values, and practices and parent-child interactions vary from culture to culture” (Choi et al., 2013, p. 19); each parenting style has its own “culturally shared beliefs about desirable qualities that parents endeavor to cultivate in their children” (Ren & Edward, 2016, p. 1). However, although those culturally constructed parenting goals, values, and practices prove that East Asian parenting cannot be judged positive or negative, they ultimately demarcate East Asian parenting as ‘different’ or ‘not the same’ as Western parenting.

Based on the understanding of parenting as a cultural practice, many Asian scholars proposed an East Asian parenting typology, which contradicts the Western parenting typology and concepts. Park and her colleagues (2010) used the same term as Baumrind’s parenting typology but added Asian values to Baumrind’s (1971) ‘authoritarian’ parenting: This style is an effective caring style that aids children’s further

learning by setting reasonable limits. This leads to a reexamination of authoritarian as traditional East Asian way of parenting rather than as an undemocratic controlling environment that damages children's development. Although the terms that describe the parenting style of East Asian immigrant families follow Baumrind's (1971) parenting typology, by stating 'authoritarian' is not a negative term to East Asian students, Park and her colleagues (2010) viewed authoritarian as an East Asian way of warmly controlling their children. S. Kim (2013), on one hand, asserted East Asian parenting and East Asian immigrant families should be assessed through a mixed format of Western and East Asian parenting styles because Baumrind's (1971) Western parenting typology is not enough to examine and to assess various dimensions, such as the complex parent-child relationship in East Asian immigrant families. With this notion, S. Kim (2013) created several dimensions to assess Asian American parenting. Warmth, inductive, reasoning, monitoring, and democratic are positive concepts for parenting while hostility, punitive, psychological control, and shaming are negative concepts for parenting. Based on 444 Chinese families, she created an East Asian parenting typology, which includes tiger, harsh, supportive, and easygoing. Tiger parenting is the combination of high positive and high negative parenting while harsh parenting is the combination of low positive and high negative parenting. For example, tiger parents monitor and use shaming with reasonable explanations to correct their children's behaviors while harsh parents use shaming without monitoring. This parenting typology is different from that of Baumrind (1971) because it includes shaming, which is "important in Chinese family socialization" (S. S. Kim, 2013, p. 220). Successful parenting, tiger and supportive parenting in the typology,

has a higher level of shaming than unsuccessful parenting, easygoing parenting.

As such, because East Asian culture is different from Western culture, defining East Asian parenting with the Western parenting typology would lead to a misunderstanding East Asia immigrant families (Chao, 1994; Choi et al., 2013; Cote et al., 2015; S. S. Kim, 2013; Park et al., 2010). The parenting styles are constructed through the cultural and social environment and vary across cultures so that East Asian cultural contexts have different understandings of ideal parenting and frameworks. In the perspective of Western researchers, East Asian parenting is often seen as ‘demanding and assertive’ so that it seems that parents fail to create a democratic environment (Chao, 1994; S. S. Kim, 2013; Way et al., 2013). However, to Asian-heritage scholars, ‘demanding and assertive’ parenting is a stronger and warmer version of caring (Park & Chesla, 2007) than responding to children’s needs. Then, we can assume children develop and learn different values and attitudes because parenting transmits the cultural norms and beliefs (Choi et al., 2013).

## 2. Unmasking the Concepts and Values in East Asian Parenting

In this section, I attempt to unmask Confucian characteristics and values in East Asian immigrant families and how the Confucian notion of gender was inherited as a ‘tradition’ in families through parenting. In a comparison of Western families and East Asian immigrant families (Cline, 2015; Koh et al., 2009; Li, 2005), East Asian immigrant families tend to orient toward social contribution, family, elder veneration, order, hierarchy, and virtues, which stem from Confucianism (Chao, 1994; Cline, 2015; Li, 2000; Park & Chesla, 2007).

## 2.1 Child Development in Confucian Culture

Confucianism is central in East Asian families' lives; moreover, Confucian values are considered an inherited tradition (Lee & Mjelde-Mossey, 2004). Confucianism is the inherited practical ethics of Kong Fu Ze, or "a set of pragmatic rules for daily life" in East Asia (Hofstede & Bond, 1988, p. 8). Before Western modernism, Confucianism was the entire foundation of cosmology, government, community, education, family, and the individual (Hofstede & Bond, 1988; Rozman, 2014; Wei-ming, 2000). It was the system to arrange a country or a community (Wei-ming, 2000), the epistemology of 'we' (Rozman, 2014), and the ontology of an ethical citizen (Hofstede & Bond, 1998). These rules are applied in East Asian countries from the interpersonal communication level to the national economic level (Rozman, 2014; Weiming, 2000). Confucianism, although it has been reinterpreted and transformed through its interaction with Western modernity in history, is still inherited and practiced in East Asian society as a tradition, Asian values, or Confucian values (i.e., sympathy, distributive justice, duty-consciousness, ritual, public-spiritedness, and group orientation; Hofstede & Bond, 1988; Rozman, 2014; Weiming, 1996) and as a counter-rhetoric to Western Enlightenment values (i.e., instrumental rationality, liberty, right-consciousness, and individualism). For example, the concept of family in East Asia is constructed and understood as the fundamental unit of society that transmits the core values of Confucianism because "the dyadic relationships within the family, differentiated by age, gender, authority, status, and hierarchy, provide a richly textured natural environment for learning the proper way of being human" (Weiming, 2000, p. 206). To repeat, family is a natural environment in

which to foster the proper human who knows how to care for other people.

Confucianism has the following belief about children: Before age 7, children are often described as “blank white paper,” indicating their innocence, lack of knowledge, and innate goodness (Chao et al., 2006). This perspective is also consistent with the Buddhist understanding regarding the nature of children. Both perspectives consider the nature of childhood as a virtue or a merit (Chen, 1996). Childhood in Japan is often typified as a “cherished and highly romanticized of life” (Chao et al., 2006, p. 61). Furthermore, most East Asian societies consider children under 7 years old as spiritual beings who are close to god. This cultural understanding of children is the foundation of parents’ attitudes toward their children (i.e., parental indulgence and respect for the children). In Japanese literature and writings, “plant cultivation” is the major metaphor for child-rearing (Chen, 1996) because the main caregivers of the plant need to let the plant’s own “inner tendencies” unfold by themselves before they shape the plant. Parents aim to rear their children to have “inner tendencies” before 7 and “correct” children’s behavior by providing education. These ideas about children’s and parental roles point out the importance of understanding East Asian parents’ roles in fostering their children’s development.

The Confucian notion of children’s development, however, is not only a traditional cultural belief in East Asian countries but is also still practiced in East Asian immigrant communities in the United States. J. Li (2005) compared students’ learning development in Chinese (including Chinese American) students and American students. She found that the Confucian values (group orientation) transmitted in the family take on

an important role in the approaches to learning and knowledge. For example, she labeled Western learners as mind-oriented who approach information based on objective facts. To the learners, 'I' is the most important interpreter of information and the center of learning. However, the Asian-origin learners are virtue-oriented who aim to learn in order to "to perfect themselves morally and socially, to achieve mastery of the material, and to contribute to society" (J. Li, 2005, p. 191). With the same notion of other-orientation, Cline concluded in *Families of Virtue: Confucian and Western Views on Childhood Development* (2015) that these differences in orientations and beliefs of knowledge ultimately show the differences in cultural beliefs. She stated that the parent-child relationship is an irreplaceably important experience among Asian families to educate children, because filial piety is the origin of human growth in Asian culture where children learn virtues and other-oriented relationships (Rozman, 2014). For example, Koh and her colleagues (2009) regarding acculturation of Asian-heritage families showed that although they are second-generation Asian Americans, fathers and mothers upheld Confucian values more than mainstream values. In the relationship domain, mothers' other-orientation of a relationship has a positive influence on children's relational sense of self. These studies indicate that children develop and learn within Confucian values and characteristics, such as connected relationships to society and family or other-oriented relationships toward the collective units (Cline, 2015), through their Asian-heritage parents.

## 2.2 Confucian values and characteristics among the East Asian immigrant family

As previous studies have shown a close relationship between the parenting style

of East Asian immigrant families and the development of their children, the dominant concept for understanding the formation of East Asian parenting is Confucianism (Chao et al., 2006; Park & Chesla, 2007, Yun, 20120). Nevertheless, some scholars (Ren & Edward, 2016; Way et al., 2013) criticized that many studies regarding East Asian parenting in the United States heavily concentrated on traditional Asian values as influencers of the parent–child relationship. In other words, this perspective on East Asian parenting repeatedly reconceptualizes it in a frozen time in the United States so that it ignores the differences in parenting in the modern era in an Asian country, such as China. The two studies pointed out how ‘contemporary’ Chinese mothers have moved away from teaching ‘traditional’ Asian values to their children, which are considered important values among East Asian immigrant families in the United States. The studies raised questions about the aim of parenting in the modern era. Thus, since various dramatic changes, such as demography, globalized early childhood education, and economic and political ideology, have contributed to changes in ideal parenting in East Asian countries, scholars suggest those changes should not be ignored.

Although studies of East Asian parenting in Asian countries have examined the modern era of parenting in China, many studies still build and contribute to the work in cultural and philosophical perspectives to understand East Asian parenting in United States.<sup>1</sup> However, Chao and her colleagues (2006) asserted that despite the major social

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<sup>1</sup> Although few qualitative studies have examined East Asian–origin children or youth’s perspectives on East Asian parenting in diasporic/immigrant contexts, Stacey Lee’s (2003) study regarding the Americanization of Hmong girls gives some clues to think about their perspectives. For example, an interview with a Hmong girl implies the conflicts between her parents’ traditional

changes, the traditional cultural folk beliefs about children and parenting are still practiced today among East Asian communities. For example, although Japanese have faced major changes in demography and child-rearing beliefs, traditional beliefs about childhood and parenting still exist in Japan. Thus, I assume that Confucianism is one of the most dominant values in the formation of East Asian immigrant families. This assumption is in the same line as the study by Park and Chesla (2007). Based on this assumption, Park and Chesla (2007) asserted that Confucian concepts should be the framework for understanding East Asian immigrant families.

In the Confucian framework, there are five virtues (benevolence, integrity, propriety, moral understanding, and trust) and five relationships (government-citizen, parents-children, husband-wife, older-younger siblings, and friend-friend). These virtues and relationships are the essential parts for constructing Confucianism because Confucius assumed they make “the perfect order” (Xu & An & Lao, 1999, p. 128, cited from Park

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(and cultural) image of family and the media’s portrayal of a ‘good family’. I quote the following from the interview with a Hmong girl:

Well, I guess they always have those TV shows with the perfect family, and ... And you know, you do kind of envy that. I mean, you don’t have it. ... I don’t know, but like, I like wish I had a good family. ... For me, I think that’s why a lot of White people are successful, you know?

For this comment on the ‘perfect’ family delineated by media, Stacy Lee (2003) mentioned that “this binary precludes the positive familial transformation that might be undertaken by these young women, and unilaterally alienates them from their families and cultures so that they cannot easily see the worth and value of their own families. Although the young women complained about their families and idealized White families, they continued to be proud of their Hmong identities” (p. 461). Stacy Lee’s analysis and the interview imply that their perspectives on East Asian parenting might be heavily affected by mainstream society’s depiction of ‘good’/‘bad’ parents or families.

& Chesla, 2007, p. 297) for the world. Confucius believed that when people respect, care for, and love each other, the world would be ideal. Thus, Confucian values emphasize harmonious relationships based on virtues. Based on the Confucian belief of the parent–child relationship (“All men love and respect their own parents and children, as well as the parents and children of others”; Xu & An & Lao, 1999, p. 128, cited from Park & Chesla, 2007, p. 297), Park and Chesla (2007) viewed “the guidance and discipline that parents give to their children ... based on emotional closeness and love” (p. 304) as a means of constructing the parent–child relationship. This relationship ultimately shows that the East Asian immigrant family relationship is established through the strong emotional closeness derived from Confucian values, which is often considered ‘emotional overinvolvement’ in Western culture.

Many studies on East Asian immigrant families (Chao, 1994; Choi et al., 2013; Chuang & Tamis-LeMonda, 2009; Cline 2015; Cote et al., 2015; J. Li, 2005; S. S. Kim, 2013; Koh et al., 2009; Park & Chelsa, 2007; Park et al., 2010; Way et al., 2013) have explained ‘filial piety’ as a significant aspect of East Asian parenting. Filial piety is the Confucian hierarchy in East Asian–heritage families based on age and gender (Kim & Wong, 2002; Park, 2007; Rozman, 2014) and associated with socialization (i.e., respecting elders and parents, interdependency, and parents’ sacrifice), emotional overinvolvement (Park & Chesla, 2007), directing, and warmth (Chao, 1994; Kim & Wong, 2002). Filial piety is a central concept (the family as the center) of parenting in Asian culture to socialize children (J. Li, 2005; Chao, 1994; Chao et al., 2006), or to make connections with other people and society in which the child lives and will live (Koh et

al., 2009). Thus, although several studies analyzed the changed parenting style in modern Asian countries, many studies have shown Confucianism is the dominant traditional value in East Asian immigrant families. However, there are discussions of strict ‘gender relations’ (Yun, 2012) and gender roles in traditional East Asian immigrant families.

### 2.3 Shaping the East Asian mother as the traditional mother: Gender<sup>2</sup> as an inherited tradition in East Asian immigrant families

As I briefly mentioned, the tradition in East Asia has a complicated relationship with Western modernity (Wei-ming, 2000). The tradition in East Asian countries is often considered Confucianism, which existed before Western modernity. With this understanding of the modernity and tradition dichotomy, tradition is often linked to the concept of old, fixed, (Ngo, 2012) or Asia (Lee, 2008a, 2008b). However, modernity is often linked to the concept of the new (Ngo, 2012), Western, or America (Lee, 2008; Lee, 2008). Although Wei-ming (2000) pointed out that Confucian way of dynamic interplays of intellectual, social, political, and economic currents, in reality, Confucianism is considered traditional,<sup>3</sup> which is the static characteristic to exaggerate exotic non-

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<sup>2</sup> This paper barely mentions trans-gender, only cis-gender. It is based on the binary understanding of man/woman. With this notion, in this paper, family is considered a heteronormative formation, or the formation of cis-genders.

<sup>3</sup> In this paper, Confucianism and ‘tradition’ mainly refer to Neo-Confucianism. Some Asian feminist scholars (C. Li, 2000; Rosenless, 2006) problematized how Confucianism was misinterpreted as theoretical oppression of East Asian women by Neo-Confucians. According to Weiming (2000), Neo-Confucianism is the social movement to practice and spread ideas responding to “the sudden appearance of the Western powers in the mid-nineteenth century” (p. 195). Rosa Kim (1994) criticized the ‘ordered inequality’ established by the Neo-Confucian understanding of ‘tradition’ perpetuated in Korean family law, for example, “the requirement that headship of the household be passed only to the oldest son or grandson regardless of age and

Western dimensions (C. Li, 2000). In other words, Confucianism, through labeling it the ‘tradition’, became the master narrative to emphasize the exotic oriental culture in the modern era (Weiming, 2000) and a theoretical oppressive tool for East Asian women’s lives (C. Li, 2000; Park & Cho, 1995).

Many scholars (Choi et al., 2013; Koh et al., 2009; Ngo, 2012; Tang & Dion, 1999) have showed the strict gender relations and roles in traditional Asian values. A traditional Asian self develops himself or herself within the gender role in order to serve the harmonious relationship that constructs the Confucian ideal world. For example, “a male would consider himself a son, a brother, a husband, a father, an heir to the family lineage, but hardly himself. Likewise, a female was a daughter, sister, wife, and a mother, but not an independent woman striving for self-actualization” (Lee & Mjelde-Mossey, 2004, p. 498). Ngo (2012) showed how Hmong girls who were raped by Hmong gang members were “shamed into silence” (Louwagie & Browning, cited from Ngo, 2012, p. 4) by the Hmong cultural community that is tied to traditional values. This victim-blaming, however, is common in traditional Confucian society (Park & Cho, 1995) because through rape, women lose their virginity, and then they cannot be someone’s wife or mother. In other words, they cannot serve the gender role. Thus, East Asian immigrant families that embrace Confucianism have a strict and traditional understanding of gender roles within the family (Rosenless, 2006, Yun, 2012).

With this notion, the research (Tang & Dion, 1999) on male and female Chinese

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ability” (p. 150). This law, however, even in the twenty-first century, has not been changed.

university students in Canada identified that gender is a strong predictor of a student's traditionalism. While Chinese male students are more traditional than Chinese female students, Chinese female students are slightly more at odds with their parents' traditional values than Chinese men and parents. This finding is in line with Choi and colleagues' (2013) finding regarding Korean American parenting control. A mother and a father in a Korean American family "endorse" (p. 28) Korean traditional etiquette and values in accordance with the children's parents' gender role. Although S. Kim (2013) mentioned the presence of a tiger father and the turn-taking form of parenting in Chinese American families, different parenting roles based on parents' gender constitute the East Asian and East Asian American family relationship (Kim & Wong, 2002; Wu et al., 2002) so that the main caregiver is a mother. Kim and Wong (2002) criticized that most studies rely heavily on mothers while fathers do not participate in the research regarding parenting in the home context. As Bond and Hwang mentioned, strictly separated gender roles in traditional Asian-heritage families indicate "structured hierarchically, and social order and harmony are maintained by each party honoring the requirements and responsibilities of the role relationship" (1986, p. 1113, cited from Chao, 1994).

The strict understanding of 'gender relation' and gender roles is still a significant characteristic in the East Asian immigrant family although parenting in East Asian countries has changed in response to social and economic factors. This approach to gender is mainly derived from the Confucian perspective on the relationship and is maintained as a 'tradition' in families. Traditional East Asian parents, although they are in the United States, 'correct' their children's development based on their gender; a father mainly

fosters his children outside home while a mother takes care of her children emotionally at home (S. Kim, 2013). In order to serve the Confucian ideal values, gender becomes the major influencer on the relationship between parents and their children.

#### 2.4 The traditional Confucian mother

Filial piety, the Confucian hierarchy based on gender, is considered the 'harmonious' relationship among East Asian immigrant family. However, the harmonious relationship assigns gender roles to family members so that children learn their gender roles through parenting. This implies that Asian women in the families (have to) follow a traditional mother because East Asian immigrant families maintain filial piety in the name of tradition. In accordance with the mistranslated Ying (dark) -Yang (light) Confucian philosophy (C. Li, 2000), in reality, traditional mothers in East Asia are often interpreted and shaped as submissive, passive, and silenced women by Neo-Confucians (Chen, 2007). Traditional mothers are considered attachments of their husbands in order to stay at home as housewives, support their husbands, and bear sons to maintain the pillar or heir of a family (Sun & Lai, 2017). In reality, the traditional mother, in the misunderstood Confucian notion of gender, is the oppressed one in East Asian immigrant family based on the male-centered misinterpretation of the philosophy (Rosenless, 2006).

### 3. Unanswered Questions about East Asian Parenting

Parenting among East Asian immigrant families in the United States is referred to as East Asian parenting and is differentiated from Western parenting. In the politics of sameness/difference, East Asian parenting faces 'differences' that are the opposite of Western cultural beliefs and Western modernity. In sum, East Asian parenting became the

signifier of ‘difference’ to show Western parenting. As previous Asian-heritage scholars mentioned (Chao, 1994; Choi et al., 2013; Chuang & Tamis-LeMonda, 2009; Cote et al., 2015; Kim & Wong, 2002; Koh et al., 2009; Park et al., 2010; Wu et al., 2002), East Asian parenting has different concepts of warmth, child development, cultural belief, and aims of child-rearing compared with Western parenting. East Asian parenting is portrayed with many concepts (Juang et al., 2013) but mainly characterized as a harsh and demanding parenting style, as well as a gender-separated parenting style, such as a tiger mother or a traditional mother.

However, East Asian parenting remains unclear. Does tiger mothering completely explain what East Asian parenting is? Or does traditional Confucian mothering fully explain what East Asian parenting is? If tiger mothering is enough to define East Asian parenting, why did many Asian-heritage scholars worry about ‘generalizing’ East Asian parenting (Choi et al., 2013; Juang et al., 2013; S. S. Kim, 2013)? If traditional mothering fully explains East Asian parenting, why are Asian-heritage scholars concerned about the oppressed lives of Asian women as mothers in Confucian society (Park & Cho, 1995)? Do the two parenting styles completely explain East Asian parenting? If those two mothering types are included in East Asian parenting, what type of mothering is the ideal, if the warm and democratic parenting style is considered the ideal in Western parenting? Don’t they become the master narrative of East Asian parenting that reduces or masks the diversities in the Asian-heritage community (Lowe, 1991)? Are tiger mothering and traditional Confucian mothering the end of East Asian parenting?

Those questions, if we keep asking, are based on the assumption that Asian is the

counter-concept of Western, or non-Western. Moreover, in East Asian parenting, 'Asia' is assumed to be the region. However, this regional category of Asia cannot fully answer the questions regarding East Asian parenting. Instead, Asia produces uncertainty and concern about different types of parenting. If we understand Asia through the lens of the Asian feminist perspective, then East Asian parenting might open up new ways to think, neither tiger mothering nor traditional mothering, which emphasize different aspects from the Western parenting style. Then, what are other ways to think about East Asian parenting instead of tiger mothering or traditional mothering?

### Chapter Three: Asian Feminism Perspective and East Asian Parenting

In order to rethink East Asian parenting, I attempt to use the Asian feminist lens. Asian feminism, or women's studies in Asia, refers to the "accumulation or synthesis of women's studies in different Asian countries" (E. Kim, 2010, p. 26). In other words, an Asian feminist views Asian feminism as an alternative study of 'Western/universal' women's studies. Therefore, the Asian feminist lens critically reexamines hidden Western assumptions regarding Asia and Asian women by asking what 'Asia' is and who 'Asian women' are. The reconceptualization of 'Asia' and 'Asian women' through the Asian feminist lens (S. Lee, 2008) provides a starting point to rethink East Asian parenting in other ways.

This third chapter is organized in several parts. In the first part, I suggest a different understanding of East Asian parenting with the concept of 'Asia' that the Asian feminist scholars reconceptualized. In the second part, I try to trouble the traditional Asian values that I explored in the previous section about parenting by the East Asian immigrant family in the United States. In the final part of this chapter, I discuss filial piety in the East Asian immigrant family to think about other ways to make a relationship or connectedness of East Asian immigrant families.

#### 1. Asia: More than a Geographic Space

Asian feminist scholars problematize the broad meanings of Asia to reconceptualize 'Asia' (Chen, 2007; S. Lee, 2008; M. Lee, 2014; C. Li, 2000; Lowe, 1991) because the term 'Asia' has been used as the opposite meaning of Western. For example, Asia is used to explain the poor economic status, mainly as 'developing countries' by

some Asian political leaders or male scholars (S. Lee, 2008), or to emphasize the differences to find identities of Western culture by several Western feminists (Chen, 2007; Lyons, 2000). In other words, Asia is used as a signifier of “the non-Western ‘Other’” (S. Lee, 2008, p. 31), which is produced and used by mainly Western scholars (Basu, 1997; Chen, 2007; E. Kim, 2010; C. Li, 2000) so that it ultimately (re)produces the borders between ‘Asia’ and ‘non-Asia’. S. Lee (2008) views the demarcating ‘Asia’ and ‘non-Asia’ as based on a mainly regional aspect (i.e., Asia as poor developing countries or a non-Western area). In other words, the category of Asia is based on the geographic space (S. Lee, 2008; M. Lee, 2014; C. Li, 2000), and it establishes the Asia/non-Asia or Asia/Western dichotomy (Chen, 2007).

Furthermore, Asian feminists focus on the irreducible diversities in Asia and suggest that they cannot simply be translated into the sameness/difference dichotomy. In Asia, there are complex and diverse contexts, languages, histories, religions, races, and ethnicities that cannot be simply categorized as Asia (S. Lee, 2008). For example, although Korea, Japan, and China are in the same geographic range of Asia, their languages are different. In addition, in Japan, there are countless religions. Although the three countries are in the same region, Korea and China have different histories since Japan colonized those countries; China also colonized Korea before the Japanese colonization. Moreover, there are about 40 ethnicities in China. However, these miscellaneous differences are disseminated under the concept of Asia. Thus, that narrow conceptualization of Asia as a geographic space fails to represent the diversity of Asian cultures; rather, it clouds and even flattens the diversities by labeling them as Asia (S.

Lee, 2008). With this notion, Chen (2007) viewed the effort to find the sameness and differences within the geographic space is the politics of exclusion. By screening the diversities of Asia into the same and different aspects, the ‘different aspects’ of Asia are ignored or even became non-Asia (E. Kim, 2010). These inclusions and exclusions reproduce in the “us-them epistemological structure” (Chen, 2007, p. 10) it finally creates the dichotomy of ‘Asia’ and ‘non-Asia’ (E. Kim, 2010). For this reason, Asian feminists (Chen, 2007; S. Lee, 2008; M. Lee, 2014) have skeptical views of the concept of ‘Asia’ within the regional category that produces the binaries (Lowe, 1991).

### 1.1 Asia and East Asian parenting

With application of the us/them epistemology, if we understand ‘Asian’ parenting as the parenting style of Asians from the East Asian region, it would be trapped in the Asian/non-Asian binary because that regional understanding will hide the diverse and dynamic contexts of Asia. For example, there are inconsistencies between parenting by Chinese in China and that by Chinese immigrants in the United States (Ren & Edward, 2016; Way et al., 2013). According to interviews with “nowadays” (Way et al., 2013, p. 68) Chinese mothers in China, parenting to teach ‘traditional values of learning,’ such as determination, perseverance, and the ability to tolerate hardships, is considered “old-fashioned” (Way et al., 2013, p. 62); however, these values are considered values to teach through parenting among the Asian community in the United States. The dramatic change in the social (i.e., from Communism to capitalism) and political (i.e., one-child policy) contexts of China shift the aim of parenting toward their child’s happiness rather than the family’s (or children’s) success (Ren & Edward, 2016; Way et al., 2013). Thus, mothers

in China aim to aid their children's social and emotional development to rear independent and autonomous children. Similarly, in a recent study of parenting by "contemporary" (Ren & Edward, 2016, p. 1) Chinese mothers in China, they want to protect their children from excessive academic pressure so they try not to push their children to study hard (Ren & Edward, 2016) while Asian immigrants in the United States urge their children to study hard to succeed in American society (Sue & Okazaki, 1990). These two studies, however, reveal the subtle inclusion and exclusion of East Asia parenting by drawing a line between tradition and contemporary. The differences between East Asian parenting in the United States and in China ultimately create the traditional/contemporary dichotomy. If we think specifically about the differences in the studies that create the dichotomy, they ultimately ask whether East Asian parenting in the United States can be included in the East Asian parenting category because it is opposite the parenting style in China. East Asian parenting in the United States is connected, as Asian feminist scholars assert, to the category of Asia in the regional concept. Since the concept of Asia has been understood in the narrow regional concept, East Asian parenting styles in the United States and in China seem to contradict each other, and even more, parenting in China seems to be the 'real' East Asian parenting. The studies connote that the 'real' Asia, for example, China, has different (or opposite) aims of parenting in the contemporary period.

However, as Asian feminist scholars' reconceptualization of Asia, the two parenting styles in different regions are part of the diversity of East Asian parenting. S. Lee (2008) reconceptualized 'Asia' as "[depending on the historical context, Asia is] changing the borders of its geographical and conceptual space as a new form of identity

and community and as a political formation” (p. 33). Specifically, Chen (2007) viewed Asia as a method to promote the imagination of the Asian community. Moreover, E. Kim (2008) situated Asia as a space in which to build up “cross-border networks” (p. 27) among Asian women. In sum, to Asian feminist scholars, Asia is not a regional space but an imaginary space for East Asian women to build up networks. It means that Asia is not the politics of exclusion but the politics of solidarity (S. Lee, 2008; M. Lee, 2014; E. Kim, 2010) by making connections through supporting the differences in experiences. With this understanding of Asia, East Asian parenting is not just distinctively different parenting styles of East Asian immigrant families; it is an invitation for their children into the imaginary East Asian community.

Therefore, the studies enable us to rethink and trouble the concept of East Asian women. The concept of differences cannot be defined in the regional category. In other words, East Asian women are not limited to what citizenship the women have or where they live; East Asian women are not individuals who already exist. East Asian women are “multiple subjects shaped by and shaping feminist practices” (Chen, 2007, p. 24) in their everyday praxis, or family.

## 2. East Asian Women as Producers of Knowledge

Nevertheless, this reconceptualization of Asia again asks the question who East Asian women are. Within the regional category of Asia, East Asian women are simply women who live in East Asia. However, this understanding repeatedly makes East Asian women Othering as an “undifferentiated mass” (Lyon, 2000, p. 4). For example, Chen (2007) and Lyon (2000) criticized Western feminists’ questions about the ‘real’ feminist

movement in Singapore. According to the Western feminist perspective, the silent feminist movement in Singapore, a country known for its lack of democracy, was not the authentic liberal form of feminism. In the Western feminists' questions regarding authentic feminism, the two scholars recognized Asian women were considered an exceptional group or a group undifferentiated from Western feminists. S. Lee (2008) also criticized that the meaning of Asian women was constructed via the dichotomy of Western/non-Western. By understanding Asian women as a whole same group, their different experiences and narratives are ignored or flattened (M. Lee, 2014). Under the politics of sameness/difference (Chen, 2007; Lyon, 2000; S. Lee, 2008), Asian women were shaped by the 'differences' that were constructed based on the dichotomy of Asian/Western and We/They.

As discussed in part one, the dichotomy of Asian/Western, moreover, produces another dichotomy, which is traditional/modern (Lyon, 2000; M. Lee, 2014). Ngo (2012) showed the double binary discourses among Hmong immigrant students. She explained how Hmong immigrant students frame their parents as "antiquated" (Ngo, 2012, p. 4) because of their traditional Hmong culture. However, the students frame themselves as modern because they live in American culture. As I mentioned about the traditional gender roles of women in East Asian cultures in Chapter Three, East Asian women function as a daughter, sister, wife, and mother, which are roles assigned by their gender. In other words, "Asian women are intrinsically tied to the debate over Asian values through their roles as mothers" (Lyon, 2000, p. 9) in traditional Confucianism. Nirmala PuruShotam (1998) defined that Asian-ness could be found in a normal family, especially

in “the core of which patriarchal” (p. 145, cited from Lyon, 2000, p. 9). In this family context, East Asian women, as wives and mothers, reproduce Asian values and tradition. In sum, East Asian women were conceptualized as reproducers of traditional Confucian values.

However, considering the notorious history of Confucianism as a tool for oppressing women (C. Li, 2000; Park & Cho, 2000), the conceptualization of East Asian women as reproducers of traditional values leads to a deep examination again whose *tradition* they are reproducing. C. Li (2000) criticized how the Confucian concepts of gender were mistranslated by male scholars and utilized as a tool to harshly categorize men and women for centuries. For example, C. Li (2000) explained the circulated process of misinterpreting the Ying (dark)-Yang (light) philosophy in history. By simply linking the Ying-Yang philosophy with the men–women relationship, men became superior (yang; light) while women became inferior (ying; dark). The degrading understanding of women became extreme during the period of Song-Ming, neo-Confucianism. This understanding of women became the basis of the “five bonds” that citizens must follow. This degrading and oppressive attitude toward women became oppressive practices in reality (Park & Cho, 1995) since it was considered to be the morality. Asian scholars (C. Li, 2000; Park & Cho, 1995) criticized that Confucianism oppressed women, and it ultimately “functions within the patriarchal power structure which ultimately benefits men” (C. Li, 2000, p. 189). Thus, we can consider East Asian women as victims of the patriarchal society based on the mistranslated Confucian philosophy.

Moreover, many scholars (Foust & Tan, 2016; C. Li, 2000; Rosenless, 2006; Yun,

2012) are skeptical about Confucianism as a historical object and its interpretations of the human body and gender roles. Considering history is the collectively repeated reinterpretation of the past rather than absolute fact (Osberg & Biesta, 2007), the theoretical justifications to oppress East Asian women could not be justified or the rationale to maintain as a tradition. In the Asian feminist perspective, Confucianism is not a historical 'object' but a viable contemporary standpoint and a resource to move toward the liberation of oppressed women under traditional Confucianism by reviewing Confucianism (Foust & Tan, 2016). Rosenless (2006) and Yun (2012) asserted that although, in reality, the metaphors of the Confucian Ying-Yang philosophy in cosmos and human body, such as darkness-light or ground-sky and femininity and masculinity, were misused as hierarchical and opposite binaries, Ying-Yang is a non-oppositional complementary binary, because those concepts could not function adequately by themselves. They are correlative binaries that are always relative to one another. Thus, the Ying-Yang philosophy cannot be the theoretical justification to oppress East Asian women under traditional Confucian values. On the contrary, the irreducible complementarity of the Ying-Yang philosophy of the cosmos and the human body even suggests "a rather fluid view of sexual difference between the male and the female body and consequently seems to imply a more tolerant view of gender roles" (Rosenless, 2006, p. 6).

## 2.1 Asian women and East Asian parenting

Asian feminists attempt to reconceptualize Asian women because the common understandings of Asian women might be stereotyping Asian women as universal victims

(C. Li, 2000; S. Lee, 2008; M. Lee, 2014). This does not mean that Asian women are not victims; it is undeniable that women are oppressed under Confucianism. Asian feminist scholars attempt to reconceptualize Asian women in other ways than as victims shaped by mainly men or Western feminists (Chen, 2007; S. S. Kim, 2013; M. Lee, 2014; Lyon, 2000). In other words, Asian feminist scholars try to reconceptualize Asian women not as 'different' women (Chen, 2007; S. Lee, 2008; M. Lee, 2014) living in Asia or as mothers reproducing Asian values, tying Asian women to the gender role (C. Li, 2000; Park & Cho, 1995).

Then, what are the different ways to think about Asian women? Chen (2007) reclaimed Asian women as the subjectivity produced within feminist knowledge and praxis to "re-conceptualize difference and to re-interrogate the relationship between difference and universality" (p. 13). Moreover, S. Lee (2008) suggested Asian women are "subjects who create change, who produce knowledge and praxis" (p. 12). Thus, with the lens of Asian feminist scholars, Asian women are producers of new values and new knowledge of the tradition in their everyday praxis, rather than reproducers of inherently traditional knowledge of the gender role. M. Lee (2014) further mentioned that if we understand 'Asia' as a discursive practice to problematize Asia as a specific region and time, as we discussed in the first part, there are no traditional Asian values. Then, in Asia, Confucianism is no longer the fixed traditional value to oppress women. Confucianism is, from the Asian feminist perspective, contextual in time and space (S. Lee, 2008; C. Li, 2000) so that it is transformable. The Asian feminist perspective opens up a new way to think about East Asian women as producers of their knowledge regarding Confucianism

and practices in their everyday praxis.

If we bring this idea of East Asian women to the level of East Asian parenting, East Asian mothers are the implementors of their knowledge and values about children in children's dominant knowledge, as Chinese immigrant parents about their changed perspectives on traditional parents' responsibilities in interviews (Cheah & Leung & Zhou, 2013). In other words, these Asian women in the interviews rethought the traditional mother role in the Asian family. If Confucian values can be interpreted in other ways instead of as fixed values of a certain way, there would be no traditional Asian mother. With this Asian feminist perspective on East Asian women, they are consistently changing in the East Asian family context rather than pinned down to traditional Confucian values. Thus, the woman in an Asian family are no longer the main emotional caregiver in the home context, the traditional mother, an attachment of the husband in her family, or the oppressed victim in her family. With the application of this notion to the man in an Asian family, he is no longer the supporter of children outside home, the traditional father who disciplines children's behavior, or the center of his family. They are 父母 (*fumu*), complementary beings in the family.

### 3. The Politics of Solidarity

Asian feminist scholars highlight the politics of solidarity as the basis to practice feminism in women's everyday lives and to respond to the oppressive powers in their local places (S. Lee, 2008; M. Lee, 2014). As Chen (2007) described the 'differences' of Asian women, the differences created under the politics of sameness/difference ultimately produce another Other, because sameness and difference are understood as an opposite

dichotomy. For example, many male Confucians misinterpreted Ying-Yang as opposite hierarchical concepts so that they emphasized gender differences. Under their male-centered interpretation, women were oppressed due to their gender differences, or not the same as men (C. Li, 2000). The politics of sameness/difference separates concepts and posits them in opposite categories. In this sense, this ‘difference’ cannot make a deep connection or solidarity among East Asian women. However, *we* cannot just ignore the difference of Asian women and emphasize the sameness because, in a broad sense, feminism itself is based on the ontology of difference (S. Lee, 2008). Thus, the urgent problem is to bring the ‘difference’ that can make genuine solidarity among East Asian women into the praxis. It is because *we* need a deeper level of relationship than respecting others’ differences so that their lives can change by bringing the differences into praxis (M. Lee, 2014).

For this, S. Lee (2008) proposed utilizing the differences in a more productive way by interpreting them more creatively. When we bring the difference into the praxis, we often make a connection with the ‘same’ experiences so that it ruptures other different experiences (Chen, 2007). Therefore, S. Lee (2008) viewed the creative way to interpret difference is the “useful strategy for contextualizing a feminist agenda in different conditions and locations of life, taking into account the diversity and particularity of women’s experience” (p. 40). This creative way for escaping binary ideas would make global connections of East Asian women under the politics of difference/difference. In other words, there are no same and different (as opposite meanings of same) experiences among the experiences of Asian women; however, there are ‘differences’ and

‘commonalities’ in their experiences. M. Lee (2014) situated the ‘differences’ and ‘commonalities’ as flexible and unfixed experiences through contexts and time among Asian women in the Ewha Global Empowerment Program (EGEP), which is considered the praxis of Asian feminist pedagogy based on the politics of difference/difference. Moreover, she further explained the praxis established the transnational solidarity/alliance of women, which “respects mutual ‘differences’ among women, signifying a formation and a practice of a feminist community transcending the borders between states based on understanding and sympathy for difference” (p. 12). In the EGEP, the participants listen to the different experiences of being oppressed from other participants in their local context, specifically the patriarchal society. At the end of the program, the ‘differences’ in experience were reconceptualized as *something* shared by Asian women and connected to their Asian women subjectivities (M. Lee, 2014).

If we bring this solidarity to the level of East Asian parenting, it ultimately leads to a reexamination of filial piety, which is the Confucian hierarchy in Asian families based on age and gender (Kim & Wong, 2002; Park & Chesla, 2007). In other words, the politics of solidarity let us reexamine ‘the harmonious relationship’ that is constructed by the gender roles. Although the virtues of the Confucian parent–child relationship are connected through the strong emotional closeness, which are caring and loving (Park & Chesla, 2007), the relationship becomes ‘harmonious’ when East Asian women and East Asian men comply with the gender roles. However, as C. Li (2000) mentioned, this understanding of gender difference in Confucian society functions to make the Other, as many East Asian mothers suffered from the traditional values in the patriarchal society

(Park & Cho, 1995). Therefore, it would be more meaningful to reinterpret the difference in other ways. As the EGEP attempted to find the differences in participants' experiences and reconceptualized them as *something* shared by Asian women, if we attempt to understand differences in the parent–child relationship other than gender but in their experiences of being together, filial piety or the harmonious relationship among the parents and children of East Asian immigrant families might have new meanings—*something* connected by parents and children through shared experiences of being the minority in the mainstream society.

#### 4. The Asian Feminist Perspective on East Asian Parenting

East Asian parenting has been focused on the differences from Western parenting. Many Asian-heritage scholars attempted to find differences in the concepts of warmth, child development, cultural belief, and aims of child rearing compared to Western parenting. As a result, the tiger mother and the traditional Confucian mother become the master narratives to understand differences of East Asian parenting. To repeat, East Asian parenting becomes the signifier of the difference from Western parenting.

However, with the Asian feminism perspective, East Asian parenting styles are not different from Western parenting styles if we deeply rethink Asia and East Asian women. First, to Asian feminist scholars, Asia is not only a fixed geographic space but also the imaginary space to build up the connections among Asian women (Chen, 2007; E. Kim, 2010; S. Lee, 2008; M. Lee, 2014). With this reconceptualization of Asia, East Asian parenting is the Asian-heritage parents' invitation to their children toward Asia. Second, the Asian feminist perspective suggests reframing Asian women as the producers

of their knowledge rather than the victims of patriarchal society and culture (E. Kim, 2010; S. Lee, 2008; M. Lee, 2014; C. Li, 2000; Lyon, 2000), which is Confucianism. With the reframing of East Asian women, they reinterpret Confucianism so that they can reconstruct traditional Confucian parents as complementary beings rather than opposite and hierarchical beings. Third, as Asian scholars (S. Lee, 2008; M. Lee, 2014) suggest a creative way to interpret 'difference' to connect Asian women. Through the creative way to understand difference, East Asian women can create networks. This leads to rethinking of the gender role to establish filial piety or a harmonious relationship between parents and children in East Asian immigrant families. The politics of solidarity suggests connectedness should be established among East Asian immigrant family members through commonalities in experiences of living as a minority in the United States. In sum, with the perspective of Asian feminist scholars, East Asian parenting is not the different parenting of Asian-heritage parents from East Asia. It is a signifier of the diversity of East Asian immigrant families.

## Chapter Four: Conclusion and Proposal

In Chapter Two, I explored to see how East Asian parenting styles are considered tiger mothering (Chao, 1994; Chua, 2011; Juang et al., 2013; S. Kim, 2013; Kim & Wong, 2002) or traditional Confucian mothering (Choi et al., 2013; Chuang & Tamis-LeMonda, 2009; Cline, 2015; Kim et al., 2014; Koh et al., 2009; Park & Chesla, 2007; Park & Cho, 1995; Red & Edwards, 2016; Way et al., 2013; Yun, 2012) that emphasizes the differences compared with Western parenting styles. However, in Chapter Three, using the Asian feminist lens (Chen, 2007; E. Kim, 2010; S. Lee, 2008; M. Lee, 2014; Lyon, 2000), I attempted to rethink East Asian parenting as a signifier of the diversity of East Asian immigrant families.

Thus, East Asian parenting is a diverse style of parenting rather than confined concepts such as the Western authoritarian parenting style, tiger mothering, or traditional Confucian mothering. As previous scholars stated, compared to the White middle-class parenting style, East Asian parenting has been understood in the fixed range of difference (i.e., obsessed with children's education more than common Western children; harsher and more emotional than Western parents). However, East Asian parenting is repeatedly considered harsh authoritarian parenting that needs to be corrected because the expected parenting (and caring) of DAP is the authoritative parenting style (Hart et al., 1997) that caregivers should provide their children for psychological aspects, such as secure, sensitive, and comfortable responses to children for their appropriate social development (Black & Aboud, 2011; Hart et al., 1997). As I discussed in Chapter Two, this understanding of authoritative/authoritarian parenting is again connected to Western/East

Asian parenting. Thus, the differences between East Asian parenting styles and Western parenting styles are considered inappropriate in American early childhood education to foster appropriate socio-emotional development. Therefore, in order for early childhood educators to understand the difference, I propose to create a space for East Asian immigrant families in the school context through teachers' genuine understanding and listening to East Asian parents' perspectives on children, socialization, and development (Feng, 1994). I believe this space of listening would invite every East Asian immigrant family as a member of the school community through early childhood educators.

First, there has been critical perspectives on early childhood education as a means of reproducing White middle-class social norms and values (Brooker, 2004; Cannella, 1997). For example, according to the National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) position statement on DAP, one of the major responsibilities of a teacher is to create an effective learning environment for children. As DAP states, children can effectively learn in a caring environment. For this reason, the environment should be a caring community where children and their families can feel safe and be responded to. In order to create this environment, a practitioner needs to establish reciprocal relationships with families so that the practitioner can acquire knowledge about a child in the family context. Therefore, the reciprocal relationship between a teacher and a family is important in the caring environment. As a result, a teacher can create a caring community where community members (administrators, teachers, families, and children) can interact psychologically in a "secure, relaxed, and comfortable rather than disengaged, frightened, worried, or unduly stressed" environment (NAEYC, 2009, p. 17).

However, considering East Asian parenting has often been described in negative terms, such as authoritarian or tiger mothering, it is doubtful whether the parent–child relationship of East Asian immigrant families could be considered ‘secure, relaxed and comfortable’ in DAP (Bang, 2009; S. Park, 2012) because of the different understanding of family. For example, Bang (2009) showed that Korean American families and American schools have different understanding of family involvement. In the schools, Korean American families felt that they are excluded from participating in school-provided family involvement programs. The study implied that participating in American school requires the families to have specific mainstream cultural knowledge and language. Moreover, this connotes that the decisions about curriculum content and teaching methodology are mainly derived from culturally dominant knowledge. Therefore, the curriculum, teachers’ expectations, and the cognitive development assessment of a child ultimately reproduce the White middle-class culture’s biases, attitudes, and values for other cultural groups (Darder, 2011). In other words, this micro-aggressive attitude (Allen et al., 2013) toward students and even their families may shrink the space for children and families from different cultural backgrounds. Thus, valuing the knowledge created by East Asian women in the classroom is one of the ways to create a space for East Asian immigrant families in the school context.

Second, DAP states a child is an individual learner. A teacher should know the best practice that is adaptive and be responsive to the child’s individual variation (NAEYC, 2009). Based on this implication, the teacher needs to make an appropriate learning plan for the individual child’s developmental stage. Throughout the position

statement, the NAEYC emphasizes the interaction between an adult and a child as an effective way of fostering age-appropriate development. One of the statements is that the adult should help a child to regulate her or his own emotions, behaviors, and attention by herself or himself because “all young human[s] must negotiate the transition from total dependence on others at birth to competence and internal control” (NAEYC, 2009, p. 12). As DAP states, a child is an individual learner, and DAP focuses on individual learning.

This understanding of a child, however, contrasts with the cultural belief of child development in East Asian immigrant families. As previous studies have shown, East Asian immigrant parents tend to emphasize relationships to other people, or the community, as well as filial piety among family members. It is doubtful whether the DAP reflects these cultural beliefs about children, although the DAP position statement strongly suggests different cultural perspectives on children’s development. DAP states that a teacher needs to be sensitive to children’s different cultural backgrounds. However, as Summer (2014) showed a teacher’s unintentional ignorance toward a different race, a school might unconsciously ensure the strong statement of a child based on the Anglo concepts of childhood as the only perspective on the child. For example, Brooker (2004) described how Bangladeshi children challenged the norm of a child in American society. She identified the school as unconsciously based on the Anglo cultural belief of childhood (i.e., “independent, autonomous, and able to show initiative” child, p. 118), which is not consistent with Bangladeshi family (i.e., Bangladeshi children were combined in the mixed-age community of the extended family). Thus, similar to the many reconceptualist scholars (Cannella, 1997; Delaney, 2015; Langford, 2010) criticized DAP

as the dominant cultural belief of the European American middle class, I propose the early childhood education system should view the DAP perspective on children as a cultural belief instead of as an objective and scientific fact. If the early childhood education system admits the DAP perspective on the child as one of many cultural beliefs, I believe the East Asian cultural understanding of a child would not be considered one of references in the early childhood education field. This is one of the other ways to sincerely include East Asian immigrant families in American schools by valuing the families' cultural beliefs about children and parenting.

According to Giroux (1987), all educators “must develop pedagogical conditions in their classrooms that allow different student voices to be heard and legitimated. This suggest[s] confirming and legitimizing the knowledges and experiences through which students give meaning to their lives” (p. 21). A teacher has the power to create a space to empower bicultural children by including their families in the dominant education space. To emphasize, a teacher is one of the major agents to create a space for immigrant families in the education system. For example, immigrant teachers were important factors in the creation of contexts of reception (Adair, 2016). Moreover, the teacher has the will to resist the regulated education system (Fenech & Sumsion, 2007). Therefore, early childhood educators are the agents who can make a space for East Asian immigrant families in DAP, which is based on dominant cultural knowledge, or White middle-class cultural knowledge (Cannella, 1997). Making a space for East Asian immigrant families in schools is possible when a teacher understands the East Asian beliefs of childhood and parenting and finds commonalities with them. Thus, to early childhood educators, I

suggest interpreting the 'difference' as the possibility to open up a new space for bicultural children and their families rather than errors that need to be corrected.

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