

# Chinese Parenting: The Impact On Individuals' Social Comparison

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**Abstract:** Social comparison refers to the psychology where individuals compare themselves with other people when they think other people are superior to them or worse than them. Social comparison was found in Chinese individuals who have authoritarian parenting. It is difficult to measure how an individual compares himself with others and the according impact caused. Therefore, in-depth interview method, a qualitative method, was applied in this research. In this research, the relationship between Chinese parenting and social comparison has been explored. The findings in this research suggest that authoritarian Chinese parenting is a crucial factor to individual's upward social comparison.

**Keywords:** Social comparison; Chinese parenting; Psychology

## 1. Research Justification and Background

The topic of my research is Explore The Relationship Of Chinese Parenting And Individuals' Social Comparison In China. Festinger set up social comparison theory in 1954 (Garcia et al., 2013). According to Festinger (1954), social comparison shows the psychology of individuals when individuals compare themselves with others in order to gain self-evaluation and self-measurement. Chinese parenting is mostly found manipulating, dominating and coercive, where parents use their family status and authority to shape children's behaviors (Li et al., 2014). I learn from my life experience in China that some Chinese parents tend to compare their children with other children who they think their children should learn from. Social comparison should arouse people's concern in China because people are increasingly suffering the stress or other psychological problems brought from social comparison (Zheng & Yu, 2016). I found that these children who are often compared, however, seem to constantly compare themselves with others though they aware of the anxiety and stress gained from the comparison. In this research, I interviewed four Chinese participants, who were often compared by their parents in their childhood and tend to compare themselves with others. I've known these participants for a long time thus I know that they are the individuals that my research focuses on. I will have more explanation about the selection of the participants in Methodology part. Weiss & Rupp (2011) show that personal history is one of the important reasons that cause social comparison yet parenting is an influential part in individuals' history (McLeod, 2007). Accordingly, parenting relates to social comparison. In this research, I applied thematic analysis to analyze the data and I explored how Chinese parenting associates with individuals' social comparison in China specifically. At the end of the research, I will summarize the key findings of my research and propose some suggestion for the further researches.

## 2. Significant Findings and Analysis

This research is aim to explore the links between the Chinese parenting and individuals' social comparison. The Chinese parenting I discuss in this research depicts the parenting where parents often compare their children with children's peers who parents think have better performances than children through asking children to learn from peers or talking about how excellent those peers are in front of children. The reason why I add 'Chinese' parenting here instead of a specific parenting is because according to my experience in China, this parenting seems a traditional family pedagogy in China. As I discussed, this parenting could be specific phenomenon in China which influenced by Chinese culture and also competitive environments in China. I do not mean this parenting or this phenomenon only happens in China. But in order to make this parenting and its influence more clear and specific, I think it is important to narrow the perception of this parenting which is likely to be influenced by certain culture and environment. According to the participants, there are a few traits of this parenting, for example, the parents mostly only compared the participants with the peers who the parents thought were better than their children rather than comparing the participants with children who the parents thought were not as good as their children. The parents sometimes also made the comparison when children's relatives were also there, which was likely to make children even more doubt about their abilities and questioned their confidence. Though it seems the parenting takes great responsibilities for children's psycho-emotional change, the influence of this parenting varied on different participants.

The participants who are more competitive, such as Lu and Ease, are more sensitive on the comparison brought up by their parents in comparison with the other participants. Thus the comparison of Lu's and Ease's parents is likely to increase their competitiveness on viewing the relationship with their peers. However, according to the data, though Lu and Ease's competitiveness was influenced, how Lu and Ease react to this influence is different. In Lu's opinion, the impact of the comparison from his parents is negative, which causes him under great pressure to compare himself with other individuals. Yet Ease thought that the comparison from her parents is generally positive, for it encourages her to spend more efforts on improving herself and become more ambitious. Lu and Ease have different understanding on their parents' parenting and therefore, though the influence on them is similar, the results are different. What makes Lu and Ease different is Lu is more competitive than Ease but he is not as confident as Ease. The participants' examples suggest that the parenting is likely to influence how individuals view the relationship with their peers but whether or how the parenting

influences individuals' competitiveness may vary because of individuals' own characters. Individuals who are more competitive are more likely to be influenced on their competitiveness toward their peers. The reason why I use 'likely' here is because the participants' characters and their main parenting are the only evidences I know. But whether there are other factors which make Lu or Ease typical is uncertain.

According to the findings, the participants' social comparison is likely to directly link with their parents' parenting. The most obvious evidence is the parenting influences how Lu and Ease view the relationship with their peers. The parenting directly influence Lu's and Ease's competitiveness while according to Festinger (1954), competitiveness is an significant element of social comparison. In other words, when the parenting influences Lu's and Ease' competitiveness, the parenting was affecting Lu's and Ease's social comparison. As I did not study about the participants' parents, this influence is unidirectional. However, Yin and Zao do not seem to be influenced on their competitiveness toward their peers. There is a possibility that the influence on individuals' competitiveness only occurs when individuals are also competitive. There is another possibility, which is individuals' competitiveness is also influenced by this parenting but the influence is not apparent. This is one of the limitations of this research, for only through interviewing the participants cannot surely measure whether their competitiveness is influenced or not. However, it is interesting to find that how the participants participate in social comparison is similar to how the participants' parents compared them with other children. Yin mentioned that she compared children with other children as how her parents compared her with others. But the above findings still lack convincing evidence to prove that the participants model their parents to compare themselves with others or follow their parents' parenting to educate other children.

After the analysis, there are two main points I want to argue. Firstly, Garcia et al. (2013) suggests that personal history and individuals' social comparison do not have direct connection. I partly agree with Garcia et al. (2013), for Lu's and Ease's examples show that personal history directly influences individuals' social comparison. However, Yin's and Zao's examples do not show that their parenting and their social comparison have direct link. Therefore, the examples suggest that personal history and individuals' social comparison have and also do not have direct link. In this research, it is found the, individuals' own competitiveness is likely to decide whether personal history and social comparison has directly link or not. But whether there are other factors that influence this link still needs more investigation. On the other hand, it seems most literatures discuss how parenting influences children and they focus on finding the similarities of parenting in order to predict how they influence children. However, the participants' examples suggest that children's characters also decide or influence how the same kind of parenting influences them. Though the participants have similar parenting, they are not influenced in the same way. Besides, generally summarizing parenting is likely to neglect other possible factors that affects that results.

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