

Investigating cultural influences on Chinese Parents' formation of Parenting Style

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Abstract. This study aims to explore the influence of cultural factors on the formation of parenting styles among Chinese parents. Parenting style is a crucial factor in child development, and there are significant variations in parenting practices across different cultural backgrounds. While numerous studies have indicated that parenting patterns are influenced by various factors, research specific to the parenting styles within the unique cultural context of China remains insufficient. Employing a qualitative research methodology, this study analyzes the current status of four classic parenting models (authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglecting) proposed by Diana Baumrind within Chinese families and the cultural influences behind them. Through questionnaires and in-depth interviews, data were collected from eight Chinese families to examine how cultural values, religious beliefs, social environments, and gender roles shape parenting styles. The study found that Confucianism in Chinese culture significantly impacts parenting styles, emphasizing collectivism, respect for authority, and the importance of education. Additionally, with the dissemination of Western culture, an increasing number of Chinese parents are beginning to value granting their children more autonomy and self-reflection space. However, regardless of the culture, cultural factors exert a profound and complex influence on parenting patterns.

Keywords: cultural influence; parenting style; Chinese families; confucianism; western culture.

1. Introduction

Parenting style is an important factor in child development and a child's socio-emotional development is influenced by the type of parenting style used in families. (Joseph M. V., John J. (2008).). Family education can affect children's future development, long-term success, moral standards, and social skills. Parenting pattern is one of the most important parts of family education. Many people believe parenting patterns occur naturally and won't change. (Diana Lang and Marissa). However, Parenting patterns are influenced by factors such as parent's personality, gender, economic status, religion, education level, social support and culture. (Diana Lang and Marissa L. Diener). "Parents with different cultural values could be assumed to have different parental values and parenting practices." (He, Usami, Rikimaru, & Jiang, 2021). While searching for types of parenting patterns, researcher Gwen Dewar found that Chinese family education patterns are labeled as "Authoritarian". Chinese parenting in early childhood reflects Confucian values which belong to one of the traditional Chinese cultures. Confucianism is based on the principles of the good life, loyalty, and respect for older persons and family, as well as encouraging harmony and altruism (Chen, 2001). After reading materials and researching about cultural effects of the formation of family education patterns in China, I found that there is still limited research. Research related to the cultural influence of parenting patterns is few and many of these types of research focus on Asia as a whole rather than a specific country. Thus, in this study, I aim to study and analyze the influence of culture on Chinese family education to provide a clearer knowledge of cultural influence on parenting patterns specific to China. In this research, I plan to use qualitative research methods to investigate four classic family education modes and study the Chinese families conforming to these four types of family education. My hypothesis is the Cultural Values Hypothesis(suggested by scholars and researchers in the education field) which suggests that cultural values and beliefs shape parenting practices and behaviors. According to this hypothesis, each culture has its values, norms, and beliefs about child-rearing. These cultural values influence the goals, expectations, and methods of parenting within that culture.

The four classic family education modes suggested by Psychologists Diana Baumrind are the authoritative family (high acceptance and high control), the authoritarian family (low acceptance and high control), the permissive family (high acceptance and low control), and the Neglecting family (low accept and low control).

Combined with the previously described research gap and goal, I found the paucity of research specific to Chinese parents. Therefore, the first question is to find out the current status of parenting styles in China. At the same time, guided by our Sociocultural Theory, I find that culture and society play an important part in human learning. Psychologist Lev Vygotsky believed that parents, caregivers, peers, and the culture at large are responsible for developing the brain's higher-order functions. According to Vygotsky, human development relies on social interaction and, therefore, can differ among cultures. As a result, my research question is: How do cultural factors influence Chinese parent's forms of parenting?

2. Method

In this study, a qualitative research design is used to investigate the relationship between the cultures that parents achieve and their parenting methods. Qualitative research is flexible since questions can be changed by the researcher when encountering different situations (Gaille, 2019). This helps ensure the study's data relevance and diversity. As a result, this method is flexible and adaptable to solve real-world problems. In this research, four types of family parenting patterns are used to analyze the influence of culture on family education. In this research, 8 individual families are invited to do a questionnaire first before analyzing the family types based on four classic family education modes. Then, diving into specific family education modes is required for further investigation. After that, understanding why families adopt specific styles of education and exploring the shallow or deep, short or long-term influence of culture on them are conducted through interviews. Finally, it analyzes the influences of specific regions and styles of culture. In China, combined with China's cultural context and factors, the four classical education types in China have their unique characteristics. Semi-structured interviews will be used through data collection by interviewing individually (George, 2023). The interview better connects the macro factors with personal factors in parenting style preferences. This research conducts in-depth interviews to gather an understanding of the relationship between parenting style and cultural influence.

The interview will focus on specific families in detail to get information that we need, instead of the general sampling. Therefore, this sampling method belongs to non-representative sampling which is more efficient in time, money, and effort with collecting a relatively small sample (‘ShortCuts’, n.d.). The data source is observations. Eight observations of parents in their homes interacting with their children are needed. Observation will last approximately 15 minutes with recording by video. Sociocultural Theory (SCT) was used to guide the current study, where culture and community influence are regarded as a key construct. The rationale for using SCT in this research is that sociocultural considers that human develops their beliefs through participating in cultural events, and this study needs a perspective that focuses on parenting patterns that formed under cultural influence. In this study, SCT is adopted to explain the relationship between the formation of Chinese parenting patterns and the impact of culture on parents, instead of investigating the social policy implications.

3. Formation of parenting pattern

3.1. How parenting pattern formed.

Parenting styles reflect variations in the attitudes and practices of parents, and comprise discrete parenting behaviors. “Parenting style” refers to a cluster of parental practices that produce relatively stable and identifiable patterns in child adjustment outcomes. (Michelle Givertz 2021.). Some forms of parenting patterns in caring for their children can be in the form of verbal or non-verbal attitudes

or actions. (Saifuddin, 2019) These different kinds of parenting forms are substantially very influential on the child's potential in intellectual, emotional, and personality aspects, social development, and other psychological aspects. Parenting patterns are formed and carried out by family members because parents want their children to achieve goals or success based on their hopes and expectations. Thus, they will use various expressions or different types of parenting patterns and guidance to ensure their children are making progress based on their expectations. In specific social periods, specific types of parenting patterns are favored and most popular. Specifically, every year, there might appear several new popular parenting styles such as tiger parenting, and lighthouse parenting. Psychologists also keep finding the best way to raise a healthy child. However, parenting patterns mostly depend on parents themselves. (Wistar Murray 2022). Most parents are educating children based on their creativity and instincts. Specifically, they will incorporate their childhood experience and children's personalities, ages, temperaments, and individual needs into account to adjust their parenting patterns to form suitable parenting patterns.

3.2. Factors affect parenting style

Parenting style can be varied by various factors based on the traits of parents, children, and social situations. Parents' characteristics are influential to the form of parenting pattern. Parents always bring cultural, religious, ethical, and moral traits when educating children. These traits mainly include belief, values, gender, age, personality, mental and physical health. (Diana Lang and Marissa L. Diener 2020). According to Baumrind's typology, some researchers used evidence to support that fathers tend to adopt an authoritarian parenting style while mothers tend to develop an authoritative one. Parents' personalities also contribute to the variation of parenting support to the children. Parents who are more agreeable, conscientious, and outgoing are warmer and provide more structure to their children. Parents who are more agreeable, less anxious, and less negative also support their children's autonomy more than parents who are anxious and less agreeable. (Prinzle, P., Stams, G. J., Dekovic, M., Reijntjes, A. H., & Belsky, J. (2009). Parents probably learn the parenting pattern from their parents when they are young. Both positive and negative parenting patterns can be passed down by generation. However, parents who are dissatisfied with their initial parenting pattern can change their parenting methods when they have a child. Socioeconomic status can be a factor that affects the formation of parenting patterns. (Joseph M. V., John J. (2008). The basic educational goals for parents from different classes are different. For example, lower and working-class parents tend to be more strict with their children and respect authority in comparison with middle and upper-class parents. (Joseph M. V., John J. (2008). The specific reason for this is that different levels of jobs require different qualities and demands. Parents will educate their children based on the skills they mostly use when working. The stress and pressure that parents have also directly influence parenting patterns. When parents are stressed or under pressure, they may become more emotionally reactive in their parenting approach. They may be more prone to frustration, impatience, or irritability, which can affect their interactions with their children. This can lead to inconsistent or harsh parenting behaviors. In addition to parents themselves, children's traits will also influence the type of parenting pattern formed. Children's identity of gender, birth order, temperament, and health status will all influence the way for parents to raise children. For example, an infant with an easy temperament may enable caregivers to feel more effective, as they are easily able to soothe the child and elicit smiling and cooing. (Diana Lang and Marissa L. Diener 2020). Another child characteristic is the child's gender identity. Parents will allocate the work for daughters and sons in different ways. Parents usually allow daughters to take care of her's siblings while asking sons to perform chores outside the home such as moving the lawn. According to Crowley, K., Callanan, M. A., Tenenbaum, H. R., & Allen, E, parents will take differently based on children's gender. In addition, culture also affects the formation of parenting patterns mainly through affecting the values, family structure, and health. Social networks, school, work settings, and neighborhoods are all contextual and sociocultural factors influencing the formation of parenting patterns.

4. Cultural influences on parenting style

The universality of these four typical parenting patterns in a specific area (the authoritative family, the authoritarian family, the permissive family, and the Neglecting family) is influenced by cultures among specific areas. Authoritarian parenting is believed to occur more frequently and is common in Asian and African countries. In these countries, parents frequently stress respect for authority. Permissive parenting is seen in Western countries since parents in these countries place a high value on their kids' independence and uniqueness, giving them more

flexibility in decision-making and self-impression. Cultures affect the frequency of a specific family's parenting in a specific country.

This paper uses qualitative research design to investigate the relationship between the cultures that parents achieve and their parenting methods. The main focus is cultural influences. Cultural influences refer to various social, religious, and historical factors that shape the beliefs, values, traditions, and customs of a particular group of people or society. In this research, cultural influences include values, society, gender roles, and religion.

4.1. Cultural values, religion, and parenting pattern

Cultural context and values, directly or indirectly, influence parents' values, beliefs, attitudes, and socialization goals (Keshavarz & Baharudin, 2009; Tamminen, 2006). When individuals are exposed to their culture with high frequency, they are likely to adopt the norms and values of that culture (Schwarz, Schäfermeister, Trommsdorff, 2005). In China, parents are more likely to encourage children to view themselves as part of the integrated wholes of their family, community, and society, and not to emphasize their differences from others (Chao, 1994; Chen, Cen, Li, & He, 2005; Ruby & Grusec, 2001, 2006). Chinese culture embodies the collectivist perspective in which achieving and maintaining social order and interpersonal harmony have been primary concerns (Chen, Liu et al., 2000). For example, Taiwan, a collectivist society, often values and promotes sociability, harmony, family integrity, obedience, and interdependent relationships with others (Oishi, Schimmack, Diener, & Suh, 1998). In traditional Chinese culture, face, criticism, and self-control are emphasized which helps establish interrelationships with others, conforming to norms, and humility. (Fung, 1999; Ho, 1995; Li, 2001; Tu, 1998). In a collectivist society, one must not "stick out" to fit in the group and maintain the harmony of the community (Ho, 1986). Being moderate, humble, self-effacing, and socially conforming while interacting with others reflects "modesty" and is greatly valued in Chinese culture (Leung, 2010; Triandis, 1995, 2001).

Parents' religiosity may influence the behaviors and beliefs that they model for their children. Particularly in the years before adolescence, parental religiosity and spirituality may have a more powerful impact on a child's well-being than does the child's self-reported religiosity (Bridges & Moore, 2002; Petts, 2011). Most parents saw religion as a way of life that was transmitted between generations. They considered it part of their parenting responsibility to pass on their faith (Horwath, Lees, Sidebotham, Higgins, & Imtiaz, 2008). Confucianism and Taoism, which are Chinese religions, emphasize self-control, interpersonal harmony, conforming to norms, respecting parents and elders, and achieving a family reputation through individual achievement (Ho, 1995; King & Bond, 1985). Studies of the Chinese or Taiwanese population (e.g., Chen & Luster, 2002; Wu et al., 2002) have identified certain characteristics of the Chinese culture stemming from Confucian principles that influence the process of parenting (Ho, 1995). For example, Wu and colleagues (2002) found that Chinese mothers significantly scored higher in "modesty encouragement" parenting strategies (e.g., discouraging the child from strongly expressing his/her point of view) compared to American mothers. Taken together, Chinese parents likely endorse these cultural values in their parenting practices/styles as a means to socialize their children to fit the social norms (Huang & Gove, 2015; Kim & Wong, 2002; S. L. Lim & B. K. Lim, 2004).

4.2. Society and parenting pattern

People who live under the influence of Asian countries believe higher education level always leads to higher social status and living quality. (Huang & Gove, 2015). Chinese culture, part of the Asian country, is highly structured based on social class. Authoritarian parenting is likely to occur in Asian countries since parents in Asian countries know the importance of education and they hope to yield success. Parents have their expectations for their children and they will force their children to achieve success based on their hopes.

In China, punishment is a common way for parents to educate their children or teachers to teach students, especially in earlier days. Parents believe using punishment helps children to understand their faults easier and it is effective in helping children to learn new lessons. Common punishments in China can be categorized into different types: Physical exercise, public humiliation, punishments involving parents, writing punishments, Deduction of a student's score for bad behavior, exclusions, being made to clean the classroom, and physical punishment. (Kim Ooi, 2022). In China,

punishments are also not banned. Chinese society is rooted in collectivism, where the well-being and reputation of the family are highly valued. (Xisu Wang, 2016). Parents often focus on raising children who conform to societal norms, maintain family honor, and contribute to the family's social standing. Chinese society can be highly competitive, and parents often engage in social comparison regarding their children's achievements. This can lead to a desire for children to excel in various areas, including academics, extracurricular activities, and social status.

4.3. gender role and parenting pattern

Gender roles refer to a set of behavioral norms corresponding to one's gender obtained through imitation learning in the process of socialization (Pleck, 1983), which is an important aspect in the development of individual socialization. Traditional gender roles and expectations also influence parenting patterns in Chinese society. There may be distinct expectations for boys and girls regarding behavior, responsibilities, and future aspirations. In China, historically, girls were often expected to help with household chores and take on responsibilities related to cooking, cleaning, and taking care of younger siblings. (Guansheng Ma, 2015). Education is highly valued for both girls and boys in Chinese society. However, girls were often encouraged to excel academically as it was seen as a pathway to future success and marriage prospects. For boys, boys were often expected to excel academically and pursue successful careers, as they were seen as the main providers for the family. Boys were encouraged to participate in sports and outdoor activities, as physical strength and competitiveness are traditionally valued traits for males. The time spent by mothers and fathers educating their children is commonly different. Child care is a stereotypically feminine activity and marks a less traditional family role for fathers. This may be especially the case when fathers spend time with their daughters. On the other hand, within-family comparisons have shown that fathers are more inclined toward sex-typed activities with children (especially boys) than mothers (Harris & Morgan, 1991; Crouter, McHale, & Bartko, 1993). The "tiger mom" is the prevailing stereotype of Chinese parenting in America (Chua, 2011). Americans perceive tiger moms to be highly controlling, strict, and severe almost to the point of abuse (Chua, 2011). In China, researchers have concluded that the authoritarian parenting pattern is the most widespread. Authoritarian parenting is a style of child-rearing that emphasizes high standards and a tendency to control kids through shaming, the withdrawal of love, or other punishments.

5. Data analysis

Data is collected using interviews in this experiment. Eight families are chosen to conduct the interview. After conducting the interview, I will synthesize the information and determine which type of family pattern the specific family belongs to. The interview question is the same for the eight families.

In this paper, the influence of culture on Chinese family education is studied, starting with four family types and placing them in the context of Chinese families, then, the factors that influence the formation of parenting are discussed and cultural plays an important part in it. Therefore, eight Chinese families with four classical types are investigated through observation and interviews which I use qualitative method. Through the investigation, I find that Confucian culture has a great influence on Chinese families, and at the same time, more and more parents are beginning to absorb Western cultural ideas such as giving children enough self-reflection space. However, no matter what kind of culture, culture has had a huge and profound impact on the model of family education.

Three of the interviewees in this interview have religious beliefs. (Interviewee four, interviewee five, and Interviewee eight). Interviewee four and interviewee five believe in Buddhism and one of them believes in Confucianism. Their education pattern has been affected by religious beliefs. For example, interviewee eight who believes in Confucianism said:“ I won't regulate my child too much since I need to give my child the opportunity to make mistakes.”This educating perspectives correspond to Confucianism which emphasizes living a peaceful life. Confucianism believers use what they have learned based on the religions to educate their children. They both believe their main educational perspectives won't be influenced by society since education remains important in their culture no matter how society changes. However, some new perspectives toward education may be included by them when educating their children.

Three of the interviewees believe in some cultural beliefs such as obedience, and respect instead of personal dreaming.(Interviewee one,Interviewee three ,interviewee two).

One of them belongs to communism. Based on their cultural beliefs, it's obvious that their parenting pattern has been affected. An interviewee who is a communist said: “Children should fight for their future and dreams through study regardless of their family backgrounds” This is the same as the concept of communism which emphasizes creating a classless society. They both believe their educational perspectives will be shaped by society, however, the importance of education in their mind won't change. They will only change their basic hopes or requirements for their children to provide talents for the changing society.

Two of the interviewees (Interviewee Six and Interviewee Seven)have some personal beliefs such as focusing on cultivating children's values and perspectives or emphasizing the importance of time management and children's diligence. They have intentionally cultivated their children based on their educational perspectives. For example, Interviewee Six emphasizes the importance of time management. Thus, she focuses on teaching her children how to make plans every day. They all believe their educational perspectives may somehow be influenced by society, however, just slightly.

Authoritarian family:

Two of the interviewees are from authoritarian families. One of them believes in socialist culture and emphasizes on collectivism, independence, and time management. She's strict about controlling her son's electronic devices. “I always make plans for him every day and she can only accept her child to play video games during the evening for no more than thirty minutes.”When educating children, the most important thing for her is to educate children to be honest and trustworthy. Good education should be based on individual abilities, and education that is suitable for each child's own physical and mental development characteristics is good. Interviewee One displayed the features of high control and low acceptance which corresponds to an authoritarian family. Another interviewee doesn't have religious beliefs but emphasizes the importance of time management and children's diligence. “I always teach my child how to make every day and how important it is. She needs to make plans for both extra or school work since the study is the only most important thing for them to focus on now.”Interviewee Six also displayed characteristics of high control and low acceptance which relates to an authoritarian family. She emphasizes the importance of study and education.

They both believe their educational perspectives will be influenced by society. Education is really important under their country's culture which is a reason for them to focus on education. With society's changes in the needs or necessity of education, their perspective will be affected since they believe they should keep pace with society and cultivate children for social needs.

Permissive family :

Two of the interviewees are from permissive families. One of them is a communist and he always believes receiving education will influence people's life. "When educating children, I believe children should be cultivated by good study habits. They not only need to study academic subjects well but also interest-oriented classes." He supports her children to join various extra classes such as piano or dance classes. "When educating children, I always listen to their opinions first before making decisions." "In my family, parents pay the most attention to educating children." It is obvious that he respects his children's perspectives and displays the features of low control and high acceptance when educating children. Another one believes in Confucian culture and emphasizes the importance of respect and making friends. "I won't regulate my child too much since I need to give my child the opportunity to make mistakes." He will only design the boundary for mistakes. Interviewee eight has a low control of his child since he respects more and gives the child the opportunity to explore.

They both believe their perspectives toward education will change a little with the change in society. However, interviewee two believes his perspective won't change too much since education is always important in his perspective. "Children should fight for their future and dreams through study regardless of their family backgrounds which is the same as the concept of communism." His educational perspective may be influenced by society but the importance of education in his mind won't change.

Authoritative parenting:

Two of the interviewees are authoritative parents. One of them has some cultural beliefs, such as obedience, and respect instead of personal dreaming. "I am transferring the importance of cultural beliefs that I believe to her children when educating my child." The most attention is that she is aiming at nurturing her children as a self-loved person with enough independence and a sense of safety. "Since my child is quite young, I will teach her to make some decisions to reduce the possibility of making mistakes. She believes everything is changing and in need of change, including parenting. Parents go first, then grandparents when educating children. Everyone needs to be involved with an integrated value of education. Interviewee three respects the child to be self-loved while instructing her child to make decisions to better reduce mistakes. Another one doesn't have any religious beliefs and she focuses on cultivating children's values and perspectives. Education that emphasizes children's critical thinking development and initiative could be considered a good education. Children need to know they should be fully involved in education which means they need to plan for their academic achievement and focus more on study. They also need to be creative and free to share their ideas not based on academic books. Interviewee seven is strict toward her child's study but also gives the child the space to be creative which indicates both high acceptance and high control in terms of family educational pattern.

They both believe their educational perspectives will be shifted by society. One of the interviewees said she is influenced by social culture as she said the fast speed of development is surely bringing hard pressure and education is highly important in our country. However, another believes his educational perspectives will only be affected a little since education is always important in his perspective. Most of his parenting styles or behavior won't change a lot.

Neglecting family:

Two of the interviewees are neglecting family and they both believe in Buddhism. Buddhism emphasizes on self-confidence and believes everyone can succeed. "When educating children, I respect children's ideas and focus on the cultivation of moral quality." One of them said. She thinks education that respects others equally can be considered a good education. Religion has expanded her educational scope, worldview, and altitude when educating children. The family pattern of interview four is neglecting family (low acceptance and low control). She focuses more on children's independence and confidence. She pays more attention to children's moral quality and educates her children to do everything based on morality.

Interviewee Five believes also in Buddhism and emphasizes loving oneself. When educating children, he hopes his children can feel free to share ideas and know how to love themselves. He

believes education that respects children's talents and cultivates children based on individual talents is good. Another interviewee gives children the space for self-thinking and development. However, he is eager to protect his child which leads to relatively high control of the child. His parenting pattern is obvious due to the feature "Low acceptance and low control."

She said her basic educational perspective won't change with the society, but she may include more social perspective. Education is important in her culture since culture is passed down by education. However, another interviewee's educational perspectives may be influenced by society. In addition, Buddhism has influenced him to focus more on children's mental health rather than emphasizing school grades only. He will protect his children from dangerous things such as eating junk food or doing dangerous sports. He hopes children can live their own dream life and be independent.

6. Conclusion

In this research, the influence of culture on parents' family patterns is studied and a qualitative method is used to investigate the influence. I searched academic research about the cultural influence on family patterns and I interviewed eight families. Throughout the interview, I make notes of the important parts and analyze that information to decide which classical parenting pattern they belong to. Consequently, I analysis how cultural influence affects them. Throughout the research, I found a positive relationship between culture and parenting patterns. Culture is highly likely to influence an individual's formation of family patterns. However, the degree of the influence is different. People who believe in religion have more percentages to be influenced by their culture.

7. Limitations

The number of samplings is relatively small and likely to be unrepresentative which leads to the data collected and analyzed is not as authoritative and objective as we expected (Vaughan, 2019). In addition, qualitative research may lead to subjectivity in data analysis which is less reliability and validity. At the same time, the information collected is based on individuals who may have biased points of view which leads to the uncertainty of data accuracy.

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Appendix:

Interview question

1. Do you have any religions or cultural beliefs such as respect for authority, emphasis on collectivism or individualism, importance of time?
2. How this type of cultural beliefs affect your parenting style? Which aspect do you pay the most attention when educating children? What types of education do you believe can be recognized as good education?
3. How religion influence your perspective on educating children?
4. Will your perspective of education be influenced by society?
5. If education become less important in your country, will your parenting style changed ?
6. Do you think education is important in your culture? Why do you think so? Do you think you have been influenced by such an environment?
7. What do you think are the main members in a family who influence education, who is responsible for children's education in your family, and what do you think is your ideal education model without objective limitations?