

Analysis of the Current Situation of Parenting Styles in China

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Abstract. Family is the place where children first receive their education. As a result, parenting styles can significantly impact for this reason, experts at home and abroad have attached great importance to the study of the influence of parenting styles on children's development. This paper integrates and analyses the classification of parenting styles by Chinese and foreign scholars, which are mainly defined as authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful according to two dimensions: demandingness and responsiveness. This paper's analysis mainly focuses on the factors that influence the different types of families' parenting styles in China and their influence mechanisms on various aspects of children's development. It was found that Chinese parents' awareness of scientific parenting has been increasing in recent years; while recognizing the importance of both demandingness and responsiveness, they generally tend to choose an authoritative parenting style. However, the idealized parenting style usually conflicts with real-life and traditional views, and the lack of systematic scientific learning makes it difficult for parents to implement parenting behaviors properly. This article aims to explore how Chinese parents can break out of this dilemma and find the most appropriate parenting style with the support and assistance of all sides under the changing times and the current situation, which is influenced by multiple factors.

Keywords: Parenting styles; Children's development; Influence factors; Influence mechanisms.

1. Introduction

In 2016, the "Guidance on Prevention and Control of Bullying and Violence among Primary and Secondary School Students" issued by nine departments, including the Ministry of Education, required parents to focus on the construction of family ethics, strengthen the discipline of their children, and focus on the education of their children's ideology and moral character and the cultivation of good behavioral habits. In the same year, the "Five-Year Plan on Guiding the Promotion of Family Education for Parents (2016-2020)" issued by the Ministry of Education and other departments elevated the importance of the family in the process of cultivating a healthy personality and good social behavior among students to a new level. On January 1, 2022, the "Law of the People's Republic of China on the Promotion of Family Education" came into effect. The law implements General Secretary Xi Jinping's important remarks on focusing on family education and family ethics and formally incorporates family education into the national education development plan and the rule of law governance. Several measures have been taken through institutional design to elevate family education from a traditional "family matter" in the old days to an important "national matter" in the contemporary era. At the same time, the central government has implemented the spirit of the document on reducing the burden of homework and out-of-school training for students in compulsory education and truly realized the cooperation between school and family education.

The French historian Phillipe Ariès notes that from the Middle Ages to the 21st century, the concept of the child has gone through a journey from the "vanishing child" to the "useful child" and the "priceless child. ". The concept of the child was missing in medieval Western society, and children were seen as "miniature adults". During the Industrial Revolution, children were given opportunities to work, and their economic value was raised, which changed the "useful children" view. While in the 20th century, the concept of the "sacred child" weakened the economic value of children and strengthened their emotional value. In the 21st century, competition for education has become more intense amid the wave of globalization. For their children to have access to high-quality educational resources, parents are willing to spend large amounts of money to buy school district houses and take their children to various summer camps and after-school programs. Families of all classes are

involved in the "parenting war" to varying degrees. There is an unprecedented level of "parenting anxiety" in society, as "intensive parenting (the existing literature refers to authoritative and authoritarian parenting as intensive parenting)" tends to be rushed.

Some scholars have pointed out that early Chinese parents favored an authoritarian rather than authoritative parenting style, which was influenced by the traditional Chinese Confucian culture of respecting authority, respecting hierarchy, and emphasizing filial piety [1]. However, current research suggests that with the implementation of the one-child policy, Chinese families have formed a "4-2-1" inverted structure consisting of grandparents, parents, and grandchildren, with children becoming the center of family development. Moreover, the authoritative parenting style has gradually become mainstream due to the spread of Western parenting styles [2].

This paper integrates the knowledge of Chinese and foreign scholars on the types of parenting styles and the criteria for classifying them at different times. This paper focuses on how traditional beliefs, individual education levels, income inequality, and the gender of children affect the parenting style choices of Chinese parents. Moreover, focus on the mechanisms by which Chinese parenting styles affect children's development in terms of academic achievement, socialization, personality, and psychological health. Chinese parents have become concerned and willing to learn about scientific parenting as the country's society has placed additional emphasis on family education year by year. However, there is a lack of systematic scientific learning as most parents only get some piecemeal advice on parenting styles from social media and other sources. At the same time, most Chinese parents are influenced by real life and traditional concepts, and they can hardly distinguish the quality of information and adapt theories to their situation. They still have difficulty relating theory to practice and accurately implementing parenting behaviors. This paper will explore how to help Chinese parents break the ice and find the most appropriate and effective parenting style through support and efforts from families, schools, communities and society.

2. Classification of parenting styles

Parenting style is a combination of parenting attitudes, parenting behaviors, and emotional expressions towards children that reflect the essence of parent-child interaction and does not change when the context changes. In family education, parenting styles directly and significantly impact children's socialization, academic achievement, and psychological health development.

The concept of parenting styles was first developed by psychologist Baumrind, who found through his research that parents tend to make different demands on their children in four areas: expressive attitudes, disciplinary methods, communication, and expectations. Baumrind thus proposed three types of parenting styles: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive [3].

Following this, Maccoby and Martin distinguished parenting styles into two dimensions, demandingness and responsiveness, which respectively capture the degree of parental intervention and responsiveness to children's choices [4]. The dimension of demandingness represents whether parents establish appropriate standards for their children's behavior and insist that their children meet these standards. This can be reflected in establishing regular task requirements and standards of excellence, such as rules and limits on children's daily activities (e.g., sleep and TV time). On the other hand, the responsiveness dimension indicates how accepting and loving the parent is of the child and how sensitive he or she is to the child's needs. It can be expressed in terms of encouraging children's independent activity and verbal expression, accompanying requests with reasons and explanations, and not dominating parental interests. Zhang Haochen and Qin Xuezheng, in 2019, found that the higher the Chinese parents' scores on demandingness and responsiveness, the better their children's academic performance, especially since the positive effect of the demandingness dimension was more significant [5]. In contrast, children's psychological health was only positively related to parents' responsiveness scores, while the increasing scores in the demandingness dimension were instead likely to hurt children's psychological health.

The intersection of these two dimensions results in four parenting styles: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful. The authoritative parenting style is a combination of high demandingness and high responsiveness, in which parents focus on both "grace and authority" in parenting, giving children adequate support and love while adhering to appropriate rules and discipline. The authoritarian parenting style is a combination of high demandingness and low responsiveness. They lack parent-child communication and commonly demand obedience from their children. They monitor and regulate their children's behavior through command, coercion, or punishment. Permissive parenting is a combination of high responsiveness and low demandingness. These types of parents tend not to interfere with their children's choices, give them plenty of freedom and help, and make fewer demands on them. Neglectful parenting is a combination of low responsiveness and low demandingness, in which parents tend to focus on their own needs. They lack rules and effective support for their children and do not respond to their children's needs.

In China, some scholars also classify the types of parenting styles. Liu Jinhua categorized parenting styles as harsh, expectant, doting, rejecting, divergent, and contradictory [6]. Lin Lei used the rapid clustering method to classify parenting styles into five types: extreme, harsh, doting, achievement pressure, and positive [7].

3. Factors Influencing Chinese Parents' Parenting Style

A variety of factors influences parenting styles. A study conducted by Yang Chuanli and Lan Xiaomeng on the parenting styles of Zhuang parents in Wuming District, Nanning City, showed that due to the rapid development of the local economy in Wuming District in recent years, parents could not bear to let their children suffer from childhood poverty. Thus, both Zhuang parents showed more over-protective and over-interfering behaviors toward their children [8]. Among them, the higher the educational level of Zhuang mothers, the higher their favoritism toward their children. Regarding over-protection, Zhuang fathers are significantly above the borderline compared to Han fathers. While on the dimension of rejection and denial, punishment and severity, and over-interference and overprotection, Zhuang mothers are significantly higher (or borderline significantly higher) than Han mothers. At the same time, Zhuang parents show more favorable and protective behaviors toward boys because many minority living areas are less developed and are still influenced by the traditional feudal ideology of "son preference" and "male superiority over female". However, ethnic minority parents also show more severe and punitive behaviors toward boys, expecting them to take up the "breadwinner" role in the future. Meng Liang's study of Daur families also found that they generally have higher expectations and stricter discipline for boys, while they have lower expectations and a permissive attitude toward girls [9].

Many studies have found that parenting styles are influenced by the level of parents' individual education level. Some parents tend to pass on feudal and traditional social values and outlook on life to their children and make them practice all activities according to their ideas because of their low education level. This puts a huge strain on the children's future learning and life, which leads them to develop unhealthy psychology, such as extreme and low self-esteem. At the same time, differences in individual education levels directly affect their performance in the labor market and impact income inequality.

Chinese families have continued to value education in recent years, as education yields have increased and income inequality has remained high. The average education expenditure of Chinese families accounted for 11.4% of total household expenditure in 2017, much higher than the proportion of education expenditure of American families in the same period [10]. The online survey "Domestic Family Investment in Children's Education Survey" was released by MileagePlus in 2019. The data shows that 38.8% of the families' education expenditures account for 20% to 30% of the annual family income. At the same time, there are obvious disparities in education investment in different family backgrounds. Analysis of the data from the 2017 China Education Finance Household Survey shows that the highest income level group spends seven times more on their children's education than the

lowest group. The proportion of education expenditure to total household expenditure is 9% higher for families whose mother has a bachelor's degree or higher than those whose mothers have an elementary school education [11].

The widening of income inequality increases family spending on education [12]. Undoubtedly, income inequality also changes family parenting style [13]. Unlike other indicators of family investment in education, parenting styles are more malleable and susceptible to policy intervention and guidance. While different groups are affected by income inequality to different degrees. If the disadvantaged groups are impacted, families increase the intensity of parenting styles, which will help improve the human capital situation, reducing the education gap and attenuating the negative impact of intergenerational mobility on income inequality. Therefore, it is of great practical importance to discuss the impact of income inequality on family parenting styles. As Li Yanan found, widening income inequality changes the intensity of family parenting styles by increasing income comparisons and increasing parents' aspirations for the next generation's success. Regardless of the inequality measure used, widening income inequality increases the intensity of family parenting styles. Moreover, income inequality has a greater effect on the intensity of parenting styles in rural households. To some extent, this has helped to reduce differences in parenting styles between rural and urban families and reduce rural-urban educational inequality. Second, income inequality had no significant effect on the parenting style of girls but had a significant positive effect on the parenting style of boys. This is because of the traditional gender concept of males as the primary provider of household income, and families have higher expectations of their success in career and social status. This suggests that when income inequality increases, families have higher expectations for boys and are more inclined to adopt intensive parenting styles that increase boys' expected future earnings in the labor market [14].

Although family income level affects educational investment, a study based on data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY) found that when parenting style variables were included, family income did not significantly affect children's emotional-behavioral performance. Instead, the parenting style significantly affected children's performance [15]. Several studies have shown that parenting styles serve as an intermediary bridge between family background and children's development. That means unfavorable economic conditions and lower parental education may negatively affect children's psychological health by acting on parenting styles and thus on children's psychological health [16]. Most of the earlier studies seemingly ignored the impact of sociocultural background and class differentiation on family parenting. The class perspective argues that families of different classes and social statuses often adopt different parenting styles. Sociologists have argued that there is a stratification of family parenting styles and that class-based parenting styles affect children's social development, academic achievement, and future success. The French sociologist Bourdieu sharply pointed out that education is a tool of the ruling class to maintain a social hierarchy. In the process of education, later generations can inherit cultural capital with class tastes, which reflects the aspirations of the dominant class and has become a tool for the reproduction of social class [17].

Many studies have concluded that families invest sufficient money and time in their children and choose the best parenting style to ensure their children have highly competitive knowledge and skills. However, parenting styles vary significantly across families, depending on parents' education level, occupation, and family socioeconomic status. For example, middle-income families whose occupations often require complex work tasks are affected by the demands of their jobs and are often actively involved in developing the skills and talents of their children, using a collaborative approach to parenting. On the other hand, low-income families do not have a sense of collaborative involvement and tend to adopt a negative or "laissez-faire" parenting style. In 2014, Xu Yinhong and other people found that middle-class families in China tend to adopt a collaborative parenting model, while working-class families tend to adopt a free-growth model. This result is more consistent with previous studies [18].

However, as the nation continues to emphasise family education, parents from all walks of life are beginning to gravitate toward learning and choosing more scientific and appropriate parenting styles. Sun Hequn conducted in-depth interviews and field observations of new urban middle-class and working families in 2022 and found that parents in both types of families actively learn to use collaborative parenting styles [19].

Both new middle-class and working-class parents attach great importance to their children's academic performance and consider it as cultural capital for upward mobility, but the expectations of new middle-class parents are more explicit and specific. New middle-class parents generally want their children to study in prestigious schools, and several parents explicitly want their children to enter "985" colleges as their academic goal, while working-class parents do not have a clear idea of what level of university they want their children to study. Only a few working-class parents talk about wanting their children to study in teacher training or medical schools. There is also a huge difference between them in terms of providing academic support for their children. New middle-class parents are supporting their children's education earlier and with more planning and purpose. New middle-class parents can provide their children with direct and effective academic support and better quality and more valuable educational resources. Working-class parents, on the other hand, usually start paying attention to their children's academic development only after they enter kindergarten or elementary school. While their academic support for their child consists only of supervising or monitoring the child's homework. When their children encounter problems with homework, they can only provide limited help, such as searching for answers to questions on Baidu on their mobile phones. In addition, working-class parents can only provide limited educational resources for their children. They consider factors such as convenient transportation and low prices when choosing after-school tutoring classes for their children. Moreover, extracurricular books are recommended by teachers or purchased randomly, and they do not screen and judge the value of extracurricular books themselves. It can be seen that working-class parents' support for their children's schooling is somewhat blind and submissive. This is because the new middle-class parents are highly educated, with a wealth of knowledge, a wide range of horizons, access to educational information, and the ability to think critically. It is through their academic achievements that they have moved from the bottom to the middle class and from the countryside to the city. They have benefited from the modern schooling system and are well versed in the "ways" and "methods" of learning subject knowledge. While at the same time, deeply aware of the value of prestigious universities in today's "Depreciation of academic qualifications", the value of prestigious universities is becoming more and more prominent. Therefore, in providing specific academic support for their children, the new middle-class parents act as "coaches" who plan their children's studies in all aspects and provide direct and effective guidance for their children's studies. Working-class parents, by contrast, lack sufficient cultural capital to engage in their children's learning. They are less educated, have limited knowledge, and their limited schooling experiences are filled with memories of frustration and few positive learning experiences. Therefore, in providing academic support for their children, they are more like "supervisors" who only supervise their children's school assignments and cannot plan extracurricular learning activities for their children. The academic support provided by new middle-class parents is highly conducive to higher academic achievement, whereas working-class children appear to be more uncertain in this regard, and their good academic achievement seems to be left to "the natural course of events" [19].

On the other hand, there is a cross-class consensus on "giving children a happy and joyful childhood". Both new middle-class and working-class parents value the company of their children and want to have a positive parent-child relationship with them. However, the quality of parent-child companionship and interaction, as well as the quality of interest classes and after-school programs chosen by new middle-class families, was better than that of working-class families. Compared with working-class parents, new middle-class parents showed a greater emphasis on the intrinsic goals of their children's development, such as the cultivation of an independent spirit and a sound personality, and also began to consider the cultivation of class tastes. Contemporary new middle-class parents try to find a middle way between authoritarianism and democracy, hoping to maintain authority in front

of their children but also to be friends with them while regulating their children's behavior and also giving them enough freedom. Working-class parents prefer punishment to the positive discipline of new middle-class parents. In addition, when young children are venting their emotions (e.g., tantrums or crying) or engaging in certain "disruptive" behaviors, working-class parents will strictly prohibit or more strictly discipline their children in the hope that they will understand and behave. Moreover, new middle-class parents are more dialectical and rational about absolute statements such as "discuss everything with your child first" and make objective choices. Working-class parents, on the other hand, seem to be more eager to express the "right" attitude but make choices that do not correspond to it in practice [19].

This shows that although both new middle-class urban families and working-class families in China are actively learning to use collaborative parenting styles, there are still significant differences in the educational styles of the two classes of families. Most of the new middle-class parents have a higher education level and are relatively more educated. They have also had the opportunity to move across borders or to be exposed to Western-style education during their studies and careers and have had the opportunity to learn a great deal about modern scientific parenting theories in their daily lives. Working-class parents, on the other hand, often have access to fragmented that are not always correct parenting theories and methods through the Internet and the media. Due to the influence of education level, family income, and social resources, working-class families do not have enough capacity to absorb and implement new parenting styles critically.

4. The Influence of Parenting Style on Child Development

Parenting styles have an important impact on children's development. First, in terms of cognition, a study based on CFPS data found that both the level of parental demandingness and responsiveness had a significant positive effect on children's academic achievement. The authoritative parenting style leads to the best academic achievement, followed by permissive and authoritarian parenting styles, and the neglectful parenting style is the most detrimental to children's academic achievement [5]. Parents of academically underachieving students scored significantly higher than academically excellent students on the dimensions of harsh punishment, denial, and excessive father interference and lowered on the dimensions of emotional warmth and understanding [20].

Second, parenting styles also have an important impact on children's socialization development. Guan Ying and other experts specifically explored the correlation between parenting styles and children's social development. Data from their study showed that in the group with high socialization scores of children, the proportion of parents adopting democratic parenting styles was significantly higher than permissive and authoritarian parenting styles. A permissive parenting style gives children more freedom, which benefits their personality development, especially social adjustment skills. However, such children receive less influence from their parents' education, so in the initial stage of children's social development, this type of education can lead to immaturity of children's social development. Parents who adopt an authoritarian style of education often do so for the "good of the child". However, too much intervention and overprotection restrict the development of the child's self-awareness and self-education ability to a certain extent and do not achieve the desired educational goals [21]. In addition, it has been shown at different ages that parental support, encouragement, and active participation can promote the positive development of children's self-concept, while rude and unsupportive behavior can hinder the healthy development of children's self-concept. [22]

Third, parenting styles have an important impact on children's personality development. The more parents use negative parenting styles such as harsh punishment, denial, and excessive interference, the more likely the child is to exhibit characteristics such as loneliness, lack of concern for others, difficulty adjusting to the outside world, and a preference for risk-taking. Parental understanding and emotional warmth can lead to a balanced development of children's personalities, which may be less concerned with their health, emotionally optimistic and stable, easy to mingle with, warm and mature, well-adjusted, prudent and practical. It also makes children prone to complacency and self-sufficiency

in life, with nothing to aspire to. If, however, over-interference and protection are added to this, it will lead to children with a negative attitude towards life, distrust of others, and no self-awareness. By allowing children to be over-cared for and coddled, they are placed in a special position within the family and are prone to develop negative personality traits such as capriciousness, self-centeredness, dependence and lack of resilience. Over-protection may hinder the development of children's independence and social skills, resulting in the development of undesirable personality traits such as lack of self-confidence, excessive self-restraint, and dependence [23].

Meanwhile, a study based on CFPS data found that parenting style also had a significant effect on children's psychological health, with the degree of responsiveness showing a significant positive relationship with children's psychological health, while the degree of demandingness was detrimental to children's psychological health [14]. The psychological health of children of the authoritative and permissive type is better than that of the authoritarian and neglectful type. This suggests that parents should strengthen their demands on their children on the one hand and enhance their care and response to their children on the other. In the context of the Chinese culture of "expecting children to become dragons" and ruling the family strictly, Chinese parents tend to pay more attention to the former and neglect the latter, which may harm their children's development in their choice of parenting style [5].

5. Recommendation

Most parents today, regardless of class, were born and raised in families with a traditional upbringing. Not only are they intensely influenced by traditional upbringing, but they also need to rely on the strength of their grandparents to cooperate in bringing up their children. Therefore, parents themselves need to be able to critically accept parenting advice and make an effort to compare various perspectives with their own parenting practices, weighing the trade-offs against the actual situation.

The introduction of the "double reduction" policy has made a great contribution to improving the physical and psychological health of primary and secondary school students and promoting the overall development of quality education. However, it may also have the unintended consequence of widening inequalities in after-school education. There are significant differences in resource endowments, such as economic, social, and cultural capital, possessed by the upper middle class and the working class. The reduction in the burden of schoolwork allows students to have more after-school time, while parents of elite-class families can use their vast interpersonal networks to link their children to educational resources for after-school education and make effective use of the increased after-school time. Meanwhile, children of the general class often lack effective channels and opportunities and find it difficult to fully use the increased free time outside of school for after-school education. This may further widen the already existing inequalities in after-school education [24].

The timely introduction of the "Family Education Promotion Act" re-emphasizes that education should never be the responsibility of individual families and that the home-school-community should be strengthened. Relevant departments and social media should encourage parents to be more involved in the education of their youth and to increase their company and communication with their children. There is also an obligation to provide parents with a home education learning platform to help them learn the right parenting style and identify and control negative parenting behaviors. This is especially useful for parents from disadvantaged families, who are often constrained by financial and time constraints and do not have access to systematic scientific parenting guidance. Moreover, modern idealized parenting styles are too distant from the reality of their lives, where effective academic guidance and quality parent-child companionship are difficult for working families severely lacking time and cultural capital. There should be better communication between home and school so that parents are aware of their children's situation, can set demands scientifically, and respond appropriately.

In urban areas, the quality of teaching in primary and secondary schools is higher, and schools already have higher requirements for children's study habits and content, so the degree of parental demands no longer plays a significant role, while parental care and response play a stronger role. The

situation is different in rural areas, where children's academic performance requires parental care and response along with more stringent parental demands to compensate for the lack of schooling [5]. Although family parenting style intensification is a strategy to cope with widening income inequality, the inhibitory effect of inferior parenting style change on widening educational inequality is relatively limited under the premise of uneven educational resources between urban and rural areas. To effectively improve educational inequality, it is still necessary to vigorously promote the equalization of regional educational resources across regions, promote equity in educational opportunities, and help young children in each family to enjoy equal educational resources as much as possible.

6. Conclusion

Along with the change in the concept of children, there has been a transition in family parenting styles. Undoubtedly, more and more parents are beginning to pay attention to the way they raise their children. It seems that both the middle class and the working class in China are aware of the need not only to make certain demands on children but also to respond to their needs promptly. Value not just academic achievement but psychological health and personality development. Both authoritarian and neglectful can cause serious harm to children. As it is true that children's development is influenced by many factors, such as the family's socioeconomic status and the individual education level of parents, the importance of parenting style cannot be ignored. Moreover, modern Chinese parents not only try to accept new educational concepts critically but also find a balance between them and traditional concepts. How to control their negative parenting behaviors consciously in real life, control both demand and response behaviors, and focus on their children's physical and psychological health while helping them develop holistically all place higher demands on today's parents.

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