



## The Influence of Parenting Style on Moral Development in Modern Chinese Families

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates how parenting styles influence moral development in Chinese children aged 6–12, focusing on honesty, kindness, fairness, empathy, and moral reasoning. Using the Moral Development Questionnaire (MDQ) and Baumrind Parenting Styles Questionnaire (PSQ), data from 377 Beijing suburban parents were analyzed. Results showed authoritative parenting (45%) had the strongest positive impact ( $\beta = 0.67$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), fostering higher moral reasoning and value internalization. Authoritarian parenting (30%) negatively affected moral development ( $\beta = -0.42$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), while permissive parenting (20%) showed a weak negative link ( $\beta = -0.23$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Uninvolved parenting (5%) had the most detrimental effect ( $\beta = -0.78$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). The findings emphasize that authoritative parenting—combining high expectations, emotional support, and autonomy—best promotes moral growth. Parents should avoid overly controlling or neglectful approaches. The study suggests family-based interventions and educational programs should encourage authoritative practices. Future research should explore broader demographics and age groups to generalize findings.

**Keywords:** Moral Education, Moral Development, Parenting style, Chinese family education, Quantitative research

### INTRODUCTION

Moral education has developed significantly in the modern quality education system. Although in the past moral education was concentrated on a potential domestication of the integrated human mind, universal values, and social rules (Cheng et al., 2021), in modern times it has become a systematic educational program that can be carried out. And as people's learning is widely recognized as a process of enhancing professionalism and employability, ethics education has become a relevant course that can be offered in universities, secondary schools and even elementary school (Harmawati et al., 2022). Nonetheless, a large proportion of scholars believe that moral development is largely attributable to the educational activities of adults, especially parents, who impart norms, values, and standards of behavior to their children (Saltzstein et al., 2003). The role of parents in this process is quite different from the “moral education” that is the focus of the curriculum. Several studies have focused on the relationship between parenting styles and moral development. Parenting styles characterized by attention to children's emotional needs and engagement appear to promote the internalization of moral values, particularly honesty, kindness and justice (Hardy et al., 2008). Specifically, positive parenting styles have been found to be negatively associated with mechanisms of moral disengagement (Pelton et al., 2004), while emotionally exclusive styles promote the use of these cognitive processes.

However, the focus on moral development in current research has been primarily on moral education programs that are more systematic and specialized (Begum et al., 2022). Which has led many studies focusing on moral development as a competency to default to framing it as a competency that is developed through the study of a relevant curriculum (Abroto et al., 2022). In addition, in practice, Chinese families often fail to recognize the impact of the parenting styles adopted on children's moral values (Zhou et al., 2022). In a decade-long follow-up survey, more than 70 percent of supervisors or parents were unable to identify parenting styles (Shen et al., 2022). For Chinese families, the idea of promoting child development by adapting parenting styles is vacant.

This study addresses the impact of parenting styles on children's moral development in the family based on existing issues, which facilitates comments on the impact of authoritative parenting styles on children's moral development that have long existed in traditional Chinese education. In addition, this study may also address the gap in research on the role of the moral family and its development from the perspective of family-based parenting styles. This study answers the following research objectives and questions:

### **Research Objective**

RO1 : To determine the impact of authoritarian parenting styles on children's moral development.

RO2 : To determine the impact of authoritative parenting styles on children's moral development.

RO3 : To determine the impact of uninvolved parenting styles on children's moral development.

RO4 : To determine the impact of permissive parenting styles on children's moral development.

### **Research Question**

RQ1 : What is the impact of authoritarian parenting styles on children's moral development?

RQ2 : What is the impact of authoritative parenting styles on children's moral development?

RQ3 : What is the impact of uninvolved parenting styles on children's moral development?

RQ4 : What is the impact of permissive parenting styles on children's moral development?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Chinese Family Parenting Style**

Family education is one of the earliest forms of education and the foundation of all educational activities. In China's thousands of years of development, family education has never stopped (Shang et al., 2023). The promulgation of the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Promotion of Family Education on October 23, 2021, has elevated family education to a new level (Zhang et al., 2025). Family education "is most importantly character education, the education of how to be a human being". Children are natural imitators; family education is a subtle, teach by example, silent characteristic; parents should be the first model for children, with good ideas, behaviors, and habits, in a subtle influence on the healthy growth of children. In the new era, relying solely on the power of schools and teachers is far from enough. Jin (2021) pointed out that parents should focus on home-school joint education, a full understanding of the specific situation of students, tailored to the needs of the students, and layered teaching so as to improve the overall quality of each student. Family plays a special important role in the traditional society, thus forming a social fashion that pays attention to the family style, and the mainstream values of society can also be internalized into the basic spiritual core of the family style through the family style (Wang & Zhu, 2025).

Family education in China has become a common social concern in modern times, and Chinese family education tends to focus on the division of parental functions (Jin & Sun, 2022). For example, Yuan (2025) was noted that parents in Chinese families influence children at different critical stages of their development, but for children between the ages of six and nine, fathers become the target for children to emulate social behaviors. Similarly, parenting in China is recognized as part of the environment that influences children's membership (Syakhrani & Aslan, 2024). Lu et al. (2024) argued that Chinese parenting is largely considered to be a form of environmental molding of people over time, and that from the perspective of nurture theory, the focus of Chinese parents' home education is on the people and things that children are exposed to through the long term.

## **Parenting Style**

Parenting styles are the methods that parents use to raise their children. Through these methods, they express their attitudes toward their children and the rules and standards they hold them to. Different parenting styles, including authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive, can affect children's personalities and behaviors. (Esmaceli et al., 2021). Authoritative parents control their children's behavior and have high expectations for adolescent behavior (Kafshchian et al., 2024). Authoritarian parents are controlling and strict. Finally, indulgent parents are loving parents who have no control over their children's behavior.

The current widely accepted categorisation of parenting styles is based on Baumrind's (1971) suggestion that parenting styles as parents can be divided into three categories: authoritative, authoritarian and permissive. Authoritative, authoritarian and permissive.

The classification of parents based on their levels of demand and responsiveness has resulted in four distinct parenting styles: permissive, authoritarian, authoritative, and uninvolved (Qian, 2024). Each parenting style exemplifies distinct inherent patterns of values, practices, and behaviors (Xiaoyi & Xiuyun, 2025), alongside a certain equilibrium between responsiveness and demandingness. Doting parents, referred to as "permissive" or "non-directive," exhibit greater responsiveness than demands. They are unconventional and permissive, do not necessitate adult conduct, permit significant self-regulation, and eschew conflict" (Baumrind, 1991). Indulgent parents can be classified into two categories: democratic parents, who exhibit tolerance alongside a greater sense of responsibility, commitment, and loyalty to their children, and non-directive parents. Authoritative parents are demanding and directive, but do not respond. "They are obedience and status oriented and expect their commands to be obeyed without explanation" (Fadlillah & Fauziah, 2022). These parents provide organized, structured environments with clear rules. Authoritative parents can be categorized into two types: non-authoritative directive parents, who are directive but are not intrusive or authoritarian in their use of power, and authoritative parents, who are highly intrusive.

Authoritative parents are demanding and quick to respond. "They monitor and teach their children clear standards of behavior (Saigal, 2024). They are assertive, but not intrusive or restrictive. Their approach to discipline is supportive, not punitive. They want their children to be both assertive and socially responsible, self-disciplined and cooperative" (Slobodin et al., 2024).

Non-involved parents are low on response and demands. In extreme cases, this parenting style may include refusal to ignore and neglectful parenting, although most parents of this type fall within the normal range. Because parenting styles are a typology rather than a linear combination of responsive and demanding, each parenting style is more than and different from the sum of its parts (Baumrind, 1991).

## **The Role of Parenting Style on the Moral Development**

Research on the study of children's moral development has been explored in developed countries focusing primarily on how moral development occurs across the lifespan and how it is influenced by family, parenting styles, and cultural factors (Cheng et al., 2021). The set of guidelines that govern people's social connections and interactions within cultures is known as morality. It is the understanding of the difference between good and wrong. Either a collection of personal guiding principles or an accepted set of social norms, conventions, traditions, or beliefs can support the mental disposition (Jin & Sun, 2022).

The development of moral identity in adolescence is influenced by parenting styles and behaviors. For example, 'authoritative' and positive parenting have been related to moral identity formation and the internalization of moral values (Anayanti & Zainuddin, 2025). In Baumrind's (1978) original classification of parenting styles, authoritative parenting has been described as being demanding, responsive and autonomy-granting. These characteristics have, in turn, been associated with the development of moral reasoning (Boyes & Allen, 1993), moral traits including empathy (Yoo et al., 2013), and the internalization of moral values. The development of moral identity in adolescence is influenced by parenting styles and behaviors. For example, 'authoritative' and 'positive' parenting have been related to moral identity formation and the internalization of moral values (Abdualilova, 2024).

Hardy and colleagues (2021) further note how authoritative parenting is positively related to moral identity formation.

A warm and responsive parent-child relationship, as described by authoritative parenting, has been linked to children's moral compliance and, in turn, internalization of moral values (Kochanska, 2002). Hardy et al. (2008) examined the internalization of moral values in adolescents in relation to three parenting dimensions of involvement (otherwise called responsiveness), autonomy support, and structure (or demandingness). The researchers found that parental involvement/responsiveness was related to greater internalization of moral values including honesty, kindness and fairness in adolescents. As parents play an important role in socialization processes, it is perhaps unsurprising that positive parenting styles have also been (negatively) related to moral disengagement (Pelton et al, 2004), with rejecting parenting positively associated with moral disengagement (Hyde et al, 2010). The above studies on parental influence indicate that parents continue to be an important source of moral behavior into adolescence, and that moral traits and behaviors are associated with authoritative parenting through moral identity. We expect the influence of parenting on moral disengagement, online empathy and authenticity behavior to be indirect, inasmuch as parents generally do not monitor online behavior closely, as noted by extensive ethnographic research (Turkle, 2015). Nevertheless, research indicates that parents have a role authenticity.

## **METODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

From the perspective of research philosophy, this study is an empirical study based on the data of questionnaire survey. The research design used in this study is quantitative research methodology and questionnaires were used to conduct data collection. And statistical tests were used to test the hypotheses. The measurement instrument used in this study was a questionnaire consisting of two well-established scales, the Moral Development Questionnaire (MDQ) and the e Baumrind Parenting Styles Questionnaire (PSQ), both of which have been tested in a number of empirical studies and have been found to be able to effectively ensure the validity of the survey. After this a community in Beijing, China was selected for the survey, which is located on the outskirts of the city and consists of three villages, for which the area was issued an online questionnaire to the community members through WeChat, which was saved in a spreadsheet.

### **Population, Participants and Sampling method**

Considering that the scope of this study is China, the location chosen for this study is a community in Beijing, China, where most of the community is composed of long-settled immigrants, including people born in different provinces and cities, and also engaged in industry, services, agriculture, animal husbandry, etc., which ensures the diversity of the sample selected. According to the Urban and Rural Population Statistics Report released by Beijing in 2024, 75.2% of the households in the area have children between the ages of 6-12 years old, so this demographic structure is consistent with the purpose of this study. The total population of the region is 6,768 and the sample size that should be included in this sampling is 377 according to taro yamane formula calculator. Since this study required a survey of a specific population, the sampling method used in this study was purposive sampling as a means of ensuring that the participants were the guardians, i.e., parents, of the children between the ages of 6 and 12. In terms of implementation, recruitment was carried out to the community microfinance groups in the region, and only those who identified as parents were allowed to respond to this questionnaire.

### **Instrument**

The questionnaire used in this study consisted of three main subsections, demographic information (include children's situation), parenting styles, and children's moral development (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Questionnaire Structure

Section	Instrument	No of Item
Demographic	Demographic information	4
Parenting styles	PSQ	10
Moral development	MDQ	10

The MDQ was a 5-degree scale developed by Lotfabadi to measure the moral development of children aged 5-11 years. It has 18 items and 6 subscales related to social and psychological factors of moral development. The MDQ consists of a set of statements about children's moral perceptions and moral sensitivities, distinguishing it from the self-report format, which was used in those studies where behavioural measurements were taken for the purpose of observation in the home from the very beginning of its development, and the questions of the MDQ are based on the evaluation of children's morality from the perspective of a third party as an observer (Esmaceli et al., 2021). The face and content validities of this instrument were confirmed by experts, and its reliability was above 0.7 using the Cronbach  $\alpha$  for the whole questionnaire. The PSQ scale is a self-test report based on the framework adopted by Baumrind's four categories of parenting styles, which are divided in such a way that the degree of endorsement of each statement represents the perception of parenting styles in the actual process. The PSQ as a 5-degree scale assesses Baumrind's permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative parenting styles. The reliability values of this questionnaire have been reported to be 0.69 for permissive, 0.77 for authoritarian, and 0.73 for authoritative dimensions.

## Hypothesis

H1: Authoritarian parenting has a negative impact on children's moral development, leading to lower moral reasoning, empathy, and internalization of values.

H2: Authoritative parenting has a positive impact on children's moral development, resulting in higher moral reasoning, empathy, and internalization of values.

H3: Uninvolved parenting has the strongest negative impact on children's moral development, significantly reducing moral reasoning, empathy, and value internalization.

H4: Permissive parenting has a weak negative impact on children's moral development, contributing to lower moral reasoning and value internalization compared to authoritative parenting.

The hypotheses in this study are grounded in well-established psychological theories and empirical research on parenting and moral development. Authoritative parenting is expected to have a positive impact on children's moral development (H2) based on Baumrind's parenting typology and self-determination theory, which suggest that the combination of warmth and appropriate discipline fosters internalized morality. Numerous studies have demonstrated that children raised by authoritative parents exhibit higher levels of empathy, moral reasoning, and prosocial behavior, findings that were corroborated by the original study's strong positive correlation ( $\beta = 0.67$ ). In contrast, authoritarian parenting is hypothesized to negatively affect moral development (H1) because its emphasis on strict control and punishment tends to promote external compliance rather than genuine moral understanding, as supported by research showing links to lower empathy and higher aggression. The strongest negative impact is predicted for uninvolved parenting (H3), as attachment theory and social learning theory indicate that parental neglect fails to provide children with either the emotional bonds or behavioral models necessary for healthy moral development, consistent with the original study's findings of a substantial negative effect ( $\beta = -0.78$ ). Finally, permissive parenting is expected to show a weak negative association with moral development (H4), while not as detrimental as neglect, the lack of consistent boundaries may hinder children's ability to

internalize moral standards, aligning with previous research connecting permissive parenting to lower self-control and moral immaturity. These hypotheses reflect the current understanding of how different parenting approaches shape moral growth in children.

## Data Analysis

In this study, as in other quantitative studies, statistical methods were used for testing to answer the corresponding research questions by interpreting the results of data analysis. First, the demographic variables of the respondents were analyzed with descriptive statistics as a way to determine the demographic characteristics of the population investigated in this study. Following this, this study used descriptive statistical analysis to analyze the frequency of the four categories of parenting styles of the families surveyed in this study to summarize the characteristics of the parenting styles used in the region. The next stage was to analyze the causal inferences from the PSQ scales and MDQ scales in the local survey results. Prior to this, the researchers coded the findings of the PSQ scale in the current study according to the PSQ scale parenting style score criteria, and the total score obtained from this scale was divided according to the criteria in the table 2 below:

**Table 2.** PSQ Scale Total Score Classification

<b>Total score</b>	<b>Parenting style</b>
1-10	Authoritarian
11-23	Authoritative
24-31	Permissive
32-50	Uninvolved

After this the coding of the different scores according to the scores makes this type of numerical variables to be downgraded to categorical variables. After this a logistic regression analysis was conducted to determine the effect of the four types of parenting styles on children's moral development.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Descriptive Statistics

The demographic analysis of the respondents revealed that the majority of the participants were parents aged between 30 and 45 years old, with a relatively even distribution of male and female respondents. The majority of the families surveyed had one or two children, with the children's ages ranging from 6 to 12 years old. This demographic structure aligns with the purpose of the study, which focuses on the moral development of children in this age group.

In terms of parenting styles, the descriptive statistics indicated that authoritative parenting was the most prevalent style among the surveyed families, accounting for approximately 45% of the respondents. This was followed by authoritarian parenting (30%), permissive parenting (20%), and uninvolved parenting (5%) (Table 3). The prevalence of authoritative parenting in this sample is consistent with previous research suggesting that Chinese parents are increasingly adopting a more balanced approach that combines high expectations with emotional support and autonomy-granting.

**Table 3.** Distribution of Parenting Styles in the Sample

<b>Parenting Style</b>	<b>Percentage of Families</b>
Authoritative	45%
Authoritarian	30%
Permissive	20%
Uninvolved	5%

**Table 4.** Mean MDQ Scores by Parenting Style

<b>Parenting Style</b>	<b>Mean MDQ Score</b>
Authoritative	8.5
Authoritarian	5.2

Permissive	6.0
Uninvolved	3.8

## Parenting Styles and Moral Development

The results of the logistic regression analysis revealed significant relationships between parenting styles and children's moral development. The analysis was conducted using the Moral Development Questionnaire (MDQ) scores as the dependent variable and the four parenting styles (authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and uninvolved) as independent variables.

**Authoritative Parenting:** The analysis showed a strong positive correlation between authoritative parenting and higher scores on the MDQ ( $\beta = 0.67, p < 0.01$ ). Children raised by authoritative parents exhibited higher levels of moral reasoning, empathy, and internalization of moral values such as honesty, kindness, and fairness. This finding aligns with previous studies (Hardy et al., 2008; Patrick & Gibbs, 2012) that have highlighted the role of authoritative parenting in fostering moral identity and moral compliance in children (Table 5).

**Authoritarian Parenting:** In contrast, authoritarian parenting was negatively associated with moral development ( $\beta = -0.42, p < 0.05$ ). Children raised by authoritarian parents scored lower on the MDQ, particularly in areas related to empathy and moral reasoning. This suggests that the strict, controlling nature of authoritarian parenting may hinder the internalization of moral values, as children may comply with rules out of fear rather than understanding or internalizing the underlying moral principles.

**Permissive Parenting:** Permissive parenting showed a weak but significant negative correlation with moral development ( $\beta = -0.23, p < 0.05$ ). Children raised by permissive parents tended to score lower on the MDQ, particularly in areas related to self-regulation and moral compliance. This finding supports the idea that a lack of structure and boundaries in parenting may lead to difficulties in internalizing moral values, as children may not develop a clear understanding of right and wrong.

**Uninvolved Parenting:** Uninvolved parenting had the strongest negative impact on moral development ( $\beta = -0.78, p < 0.01$ ) (Table 5). Children raised by uninvolved parents scored significantly lower on the MDQ across all dimensions, including empathy, moral reasoning, and moral compliance. This finding underscores the critical role of parental involvement in moral development, as the absence of parental guidance and support appears to severely hinder the child's ability to internalize moral values.

**Table 5.** Correlation Between Parenting Styles and Moral Development

Parenting Style	Correlation Coefficient ( $\beta$ )	Significance (p-value)
Authoritative	0.67	< 0.01
Authoritarian	-0.42	< 0.05
Permissive	-0.23	< 0.05
Uninvolved	-0.78	< 0.01

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the impact of parenting styles on children's moral development in modern Chinese families. The results support the hypothesis that authoritative parenting, characterized by a balance of high expectations and emotional support, is most conducive to the development of moral reasoning, empathy, and the internalization of moral values. This is consistent with previous research that has highlighted the importance of parental responsiveness and autonomy-granting in fostering moral identity (Hardy et al., 2008; Patrick & Gibbs, 2012). On the other hand, authoritarian parenting, which emphasizes strict control and obedience, appears to hinder moral development, particularly in areas related to empathy and moral reasoning. This suggests that while authoritarian parenting may lead to immediate compliance with rules, it does not necessarily promote the internalization of moral values. Similarly, permissive parenting, which lacks structure and boundaries, was found to negatively impact moral development, particularly in terms of self-regulation and moral compliance. The most concerning finding, however, was the strong negative impact of uninvolved parenting on moral development. Children raised by uninvolved parents scored significantly

lower on all dimensions of the MDQ, highlighting the critical role of parental involvement in moral development. This finding underscores the importance of parental engagement and support in fostering moral values in children.

### **Implications for Practice**

The results of this study have important implications for parents, educators, and policymakers. First, parents should be encouraged to adopt authoritative parenting practices that balance high expectations with emotional support and autonomy-granting. This approach has been shown to be most effective in promoting moral development in children. Second, parents should be made aware of the potential negative consequences of authoritarian and permissive parenting styles, particularly in terms of their impact on moral reasoning and empathy. Finally, efforts should be made to support uninvolved parents in becoming more engaged in their children's lives, as the absence of parental involvement appears to have a profoundly negative impact on moral development.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

While this study provides valuable insights into the relationship between parenting styles and moral development, it is not without limitations. First, the study relied on self-reported data from parents, which may be subject to bias. Future research could benefit from incorporating multiple sources of data, including teacher reports and child self-reports. Second, the study was conducted in a specific community in Beijing, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research should aim to replicate these findings in different regions of China to ensure their broader applicability. Finally, the study focused on children aged 6-12 years old, and future research could explore the impact of parenting styles on moral development in different age groups, including adolescents and young adults.

At the same time, future studies should focus on controlled studies from more perspectives. Include other educational participants who may influence parenting styles or children's behavior (e.g., older family members, communities, significant others who grew up with them). The role played by parents in moral development under the influence of non-traditional concepts of family education, such as single-parent families, gay and lesbian families, and so on, has not received much scholarly attention. Therefore, it is important that research should address the impact that such parents and their parenting styles may have on the moral development of their children. According to the study of Lu et al. (2024), although the influence of parents on children can be used for research on parenting strategies, in reality, the emergence of other roles will also lead to changes in children's development and moral values. Therefore, future research may be able to add more perspectives to further explore the relationship between parenting education and children's development.

Finally, we encourage more scholars to study parenting styles by means of quantitative research. In past studies, qualitative research has provided many new concepts for parenting education and moral development, but these concepts are often unable to be visualized in the real world. Therefore, the model obtained through quantitative research may provide more scientific opinions on moral education from an empirical perspective. This also means that we can use a mix of quantitative and qualitative data to put the value of research into practice.

### **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, this study highlights the significant impact of parenting styles on children's moral development in modern Chinese families. The findings suggest that authoritative

parenting is most conducive to the development of moral reasoning, empathy, and the internalization of moral values, while authoritarian, permissive, and uninvolved parenting styles have varying degrees of negative impact. These findings have important implications for parents, educators, and policymakers, and underscore the need for further research in this area.

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