

## Chinese parenting in Hong Kong: links among goals, beliefs and styles

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The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships among parental goals, parental beliefs and parenting styles. Questionnaires were completed during interviews with 189 Hong Kong-Chinese mothers of children aged six to eight years. Results indicated that these mothers embraced Chinese parental beliefs (guan) and Chinese parental goals of filial piety and harmonious social relationships. In contrast to other studies on Chinese parenting, this study examined Chinese mothers' adoption of psychological control in addition to authoritarian and authoritative parenting. Participants' main styles were found to be authoritative and psychologically controlling rather than authoritarian as reported in previous research. Parental goals were found to mediate the effect of parental beliefs on adoption of parenting styles. Mothers who embraced guan and filial piety reported either an authoritarian or a psychologically controlling parenting style, while those who embraced guan and harmonious social relationships adopted an authoritative parenting style.

**Keywords:** Chinese parenting; filial piety; guan; parental beliefs; parental goals; psychological control

### Introduction

Parenting styles are widely recognised as the cornerstone of young children's socialisation. Understanding the major influences of parenting styles is important in the advancement of research in many areas, including research examining individual and cultural differences and research attempting to identify effective strategies for changing parenting practices. In 1993, Darling and Steinberg proposed an integrative model, with parenting style acting as a context that moderates the influence of particular parenting practices involved in early socialisation. In their model, parenting practices and parenting styles are influenced by the goals and values of parents. Parenting practices are directed towards behaviour, whereas parenting styles convey to the child the parent's attitude towards him or her (the emotional climate), hence enhancing or diminishing the effectiveness of parenting practices. Darling and Steinberg's integrative model focused on the interrelationship of parenting goals, styles and practices.

While Darling and Steinberg's work continues to be influential in parenting research (e.g. Ang, 2006; Spera, 2006), other researchers have emphasised the role of parental beliefs or ideas in directing parenting practices (e.g. Bugental & Johnson, 2000; Pearson & Rao, 2003). This raises the important question of the role of parental beliefs in early socialisation. A range of possible investigations can be developed by incorporating parental

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beliefs into the Darling and Steinberg's model. In this study, we are interested in the role of parental beliefs in relation to parenting style.

Parenting beliefs, styles and goals are influenced by culture, and parenting must take place within one or more cultural contexts. The current study then served two purposes. It aimed to investigate how parental goals, beliefs and parenting styles relate to each other as a structure through examining the parenting patterns of Chinese mothers. It also aimed to contribute to an understanding of Chinese parenting by studying the Chinese mothers of young children in Hong Kong, a population that has not been extensively researched.

### ***Chinese parental beliefs***

Parental beliefs are parents' ideas about their children, child-rearing and themselves as parents (Coplan, Hastings, Lagace-Seguin, & Moulton, 2002). Goodnow (2006) contends that culture is an important source of information about child-rearing for parents, including ideas about what children are expected to be like at various ages and which parenting practices work.

In 1994, Chao introduced an indigenous Chinese ethnotheory of child-rearing which she called 'guan', a term borrowed from Tobin, Wu, and Davidson (1989). She translated 'guan' into English as 'training'. Tobin et al. (1989) explained that 'guan' means 'to govern' and that although 'guan' means to control and to restrict, it also has the positive connotation of 'to love' and 'to care for'. Chao (1994) also suggested that Chinese parents believe that firm control and governance of the child are synonymous with deep concern and care, and high involvement of the mother.

To operationalise this Chinese indigenous concept of loving and caring through governing and controlling, Chao (1994) developed a scale to measure guan. Although the scale for guan has been modified to measure parental behaviours (e.g. Stewart, Bond, Kennard, Ho, & Zaman, 2002; Stewart et al., 1998), the scale guan was originally developed to measure Chinese parental beliefs. Chao (1994) specified clearly that the scale incorporated two areas: ideologies on child development and learning, and ideologies on the mother-child relationship. The former area relates to beliefs about how children learn: by effort, modelling and self-discipline. The second area involves the beliefs that taking care of the child is the sole concern of the mother and the mother should try her best to help the child succeed even when she has to make many sacrifices. That implies warmth and devotion on the part of parents.

Chen and Luster (2002) used items from Chao's guan scale as a measure of mother's child-rearing beliefs and found that guan was an important predictor of mother's parenting practices. From the retrospective reports of young Hong Kong female adults about their parents, Stewart et al. (2002) also concluded that guan was regarded as representing good parental pattern of behaviour.

Guan is an indigenous parental belief system which has been found to be endorsed by immigrant Chinese mothers in the USA (Chao, 1994, 1995) as well as Chinese mothers in Taiwan (Chen & Luster, 2002). It is important to discover whether these parental beliefs are also held by Chinese mothers living in Hong Kong and how they are related to Chinese parental goals and parenting styles.

### ***Chinese parental goals***

In theory, parental goals for their child also affect how parents put these beliefs into practice. Parental goals are the outcomes parents hope to achieve with their children (Dix, 1992). Different cultures value different attributes or values related to children and these

may lead to variation in socialisation goals (Bornstein & Cheah, 2006; Kagiticibasi, 1996). Therefore, culturally relevant goals have been included in the current study of the relationships among parental beliefs, parental goals and parenting styles.

The literature shows that filial piety is an important parental goal in Chinese culture (Ho, 1986, 1994; Lin & Fu, 1990; Tobin et al., 1989). Chao (1995) found that respecting and obeying parents and seniors was rated as one of the top three child-rearing goals of immigrant Chinese mothers in the USA. If parents believe in *guan* and value filial piety, it means that parents, especially mothers, should devote themselves to bringing up children, and that children should submit to senior family members, especially their parents. In addition to filial piety, maintaining harmonious social relationships is another important Chinese value (Bond, 1991; Wu et al., 2002) and so another important Chinese parental goal.

Wu (1996) reported that contemporary Shanghai parents still value group-orientation and cooperation, respect for elders and obedience as important values to be cultivated in children. In order to examine the relationships among parental beliefs, goals and styles, this study included these two culturally relevant parental goals.

### ***Chinese parenting styles***

Possibly the most significant contribution to parenting research is Baumrind's conceptualisation of parenting style (Baumrind, 1967, 1989). Parenting style is a constellation of parental attitudes towards the child which creates an emotional climate or shapes the emotional relationships between parent and child (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). Different types of parenting styles have been identified in the literature, including authoritarian, authoritative, permissive and neglecting parenting styles (Maccoby & Martin, 1983), but research on Chinese parenting has focused mostly on authoritarian and authoritative parenting, generally for the purpose of comparing Chinese with Western parents. Another possible reason for not including permissive and neglecting parenting styles in studies on Chinese parenting is that Chinese people place an emphasis on the parents' role as an educator in the family (Kelly & Tseng, 1992) and parents' responsibilities for governing their children (Chao, 1995). Chinese parents are seldom reported in research as permissive. For this reason, the present study did not include permissive or neglecting parenting styles.

Research has reported that Chinese or Chinese-American parents tend to be more restrictive and punishment oriented (Chen, Dong, & Zhou, 1997; Chen et al., 1998) and more controlling (Lin & Fu, 1990) than European-American mothers and English mothers (Pearson & Rao, 2003). The literature also describes Chinese parents as authoritarian (Ho, 1987). Ho explained that this style is related to filial piety, the most important Chinese parental goal. Filial piety implies that the role of being a parent entitles Chinese parents to control their children. However, retrospective studies in Hong Kong have found that Hong Kong adolescents characterised their parents as authoritative rather than authoritarian (Chan & Chan, 2007).

Like authoritarian parents, Chinese parents are controlling, but they are also warm and caring like authoritative parents. As described by Chen, Dong, and Zhou (1997), Chinese parental control is based on affectionate attitudes towards the child. The warm but controlling relationship is not the relationship embedded in authoritarian or authoritative parenting but rather one of psychological control, a parenting style which has received little attention in previous studies on Chinese parenting.

Psychological control refers to the control attempts that intrude into the psychological and emotional development of the child (e.g. thinking processes, self-expression, emotions and attachment to parents) and is a type of interaction based on manipulation and exploitation

of the parent–child bond (e.g. love withdrawal and guilt induction) involving negative, affect-laden expressions and criticisms (e.g. disappointment and shame) and excessive protective personal control of children (e.g. possessiveness and protectiveness) (Barber, 1996). Chinese parents have been found, in several studies, to use parental practices that involve psychological control. Ho (1986) reported that Chinese parents in general may use strategies such as threatening withdrawal of love and actual withdrawal of love and shaming. When Fung (1999) examined Chinese parents' use of shaming, she found use of techniques such as threats of abandonment and turning the whole body away from the child. Lai, Zhang, and Wang (2000) reported that Hong Kong mothers were more likely than those in Beijing to dominate their children and to control them by anxiety induction. Wu (1985) also found from an interview with Hong Kong mothers that mothers would ask the child to apologise, and then 'would assure the child that she would love him or her again as long as he or she was good' (p. 130). Wu et al. (2002) pointed out that both protection and shaming/withdrawal of love were parenting practices reported as used more commonly by mothers in Mainland China than by their Western counterparts.

These kinds of behaviours displayed by Chinese mothers help to secure parental status in a subtle way and ensure their control over their children. As Maccoby and Martin (1983) reported, the affectionate tie between parent and child is a powerful motive for ensuring obedience, and withdrawal of love is a powerful strategy for soliciting children's compliance with the parent's demands.

The nature of the parent–child relationship and parental goals of psychological control are consistent with *guan* and filial piety but there is little research on this psychological control as a parenting style among Chinese parents.

As the present investigation of the relationship between parental beliefs, parental goals and parenting styles involves Chinese mothers from Hong Kong, it is important to include measures that are attuned to Chinese culture. Based on the previous research findings discussed earlier, we have included measures of *guan* (belief), filial piety and harmonious social relationships (goals) and psychological control (parenting style), and predict that each of these will be adopted by a majority of participants.

## **Method**

### ***Participants***

Participants were 189 Hong Kong resident Chinese mothers. The ages of their children (91 girls, 98 boys) ranged from six to eight years with a mean age of 7.3 years ( $SD = .72$ ). The mothers were recruited from 16 primary schools attended by their child, through the school principal or the chairperson of the parent–teacher association of the school. The aim and methods of the study were explained in an information sheet and verbally by the first author, who conducted all interviews and is a native speaker of Cantonese. Mothers in the sample were aged from 30–44 (92.2%). Only 3.7% of mothers were younger than 30 years and 4.2% were aged 45 and older. The sample was mainly high-school educated (81.5%). For the rest, 19 (10.1%) had primary school education level or below, and 16 (8.5%) had post-secondary education level. All the mothers were of Chinese origin, literate in Chinese and spoke Cantonese at their home.

### ***Data collection***

The data were collected through face-to-face meetings held with groups of mothers at their local school. The group size varied from 4–16 at each school, depending on the number of

mothers who returned consent forms and followed through with the interview. The mothers were reminded to answer all the questions with reference to the child through whom they were recruited. The researcher explained the rating scales to the mothers at the beginning of the session and then read the items aloud one by one. The mothers provided individual responses on their copy of questionnaire. The small groups allowed the interviewer to clarify any questions raised by the participants about the items.

### **Materials**

The questionnaire set included demographic questions and three scales to measure parental beliefs, goals and styles.

#### *Chinese parental beliefs (guan)*

Guan was measured by the original scale developed by Chao (1994), except that the item 'When child continues to disobey you, he/she deserves a spanking' was deleted because of its overlapping with an item in the authoritarian scale. There were two subscales: ideologies of child development and learning (6 items; e.g. 'Children can improve in almost anything if they work hard') and ideologies of the mother-child relationship (6 items; e.g. 'Mothers should do everything for child's education and make many sacrifices'). Results of item-total correlation showed that two items showed a low correlation with the scale and were deleted. One item, 'Children are by nature born good' was deleted from the ideologies of child development and learning subscale. The other deleted item 'Children should be allowed to sleep in their mother's bed' was deleted from the ideologies of mother-child relationship subscale. This item had been also deleted in other studies on guan (e.g. Stewart et al., 2002; Stewart et al., 1998). The Cronbach alpha of the remaining 10 items was .75. The scale was a six-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree; 6 = strongly agree). The scale was translated into Chinese by two Chinese psychology lecturers who had Chinese as their mother language. Since the scale has been rarely used in Hong Kong, confirmatory factor analysis using LISREL.8 was used to validate it with Chinese mothers from Hong Kong (where LISREL stands for 'linear structural relations'). The strong indexes of goodness of fit, NNFI = .98; CFI = .99; IFI = .99; RMSEA = .063, indicate that the scale can be used in Hong Kong (where NNFI is 'non-normed fit index', CFI is 'comparative fit index', IFI is 'incremental fit index', RMSEA is 'root mean square of error approximation').

#### *Parental goals*

Pearson and Rao's (2003) scale, which was written in Chinese, was adopted for measuring the two parental goals: filial piety and harmonious social relationships. Cronbach alphas of these two subscales were .74 for the Filial Piety subscale (6 items), and .70 for the Harmonious Social Relationships subscale (five items). Mothers rated each item along a six-point Likert scale. The higher the score, the more the mother regarded the goal as important.

#### *Parenting styles*

Authoritarian and authoritative parenting styles were measured by the Authoritative and Authoritarian subscales of the Parental Behaviour Questionnaire (PBQ) developed by Robinson, Mandlco, Olsen, and Hart (1995). The short form (Russell, Hart, Robinson, & Olsen, 2003) was used in the present study. The instrument has been found to be a valid and reliable measure of Chinese parenting (Chen & Luster, 2002; Wu et al., 2002). The Chinese

version used by Chen and Luster (2002) was used in the present study. The authoritative subscale consists of 15 items (e.g. 'Take child's desires into account before asking the child to do something') and the authoritarian subscale consists of 11 items (e.g. 'Shoves child when the child is disobedient'). In addition, based on Barber and Harmon's (2002) discussion on psychological control in parenting, a psychological control scale was constructed to measure the mother's tendency to use psychological means to discipline the child (e.g. 'Let my child know how disappointed and shameful I feel when he/she misbehaves'). Each item was rated along a scale ranging from 1 (never) to 6 (always). This scale was developed in Chinese and consists of 12 items. Since it was a newly developed scale, confirmatory factor analysis was used to test its construct validity. The results were at very good fit level (Wang, Slaney, & Rice, 2007): NNFI = 1.03; CFI = 1.00; IFI = 1.01; RMSEA = .000. In the present study, the Cronbach alphas were .83 for the Authoritative scale, .79 for the Authoritarian scale and .67 for the Psychological Control scale.

## Results

The means and standard deviations of guan, the three Chinese parental goals and the three types of parenting styles are presented in Table 1.

### *Chinese parental beliefs and goals*

Table 1 shows that mothers in this study endorsed guan (mean of 4.27 on a six-point scale), and the mothers reported that while both parental goals were important to them, filial piety was rated as significantly more important than harmonious social relationships,  $t(188) = 3.12$ ,  $p = .002$ . Guan was significantly correlated with both filial piety,  $r(189) = .51$ ,  $p < .001$  and harmonious social relationship,  $r(189) = .43$ ,  $p < .001$ . This indicates that when mothers endorse guan, they also tend to rate as important the two Chinese parental goals of filial piety and harmonious social relationship.

### *Parenting styles*

The means of the scales measuring parenting styles showed that mothers in Hong Kong adopted an authoritative parenting style most often, followed by psychological control. They reported that they seldom adopted an authoritarian parenting style. Paired sample  $t$ -tests showed that there was a significant difference between authoritative and psychological control,  $t(188) = 14.06$ ,  $p < .001$  and between authoritative and authoritarianism,  $t(188)$

Table 1. Means and standard deviations of guan, parental goals and parenting styles ( $n = 189$ ).

	Means	SD
Chinese parental beliefs (guan)	4.27	.57
Chinese parental goals		
Filial piety	4.93	.52
Harmonious social relationships	4.83	.49
Parenting styles		
Authoritarian	4.79	.45
Authoritative	3.44	.68
Psychological control	4.14	.52

= 19.63,  $p < .001$ . Authoritarianism was also significantly different from psychological control,  $t(188) = -12.90$ ,  $p < .001$ .

### ***Parental beliefs, goals and parenting styles***

It was predicted that parental beliefs and parental goals would be related to parenting styles. Correlational analysis was conducted to explore the relationships among the three. The results showed that psychological control correlated strongly with guan,  $r(189) = .45$ ,  $p < .001$ , filial piety,  $r(189) = .26$ ,  $p < .001$ , and harmonious social development,  $r(189) = .25$ ,  $p < .001$  (see Table 2). This indicates that mothers who embrace guan and the two Chinese parental goals tend to adopt psychological control in their parenting.

When authoritarian parenting was considered, it correlated with guan,  $r(189) = .14$ ,  $p = .049$ , but it did not correlate with filial piety or harmonious social relationships (see Table 2). Authoritative parenting was correlated only with the parental goal of harmonious social relationships,  $r(189) = .32$ ,  $p < .001$ .

In order to further confirm how guan, filial piety and harmonious social relationships were related to parenting styles, confirmatory factor analyses using LISREL.8 were conducted to test different models. Since guan and the two parental goals may independently have predictive power over the adoption of parenting styles, or parental goals may be the mediating factor between guan and parenting styles, three models were tested. As suggested by Chang, Lei, Li, and Liu (2005) and MacCallum, Widaman, Zhang, and Hong (1999), the items were paired and the mean of each two items together with the score of the remaining single item, if the item number was odd, were used for confirmatory factor analyses. The parcelling of items can help to achieve an acceptable sample size-to-variable ratio and the method has been widely used in structural equation modelling studies (Chang et al., 2005).

In the first model (Model 1), guan was entered as the predicting variable and the three parenting styles were entered as the dependent variables. The results were at good fit level:  $\chi^2 = 423.32$ ,  $df = 249$ , CFI = .93, TLI (NNFI) = .92, IFI = .93, RMSEA = .061 (where TLI is 'Tucker–Lewis index') (see Figure 1). These results have been considered acceptable for validating structural equation models, especially those with small samples (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 1998; Wang et al., 2007). The model shows that guan has significant predictive power for the adoption of authoritarian (.20) and psychologically controlling parent styles (.69). In the second model (Model 2), the two parental goals were entered as the predicting variable and the three parenting styles were entered as the dependent variables. The model did not converge.

In the third model (Model 3), guan was entered as the predicting variable, filial piety and harmonious social relationships as the mediating variables and the three parenting styles as the dependent variables. The model was found to fit the data well with  $\chi^2 = 673.78$ ,  $df = 397$ , CFI = .93, TLI (NNFI) = .92, IFI = .93, RMSEA = .061 (see Figure 2). Model 3 shows that the endorsement of guan predicts the endorsement of filial piety (.96) which, in turn, predicts the adoption of authoritarian style (1.25), and psychologically controlling style (.53) and not an authoritative parenting (-1.11). Guan also predicts the endorsement of harmonious social relationships (.89) which, in turn, leads to the adoption of authoritative style (1.41) and not an authoritarian style (-1.21). The results suggest that parental goal is an important mediator of the influences of guan on parenting styles. When guan was mediated by filial piety, the mother tended to adopt an authoritarian or psychologically controlling style and not an authoritative style. However, when guan was mediated by the goal of harmonious social relationships, the mother tended to adopt an authoritative parenting style and not an authoritarian parenting style.

Table 2. Correlations among parental beliefs, goals and styles.

	Guan	Filial piety	Harmonious social relationship	Authoritative	Authoritarian	Psychological control
Guan	1					
Filial piety	.51***	1				
Harmonious social relationship	.43***	.63***	1			
Authoritative	.12	.14	.32***	1		
Authoritarian	.14*	.05	-.06	-.39***	1	
Psychological control	.45***	.26***	.25**	.15*	.24**	1

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

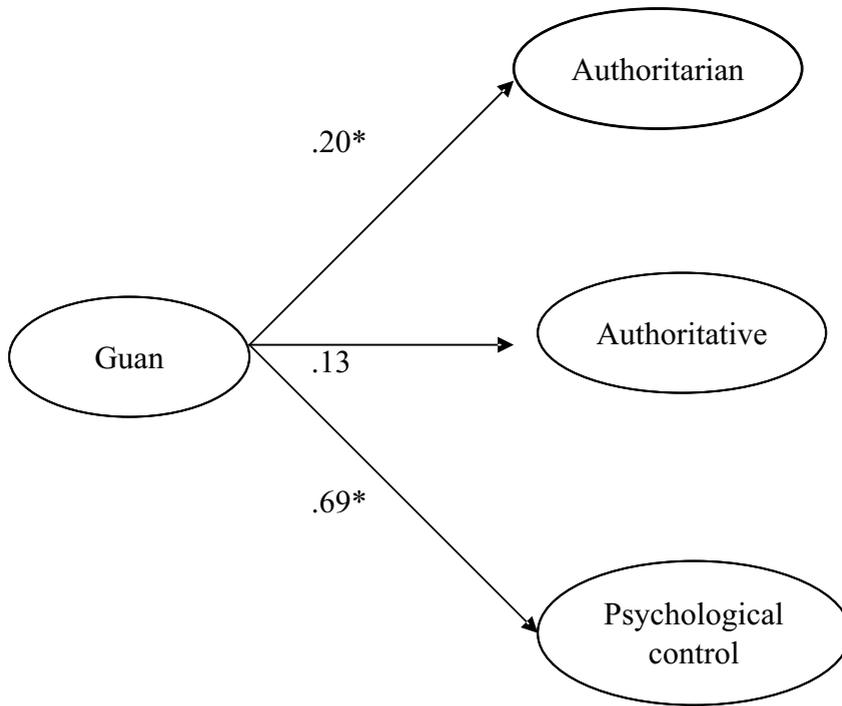


Figure 1. Model 1 with guan predicting authoritarian, authoritative and psychologically controlling parenting styles.

Since Model 3 offers a more complete model explaining the relationships among beliefs, goals and styles, and the goodness of fit indexes were significant, Model 3 was accepted.

## Discussion

The study aimed to explore the relationships among parental goals, beliefs and parenting styles through studying the reported parenting of Hong Kong-Chinese mothers. Another major contribution is the additional knowledge it adds to the literature on Chinese parenting and to Hong Kong parenting in particular.

First of all, the present study explores guan as Chinese parental beliefs. Although Chao (1994) has claimed that guan is an important indigenous concept in Chinese parenting, few studies have been done on guan. The present study confirms that guan is an important aspect of Chinese parental beliefs as it is strongly embraced by Chinese mothers in Hong Kong. These mothers believe that hard work and modelling are very important in their children's learning. This matches the teaching conveyed in Confucian writings that modelling is an effective way of learning (Bai, 2005; Wu, 1996). With regard to the mother's role in taking care of their child, also measured in the guan scale, Hong Kong-Chinese mothers believe that taking care of their children should be their sole concern and they should try their best to take care and help their children succeed even if they may have to make many sacrifices.

The present study also confirms that filial piety and harmonious social relationships were regarded by Hong Kong-Chinese mothers as important parental goals with filial piety being rated as the more important. Moreover, these two goals were correlated Chinese

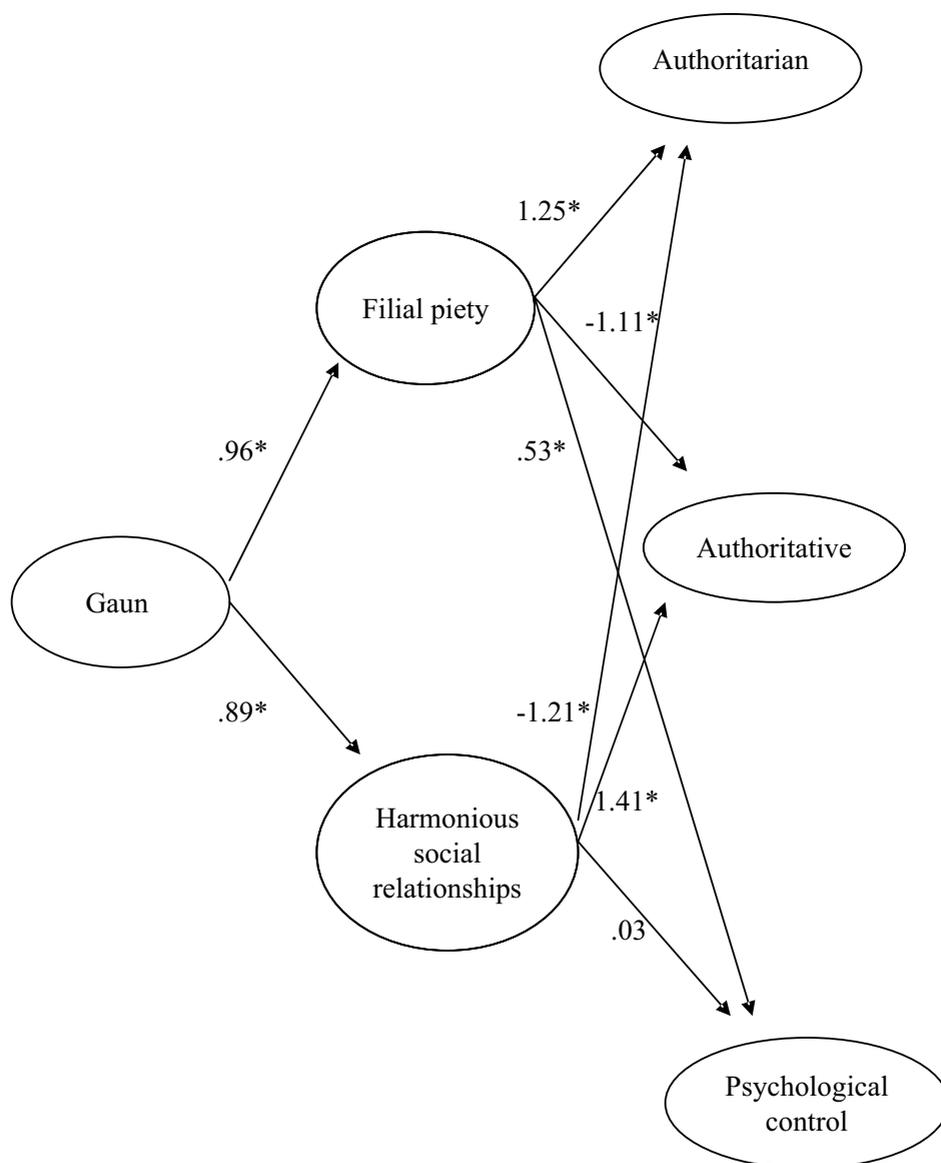


Figure 2. Model 3 showing the relationships among guan, filial piety and the three kinds of parenting styles.

parental belief. That is, the more the mother endorsed Chinese parental beliefs, the more she agreed that the two Chinese parental goals are important. Since guan, filial piety and maintaining harmonious social relationships are considered important by Chinese mothers in Hong Kong, future studies on Chinese parenting should take these into consideration.

Another important contribution of the present study is the findings about Chinese parenting styles. The study explores a parenting style, which, according to the literature, is common among Chinese mothers, yet has been subject to little research. The results indicate that psychological control parenting is a prevailing parenting style among the mothers in the present study. What is more, contrary to previous findings that Chinese parents are

low in authoritativeness and high in authoritarianism (Chen et al., 1998; Chen & Luster, 2002; Lin & Fu, 1990; Steinberg et al., 1992), but in line with another study conducted in Hong Kong (Chan & Chan, 2007), Chinese mothers in this study reported that they were more likely to adopt an authoritative parenting style and least likely to adopt an authoritarian style. These results suggest that Chinese parents are not dominantly authoritarian. The present study also contributes to parenting studies. It provides support for the hypothesis that parental beliefs and goals are related to parenting styles, forming a coherent system. This hypothesis was tested in relation to guan and the two Chinese parental goals, filial piety and harmonious social relationships, and was confirmed. Results show that without parental beliefs, parental goals itself do not have predictive power for the type of parenting styles adopted, and the effect of parental beliefs in predicting parenting styles adopted is mediated by parental goals.

When a Hong Kong mother embraces guan and values filial piety, she tends to adopt an authoritarian or psychologically controlling parenting style and not to adopt an authoritative parenting style. Guan entails strong maternal commitment and endorsement of modeling and hard-working while filial piety implies parental power and obedience from the child. Guan and filial piety together result in parental control. As explained by Ho (1986, 1996) and Lin and Fu (1990), Chinese authoritarian parenting is rooted in Confucian concepts of parental authority, filial piety and indebtedness of the child to the mother. Therefore the mother tends to adopt an authoritarian style. However, parents, especially mothers, may control by psychological rather than physical means. Chinese people have the concept of 'kind mother and stern father'. Strong devotion entailed by guan may lead to possessiveness. The devoted mother forms an enmeshed relationship with the child and expects the filial child to 'repay' by pleasing following her views and will. Naturally, the enmeshed relationships enable the mother to control the child by psychological means such as induction of guilt and withdrawal of love.

The results of the present study also show that mothers who believe in guan and value filial piety would be unlikely to adopt an authoritative parenting style. This result is consistent with the finding that authoritative parents value a more egalitarian parent-child relationship and democratic participation in the family (Robinson et al., 1995). Both of these are incompatible with parental control and obedience from the child.

When the mother embraces guan and stresses that her child should learn to build up good relationships with other people, she tends to adopt an authoritative parenting style and not an authoritarian style. This concurs with the findings in the literature on the effect of authoritative parenting on children outcomes. It has been found that young children brought up by authoritative parents in the USA tended to be energetic and friendly (Baumrind, 1967, 1989; Baumrind & Black, 1967). This type of child had the following characteristics of instrumental competence: self-reliance, self-control, cheerfulness and friendliness, good coping skills with stress, cooperation with adults, curiosity, purposiveness and achievement-orientation (Baumrind, 1967, 1989). Many of these characteristics are related to harmonious social relationships with peers and teachers which were tapped by the items in the present study. Self-control, cheerfulness and friendliness and self-reliance help to build good relationships with peers while cooperation with adults, purposiveness and achievement-orientation help to maintain a good relationship with teachers. Guan denotes modelling, so mothers who embrace guan and harmonious social relationships rather than filial piety would model egalitarian rather than hierarchical relationships when interacting with their children.

However, it should be noted that in Model 3, the path from the goal of maintaining harmonious social relationships to psychological control is not significant though guan is a

strong predictor of psychological control in Model 1. This also reveals that the parental goal has a strong mediating effect on the relationships between guan and parenting style. The close mother–child relationship and maternal devotion embedded in guan would denote the tendency to use psychological control in bringing up the child. However, if the mother emphasises that her child should learn how to maintain good social relationships, she would not adopt psychologically controlling parenting, implying that in her conception, withdrawal of love and manipulation of guilty feelings are against her parental goals.

This study has three main limitations that should be addressed in future research. The limitations relate to sample selection—mothers only, with children within a restricted age range and a confined cultural context. Limiting the sample in this way has offered some strength, such as enabling the use of culturally relevant questions rather than generic questions to apply across a range of cultures. Nonetheless, the extent to which generalisations can be made remains unclear and can only be explored with further research.

In conclusion, although the integrative model of Darling and Steinberg (1993) was not explicit about the role of beliefs in parenting, beliefs are often given prominence in the parenting literature. Our findings confirm that parental beliefs and goals together affect the parenting styles adopted. Parents tend to choose the parenting style compatible with the type of child they value and their beliefs about how that can be achieved. Further research is needed before making strong claims concerning implications for practice, but these findings suggest that practitioners attempting to facilitate changes in parenting styles should focus on both beliefs and goals.

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