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ORIGINAL PAPER

Perceptions of Being a 'Good Parent' of Preschool Children: A Q-study of Hong Kong Parents

Grace W. K. Ho[1] · Athena C. Y. Chan[2] · Jonie Chiu[1] · Deborah A. Gross[3]

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Abstract

Understanding culturally-specific and locally-relevant profiles of positive parenting ensures parenting interventions are designed and matched with parents' values and needs. This study employed Q-methodology to examine parents' perceptions of what it means to be a "good parent" for young children in Hong Kong. A purposive sample of 101 parents with children ages 3–5 years (58.4% mothers; mean age = 37.5 years) ranked the importance of 64 statements of parenting goals and styles on a Q-sort continuum. By-person factor analysis uncovered four prevailing views: (1) emotion-focused parenting; (2) survival-focused parenting; (3) outcomes-focused parenting; and (4) traditions-focused parenting. Overall, views of a "good parent" in Hong Kong did not align with traditional notions of Chinese parenting. Findings support Q-methodology as an alternative method to develop positive parenting frameworks across cultures.

Highlights

- Little is known about what it means to be a "good parent" from parents' perspectives
- Q-methodology was used to uncover four unique views of a "good parent" from 101 Hong Kong parents with young children
- We found wide consensus on what a "good parent" is not, but views on what is a "good parent" varied substantially
- Findings highlight the importance of matching parenting interventions with parents' values and needs

Keywords Positive parenting · Young children · Q-methodology · Culture · Parenting goal · Parenting style

Parents are essential agents in all aspects of their children's development. Ample research shows that positive experiences in the first five years of life lay a crucial foundation for children's long-term well-being and life trajectories, thus the way that parents raise and socialize their children in these formative years are particularly important (Jeong et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2021). Identifying the central tenets of "good" parenting in early childhood is also integral to understanding how best to support parents with young children and to promote positive child development. However, prevailing theories of positive and effective parenting, and its relation to child development were predominantly developed and validated in Western settings. Studies adapting these theories to other cultural groups, particularly in Chinese families, have often produced mixed or spurious results (Chao, 1994, 2001; Lansford, 2022; Lim & Lim, 2003). This suggests a universal model for positive and effective parenting cannot be applied to our global and pluralistic society (Gross, 1996). Further, few studies have systematically examined the constellation of parenting attributes that describes a "good parent" from the perspectives of the most essential stakeholders – the parents. The present study aimed to re-examine what it means to be a "good parent" for preschool children in Hong Kong and provide a model to develop culturally congruent conceptual understandings of positive parenting in unique parenting contexts.

✉ Grace W. K. Ho
grace.wk.ho@polyu.edu.hk

[1] School of Nursing, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hung Hom, Hong Kong SAR, China

[2] Human Development and Family Sciences, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX, USA

[3] School of Nursing, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD, USA

Raising Young Children in Hong Kong

In recent years, the notion of "winning at the starting line" has become a motto for early parenting in Hong Kong (Siriboe & Harfitt, 2018). Hong Kong's education system is highly competitive and selective, where excelling and outperforming peers in public examinations is viewed as essential for entry to elite local universities and subsequent economic success (Wong & Rao, 2015). Thus, the pursuit of academic achievement - a primary parenting goal for many Chinese parents - is likely magnified, and parents in Hong Kong have adopted the approach of taking extreme measures to ensure their children have a competitive edge as early in life as possible. Indeed, recent research showed that a strong emphasis on children's academic performance, including frequent comparisons with their peers, and over-scheduling children's activities are some of the core features of Chinese overparenting (Leung, 2020). For example, a survey of 751 Hong Kong adults (Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2016) found that, among respondents with children in primary school or kindergarten, over 80% enrolled their child into at least one extracurricular learning activity and 8.2% already enrolled their child into five or more activities. Further, the survey found that almost 90% respondents felt "winning at the starting line" is a common mentality, yet only a third agreed with this sentiment. In fact, over 90% of the respondents agreed children face high stress from academic pressures and 77% felt children do not have enough space and freedom to play. Taken together, these results suggest a sense of ambivalence about early parenting in Hong Kong, and it remains unclear how parents in Hong Kong view themselves as essential agents for their young child's development. Further, the lack of understanding in what it means to be a "good parent" precludes providing support to these parents under this uniquely stressful parenting social climate. Indeed, a recent local survey showed parents of preschool children experienced higher parenting stress when a large disparity exists between being the parent they want to be and being the parent that society demands of them (Guo & Chiu, 2021).

To date, parenting research conducted in Hong Kong is limited by a lack of investigations into culturally-specific parenting concepts and an over-reliance on using measures developed under an Anglo-Western context (Fok & Shek, 2011a, 2011b). Chinese and Western parenting are fundamentally different. While Western parenting values individualism, independence, and democracy, Chinese parenting values collectivism, obedience, and social hierarchy (Chao, 1994; Lansford, 2022). These values shape parents' culturally relevant socialization goals. For Chinese parents, these culture-specific parenting goals often include filial piety, and a strong emphasis on academic achievement and harmonious social relationships (Pearson & Rao, 2003). Chinese parents also endorse the belief of "guan," which incorporates firm control and governance with deep concern and care (Tobin et al., 1991). Indeed, a recent study in mainland China identified "intensive parenting" as a unique parenting style marked by high demandingness, high responsiveness, and high involvement (Du & Li, 2023). However, the Western literature often presented "guan" as high parental monitoring and control (Chao, 1994), which appeared similar to an authoritarian parenting style (i.e. low parental warmth and high demandingness for control and absolute obedience) that is typically associated with poorer child outcomes in the West (Baumrind, 1989; Glasgow et al., 1997). Therefore, it is not surprising that, paradoxically, some studies found Chinese children fared better under authoritarian parenting compared with their Western counterparts, and that Chinese parents often report a higher endorsement of authoritarian parenting (Chao, 2001; Fung et al., 2017; Yang & Zhao, 2020). Therefore, capturing a culturally congruent understanding of what it means to be a "good parent" is of particular interest, as equal parenting exercised under unequal circumstances by way of different cultural values and social contexts has shown to affect children differently.

Importantly, neither traditional Chinese beliefs or theories from the West can be wholly generalized to Hong Kong because its colonial history has imparted Western ideals that are strongly juxtaposed with traditional Chinese values (Fok and Shek (2011a). For example, despite the underlying assumption that Hong Kong parents would be more Westernized compared with mainland Chinese parents, studies have found that Hong Kong parents are more controlling, less warm, and generally more authoritarian (Berndt et al., 1993; Lai et al., 2000). These findings suggest there may be locally-specific parenting profiles that are not adequately captured by prevailing conceptualizations of positive parenting (e.g. warm, authoritative parenting), and underscore the need to redefine existing notions of a "good parent" to better align with the specific demands of raising children under this unique sociocultural makeup. Lastly, the sociodemographic background of Hong Kong parents is evolving due to the rise of single-parent households, lower birth rate, and widening wealth and income gaps (Ma et al., 2011). Therefore, it is also important to investigate how Hong Kong parents may perceive their role in raising young children and what it means to be a "good parent" under different parenting contexts and circumstances.

Q-Methodology in Parenting Research

Q-methodology was developed to empirically examine human subjectivities using a systematic mix of quantitative and qualitative methods (Stephenson, 1935). Unlike quantitative surveys, which measures phenomena based on theoretical formulations of constructs operationalized by the researcher (Dennis, 1986), Q-methodology organically uncovers human perceptions by allowing research participants to create their own meanings bearing on their individual frames of reference through an operational medium known as the Q-sort (Chinnis et al., 2001; McKeown, 1988). Since Q-sorts are self-referent and created based on subjective opinions, Q-Methodology has the potential to uncover novel and culturally-relevant constructions of a "good parent" that may have been overlooked by traditional measurement approaches commonly used in Western parenting research (e.g. Likert-type scales) (Ho, 2016). Further, beyond the general descriptions of a "good parent" uncovered in qualitative research, which were typically rooted in the values inherent in a cultural group or a specific parenting context (e.g. single-parenthood, parenting in poverty) (Elliott et al., 2013; Lo Cricchio et al., 2019; Narciso et al., 2018; Park & Young In, 2009), Q-methodology has the potential to elucidate whether different views exists within a specific context, and generate hypotheses about whether and how different parents may have varying views.

Indeed, many have advocated for the use of Q-methodology to systematically examine parents' perception of parenting (Lawton & Coleman, 1983), and the Q-sorting method has previously been used to identify views on child-rearing issues (Block et al., 1981) and socialization practices (Baumrind & Black, 1967). In recent years, Q-studies have also investigated views on parenting needs (Trautmann et al., 2018), goals (Ng et al., 2012), and behaviors (Ho & Gross, 2015a, 2015b; Lam et al., 2022).

Present Study

Uncovering culturally-specific and locally-relevant profiles of positive parenting is important for ensuring that parenting interventions are designed and matched with parents' values and needs. Using Q-methodology, this study aimed to (1) examine parents' views on what it means to be a "good parent" for their young children in Hong Kong, and (2) describe and compare the characteristics of parents endorsing different views. This study can also serve as a model to examine unique tenets and develop frameworks of positive parenting across cultures using Q-methodology.

Method

Participants

Parents who had at least one child between ages 3 and 5 years, were currently residing in Hong Kong, and could read simplified or traditional Chinese were eligible to participate. The purpose of Q-methodology is to uncover a diverse sample of prevailing viewpoints on a given topic and not the proportion of individuals endorsing each view (Cross, 2004), hence 40–60 participants who are purposively sampled based on their potential to elicit unique views is considered an adequate person-sample size (Brown, 1980). Parents were recruited through advertisements placed in university campuses, social media, and community agencies that provide services to parents with children in the target age group. Written informed consent for participation in the study was obtained before data collection. All participants received a HKD50 supermarket coupon.

A total of 101 parents (i.e., 59 mothers and 42 fathers) from 88 families (i.e. 13 married couples) participated in this study. Their mean age was 37.50 years (range = 23–70). Approximately one in five parents reported having obtained secondary school education or below (n = 21, 20.79%); were immigrants from mainland China (n = 20, 19.80%); had a chronic physical illness or mental illness (n = 20, 19.80%); or were single-parents (n = 19, 18.81%). Seven parents received social assistance from the government, while approximately 40% were in single income families. Target children of participants included 70 boys and 31 girls, all between ages 3 and 5 years. Nearly 20% of these children (n = 17) have been diagnosed with a chronic illness (e.g., anemia, high blood pressure) or receive special educational need (e.g., autism, ADHD).

Procedure

A Q-methodology study (Q-study) is performed in two sequential phases. First, a representative collection of items that cover all relevant aspects of the topic is compiled (McKeown, 1988; Steven, 1993). This is known as the Q-sample, and is typically presented in the form of written statements. Second, a purposive sample of participants (i.e. the P-sample) with diverse backgrounds are selected to perform a sorting exercise (Q-sort), which is typically followed by a brief post-sort interview and completing other relevant study measures. This study was approved by the research ethics committee of the first authors' affiliated institution, and all participants provided written informed consent.

Compiling the Q-Sample and P-Sample

The Q-sample was extracted through an in-depth, extensive review of the parenting literature; this is a common strategy for Q-sample generation (Watts & Stenner, 2005). Items related to parenting goals and style were included as these parenting constructs dictate the practices and behaviors that parents exercise within their daily parent-child interactions (Chao, 2000; Pearson & Rao, 2003) and directly impact children's socioemotional development and wellbeing. All relevant measures, constructs, and operationalizations of parenting goals and styles available from the extant literature were compiled through a systematic literature search. A systematic review resulting from this literature search was reported elsewhere (Ho et al., 2022). A structured approach (Steven, 1993) was used to guide the proportionate and representative sampling of statements related to parenting goals and attributes of different parenting styles.

To ensure content, face, and Q-sorting validity (Watts & Stenner, 2005), the initial Q-sample drawn from the literature was pilot tested with one Q-methodology expert and eight content experts (i.e. two academic experts on parenting research; two academic experts on Chinese parenting; two Hong Kong mothers with a preschool child; and two Hong Kong fathers with a preschool child). The statements were continually refined until a consensus was reached among experts to assure satisfactory clarity, coverage, and representativeness. The 64 finalized statements (i.e., 26 related to parenting goals and 38 related to parenting styles; **see** Table 1) were each assigned a number at random for subsequent data collection.

Maximum variation sampling was used to purposively select parents from diverse backgrounds based on a predetermined set of parent and child characteristics that may influence views of a "good parent" (e.g. education, marital status, parent/ child health; **see** Table 2). Mothers and fathers were also proportionately sampled to enhance inclusiveness of views by parent gender.

Performing the Q-Sorts

Participants were given a deck of 64 cards, each printed with a statement related to a parenting goal or an attribute of a parenting style (i.e. the Q-sample), and were asked to sort them based on the following instructions:

> Every parent raises their child differently. We would like to know what you think is a 'good parent' for young children in Hong Kong. You are given a deck of cards, each printed with a statement that describes an aspect of parenting that may be important when raising young children. Please sort these statements onto the grid below from those that you think are Most Important to you to those that you think are Most Unimportant to you in terms of being a 'good parent' for your child between ages 3 and 5 years.

Q-sorting was performed in three steps. First, parents briefly read through the statements. Second, parents pre-sorted the statements into three piles – Important, Not Sure, and Unimportant. Last, parents completed the Q-sort by placing all the statements onto a continuum ranging from 'Most Important' (+5) to 'Most Unimportant' (−5), one pile at a time. The Q-sort continuum (see Fig. 1) had 64 boxes, one for each statement, and was presented in a quasi-normal distribution printed on a large poster. Statements placed in the same column represent the same level of importance for being a "good parent."

The research team member explained, offered assistance, and answered questions about the sorting instructions, but was not otherwise involved in the sorting process. Parents who had more than one child between ages 3 and 5 were asked to select one child as the "target" when performing their sort. Participants took an average of 22.65 min (SD = 6.80) to complete the sort. Finalized sorts were recorded using the random number assigned to each statement.

Post-Sort interviews

After Q-sorting, parents discussed (1) what being a "good parent" means to them; (2) their rationale for placing certain statements at the extreme ends of the continuum; (3) the statements that were difficult to discriminate between or place along the continuum; and (4) their overall impression of the sorting exercise. Field notes were taken during post-sort interviews to record the responses and any relevant impressions of the participants.

Measures

In addition to the Q-sort, parents completed a background survey on their age, sex, highest level of education obtained, employment and marital status, age when first child was born, number of children, age and sex of all children, number of people living in household, additional key child caregivers (e.g. partner/ spouse, domestic helper, grandparent, or neighbor), housing type, and district of home address. Parents also completed two a measure of parenting stress and child behavior problems.

The Parenting Stress Index - Short Form (PSI-SF) is a 36-item measure assessing stress related to parenting (Abidin, 1990). Prior validations of the Chinese PSI-SF in Hong Kong have demonstrated good psychometric properties

Table 1 Statements Rankings across Viewpoints

No.	Statement	Factor 1 ($n=37$)	Factor 2 ($n=9$)	Factor 3 ($n=14$)	Factor 4 ($n=10$)
Parenting goal					
5	*To make their parents proud*	*−3*	*−3*	*−4*	*−4*
20	*To be able to put others' needs before their own*	*−2*	*−1*	*−1*	*−1*
26	To be better than others	−3	−4	−5	−5
16	To be easy-going	−1	0	+1	0
7	To be ambitious and competitive	−2	−3	−2	−4
24	To get along well with others	**0**	+3	+3	+3
2	To be self-reliant	+1	+2	**+4**	+2
25	To be an independent thinker	+1	+1	**+3**	+1
13	To be thankful and appreciative	**+2**	+4	+4	+4
4	To be humble	**−1**	+1	**+3**	+2
23	To be open-minded	0	+1	+2	**−1**
22	To be family-oriented	−1	−1	0	**+2**
12	To be unique and different from others	−2	−5	−3	−5
15	To be optimistic	+2	+1	**+5**	+3
21	To have a sense of justice	−1	+1	+1	−2
18	To follow the rules	**−1**	+2	**0**	+2
3	To be responsible	+2	+4	+5	+5
8	To have good self-esteem	**+1**	−1	**+2**	−1
19	To be kind and caring	**+2**	+5	+4	+5
14	To be curious	0	0	**+2**	**−2**
1	To be mentally strong	0	+2	**+4**	0
11	To be honest	**+1**	+5	+3	+5
9	To be polite	**0**	+5	+5	+5
6	To be in control of their emotions and behaviors	+2	+1	**+5**	**+3**
10	To be creative	**0**	−2	**+3**	−2
17	To respect authority	**−1**	+5	+2	+4
Parenting style					
59	*To try to give their children everything they want*	*−5*	*−5*	*−5*	*−5*
50	*To be in control of everything that their children do or experience*	*−5*	*−5*	*−5*	*−5*
49	*To make sure their children will not do anything embarrassing*	*−4*	*−3*	*−5*	*−3*
53	*To know what their children are doing at all times*	*−4*	*−4*	*−4*	*−3*
37	To prevent their children from experiencing unnecessary risks, disappointments, or failures	−5	−3	−4	−4
55	To not let their children see them as weak or make a mistake	−4	−3	−4	−4
58	To have a clear direction for their children's future	−2	−1	−2	−2
43	To make their children feel pain after they misbehave	−3	−2	−2	−2
42	To train their children to become better	−2	−2	−1	−3
56	To seek help and advice when they need it (e.g. friends, doctors, books etc.)	0	−2	−1	0
39	*To help their children understand their mistakes and consequences*	*+3*	*+4*	*+2*	*+2*
27	To give their children praise and compliments	+4	+2	+1	+3
30	To comfort their children when they experience difficulties	+3	+2	0	+1
48	To sacrifice themselves for the sake of their children	−2	−1	**−3**	−2
57	To take good care of themselves and their own needs	**+1**	−2	−1	−1
63	To teach their children that only good children will be liked	**−5**	−2	−3	−3
33	To help their children solve problems together	+3	+2	0	+1
62	To set clear rules and expectations for their children's behavior	+1	−1	0	+2
52	To be a good model for their children	+3	+3	**+1**	+4
51	To be concerned and worried about their children all the time	−4	−2	−3	−3
41	To reward their children when they behave well	+1	**+3**	0	+1
40	To keep reminding their children about how they should behave	−3	−4	−2	−1
64	To be flexible when things do not go according to plan	+1	0	−1	**−2**
61	To teach their children to not interrupt or intrude on adult conversations	−1	**+1**	−1	−1
34	To spend time doing something fun with their children everyday	+5	+3	+2	+1
35	To immediately attend to their children's needs	0	0	**−2**	+1

Table 1 (continued)

No.	Statement	Factor 1 (n=37)	Factor 2 (n=9)	Factor 3 (n=14)	Factor 4 (n=10)
29	To appreciate and nurture their children's uniqueness	**+4**	0	+1	+1
45	To begin teaching and disciplining their children as early as possible	−1	0	−1	**+2**
60	To establish consistent routines within the household	**+3**	−1	−1	0
44	To follow through with what they say to their children every time	**+4**	0	+1	+1
46	To remain calm in front of their children	**+2**	−1	−2	0
54	To teach their children to do as they say	−2	−4	−2	**0**
47	To be confident and exert authority in the family	−3	**−5**	−3	**−1**
36	To maintain physical closeness with their children (e.g. hugging and kissing)	**+5**	+2	+1	+3
28	To openly talk about each other's thoughts and feelings with their children	+4	+3	0	0
32	To let their children think and act freely under safe conditions	**+5**	0	+1	0
38	To show their children that they are loved no matter what	+5	+1	+2	+4
31	To solicit and consider their children's input	+2	+4	0	**−1**

Statements organized by descending level of consensus across factors based on normalized factor z scores. Rankings range from "Most Unimportant, −5" to "Most Important, +5". Consensus statements across factors are italicized; distinguishing statements for each factor are in bold

(Lam, 1999; Tam et al., 1994). The Cronbach's alpha value in the present sample was .89.

The Child Behavior Checklist 1½–5 (CBCL) is a checklist of 99 child behavior problems reported by caregivers of preschool children (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1983); this measure includes internalizing and externalizing behavioral subscales. Previous psychometric testing of the CBCL in Hong Kong samples demonstrated good scale reliability and validity (Leung et al., 2006). The Cronbach's alpha value in the present sample was 0.95.

Analysis Plan

By-person factor analysis was conducted using PQMethod 2.35 (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) to generate groups of parents who expressed similar views. Unlike ordinary factor analysis (i.e. an item-centered approach that produces factors of correlated items), by-person factor analysis is a person-centered data reduction technique that identifies groups (i.e. factors) of participants who created similar Q-sorts. (Ho, 2016). Then, composite Q-sorts (i.e. a Q-sort that represents the overall view of participants within the same group) are generated to reveal gestalt configurations of distinct views (Akhtar-Danesh et al., 2008; McKeown, 1988). Composite Q-sorts can be compared and contrasted to identify commonalities and differences across viewpoints, and characteristics of participants with similar or opposing views can be described to generate hypotheses on the types of people in the population who will likely endorse each view (Akhtar-Danesh et al., 2008).

The centroid factor extraction method was used to extract factors (i.e. groups of parents) based on total sort correlations; iterations of 1- to 5-factor solutions were examined to identify the best solution (Watts & Stenner, 2012). A 4-factor solution, explaining 59% of the total variance was deemed most appropriate (Factor 1, 26%; Factor 2, 12%; Factor 3, 12%; Factor 4, 9%) based on Eigenvalues (Factor 1, 52.44; Factor 2, 4.38; Factor 3, 3.35; Factor 4, 2.23) and each factor with at least two defining sorts (McKeown, 1988; Steven, 1993; Watts & Stenner, 2005). Varimax and two additional manual rotations were performed to enhance factor interpretability (Akhtar-Danesh et al., 2008; Watts & Stenner, 2005). Sorts were considered significant and representative of a factor at $p<0.001$ if it uniquely loads on that factor with a factor loading of $\pm 3.36(1/\sqrt{n})$, where n denotes the number of statements (Brown, 1980). Thus, sorts that uniquely load on a factor at ±0.42 was considered significant.

Q-sorts defining each factor were weighted based on their factor loading to create a composite Q-sort (i.e. a Q-sort representative of participants endorsing that factor). The placement of statements on the composite Q-sorts were based on the normalized factor z score calculated for that statement within the factor. The normalized factor z scores for each statement across factors were used to determine consensus and distinguishing statements for each factor. Then, a systematic approach (Watts & Stenner, 2005) was used to interpret the composite Q-sorts. Consensus and distinguishing statements were compared and contrasted to assess similarities and differences across views. Holistic constellations (i.e. profiles) of parenting goals and attributes of parenting styles representative of a "good parent" in Hong Kong was generated by abductive reasoning (Brown, 1980; Susan & Isadore, 2011). Qualitative data from post-sort interviews were used to inform the interpretation and explanation of findings (Brown, 1980; Watts & Stenner, 2005). Lastly, background characteristics and measures of parenting stress and child behavior problems were analyzed using STATA SE14.1 (StataCorp, 2015); comparisons across factors were made using nonparametric procedures (i.e. Fisher's exact

Table 2 Demographic Characteristics of the Full Sample and by Factor

	Full Sample ($N=101$)	Factor 1: Emotion-focused ($n=37$)	Factor 2: Survival-focused ($n=9$)	Factor 3: Outcomes-focused ($n=14$)	Factor 4: Traditions-focused ($n=10$)
Participant Characteristics					
Age*(x, SD)*	37.50 (6.35)	36.49 (5.81)	34.00 (6.24)	38.14 (5.14)	41.10 (10.59)
Female(n, %)***	59 (58.42)	23 (62.16)	7 (77.78)	3 (21.43)	7 (70.00)
Education*(n, %)*					
Secondary school or below *(n, %)	21 (20.79)	4 (10.81)	5 (55.56)	2 (14.29)	3 (30.00)
Undergraduate degree or above	80 (79.21)	33 (88.19)	4 (44.44)	12 (85.71)	7 (70.00)
Marital status*(n, %)*					
Single-parent (single, divorced/ separated, widow)	19 (18.81)	4 (10.81)	4 (44.44)	2 (14.29)	3 (30.00)
Two-parent (married, cohabitated)	82 (81.19)	33 (89.19)	5 (55.56)	12 (85.17)	7 (70.00)
Immigrant(n, %)***	20 (19.80)	2 (5.41)	6 (66.67)	4 (28.57)	0 (0.00)
With any illness (e.g. chronic, terminal, or mental illness)	20 (19.80)	6 (16.22)	1 (11.11)	3 (21.43)	4 (40.00)
Housing type*(n, %)*					
Public/ Subdivided unit	25 (24.75)	5 (13.51)	5 (55.56)	4 (28.57)	3 (30.00)
Subsidized	12 (11.88)	4 (10.81)	1 (11.11)	1 (7.14)	2 (20.00)
Private	64 (63.37)	28 (75.68)	3 (33.33)	9 (64.29)	5 (50.00)
Household size*(x, SD)*	4.28 (1.21)	4.30 (1.02)	4.22 (0.97)	4.29 (1.14)	3.80 (1.23)
Living with domestic helper*(n,%)*	40 (39.60)	10 (27.03)	4 (44.44)	7 (50.00)	5 (50.00)
Employed*(n, %)*	33 (32.67)	25 (67.57)	4 (44.44)	12 (85.71)	7 (70.00)
Age when first child was born*(x, SD)*	32.44 (5.29)	31.78 (5.40)	28.89 (6.19)	33.86 (5.04)	33.00 (2.45)
Number of children*(n,%)*					
One	39 (38.61)	13 (35.14)	3 (33.33)	5 (35.71)	4 (40.00)
Two	56 (55.45)	21 (56.76)	5 (55.56)	9 (64.29)	5 (50.00)
Three or more	6 (5.94)	3 (8.11)	1 (11.11)	0 (0.00)	1 (10.00)
Parenting stress*(x, SD)*	84.25 (16.86)	82.03 (16.13)	94.00 (13.69)	90.21 (18.74)	86.20 (12.30)
Target Child Characteristics					
With any illness or special education need (SEN)	17 (16.83)	7 (18.92)	0 (0.00)	1 (7.14)	3 (30.00)
Child behavior problem*(x, SD)*	36.33 (21.67)	33.51 (17.20)	36.67 (19.44)	37.14 (23.69)	29.70 (16.96)
Internalizing problems	10.26 (7.90)	8.43 (5.76)	11.33 (7.12)	10.29 (8.19)	8.00 (5.52)
Externalizing problems	12.43 (8.00)	12.22 (7.62)	11.89 (5.84)	12.29 (7.25)	10.40 (7.07)

Significant difference across classes at $p<0.05$ (*) and $p<0.01$ (**) from Kruskal-Wallis or Fisher's exact tests

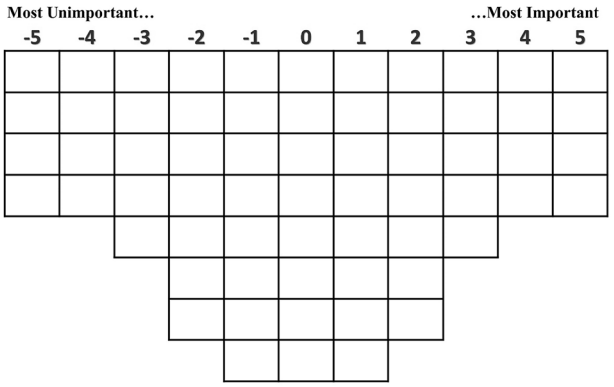


Fig. 1 11-point Q-sort Continuum. Statements placed in the same column denotes the same level of importance

and Wilcoxon Mann-Whitney tests) due to small sample size. In the following results, the terms "viewpoint" and "factor" will be used interchangeably.

Results

Demographic characteristics of the full sample and by factor are described in Table 2. Among 101 parents participating in this study, 70 provided defining sorts; 31 Q-sorts did not significantly or uniquely load on a single factor. Among these non-defining sorts, 28 were confounding sorts (i.e. loading significantly on two or more factors). The high number of confounding sorts suggests possible hybrid views between two or more factors; however, such views were not distinct enough to form factors on their own. This finding underscores the complexity of parenting ideals and that perceptions of a "good parent" is highly nuanced. The remaining three parents were considered non-loaders (i.e., factor loading less than 0.42 on all factors). Since the purpose of Q methodology is to identify and examine prevailing viewpoints, emphasis were placed on findings from the four-factors uncovered.

Statistical comparisons of parent characteristics across factors showed that parents in Factor 1 reported significantly higher education attainment ($p=0.019$); Factor 2 had higher proportion of immigrant parents ($p<0.001$); and parents in Factor 3 were more likely to be fathers ($p=0.021$). Although not statistically significant, there were no immigrant parents in Factor 4 and parents in this factor also reported the highest average age compared with other factors. Perceived parenting stress and parent-reported child behavior problems did not statistically significantly differ across the four factors.

Factor Consensus

Correlations between the four factors were moderately high ($r=0.72$–0.84), indicating significant overlaps across different views of 'good parenting' for preschool children in Hong Kong. Specifically, there were six consensus statements that were considered "not important" across all factors (ranked between '−1' to '−5' across all factors). Two statements were ranked as the most unimportant across all factors (i.e. ranked '−5'), they are: (1) to be in control of everything that their children do or experience; and (2) to try to give their children everything they want. Six statements were also ranked highly "not important" across all factors (i.e. ranked '−3' or below): (1) to make sure their children will not do anything embarrassing; (2) to know what their children are doing at all times; (3) to prevent their children from experiencing unnecessary risks, disappointments, or failures; (4) to not let their children see them as weak or make a mistake; (5) to be better than others; and (6) to make their parents proud. One statement was perceived to be relatively unimportant across all factors (ranked '−1' or '−2'): to be able to put others' needs before their own. On the other hand, one statement was deemed to be important (ranked '+2' or above) across all factors: to help their children understand their mistakes and consequences.

Consensus among statements related to parenting goals versus styles were also examined separately, since parents' emphasis of either one as more important may impact the ranking of statements for the other. Overall, parents across all factors revealed that raising children to be better than others, ambitious and competitive, or unique and different from others were not important goals of their parenting. Conversely, they unanimously viewed it was very important to raise children who are responsible, kind and caring, and thankful and appreciative.

Factor Narratives

The four factors were each given a label that describes the aspect of parenting that was most valued and perceived to be the essence of a "good parent" by parents endorsing that view. They are (1) emotion-focused parenting; (2) survival-focused parenting; (3) outcomes-focused parenting; and (4) traditions-focused parenting. Given the correlations between factors were moderately high, these labels underscore the different foci that a "good parent" would assume as top priority when raising young children in Hong Kong. The four foci were developed based on a holistic examination of each composite Q-sort, as well as the statements that were relatively and uniquely ranked as more important across different views.

To provide substantive support for each factor and their respective label, the following provides a detailed description and interpretation of the composite Q-sorts from each factor and highlights the nuances in perceptions of a "good parent" for each viewpoint. Each factor narrative will begin with a description of participants who defined that view, followed by a summary of their view on what it means to be a "good parent" for young children in Hong Kong. Distinguishing statements that are central to describing each factor are embedded in its narrative and highlighted in bold in Table 1. Statement rankings within the factor composite Q-sort are denoted in brackets (e.g. [+4] indicates a statement was ranked '+4' along the 11-point continuum from 'Most Unimportant, −5' to 'Most important, +5').

Factor 1: Emotion-Focused Parenting

This view was endorsed by the largest group of parents ($n=37$; 36.63%), many of whom were full-time stay-at-home parents ($n=12$, 32.43%; 9 mothers and 3 fathers), highly educated ($n=33$, 88.19% with an undergraduate or postgraduate degree), and had more economic resources ($n=28$, 75.68% living in private housing). Seven parents (18.92%) had a target child with a chronic illness or special education needs. These parents viewed a "good parent" as one who provides a sensitive and nurturing environment for their children. They were also more concerned with the emotional climate they create in their parent-child relationship, more so than the long-term goals for their children. This was supported by their placement of the majority of statements related to parenting styles along the extreme ends of the continuum, whereas statements related to parenting goals were placed in the center of the continuum (i.e. neither highly important or unimportant).

Parents who endorsed this viewed a "good parent" as one who strongly values maintaining a close relationship with their children, and offering unconditional acceptance and love (e.g. to maintain physical closeness with their children [+5]; to show their children that they are loved no matter what [+5]). These parents also highly valued the importance of developing their children's uniqueness, freedom, and self-expression (e.g. to appreciate and nurture their children's uniqueness [+4]; to let their children think and act freely under safe conditions [+5]). Aligned with their values of building a warm and positive emotional climate, and developing their children's sense of self, the goals that these parents deemed to be most important were to raise children who become autonomous and emotionally well-adjusted adults (e.g. to be in control of their emotions and behaviors [+2]; to be optimistic [+2]; to be responsible [+2]; to be an independent thinking [+1]). Lastly, more so than parents endorsing other factors, these parents viewed it is important for a "good parent" to provide stability and be responsiveness to their child's needs (e.g. to establish consistent routines within the household [+3]; to follow through with what they say to their children every time [+3]; to comfort their children when they experience difficulties [+3]). They also ranked the importance of parents' stress management and self-care higher than those endorsing other factors.

Factor 2: Survival-Focused Parenting

Nine parents (8.91%) endorsed this factor, and the majority were immigrant parents from mainland China ($n=6$; 66.67%). It appeared these parents were of lower socioeconomic status or had fewer resources compared with parents in other factors. For example, over half of these parents ($n=5$; 55.56%) lived in public or subdivided housing, or had secondary school education or below. Descriptive comparison also showed a higher proportion of parents in this factor were mothers (77.78%) or lived in single parent households (66.67%). Their average age at birth of first child was also the lowest (M = 28.89, SD = 6.19). These parents also had the highest mean parenting stress score (M = 94.00, SD = 13.69).

Those endorsing this view perceived a "good parent" as one who raises their children to become ordinary, socially accepted, and rule-abiding members of society – all of which are basic characteristics that ensures the child's survival. In fact, these parents viewed raising a child to be unique and different from others [−5] to be the least important aspect of being a "good parent." Instead, the parenting goals that were perceived to be highly important include raising children to be responsible [+4], honest [+5], polite [+5], and respect authority [+5]. These parents also viewed it was highly important to help their children understand their mistakes and consequences [+4], and ranked teaching their children to not interrupt or intrude on adult conversation [+1] more importantly than other factors. Perhaps due to their lower socioeconomic status, they viewed it was not important for a "good parent" to be confident and exert authority in the family [−5], to teach their children to do as they say [−4], to keep reminding their children about how they should behave [−4], to take good care of themselves and their own needs [−2], or to seek help and advice when they need it [−2]. Instead, they ranked the importance of soliciting and considering their children's input [+4] and rewarding their children when they behave well [+3] more highly compared with other factors.

Factor 3: Outcome-Focused Parenting

Fourteen parents provided defining sorts for this factor. Among them, 11 (78.57%) were fathers and 12 of the target

children (85.71%) were boys. The majority of these parents had an undergraduate degree or above ($n=12$, 85.71%), were from two-parent households ($n=12$, 85.71%), lived in private housing ($n=9$, 64.29%), or employed ($n=12$, 85.71%). These parents appeared to view a "good parent" as one who is highly goal-oriented, such that all statements ranked as highly important (i.e. +3 to +5) were related to long-term outcomes for young children, especially in relation to their character.

Parents endorsing this view emphasized the attributes that children raised by a "good parent" would possess. Specifically, they believed that raising a disciplined, mentally strong, and independent child was fundamental (e.g., to raise a child to be responsible [+5], optimistic [+5], self-reliant [+4], mentally strong [+4], creative [+3], humble [+3], and to be an independent thinker [+3]). Further, parents endorsing this view believed the most important goal of a "good parent" is to raise a child to have good control of their emotions and behaviors [+5]. Therefore, these parents perceived a "good parent" as one who ultimately raises children with good character, particularly those required to successfully navigate future demands and challenges. On the other hand, these parents placed less emphasis on providing comfort or supporting the child in the day-to-day parent-child interactions. For example, these parents ranked the importance of immediately attending to their children's needs [−2], comforting their children when they experience difficulties [0], helping their children solve problems together [0], and rewarding their children when they behave well [0] lower than other factors. They also ranked the importance of self-sacrifice for the sake of their children [−3], remaining calm in front of their children [−2], and being a good model of their children [+1] lower than parents endorsing other views.

Factor 4: Traditions-Focused Parenting

Ten parents (9.90%) endorsed traditions-focused parenting and portrayed "good parents" in accordance to the traditional Chinese cultures. The mean age of these parents (41.10; SD = 10.59) was the highest compared to other factors. Among these parents, seven (70.00%) were mothers, four (40.00%) reported having a physical or mental illness, and three (30.00%) reported having a target child with illness or special education needs. Although not statistically significant, these parents also reported the lowest mean score on child behavior problem (M = 29.70, SD = 16.96) compared with other factors.

Parents in this factor viewed a "good parent" as one who raises children to be family-oriented [+2] and upholds traditional Chinese principles of filial piety, obedience, and harmony preservation (i.e., be responsible [+5], polite [+5], respect authority [+4], and follow the rules [+2]). Those endorsing this view also ranked the importance of "guan" more highly compared with other factors (e.g., to begin teaching and disciplining their children as early as possible [+2], and to teach their children to do as they say [0]), while also valuing the importance of demonstrating their love and care for their children (e.g. to show their children that they are loved no matter what [+4], to maintain physical closeness with their children [+3]). These parents appeared to be more rigid. For example, they valued setting clear rules and expectations of their children's behavior [+2] more so than other factors, while ranking being flexible when things do not go according to plan [−2] as relatively unimportant. They also placed lower importance in raising children who are creative [−2], curious [−2], open-minded [−1], and unique and different from others [−5]. Instead, these parents are more concerned with upholding their position of authority and maintaining their image as the leader within the parent-child relationship. As such, they ranked the importance of being a good model of their children [+4] and to be confident and exert authority in the family [−1] more highly compared with other factors. Their perceived importance of soliciting and considering their children's input [−1] was also ranked the lowest among the four factors.

Discussion

This study uncovered four factors (i.e. viewpoints) on what it means to be a "good parent" among parents of young children from diverse backgrounds in Hong Kong. We observed wide consensus on what was considered unimportant when raising young children in Hong Kong. Contrary to previous assertions that high parental control and monitoring, shame avoidance, and the faultless nature of parents being intrinsic to Chinese parenting (Shek, 2006), parents across all factors ranked being "in control of everything that their children do or experience," knowing "what their children are doing at all times," making sure "their children will not do anything embarrassing," and not letting "their children to see them as weak or make a mistake" to be highly unimportant. Further, parents across the four views considered it an unimportant goal to raise children who would make them proud or become better than others. Therefore, the common belief of "winning at the starting line" in Hong Kong did not appear to resonate with parents with young children, and the high correlations among the four factors were largely attributed to the unanimous disagreement towards this culturally-ingrained notion about parenting.

Although parents have a general consensus on what a "good parent" *is not*, views on what *is* a "good parent" varied substantially. Our analysis uncovered four views of a "good parent" for young children in Hong Kong, and

described the characteristics of parents who may be more likely to endorse each view. The most highly endorsed view, emotion-focused parenting, primarily comprised of highly educated parents from two-parent households living in private accommodations. Parents who endorsed this view emphasized building a warm, loving, and close relationship with their children, whose emotional wellbeing is a priority. These parents' focus on their children's emotional wellbeing also appeared to reflect their views of themselves, as evidenced by their higher ranking of statements related to stress management and self-care compared with parents endorsing other views. The importance of creating a positive parent-child relationship also supersedes ensuring their children's future success and "fitting in." In fact, these parents provided the lowest rankings on the importance of raising children who conform to social norms and seek extrinsic rewards (e.g. outperform others). It is likely that parents who are more affluent and well-educated have more material and social resources, and feel they are more secure and in control of their world, which translates to more flexibility and optimism for their children's future.

Similar to those who endorsed emotion-focused parenting, those who endorsed outcomes-focused parenting were also highly educated and from two-parent households, but a notable demographic differentiator was parent gender. The majority of parents who endorsed outcomes-focused parenting were fathers, who perceived achieving long-term goals and instilling good character traits (e.g. responsibility, self-reliance, and independence) to be highly important. Conversely, these parents provided lower rankings for statements related attending to the child's needs and providing comfort. These findings were consistent with prior research showing that fathers are more likely to focus on overseeing their children's long-term character building and teaching life skills, whereas mothers devoted more effort to providing emotional support and nurturance in the day-to-day interactions with their children (Pedersen, 2012). The majority of the target children for parents who endorsed outcomes-focused parenting were boys, which also support the gendered notions that boys should be raised to become mentally strong and independent (Root & Rubin, 2010). Our findings suggest views of a "good parent" are influenced by parent and child gender, especially in the context of a father-son relationship.

While emotion-focused and outcomes-focused parenting more closely reflected Western parenting beliefs (e.g. developing children's uniqueness, independent thinking, and autonomy), parents who endorsed traditions-focused parenting emphasized raising children with qualities that reflect traditional Chinese values (e.g. to be family oriented; obedient; respect authority). Traditions-focused parenting upheld Confucian values of filial piety and relationship harmony, and emphasized the importance of maintain social norms and proper behavior over the socioemotional needs of children. These parents' view of a "good parent" most closely aligns with the Chinese traditional parenting ideology of 'guan' found in prior local research (Chan et al., 2009; Fung & Lau, 2012). It is noteworthy, however, that this view was only endorsed by a small number of parents, who had the highest mean age compared with parents endorsing other views. In line with previous research showing that parents were less likely to embrace traditional Chinese parenting beliefs across younger generational cohorts (Lam et al., 2018), and along with our present findings on the wide consensus across viewpoints, our results indicate conceptualizations of traditional Chinese parenting may be phasing out and no longer applies to contemporary society in Hong Kong.

Survival-focused parenting was primarily endorsed by immigrant parents, half of whom lived in public housing and had secondary education level or below. This view also comprised of the youngest parents, and had a greater proportion of females and single-parents compared with other factors. Survival-focused parenting placed greater importance on raising honest, polite, and rule-abiding children who respect authority and conform to social norms. In other words, they did not aspire to raise children who "stand out." Instead, they were more focused on ensuring their children are well-behaved (e.g. helping their children understand their mistakes and consequences; rewarding their children when they behave well). Indeed, ample research showed, as a survival mechanism, parents of lower socioeconomic status are more likely to raise children to conform and obey than well-resourced parents (Foucault & Schneider, 2009; Kohn, 1959). We also observed these parents endorsed a more child-centered parenting approach (e.g., soliciting their child's input) and perceived being confident and exerting authority in the family to be highly unimportant. Despite appearing to reflect a democratic parenting style, we surmised that this approach likely reflects inconsistent parenting, or lower attention, parenting confidence, and cognitive bandwidth among parents raising children under economic hardship (Cobb-Clark et al., 2019; Kaiser & Delaney, 1996).

Parenting stress and child behavior problems did not significantly differ across views. Although this may be due to the small sample size limiting the power to detect statistical differences, it is also possible that all parents of young children in Hong Kong experience a similar level of parenting stress regardless of parenting ideal. Hong Kong's high-pressure education system is a pervasive source of parental stress. A recent study on 6454 parents of preschool children in Hong Kong found parents who experienced the highest level of parenting stress were those caught between having to satisfy the social narrative and struggle with the discrepancy

in their perceptions and society's expectations (Guo & Chiu, 2021). Our findings showed, in general, parents no longer endorse traditional notions of Chinese parenting and "winning at the starting line," yet their parenting practices are still likely driven by perceived norms (Tam et al., 2012). Descriptively, however, we observed parents who endorsed emotion-focused parenting reported lowest level of parenting stress, followed by those in traditions-focused parenting, outcomes-focused parenting, and survival-focused parenting. While this may be attributed to the differences in characteristics of the target child and the parents endorsing each view (Fang et al., 2022), it is plausible that holding different views of a "good parent" impacts parenting stress, especially if parents are not able to apply their parenting ideals in practice due to situational, contextual, or cultural constraints. Similarly, parent-reported child behavior problems did not significantly differ across the four factors. It is possible that parenting ideals have not yet exerted an influence in early childhood, and that the impacts of different parenting ideals may become more apparent when different parenting values and goals become more magnified as children grow older (e.g. entering formal education). Therefore, more research is needed to understand whether and how different views may parent and child outcomes in the longer term.

Limitations and Future Research

Three study limitations were noted. First, we included thirteen couples in our sample, which may have precluded a more distinct comparison between mothers and fathers' views on "good parenting." Many of these participants revealed how the other parent compromised and/or compensated their role in raising their child, and how the division of labor affected couple relationship and family dynamics. Of note, three out of thirteen dyads fell into the same category (i.e., 2 pairs in Factor 1 and 1 pair in Factor 3). Future studies on parenting couples could explore how parenting ideals are influenced by dyadic interactions. Parents from non-traditional households, such as same-sex or LGBTQ+ parents, should also be included. A second limitation is the cross-sectional design of the study and only including parents of young children. Parenting is a dynamic process that is continuously renegotiated in response to the child's development or changes in the family dynamic (e.g. addition of new siblings) (Strohschein et al., 2008). Using a longitudinal design, future research can investigate changes in parenting perceptions and parental expectations for children during different developmental phases (i.e., during preschool, primary school, secondary school, etc.). Third, we did not include measures of parenting behaviors or child outcomes. Future studies should examine how perceptions of a "good parent" might actually translate into day-to-day parent-child interactions, whether parenting ideals are in fact practicable under the constraints of societal views and expectations, and what child outcomes are linked with parents' views of "good parent" based on their goals and values.

Practical Implications of Study Findings

The present study uncovered four views on what it means to be a "good parent" for preschool children in Hong Kong. Based on the findings, two concrete recommendations on how to better support parents with young children are offered. First, we found demographic and background differences (namely gender, age, and socioeconomic status) that may influence parents' perceptions of a "good parent." While further investigations with larger representative samples to replicate and explain these findings are warranted, the results suggest parenting interventions and parent support programs should cater to parents with diverse views, and adapt the contents and messaging to parents' socioeconomic, cultural, and parenting contexts to ensure that they are matched with parents' values and needs. Indeed, offering information, resources, and skills that target the goals and outcomes parents hope to achieve and perceive to be successful is key to keeping parents engaged and feeling empowered (Butler et al., 2020; Mytton et al., 2014).

Second, we found wide consensus on what parents believed to be unimportant for being a "good parent" (e.g., pushing children to become competitive and successful), but it is possible perceptions of an "ideal" parent may not align with actual parenting practices. For example, a study of South Korean mothers with preschool children (Park & Young In, 2009) found mothers prioritized a desire to raise children with good emotional and social traits, yet they were more focused on their children's academic achievements in practice. This failure to connect their beliefs and behaviors was attributed to their tendency to compare parenting practices with those of other mothers, particularly in an exceedingly competitive society. Our results highlight the need to change the normative narrative about what a "good parent" is in Hong Kong, and to let parents know that "winning at the starting line" is merely an assumption of good parenting and not a belief that parents actually endorse. Sharing this message widely through universal public campaigns, use of mass media, or educating parents through school-based events may ultimately support parents to reconcile the disconnect between the parent they aspire to be and the parent they are pressured to become in a manner that is meaningful and culturally sensitive.

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Declarations

Conflict of Interest The authors declare no competing interests.

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