



The different Child-rearing

Practices in Hong Kong and Beijing

There are plenty of cultural variations among Chinese families. Such as knowledge of childrearing values, attitudes, and behaviours. Chinese people in different geopolitical locations may have different parenting practices in their families due to the great impact of social institutions and social policies on family functioning. Although Hong Kong and mainland China are both Chinese societies, does this mean that the parents of mainland China and Hong Kong share the same child-rearing style? There are undeniable variations in socialization between Chinese people in mainland China and Hong Kong, these variations

arise from the great differences in cultural context, especially the differences of ideological objectives and the goals of socialization.

Hong Kong society has gone through rapid urbanization, producing a mixture of traditional and modern values. Nowadays, as more and more women in Hong Kong receive higher education, the opportunity for them to work has increased tremendously. As more mothers are going to work, the roles and functions of family members have changed. Children are taken care of by grandparents, domestic helpers or day-care centers. Many families in Hong Kong face high levels of stress and life pressure. The housing shortage is a major stressor in Hong Kong. More



than 40% of the population cannot afford to buy their own apartment and have to live in public housing with limited space. Relevant research states that lower maternal stress contributes to positive mother and child attachments. It suggests that the level of stress parents experience may influence their child-rearing practices.

Mainland China has also undergone radical change in the past half-century. The majority of Chinese people have changed their attitudes and values in many spheres of social life. After the government implemented the one child policy, parenting and children's behaviour have changed. Many couples have spoiled their child in daily life by trying to satisfy all of his or her needs,

which has contributed to negative traits. Researchers found that single children were more egocentric, less persistent, and less cooperative than children with siblings.

Dr. Alice Cheng Lai and Dr. Zhi-Xue Zhang from The Hong Kong Polytechnic University have conducted a study on child-rearing attitudes and behaviours between Mothers in Hong Kong and Beijing.

The study revealed that mothers in Hong Kong adopted a restrictive child-rearing style in their family practices much more than the mothers in Beijing, but the two groups did not differ on democratic child-rearing style. The results showed that mothers in Hong Kong were more likely to



dominate their children, to control them by anxiety induction, to worry about them, to show negative affect towards their children, and to protect their children than the mothers in Beijing. These findings suggest that families in Hong Kong may have more strict and well-established rules for their children, and that the mothers believe that criticism, scolding, and even physical punishment may be helpful for a child's development. Their family practice is to control their children. Mothers in Hong Kong were more likely to express negative affect towards their children, which suggests that the relationships between mothers and their children in Hong Kong are less

relaxed and comfortable than those in Beijing.

Mothers in Beijing were found to have higher degrees of endorsement than their counterparts in Hong Kong on the following four parenting attributes: openness to experience, emphasis on health, emphasis on achievement, and suppression of aggression. This shows that Chinese parents care for their only child very much. After a child's birth, the mother usually leaves her job for about 6 months to breast-feed her baby. When the child grows up, parents are still very concerned about what their children eat at home and school. They generally have more time for outdoor pursuits such as sports with children.



Accordingly, mothers in Beijing indicated higher degrees of endorsement on these parenting practices.

The results also showed that mothers in Beijing are more likely to suppress their children's aggressive behavior towards others, and to emphasise their children's achievement to a greater degree than their counterparts in Hong Kong. From Chinese traditional ethics, children's aggression should be absolutely prohibited at both home and school.

This may be due to highly stressed moral education in China. The mothers in Beijing believe it is important to teach children what kind of behaviour is acceptable in society. They expect their

child to grow up to be a person with good moral characters, and pro-social behaviour. Aggression is widely regarded as showing bad moral characters. Accordingly, both parents and school teachers have attempted to suppress children's aggressive behaviour. It is interesting that mothers in Beijing emphasised their children's achievement to a greater degree than mothers in Hong Kong.

Parents in mainland China are extremely concerned about their children's achievement. It is due to their particular experience. These parents usually force their children to do their best so that their own lost aspirations can be compensated for. Most parents believe that going to



university is the best way for their child to have a bright future. Therefore, parents exert great pressure on their children when they enter primary school. They help their children to do their homework, give them additional assignments, and prompt them to read widely about the subjects they study in school. Many parents require their children to show excellent school performance. Children have always been encouraged to strive and to do better than others. Parents generally are honored by their children's success and excellent performance. In Hong Kong, there are more job opportunities for young people, and thus studying at university is not the only way for young people to get a good position.

Moreover, young people are generally more independent of their parents. For this reason, mothers in Beijing have a higher degree of emphasis on achievements as opposed to their counterparts in Hong Kong.

The results also indicated that mothers in Hong Kong disciplined their children in a more restrictive way than mothers in Beijing. But the two groups of mothers did not differ in their democratic style. Mothers in Hong Kong differed significantly from those in Beijing in restrictive child-rearing styles. Parents in Hong Kong keep more traditional elements in their child-rearing practices. The findings indicated that mothers in Hong Kong are more likely to control their children,



to show negative emotions towards their children, and to protect their children, all of which are characteristics of a traditional disciplinary style. Chinese traditional culture emphasises parental control over children, e.g. parents set up strict rules for children, do not allow their children to have privacy, and do not allow children to oppose their parents' decisions in the family, etc. In this sense, people in Hong Kong seem to keep the traditional cultural values to a greater degree than those in mainland China.

It is noteworthy that mothers in Beijing do not adopt a more democratic disciplinary style than their Hong Kong counterparts despite their adoption of a less restrictive child-rearing pattern.

This is because couples in urban areas of mainland China have only one child, so they generally direct intensive attention on that child. For example, they devote more time to play with them, to take them to visit parks, gardens, or other recreational centers. They provide many opportunities for their child to enjoy new experiences, and some of them even spoil their only child by satisfying their every need. The indulgent parents usually become tender when they face their demanding, domineering, and defiant single children. We suspect that Beijing mothers' emphasis on children's health and openness to experience may be the consequence of rearing a single child. which indicates that single

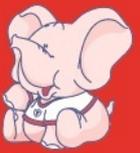


children are more picky and selective in their food, less physically punished by their parents, and are always accompanied by one parent if, for example, the other parent is not at home. Therefore, we can observe that Beijing mothers' higher degree of endorsement on some attributes in the democratic style is probably because they rear only one child rather than because they really have less democratic values regarding child-rearing in their minds.

Since Hong Kong shares the same cultural tradition as mainland China, the parenting practices in both Hong Kong and the Chinese mainland are characterised as restrictive. However, this does not mean that the parents of

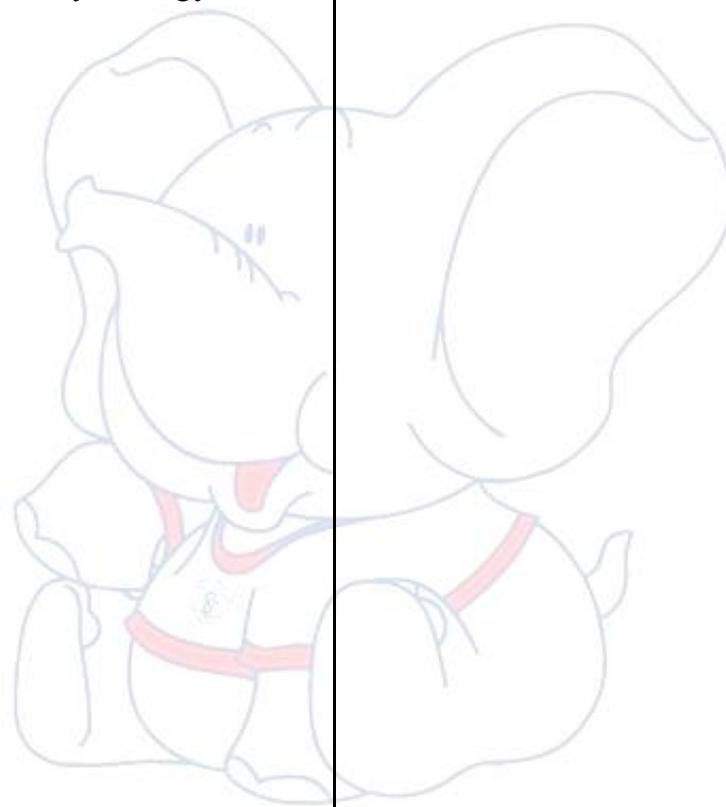
mainland China and Hong Kong share the same child-rearing style. It is important to learn that subcultures and social systems have a great influence on parents' values. Parents in Hong Kong and mainland China differ in specific child-rearing practices. Based on this observation, we can see the variations in child-rearing practices between Hong Kong and mainland China are derived, in part, from the different social policies, values, and lifestyles of the families.

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