



# The relations between perceived parenting styles and academic achievement in Hong Kong: The mediating role of students' goal orientations<sup>☆,☆☆</sup>



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## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 7 March 2014

Received in revised form 13 November 2014

Accepted 13 November 2014

### Keywords:

Parenting styles

Goal orientations

Academic achievement

## ABSTRACT

This study examined the relations between perceived parenting styles, goal orientations, and academic achievement among Chinese students. A survey was conducted among 339 university students in Hong Kong to collect information on their perceptions of parenting styles, goal orientations, and grade point averages. Using structural equation modeling, the results suggested that perceived authoritative parenting was related to Chinese students' mastery goals and performance-approach goals, which in turn contributes positively to their academic achievement. Perceived authoritarian parenting was found to be positively associated with academic achievement by shaping Chinese students' performance-approach goals and negatively with academic achievement by shaping Chinese students' performance-avoidance goals. Cultural factors and considerations are addressed to clarify the findings of the study.

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## 1. Introduction

In recent years, the academic success among Chinese students (e.g., Hong Kong students), compared to students from Western societies, has been well documented in several international academic reports including the Trend in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS, 2011) and The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS, 2011). An increasing attention has been drawn on how constructs of achievement cognitions and motivation, such as achievement goal orientations, contribute to the academic success of this particular group of students (Chen & Wong, in press; Hau & Ho, 2008; Ho & Hau, 2008). However, given the flourishing findings regarding the important role of parenting when explaining Chinese motivation and academic achievement (Chao & Tseng, 2002; Chen, Lee, & Stevenson, 1996; Leung, Lau, & Lam, 1998; Phillipson & Phillipson, 2007), there is surprisingly little research investigating how achievement goal orientations have been constructed and developed in the family context and consequently influence students' academic performance. Therefore, the present study aims to fill this gap in the literature by exploring the underlying processes by which students' perceptions of parenting relate to their academic performance by shaping their motivation within the Chinese cultural context.

Achievement goal orientations refer to the purposes behind students' learning behaviors and the evaluation standards that students use to assess their performance in achievement situations. According to achievement goals theory, two goal orientations were originally defined (Dweck & Leggett, 1988); the first one is the mastery goal orientation whereby students are interested in learning new knowledge, skills, and competence, as well as improving understanding. The second one is the performance goal orientation whereby students are concerned with demonstrating their ability in comparison to others. Later researchers (Elliot, 1999; Elliot & Covington, 2001; Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996) incorporated the approach-avoidance distinction to further advance the theoretical framework of goal orientations. Recent research in goal orientation, therefore, adopts a 2 × 2 framework that defines mastery-approach, mastery-avoidance, performance-approach, and performance-avoidance (Elliot, 1999; Elliot & McGregor, 2001; Pintrich, 2000). Performance-approach goals focus on outperforming others, whereas performance-avoidance goals aim to avoid failure or looking incompetent or inferior (Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996; Elliot & McGregor, 2001). However, since the three-component conceptualization of goal orientations still is the most widely adopted framework (without mastery-avoidance goals) in current research (Elliot, 2005; Payne, Youngcourt, & Beaubien, 2007), it is chosen to be the goal approach in the present study.

A series of studies have been conducted regarding how students' goal orientations relate to their learning processes and academic achievement among Chinese students. Consistent with findings in Western society, mastery goals are associated with adaptive learning (Hau & Ho, 2008; Ho & Hau, 2008), including better learning strategies

<sup>☆</sup> This research was conducted by Wei-Wen Chen, Faculty of Education, University of Macau.

<sup>☆☆</sup> The research was funded under grant SRG021-FED11-12T-CWW from the University of Macau.

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(Chan & Lai, 2006; Liem, Lau, & Nie, 2008; Salili & Lai, 2003) and self-efficacy (Lau & Lee, 2008), whereas performance-avoidance goals are linked to lower academic achievement and maladaptive learning (e.g., negative learning strategies, lower self-efficacy) among Chinese students.

According to the Western literature, performance-approach goals were found to positively link to competency expectancy performance outcomes, effort and persistence while studying, and viewing learning as a challenge (Elliot & Church, 1997; McGregor & Elliot, 2002; Zusho, Pintrich, & Cortina, 2005). Yet, other studies revealed that the performance-approach goals were unrelated to interest and intrinsic motivation (Hulleman, Schrager, Bodmann, & Harackiewicz, 2010) and associated with text anxiety, unwillingness to seek help, and shallow or surface processing of information (Elliot, 1999). Hulleman et al. (2010) conducted a meta-analysis on achievement goal measures and integrated the mixed findings by further differentiating the conceptual differences in the measurement of performance-approach goals. Performance-approach goals were found to positively correlate with achievement when using normatively coded performance goal scales (e.g., Achievement Goal Questionnaire) that emphasize the “outperforming others” element. In contrast, negative correlations were found when using scales with appearance and evaluative items that emphasize the “demonstrating ability” element. These results were held true in the Asian cultures in their meta-analysis, which implies that performance-approach goals function similarly across the Western and Asian cultures (Hulleman et al., 2010). Studies among Chinese students have shown that performance-approach goals foster adaptive learning (Chan & Lai, 2006; Ho & Hau, 2008; Lau & Lee, 2008; Lau, Liem, & Nie, 2010; Liem et al., 2008; Salili & Lai, 2003) and academic achievement (Hau & Ho, 2008; Ho & Hau, 2008; Salili, Chiu, & Lai, 2001; Salili & Lai, 2003; Shih, 2005).

The cultural context predisposes Chinese students to pursue performance-approach goals while learning (Chen & Wong, 2014). Education has been viewed as a social ladder in the social hierarchy in Chinese societies. Chinese academic performance is strongly tied to individuals' future accomplishments and life success (Chen et al., 1996). In addition to the utility view of education, academic achievement is seen as a filial duty and family obligation. Chinese students seek to outperform others in order to avoid disappointing their parents, bringing shame to the family or ‘losing face’ in front of family members, and to honor or repay their parents' investment and sacrifice (Hau & Ho, 2008; Hau & Salili, 1996; Mordkowitz & Ginsburg, 1987). As individuals living in collectivistic societies, Chinese students also tend to define their accomplishments relative to their counterparts and work hard to achieve in-group goals (e.g., family expectation) (Chen & Wong, 2014). The school environment, as a result, is highly competitive and exam-oriented with great emphasis on social comparison and individual achievement (Chen et al., 1996; Hau & Salili, 1996; Ho & Hau, 2008). With the strong faith in effort, Chinese students make the best of their cultural views about schooling to outperform others, including hard-working, self-discipline, and perseverance (Chen & Wong, 2014). The Chinese cultural context may legitimize performance-approach goals to associate with the positive learning behaviors and become more conducive to academic achievement.

Furthermore, the three achievement goals are positively inter-correlated with each other (Lau & Lee, 2008). Research on goal orientations within the Chinese context has consistently found a high positive correlation between mastery and performance-approach goals. Chinese students believe in the virtue of learning for whole-person development and self-fulfillment based on Confucianism, but at the same time, they also compete and excel in academic work (Salili & Lai, 2003). However, the positive associations between performance-approach goals and mastery goals can be rare in the Western literature, in which performance-avoidance goals are typically found to be maladaptive (e.g., negative learning strategies, lower self-efficacy) and negatively correlated with mastery goals (Elliot, 2005; Elliot & Church, 1997;

Urdan, 1997). Hulleman et al. (2010) also found similar results in Asian sample in their meta-analysis. They indicated that different goals were more highly correlated in Asian sample than U.S. or Canadian sample, and performance-avoidance goals were positively correlated with performance outcomes in Asian sample (Hulleman et al., 2010). Due to the importance of education in Confucian culture (Lau & Lee, 2008) and the competitive learning environment in the Chinese collectivistic society (Salili & Lai, 2003), academic failure may have several severe consequences (e.g., the end of one's educational career, bringing shame to one's family, psychological toll due to failure) for Chinese students. Therefore, Chinese students may display a higher level of fear of failure by endorsing performance-avoidance goals while learning. Multiple motivational sources, such as improving understanding, outperforming others, and avoiding failure, can all be intertwined and important to students' learning within the Chinese educational and cultural context (Lau & Lee, 2008).

However, in contrast to the abundant findings regarding the effects of classroom and school contexts on students' goal orientations, ongoing research should investigate how variables in the home might shape students' ideas about purposes of learning (Chan & Chan, 2007). Given the vital role of parenting styles in Chinese students' learning and achievement (Chao & Tseng, 2002), it is of interest to explore the underlying process by which achievement goals are constructed and promoted through parent-child interactions. Parenting styles, defined by the degree of warmth and demandingness, can represent the quality of parent-child interactions and play an important role in children's development of their cognitions and meaning system related to learning and schooling (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). Therefore, parenting styles may have far-reaching implications in shaping their children's goal orientations (Chan & Chan, 2005, 2007).

Baumrind's (1991) parenting style, particularly authoritative and authoritarian parenting, was found to be associated with Chinese students' academic success (Chen, Dong, & Zhou, 1997; Leung et al., 1998; McBride-Chang & Chang, 1998). Authoritative parenting, described by a high degree of demandingness (also referred to as behavioral control) and high responsiveness (also referred to as warmth or supportiveness), is characterized by frequent employment of inductive reasoning, rational guidance, and encouragement for exploration. Given the positive quality of authoritative parenting, it was found to contribute to higher motivation and academic performance among Chinese students. In contrast, authoritarian parenting, described by a high degree of demandingness and low responsiveness, is characterized by strict enforcement, punishment, and negative emotionality with a lack of explanations and explorations. Given the relatively less positive quality of authoritarian parenting, research has found the negative association between authoritarian parenting and Chinese students' school performance (Chen et al., 1997; Leung et al., 1998; McBride-Chang & Chang, 1998).

In spite of the limited number, a few studies in the Western literature have investigated the relation between parenting styles and students' goal orientations. Some researchers (Gonzalez, Greenwood, & Wenhsu, 2001; Gonzalez, Holbein, & Quilter, 2002; Hoang, 2007) reported that perceived authoritative parenting styles were positively associated with the mastery goal orientation, whereas perceived authoritarian parenting styles were positively related to performance goal orientation among both high school and undergraduate students. Chan and Chan (2005, 2007) examined the relation between parenting styles and students' goal orientations in a sample of teacher education students in Hong Kong and found similar results. However, these studies used a dichotomous approach of achievement goals (mastery vs. performance) without examining the approach-avoidance distinction in performance goals.

Given the distinct effects on the learning processes and academic achievement between performance-approach and performance-avoidance goals (Elliot, 2005), it would be interesting to examine how different parenting styles associate with the two performance goals. In

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